



Relationship Between Brand Image and Patient Loyalty: A Cross-Sectional Study at a Private Hospital in South Kalimantan

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: 2026-06-01

Accepted: 2026-08-12

Published: 2026-08-17

Keywords:

Brand Image;
Patient Loyalty;
Hospital;
Healthcare Services

ABSTRACT

Background: Brand image plays an important role in influencing loyalty toward healthcare services. In the increasingly competitive healthcare sector, hospitals are required to build a positive image to maintain patient loyalty and improve service sustainability. This study aimed to analyze the relationship between brand image and patient loyalty at Hospital X.

Methods: This study used a quantitative method with a cross-sectional design conducted at the outpatient unit of Hospital X in April 2026. A total of 100 respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Data were collected through a closed-ended questionnaire using a Likert scale that had been tested for validity and reliability. Data were analyzed using univariate analysis to describe the distribution of respondent characteristics and variables, while bivariate analysis using the Spearman Rank correlation test was conducted to examine the relationship between variables.

Results: The results showed that most respondents perceived the hospital's brand image as good (91%) and had a high level of patient loyalty (81%). Statistical analysis revealed a significant relationship between brand image and patient loyalty, with a p-value of 0.001 and a correlation coefficient of 0.681, indicating a strong positive correlation.

Conclusion: This study confirms a significant positive relationship between hospital brand image and patient loyalty. Patients who perceive a more positive brand image tend to demonstrate higher levels of loyalty. These findings highlight the importance of brand image as a factor associated with patient loyalty in hospitals.



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INTRODUCTION

Hospitals play an important role in providing comprehensive healthcare services, including promotive, preventive, curative, and rehabilitative care. According to the World Health Organization, hospitals are an integral part of social and health organizations that are responsible for improving public health services. In the increasingly competitive healthcare sector, hospitals are required not only to provide high-quality medical services but also to build a positive image in the minds of patients and society. Patients generally select hospitals that deliver high-quality healthcare services and satisfactory service experiences (Eftitah et al., 2023).

The rapid growth in the number of hospitals has intensified competition among healthcare providers. This condition encourages hospitals to become more patient-oriented in order to maintain their competitiveness. In healthcare services, patient satisfaction and trust are essential factors in creating patient loyalty. One of the important factors influencing patient loyalty is the hospital's brand image. Brand image refers to patients' perceptions, beliefs, and impressions of a

hospital formed through information and experiences while receiving healthcare services (Dewi & Sukei, 2022). A positive brand image can strengthen patient trust, encourage repeat visits, and increase patients' willingness to recommend the hospital to others. Conversely, a negative brand image may reduce patient trust and weaken patient loyalty toward the hospital (Solo et al., 2025).

Globally, patient loyalty has become an important issue in healthcare services. According to the Medical Tourism Association, approximately 14 million people travel abroad annually for medical treatment, with estimated expenditures reaching USD 125 billion in 2021 (Mahardika, 2024). In Indonesia, the Ministry of State-Owned Enterprises (BUMN) reported that around 2 million Indonesians seek medical treatment overseas, resulting in a loss of approximately 150 trillion rupiah in national foreign exchange each year (BUMN, 2025). This phenomenon suggests that many Indonesian patients perceive foreign healthcare institutions as offering better service quality, facilities, and reputations than domestic hospitals (Asa et al., 2024). Previous research conducted by Zain on Indonesian patients at National Heart Institute found that dissatisfaction with domestic healthcare services and recommendations from relatives were among the primary reasons patients preferred medical treatment abroad (Zain et al., 2022). These findings suggest that a strong and positive image can influence patient loyalty toward healthcare institutions.

Hospital X is a private type C general hospital located in South Kalimantan. The hospital continuously improves service quality through regular in-house training programs, especially service excellence training for healthcare workers. These efforts aim to create positive patient experiences and strengthen the hospital's image. Nevertheless, outpatient visit data in 2024 still showed fluctuations, indicating that patient loyalty may not have been optimally established (Noor, 2024). Preliminary data revealed that outpatient visits experienced several declines during 2024. The most significant decrease occurred between January and April, when the number of patient visits dropped from 6,136 to 5,203 patients. Additionally, during the last three months of 2024, outpatient visits consistently declined by a total of 876 patients. These fluctuations indicate instability in patient visits, which may affect patient loyalty toward the hospital.

Several factors may contribute to this problem, including inconsistent service quality, ineffective communication, and weak brand image. According to Curatman, customer loyalty is influenced by satisfaction, service quality, brand image, perceived value, and trust (S.Depari, 2023). In healthcare settings, if hospitals fail to create a positive image through high-quality services and positive patient experiences, patients may lose trust and choose alternative healthcare providers. Low patient loyalty may negatively impact hospital profitability, reduce repeat visits, and weaken positive word-of-mouth communication among the community (Nisa & Aristi, 2023).

Initial interviews with patients indicated that some patients perceived the hospital positively due to its healthcare services and superior hemodialysis facilities. However, several patients also expressed negative perceptions regarding parking accessibility, waiting room comfort, long waiting times, and communication from healthcare workers. Furthermore, patient reviews on Google Review revealed complaints related to healthcare staff attitudes, pharmacy services, and inadequate communication from doctors. These negative experiences may weaken the hospital's brand image and influence patient loyalty.

Hospitals should recognize that patients are not only seeking high-quality healthcare services but also positive experiences, emotional engagement, and trust in the hospital brand (Lejab, 2024). Therefore, understanding the relationship between brand image and patient loyalty is essential to support hospital sustainability and competitiveness. However, previous studies examining the relationship between brand image and patient loyalty have produced inconsistent results. Several studies have reported that a positive brand image significantly influences patient loyalty. For example, Nurfitriani found that a positive brand image had a direct effect on patient loyalty (Nurfitriani, 2023). In contrast, Yanti and Irda reported that brand image did not significantly affect patient loyalty (Yanti & Irda, 2023). These inconsistent findings indicate the need for further research to better understand the role of brand image in fostering patient loyalty.

Furthermore, no previous study has specifically examined the relationship between brand image and patient loyalty at Hospital X. Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze

“Relationship Between Brand Image and Patient Loyalty: A Cross-Sectional Study in a Private Hospital in South Kalimantan”.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design. The study was conducted among outpatients at Hospital X in April 2026. The study population consisted of all outpatients who visited the hospital in 2024, totaling 69,337 patients. A sample of 100 respondents was determined using the Slovin formula with a 10% margin of error and selected through purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria were outpatients who had utilized the hospital's outpatient services at least twice and were assessed during their third visit, were aged 17 years or older, and were willing to participate in the study. Respondents who submitted incomplete questionnaires or provided inconsistent response patterns were excluded from the study.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of 16 brand image items covering the dimensions of corporate identity, physical environment, contact personnel, and service offering, and 8 patient loyalty items covering repeat purchase behavior, willingness to recommend services, and resistance to competitors. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Favorable items were scored from 1 to 5, while unfavorable items were reverse-scored. Brand image scores were categorized as poor (16–37), moderate (38–58), and good (59–80), whereas patient loyalty scores were classified as low (8–18), moderate (19–29), and high (30–40). All questionnaire items were valid ($r > 0.361$). Reliability testing demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.756 for brand image and 0.763 for patient loyalty.

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27. Univariate analysis was performed to describe respondents' characteristics and study variables, while the Spearman Rank correlation test was used to examine the relationship between brand image and patient loyalty. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Health Research Ethics Committee of STIKES Intan Martapura (Approval No. 173/KE/BIP-SI/XII/2025). All respondents provided informed consent prior to participation in the study.

RESULTS

The study involved a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design and was conducted at the outpatient unit of Hospital X in April 2026. A total of 100 respondents participated in the study. The respondents' demographic characteristics included age, gender, educational level, and occupation.

Univariate Analysis

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	n	%
Age		
17–25 years	16	16
26–35 years	25	25
36–45 years	11	11
46–55 years	24	24
56–65 years	24	24
Gender		
Male	25	25
Female	75	75
Education Level		
Elementary School	14	14
Junior High School	12	12
Senior High School	45	45
Diploma	9	9
Bachelor's Degree	20	20
Occupation		
Student	8	8

Civil Servant	17	17
Private Employee	15	15
Entrepreneur	15	15
Unemployed	45	45

Source: Primary data, 2026

Based on Table 1, most respondents were in the 26–35 years age group, accounting for 25% of the total respondents. Most respondents were female, accounting for 75% of the respondents. Based on educational level, most respondents had completed senior high school or equivalent education, accounting for 45% of the respondents. In terms of occupation, most respondents were unemployed, accounting for 45% of the respondents.

Table 2. Distribution of Brand Image and Patient Loyalty Variables

Variables	n	%
Brand Image		
Good	91	91
Moderate	9	9
Poor	0	0
Patient Loyalty		
High	81	81
Medium	19	19
Low	0	0

Source: Primary data, 2026.

Based on Table 2, most respondents perceived the brand image as being in the good category, accounting for 91% of the respondents. Most respondents also demonstrated a high level of patient loyalty, representing 81% of the total sample.

Bivariate Analysis

Table 3. Relationship Between Brand Image and Patient Loyalty

Brand Image	Patient Loyalty						Total		p-value	Correlation Coefficient
	High		Medium		Low					
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Good	79	79	12	12	0	0	91	91	0.001	0.681
Moderate	2	2	7	7	0	0	9	9		
Poor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Total	81	81	19	19	0	0	100	100		

Source: Primary data, 2026.

Based on Table 3, the distribution of the relationship between brand image and patient loyalty showed that among respondents who perceived the brand image as good, 91% of respondents were identified, with 79% having high patient loyalty and 12% having moderate patient loyalty. Meanwhile, among respondents who perceived the brand image as moderate, 9% of respondents were identified, with 2% having high patient loyalty and 7% having moderate patient loyalty. No respondents were found in the poor brand image category.

Statistical analysis showed a significant relationship between brand image and patient loyalty ($p = 0.001$). The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.681$) indicated a strong positive relationship, suggesting that a better brand image was associated with higher patient loyalty.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study showed a statistically significant relationship between brand image and patient loyalty at Hospital X. The positive correlation indicates that a better hospital brand image are associated with higher patient loyalty. These findings are consistent with previous studies by Nurfitriani who reported that brand image significantly influenced patient loyalty at

RSUD Haji South Sulawesi (Nurfitriani, 2023). Similar findings were also reported by Saputra et al. who stated that brand image had a significant effect on patient loyalty at Santo Antonio Hospital Baturaja, South Sumatra (Saputra et al., 2026).

According to Kotler and Keller, brand image plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and influencing purchasing decisions and loyalty. Aaker also emphasized that a strong brand image enhances customer loyalty through trust, consistent service quality, and effective brand communication (Zed et al., 2025). Conversely, a poor brand image may reduce consumer confidence in choosing a service (Putri et al., 2021). Furthermore, a positive brand image can stimulate emotional responses such as comfort and confidence, which encourage repeat utilization and long-term loyalty (Zed et al., 2025).

Hospital brand image encompasses all patient memories and their associations with the brand, which can strengthen a hospital's competitiveness compared to others (Nurliyah, 2022). Brand image is formed through long-term interactions between consumers and a brand, influenced by service experiences, promotional activities, and environmental factors. A positive brand image can increase consumers' intention to choose and use healthcare services. In the healthcare context, brand image also plays an important role in influencing patients' intention to visit. Hospitals with a positive image are more likely to attract patients and encourage service utilization. Conversely, a negative brand image, such as poor service quality or unfriendly staff, may lead patients to avoid the facility and seek alternative providers (Wahyuni, 2024).

A positive brand image plays an important role in influencing patients' trust and decisions to continue using healthcare services. Patients who perceive a hospital positively are more likely to revisit and recommend the hospital to others. In addition, a strong brand image can create emotional attachment between patients and the hospital, which contributes to long-term loyalty (Wardhana, 2024). According to Liu et al., loyalty is defined as a strong commitment to repurchase or consistently use a preferred product or service in the future, leading to repeated use of the same brand despite situational influences and marketing efforts that may encourage switching behavior (Liu et al., 2021). Loyalty is more closely related to behavioral aspects rather than merely attitudinal ones. Loyal customers tend to demonstrate consistent purchasing behavior over time, reflected in repeated usage decisions (Sihombing, 2022).

Hospitals with well-established brands also tend to have stronger competitiveness compared to other healthcare providers (Sari et al., 2022). According to Kotler and Keller, positive consumer perceptions of service quality and performance can encourage repeated service utilization (Tri Okta Ratnaningtyas et al., 2023). The findings also indicated that several brand image indicators contributed to patient loyalty. Regarding the corporate identity indicator, the findings showed that the hospital's name was easy for patients to pronounce and remember and that its services were perceived as superior to those of other healthcare providers. These findings suggest that the hospital's identity has been well established in patients' minds, making it easier for them to recognize and differentiate the hospital from its competitors. Previous studies have also reported that corporate identity significantly influences public perception and patients' decisions when selecting healthcare services (D. A. Fadillah et al., 2024). A strong corporate identity can enhance patients' trust and confidence in the quality of services provided, which may ultimately contribute to the development of patient loyalty (Jak et al., 2024).

However, several patients reported that the hospital's signage was not clearly visible from the main road, which may limit the accessibility of visual information, particularly for first-time visitors. This finding is consistent with the view of Leblanc, who emphasized the important role of corporate identity in shaping consumer perceptions (Fadillah et al., 2024). Furthermore, clear and easily recognizable visual elements are essential for strengthening a hospital's image and improving public awareness (Afiana et al., 2025). Therefore, although the hospital has established a strong identity through its name and service excellence, improvements in visual identity remain necessary to further reinforce its positive image and strengthen patient loyalty.

Regarding the *physical environment* indicator, the findings showed that the hospital's accessible location and available facilities contributed to positive patient experiences. However, this indicator received the lowest score among all dimensions, particularly regarding the distance

between the parking area and the main hospital building, which was perceived by some patients as relatively far. This finding suggests that physical accessibility remains an important concern for patients when accessing healthcare services. These findings are consistent with the concept proposed by Hutton and Richardson, who stated that the *physical environment* includes location, medical equipment, and hospital facilities and infrastructure, all of which play an important role in shaping public perceptions of service quality (Fadillah et al., 2025). Previous studies have also demonstrated a significant relationship between the *physical environment* and public perceptions of healthcare services (Fadillah et al., 2024). A comfortable and supportive healthcare environment can enhance patient satisfaction and encourage patients to revisit the hospital for future healthcare needs (Jak et al., 2024).

Regarding the *contact personnel* indicator, the findings showed that the quality of interactions between patients and healthcare personnel was the most dominant factor in shaping the hospital's *brand image*. Neat appearance, professional attitudes, and the ability of healthcare personnel to provide clear information enhanced patients' trust and comfort during service delivery. Based on the mean scores of respondents' answers, this indicator received the highest rating, particularly for the statement that doctors, nurses, and non-medical staff wore clean, neat, and appropriate uniforms. These findings suggest that direct interactions between patients and staff, both through visual appearance and professional behavior, play an important role in shaping positive perceptions of the hospital. These findings are consistent with previous studies demonstrating that *contact personnel* significantly influence patients' decisions to utilize healthcare services, with friendliness, responsiveness, and attentiveness being the primary factors evaluated by patients (Chairunnisa, 2022). Furthermore, the neat and professional appearance of healthcare personnel reflects service quality and enhances patients' trust in the hospital (Afiana et al., 2025). Strong trust in the hospital may ultimately increase patients' willingness to revisit and maintain long-term relationships with healthcare providers (Jak et al., 2024).

Regarding the *service offering* indicator, the findings showed that easy registration procedures, equitable services for both general and BPJS patients, and relatively acceptable waiting times contributed to patients' positive perceptions of the hospital. However, some patients reported that waiting times for pharmacy services were still relatively long. These findings suggest that service quality is evaluated not only based on the outcomes of care received but also on the convenience and efficiency of the service process experienced by patients. These findings are consistent with previous studies demonstrating that *service offering* influences patients' decisions to utilize healthcare services, in which ease of procedures, fairness of services, and service responsiveness are important factors contributing to patient satisfaction (Chairunnisa, 2022). Healthcare services that are accessible, equitable, and efficient can enhance patient comfort and encourage patients to revisit the hospital for future healthcare needs (Jak et al., 2024).

The results of this study indicate that brand image plays an important role in shaping patient loyalty, as reflected by the strong relationship between the two variables. Consistent with previous theories and studies, these findings suggest that positive patient perceptions are formed not only by a single factor, but also by the hospital's overall image. Positive perceptions regarding hospital identity, staff interactions, and service convenience can increase patient trust and encourage repeat visits. However, several aspects still require improvement, particularly physical facility limitations such as parking accessibility and service efficiency, which may directly affect patient comfort. If these issues are not addressed, they may weaken patient experiences and potentially reduce patient loyalty despite the hospital's generally positive brand image. Therefore, continuous improvement across all dimensions of brand image is necessary to strengthen positive perceptions and maintain long-term patient loyalty.

The predominance of positive responses in this study may be attributed to the characteristics of the respondents, who were patients receiving services at Hospital X and had direct experience with the hospital. Positive experiences related to service quality, interactions with healthcare personnel, and the hospital environment may have contributed to favorable perceptions of the hospital's brand image and loyalty. As a result, most respondents tended to rate

both variables within the moderate to high categories. In addition, the possibility of social desirability bias should be considered when interpreting the findings. Because the data were collected within the hospital setting, some respondents may have been inclined to provide more favorable responses that they perceived as socially acceptable or appropriate. Although respondents were informed that their responses would remain confidential and would not affect the services they received, the potential influence of social desirability bias cannot be completely ruled out.

This study has several limitations that warrant acknowledgment. First, the study used a cross-sectional design, which could not describe changes in patients' perceptions and loyalty over time. Second, the respondents were limited to outpatients only, so the findings cannot be generalized to all hospital patients, including inpatients. Third, data collection relied on self-reported questionnaires, which depended on respondents' honesty and subjective perceptions, thereby allowing the possibility of response bias. These limitations may have influenced the generalizability of our findings and should be considered in the interpretation of results. Future research should address these limitations to further refine our understanding of brand image and patient loyalty.

Building on the findings of this study, future research should further explore other factors that may influence patient loyalty, such as service quality, patient satisfaction, trust, referral systems, and patient experience. Future studies are also recommended to involve larger and more diverse populations, including both outpatient and inpatient participants, in order to improve the generalizability of the findings. In addition, using longitudinal or mixed-method approaches may provide a more comprehensive understanding of changes in patients' perceptions and loyalty over time, as well as deeper insights into the relationship between brand image and patient loyalty in healthcare services.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the relationship between hospital brand image and patient loyalty by demonstrating a significant and strong positive association between the two variables. These findings contribute to the understanding of patient loyalty in healthcare services and highlight the importance of maintaining a positive hospital image through improved service quality, patient experience, and service accessibility.

This research recommends that hospital management continuously improve service quality, efficiency, and facility accessibility to strengthen patient loyalty. For academic institutions, the findings may serve as an additional reference for studies on hospital brand image and patient loyalty. For future researchers, further studies are encouraged to examine other factors influencing patient loyalty using larger populations and different research designs.

Authors' Contribution Statement

Lina Waldana: Conceptualization, Investigation, Data curation, and Writing – Original Draft.
M. Noor Ifansyah: Methodology, Formal Analysis, Supervision, and Writing – Review & Editing.
Zubaidah: Data Analysis, Validation, Visualization, Resources, and Project Administration.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests related to the publication of this article. No financial, personal, professional, institutional, or other relationships were identified that could have influenced the design, implementation, analysis, interpretation, or reporting of the study. The research was conducted independently, and the authors maintained objectivity throughout the research and manuscript preparation processes.

Source of Funding

This study was conducted using the authors' own financial resources and did not receive funding, grants, or other financial assistance from government institutions, private organizations, commercial entities, or non-profit agencies. The authors independently supported the research activities, including study planning, data collection, data analysis, manuscript preparation, and submission for publication. No external funding source was involved in the study design, data interpretation, preparation of the manuscript, or the decision to submit the article for publication.

Acknowledgments

The authors gratefully acknowledge the management of Hospital X and the staff of the outpatient unit for their cooperation and assistance throughout the data collection process. The authors also extend their appreciation to STIKES Intan Martapura for the academic support and institutional guidance provided during the conduct of this study. Finally, sincere thanks are given to all patients who participated voluntarily as respondents and provided the information necessary for the completion of this research.

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