

Chapter 5

Going for Silver–Senior Consumers’ Reviews of Medical Tourism

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ABSTRACT

Senior medical tourism is a growing niche market. Senior citizens are increasingly traveling abroad with the stated intent of accessing medical treatment. This study sought to identify the main dimensions of overall experiences in senior medical tourism. Data based on senior citizens’ comments and ratings were retrieved from the treatment abroad website, with a focus on customers over 54 years old. Content analyses identified eight major themes in medical tourism reviewers. The themes of happiness (with the results) and treatment are predominant in senior consumers. The results are relevant to managers and marketing researchers who run medical tourism businesses, providing them with a deeper understanding of the senior market on services and identifying which services’ quality most significantly influence customers’ recommendations.

INTRODUCTION

Referred to as being in their “third age” in some regions of the world, older individuals are turning senior medical tourism into a hot market with the potential for lucrative business development (Han & Hyun, 2015). This sector’s growth is directly correlated to the aging of baby-boomer medical tourism consumers who have the time and means to travel for longer periods in other countries (Alén, Losada, & Domínguez, 2016). Although the sector has not been extremely significant in past decades, its importance is currently growing as more senior consumers are traveling abroad with the stated intent of accessing

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medical treatment. This demographic trend is growing, and it is tied to an increase in senior medical tourism (Lunt & Carrera, 2010). Medical tourism is an expanding niche market that encourages destination countries' economic growth mainly in non-OECD countries, promotes related employment beyond the high season, and extends seniors' quality of life and health (Bristow & Yang, 2015; Laesser, 2011; Baladi, Chao, Ee & Hollas, 2019). In addition, medical tourism has a positive effect on local communities' wellbeing promoting local commerce and creating jobs in the health industry in both public and private sectors (Suess, Baloglu & Busser, 2018; Ganguli & Ebrahim, 2017). Medical tourism increases tourism's overall intensity, mostly because specific senior populations are characterized by extensive tourism experiences. In addition, these tourists and those who travel with them have time for tourism activities that include hotels, restaurants, shops, museums, transportation systems, and airlines, which all greatly benefit from this industry (Alén, Losada, & Domínguez, 2016; Connel, 2006).

Past studies have highlighted the usefulness of Web reviews in terms of understanding patients' experiences in health tourism (Rodrigues, Brochado, Troilo, & Mohsin, 2017; Gohosh & Mandal, 2019). Furthermore, a significant number of researchers found that user-generated content are a reliable source for research in tourism and have significant impact to influence tourists' decisions at any stage of their travel arrangements (Lu & Stephenkova, 2015; Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013). Nevertheless, there is a dearth of studies that examine the effect of web reviews on a senior population. Considering this, the present research sought to add to the previous studies' findings by providing a fuller understanding of senior medical tourism based on an analysis of consumers' online posts on the Treatment Abroad website, in particular those that emphasize senior cosmetic procedures. This study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the main dimensions of senior medical tourism experiences in narratives shared online in the post-purchase phase of medical treatments?
2. What are the main themes linked with male versus female patients?
3. What are the main dimensions of senior medical tourism experiences linked with recommendations?

The research below is structured as follows. The next section discusses trends in medical tourism and the senior market. Then, the methods section presents the research context and data collection and analysis procedures. The section on results includes the context analysis results for online reviews shared by senior medical tourists in the post-purchase phase of their experiences. The paper concludes with the study's findings, limitations, and future avenues of research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Medical Tourism Trends

The medical tourism industry is relatively new, but it is considered to be one of the fastest growing sectors globally due to massive migrations of tourists from developing nations to less developed nations that offer reasonable options for price-conscious tourists (Alleman, Luger, Reisinger, Martin, Horowitz & Cram; Seetanah, 2011). The World Tourism Organization has listed among the 2020 future market trends for medical tourism 1) an increase in tourists' age, 2) a change from active vacations to experience-

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