

CONSTRUCTING PATIENT LOYALTY IN A COMPETITIVE ERA: THE CRITICAL ROLE OF BRAND AWARENESS IN PRIVATE HOSPITAL MARKETING STRATEGY

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ABSTRACT

Background: Competition in the healthcare industry compels private hospitals to build sustainable patient loyalty. Brand awareness is hypothesized to be a critical foundation in constructing this loyalty, particularly in shaping patients' proactive choices amidst numerous alternatives. Objective: This study aims to analyze the role of brand awareness in the marketing strategy of private hospitals by examining its relationship with outpatient loyalty. Method: This research employs a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design. Seventy-seven outpatients from a type C private hospital in East Java were selected purposively. Data were collected using a questionnaire measuring the variables of brand awareness (through indicators of recognition, recall, and preference) and patient loyalty (through indicators of repurchase intention and recommendation). Data analysis used the Spearman's Rank correlation test. Results: The level of brand awareness was in the moderate category (54.5%), while patient loyalty was in the high category (57.1%). Statistical testing revealed a significant and strong positive relationship between the two variables (correlation coefficient = 0.683; p-value = 0.000). Conclusion: Brand awareness plays a critical role in constructing patient loyalty in private hospitals. These findings highlight that an integrated marketing strategy must prioritize enhancing brand awareness, particularly the aspect of brand recall (spontaneous memory), as a strategic step to build long-term loyalty and competitiveness in an intensely competitive era.

Keywords: Loyalty Construction, Brand Awareness, Marketing Strategy, Private Hospital, Healthcare Competition.

INTRODUCTION

Increasingly fierce competition in healthcare is pushing private hospitals to compete not only on the quality of medical services but also on effective marketing strategies to build patient loyalty as a strategic asset for the institution (Irawan et al., 2025). Brand awareness is a crucial element of brand equity, contributing to positive perceptions and patient loyalty toward a hospital, as patients tend to choose hospitals that are well-known and memorable (Nugroho, Rohendi, & Rinawati, 2025). Empirical research shows that brand awareness has a positive and significant effect on patient loyalty, as patients who remember a hospital's brand are more likely to return and recommend it to others (Pramesti et al., 2008)

Furthermore, studies have also found that brand awareness and service quality jointly have a significant effect on patient loyalty in specialized eye hospitals, demonstrating the importance of brand-focused marketing in the healthcare context (Walean et al., 2022)

Brand awareness influences patients' perceptions of a hospital's brand equity, part of a marketing strategy that can create a competitive advantage amidst the multitude of healthcare options (SURIAH, 2024)

In a narrative review study, brand equity, which includes brand awareness, was found to be a crucial factor in shaping customer (including patient) loyalty, with service quality as the primary mediator (Aufa & Sipahutar, 2022)

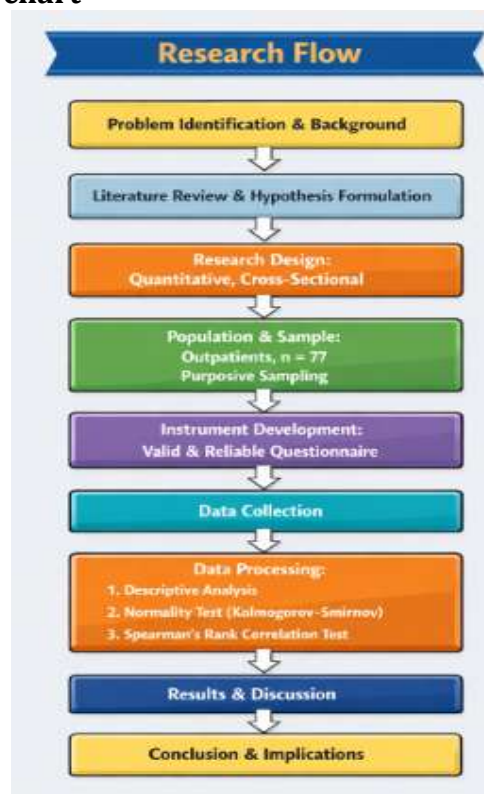
Research on the influence of social media on patient visits shows that digital

marketing efforts can increase brand awareness and ultimately patient visit intention, strengthening the relationship between brand awareness and patient behavior. Patient loyalty is shaped not only by the medical service experience but also by the hospital's ability to market itself effectively, thus creating brand recognition and trust (Asopari, 2024). Research in other hospitals confirms that marketing strategies such as Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) and relationship marketing are more effective in building patient loyalty than relying solely on clinical services (Utami et al., 2024). Meanwhile, the relationship between brand image and loyalty demonstrates the importance of overall branding including brand awareness in fostering long-term patient loyalty in various hospital contexts (Siagian et al., 2025). Based on this empirical evidence, it can be concluded that increasing brand awareness is an inevitable strategic prerequisite in private hospital marketing to build sustainable and competitive patient loyalty in an era of healthcare competition. (Conclusions cited from the various studies above).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional design, conducted in March 2025 at a type C private hospital in Malang Regency, East Java. This design was chosen to examine the relationship between variables at a single point in time. The research flow is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Research Flowchart



Method Stages:

1. **Population and Sample:** The population consisted of all outpatients at the hospital. A sample of 77 respondents was selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) adults (≥ 18 years old), (2) a history of at least two visits within the past year, and (3) willingness to participate. This sample

size was considered adequate for inferential statistical analysis (Hair et al., 2019).

2. **Data Collection Instrument:** Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising three sections:
 - a) **Demographic Data:** Gender and age.
 - b) **Brand Awareness:** Measured with 9 items adapted from Keller's (2020) scale across three dimensions: Brand Recognition (e.g., "I can easily recognize this hospital's logo"), Brand Recall (e.g., "This hospital's name is the first I remember when needing healthcare services"), and Brand Preference.
 - c) **Patient Loyalty:** Measured with 6 items adapted from the scale by Zeithaml et al. (2020), encompassing Behavioral Intention (repurchase intent) and Advocacy (recommendation intent). A 5-point Likert scale was used for measurement.
3. **Validity and Reliability:** The questionnaire underwent content validity testing by experts. A pilot test demonstrated good reliability with Cronbach's Alpha > 0.70 for all constructs.
4. **Data Collection Procedure:** Surveys were administered directly to eligible outpatients in the waiting area after obtaining informed consent.
5. **Data Analysis:** Data were analyzed using SPSS 25. The stages were:
 - **Descriptive Analysis:** To present respondent characteristics and the distribution of research variables (brand awareness and loyalty).
 - **Normality Test:** The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used, indicating the data were not normally distributed ($p < 0.05$).
 - **Hypothesis Testing:** Given non-normal data distribution, the Spearman's Rank correlation test was used to examine the relationship between brand awareness and patient loyalty, with a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$.

The study received ethical approval. The principles of informed consent, data confidentiality, and the respondents' right to withdraw were fully applied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The presentation of results follows the analytical stages outlined in the method.

1. Respondent Characteristics (Descriptive Analysis)

A total of 77 respondents participated in this study. The majority of respondents were female (50.6%). The most common age distribution was in the 40-49 year group (20.8%), followed by the 60-69 year group (19.5%). The complete characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n=77)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	38	49.4
	Female	39	50.6
Age	≤ 29 years	15	19.5
	30 - 49 years	29	37.7
	≥ 50 years	33	42.8

2. Research Variable Description (Descriptive Analysis)

Based on categorization using the mean score, the level of brand awareness at the hospital falls into the *moderate* category (54.5% of respondents). Conversely, the level of patient loyalty is classified as *high* (57.1% of respondents). The distribution of responses for the highest category ("Strongly Agree") for each variable is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of "Strongly Agree" Responses for Each Variable

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Brand Awareness	25	32.5%
Patient Loyalty	34	44.2%

3. Test of Relationship (Inferential Analysis - Spearman's Rank Correlation)

The results of the Spearman's Rank correlation test (Table 3) show a correlation coefficient (rho) of 0.683 with a p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.01$). This indicates a significant positive relationship between brand awareness and patient loyalty. The strength of the relationship falls into the *strong* category (coefficient > 0.60).

Table 3. Results of Spearman's Rank Correlation Test between Brand Awareness and Patient Loyalty

	Brand Awareness	Patient Loyalty
Correlation Coefficient (ρ)	1.000	0.683
Sig. (2-tailed)	-	0.000
N	77	77

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate a positive and significant relationship between brand awareness and hospital outpatient loyalty in a competitive marketing context. This is consistent with previous findings that brand awareness is a crucial element of brand equity influencing patient loyalty in healthcare (Nugroho & Rohendi, 2025). Brand awareness is not only related to name recognition but also plays a role in patients' decisions to choose services. Research in other hospitals has shown that brand awareness significantly influences the decision to use medical services (Herdiana et al., 2025). This finding aligns with studies showing that brand awareness, along with service quality and perceived quality, has a positive and significant effect on patient loyalty, confirming the role of brand awareness as a factor strengthening loyalty in the healthcare sector (Syahrian & Angelina, 2023). The results are also consistent with research that found that brand awareness can influence patient visit intention through social media as a hospital marketing strategy, underscoring the importance of brand awareness in patient behavior (Hariyanti et al., 2023).

In the international literature, narrative reviews indicate that brand equity dimensions, including brand awareness, contribute to customer loyalty in healthcare settings, supporting the role of brand awareness in shaping long-term loyalty (Angela et al., 2025). Other research shows that general brand perception, including brand awareness, is part of the brand equity that influences hospital patient loyalty, thus strengthening the relationship between brand awareness and patient loyalty behavior (Sinuraya, 2021). This analysis is also supported by research showing that

brand awareness can explain a significant portion of the variance in patient loyalty when combined with service quality, suggesting that brand awareness is not a single factor but part of a complex patient perception system (Syahrian, 2024).

This finding also correlates with literature confirming that brand image a concept closely related to brand awareness has a positive relationship with patient loyalty, although the primary focus was not on brand awareness alone (Hasibuan & Mas, 2026). Furthermore, a marketing literature review shows that brand communication strategies such as Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) and relationship marketing can strengthen patient loyalty, indirectly reflecting the importance of brand awareness in hospital marketing efforts (Nur et al., 2024).

The results of this study also show that high patient loyalty, despite moderate brand awareness, can be interpreted as loyalty built through adequate service experiences, consistent with the literature's argument that patient experience can be a catalyst for loyalty (Shafa et al., 2025). Other research in the hospital context shows that brand image and service quality contribute to patient loyalty, supporting the notion that broader brand elements, including brand awareness, play a role in loyalty (Nur et al., 2024). Furthermore, numerous marketing studies outside the healthcare context confirm that brand awareness is a crucial prerequisite in the chain of brand loyalty formation, as customers need to recognize and remember a brand before they become loyal (Syahrian, 2024).

This approach also aligns with findings from e-commerce marketing studies showing that brand awareness plays a mediating role between digital marketing strategies and consumer loyalty suggesting that the implications of brand awareness on loyalty apply across sectors (Yesawen & Ady, 2026). Thus, the results of this study confirm that hospital marketing efforts need to integrate strategies to strengthen brand awareness, which has been shown to be a crucial foundation for building and maintaining patient loyalty (Herdiana et al., 2025). In the context of hospital marketing management, strengthening brand awareness can also be achieved through consistent and effective communication activities that can increase top-of-mind awareness, as emphasized by the social media literature in the context of brand awareness (Rahmadini et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the results of this study support the notion that marketing strategies focused on brand awareness impact long-term patient decisions. Therefore, marketing strategies should be designed not only for short-term gains but also to build long-term relationships with patients (Herdiana et al., 2025).

Other literature also states that increasing brand awareness can contribute to reducing the risk of negative perceptions among patients, yes. Therefore, the strategic implications of this research emphasize the need for an integrated approach:

1. **Proactive Marketing Strategy:** Shifting the focus from transactional marketing to marketing that builds brand awareness and equity, with an emphasis on improving *brand recall* through consistent narrative campaigns.
2. **Loyalty Construction Strategy:** Leveraging the existing base of loyal patients as organic marketing agents while ensuring service quality as the foundational experience that sustains loyalty.
3. **Integrated Measurement:** Monitoring brand awareness and patient loyalty as complementary marketing performance indicators to periodically identify gaps and opportunities.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that in constructing patient loyalty in the competitive era of healthcare services, brand awareness is not merely a peripheral variable but a critical foundation and strategic prerequisite, consistent with the study's objective. The strong positive relationship between brand awareness and patient loyalty in private hospitals proves that efforts to build loyalty must be initiated and driven by systematic efforts to enhance brand awareness, particularly in the aspect of *brand recall*.

The results reveal a clear gap between high loyalty (constructed reactively from experience) and moderate brand awareness (indicating weak proactive appeal). This signals both a significant opportunity and a vulnerability. To build sustainable competitive resilience, private hospitals need to adopt an integrated marketing strategy that simultaneously strengthens brand awareness in the minds of prospective patients and maintains the quality experiences that solidify the loyalty of existing patients. In this way, loyalty can be constructed from a strong and proactive foundation, not merely as a consequence of reactive experiences.

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