

Medical Tourism Destination Marketing in the Event of COVID-19 Outbreak through Neuromarketing Techniques: A Fuzzy DEMATEL Approach

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Abstract

In the last decade, medical tourism has increased tremendously. After assessing the alarming levels of spread and severity, the World Health Organization declared the new coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak as a global pandemic. The COVID-19 outbreak has affected many of the major destinations and sources of medical tourism. Patients who have planned to travel abroad for affordable medical care are canceling or postponing trips due to this pandemic. During this pandemic, it is important to obtain new medical tourists through effective destination branding. Neuromarketing techniques and tools have been effective in studying the consumers' behaviors, particularly in the decision-making process. It is found that neuromarketing tools can assist the decision-makers to accurately measure the consumers' behaviors in relation to the conventional techniques. This paper investigates the role of neuromarketing techniques in the event of the COVID-19 outbreak for destination marketing. Accordingly, a decision-making model is developed for destination marketing in the event of the COVID-19 outbreak. The data is analyzed by a fuzzy multi-criteria decision-making model, Fuzzy Decision Making Trial and Evaluation Laboratory (DEMATEL). The results showed that accuracy and quality of information are the most important factors in implementing neuromarketing techniques for medical tourism destination marketing in the event of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Keywords: Neuromarketing, COVID-19 Outbreak, Medical Tourism, Destination Marketing, Fuzzy DEMATEL

1. Introduction

In the last decade, medical tourism (Kim et al., 2019; Nilashi et al., 2019b) has been advanced tremendously, in which health care systems have become an important part of this worldwide industry (Ahani et al., 2019a; Moghavvemi et al., 2017; Momeni et al., 2018). The market for medical tourism is developing increasingly, making it internationally very competitive (Ahani et al., 2019a; Ganguli and Ebrahim, 2017; Momeni et al., 2018; Rodrigues et al., 2017). Medical tourism also allows patients access to healthcare with high-quality services at lower costs and shorter treatment times. Therefore patients seeking healthcare are willing to travel as medical tourists to developing countries for various types of treatment of diseases and several wellness services (Ahani et al., 2019a; Yeoh et al., 2013; Zarei and Maleki, 2019). The world's annual medical tourism income has grown by around 20%

(Yu and Ko, 2012). The global medical travel industry is expected to hit nearly 3 trillion USD by 2025, with a forecast growth of 25% per year. It was found that, in 2014, medical tourism income in the United States was approximately 55 billion dollars, where approximately 11 million patients of this country have received care in other developing and developed countries and each patient has spent an average of 3,500 to 5,000 dollars (John and Larke, 2016; Momeni et al., 2018).

Latin America is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. Every year millions of travelers are interested in destinations such as Mexico, Cuba, or the Dominican Republic. Medical care has emerged as one of the key reasons for visiting this region over the last decade, mainly because of the cheaper price of health procedures and also the high quality of the health services provided in many Latin American countries in terms of hospitals and clinics. According to (Statista, 2020a), in Latin America,