

THE EFFECT OF PATIENT EXPERIENCE AND PROMOTION STRATEGY ON OUTPATIENT LOYALTY WITH WORD OF MOUTH AS A MEDIATING VARIABLE

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Received : 01 June 2026

Accepted : 30 June 2026

Revised : 10 June 2026

Published : 16 July 2026

Abstract

To survive in the increasingly tight healthcare competition, hospitals must maintain clinical and operational service quality to build long-term patient loyalty. This study examines the effect of patient experience and promotion strategies on outpatient loyalty, both directly and indirectly through word of mouth (WOM) as a mediating variable. A purposive sampling technique was used in the data collection process, involving 180 outpatient respondents at RS Sentra Medika Cikarang. Data analysis was performed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) based on Partial Least Squares (PLS) via SmartPLS 3.0 software. The test results show that patient experience and promotion strategies are essential aspects that significantly drive positive word of mouth. Furthermore, patient experience and word of mouth have a significant positive direct effect on patient loyalty. In contrast, the promotion strategy does not directly influence patient loyalty. Mediation analysis reveals that word of mouth partially mediates the effect of patient experience on loyalty, while it fully mediates the impact of promotion strategy on patient loyalty.

Keywords: patient experience, promotion strategy, word of mouth, patient loyalty

1. Introduction

Healthcare services at this time have become an aspect that is very important for society. Particularly in Indonesia, the rapid growth of private and government-owned hospitals has triggered intense competition in the healthcare industry. This competition is highly visible in industrial growth centers, such as the Cikarang region, where various healthcare facilities compete to offer their best services to the public. To survive and thrive in this competitive environment, hospital management must not only focus on clinical treatment but also pay great attention to retaining their patients. Building patient loyalty is a critical factor for hospitals to ensure operational sustainability and long-term reputation. In the context of hospital marketing and operations, patient loyalty is largely shaped by the real interactions felt by patients during their treatment process, widely known as the patient experience. Patient experience encompasses every single touchpoint of a patient's journey, from the registration queue, the empathy shown by medical staff, to the comfort of the physical environment. When a hospital successfully delivers a humanistic and seamless patient experience, it fosters a sense of personal security that directly encourages patients to revisit the facility in the future.

In addition to operational experience, the promotion strategy implemented by the hospital also serves as an external stimulus to attract and maintain consumers' attention. Hospital promotion, which includes digital marketing, health education webinars, and community social programs, is designed to deliver value and build brand communication with potential patients. However, in the professional healthcare industry, previous studies often show inconsistent results regarding the direct impact of promotion on long-term loyalty. Patients rarely decide to be loyal to a medical facility solely based on commercial advertisements if it is not supported by real quality in the field. This information asymmetry and high perceived risk in medical services cause patients to heavily rely on social validation, such as word of mouth (Asumsi informal antar-pasien/WOM). Word of mouth, whether shared through traditional direct recommendations or digital platforms (e-WOM), acts as a powerful anchor of trust for patients. Patients who have an excellent experience or are stimulated by interesting promotional programs are highly likely to share positive stories with their social circle. This organic conversation eventually builds a strong collective reputation that bridges the gap toward patient loyalty. Therefore, this study aims to examine the structural model of patient loyalty by

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positioning word of mouth as a mediating variable for patient experience and promotion strategy at RS Sentra Medika Cikarang.

Based on the background described above, the research at RS Sentra Medika Cikarang problems are formulated as follows:

1. Does patient experience significantly affect word of mouth?
2. Does promotion strategy significantly influence word of mouth?
3. Does promotion strategy significantly influence patient loyalty?
4. Does patient experience significantly affect patient loyalty?
5. Does word of mouth significantly influence patient loyalty?
6. Does word of mouth significantly mediate the effect of patient experience on patient loyalty?
7. Does word of mouth significantly mediate the effect of promotion strategy on patient loyalty?

To answer these problems, the following research hypotheses are proposed:

- **H1:** Patient Experience has a significant effect on word of mouth.
- **H2:** Promotion strategy has a significant effect on word of mouth.
- **H3:** Promotion strategy has a significant effect on patient loyalty.
- **H4:** Patient Experience has a significant effect on patient loyalty.
- **H5:** Word of mouth has a significant effect on patient loyalty.
- **H6:** Word of mouth significantly mediates the effect of patient experience on patient loyalty.
- **H7:** Word of mouth significantly mediates the effect of promotion strategy on patient loyalty.

II. Research Methods

The population in this study were the outpatients who received healthcare services at RS Sentra Medika Cikarang. Sampling was carried out using a non-probability sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling, to select respondents who met predetermined criteria (such as having visited the outpatient clinic at least twice). The total sample taken for this study consisted of 180 outpatient respondents. Data collection was conducted through a questionnaire instrument designed with a Likert scale to measure respondents' perceptions. The research model involves four variables: Patient Experience (X_1) and Promotion Strategy (X_2) as the independent variables, Word of Mouth (Z) as the mediating variable, and Patient Loyalty (Y) as the dependent variable. Data analysis was performed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) based on Partial Least Squares (PLS) through the SmartPLS 3.0 software package to evaluate both the measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model).

Research Conceptual Model

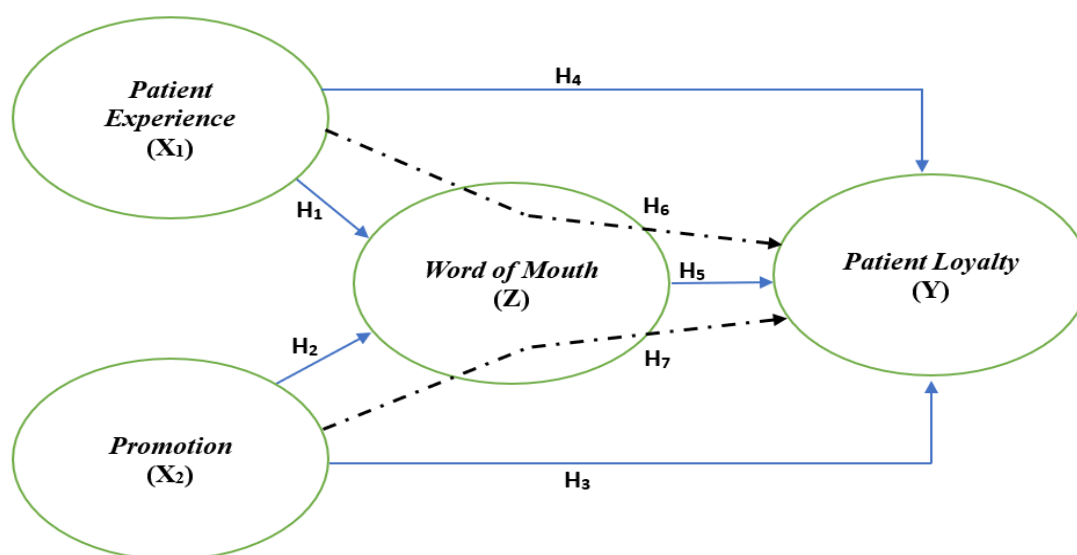


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

III. Discussion

The data analysis in this study begins with evaluating the measurement model (outer model) to ensure the validity and reliability of the research instruments, followed by evaluating the structural model (inner model) to test the proposed hypotheses.

1. Validity and Reliability Test

The validity test consists of convergent validity, which is assessed through the loading factor of each indicator and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value. Indicators are considered valid if the loading factor exceeds 0.70 and the AVE value is higher than 0.50. Reliability is measured using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability, with a threshold value greater than 0.70 to be considered consistent.

Table 1. Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

Variable	Parameter	Results	Status
Patient Experience (X1)	Loading Factor	> 0.70	Valid & Reliable
	AVE	> 0.50	
	Cronbach's Alpha	> 0.70	
	Composite Reliability	> 0.70	
Promotion Strategy (X2)	Loading Factor	> 0.70	Valid & Reliable
	AVE	> 0.50	
	Cronbach's Alpha	> 0.70	
	Composite Reliability	> 0.70	
Word of Mouth (Y)	Loading Factor	> 0.70	Valid & Reliable
	AVE	> 0.50	
	Cronbach's Alpha	> 0.70	
	Composite Reliability	> 0.70	
Patient Loyalty (Z)	Loading Factor	> 0.70	Valid & Reliable
	AVE	> 0.50	
	Cronbach's Alpha	> 0.70	
	Composite Reliability	> 0.70	

Source: SmartPLS 3.0 Processed Data (2026)

The evaluation of the outer model demonstrates that all reflective indicators for patient experience, promotion strategy, word of mouth, and patient loyalty satisfy the convergent validity criteria. Furthermore, the Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values for all constructs exceed 0.70, proving that all research instruments are highly reliable and consistent.

2. Coefficient of Determination (R-Square)

The R-Square (R^2) value represents the predictive power of the structural model in explaining the variance of the endogenous variables.

Table 2. R-Square Results

Endogenous Variable	R-Square	Interpretation
Word of Mouth (Y)	0.733	73.3% Substantial Predictive Power
Patient Loyalty (Z)	0.851	85.1% Substantial Predictive Power

Source: SmartPLS 3.0 Processed Data (2026)

The R-Square value of 0.733 indicates that 73.3% of the variance in Word of Mouth can be explained by Patient Experience and Promotion Strategy. Meanwhile, the R-Square value of 0.851 shows that 85.1% of the variance in Patient Loyalty is successfully explained by Patient Experience, Promotion Strategy, and Word of Mouth. This

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reflects that the structural model has an excellent capability to explain patient loyalty behavior at RS Sentra Medika Cikarang.

3. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing in PLS-SEM is conducted by observing the path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values derived from the bootstrapping procedure with a significance level of 5% ($t > 1.96$ or $p < 0.05$).

Table 3. Path Coefficients and Direct Effects

Hyp.	Path	Coefficient	t-Statistic	p-Value	Status
H1	Patient Experience → Word of Mouth	0.546	11.382	0.000	Significant
H2	Promotion Strategy → Word of Mouth	0.358	5.767	0.000	Significant
H3	Promotion Strategy → Patient Loyalty	0.079	1.851	0.065	Not Significant
H4	Patient Experience → Patient Loyalty	0.106	2.154	0.032	Significant
H5	Word of Mouth → Patient Loyalty	0.781	15.528	0.000	Significant

Source: SmartPLS 3.0 Processed Data (2026)

Table 4. Indirect Effects (Mediation Analysis)

Hyp.	Path	Coefficient	t-Statistic	p-Value	Mediation Type
H6	Patient Experience → WOM → Loyalty	0.426	8.862	0.000	Partial Mediation
H7	Promotion Strategy → WOM → Loyalty	0.280	5.568	0.010	Full Mediation

Source: SmartPLS 3.0 Processed Data (2026)

Through the results of testing the hypotheses in this study:

1. The first result shows that Patient Experience has a significant positive effect on Word of Mouth ($\beta = 0.546$, $t = 11.382$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H1. This proves that a better and more holistic experience perceived by outpatients during their medical journey significantly stimulates them to share positive recommendations with others.
2. The second result shows that Promotion Strategy has a significant positive effect on Word of Mouth ($\beta = 0.358$, $t = 5.767$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H2. Effective communication and promotional activities trigger community discussions, generating positive brand awareness.
3. The third result shows that Promotion Strategy does not significantly affect Patient Loyalty directly ($\beta = 0.079$, $t = 1.851$, $p = 0.065$), thus H3 is rejected. Commercial advertisements or promotions alone do not have the power to lock in long-term patient loyalty if not supported by good service quality in practice.
4. The fourth result shows that Patient Experience has a significant positive direct effect on Patient Loyalty ($\beta = 0.106$, $t = 2.154$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H4. Smooth administrative workflows and emphatic medical interaction create personal reassurance that directly motivates patients to return to RS Sentra Medika Cikarang.
5. The fifth result shows that Word of Mouth has a significant positive effect on Patient Loyalty ($\beta = 0.781$, $t = 15.528$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H5. WOM serves as the most powerful determinant in this model, indicating that social validation from relatives or digital feedback strongly cements patient loyalty decisions due to the high perceived risk associated with healthcare services.
6. The sixth result proves that Word of Mouth partially mediates the effect of Patient Experience on Patient Loyalty ($\beta = 0.426$, $t = 8.862$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H6. Excellent experiences can generate loyalty on their own, but the effect multiplies significantly when patients actively advocate for the hospital.
7. The seventh result indicates that Word of Mouth fully mediates the effect of Promotion Strategy on Patient Loyalty ($\beta = 0.280$, $t = 5.568$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H7. Since the direct effect is non-significant, promotion cannot build loyalty independently; it must first trigger social conversations or recommendations (WOM) before it can translate into actual patient loyalty.

IV. Conclusion

This study aims to examine the effect of patient experience and promotion strategies on outpatient loyalty, both directly and indirectly through word of mouth (WOM) as a mediating variable at RS Sentra Medika Cikarang. Through the empirical test results obtained using PLS-SEM, it can be concluded that the structural model is highly substantial, and six out of seven proposed hypotheses are supported by the data:

1. Patient Experience has a significant positive effect on Word of Mouth. A seamless, humanistic, and excellent healthcare journey during outpatient visits effectively stimulates patients to share positive recommendations with their social circles.
2. Promotion Strategy has a significant positive effect on Word of Mouth. Well-targeted marketing and interactive communication materials act as powerful external stimuli that trigger community discussions and organic social recognition.
3. Promotion Strategy does not significantly affect Patient Loyalty directly. Commercial advertisements or one-way marketing campaigns cannot instantly lock in long-term patient loyalty if the hospital does not demonstrate high-quality medical and operational performance in reality.
4. Patient Experience has a significant positive direct effect on Patient Loyalty. Favorable patient touchpoints, from swift administrative workflows to empathetic medical personnel interactions, foster a direct retentive behavior for future visits.
5. Word of Mouth has a significant positive effect on Patient Loyalty. WOM serves as the most dominant predictor in this research model. Due to the high perceived risk and information asymmetry in professional healthcare services, patients rely heavily on interpersonal recommendations and validation before determining their long-term loyalty.
6. Word of Mouth partially mediates the effect of Patient Experience on Patient Loyalty. While an exceptional experience can drive loyalty directly, its impact multiplies significantly when patients actively transform that inner satisfaction into advocacy behaviors.
7. Word of Mouth fully mediates the effect of Promotion Strategy on Patient Loyalty. Because the direct path is non-significant, promotion cannot build loyalty independently. Instead, it must successfully provoke word of mouth or social conversations first, which then indirectly creates solid patient commitment and loyalty.

Based on these findings, hospital management is highly recommended to shift marketing communications from traditional hard-selling into interactive and health-education-oriented programs to efficiently generate organic e-WOM. Concurrently, maintaining consistency across all operational touchpoints remains a critical foundation. Future researchers are encouraged to introduce moderating variables, such as insurance types (e.g., BPJS vs. Private Insurance), to test the stability of this structural model.

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