


# Chapter 15


## Ethical Digital Marketing in Medical Tourism: A Mental Health– Oriented Approach

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### ABSTRACT

*Medical tourism is growing rapidly and increasingly depends on digital marketing, yet unethical practices (exaggerated claims, incomplete information, and culturally insensitive communication) can heighten international patients' psychological stress and erode trust. This conceptual article proposes the Ethical Digital Marketing*

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*Framework for Mental Health-Oriented Medical Tourism (EDMF-MHMT), structured around four dimensions: information transparency, cross-cultural communication, digital psychological support, and patient-centered marketing. Practical implications include empathetic storytelling, multilingual communication, and telehealth as an educational and reassurance channel to reduce uncertainty. The framework also highlights strong data protection and privacy compliance (e.g., GDPR/HIPAA-aligned practices) to reinforce patients' perceived safety in digital interactions.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Medical tourism has rapidly grown into a strategic global sector by offering more affordable and quality healthcare services abroad, attracting patients from various recovery countries (Marques & Battistella, 2025; Saba et al., 2024). This development shows a paradigm shift in healthcare from a domestic approach to a cross-border system that is integrated with the tourism industry. According to the report Global Wellness Institute (2024), the medical tourism sector is projected to continue to grow as the demand for healthcare services that are not only oriented towards physical healing, but also on the holistic well-being of patients. This growth was also driven by limited access to healthcare services in the patient's home country as well as advances in digital technology that facilitate the marketing of medical services globally (Asa et al., 2024).

While it offers significant economic potential, the development of medical tourism also poses various ethical challenges, particularly in the context of digital marketing. Digital marketing in medical tourism often risks misleading patients through exaggerated claims, simplification of medical risks, or the presentation of information that is unbalanced between benefits and potential treatment impacts (Nagappan et al., 2024). In this context, digital literacy is an important factor in designing marketing strategies that are not only commercially effective, but also ethical and responsible (Ali et al., 2025). Unethical marketing practices have the potential to undermine patient trust, exacerbate anxiety, and create psychological stress in the cross-border medical decision-making process.

Digital marketing in the medical sector has a great capacity to reach a global audience, but at the same time it can create uncertainty for patients, especially when the information conveyed is not managed transparently and accurately (Kwilinski et al., 2024). Patients considering medical treatment abroad often face significant anxiety regarding medical procedures, the security of personal data, and the transparency of costs and treatment outcomes (Conduah et al., 2025; Tseng et al., 2021). The increasing use of social media, hospital websites, and digital communication platforms allows for more intensive interactions between providers and patients,

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