



# Medical Tourism Decision-Making Strategies -Effects of Time Horizon Perspective



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## Abstract

Medical tourism is a tourism form that sets medical treatment as the primary purpose. Many developing countries are currently planning legally and practically for this market since it has been regarded as a way to increase gross domestic product, improve services, generate foreign exchange, create a more favorable trade balance, and boost tourism. The present study expands the understanding of the time horizon perspective in medical tourists' decision-making strategies, which significantly contributes to hospital management and medical tourism research.

**Keywords:** Marketing Strategies; Medical Tourism; Decision-Making; Emotional Experience; Social Goal; Accessible Tourism

## Introduction

Medical tourism is a rising global phenomenon (Chew & Darmasaputra, 2015, p. 119). Its emergence is because of globalization in healthcare (Hopkins, Labonte, Runnels, & Packer, 2010; Meghani, 2011), and it is a result of continuing seeking for lower costs, better quality care, shorter waiting lists (Ngamvichaikit & Beise-Zee, 2014), and purchasing of human organs [1]. Historically, patients in less-developed countries often traveled to medical centers in more developed countries, receiving services that were unavailable in their home countries [2]. However, the direction of medical tourism flows has changed during the last two decades since technology and medical know-how dissolved in emerging-market countries such as India, Hungary, Thailand, and Turkey [3]. In addition, outbound medical tourism has become increasingly common among high-income countries as government capacity constraints (e.g., European), the loss of employer-provided insurance coverage (e.g., America), and increasing healthcare costs [4].

Patients who travel to a foreign country for treatment often face various institutional and social challenges, such as a huge amount of money spent, follow-up care, and a range of risks. What drove the patients to make the decision? What kind of reason prompted them to revisit? The answer to these questions will help stakeholders to recognize vital factors in medical travelers repurchase decision-making processes and understand their emotional experience, which is critically important for improving

the competitiveness of medical tourism destinations and developing convincing communication programs.

## Effects of time horizon perspective and age on social goal pursuit

Socioemotionalselective theory (SST) posited that the (chronic) tendency to perceive time as limited increases with age, and the priorities of different social goals would change correspondingly [5,6]. SST is proposed based on three presumptions: first, social interaction is the core to survival, with predispositions toward social interest and social attachment having evolved over the millennia. Second, human behavior is driven by expectations of achieving goals. Third, people have multiple or even opposite goals. And the key postulate of SST is that the relative importance of goals changes as a function of future time horizons [7].

According to SST, there are two categories of social goals: acquisition of knowledge (future-oriented goal) and regulation of emotions (present-oriented goals). The purpose of a future-oriented goal is to obtain knowledge in social interaction with others for getting prepare for the future. The present-oriented goals aim to control a variety of emotional states, focusing on the meaning of life and the intimacy of emotions, which are always expressed as avoiding negative emotions and tending to maintain a positive emotional state. Past research has consistently found that aging is associated with an increased focus on present-oriented goals, especially personal values and experiences [8], and a

decreased emphasis on non-emotional information. Furthermore, aging influence how older respond to marketing variables, such as product information [9]; advertising e.g., [10-12] and retail channels [13]. The main reason for this attentional shift is a cognitive decline, maturation, and the perception of time [8].

Furthermore, [14,15] explained the important role of the subjective sense of future time in human motivation, which implied that time left is a better predictor than chronological age, emotional, and motivational variables. This is because motivational shift occurs with age but also appears in other contexts (for example, geographical relocations, illnesses, and war) that limit subjective future time.

SST regards the subjective sense of future time as an essential factor for explaining changes in social goals, highlighting that perceptions of future time can predict the pursuit of the social goal [15]. When the future is perceived as long and nebulous, future-oriented goals related to gathering information and expanding horizons are prioritized over emotional gratification. When time horizons are constrained, present-oriented goals related to emotional satisfaction and meaning are prioritized over goals associated with long-term rewards. [16] proved that an older individual is more likely to be in touch with a familiar, intimate companion, which is related to obtaining short-term benefits.

## Discussion

To date, most studies paid attention to medical tourists who traveled to the hospital in emerging market countries [17] and analyzed the consumer behavior based on the influence of service quality [18], price [19], satisfaction [20], or comparative advantage [21]. However, it is unclear what changes will occur if from a time horizon perspective.

## Conclusion

This paper concludes that the effects of the time horizon perspective play an important role in medical tourists' decision-making strategies. Future research should consider tourists' perceived time of the future since past research has revealed reliable changes will occur in social goal pursuit with age and subjective sense of future time [7,15].

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