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A Systematic Review of Challenges in Medical Tourism Destination Management

Introduction

Medical tourism is becoming an increasingly popular option for tourists who seek healthcare services from sources outside the country along with having the opportunity to combine it with visiting the tourist attractions of that country (Connell 2013, Crooks et al. 2011). Medical tourism as a progressive economic strategy can make a significant contribution to the medical tourism destinations' s economy. Therefore, investing in the medical industry is a way to increase the gross domestic product (GDP), upgrade services, generate foreign exchange and create a more favorable balance of trade situation, and boost tourism (Ramirez de Arellano 2007).

Although medical tourism is an expanding segment in global tourism, only a few academic studies have focused on the sector. There is a lack of research on medical tourism. Medical tourism destinations are facing complex and numerous challenges in developing, maintaining and sustaining their destinations, specifically in highly competitive environment. Due to the limited literature and empirical evidence on the topic, this study attempts to better understand not only challenges in medical tourism destination management faced by main medical tourism stakeholders but also impacts of medical tourism. Several studies presented the need of destination management in helping tourism destinations to be competitive and sustainable (Crouch and Ritchie 1999, Dwyer and Kim 2003, Presenza, Sheehan and Ritchie 2005). Based on the foregoing description, the following research questions will be addressed in this study.

Research question 1: What are the challenges of medical tourism destination management faced by main stakeholders?

Research question 2: What are the economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of medical tourism?

Literature Review

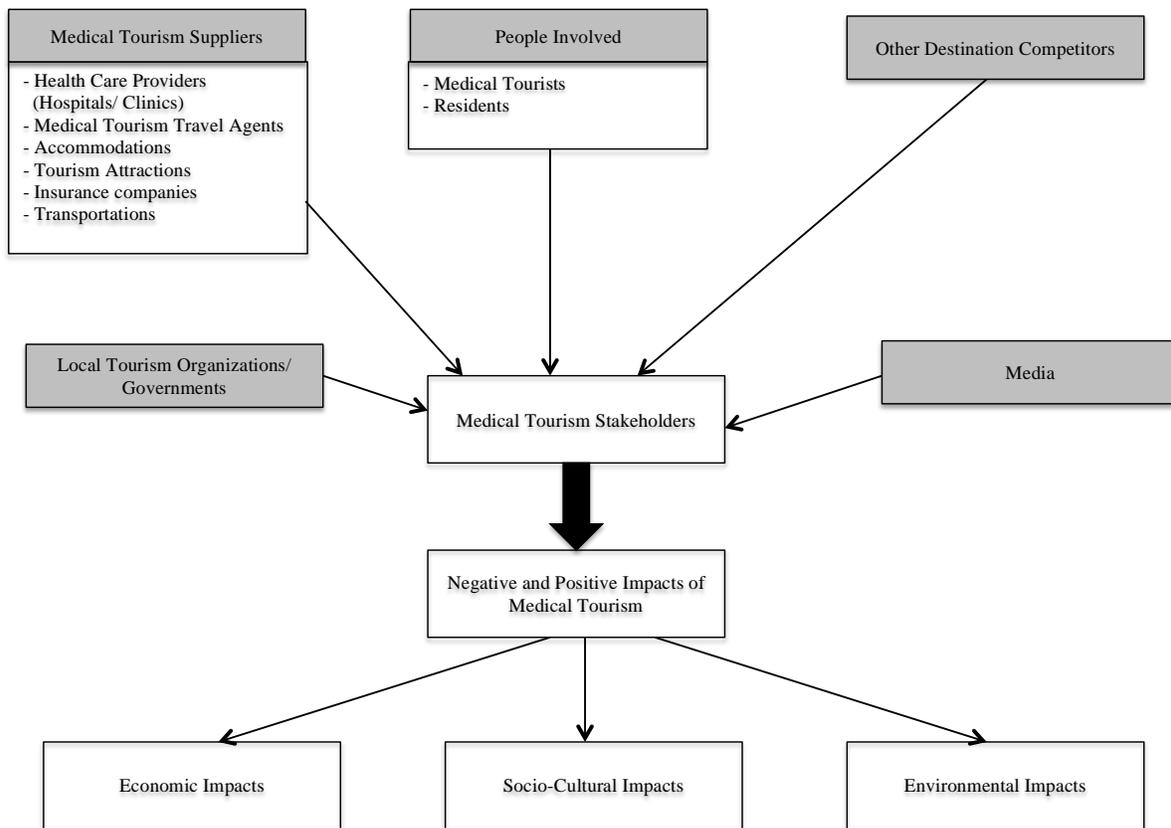
Destination Management refers to a process of leading, influencing and coordinating the management of all the aspects of a destination contributing to a visitor's experience, taking account of the needs of visitors, local residents, businesses and the environment. Several researchers asserted that the need of stakeholders should be taken into account in managing destinations (Bornhorst, Ritchie and Sheehan 2010, Fuchs and Weiermair, 2004, Wang 2011). There are numerous definitions and perspectives of stakeholder in previous studies. According to Freeman, a stakeholder can be defined as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives" (1984: 46). In the tourism industry, the UNWTO identified stakeholders in tourism destinations as tourism professionals, public authorities, and the press and other media. In addition, other interest groups and individuals and in particular local residents and indigenous groups, are also recognized as stakeholders in their own right (Macbeth et al. 2002). Some researchers mentioned that tourism stakeholders include any individuals or groups involved, interested in, or affected by tourism (Aas et al. 2005). A clearer image of the medical tourism stakeholder should be recognized in this study, the authors have therefore divided medical tourism stakeholders in the medical tourism into five groups in order to make it easier for stakeholder to identify a medical tourism network for improving the medical tourism sector. Specifically, medical tourism stakeholders of this study consist of five

groups namely medical and tourism providers, people involved, other destination competitors, media, and local tourism organizations and governments as shown in Figure 1.

Due to the second research question, it is critical to be aware of the fact that to better understand the impacts of tourism industry will help in creating the impacts of medical tourism industry. Tourism industry has often been assessing for its negative and positive impacts upon to host destinations. On the one hand, tourism plays a vital role in positive impacts including both the economy of many countries and social benefits on the communities. Several studies state that tourism can provide employment and business opportunities, economic diversification and multiplier effect (Gunn and Var 2002, Lee and Brahmairene 2013, Milman and Pizam 1988). On the other hand, the negative impacts of tourism include cultural erosion, crime, and damage to the environment (Amelung and Nicholls 2014, Deery, Jago and Fredline 2012, Liu, Sheldon, and Var 1987, Gössling and Hall 2012). As noted by Honey (2008), many tourism destinations have adopted sustainable tourism as an important concept in developing plans in order to provide tourists with a positive experience. Therefore, this study develops and applies a framework based on sustainable tourism development for the purpose of evaluating socio-cultural, economic and environmental impacts of medical tourism faced by main stakeholders. This study focuses on both positive and negative perspectives as suggested by Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (2010). This suggestion indicated that effective sustainable management should not only maximize economic, socio-cultural and environmental benefits but also minimize negative impacts. Similarly, as indicated by Mason, “tourism, as a significant form of human activity, can have major impacts. These impacts are very visible in the destination region, where tourists interact with a local environment, economy, culture and society. Hence, it is conventional to consider the impacts of tourism under the headings of socio-cultural, economic and environmental impacts” (2003, p.23).

Based on the review of the literature, this study attempts to investigate challenges faced by main stakeholders in medical tourism. Moreover, this study examines the economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of medical tourism in both positive and negative perspectives as presented in Figure 1.

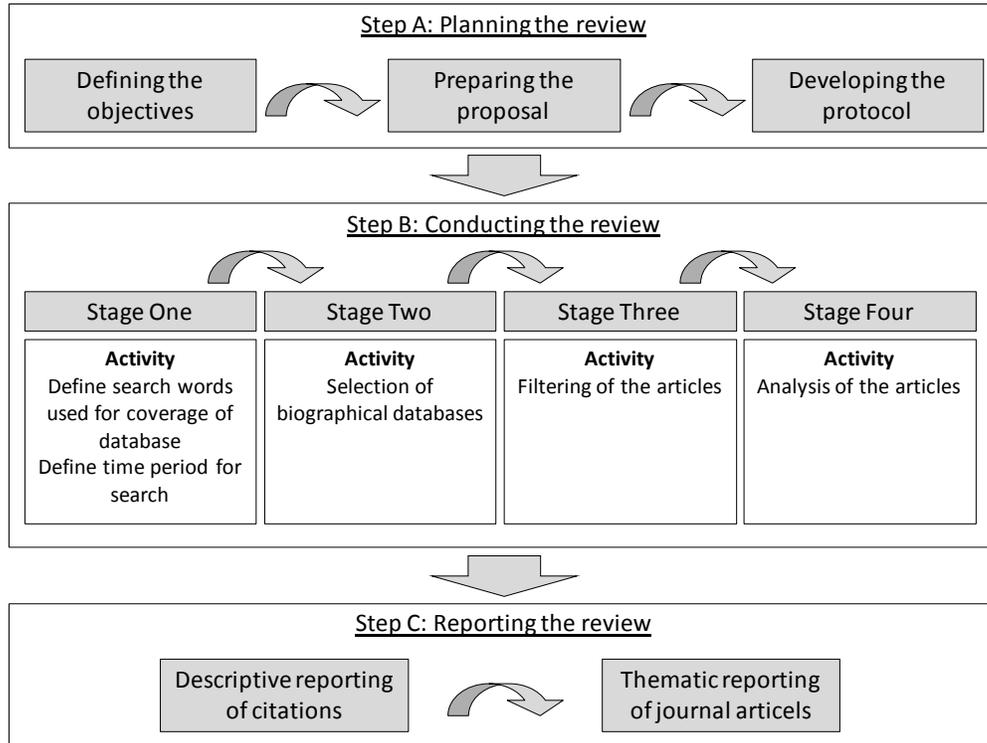
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



Methodology

A systematic literature review will be used to identify challenges faced by main stakeholders in medical tourism and also to examine the economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of medical tourism in both positive and negative perspectives. With the increasingly vast amounts of literature published and indexed by online databases, it is necessary to examine the literature on this topic and clarify what is known about the challenges faced by main stakeholders in medical tourism while also examining impacts of medical tourism. As such this requires the systematic review process to accomplish the main task. As noted by Campbell Collaboration (2001) and Petticrew and Roberts (2006), systematic reviews provide a summary and analysis of the literature through completion of a comprehensive search and systematic selection process; this methodology allows researchers to make sense of large amounts of information and contribute to the knowledge base of what works and what doesn't work. Therefore, this study applies the three stages of the systematic review process as outlined by Transfield et al. (2003) namely planning the review, conducting the review, and reporting and dissemination as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Summary of the systematic review process (Thorpe et al., 2005)



Step A: Planning the review consists of three main points: defining the objectives, preparing the proposal and developing the protocol. As it relates to this study, the main objectives are (1) to identify challenges faced by main stakeholders in medical tourism and (2) to examine the economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of medical tourism in both positive and negative perspectives. Subsequently, the protocol is a plan that helps to protect objectivity by providing explicitly descriptions of the steps to be taken (Transfields et al., 2003). Davies and Crombie (1998) have suggested that the protocol should contain information on the specific questions addressed by the study, the search strategy for identification of relevant studies, and criteria for inclusion and exclusion of studies in the review.

Step B: Conducting the review, this study begins with the identification of keywords and search terms, which are built from the scoping literature study. The researcher scans the published literature on medical tourism to identify keywords relevant to the objectives of this study. All research related to medical tourism was search by using main keywords “medical tourism” and “healthcare tourism” that search for in online indices such as Google and Google Scholar. Therefore, selected keywords of the study are shown in Table 1 and key searches of challenges in medical tourism faced by stakeholders and medical tourism impacts are presented in table 2.

Table 1 Keywords used in guiding the systematic literature review

Focus	What	Who
Medical tourism Healthcare tourism	Challenges Economic impacts Socio-cultural impacts Environmental impacts	Stakeholders Health care providers Hospitals Clinics Medical Travel Agents Accommodations Tourism Attractions Insurance Local Tourism Organizations/ Governments Media Tourists Residents

Table 2 Key searches used in guiding the systematic literature review

Key search
Medical /Health Tourism + Challenges
Medical /Health Tourism + economic impacts
Medical /Health Tourism + socio-cultural impacts
Medical /Health Tourism + environmental impacts
Medical /Health Tourism + stakeholders
Medical /Health Tourism + health care provider, hospitals, clinics
Medical /Health Tourism + medical travel agent
Medical /Health Tourism + accommodation/ hotel
Medical /Health Tourism + insurance
Medical /Health Tourism + Local Tourism Organizations/ Governments
Medical /Health Tourism + Media
Medical /Health Tourism + tourists/ patients
Medical /Health Tourism + residents

In addition, it is important for systematic reviews to provide detailed explanations of the search and selection process, and criteria for inclusion and exclusion so that others may see how the review was conducted and may replicate it later (Campbell Collaboration 2001, Fink 2005). As mentioned, the primary criterion for the articles and their relationship with medical tourism is

one of the keywords in this study. The inclusion and exclusion criteria are studies include: 1) all articles, governmental and institutional reports, media sources such as YouTube, online news, business briefs, newspaper editorials published during the past fifteen years (from 2001-2015). 2) all aforementioned sources had to be written in English 3) academic research and other sources had to describe the challenges of medical tourism faced by main stakeholders 4) previous studies had to explore positive and negative medical tourism impacts in terms of economic, socio-cultural and environmental 5) full-text academic researchers could be implemented and 6) articles with only abstracts were not considered.

Subsequently, filtering of the articles, in order to assess the relevance and to state clearly the focus of the research study, the scope of the literature review process have to be delimited further by other factors. Transfield et al. (2003) state regarding this problem: "...management researchers usually rely on the implicit quality rating of a particular journal, rather than formally applying any quality assessment criteria to the articles they include in their reviews (i.e. refereed journals are 'better' than practitioner journals)...". So the initial assessment criteria for including studies in the literature review are the specifically relation to medical tourism, theoretical and empirical studies, quantitative and qualitative studies, and studies which are published in academic or high quality business journals.

The last stage of conducting the review, content analysis will be used to analyze and classify the data. Content analysis, defined by Mehmetoglu and Dann (2003), is "a multidisciplinary unobtrusive measure for systematically classifying and making inferences from the manifest and denotative content of any type of human communications" (p.1). This research technique allows scholars to analyze non-statistical material in a systematic way (Finn, et al. 2000). Also, content analysis will be used to identify the research type, the year of publication, the source (journal) of the research, authorship, contributing institutions, and geographic characteristics. The current study will combine all three approaches, namely conventional content analysis, directed content analysis, and summative content analysis, as suggested by Hsieh and Shannon (2005).

Step C: Reporting the review, findings of this study and implications for academics and practitioners will be discussed at this stage. At last, future study areas will be suggested. Although systematic review takes considerable time and requires that reviewers pay special attention to detail, the researchers believe that it provides the most efficient and high quality method by which to identify and evaluate the literature.

Implications

With the expansion of the global tourism industry, medical tourism destinations are competing in the international marketplace. The purpose of this study is to investigate challenges faced by main stakeholders in medical tourism. Moreover, this study examines the economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of medical tourism in both positive and negative perspectives. The expected outcomes of this study will be a valuable contribution and add to the existing literature of challenges in medical tourism destination management as well as the impacts of medical tourism toward medical tourism destination. In addition, the outcome of this study could be recommendations for marketers and stakeholders in sustaining their business in the long term.

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