

Medical Tourism Travel Motivations: The Push and Pull Driving Forces

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted the medical tourism industry, leading to a decline in international travel and healthcare services. However, as the world recovers from the pandemic, understanding the factors that influence medical tourism decisions remains crucial for industry growth. This study investigates the push and pull factors that motivate individuals to seek medical treatment abroad in the post-pandemic era. By examining these factors through the lens of the push-pull theory, the research explores the motivations of people pursuing medical treatment overseas. Primary draw factors for medical tourism include economic efficiency, reduced waiting times, an extensive array of therapies, enhanced healthcare quality, attractive locations, and cutting-edge technology. Conversely, push factors compelling individuals to abandon domestic healthcare include financial obstacles, protracted wait times, restricted treatment options, substandard quality, absence of insurance, and legal constraints. The report analyses these elements to offer insights into attracting medical tourism. Furthermore, it provides a comprehensive understanding of how firms can effectively utilize both push and pull forces to attract medical tourists and address the diverse needs of a global market seeking affordable, high-quality healthcare.

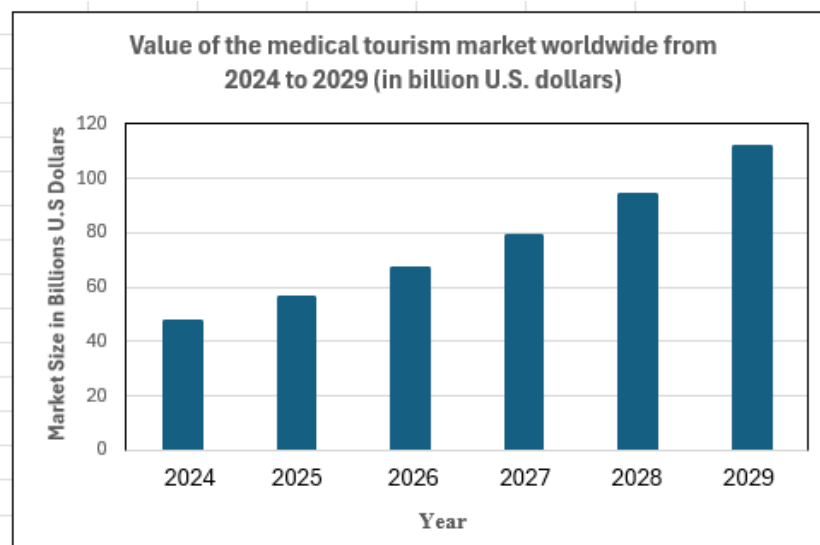
Keywords: Medical Tourism, Availability, Low Cost, Service Quality, Value

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected the medical tourism sector, resulting in a drastic reduction in foreign travel and healthcare services (World Health Organization, 2020). As global recovery advances, comprehending the determinants that affect medical tourism choices is crucial for rejuvenating the sector. Medical tourism refers to a patient's capacity to go abroad, frequently in pursuit of more economical, specialized, or expedited medical care (Lunt et al., 2016). Medical tourism is an emerging issue that has garnered the interest of governments, corporations, scholars, and the media. Kim et al. (2019) and Businesswire (2021) indicate that the United States is poised to generate a substantial medical tourism market for Southeast Asia due to increasing treatment costs. Individuals select these countries due to their discontent with the local healthcare services. The United States seeks

to create a substantial presence in Southeast Asia's medical tourism sector (Chen & Flood, 2023; Kim et al., 2019). In recent years, nations such as Malaysia, Thailand, and India have grown as significant medical tourism centers, drawing patients from throughout the world. Medical tourism has significantly enhanced medical services, bolstered national economic growth (Cham et al., 2020; Sarantopoulos & Demetris, 2015), and generated foreign exchange (Heung et al., 2011).

Although the coronavirus pandemic put a halt to medical tourism, the market was forecast to recover and increase drastically in the years to come. Medical tourism was valued at 47 billion U.S. dollars in 2024 and was forecast to reach a market size of over 111 billion U.S. dollars by 2029 (Yang, 2024) as shown in Figure 1 below



Source: Ststisca.com

Figure 1. Value of the medical tourism market worldwide from 2024 to 2029 (in billion U.S. dollars)

Medical tourism involves traveling to other countries for medical, dental, or surgical procedures, often driven by a combination of factors categorized as "push" and "pull" forces. This study examines the motivating elements that compel individuals to pursue medical treatment overseas in the post-pandemic period. The push-pull motivational theory (Dann 1997), a fundamental notion in tourism research, provides a valuable framework for examining these motivations. Push factors denote the internal motivations that drive an individual to pursue medical treatment overseas, including dissatisfaction with domestic healthcare services, exorbitant costs, protracted waiting periods, a preference for privacy and discretion, and advantageous currency exchange rates (Alnakhi et al., 2019; Capar & Azlan, 2020; Chandran et al., 2018). Pull factors are external attractions that entice people to destinations, including the presence of innovative medical technologies, proficient healthcare experts, cost-effective treatments, and a favorable reputation of the area. Researchers have highlighted service quality, consumer value, and the reputation of medical institutions as pivotal factors influencing the perceived value and happiness of medical tourists (Cheng, 2016; Eze et al., 2020; Hsu & Tseng, 2017a). Additionally, personal attributes such as self-esteem, self-actualization, and risk tolerance also influence patients' incentives to seek medical care abroad.

This study seeks to elucidate the decision-making processes of medical tourists by evaluating these elements and proposing solutions to promote the expansion of the medical tourism business in the post-pandemic era.

Definition of Medical Tourism

Early scholars examining the phenomena of market globalization propose that consumers regard medical tourism as advantageous, especially with the rise of globalization. Carrera & Bridges (2006), characterize medical tourism as the organized journey from one's local surroundings to pursue health maintenance, augmentation, or restoration - encompassing both mental and physical wellness—via medical care. Similarly, Ackerman (2010), characterizes medical tourism as the phenomenon of individuals journeying considerable distances, frequently across international borders, to obtain medical care while concurrently participating in recreational activities, like conventional tourism. Goodrich & Goodrich (1987), further elucidate that, in addition to receiving treatment, medical tourists frequently engage in the utilization of conventional tourist services, encompassing lodging, transportation, and excursions to sites. Tourist locations are progressively promoting healthcare services in conjunction with other tourism amenities. Consequently, there is an increasing necessity for an accurate and thorough conceptualization of medical tourism.

Medical tourism, in which individuals seek medical treatment abroad, has emerged as a substantial contribution to the global economy (Mattoo & Rathindran, 2006). The sector integrates healthcare and travel, yielding significant economic advantages for host nations while providing affordable, high-quality medical services to foreign patients (Musa et al., 2012; Nwobodo, 2020; Lim & Ng, 2023). The economic impact of medical tourism can be assessed through multiple dimensions, including direct cash contributions, job creation, investment in healthcare infrastructure, and its wider repercussions on the economy.

The most profound economic benefits of medical tourism are the revenue generated from the influx of international patients. These individuals travel to hosting nations with specialized healthcare services, often seeking treatments that are either unavailable, too costly, or delayed in their home countries (Tseng, 2017a; Tseng et al., 2021)

Many patients from developed countries like the U.S., Canada, or the UK travel to countries like India, Thailand, Mexico, or Malaysia for medical care because treatments there can be 30% to 80% cheaper, even with travel and accommodation costs (Masoud et al., 2013; Rusman & Fiona, 2018; Widiyastuty et al., 2023). This cost differential drives a steady flow of patients, contributing directly to the revenue of hospitals and clinics in destination countries.

The travel and tourism industry, continuously evolving, is the world's largest service sector. It significantly boosts the Gross Domestic Product of destination countries and contributes substantially to government tax revenues (Johnston et al., 2010; Roman et al., 2022). Valued at USD 7.6 trillion, the travel and tourism sector accounts for over 10% of global GDP, 7% of international trade, and 30% of global service exports. Furthermore, Experts predict that the industry will grow from generating \$102.6 billion USD globally, in 2019, to approximately \$272.7 billion, by 2027 (Castillo & Liew, 2024). Popular medical tourism destinations such as Thailand, Turkey, and India each generated billions of dollars from

international patients. This income supports the growth of healthcare facilities and the local economy, making medical tourism a key source of foreign exchange earnings.

Beyond the immediate healthcare sector, medical tourism has a ripple effect on other parts of the economy (Chen et al., 2024). The spillover effects extend to industries such as hospitality, transportation, and local businesses. Medical tourists typically combine their treatment with a vacation or recuperation period, leading to increased demand for hotels, restaurants, and tourism services (Chandran et al., 2018). Many medical tourism packages are designed to offer leisure activities in addition to healthcare services, leading to further spending in tourism-related sectors (Lee, 2007). Countries with strong tourism industries, such as Thailand or Mexico, can leverage their existing infrastructure to support medical tourists.

The need for travel by medical tourists also boosts the airline industry and local transport services. The combined effects of airfare, local transportation, and medical tourism logistics contribute to the overall economic impact (Ramli, 2015). As medical tourists and their companions often stay for extended periods, they also contribute to the local economy by spending on shopping, dining, and other personal services (Crooks & Synder., 2011). Their activities generate demand for a variety of goods and services, benefiting local businesses.

The expansion of the medical tourism sector substantially enhances employment opportunities in healthcare and other industries. The rising demand for medical services results in the proliferation of healthcare facilities, hence generating employment opportunities for physicians, nurses, and other professionals (Chen et al., 2024). as shown in nations such as Singapore (Chanda, 2002). Similarly, the sector also creates positions in logistics, translation, travel, and hospitality, all of which are crucial for facilitating a seamless medical tourism experience from arrival to departure.

The potential to attract international patients has motivated numerous governments and private sector investors to enhance their healthcare facilities. This investment yields enduring advantages for both domestic and international patients. To be competitive in the global medical tourism industry, host countries must prioritize healthcare of superior quality that adheres to international standards. The research conducted by Yousefi & Marzuki (2015), Wang et al (2020), and Sarwar (2013) indicates that Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia have allocated resources towards modern medical infrastructure, cutting-edge technology, and proficient healthcare personnel to enhance the quality of healthcare for both domestic and international patients.

Medical tourism helps generate foreign direct investment (FDI) as global healthcare networks or insurance firms collaborate with domestic hospitals. These collaborations may result in the establishment of new healthcare facilities (Chanda, 2002) and the enhancement of existing ones, thereby improving the overall healthcare system and local economies. Similarly, medical tourism significantly contributes to foreign exchange generation for underdeveloped nations. Patients from affluent nations pursue cost-effective treatment alternatives in underdeveloped countries, compensating in foreign currency, hence enhancing foreign exchange reserves (Heung et al., 2011). These revenues can stabilize

exchange rates, enhance the trade balance, and bolster the general economic vitality of the nation.

Nonetheless, Medical tourism provides another means for nations to diversify their economy. Nations like Singapore and Malaysia, who have historically depended on limited industries such as manufacturing, can mitigate their economic reliance on unstable markets by cultivating a strong medical tourism business, so fostering a more stable and diversified economy (Connell, 2013; Saragih & Jonathan, 2019; Md-Zain et al., 2022). While medical tourism provides significant economic advantages, it also poses obstacles. Local patients may have extended wait times and diminished access to inexpensive healthcare when hospitals emphasize profit-oriented international patients (Johnston et al., 2010). Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic showed the tourism industry's vulnerability to worldwide travel restrictions and health concerns, with continued hazards lingering despite current recovery efforts. To mitigate future effects on the tourism sector, rigorous steps must be enacted to avert the recurrence or emergence of further pandemics.

Literature Review

In the 21st century, medical tourism has become a swiftly growing global sector. The Fourth Industrial Revolution, the declining costs of travel, and the accessibility of information have propelled this expansion (Kim & Hyun, 2008). The wider tourist industry increasingly acknowledges medical tourism as a vital sector that significantly contributes to national income (Abdullah et al., 2019). Today, millions of individuals seek medical care abroad for reasons such as financial efficiency, brand identity, reduced waiting periods, treatment availability, accessibility and connectivity, cultural and linguistic, service quality, post-treatment care and continuity of care. Nevertheless, Akter et al., (2011; 2020); Chandran et al., (2018); Hsu & Tseng, (2017b); Rusman & Fiona, (2018); Saragih & Jonathan, (2019) and Angela et al. (2020), among others, have performed extensive study to elucidate the essential factors that ensure the success of the medical tourism industry. The current study highlighted the following elements as the key success factors in medical tourism. A multitude of critical success factors that influence the competitiveness and sustainability of nations seeking to establish themselves as medical tourism hubs have profoundly affected their development. The phenomenon of globalization surpasses the expansion of medical tourism as they enable hospitalization via bilateral agreements between countries. Conceptualizing factors for medical tourism involves understanding the unique characteristics and influences specific to the patient's need.

Push and Pull Motivational Theory

The push and pull motivational theory, as articulated by Dann (1997), is a fundamental concept in tourism studies, explaining why people are motivated to travel. This section outlines and examines these elements in alignment with current literature and market trends. Push factors represent internal motivations that drive individuals to seek medical treatment abroad due to dissatisfaction or unavailability of healthcare services in their home country (Lee & Tan, 2023) which encompass:

- **Physical Security:** Patients who is concerned about safety and security in their home country may drive individuals to seek medical treatment in Malaysia where they perceive a safer environment (Xiaoqing & Moreira, 2018; Md-Zain et al., 2022).

- Love and Belonging: Patients seeking medical treatment in a foreign country may be motivated by the desire to receive care in a supportive and nurturing environment, especially if individuals feel isolated or lack support in their home count (Filep & Matteucci, 2020)
- Self-Esteem: Potential patients may seek medical tourism abroad to improve their self-esteem by accessing high-quality healthcare services and achieving desired medical outcomes (Hollas et al., 2022).
- Self-actualization: Patients pursue their personal growth and fulfillment through medical treatment abroad, seeking opportunities for self-improvement and holistic well-being (Ying & Krishnapillai, 2018; Rageth, 2023).
- Acquisition of knowledge: Patients have the desire to gain new medical knowledge or access to specialized treatments not available in their home country (Peters et al. 2011; Falk et al., 2012; Chow et al., 2017).
- Inferior Healthcare Services: Patient often receive poorer healthcare treatment in their home country (Manon et al., 2023)
- Long Wait Queue: Some patients came across were faced with longwaiting queues in their home country (Cohen et al., 2014; Adhikari, 2015)
- Affordability: The widespread issue of high insurance premiums, especially in the United States, along with elevated treatment costs in other countries due to suboptimal practices, has contributed to the increasing overall cost of healthcare (Lunt et al., 2016; Chen & Flood, 2023)
- Unavailability, government policy and restrictions: There are instances when a particular diagnosis and treatment is not legally permitted in some countries. In such circumstances, the patients then seek the permitted treatment abroad (Nwobodo, 2020; Bagga et al., 2020; Cheng, 2016; Zolfagharian et al., 2018)

Table 1
Major Push Factors Identified from the Literature Review

Dimension	Author
Physical Security	Xiaoqing & Moreira, (2018), Md-Zain et al., (2022)
Love & belonging	Connell, (2013), Aigbogun et al., (2013), Filep & Matteucci, (2020); Baumeister & Leary (2017)
Self-Esteem	Simkova, & Holzner, (2014), Hollas & Woosnam, (2022), Amin & Rahmiati, (2021).
Self-actualization	Hsu & Huang, (2017a), Rageth, O. (2023), Eze et al., (2020),
Acquisition of knowledge	Peters et al. (2011), Falk et al., (2012), Chow et al., (2017).
Affordability	Connell, (2013), Md-Zain et al., (2022), Lunt et al., (2016); Chen & Flood, (2023)
Adjournment (Long Wait queue)	Lunt et al., (2016), Hsu & Tseng, (2017a), Tseng et al., (2021), Sung & Ozuem, (2015), Yousefi & Marzuki, (2015)
Unavailability	Lunt et al., (2016), Lee & Tan, (2023), Zolfagharian et al., (2018), Bagga et al., (2020), Angela et al., (2020)
Inferior Healthcare Service	Helble (2011), Saragih & Jonathan, (2019), Angela et al., (2020), Hsu & Tseng, (2017b), Manon et al., (2023)
Lack of insurance Coverage	Adhikari, (2015), Drinkert & Singh (2017),

Therefore, issues concerning the unavailability of medical treatment in their home country, long waiting queues, high treatment costs, and poor service quality (Lunt et al., 2016; Adhikari, 2015; Drinkert & Singh, 2017; Xiaoqing & Moreira, 2018) are pushing them away.

The pull factors on the other hand are external attractions that entice people to pursue medical treatment abroad, highlighting the benefits in healthcare (Lim & Ng, 2023), which encompass:

- **Availability:** Patients would have access to advanced medical technology and specialized treatments in Malaysia that may not be available or easily accessible in the home country (Alnakhi et al., 2019; Al-Talabani, et al., 2019).
- **Vacation:** Patients would combine medical treatment with leisure travel, allowing patients to recuperate while also enjoying tourism activities during their recovery (Iulia-Maria, 2015; Wang et al., 2015; Fadda & Sorensen, 2017).
- **Price:** Patients seek the cost-effectiveness of medical procedures in hosting countries compared to other countries, including lower treatment costs, accommodation, and living expenses (Masoud et al., 2013; Rusman & Fiona, 2018; Cham et al., 2020; Widiyastuty et al., 2023).
- **Branding:** The positive reputation and branding of medical institutions in Malaysia offering quality medical facilities, promoting trust and confidence among international patients seeking treatment in Sarawak (Musa et al., 2012; Nwobodo, 2020).
- **Security and privacy:** Patients have assurances of security and privacy during medical treatment, including confidentiality of medical records and personalized care while seeking medical treatment abroad (Zolfagharian et al., 2018; Zotova & Karapetyan, 201); Md-Zain et. al., 2022; Hadiyantina et al., 2022).
- **Short Wait Queue:** Patients who are faced with long wait queues for treatment at home would seek prompt treatment abroad (Sung & Ozuem, 2015; Yousefi & Marzuki, 2015),
- **Quality Treatment and Care:** Patient who are faced with poor medical care would seek quality medical care abroad (Rusman & Fiona, 2018; Saragih & Jonathan, 2019; Angela et al. 2020).
- **Social and Cultural Environment:** Cultural similarities and the availability of relatives or friends in the target country are primary motivators for medical tourists when selecting international destinations (Li & Cai, 2013; Ormond & Sulianti, 2014; Angela et al, 2020)
- **Consumption Value:** The perceived benefits or utility that individuals derive from consuming goods or services, that would act as a mediator between motivational factors and the decision to engage in medical tourism (Tan & Wong, 2023; Damijanac & Luk, 2017; Cavusoglu & Avcikurt, 2021).

Table 2

Major Pull Factors Identified from the Literature Review

Dimension	Author
Availability	Alnakhi et al., (2019), Al-Talabani, et al., (2019).
Vacation	Wang et al., (2015), Fadda & Sorensen, (2017); Zolfagharian et al., 2018
Price	Chandran et al., (2018), Saragih & Jonathan, (2019), Masoud et al., (2013)
Branding	Iulia-Maria, (2015); Chandran et al., (2018), Saragih & Jonathan, (2019)
Security & Privacy	Zolfagharian et al., (2018), Md-Zain et. al., (2022); Zotova & Karapetyan, (2018).
Less Waiting Time	Sung & Ozuem, (2015), Yousefi & Marzuki, (2015)
Quality Treatment and Care	Rusman & Fiona, (2018), Saragih & Jonathan, (2019), Angela et al. (2020).
Social and Cultural Environment	Li & Cai, (2013), Ormond & Sulianti, (2014), Angela et al, (2020)
Consumption Value	Tan & Wong, 2023; Damijanik & Luk, 2017; Cavusoglu & Avcikurt, 2021).

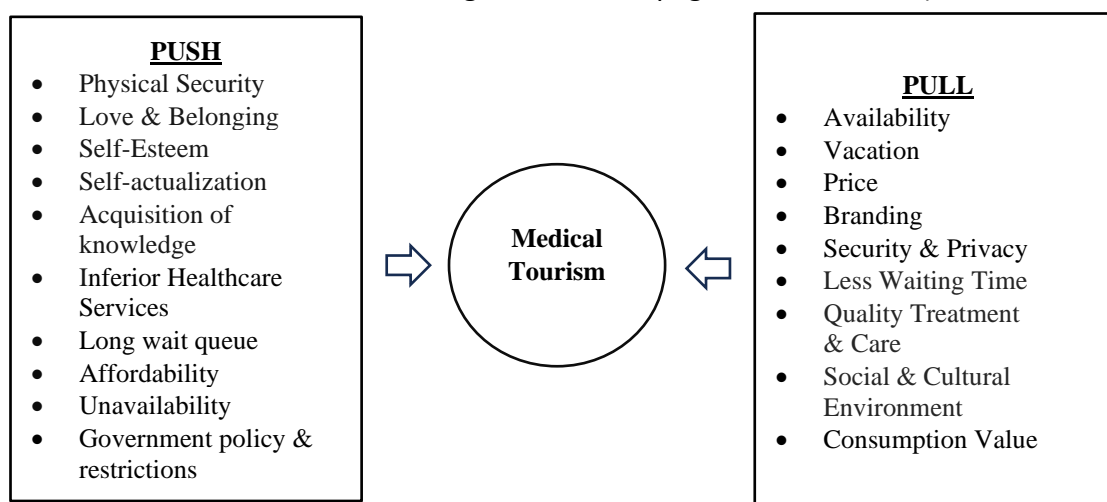
Considering all this evidence, both the push and pull factors would drive medical tourists to seek alternative treatment abroad as well as providing convenience, security and comfort to the medical tourists. According to Walker & Walker (2010), internal or psychological pressures led medical tourists to make travel decisions, with the desire to regain one's physical health serving as the primary driving reason (Sarwar, 2013). Similarly, Dann (1997) emphasized that push and pull factors frequently interact. For instance, someone motivated by a need to unwind may be attracted to a location renowned for its tranquil beaches and wellness resorts. This duality of motivations illustrates the intricacies of travel choices. The push-pull motivational theory continues to serve as an important framework for understanding the reasons behind travel and how destinations can cater to diverse motivations through effective marketing and development.

Medical Tourism Motivation: Utilizing the Push-Pull Framework to Understand the Driving Forces Behind Medical Tourist Decision

Since the 1960s, travel motivation has been a primary concern for tourism researchers, as highlighted by Yoon and Uysal (2005), especially regarding the comprehension of traveler's desires and behaviors. In medical tourism, travel motivation includes the reasons that drive individuals to pursue medical treatment overseas, integrating healthcare with tourism (Cham et al., 2020; Chandran et al., 2018; Walker & Walker, 2010). Similarly, medical tourists frequently pursue healthcare services while engaging in recreational activities in international locations (Eissler & Casken, 2013; Adhikari, 2015). Travel motivation theory often analyses the push and pull factors (Lim & Ng, 2023; Yousefi & Marzuki, 2015). Yousaf et al (2018), defined principal motivators derived from Maslow's hierarchy of needs, encompassing elements such as social inclusion, rejuvenation, recreation, and self-actualization.

Key drivers of medical tourism include the absence of health insurance, high treatment costs, limited healthcare services, and unavailable treatments in the home country (Tseng, 2017a; Tseng et al., 2021). Other factors include high insurance premiums, strict regulatory systems, long waiting times, and outdated medical technology (Adhikari, 2015; Drinkert & Singh, 2017; Sung & Ozuem, 2015; Yousefi & Marzuki, 2015). Additionally, personal aspirations for self-improvement and the pursuit of knowledge further motivate individuals (Simkova & Holzner, 2014; Hsu & Huang, 2017a; Falk et al., 2012).

In medical tourism, the pull factors refer to external destination-related influences which include patient demographics, treatment availability, cost, brand identity, service quality, and home-country conditions that drive the need for medical treatments (Lunt et al., 2016; Adhikari, 2015; Drinkert & Singh, 2017; Xiaoqing & Moreira, 2018).



Source: Authors

Figure 2: Success Factors of Medical Tourism Growth

Medical Tourism Motivation- The Driving Force

With the expansion of the worldwide medical tourism business, it is essential to comprehend the primary motivations driving medical tourists to pursue treatment abroad. Motivation, influenced by inner elements such as personal fulfilment and extrinsic factors such external incentives (Liu, 2020), is pivotal in medical tourism. The allure of the destination nation is intricately connected to these objectives. Walker & Walker (2010), assert that psychological demands, especially the aspiration to regain physical health, are fundamental motivators of medical tourism, a perspective corroborated by Sarwar (2013), who identifies health recovery as the principal rationale for seeking treatment overseas.

Push factors are the domestic elements that compel people to pursue medical treatment elsewhere. These factors frequently arise from unfulfilled healthcare requirements or individual situations, including:

The absence of essential treatments in their home nation frequently drives patients. This encompasses restricted access to specialised operations, insufficient modern medical equipment, or generally poor healthcare infrastructure (Tseng, 2017a; Lunt et al., 2016).

In nations lacking universal healthcare or where treatment expenses are exorbitant, patients frequently seek more economical alternatives overseas (Su & Hsu, 2013). This is

especially evident in nations such as the United States, where insurance cost or healthcare costs impose a considerable burden (Drinkert & Singh, 2017).

Furthermore, lengthy delays for medical procedures serve as a significant motivator. In nations with strained public healthcare systems, patients frequently encounter prolonged waiting times, prompting them to pursue expedited treatment abroad (Adhikari, 2015). In many instances, patients are also precluded from obtaining specific treatments due to stringent legislative frameworks in their place of residence. Regulations governing novel, experimental procedures or fertility treatments may compel patients to pursue care in nations with more permissive healthcare systems (Xiaoqing & Moreira, 2018). Similarly, individual objectives such as self-enhancement, self-esteem drive individuals beyond healthcare-related necessities. Their aspiration to pursue alternative health therapies can motivate medical tourism (Simkova & Holzner, 2014).

Nonetheless, pull factors on the other hand refer to the attributes of the destination country that attract medical tourists. These factors are critical in shaping the choice of destination, including:

The success of medical tourism largely depends on the quality of healthcare services offered. Destinations with advanced healthcare systems, skilled professionals, and high standards of care, validated by global accreditation bodies like the Joint Commission International, are more likely to attract international patients (Johnston et al., 2019). Factors such as advanced medical technologies, expert healthcare providers, and adherence to safety protocols further enhance a destination's appeal (Connell, 2020). Additionally, some countries specialize in offering advanced or experimental treatments, such as cutting-edge surgeries or stem cell therapies, that may not be available in patients' home countries (Sung & Ozuem, 2015). According to Chandran et al (2018), medical tourists are drawn to destinations known for superior healthcare services compared to their home countries.

Similarly, medical tourists' pursuit of cost-efficacious healthcare is the primary incentive for seeking treatment abroad, motivated by the opportunity to obtain superior care at an affordable price compared to their own nations. Price competitiveness, especially regarding operations, dental treatments, and cosmetic procedures, is essential for the success of the medical tourism industry (Heung et al., 2020). Countries such as Thailand, India, and Malaysia have effectively used cheaper healthcare expenses relative to Western nations while upholding satisfactory service levels (Sultana et al., 2024). Reputable destinations like India, Thailand, and Mexico entice medical tourists by providing substantial cost reductions on intricate medical treatments while maintaining quality (Cham et al., 2020).

Nonetheless, accessibility and connectivity to hosting nations are essential for the success of medical tourism. Countries possessing sophisticated transportation infrastructure, streamlined immigration procedures, and accessible medical visas draw a greater number of medical tourists. Non-stop flights to essential medical facilities are crucial, especially for patients travelling large distances (Turner, 2019; Angela et al., 2020). Partnerships with travel companies and airlines, such as those in Malaysia, improve accessibility and convenience for overseas patients (Ramli, 2015).

Similarly, government assistance via rules, legislation, and promotional initiatives aids in the development of the medical tourism sector. In prominent medical tourism destinations like Malaysia and Singapore, governments have enacted strategic steps to enhance healthcare infrastructure, draw international patients, and position their nations as medical tourism centers (Zolfagharian et al., 2018; Bong, 2023). These policies frequently encompass tax incentives for private healthcare providers, accreditation schemes, and the establishment of specialized entities such as the Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council (MHTC, 2024)

Furthermore, the reputation of a country for delivering superior healthcare is a crucial determinant of its efficacy as a medical tourism destination. Positive word-of-mouth, patient endorsements, and international rankings contribute to the establishment of a robust global healthcare brand. Strategic marketing that emphasizes a country's medical proficiency, state-of-the-art facilities, and cultural hospitality is essential for drawing international patients (Connell, 2020). Malaysia's esteemed reputation as a premier medical tourism destination, acknowledged by the International Living Global Retirement Index, has bolstered its international prominence (Singh, 2021). Hospitals proficient in specialized areas, such as cardiac surgery or cosmetic operations, secure a competitive edge in the medical tourism sector (Lunt et al., 2016).

Cultural and linguistic factors significantly play an important role in attracting medical tourists. Patients favor destinations that correspond with their cultural values and offer effective communication in their native language (Heung et al., 2020). Western patients tend to prefer destinations where English is spoken, whereas Muslim patients frequently select countries that provide halal food and accommodate religious practices, such as Malaysia (Yousaf et al., 2018). The presence of expatriate communities can enhance a destination's appeal (Angela et al., 2020).

Beyond medical treatment, many patients view medical tourism as an opportunity to combine healthcare with leisure. The ability to recuperate in a pleasant environment or explore tourist attractions makes certain destinations more appealing (Eissler & Casken, 2013). Lastly, medical tourism necessitates extensive post-treatment care and rehabilitation services. Patients may require extended follow-up, necessitating cooperation between healthcare providers in both the destination and home countries. Facilitating access to aftercare facilities improves patient satisfaction and encourages return visits (Johnston et al., 2019). Patients are driven by a confluence of individual healthcare requirements and the allure of international locales.

Implications and Contributions

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly impacted the medical tourism sector, leading to a reduction in international travel and restricted healthcare services. As global recovery progresses, comprehending the elements that promote and hinder medical tourism decisions is essential. The push-pull hypothesis provides a useful framework for examining these factors, elucidating the reasons and attractions that drive individuals to pursue medical treatment overseas.

The push-pull theory elucidates the reasons individuals seek medical treatment abroad. It examines both the motivations prompting individuals to depart their own country (push

factors) and the elements that draw them to a particular destination (pull factors). Push considerations may encompass the inability to access necessary care locally, the desire to enhance self-esteem, the pursuit of knowledge, and cost constraints (Alnakhi et al., 2019; Capar & Azlan, 2020; Chandran et al., 2018). Pull considerations may encompass the accessibility of medical care and opportunities for recreation (Al-Talabani, et al., 2019; Abdullah et al., 2019). Comprehending these characteristics aids researchers in elucidating the decision-making process of medical tourists. Brand trust is crucial for medical tourists, since it signifies a dedication to quality, safety, and affordability (Musa et al., 2012; Nwobodo, 2020).

Studying post-pandemic medical tourism motivations enriches the push-pull theory by exploring how global health crises reshape travel motivations. This theoretical expansion can also inform consumer behavior theories by examining how the risk perception of medical procedures abroad may shift following a pandemic. Additionally, it aids in understanding global healthcare disparities and the interconnectedness of tourism and health sectors. The push-pull theory has made substantial contributions to the body of knowledge in tourism by:

- **Providing a theoretical foundation:** It offers a clear and concise explanation of the factors that influence medical tourist travel decisions.
- **Guiding research:** It has shaped research methodologies and guided the development of new research questions.
- **Informing practical applications:** It has been applied to a wide range of tourism-related issues, such as destination marketing, tourism planning, and policy development.

The push-pull theory aids tourism marketers in identifying certain demographics and enhancing consumer satisfaction. Ultimately, comprehending push and pull aspects enables destination planners to create methods that attract medical tourists and augment their allure. These strategies may include the identification and promotion of medical packages, the improvement of infrastructure, and the creation of memorable experiences.

Medical tourism has a substantial economic impact, especially for developing nations. Medical tourism can boost local economies through direct spending on medical procedures, accommodation, and travel, and indirectly through employment creation in the healthcare and hospitality industries. In the post-pandemic context, countries that invest in safe, cost-effective healthcare services and promote health infrastructure are likely to see robust growth in medical tourism, thereby strengthening their economies and public health systems.

Conclusion

In conclusion, examining post-pandemic medical tourism motivations using the push-pull paradigm offers essential insights for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers regarding patient decisions and the pandemic's effects. An effective framework for medical tourism must incorporate consumer value, service quality, and institutional reputation, providing a paradigm for other nations to improve their medical tourism industries. This methodology enhances comprehension of tourism behavior and facilitates practical developments within the sector.

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