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Identifying and explaining the medical tourism marketing model with an emphasis on the quality of medical services Qualitative approach: phenomenology

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Abstract

The present study aimed to identify and explain the medical tourism marketing pattern with an emphasis on the quality of medical services. This study was designed in terms of qualitative methodology and based on a phenomenological approach to examine in depth the experiences and perspectives of experts in the field of medical tourism and managers of medical centers and hospitals with international units. The statistical population included academic experts and managers of medical centers in Tehran, and by conducting fifteen semi-structured interviews, the researcher achieved theoretical saturation. Data were collected and conceptually analyzed using an interview protocol, and to ensure validity and reliability, triangulation techniques, research audit, and data analysis by several independent coders were used. The findings showed that several factors, including competitive treatment costs, quality of services, access to specific specialties, effective marketing, provision of after-treatment services, and use of communication technologies, play a decisive role in patients' experience and satisfaction. The results of the study can help managers and policymakers to improve the quality of medical services and medical tourism marketing by designing effective strategies, improving the monitoring and nursing system after treatment, and paying attention to the experience of foreign patients.

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Medical tourism is one of the emerging and growing areas in the health and tourism industry that encourages patients to travel to destinations outside their home area to receive medical, diagnostic, or cosmetic services (tang et al., 2025). This type of tourism does not only include receiving medical services, but also the patient experience includes after-treatment care, interaction with personnel, use of new technologies, and benefiting from ancillary services such as accommodation and transportation. The importance of aftercare in medical tourism is twofold, as foreign patients do not have direct access to healthcare providers after returning to their home country, and follow-up on treatment status requires coherent and reliable systems (Tran & Rudolf, 2022). This area includes patients' travel to receive diagnostic, therapeutic, rehabilitation or cosmetic services outside their place of residence, and the patients' experience in this process is influenced by a set of medical, financial, cultural and social factors. Patients' decision to choose a treatment destination depends above all on the quality of healthcare services and competitive costs. Providing high-standard healthcare services, the reputation of hospitals and the experience and expertise of doctors, along with transparent pricing of medicines and appropriate treatment packages, increases patients' trust and strengthens their motivation for medical travel (kumar et al., 2025). In addition, access to specific specialties and modern information and communication technologies play a key role in the patients' experience. Patients often seek treatments that are limited or unavailable in their home country, and the use of online technologies, such as consultation platforms and telemedicine services, provides easy access to information and specialized consultations before and after treatment. In addition to facilitating treatment planning, these reduce concerns and increase patient satisfaction (Cynthia et al., 2025). Medical tourism marketing, as one of the determining factors in attracting foreign patients, improves the treatment experience by providing special treatment packages, targeted advertising, and attention to the patient's culture and language. Creating user-friendly websites, displaying the cultural and social environment of the destination, and providing the possibility of comparing services and prices, helps patients make informed decisions. Also, paying attention to the patient's culture and language and providing multilingual services facilitates effective communication between patients and medical staff and increases their satisfaction (Hanna et al., 2021).

Aftercare services and monitoring and care systems are also vital components of medical tourism. Tracking patients' condition, providing rehabilitation and aftercare services, conducting periodic surveys, and analyzing feedback improve the quality of services and enhance the patient experience. Also, establishing quality control systems and continuous monitoring of the services provided play an important role in standardizing treatment and increasing the credibility of medical centers. These measures not only improve the quality of services, but also increase competition between medical centers and the sustainable development of the medical tourism industry (sadatreshadi et al., 2025). Given the increasing growth of medical tourism globally, hospitals and medical centers are facing the challenge of competing to attract international patients. Many medical centers lack a comprehensive model for effective marketing and managing the experience of foreign patients, and insufficient information about service quality, costs, and specialties reduces patient trust and choice. Also, the lack of monitoring and providing post-treatment services reduces the opportunity for patients to return and repeat visits. Therefore, the researcher seeks to answer the question: What is the medical tourism marketing model with an emphasis on the quality of medical services, a qualitative approach: phenomenology?

Theoretical Basis

Medical Tourism

Medical tourism is an emerging and growing branch of health tourism that has attracted the attention of many researchers and decision-makers in the field of health and tourism in recent decades due to the development of medical technologies, increasing the quality of health

services, and the globalization of access to information. In this type of tourism, patients travel from their place of residence to another destination in order to receive medical, diagnostic, or cosmetic services, and their experience includes a set of medical interactions, welfare services, and travel experiences. This phenomenon is not only considered an economic opportunity for countries, but also a tool for improving the quality of health services and improving the patient experience (yu et al., 2025).

Research Background

Farzinmehr et al. (2025) studied "Providing a marketing model for health tourism with an emphasis on medical equipment". The findings showed that economic and policy factors indirectly affect marketing development through infrastructure and service quality. Infrastructure conditions have a positive and significant effect on service quality, patient experience, and marketing development, but its direct effect on destination image was not significant. Service quality indirectly affects marketing development through patient experience, and marketing and destination image directly enhance the development of health tourism. Emami et al. (2025) studied "Designing a Customer Relationship Management Model Based on Artificial Intelligence in Digital Marketing of Services in the Health Tourism Industry". The results of the study showed that the causal conditions in the study include promoting market competition, improving relationships, automatic data analysis, empowerment; and the contextual conditions include customer data management, intelligent services.

Methodology

The present study was designed to investigate the effective factors in medical tourism marketing, which is qualitative and based on a phenomenological approach. This approach allows the researcher to deeply understand the experiences, perspectives, and meanings of phenomena from the perspective of informed and relevant individuals in the field of medical tourism and to achieve conceptual analysis and accurate inference from the data. The statistical population of this study included two groups of experts and stakeholders in the field of medical tourism: first, academic experts who had scientific and research publications in the field of medical tourism marketing, and second, managers of medical centers and hospitals that had international units and were active in the field of medical tourism in Tehran. By conducting fifteen semi-structured interviews, the researcher reached a level of theoretical saturation; meaning that the information obtained was repeated and receiving new data did not provide additional and new information. The average time for each interview was about 60 minutes, and the sample composition included 7 women and 8 men with bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees and with different employment statuses, all of which are reflected in Table 1. The data collection tool in this study was a semi-structured interview protocol. This tool allows the researcher to clearly ask the main questions while maintaining the flexibility to follow up on emerging issues and unique responses from participants.

Research findings

The research findings show that high quality of healthcare services, competitive costs, and access to specific specialties play a major role in attracting foreign patients. Also, positive experiences of previous patients and the provision of transparent and accessible information increase patients' trust and facilitate their decision-making to choose a treatment destination. Providing after-treatment services and patient monitoring improves patient satisfaction and return. Finally, combining these factors with targeted marketing and multilingual information forms a successful model for medical tourism.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results showed that the quality of healthcare services plays a major role in choosing a treatment destination. The credibility of doctors, their experience and expertise, and compliance

with international standards increase patients' trust and satisfaction. Studies by Kumar et al. (2025) show that improving the quality of treatment not only increases the level of patient satisfaction, but also leads to patients returning and recommending them to others. Therefore, implementing quality control systems and continuous training of staff is a vital strategy for the development of medical tourism. The results showed that competitive costs and transparency in prices are one of the most important drivers of choosing a treatment destination. International patients are looking for high-quality services at an affordable price, and comparing costs with the country of origin plays a decisive role in decision-making. The findings of Wang et al. (2023) emphasize that providing transparent treatment packages, discounts and various insurances increase the competitiveness of medical centers and facilitate improved marketing. Access to specialists and medical centers with unique capabilities, such as complex surgeries or innovative treatments, plays a key role in attracting foreign patients. Studies by Emami et al. (2025) have shown that foreign patients are more likely to seek out centers that are able to provide specialized services. Attracting experienced specialists, providing training courses, and introducing specialties in marketing are effective factors in the development of medical tourism. The results showed that positive experiences of previous patients, especially through online feedback and social networks, increase the trust of new patients. Farzinmehr et al. (2025) have shown that publishing real feedback and patient satisfaction, along with images and verbal descriptions, increases the credibility of the medical center and has a direct impact on successful marketing. Post-treatment monitoring and care, including telemedicine services, patient follow-up, and feedback analysis, are important factors in increasing patient satisfaction and return. This is consistent with the findings of Kumar et al. (2025) and shows that patient experience management is not limited to treatment alone, but also includes ongoing care and communication after treatment. In addition, medical tourism marketing increases trust and destination choice by providing complete, transparent, and multilingual information, introducing past patient experiences, and offering special service packages. These findings are consistent with the results of Emami et al. (2025) and emphasize that targeted advertising and the use of new information and communication technologies play an important role in the success of medical tourism.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no financial or non-financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest relevant to this work.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

AI Use Statement

The authors declare that no generative artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted technologies were used in the preparation, writing, or editing of this manuscript.

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Ethics Approval

All procedures performed in this study were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the responsible institutional and national research committee.