

Marketing Strategies That Impact Patient Loyalty in Hospitals: An Empirical Literature Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Background: In an era of increasingly tight healthcare competition, patient loyalty is an important indicator of hospital success. This loyalty is not only influenced by the quality of medical services alone, but also by the effectiveness of the communication and marketing strategies implemented. Hospital marketing strategies that are able to build long-term relationships with patients are now the focus of study, especially in the context of how these strategies can increase patient trust and retention. Therefore, it is important to identify marketing strategies that have been empirically proven to have an impact on patient loyalty.

Methods: This study uses a systematic literature review approach, which examines and evaluates five selected scientific papers from various hospital contexts in Indonesia and Japan. The literature review involves qualitative and quantitative studies to gain a comprehensive understanding of effective marketing strategies. The selection process of articles is based on their relevance, credibility, and contribution to the topic of patient loyalty in healthcare marketing.

Results: The results of the analysis show that the two main strategies that are dominant and significant in increasing patient loyalty are Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) and relationship marketing.

Conclusion: This study confirms that patient loyalty is not only formed by the quality of medical services, but also by integrated, adaptive, and long-term-oriented communication and marketing strategies. These findings provide an important contribution in formulating more strategic health service marketing policies that focus on sustainable patient relationships, so that they can be a practical reference for hospital managers in increasing institutional competitiveness.

I. Introduction

In the last two decades, the growth of hospitals in Indonesia has shown significant improvement, both in terms of numbers and the variety of services offered. This phenomenon serves as an indicator of progress in the national healthcare system, but simultaneously presents new challenges in the form of competition between healthcare institutions, both public and private. Amid this increasingly intense competition, hospitals are not only required to provide quality medical services but also to adopt effective marketing strategies to maintain and enhance patient loyalty (Soraya et al., 2022). Patient loyalty has now become one of the key indicators of hospital management success as it reflects satisfaction, trust, and long-term relationships between patients and healthcare institutions. However, various hospitals in Indonesia, such as Royal Prima Medan and Efarina Etaham Berastagi hospitals, have experienced a significant decline in patient visits, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (Soraya et al., 2022; Tarigan et al., 2024). This decline not only impacts the financial aspect but also serves as an indicator of the weakness in the effectiveness of the marketing strategies implemented. Several studies show that the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) approach and relationship marketing can

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significantly enhance patient loyalty. IMC, which includes promotions through advertising, direct communication, public relations, and word of mouth, has been proven to create consistent and effective messages that build positive patient perceptions (Koyama et al., 2019; Kumaiyah et al., 2020). However, most previous studies have focused on increasing short-term visits and have not systematically examined the relationship between marketing strategies and patient loyalty in the long term (Romauly & Darma, 2023). Therefore, there is an urgent need for research that comprehensively evaluates hospital marketing strategies based on empirical evidence, focusing on patient loyalty as the main outcome. This research aims to bridge this gap by presenting a structured literature synthesis from various hospital contexts, both private and public, and formulating the most impactful marketing strategy elements. The novelty of this research lies in its approach, which combines cross-institution studies and emphasizes the importance of transitioning from a transactional marketing approach to a relational one in hospital management. The findings of this research are expected not only to contribute theoretically to the literature on healthcare service marketing but also to provide a basis for strategic policies for hospital managers in Indonesia and other developing countries in building patient loyalty sustainably.

II. METHODS

This research uses a systematic literature review method oriented towards a qualitative-descriptive approach. This method was chosen to deeply examine hospital marketing strategies that have a significant impact on patient loyalty based on empirical studies conducted in various healthcare institution contexts. This approach is considered appropriate as it provides a comprehensive understanding of the patterns, trends, and effectiveness of various marketing strategies that have been scientifically tested in previous studies (Annisa Soraya et al., 2022; Kumaiyah et al., 2020). The research design used is descriptive-qualitative with thematic synthesis, allowing the researcher to examine and group various findings from previous studies into relevant main themes, such as Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), relationship marketing, digital strategies, and service differentiation strategies. The literature analyzed in this study consists of scholarly articles published in accredited national journals and reputable international journals, as gathered and reviewed from five primary documents. The research sample consists of literature that has been purposively selected based on inclusion criteria, namely: (1) discussing hospital marketing strategies, (2) examining the impact on patient loyalty or satisfaction, (3) based on empirical data (quantitative or qualitative), and (4) published within the last five years (2019–2024). A total of five scholarly articles were analyzed, namely the works of Annisa Soraya et al. (2022), Tarigan et al. (2024), Kumaiyah et al. (2020), Romauly & Darma (2023), and Koyama et al. (2019). The research instrument in this literature review study is a data recording format based on thematic coding. Data from each article are classified based on the main variables being studied, the methods used, the research location, and the main conclusions related to marketing strategies and patient loyalty. In addition, the researcher uses matrix extraction to identify common threads and significant differences between the studies reviewed. The data collection procedure is carried out in three stages: (1) document identification, (2) literature selection based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, and (3) data extraction and thematic grouping. All processes are done manually, with in-depth analysis of the methods and results sections of each literature. In the selection process, the researcher ensures that each article has academic quality that can be accountable and contains primary or secondary data that can be used for synthesis. The data analysis method used is thematic analysis based on the Miles & Huberman model, consisting of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the data reduction phase, the researcher selects key findings related to marketing strategies and patient loyalty. Next, the data is displayed in the form of a thematic matrix to observe the relationships between variables. Finally, the researcher draws conclusions based on dominant patterns that emerge from the literature that has been analyzed. The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of the literature sources and the consistency of theme categorization by two independent reviewers. This technique aims to ensure that data interpretation is unbiased and has a strong foundation from primary sources. In addition, content validity is maintained by only using verified scholarly articles from journals that have been academically recognized. With this systematic and structured method, the research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions in identifying effective marketing strategies to build hospital patient loyalty based on legitimate and relevant empirical evidence.

III. RESULTS

This study reveals that hospital marketing strategies play a strategic role in building and maintaining patient loyalty. Based on the literature analysis conducted, it was found that the application of appropriate marketing strategies can drive not only an increase in the number of visits but also strengthen the long-term relationship between patients and healthcare institutions. One of the most dominant and widely implemented strategies in the hospital context is Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC). As stated by Annisa Soraya et al. (2022), IMC elements such as advertising, personal promotions, public relations, direct marketing, and word of mouth have been proven to improve patients' positive perceptions of Royal Prima Hospital, although in practice, verbal implementation is still suboptimal. This finding is reinforced by the study of Tarigan et al. (2024), which analyzed the IMC strategy at Efarina Etaham Berastagi Hospital. The study shows that although some communication elements have been implemented, there has been no synergy or consistency in the messaging across all promotional channels. This inconsistency has led to low communication effectiveness and suboptimal patient loyalty formation. This means that the success of marketing strategies is not only determined by the number of channels used but also by the consistency of the message and the integration of communication elements that lead to a strong and trustworthy hospital image. This strengthens the view that patient loyalty is not built instantly, but through a series of consistent, informative, and trust-building interactions. In addition to IMC, relationship marketing strategies are also an important approach in building patient loyalty. Research by Siti Kumaiyah et al. (2020) at Sumberglagah Hospital shows that long-term relationships between hospitals and patients can be formed through two-way communication, interpersonal approaches, and responsiveness to patient complaints or feedback. This strategy is considered more effective in retaining existing patients and encouraging them to become informal ambassadors of the hospital through word-of-mouth promotion. This approach is relevant to the social context of Indonesian society, which has a collective culture and prioritizes interpersonal trust in decision-making, including in choosing healthcare facilities. A study by Koyama et al. (2019) in Japan provides an additional perspective on the importance of hospital digital branding, especially through websites.

IV. DISCUSSION

The study shows that although some communication elements have been implemented, there has been no synergy or consistency in the messaging across all promotional channels. This inconsistency has led to low communication effectiveness and suboptimal patient loyalty formation. This means that the success of marketing strategies is not only determined by the number of channels used but also by the consistency of the message and the integration of communication elements that lead to a strong and trustworthy hospital image. This strengthens the view that patient loyalty is not built instantly, but through a series of consistent, informative, and trust-building interactions. In addition to IMC, relationship marketing strategies are also an important approach in building patient loyalty. Research by Siti Kumaiyah et al. (2020) at Sumberglagah Hospital shows that long-term relationships between hospitals and patients can be formed through two-way communication, interpersonal approaches, and responsiveness to patient complaints or feedback. This strategy is considered more effective in retaining existing patients and encouraging them to become informal ambassadors of the hospital through word-of-mouth promotion. This approach is relevant to the social context of Indonesian society, which has a collective culture and prioritizes interpersonal trust in decision-making, including in choosing healthcare facilities. A study by Koyama et al. (2019) in Japan provides an additional perspective on the importance of hospital digital branding, especially through websites. They demonstrated that regular, relevant, and informative content updates can increase the number of new patients and job applicants accessing the hospital through digital channels. This indicates that digital marketing is not just about an online presence, but about how healthcare institutions build narratives that educate, influence, and emotionally engage prospective patients. In the context of Indonesia, this strategy is becoming relevant as internet penetration increases and people increasingly search for health information online before deciding to seek medical treatment. The theoretical implications of these findings suggest that patient loyalty in the hospital context is influenced by a combination of integrated communication strategies, consistent service experiences, and positive perceptions of the hospital's reputation. Patient loyalty is not merely the result of good medical service, but also of how information is communicated, relationships are built, and the hospital's values are continuously conveyed. Romauly and Darma (2023) emphasize that professional service, improved facilities, and a responsive managerial approach to patient needs are key determinants in the growth strategy of clinics and hospitals. Therefore, marketing should not be viewed

as a secondary function, but as an integral part of the hospital management system. Practically, hospitals need to design marketing strategies based on patient behavior analysis and adapted to local market dynamics. These strategies must involve all units of the hospital, not just the marketing department, to form cross-functional synergies that support patient loyalty. Additionally, hospitals should regularly evaluate the effectiveness of their marketing strategies. As found by Tarigan et al. (2024), hospitals often lack a robust evaluation system for the impact of their communication campaigns, both quantitatively and qualitatively. This evaluation is crucial to determine whether the strategies implemented actually impact patient behavior or are just promotional activities that are not measured. This study also has policy implications for hospital management, especially in terms of resource allocation, staff training, and long-term strategic planning. For instance, there should be an investment in training marketing staff and front-line personnel in building effective and empathetic communication with patients. Furthermore, hospitals should strengthen their digital marketing division to build the hospital's digital narrative sustainably. In terms of regulation, hospital marketing strategies must adhere to health promotion ethics, as outlined in legal regulations. Therefore, it is important for hospitals to design adaptive yet ethical marketing strategies. However, this study has several limitations. First, although based on empirical literature, the data used comes from studies with different geographic and socio-cultural contexts, so generalizing the results should be done cautiously. Second, most of the studies analyzed use qualitative approaches, so the limitations in quantitative validation present a challenge. Third, not all literature explicitly measures patient loyalty as a primary variable; some only consider loyalty as an implication of satisfaction or branding. This raises challenges in constructing a strong causal relationship between marketing strategies and patient loyalty directly. Nevertheless, the strength of this study lies in its ability to present a comprehensive critical synthesis of various hospital marketing strategies, considering valid empirical evidence. This study contributes significantly to the development of hospital marketing models that are not only oriented toward promotion but also toward building long-term relationships based on values, empathy, and trust. This approach aligns with global demands for more humanistic healthcare systems, adaptable to technology, and accountable in building relationships with the community. In conclusion, hospital marketing strategies that impact patient loyalty are strategies that not only sell services but also build meaningful and sustainable relationships. These strategies must be based on integrative communication, consistent service, and professional reputation management. Patient loyalty is an asset that cannot be bought instantly, but is formed through experiences, perceptions, and trust that are built over time. Hospitals that understand and implement these principles will have a strong competitive advantage in the increasingly competitive healthcare landscape.

V. CONCLUSION

This study emphasizes that hospital marketing strategies have a significant influence on the formation and enhancement of patient loyalty. Based on empirical literature reviews, it was found that Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) and relationship marketing strategies are the most prominent approaches in creating consistent and valuable patient experiences. IMC, when implemented in a structured and integrated manner, helps to build a strong hospital image, increase brand awareness, and instill trust in patients. Meanwhile, the relationship marketing approach strengthens the emotional and cognitive bond between patients and the hospital through personal and ongoing interactions. The studies reviewed also show that successful marketing strategies are not only determined by the number of promotional media used, but more so by message consistency, communication source credibility, and sensitivity to patient needs. In this context, the success of marketing strategies should be viewed not only from a quantitative perspective, such as the increase in visits, but more deeply from a qualitative perspective, such as increased trust, satisfaction, and patients' intention to return for hospital services. Therefore, hospitals that wish to build sustained patient loyalty should position marketing not just as a promotional activity, but as a strategic function that touches all elements of service and organizational culture. Patient loyalty is not an instant result, but rather the outcome of a relationship that is consistently and meaningfully built through communication, service, and the values conveyed by the hospital.

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