

# “The Effect of Marketing Mix on Positive Word of Mouth Communication: Evidence from Accounting Offices in Turkey”

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## The effect of marketing mix on positive word of mouth communication: evidence from accounting offices in Turkey

### Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between marketing mix and word of mouth communication. These variables are increasingly recognized as being sources of competitive advantage in the marketing and management literature. However, no empirical research has been conducted to examine these variables' relationship. An integrative model was developed and tested with structural equation model using data collected from the 503 Turkish accounting offices' customers. The results show that marketing mix components, namely price, product, promotion and place have effect on word of mouth communication with different impacts significantly.

**Keywords:** word of mouth communication, accounting offices, marketing mix.

### Introduction

In the past, consumers used to talk to other people when looking for opinions on a particular brand, product or company. This became known as word of mouth (WOM) in the marketing literature (Pollach, 2006). WOM is probably the oldest mechanism by which opinions on products, brands, and services are developed, expressed, and spread (Lau and Ng, 2001). A spate of recent articles and books in popular press already notes an increasing interest in word of mouth (Ozcan, 2004). File et al. (1992) define WOM as recommending the firm and the service to others. Specifically, Anderson (1998) refers to positive WOM as relating pleasant, vivid, or novel experiences, recommendations to others, and even conspicuous display. Numerous research reinforced the contention that positive WOM is a cherished outcome in marketing. In 1955, Katz and Lazarsfeld found positive WOM seven times more effective than newspaper and magazine advertising, four times more effective than personal selling, and twice as effective as radio advertising in influencing consumers to switch brands. In 1983, Morin uncovered that referrals from others accounted for three times as many purchases as did advertising when consumers were asked what factors influenced their purchases of 60 different products. WOM communication is an important source of consumer information. It forms the basis of interpersonal communications and significantly influences product evaluations and purchase decisions (Mahajan et al., 1990). In fact, WOM has been shown to be more powerful than printed information (Borgida and Nisbett, 1977), primarily because WOM information is considered to be more credible. Another reason for the power WOM marketing is that WOM is always relevant and timely, it is driven by customer needs and it grows exponentially, for example, one tells a story to five people, they each tell it to five more, who tell

it to five more after that. WOM also makes use of human nature, feeding on the fact that many people like to consider themselves experts (Jerram, 2003).

The marketing mix is, as also known as the 4Ps, summarily, the product, price, places and promotion (Koontz, 2004). The 4Ps framework is widely used by marketers as the underpinning of their marketing planning is based on the high degree of acceptance of the marketing mix by marketing practitioners as the universal marketing paradigm. Grönroos (1997) argues that the 4Ps framework has won an overwhelming acceptance among marketing practitioners, noticing that "...Marketing in practice has, to a large extent, been turned into managing this toolbox...", a point shared by Goldsmith (1999) who argues that the "...time-honoured concept of the 4Ps the marketing mix..." is the heart of the contemporary marketing management (Constantinides, 2002a). In a competitive situation, a firm has to prioritize marketing mix elements. This does not mean concentrating only on a few elements and ignoring the others. Prioritizing emphasizes the need to recognize the fact that some elements may be important than others at a given point in time (Kumar, 2002). On the other hand, in recent years some scholars in marketing literature increase the marketing mix to the "5 Ps", to include people. Besides, some discusses "7 Ps", to include physical evidence and process.

This paper may be of interest for several reasons. Firstly, despite the interest in WOM, no research has been done yet about the marketing mix contribution towards WOM communication. Based on a synthesis of the literature, this paper develops a conceptual framework of the factors that contribute to WOM. Eight factors are identified that contribute to WOM's significance. Four of these factors (customer loyalty, customer satisfaction, perceived value, perceived quality) are known as the determinants of WOM but four of them (price, place, promotion and product) hadn't been explored. Our research

is important to fill this gap. Secondly, except for some papers discussing on segmentation of business clients of CPAs (i.e. Walt et al.,1994) and level of service quality clients received from CPAs (i.e. Yayla and Cengiz, 2006; Woodside et al.,1992), no one has seriously aimed to marketing of CPAs, accounting services and offices. Thus, this study is devoted to analyse clients' perceptions of the marketing components (marketing mix and word of mouth communication relations here) accounting offices use.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows . In section 1, we offer a brief outline of accounting offices in Turkey. Section 2 provides the theoretical framework which specifies constructs of marketing mix, WOM and WOM's determinants like customer loyalty, customer satisfaction, etc. In section 3 a model is introduced to investigate relationship between marketing mix components and WOM communication. After dealing with the model test, this paper discusses the results of the empirical study that was undertaken to test our research hypotheses.

### 1. Accounting offices in Turkey

Since 1989, the establishment and the operations of professional accounting offices in Turkey are arranged with the Law Number 3568 of "Independent Accountancy, Certified Public Accountancy and Sworn-in Certified Public Accountancy". The Law establishes accounting and auditing as a profession and defines those who are rendering services in these fields as professionals. The Law creates and defines three categories of accounting and auditing professionals (TURMOB, 2006b):

- ◆ independent accountant (IA);
- ◆ certified public accountant (CPA);
- ◆ sworn-in certified public accountant (Sworn-in CPA).

According to the Law, the persons who are entitled to operate the accounting offices are the persons who fulfil the private and general conditions stated in the Law and have the title of Independent Accountant (IA) and Certified Public Accountant (CPA). Sworn-in Certified Public Accountants are prohibited from the enterprising of the accounting office and they can only execute the auditing and the attesting duties as specified in the Law. The real persons who have the titles of Independent Accountant (IA) and Certified Public Accountant (CPA) can start their accountancy activities by registering in the occupational chamber which is appertained to the Union of Certified Public Accountants of Turkey (TÜRMOB) in the city where they carry on their own activities. As of the year 2006, there are 16.219 Independent Accountants and there are

19.289 Certified Public Accountants in Turkey (TÜRMOB, 2006a) who are registered in the Union of Certified Public Accountants of Turkey.

The 2nd, 44th and 46th articles of Law number 3568 handle the product, promotion and the price from the marketing mix elements and indicate the use of the same by the accounting offices. There is no arrangement in the Law regarding the place element and there is no restriction regarding the place for the establishment of the accounting offices.

The 2nd article of the Law defines the profession subject to the Independent Accountant (IA) and Certified Public Accountant (CPA), in other words, it defines the services and the products of the accounting offices. According to this article, the working subjects of the accounting offices are as shown in the following 3 paragraphs:

- ◆ to carry out the works of bookkeeping, to arrange the balance sheets and profit-loss sheets and their statements and similar works of the real persons and corporate bodies as per generally accepted accounting policies and the provisions of the relative legislation;
- ◆ to establish the accounting systems of the real persons and corporate bodies and to develop the same, to arrange the relative works for the enterprising, accountancy, financial legislation and to arrange the works in relation with their applications, and to provide consultancy services in these subjects;
- ◆ based on the documents: to do examinations, analyses, audits based on the subjects stated in the above paragraph, to provide written opinion standpoint for the financial sheets and statements, to arrange reports and the similars and to do arbitration, expertising and similar works.

According to Law number 3568, Certified Public Accountant (CPA) can achieve all works stated in the above areas while the Independent Accountant (IA) can only achieve the activities indicated in the above stated paragraph (Law No 3568, Article 5). The 44th article of the Law refers to promotion from the marketing mix elements and it states: "*Profession members can not do the activities which can be considered as advertisement. In their signboards or printed papers they can not use any other designation being other than their own occupational titles determined with the licence.*" And with this provision, the advertisement activities of the accountant offices are prohibited. Nonetheless, the 46th article of the Law makes detailed arrangement to the price of the marketing mix elements:

*“Fee means the amount for the payment against profession members’ services. The minimum amount of the fee is determined with the price tariff. The acceptance of any work with the fee being charged under the price tariff is prohibited and acting on the contract of this provision requires discipline penalty. The board of directors of every chamber prepares the price tariffs for the fees to be paid against each of the works and processes to be carried out by Independent Accountants, Certified Public Accountants and Sworn-in Certified Public Accountants to be effective from January of each year and they send this to the Union. The Board of Directors of the Union prepares the tariffs to be applied in the groups by taking the proposals of the chambers into consideration and by determining the groups and sends the same to the Ministry of Finance and Customs. Ministry of Finance and Customs attests the tariff being the same or attests according to the changes which are deemed to be necessary. Tariffs become effective after being published in the Official Gazette and the existing tariff remains effective until the attestation of the new tariff.”*

## 2. Theoretical framework

*Marketing mix:* The Marketing Mix is a term used to describe the combination of tactics used by a business to achieve its objectives by marketing its products or services effectively to a particular target customer group (CIM, 2004). It is also referred to as the 4 Ps: Product, Price, Promotion and Place. The four Ps of the marketing are briefly described as follows (Copley, 2004): Product, the item or service being marketed, through its features, quality, benefits and quantities; Price, this includes the price of the item and product assortments and lines, price changes and payment methods; Place, the location where the product or service is available to the customer, including distribution channels; Promotion, market communication is achieved by personal selling, advertising, direct marketing, public relations (PR), sales promotion and sponsorship. As Bennett (1997) observed, it is now just over 40 years since McCarthy (1964) offered the marketing mix, often referred to as the 4 Ps, as a means of translating marketing planning into practice: product, price, place and promotion. On the other hand, the shortcomings of the 4Ps marketing mix framework, as the pillar of the traditional marketing management have frequently become the target of intense criticism. A number of critics even go as far as rejecting the 4Ps altogether, proposing alternative frameworks (Constantinides, 2002b; see Kotler, 1967; Bennet, 1997; Grönroos, 1997 for example).

*Word of Mouth:* Arndt (1967) defines Word of Mouth (WOM) as oral, person to person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver senses as non-commercial, regarding a brand, product or service. Instead, according to Stern (1994) WOM differs from advertising in its lack of boundaries. WOM comprises the interchange of shortlived oral or spoken messages between an adjacent source and a recipient who communicate directly in real life (Stern, 1994). Actually, it has been asserted that WOM can be more influential than neutral print sources such as consumer reports (Herr et al., 1991). Besides, according to Sheth (1971) WOM was more important than advertising in developing awareness of an innovation and in securing the decision to try the product. In accordance with Day (1971) this was due to source reliability and the flexibility of interpersonal transmission. WOM is supposed to be of two types: negative WOM and positive WOM. Less unanimity, however, exists with regard to the extent of the information being transferred; in conceptualizations and operationalizations of the WOM construct, some authors underline manifest counsels (see Fullerton and Taylor, 2002; Gremler and Brown, 1999; Hartline and Jones, 1996), while others view WOM as an activity that contains sharing notion about a commercially based experience (see Maru File et al., 1994; Mikkelsen et al., 2003; Westbrook, 1987).

*Perceived Quality:* In a broad sense, perceived value of a service can be developed by delivering better service (Ravald and Grönroos, 1996). Supplementing value to the service at a competitive price is a potent source of competitive advantage. Generally, customers sense higher value in the service when they comprehend the quality of service as passing away the costs they have given away to get the service. In parallel, there is a body of empirical evidences to support the view that quality is positively related to perceived value (see Brady and Robertson, 1999, for example). Furthermore, perceived quality of service is dependent on a comparison between expected and perceived service, and is thus the consequence of a comparative evaluation process (Gronross, 1984). Particularly, Parasuraman et al. (1985) describe service quality as the degree and direction of discrepancy between a customer’s perceptions and expectations, while perceived service quality is the gap between a customer’s expectations and perceptions as a measurement of service quality. When the gap is smaller, the quality of service is better and the customer satisfaction is greater. The actual quality of service is difficult to characterize and measure (Gavin, 1983; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Brown and Swartz, 1989). However, there is a unanimity that service quality should be characterized

and measured from the customer's view. Perceived service quality definition that is the most widely accepted is that symbolizes the discrepancy between customers expectations and their perceptions of the service performance (Lewis and Booms, 1983; Grönroos, 1984).

*Customer Satisfaction:* A body of literature has been the subject of attention on consumer satisfaction and its potential effects on consumer behavioral intentions and customer retention (e.g. Anderson and Fornell, 1994; Cardozo, 1965; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Olson and Dover, 1979; Rust and Oliver, 1994). Hunt (1977) defines satisfaction as an evaluation of a feeling, suggesting that it reflects the grade to which a consumer believes that the possession and use of a service awake positive feelings (Rust and Oliver, 1994). Arguably, according to Churchill and Surprenant (1982) customer satisfaction is a result of purchase and use resulting from the buyers' comparison of the rewards and costs of the purchase in relation to the expected consequences. Besides, customer satisfaction has also been regarded as an emotional state that appears in response to the evaluation of a service (Westbrook, 1981). Woodruff et al. (1991) claim that customer satisfaction can be defined as an emotional response, that arises from a cognitive process of evaluating the service received against the costs of getting the service. On the other hand, customer satisfaction has been proposed to be the resulting determinant of loyalty (e.g. Anderson and Fornell, 1994; Bitner, 1990). Customers' loyalty to a service provider is affected by their overall satisfaction with that provider. Most prior research has found qualified support for a positive "satisfaction-customer retention" relationship (McDougall and Levesque, 2000; Olsen, 2002). Rust et al. (2000) propose that the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty is positive, for example, the more satisfied customers are with a service provider the more loyal they are to the service provider.

*Customer Loyalty:* Stank et al. (1999) specify customer loyalty as a customer's attitude to the service where loyalty has been described as repeat purchase behavior impinged by proper attitudes or as a consistent purchase behavior arising from the psychological decision-making and evaluative process. According to Jacoby and Kyrer (1973) customer loyalty is shaped by a customer's cumulative (long-term) experience with the service over time, not by a specific service encounter. It's a clear fact that, customer loyalty can lower costs and increase profitability. The cost of recruiting a new customer is said to be five times more than the cost of keeping an existing customer (Barsky, 1994; Reichheld, 1996). Fornell et al. (1987) have asserted that the costs of

customer retention are in fact less than the relative costs of customer acquisition, and loyal customers, if served correctly, are said to generate increasingly more profits each year when they stay with a company (Lam and Burton, 2006). Customer loyalty should be realized through customer satisfaction, ground on the perceived performance of the service product; therefore service quality and customer satisfaction are two prerequisites of loyalty (Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Shoemaker and Lewis, 1999; McIroy and Barnett, 2000). Further, in the last decade researches on loyalty have emphasized its positive effects on customer satisfaction (Ganesh et al., 2000; Jamal and Naser, 2002). Perceived service quality has also been found to have a positive association with customer loyalty (Lam and Burton, 2006) and has even been said to be a key determinant of service loyalty (Lee and Cunningham, 2001). Besides, according to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2002) though satisfaction is modeled as the only immediate antecedent of loyalty, other key drivers of loyalty include service quality and customer expectations (Ehigie, 2006). Also Payne and Rickard (1993) specify that service quality has measurable impact on customer retention (Ehigie, 2006).

*Perceived Value:* Zeithaml's (1988) research of the value construct determines four unique definitions upon which consumers appear to base their evaluations of service exchanges. However, Zeithaml's summed the four definitions into a single unique definition "perceived value is the consumers overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given" (Zeithaml, 1988). Some researchers examined the role of perceived value in consumption contexts. For instance, Zeithaml (1988) supplies evidence supporting an influential role of value in consumers' purchase decision making. As per the means-end model asserted by Zeithaml (1988), perceived value is a direct antecedent of a purchase decision. By Dodds et al.'s (1991) work perceived value is conceptualized as a tradeoff between perceived quality and perceived psychological as well as monetary sacrifice and Dodds et al.'s model points that perceived value is a direct antecedent of consumer purchase intention. On the other hand, Woodruff (1997) put forward a perceived value hierarchy model in which perceived value was received as a hierarchically structured construct at degrees of consumption goals, consequences, and attributes. Besides, according to Woodruff, perceived value stands in every level of customers' expectancy-disconfirmation process. Furthermore, prior studies determined perceived performance or perceived quality as a direct antecedent of value and repurchase intention and these studies support the general concept

that perceived value leads to customer loyalty (Grewal et al., 1998; Voss et al., 1998 for example).

In the light of stated knowledge in the theoretical background, the article's hypotheses are as shown below.

*H1. Price component of marketing mix will have positive effect on word of mouth communication of Accounting Offices in Turkey.*

*H2. Product component of marketing mix will have positive effect on word of mouth communication of Accounting Offices in Turkey.*

*H3. Promotion component of marketing mix will have positive effect on word of mouth communication of Accounting Offices in Turkey.*

*H4. Place component of marketing mix will have positive effect on word of mouth communication of Accounting Offices in Turkey.*

A conceptual path model is now presented as Figure 1.

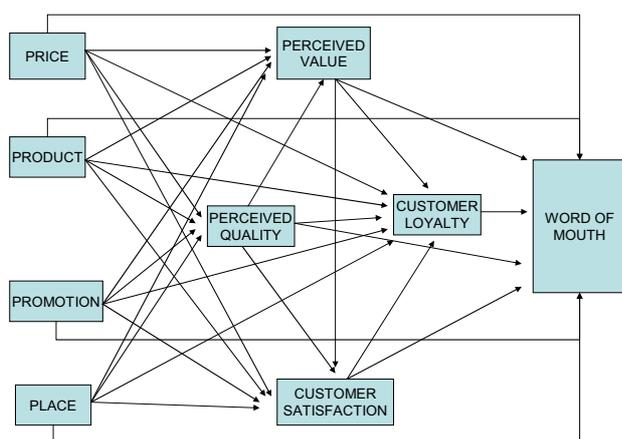


Fig. 1. Research model

### 3. Research method

**3.1. Measurement of constructs.** Marketing mix component items are adapted from Bradley (2001). Product construct is measured with 7 items, each of promotion and place constructs include 4 items, price construct is scaled with 5 items. Perceived value is measured through three indicators ‘good value for money’, ‘acceptable price’ and ‘to be a good buy’ (Cronin et al., 2000). The latent variable customer satisfaction is measured through three indicators, ‘overall satisfaction’, ‘to fulfil expectations’, ‘to be perfect in all aspects’ (Ryan et al., 1995). Other two indicators describe the latent variable customer loyalty: ‘Resubscription intention’ and ‘New services subscription intention’ (Juhl et al., 2002). Other constructs and constructs’ items can be seen in Appendix A.

**3.2. Survey method.** A survey was conducted to 512 customers of 23 Accounting Offices in Turkey

(in cities of Ankara, İstanbul, İzmir, Trabzon, Giresun, Diyarbakır, Antalya, Kayseri) from January 22 to March 30, 2007. A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to customers of these Accounting offices who were asked to express his/her agreement with the items, based on a seven-point Likert-type scale with anchors ranging from “inferior performance” (1) to “superior performance” (7). Respondents were asked to rate how much they agreed with each item on the scale (Appendix A). A total of 512 questionnaires were collected. Of these, 9 questionnaires were deleted due to unanswered items and 503 questionnaires were finally used in the analysis.

### 4. Results

**4.1. Measurement model.** The proposed research model in this study is composed of nine constructs with interrelated dependence relationships or causal paths among themselves, requiring a structural equation model (SEM) analysis (Bollen, 1989; Hair et al., 1998) which can estimate multiple causal relations simultaneously. SEM analysis usually requires that the constructs should first be assessed and measured rigorously by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 1998; Segars and Grover, 1993). In order to generate statistically reliable estimates on causal paths among constructs, the minimum sample size for reliable SEM analysis ranges from 100 (Bollen, 1989) or 150 (Anderson and Gerbing, 1982) to 200 or more (Boomsma, 1982). Given that the research model is relatively simple with ten constructs, the sample size of 503 collected in this study is considered adequate. Seven common model-fit measures were used to assess the model’s overall goodness of fit: the ratio  $\chi^2/(d.f.) = 3.259$ , adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) = 0.93, normalized fit index (NFI) = 0.96, non-normalized fit index (NNFI) = 0.94, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.97, relative fit index (RFI) = 0.98 and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.069. All the model-fit indices exceeded the respective common acceptance levels suggested by previous research, demonstrating that the measurement model exhibited a good fit with the data collected. Therefore, we proceeded to evaluate the properties of the measurement model in terms of reliability, convergent validity.

Table 1 shows the results of CFA from undertaking by AMOS 5.0. As shown in Table 1, convergent validity of CFA results should be supported by item reliability, construct (composite) reliability and average variance extracted (Chau, 1996; Hair et al., 1998). Item reliability denotes the amount of variance in an item due to the underlying construct, t-values for all the standardized factor loadings of items were

found significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), assuring item reliability. Hair et al. (1998) proposed construct reliability estimates as being greater than 0.70. In this study construct reliability estimates range from 0.879 to 0.982, which is satisfactory. The average variance extracted, which should be above 0.50, measures the amount of variance explained by the construct (Chau, 1996; Hair et al., 1998). Table 1 shows that the average variances extracted are between 0.916 and 0.995. These results indicate that the measurement items have high reliability and validity.

In this research, alternative factor based procedure for assessing discriminant validity was used proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981). In this

method, the researcher concludes that constructs are different if the average variance extracted (AVE) for one's constructs is greater than their shared variance. That is, the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for a given construct should be greater than the absolute value of the standardized correlation of the given construct with any other construct in the analysis. In the analysis the biggest correlation value is 0.562 between customer loyalty and customer satisfaction. Other correlation values are smaller than this. So when we look at AVE values (Table 1), it is obvious that no correlation values can exceed square root of AVE values.

Table 1. Confirmatory factor analysis results

| Constructs            | Items | (MLE) | sd   | t     | Construct reliability | Average var. extracted |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|------|-------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Product               | P1    | .982  | .086 | 10.84 | .953                  | .971                   |
|                       | P2    | .823  | .073 | 10.46 |                       |                        |
|                       | P3    | .916  | .102 | 8.34  |                       |                        |
|                       | P4    | .911  | .053 | 16.79 |                       |                        |
|                       | P5    | .889  | .031 | 27.74 |                       |                        |
|                       | P6    | .954  | .086 | 11.51 |                       |                        |
|                       | P7    | .932  | .039 | 24.58 |                       |                        |
| Promotion             | PRO1  | .908  | .171 | 5.12  | .944                  | .957                   |
|                       | PRO2  | .926  | .115 | 7.84  |                       |                        |
|                       | PRO3  | .954  | .053 | 17.52 |                       |                        |
|                       | PRO4  | .827  | .076 | 10.46 |                       |                        |
| Place                 | PL1   | .825  | .077 | 10.43 | .981                  | .995                   |
|                       | PL2   | .897  | .025 | 30.83 |                       |                        |
|                       | PL3   | .844  | .093 | 8.75  |                       |                        |
|                       | PL4   | .892  | .105 | 8.33  |                       |                        |
| Price                 | PR1   | .862  | .015 | 45.33 | .982                  | .994                   |
|                       | PR2   | .743  | .027 | 29.87 |                       |                        |
|                       | PR3   | .895  | .023 | 30.83 |                       |                        |
|                       | PR4   | .964  | .182 | 5.21  |                       |                        |
|                       | PR5   | .857  | .023 | 34.23 |                       |                        |
| Perceived quality     | PQ1   | .885  | .023 | 38.47 | .923                  | .954                   |
|                       | PQ2   | .893  | .043 | 20.76 |                       |                        |
|                       | PQ3   | .992  | .101 | 9.82  |                       |                        |
|                       | PQ4   | .990  | .089 | 11.12 |                       |                        |
|                       | PQ5   | .798  | .031 | 25.45 |                       |                        |
|                       | PQ6   | .821  | .111 | 7.39  |                       |                        |
|                       | PQ7   | .943  | .078 | 12.08 |                       |                        |
| Word of mouth         | WM1   | .874  | .045 | 19.42 | .912                  | .931                   |
|                       | WM2   | .934  | .096 | 9.72  |                       |                        |
|                       | WM3   | .918  | .112 | 8.19  |                       |                        |
| Perceived value       | PV1   | .792  | .038 | 20.84 | .896                  | .923                   |
|                       | PV2   | .889  | .096 | 9.26  |                       |                        |
|                       | PV3   | .876  | .117 | 7.48  |                       |                        |
| Customer loyalty      | CL1   | .923  | .099 | 9.32  | .905                  | .916                   |
|                       | CL2   | .897  | .056 | 16.01 |                       |                        |
| Customer satisfaction | CS1   | .887  | .026 | 34.11 | .879                  | .928                   |
|                       | CS2   | .815  | .017 | 47.94 |                       |                        |
|                       | CS3   | .821  | .074 | 11.09 |                       |                        |

**4.2. Structural model.** A similar set of fit indices was used to examine the structural model. Comparison of all fit indices, with their corresponding recommended values, provided evidence of intermediate

model fit ( $X^2/d.f. = 6.891$ ,  $AGFI = 0.85$ ,  $NFI = 0.89$ ,  $NNFI = 0.86$ ,  $CFI = 0.90$ ,  $RFI = 0.91$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.099$ ) (see Figure 2). After that, we wiped insignificant path and then we run structural equation

procedure again. New situation fit indices have good fit ( $X^2/d.f. = 2.154$ , AGFI = 0.92, NFI = 0.96, NNFI = 0.94, CFI = 0.97, RFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.071) (Figure 3). Thus, we could proceed to examine the path coefficients of the structural model.

In the model, direct and indirect effects (Table 2) and total effects (Table 3) can be seen.

Table 3 shows total effect of marketing mix component on other research constructs. As can be seen from Table 3, promotion and price components have strong positive effects on word of mouth communication. Product was found to show intermediate effect on word of mouth. On the other hand, place has little influence on word of mouth.

*H1. Price component of marketing mix has positive effect on word of mouth communication of Accounting Offices in Turkey ( $r = 0.719$ , ACCEPTED).*

*H2. Product component of marketing mix has positive effect on word of mouth communication of Accounting Offices in Turkey ( $r = 0.442$ , ACCEPTED).*

*H3. Promotion component of marketing mix has positive effect on word of mouth communication of Accounting Offices in Turkey ( $r = 0.869$ , ACCEPTED).*

*H4. Place component of marketing mix has positive effect on word of mouth communication*

*of Accounting Offices in Turkey ( $r = 0.108$ , ACCEPTED).*

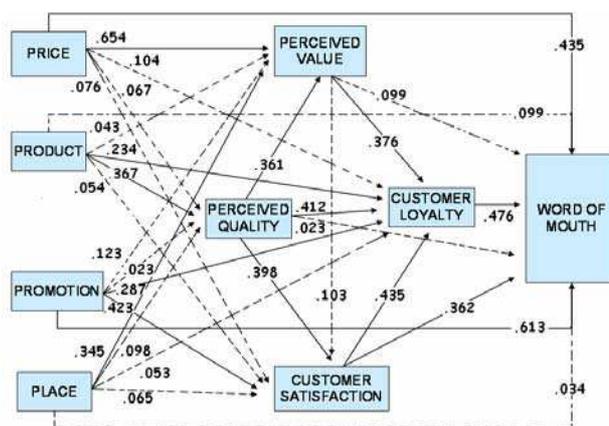


Fig. 2. Structural equation analysis results

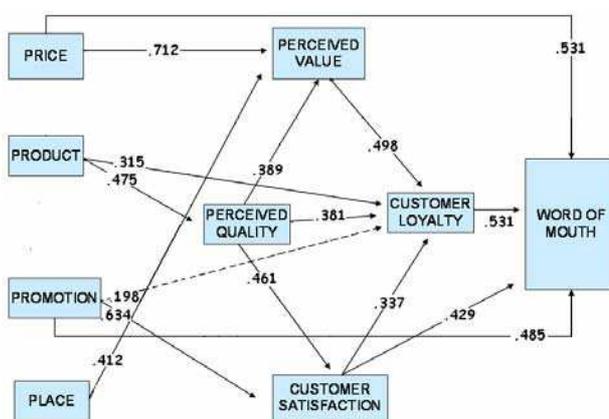


Fig. 3. Repeated structural equation analysis

Table 2. Direct and indirect effects on constructs

|                | Perceived value |          | Perceived quality |          | Customer satisfaction |          | Customer loyalty |          | Word of mouth |          |
|----------------|-----------------|----------|-------------------|----------|-----------------------|----------|------------------|----------|---------------|----------|
|                | Direct          | Indirect | Direct            | Indirect | Direct                | Indirect | Direct           | Indirect | Direct        | Indirect |
| Price          | .712            | -        | -                 | -        | -                     | -        | -                | .354     | .531          | .188     |
| Product        | -               | .184     | .475              | -        | -                     | .218     | .315             | .345     | -             | .442     |
| Promotion      | -               | -        | -                 | -        | .634                  | -        | -                | .213     | .485          | .384     |
| Place          | .412            | -        | -                 | -        | -                     | -        | -                | .205     | -             | .108     |
| P. quality     | .359            | -        | -                 | -        | .461                  | -        | .381             | .348     | -             | .583     |
| P. value       | -               | -        | -                 | -        | -                     | -        | .498             | -        | -             | .264     |
| C.satisfaction | -               | -        | -                 | -        | -                     | -        | .337             | -        | .429          | .178     |
| C. loyaly      | -               | -        | -                 | -        | -                     | -        | -                | -        | .531          | -        |

Table 3. Total effects on constructs

|            | Perceived value | Perceived quality | Customer satisfaction | Customer loyalty | Word of mouth |
|------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------------|------------------|---------------|
| Price      | .712            | -                 | -                     | .354             | .719          |
| Product    | .184            | .475              | .218                  | .660             | .442          |
| Promotion  | -               | -                 | .634                  | .213             | .869          |
| Place      | .412            | -                 | -                     | .205             | .108          |
| P. quality | .359            | -                 | .461                  | .729             | .583          |

Table 3 (continued). Total effects on constructs

|                 |   |   |   |      |      |
|-----------------|---|---|---|------|------|
| P. value        | - | - | - | .498 | .264 |
| C. satisfaction | - | - | - | .337 | .607 |
| C. loyalty      | - | - | - | -    | .531 |

**Conclusion**

Word of mouth is a way of communication between people regarding product and service performances. It is considered an unofficial form of communication and there are various expressions as to how people and academics refer to it. Words like “buzz”, “grapevine” or “customer talking” are often used to describe this communication activity people engage in.

Based on extant literature, seven factors can be thought of as contributing towards the pervasiveness of WOM. Firstly, WOM is a global phenomenon, although individualist and collectivist cultures may engage in WOM to a different extent. Secondly, WOM operates across all industries. WOM’s importance stretches across diverse industries encompassing corporate services, personal services, basic goods and complex goods. Thirdly, the proportion of consumers engaging in WOM has been found to be very high. Fourthly, the proportion of consumers relying on WOM has been found to be very high. While the precise proportion is disputed, it is clear that the majority of consumers often rely on WOM for decision-making. Fifthly, WOM can spread quickly. Sixthly, one of the key factors in allowing WOM to spread quickly is the fact that WOM may be retransmitted. That is, WOM may be received by a consumer who then passes the message onto another consumer and so forth. Lastly, one of the most powerful facets of WOM is that it can be shared with more than one person, i.e. multiple dyads.

As a result it can be seen that word of mouth is the most powerful communication way to reach customer. Accounting offices are not exception. So we research how word of mouth communication empowered. Firstly, we investigate literature on word of mouth communication and we find that five factors affect word of mouth that are customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, customer expectation, perceived quality and perceived value. Beside these factors we put forward that marketing mix (price, place, promotion and product) affects word of mouth via foregoing five factors. We did an empirical research based on a model on customer of accounting offices of Turkey. Finally we found that marketing mix especially product and promotion components have important influence on word of mouth communication indirectly.

**Managerial implication**

From the clients point of view, it is of paramount importance that accounting offices have a good understanding of customer responses and thought about them, and use this knowledge to provide a personalized high quality service. In this regard, marketing mix may help to realize this aim. This research has shown that by doing so, accounting offices can increase significantly their clients loyalty and word of mouth activities by using marketing mix. Hence, policies and decisions of accounting offices must favor an in-depth knowledge of customer needs, goals and expectations. Recent technological advances have helped to make this objective achievable. Rapid improvements in information technology allow accounting offices and their front-line staff to track customer characteristics more easily and respond with appropriate marketing offers. Businesses are no longer restricted to marketing at segment level, but can now tailor offers to individual customers. Accounting offices can also benefit from new information technologies to develop an image of good and effective service, given that this factor was found to affect word of mouth. In that respect, account managers should seek references from clients who they think are very satisfied. This strategy could prove to be very beneficial because positive word of mouth has been identified as a powerful factor in the purchase of accounting services.

Although the tariff has been restricted by the 46th article of the Law 3568, it is seen by the research results that Turkish accounting offices’ price component of marketing mix has positive effect on the customer loyalty model components. The reason of that the competition between accounting offices in Turkey has gone too far and the non-competitive regulations of the UNION seem unreasonable to applicants. So, accounting offices in Turkey are illicitly using price component as a tool of attracting clients’ loyalty. We suggest that Turkish regulators should either enhance inspection on the price using accounting offices as a marketing tool or the union should set a new market regulation on the price component which gives the opportunity of setting own tariffs to accounting offices.

Every business, either knowingly or unknowingly, generates word of mouth that is either positive – which helps build their business, or negative –

which hurts it. There are even some fortunate (but relatively few) businesses that rely entirely on word of mouth to generate more business than they can handle. When someone says good things about a business to someone else, it serves as a real-life testimonial, which is much more believable than when owner of that business saying good things about it. Studies have shown that the vast majority of dissatisfied customers and prospects will not voice complaints to responsible persons in a business which they have experienced some dissatisfaction with, but will quietly take their business elsewhere. And since they will likely spread negative word of mouth about their experience to others, not only does the business lose future business from the dissatisfied customer or prospect, but also from others that may be repelled by hearing such negative word of mouth. Here are some tips on generating positive word of mouth advertising for accounting offices:

1. Accounting offices should use experts (for example, advisory groups of agents, professional association representatives or careers counselors) in marketing (Jerram, 2003).
2. Internet offers a significant potential for marketing accounting services. IAs and CPAs should harness the power of web sites into marketing of services.
3. Accounting offices actively should seek feedback in the form of questions, comments, and even complaints from customers and prospects. It should be viewed as opportunities to improve firm's services and customer support (Foley, 2007).
4. IAs and CPAs shouldn't forget the importance of internal staff in talking about accounting of-

fices and providing a "virtual experience" (Jerram, 2003).

5. Another key for positive word of mouth communication is delivering excellent customer service. Even if customers are not satisfied with firm's business, they can have been neutral by excellent after selling services (Foley, 2007). In other words, accounting offices should provide quality service.

### Limitations

Our study was based on a descriptive perspective, rather than on a longitudinal one, which limits the knowledge of the long-term impact of the factors in our model. Would a longitudinal research produce different results from ours? Wilson (1995) argued that some determinants are very important at certain stages of the relationship development, but may become latent in others. In that respect, it could prove interesting to study the phenomenon under a long-term horizon. Such a study would also increase our understanding of the development process of a relationship. Do the results of our study apply to other business sectors? Would we obtain the same results at the international level? To answer these questions, researchers could eventually test the model presented in this paper, but under a completely different angle. Studies could, for example, be conducted in another industry (e.g. telecommunications), for a particular type of clientele (e.g. the government) or in another region (e.g. Asia). The results that we have obtained, although interesting, constitute only a spring-board for future investigations in a domain growing in theoretical and practical importance.

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**Appendix A**

**Table 1**

| Marketing mix items (Bradley, 2001)  |   |
|--|---|
| Product<br>P1. Wide range of services<br>P2. Very high standard of services<br>P3. Excellence of services<br>P4. Comply rigidly with technical specifications<br>P5. Innovativeness<br>P6. Incorporation of new technical developments<br>P7. Adaption of services to user needs<br><br>Place<br>PL1. Good residential area<br>PL2. Closeness to business centers<br>PL3. Open hours<br>PL4. Accessibility | Promotion<br>PRO1. Active dissemination of new information on services<br>PRO2. High quality of content in bureau communications<br>PRO3. Truthful communications<br>PRO4. Imaginative/creative bureau adver.<br><br>Price<br>PR1. Good value for money<br>PR2. Good discounts<br>PR3. Good credit terms<br>PR4. Competitively priced<br>PR5. Imaginative use of nonprice factors |

Table 1 (continued)

| Customer loyalty model items  |   |
|---|---|
| Perceived quality (Stafford, 1996)<br>PQ1. Atmosphere<br>PQ2. Relationships<br>PQ3. Available services<br>PQ4. Convenient service<br>PQ5. Reliability<br>PQ6. Honesty<br>PQ7. Tellers | Perceived value (Cronin et al., 2000)<br>PV1. Good value for money<br>PV2. Acceptable price<br>PV3. To be a good buy<br><br>Customer loyalty (Juhl et al., 2002)<br>CL1. Resubscription intention<br>CL2. New Services subscription intention |
| Customer satisfaction (Ryan et al., 1995)<br>CS1. Generally satisfied<br>CS2. Fulfil expectations<br>CS3. Perfect in all aspects  | Word of mouth (Maxham, 2001)<br>WM1. Intent to recommend<br>WM2. Spreading firm good reputation<br>WM3. Inform others about firms services  |

Note: 1: inferior performance.....7: superior performance.