

# Enhancing Patient Trust in Yangon's Private Hospitals: Impact of Service Quality Using SERVQUAL Model on Brand Image

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*Received: October 22, 2024 Revised: February 23, 2025 Accepted: March 3, 2025*

## Abstract

Given Myanmar's harsh surrounding environment and competition in the healthcare industry, this study examined the impact of dimensions of the SERVQUAL model – such as tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy – on patients' trust via the brand image of private hospitals in Yangon based on Social Capital Theory. Stratified purposive sampling was employed for sample selection, and data from 414 patients were collected online. The results of PLS–SEM showed that tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy significantly influenced brand image. Among these, tangibles, responsiveness, and assurance also positively impacted patient trust, while reliability and empathy did not. The findings of the Sobel test also showed that brand image mediated the effects of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy on patients' trust. Additionally, these findings enrich new knowledge of how the SERVQUAL model enhances patients' trust through the brand image of Yangon's private hospitals, extending the application of social capital theory and offering valuable strategic and business implementation guidelines to promote private hospital businesses and practitioners to improve healthcare service quality.

**Keywords:** SERVQUAL, Trust, Brand Image, Patients, Private Hospital

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# การเสริมสร้างความไว้วางใจของผู้ป่วยในโรงพยาบาลเอกชนอย่างกึ่ง: ผลกระทบของคุณภาพการบริการ โดยใช้แบบจำลอง SERVQUAL ต่อภาพลักษณ์แบรนด์

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วันรับบทความ: October 22, 2024 วันแก้ไขบทความ: February 23, 2025 วันตอบรับบทความ: March 3, 2025

## บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาผลกระทบของมิติต่างๆ จากโมเดล SERVQUAL ได้แก่ สิ่งที่ต้องได้ ความน่าเชื่อถือ การตอบสนอง การสร้างความมั่นใจ และความเห็นอกเห็นใจ ต่อความไว้วางใจของผู้ป่วย ผ่านภาพลักษณ์ของแบรนด์ในโรงพยาบาลเอกชนในเมืองอย่างกึ่ง ประเทศเมียนมาร์ โดยใช้ทฤษฎีทุนทางสังคม การสุ่มตัวอย่างเชิงชั้นและเชิงเจาะจงถูกนำมาใช้ในการเลือกกลุ่มตัวอย่าง และเก็บข้อมูลจากผู้ป่วย 414 คนผ่านทางออนไลน์ ผลการวิเคราะห์ด้วย PLS-SEM แสดงให้เห็นว่า ปัจจัยที่ต้องได้ ความน่าเชื่อถือ การตอบสนอง การสร้างความมั่นใจ และความเห็นอกเห็นใจ ส่งผลโดยตรงต่อภาพลักษณ์ของแบรนด์ นอกจากนี้ ปัจจัยที่ต้องได้ ความน่าเชื่อถือ การตอบสนอง การสร้างความมั่นใจ และความเห็นอกเห็นใจ ส่งผลโดยตรงต่อภาพลักษณ์ของแบรนด์ การตอบสนอง การสร้างความมั่นใจ ส่งผลโดยตรงต่อความไว้วางใจของผู้ป่วย ส่วนความน่าเชื่อถือและการเอาใจใส่ พบว่าไม่มีผลโดยตรง อีกทั้งผลการทดสอบ Sobel ยังชี้ให้เห็นว่าภาพลักษณ์ของแบรนด์มีบทบาทเป็นตัวกลางในการเชื่อมโยงระหว่างปัจจัยเหล่านี้กับความไว้วางใจของผู้ป่วย นอกจากนี้ผลการศึกษานี้เสริมสร้างความรู้ใหม่เกี่ยวกับวิธีการที่โมเดล SERVQUAL สามารถเพิ่มความไว้วางใจของผู้ป่วยผ่านภาพลักษณ์ของแบรนด์ในโรงพยาบาลเอกชน รวมทั้งขยายขอบเขตการประยุกต์ใช้ทฤษฎีทุนทางสังคม และเสนอแนวทางด้านกลยุทธ์ และการดำเนินการทางธุรกิจที่มีคุณค่าในการส่งเสริมธุรกิจโรงพยาบาลเอกชนและผู้ปฏิบัติงานเพื่อพัฒนาคุณภาพการบริการด้านสุขภาพ

**คำสำคัญ:** โครงสร้างพื้นฐานด้านการขนส่ง การค้าระหว่างประเทศ การลงทุนโดยตรงจากต่างประเทศ การเติบโตทางเศรษฐกิจ

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## **Introduction**

High-quality healthcare is essential for societal well-being, with healthcare providers aiming for efficiency, safety, and patient-centered approaches (Bäckström et al., 2023). In Myanmar, the Ministry of Health oversees a vast network of public and private healthcare services (Ministry of Health and Sports [MOHS], 2020). An annual report by MOHS (2020) indicated that the healthcare industry comprises 200 private specialist clinics, 249 private hospitals, 800 private dental clinics, and 5,000 private general clinics. Clinics are the most preferred healthcare service providers, surpassing 76% of the market share, with private hospitals being chosen by 17%, and public hospitals by just 3% (Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion [OSMEP], 2015). Private hospitals must establish competitive advantages to achieve sustainable viability in this competitive market. To stay competitive, private hospitals must build patient trust, which is influenced by service quality, innovation, and loyalty (Adi et al., 2022). This study explores how the SERVQUAL model dimensions affect patient trust through brand image, guided by social capital theory. As brand image represents a distinct association retained in the minds of target customers, shaping their perceptions of a brand through their experiences with its products and services, it can contribute to positive business outcomes, including brand trust, customer loyalty, purchasing decisions, and repurchase intentions (Ratasuk, 2022). Consequently, patients are more confident and trusting in private hospitals (Kalia et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2022). The findings provide insights for improving healthcare service quality and marketing strategies.

## **Literature Review**

### **Social Capital Theory**

Social capital theory, introduced by Bourdieu (1986), explains the relationships and networks between individuals within a specific community as valuable capital that can lead to preferable outcomes. In the healthcare context, the attributes of healthcare service quality, such as well-maintained facilities, timely responses, and sufficient information, can strengthen a strong relationship between patients and healthcare providers (Abdullah et al., 2022). It can be stated that service quality, such as empathy given by service providers to an individual's specific emotional and psychological needs and desires, is an important antecedent in shaping behavioral intentions and overall satisfaction

(Parasuraman et al., 1988; Swain & Singh, 2021). In this study, social capital theory was used to frame the contributions of the SERVQUAL dimensions to customer trust by brand image, which reflects positive relationships between private hospitals and patients.

## **SERVQUAL**

Parasuraman et al. (1988) developed the SERVQUAL model to assess service quality, comprising tangibles, responsiveness, reliability, assurance, and empathy. Based on the SERVQUAL model, Shie et al. (2022) found a positive contribution of hospital service quality to customer trust in hospitals in China. Uzir et al. (2021) also found a positive association between service quality, based on the SERVQUAL model, and trust in-home delivery service personnel in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

### **The relationship between SERVQUAL, brand image, and patient trust**

Based on social capital theory, the strong and positive association between healthcare providers and their clients, particularly patients' trust in the brand image, is a valuable resource that establishes a strong bond between them and can lead to positive outcomes and long-term success (Mandagi et al., 2024). Healthcare service quality attributes, such as well-maintained facilities, prompt responses, and adequate information, can foster a strong connection between patients and healthcare providers (Abdullah et al., 2022). It can be explained that genuine care and attention of an individual's specific emotional and psychological needs and desires by service providers are a significant antecedent in influencing behavioural intentions and overall satisfaction (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Swain & Singh, 2021). This, in turn, leads to a positive attitude towards healthcare service providers as patients feel more connected to, and make decisions in selecting, healthcare services, risk assessment, medical service visualization, and medical service consultation with the quality of healthcare they receive, which thus tends to develop a good image of their healthcare (Govindarajo & Khen, 2020). Because a brand image is a specific connection held in the minds of the intended customer, which shapes their perceptions of a brand based on their interactions with its products and services, it can lead to favourable business outcomes, such as brand trust, customer loyalty, buying decisions, and repurchase intentions (Ratasuk, 2022). As a result, patients are more likely to build their confidence and trust in the private hospital (Wu et al., 2022).

## **Research Objectives**

The research objectives are to examine the impact of sub-dimensions of the SERVQUAL model, such as tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, on patients' trust via brand image in the private hospital in Yangon based on the social capital theory.

## **Hypotheses**

To study of impact of sub-dimensions of the SERVQUAL model on patients' trust via brand image in the private hospital in Yangon, there are ten hypotheses as follows:

- Hypothesis 1 Tangibles have a direct and significant effect on patient trust.
- Hypothesis 2 Reliability has a direct and significant effect on patient trust.
- Hypothesis 3 Responsiveness has a direct and significant effect on patient trust.
- Hypothesis 4 Assurance has a direct and significant effect on patient trust.
- Hypothesis 5 Empathy has a direct and significant effect on patient trust.
- Hypothesis 6 Brand image arbitrates the interrelation between tangibles and patient trust.
- Hypothesis 7 Brand image arbitrates the interrelation between reliability and patient trust.
- Hypothesis 8 Brand image arbitrates the interrelation between responsiveness and patient trust.
- Hypothesis 9 Brand image arbitrates the interrelation between assurance and patient trust.
- Hypothesis 10 Brand image arbitrates the interrelation between empathy and patient trust.

## **Research Scope**

This study examined the impact of sub-dimensions of the SERVQUAL model – such as tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy – on patients' trust via brand image in private hospitals in Yangon based on the social capital theory. Convenience sampling was used to obtain the samples. The study sample consisted of patients over 18 years of age who had used healthcare services

at private hospitals in Yangon by using pre-screened questions to ensure that they actually had used healthcare services at private hospitals in Yangon.

## **Research Methods**

This study utilized a quantitative method, and the target population is unknown. The study surveyed patients over 18 who had used services at private hospitals in Yangon, Myanmar. Using Cochran's (1977) formula, the researchers aimed for a sample size of 400, ensuring a 95% confidence interval. A purposive stratified sampling method selected 40 patients from each of 15 private hospitals, targeting 600 patients. However, 414 respondents (69% of the target) participated, which was deemed sufficient for the study. Data were collected via a self-administered online questionnaire, distributed through local health groups. Participants were informed of confidentiality and their right to withdraw at any time.

The measurement items for all latent variables were adapted from prior research and assessed for validity and reliability. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale. Tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy were measured using SERVQUAL scales adapted from Lai et al. (2020). Patient trust was measured using items from Alhidari and Alkadhi (2018) and Senasu (2012). The hospital image was assessed with items from Nguyen and Leblanc (2001) and Odoom et al. (2019). The study also considered four control variables: gender, age, education, and income.

Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to evaluate the proposed research model, and the Sobel test was used to test the mediation effects. PLS-SEM is more suitable than CB-SEM for predicting complex research models with multiple variables and relationship paths (Dash & Paul, 2021). It can also produce robust results and is suitable for data that are not normally distributed (Hair et al., 2012). The latest version of WarpPLS, version 8.0, was used for this analysis to ensure high-quality and precise results. Before conducting PLS-SEM, various tests, including descriptive statistics, validity and reliability tests, normality tests, multicollinearity tests, common method bias (CMB), and model-fit indices, were conducted to test the quality of the model.

The Research Ethics Committee (REC) granted approval, number PIM-REC 013/2567. Data collection began after receiving the REC number.

## Research Results

Based on the data analysis, out of 600 respondents, 414 (69%) completed the survey, with 55.3% being male and 44.7% female. The largest group (31.4%) was aged 31–40, and 30.4% reported a monthly income over 1,500,000 kyats. Additionally, 73.3% had a graduate degree. Prior to conducting PLS–SEM analysis, convergent validity, discriminant validity, multicollinearity, and common method bias (CMB) were assessed. Convergent validity was confirmed with factor loadings between 0.664 and 0.957, CR values above 0.7, and AVE values exceeding 0.5 (Cheung et al., 2024). Discriminant validity was verified using the HTMT criterion, with AVE square roots surpassing correlations (Henseler et al., 2015). No significant multicollinearity or CMB issues were detected, as VIF values stayed below 5.0.

### PLS–SEM analysis results

After confirming satisfactory model quality, PLS–SEM was employed to test the proposed hypotheses, as summarized in Figure 1. The Sobel test assessed mediation, showing that tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy significantly influenced brand image. Among these, tangibles, responsiveness, and assurance also positively impacted patient trust, while reliability and empathy did not significantly affect trust. Notably, brand image was found to influence patient trust. Hypothesis 1 confirmed that tangibles affect trust positively ( $\beta = 0.092$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ). In contrast, Hypothesis 2 was not supported, as reliability had no significant effect on trust ( $\beta = 0.018$ ,  $p = 0.218$ ). Hypothesis 3 was supported with a significant relationship between responsiveness and trust ( $\beta = 0.214$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Hypothesis 4 was also confirmed, showing the positive impact of assurance on trust ( $\beta = 0.317$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). However, Hypothesis 5 was not supported, as empathy showed no significant effect on trust ( $\beta = 0.015$ ,  $p = 0.125$ ).

### Sobel test results

The PLS–SEM analysis revealed that all five independent variables positively influenced brand image, which in turn positively impacted patient trust ( $\beta = 0.188$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The Sobel test confirmed the mediation effect for each hypothesis. Hypothesis 6 showed that tangibles positively impacted brand image ( $\beta = 0.136$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ) with partial mediation ( $t = 2.295$ ,  $p = 0.021$ ). Hypothesis 7 found that

reliability had a positive effect ( $\beta = 0.169$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) with full mediation ( $t = 2.618$ ,  $p = 0.008$ ). Responsiveness (Hypothesis 8) also had a strong positive effect ( $\beta = 0.296$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) with partial mediation ( $t = 3.325$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Assurance (Hypothesis 9) positively impacted brand image ( $\beta = 0.167$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) with partial mediation ( $t = 2.601$ ,  $p = 0.009$ ). Finally, empathy (Hypothesis 10) demonstrated full mediation ( $t = 3.093$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) with a significant positive effect on brand image ( $\beta = 0.242$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

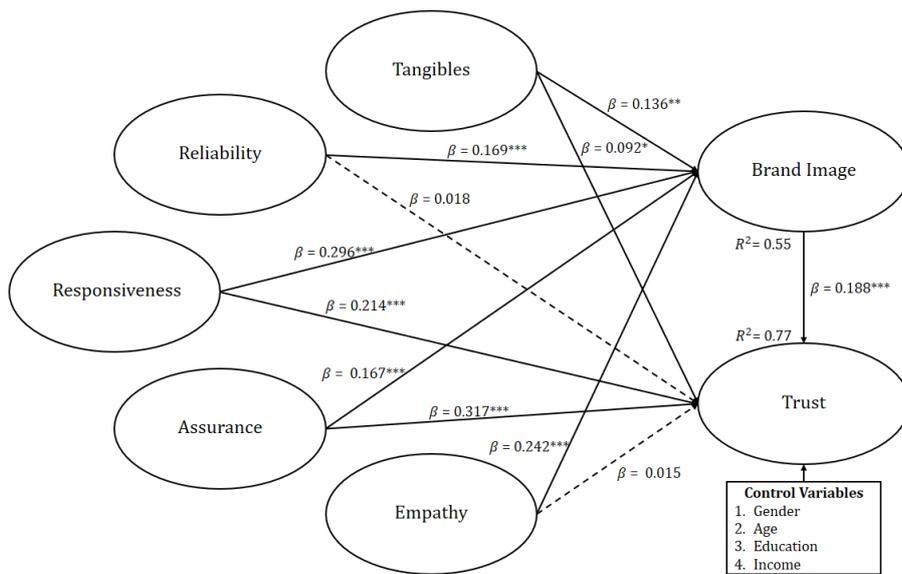


Figure 1: PLS-SEM Results

Note: \*\*\* =  $p$ -value  $< 0.001$ , \*\* =  $p$ -value  $< 0.01$ , \* =  $p$ -value  $< 0.05$

Source: Analyzed and concluded by the authors

## Benefits

1. This study makes significant contributions to the fields of healthcare service quality and brand management.

2. The findings offer several practical implications for hospital administrators, healthcare marketers, and policymakers. Hospital administrators should prioritize enhancing the tangibles and responsiveness of their services.

## Summary and Discussion of Results

The study emphasizes the significant role of SERVQUAL model dimensions in building patient trust in Yangon's private hospitals, with brand image serving as a crucial intermediary. Among the dimensions studied, tangibles, responsiveness, and assurance had the strongest influence on trust. These results align with previous research that links service quality to trust in healthcare (Shie et al., 2022). The tangibles, responsiveness, and assurance dimensions were particularly influential in shaping patient trust. Tangibles, encompassing the physical facilities and equipment of the hospital; responsiveness, defined as the hospital's ability to address patient needs promptly; and assurance, reflecting the competence and reliability of hospital staff all play pivotal roles in fostering trust (Abdullah et al., 2022; Mandagi et al., 2024). These findings align with previous research by Shie et al. (2022), who identified a positive impact of hospital service quality, measured by the SERVQUAL model, on customer trust in hospitals in China. Interestingly, the dimensions of reliability and empathy did not show a significant direct effect on trust. This finding suggests that patients may prioritize other aspects of service quality, such as tangible cues, responsiveness, and assurance when evaluating their trust in private hospitals. These results partially align with earlier studies, which have reported mixed findings regarding the direct impact of reliability and empathy on trust across various service contexts (Ladhari, 2009). The analysis also shows that brand image plays a key role in mediating the relationship between service quality and trust. All five SERVQUAL dimensions positively affected brand image, which in turn boosted patient trust (Keller, 2003). Tangibles, responsiveness, and assurance were particularly critical in strengthening brand image. Supporting studies (Abdullah et al., 2022; Wardi et al., 2022) confirmed the strong connection between service quality, brand image, and trust in various sectors, including healthcare. This underscores the importance of brand image in fostering trust, suggesting that hospitals should focus on tangible service quality and maintain a strong brand to enhance patient trust (Wijaya et al., 2020).

## Suggestions

The study highlights key strategies for hospital administrators and policymakers, focusing on improving tangibles such as facilities and equipment, and enhancing responsiveness by reducing waiting times. Effective brand management is essential, with emphasis on service quality dimensions such as

reliability and empathy. Continuous staff training is recommended to improve assurance, ensuring competence and confidence in patient interactions. In addition, strategic brand management is also essential, as this study underscores the importance of maintaining a strong brand image in healthcare. Hospitals should focus on developing cohesive branding strategies that communicate their commitment to quality care, emphasizing strengths in tangible elements, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. To further improve the assurance dimension, hospitals should invest in continuous training and development programs for their staff in order to ensure that they possess the skills, knowledge, and demeanor needed to inspire patient confidence. Competence and reliability should be consistently demonstrated in every patient interaction in order to enhance trust.

Regarding suggestions for further study, this study can also be applied to various areas, such as tourism and banking services, to analyze the impact of the SERVQUAL model on promoting patients' trust through brand image. Furthermore, it is essential to investigate other influential variables of patient trust, such as customer satisfaction, loyalty, and word of mouth. Lastly, it is essential to address all of the study's limitations, which are recommended to be expanded upon through future research and analysis.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the Research Ethics Committee (REC), who granted the approval, number PIM-REC 013/2567, for this research study.

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