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Strategy for implementing segmentation, targeting, and positioning to increase the utilization of outpatient services in hospitals

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Abstract

Background: Hospitals have a responsibility to provide quality, affordable, and accessible healthcare services to all levels of society. Varied patient needs and characteristics often pose challenges in optimizing visits and maintaining service quality, particularly in outpatient care. Implementing a segmentation, targeting, and positioning (STP) strategy can be an effective service management approach to tailoring services to patient profiles, thereby supporting increased service utilization and enhancing patient satisfaction.

Purpose: To systematically review the application of STP strategies in hospital settings and to identify their role in enhancing the utilization of outpatient services, with a focus on patient-centered care and health service accessibility.

Method: A systematic review was conducted following PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Literature was searched through the Scopus database. A total of 20 articles that met the inclusion criteria were analyzed.

Results: Hospitals apply segmentation strategies (demographic, psychographic, behavioral), targeting (specific patient groups, medical tourism, service-based targeting), and positioning (faith-based service values, patient-centered care, experience-based branding). These approaches have been shown to increase patient satisfaction, loyalty, and particularly the utilization of outpatient services.

Conclusions: This review demonstrates that segmentation, targeting, and positioning (STP) strategies, although traditionally applied in hospital service strategies can be effectively adapted to optimize outpatient healthcare services. The novelty of this study lies in reframing STP as a health service management approach that enhances patient-centered care, increases service utilization, and supports broader public health outcomes.

Keywords: Hospital Service Strategies; Patient Loyalty; Patient Satisfaction; Positioning; Segmentation; Targeting.

INTRODUCTION

The health services sector is undergoing significant changes, with increasing public demand for patient-centered healthcare services (Gabutti, Mascia, & Cicchetti, 2017). As stated by the World Health Organization (World Health Organization, 2025) the quality of healthcare services is not defined by a single standard, but by the extent to which services respond to individual preferences, needs, and values. This enables the public to assess the quality of each healthcare service provider,

particularly hospitals, when choosing a treatment option. This situation forces hospitals to compete to provide the best possible service. Hospitals are also required to develop service strategies that focus on patient needs and preferences (Yusuf, Yanuarrahmat Shah, Pusaka, & Sunaryanto, 2022). This challenge is particularly evident in outpatient services, which often represent the first point of contact between patients and hospitals and require strategies that align with patient needs and improve

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access to healthcare services (Asamrew, Endris, & Tadesse, 2020).

Health service management strategies have unique characteristics, shaped by patient preferences in choosing a hospital such as distance, reputation and trust in doctors, personal experience, and recommendations from family and friends (Fischer, Pelka, & Riedl, 2015; Smith, Currie, Chaiwuttisak, & Kyprianou, 2018). Hospitals, as providers serving patients with diverse characteristics, need to adopt targeted service strategies to differentiate themselves and build long-term relationships with patients (Nengsih et al., 2025). One such strategy is the application of segmentation, targeting, and positioning (STP) (Ningsih & Aumeilia, 2024).

STP strategy offers a systematic framework for understanding targets and building improving service performance and patient trust. Segmentation aims to group patients based on specific characteristics, such as demographics, behavior, or service needs (Sjamsuddin, Firmansyah, & Laferani, 2025; Tae, Hariyanti, & Al Rasyid, 2017). Targeting is used to determine which patient groups to focus on, while positioning helps the hospital form a strong image in the minds of patients (Bangsawan, Kadir, & Abdullah, 2013; Armstrong, Adam, Denize, & Kotler, 2018; Jati, Arso, KartasuryaM. I., & Firman, 2024). Implementing STP strategies in hospitals can deliver more relevant messages, tailor services to patient preferences, and improve patient satisfaction (Amira & Fitriarsi, 2021; Elrod & Fortenberry Jr, 2018).

Several studies have shown that implementing an effective STP strategy has a positive impact, particularly on patient satisfaction and loyalty. This strategy has been proven in research Sciulli and Missien (Sciulli & Missien, 2015) which explains that positioning strategies and brand image in hospitals have a significant influence on service quality, patient satisfaction, and organizational performance. Another study by Calero (Calero, Lorenzo, & Gallarza, 2018). A study in Valencia explained that patients with certain characteristics tend to exhibit different loyalty patterns, so segmentation can help hospitals develop more targeted communication and service strategies to maintain loyalty. A similar finding was also found in Mudayana's study. Laparoscopic surgery services at PKU

Muhammadiyah Hospital Yogyakarta are segmented toward the middle-income segment. Although the target market has not been specifically defined, this service is positioned to excel due to its quality, efficiency, and affordability (Mudayana, 2010).

Previous studies remain largely descriptive and limited to specific geographic or institutional contexts, with little attention to their implications for optimizing outpatient service utilization. This highlights the need for a more comprehensive and evidence-based synthesis to better inform hospital strategies that support patient-centered care, satisfaction, loyalty, and equitable access to services. Therefore, this study was conducted to systematically review the application of segmentation, targeting, and positioning (STP) strategies in hospital service management and to analyze their role in enhancing outpatient service utilization alongside patient satisfaction and loyalty. By synthesizing findings from previous studies, this review is expected to contribute to the development of more patient centered and sustainable hospital health service strategies.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a systematic review method following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, with literature searches conducted through the Scopus database in May 2025. Search queries included the keywords "segmentation," "targeting," "positioning," "STP strategy," "hospital," "health care services," "outpatient services," "patient satisfaction," and "patient loyalty." The use of Scopus query tools and automation helped refine the search results to ensure the inclusion of relevant scientific articles.

The research question guiding this review was: "What segmentation, targeting, and positioning (STP) strategy approaches have been applied in hospital service management, and how do they impact outpatient service utilization, patient satisfaction, and patient loyalty?"

Article inclusion criteria included articles discussing segmentation, targeting, and positioning strategies in hospitals and including outcomes such as patient satisfaction and/or loyalty. Inclusion criteria also included studies conducted using quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approaches. Furthermore, inclusion criteria included

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peer-reviewed journal articles with final publication status and published between 2010 and 2025. Exclusion criteria included articles not relevant to the hospital context or not mentioning STP strategies or patient satisfaction and/or loyalty.

All search results were uploaded into Zotero Reference Manager to identify and remove duplicate articles. The screening process was carried out in stages, beginning with title and abstract review, followed by full-text evaluation to determine eligibility based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Articles that met the criteria were documented in a PRISMA 2020 flowchart. Data extracted from the eligible studies included author name, year of publication, country, study design, hospital service context (particularly outpatient care), type of STP strategy applied, and reported outcomes such as patient satisfaction, loyalty, and outpatient service utilization. This systematic extraction process was designed to ensure methodological rigor and minimize bias in synthesizing findings relevant to hospital health service management.

RESEARCH RESULTS

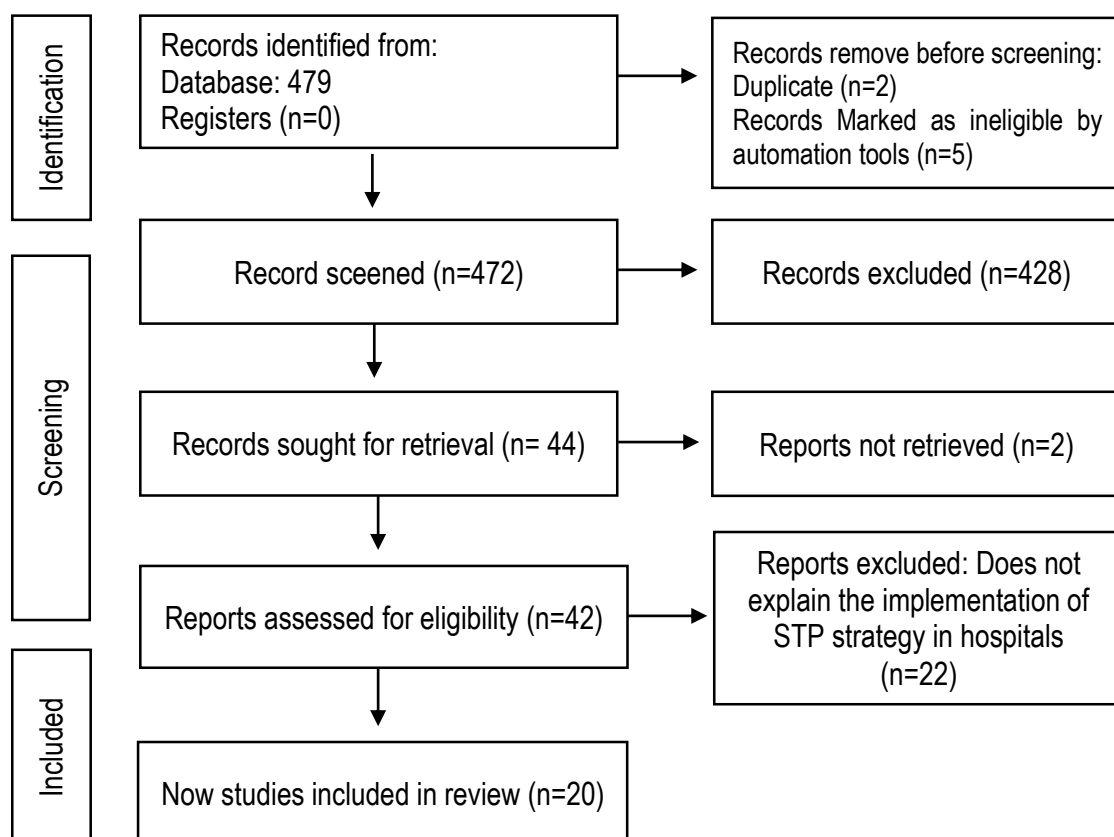


Figure PRISMA flow diagram

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Table Summary of Review Articles

(Author, Year) (Country)	Purpose	Methods	Results
(Xue et al., 2013) (China)	To determine the extent to which different hospitals adopt different strategies, whether strategies are associated with organizational culture and whether hospital strategies are associated with hospital performance.	Cross-sectional survey with cluster analysis and ordinal logit.	Leaders, specialists, and followers show higher profitability. Leaders and specialists have the highest patient satisfaction. When organizational culture is controlled, strategic effects diminish. Organizational learning culture increases profitability, while customer-focused culture decreases patient satisfaction.
(Jung & Hong, 2012) (Korea)	to contribute to the establishment of a desirable medical marketing strategy, through the factors of customer satisfaction and the positioning of patients' perceptions by marketing institutions.	Cross-sectional survey with SERVQUAL and multidimensional scaling.	Regression model significant with R-squared of 0.606. Doctor quality is the strongest predictor. Perceptions differ by hospital size and specialty. Practical recommendations developed.
(Agustiani et al., 2020) (Indonesia)	to specify the patients' perceptions about the customer-centric approach as a patient-centeredness in the executive ambulatory polyclinics of Hermina Depok Hospital in Indonesia.	Cross-sectional quantitative survey with validated questionnaire.	Most respondents value a customer-centric approach, yet many still require procedural assistance. Target market not fully reached due to limited understanding of executive clinic advantages.
(Sciulli & Missien, 2015) (USA)	to provide a conceptual framework for developing service-line positioning and brand image strategies for healthcare organizations.	Longitudinal case study from 2011 to 2014.	Orthopedic satisfaction reached the ninetieth percentile. Complications and length of stay both decreased. Contribution margin increased despite lower revenue.

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(Author, Year) (Country)	Purpose	Methods	Results
(Sahoo & Ghosh, 2016) (India)	to identify the motives that enforce consumers to find out the major determinants that frame healthscape in private healthcare service that leads to their satisfaction in a developing country like India.	Cross-sectional survey with 378 patients, factor analyses, and regression.	Six healthscape dimensions identified. Significant predictors include location and appearance, decor, ambience and facilities, and service delivery.
(Verma et al., 2020) (India)	To quality healthcare services has developed into a new field known as “e-Healthcare services.”	Quantitative survey with 262 respondents using the 5Qs instrument.	Interaction quality, atmosphere, and objects are significant predictors of satisfaction. Region, income, and occupation show the strongest demographic associations.
(Lee, 2012) (Korea)	To discover patients loyal to a hospital and model their medical service usage patterns.	Retrospective database analysis using RFM segmentation and predictive modelling.	About 11.7 percent of patients identified as loyal. Certain clinical and service factors strongly predict loyalty. Decision-tree model performs better than logistic regression.
(Meese et al., 2019) (USA)	To examine the relationship between country-of-origin (COO) and brand positioning in the context of the high-involvement service of health care.	Content analysis of brochures with COO classification.	European and Middle Eastern hospitals mostly use foreign positioning. North American hospitals rely on global positioning. Significant regional differences found.
(Priyobodo & Sulistiadi, 2022) (Indonesia)	To carry out a marketing mix strategy so that the hospital revival	Literature review	Clear segmentation and positioning as a safe, non-COVID facility combined with 7Ps improves patient trust and visit recovery.

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(Author, Year) (Country)	Purpose	Methods	Results
(Nuryadi et al., 2022) (Indonesia)	To find out the strategies of several hospitals in assessing e-health market opportunities.	Narrative review	STP combined with 7Ps enhances alignment with patient needs. Requires support from human resources and facilities.
(Joung & Sulistiadi, 2023) (Indonesia)	To discuss how segmenting, targeting, and positioning strategies are implemented as a hospital marketing strategy.	Literature review study with research journals that have been published in the last 5 years.	STP practices improve service quality and revenue. Expanded promotion recommended.
(Al-Amri et al., 2024) (Iraq)	To design a brand promotion model for Iraqi non-governmental hospitals.	Descriptive literature review	Highlights causal conditions, strategic actions, and expected outcomes for brand development in private hospitals.
(Elrod & Fortenberry 2020) (USA)	To stay abreast of the latest details concerning advertising and its associated applications, increasing the likelihood of successful audience engagements.	Grounded Theory study with interviews.	Personal selling supports two-way communication, relationship development, and insight gathering. Enhances hospital growth.
(Elrod & Fortenberry 2020) (USA)	To ensuring that marketing communications are properly integrated.	Grounded Theory study with interviews.	IMC strengthens communication coherence and increases promotional effectiveness.
(Elrod & Fortenberry 2018) (USA)	To more effectively address the wants and needs of customers, involves three interrelated activities.	Twenty semi-structured interviews	Targeting children improves brand affinity and influences parental decisions. Creates competitive differentiation.

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(Author, Year) (Country)	Purpose	Methods	Results
(Elrod & Fortenberry 2018) (USA)	of conveying desired images to target audiences is of paramount importance in the health services industry.	Conceptual case	Emotional branding with multisensory cues enhances recognition and attachment. Example includes the Willis mascot.
(Rahayu et al., 2023) (Indonesia)	To fulfill the availability of hospitals, increase access to health services and face high competition in hospitals located in the city of Tasikmalaya.	Conceptual case study with Positioning and IMC; segmentation and targeting used as inputs.	STP assessed as moderately strong. Halal-oriented positioning contributes to patient growth and service expansion.
(Fischer, 2014) (Germany)	for hospital positioning and illustrates the implementation of integrated hospital marketing communication strategy.	Conceptual review	Identifies five major themes and key gaps related to IMC measurement.
(Exprúa & Barberena, 2016) (Nicaragua)	To think critically about a real life dilemma in hospital management.	Scoping review with thematic analysis.	Revenue from certain payer groups fell sharply, while others increased. Case demonstrates STP redesign for sustaining profitability.
(Chen et al., 2012) (Taiwan)	To propose a two-stage clustering-classification model through initially integrating the RFM attribute and K-means algorithm for clustering the TCS patients and then integrating the global discretization method and the rough set theory for classifying hospitalized departments and optimizing health care services.	Qualitative descriptive study with interviews and document review.	The segmentation-classification model achieved high accuracy. Certain segments contribute disproportionately to costs and revenues.

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DISCUSSION

Several studies have explored segmentation approaches in hospital settings. Demographic segmentation based on region, income, and occupation has been widely applied (Verma et al., 2020). Other studies examined combinations of geographic, demographic, and psychographic segmentation incorporating cultural and religious values in maternal and child health services (Rahayu, Yuniarsih, Gaffar, & Dirgantari, 2023). Data mining using the RFM model has been utilized to identify high-value patients (Lee, 2012; Chen et al., 2012) while cultural perceptions were found to influence variations in hospital segmentation across regions (Meese, Powers, Garman, Choi, & Hernandez, 2019).

Targeting strategies were reported with diverse applications. Market repositioning has been implemented in hospital service delivery (Exprúa & Barberena, 2016) targeting has been used for specialized services such as orthopaedics (Sciulli & Missien, 2015) predictive targeting methods were developed using machine learning (Lee, 2012) and family-centered programs were applied in pediatric and maternal health care (Elrod & Fortenberry Jr, 2018a; 2018b). In addition, medical tourism was identified as a target market in some contexts (Al-Amri, Shirkhodaie, & Safari, 2024) while other approaches emphasized engagement with external stakeholders to strengthen service delivery (Elrod & Fortenberry Jr, 2018b).

Positioning strategies in hospitals highlighted different models. Some hospitals positioned themselves according to cultural or religious values to strengthen their service identity (Rahayu et al., 2023) while others adopted models such as executive polyclinics to attract specific patient groups (Agustiani, Sulistiadi, Asyary, & Purwadi, 2020). Brand identity has also been applied to enhance competitiveness in international contexts (Al-Amri et al., 2024) and comparative studies have shown cross-cultural variations in positioning strategies (Meese et al., 2019). Consistent and integrated health communication was further emphasized as essential for maintaining hospital image and patient trust (Fischer, Pelka, & Riedl, 2015; (Elrod & Fortenberry Jr, 2018a).

Several studies have highlighted the relationship between segmentation, targeting, and positioning (STP) strategies and patient satisfaction. Perceived physician quality was reported as a significant determinant of satisfaction (Jung & Hong, 2012) while hospital physical infrastructure also played an important role (Sahoo & Ghosh, 2016). Hospitals positioned as leaders or specialists demonstrated higher levels of patient satisfaction (Xue et al., 2013) and patient satisfaction itself has been emphasized as a key indicator of successful alignment of hospital services with patient needs (Marno & Sulistiadi, 2022).

The relationship between STP and patient loyalty was also evident. Segmentation using RFM models has been applied to identify high-value and potentially loyal patients (Lee, 2012; Chen et al., 2012) while specialization in musculoskeletal and orthopedic services was found to increase both patient loyalty and hospital performance (Sciulli & Missien, 2015). Evidence from hospital settings in Indonesia indicated that STP strategies can enhance service quality and contribute to patient retention (Joung & Sulistiadi, 2023).

In addition, STP approaches supported the restoration of public trust during the COVID-19 pandemic. Segment-specific interventions, including community-based services and strict infection-prevention measures during the Omicron surge, were found to strengthen perceptions of patient safety and public confidence (Marno & Sulistiadi, 2022).

Overall, the application of STP strategies in hospital services contributes not only to improved patient satisfaction and loyalty but also to the restoration of public trust and the enhancement of institutional competitiveness in increasingly complex healthcare environments.

The implementation of segmentation, targeting, and positioning (STP) strategies in hospitals varies depending on institutional characteristics, cultural context, and the types of services developed. Segmentation, as the initial step in hospital service strategy, has been applied through demographic classifications, psychographic approaches, and patient behavior analysis. Evidence from hospital services indicates that demographic factors such as

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region, income, and occupation significantly influence patient satisfaction and guide tailored service development (Verma, Kumar, & Sharma, 2020). Segmentation enables hospitals to better understand differences in patient needs, thereby supporting the design of patient-centered and culturally responsive health services, including models of care based on Sharia service culture (Rahayu, Yuniarsih, Gaffar, & Dirgantari, 2023).

Technology-assisted segmentation has also been applied through data mining. The use of the RFM (Recency, Frequency, Monetary) model and clustering analysis has successfully categorized patients into loyal and regular groups based on utilization frequency and expenditure levels research (Lee, 2012; Chen, Cheng, Lai, Hsu, & Syu, 2012). Such segmentation not only facilitates patient categorization but also guides strategic decisions in managing hospital service strategy and prioritizing departments with high-value contributions. Following segmentation, targeting strategies are developed to direct hospital resources toward specific patient groups. One study described the repositioning of services after the loss of a dominant patient segment, where hospitals redirected their strategy to target insured patients and middle-income groups to sustain revenue and service volume (Exprúa & Barberena, 2016). Other evidence highlights the role of niche targeting, such as the development of specialized orthopedic care for musculoskeletal patients, enabling focused promotion and tailored interventions (Sciulli & Missien, 2015). In addition, predictive targeting supported by machine learning algorithms has been used to identify patients with a high likelihood of loyalty based on patterns of healthcare utilization and expenditure, thereby strengthening patient relationship management (Lee, 2012).

Targeting strategies in hospital services not only determine priority patient groups but also influence branding processes. Evidence from pediatric and maternal health services shows that targeting strategies can be directed not only at mothers but also at decision-making family members, including children, thereby strengthening emotional bonds and influencing healthcare choices (Elrod & Fortenberry Jr, 2018a; Elrod, & Fortenberry 2018b). Programs that engage children in early hospital orientation

have also been reported to create long-term loyalty and trust in healthcare providers. Such approaches provide competitive advantages in pediatric services by enhancing family centered care.

On a global scale, targeting strategies have also been developed in the context of medical tourism. Private hospitals in certain regions prioritize international patients and high-income domestic groups seeking premium services, thereby competing with neighboring countries that invest heavily in healthcare and medical tourism (Al-Amri, Shirkhodaie, & Safari, 2024). This indicates that targeting in hospital management is not only directed at patients but can also extend to external stakeholders, including community leaders, educational institutions, military organizations, and insurance providers, thereby reinforcing institutional networks and sustainability (Sciulli & Missien, 2015).

After defining segmentation and targeting, hospitals develop positioning strategies to create strong, consistent, and distinctive perceptions compared with competitors. Value-based positioning has been applied in maternal and child hospitals that align their services with cultural and religious values, supported by work culture and service certification (Rahayu et al., 2023). Other hospitals attempt to position themselves as executive polyclinics with patient-centered approaches, although studies indicate that gaps may remain between projected images and patient perceptions of service quality.²⁶ In other cases, hospitals have emphasized brand identity through mission statements, organizational values, and differentiation strategies to expand their market share and build credibility in competitive environments (Al-Amri et al., 2024).

Positioning approaches are also shaped by cultural and regional contexts. Hospitals in the Middle East and Europe have been reported to predominantly apply Foreign Consumer Culture Positioning (FCCP), whereas those in North America frequently adopt Global Consumer Culture Positioning (GCCP) (Meese, et al., 2019). Consistency in positioning can be achieved through integrated hospital service strategy communication, which involves advertising, public relations, personal selling, environmental design, and even staff appearance to strengthen institutional branding and

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maintain patient trust (Fischer et al., 2015; Elrod & Fortenberry Jr, 2018a)

Implementation of segmentation, targeting, and positioning (STP) strategies in hospitals has demonstrated positive impacts on service delivery, patient perceptions, and institutional performance. Patient satisfaction is enhanced when services are aligned with expectations and individual preferences. Evidence indicates that perceived physician quality plays a significant role in shaping satisfaction (Jung & Hong, 2012) while hospital characteristics such as location, infrastructure, and physical environment also contribute substantially (Sahoo & Ghosh, 2016). Hospitals positioned as leaders or specialists were reported to achieve higher satisfaction levels compared with general competitors, largely due to advanced technology adoption and a broader range of specialized services (Xue, Zhou, Bundorf, Huang, & Le Chang, 2013).

In addition, patient satisfaction serves as an important indicator of the effectiveness of STP strategies in meeting healthcare needs. When patient groups are clearly identified and healthcare delivery is tailored accordingly, the relevance and responsiveness of services increase, thereby improving satisfaction levels and strengthening the foundation for long-term loyalty (Marno & Sulistiadi, 2022).

Another important impact of STP strategies in hospitals is on patient loyalty and retention. Evidence shows that data-driven segmentation, such as the RFM model, can identify high-value patients, including frequent visitors, high spenders, and those with strong potential for long-term loyalty (Chen, Cheng, Lai, Hsu, & Syu, 2012; Lee, 2012). This approach not only increases institutional revenue but also ensures that superior services are directed toward groups with the highest healthcare needs. Focused strategies, particularly in specialized services such as musculoskeletal and orthopedic care, have been shown to strengthen patient satisfaction, loyalty, and profitability (Sciulli & Missien, 2015). Moreover, implementation of STP practices in Indonesian hospital settings demonstrated improvements in service quality and positive patient impressions, which indirectly support financial sustainability (Joung, & Sulistiadi, 2023).

Beyond satisfaction and loyalty, STP strategies also contribute to restoring public trust, especially during health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Interventions tailored to specific community needs such as targeted outreach programs, free basic services, and strict infection-prevention protocols were associated with increased perceptions of safety, higher patient confidence, and improved hospital utilization (Marno & Sulistiadi, 2022).

Overall, STP implementation strengthens hospital competitiveness in dynamic healthcare environments. The outcomes extend beyond financial performance, supporting patient-centered care, service responsiveness, and long-term trust in hospital systems.

CONCLUSIONS

Segmentation, targeting, and positioning (STP) strategies in hospitals, when tailored to patient needs and institutional values, have been shown to enhance satisfaction, loyalty, trust, and overall competitiveness. This review offers novelty as the first systematic synthesis linking STP implementation with outpatient service utilization and patient centered outcomes across different contexts, moving beyond descriptive and localized studies. The findings highlight that evidence-based STP can optimize service delivery, support sustainable healthcare management, and strengthen community trust in hospitals. Therefore, hospitals and policymakers are recommended to integrate STP principles into strategic planning, particularly in areas such as obstetrics, pediatrics, surgery, and nursing care, to ensure services remain clinically effective, equitable, and responsive to evolving patient expectations.

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