Mainland Chinese Customers’ Intention toward Medical Tourism in Taiwan

Hsiu-Yuan Wang, and Shwu-Huey Wang

Abstract—This study proposes and tests a research model capturing elements of perceived gain and loss that, by affecting the perceived value of medical tourism products, influence the buying intention of potential customers. Data from 301 usable questionnaires were tested against the research model using the structural equation modeling approach. The results indicate that perceived value was a key predictor of customer intentions. As for benefits, perceived medical quality, service quality and enjoyment were critical components that significantly influenced the perception of value. Regarding sacrifice, the effects of perceived risk on perceived value were significant. The findings can provide insights into research on how destination countries can make medical tourism a win/win option for themselves and international patients.

Keywords—Medical tourism, Perceived value, Customer intention.

I. INTRODUCTION

Today, many people travel overseas to obtain medical, dental and surgical care, while at the same time taking a holiday abroad. Medical tourism in this study refers to “travel across international borders to seek healthcare while also taking a holiday in the foreign country.” As such, medical tourism goes beyond the usual relaxation, exercise and visits to spas that might be included in a recuperative vacation, to include medical and surgical interventions. Thus defined, medical tourism is a burgeoning industry that has taken the attempt of tourists to attain better health while on holiday to a whole new level [1].

The purposes of this study are thus twofold: (1) to propose and examine a research model capturing both gain and loss elements that could influence potential medical tourists’ perceived value; and (2) to investigate the impact of perceived value on potential tourists’ behavioral intention to travel for medical care to a foreign destination, in this case Taiwan.

II. THE PROPOSED RESEARCH MODEL

The research model for this study, shown in Fig. 1, is intended to cover important features that can account for most of the variance in the intention of medical tourists. Intention, which is defined as a person’s subjective probability to perform a specified behavior, is chosen as the dependent variable for theoretical and practical reasons. According to prior research [2], intention has a major influence on actual behavior in mediating the effect of other determinants on behavior. In this study, which focuses on medical tourism in Taiwan, intention was chosen instead of actual behavior as the dependent variable because it allowed for a timely investigation of the potential behavior among the target research group.

From a customer choice perspective, this study expects that a high evaluation of perceived value among potential tourists will cause an increase in the intention to purchase or participate in medical tourism products or tours. The following hypothesis summarizes this expectation:

H1. The overall perceived value of medical tourism has a positive effect on the intention of potential customers to participate in these tourism activities.

This study suggests that there are three beneficial components of perceived value among potential medical tourists: perceived medical quality, perceived service quality and perceived enjoyment.

Perceived medical quality in this study is defined as the degree to which a potential tourist believes that hospitals and medical tourism agencies can provide patients with a technologically advanced medical environment, a high level of medical standards and expertise and a medical tourism package of high quality. This study anticipates that from the perspective of potential customers travelling to a foreign destination for medical care, a higher level of medical quality will be associated with a higher value of medical tourism products. Thus, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H2. Perceived medical quality has a positive effect on the perceived value of medical product offerings among potential customers.

This research defines perceived service quality as the degree to which a potential tourist thinks that medical tourism agencies