

Fostering Global Wellness: Harnessing Social Media to Enhance Cross-Cultural Trust to propel Medical Tourism Ensuring Economic Growth

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Abstract: The "Heal in India" initiative, initiated by the Government of India and fortified by a dedicated web portal, is the fulcrum of India's strategy to boost medical tourism. Apart from its impact on healthcare, this initiative is a compelling economic growth catalyst. By positioning India as a preferred destination for international healthcare seekers, the initiative stimulates foreign exchange inflows, creates employment opportunities, and contributes to the growth of ancillary sectors such as hospitality and tourism. Medical travel, a burgeoning universal trend, involves people seeking healthcare services across transnational borders. India ranked 10th on the Medical Tourism Index 2020-21, securing twelfth position globally and fifth in Asia-Pacific for wellness tourism. Accredited healthcare facilities contribute to this accolade, including 1400 National Accreditation Board for Hospitals & Healthcare Providers (NABH) accredited hospitals and 40 Joint Commission International (JCI). The "Heal in India" initiative, complemented by a dedicated web portal, emphasizes the Indian government's commitment to medical tourism. Developing trust among likely medical tourists is quintessential as it creates confidence in the quality, safety, ethical standards and transparency of healthcare, overwhelmingly influencing the choice of medical tourism destination. Social media can nurture trust among potential medical tourists, in some way contributing to economic growth in medical tourism destinations by augmenting reputation and visibility, thereby enticing a steady influx of patients through positive word-of-mouth marketing. Trustworthiness authenticated through informative content that is transparent influences decision-making, leading to increased patient inflow and revenue generation. Adapting content to align with cultural subtleties builds trust and increases the appeal of a destination, expanding its clientele with an economic impact extending to ancillary industries. Thus, within social media, vital for healthcare marketing, this study advocates leveraging online platforms such as Facebook (Meta), Twitter, and Instagram to foster trust among potential medical tourists. Steered by Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, which explores communication styles, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and individualism/collectivism, this research establishes a nuanced conceptual framework for tailoring social media content strategies based on Individualism/collectivism dimension. In individualistic cultures, content highlighting personal testimonials and individual success stories may resonate, building trust in the provider's expertise. Conversely, collectivist societies may favour content emphasizing community and shared experiences, establishing trust through collective endorsement. The dimension of indulgence/restraint directs content tone, with culturally attuned approaches aligning with societal values. By integrating these cultural insights into social media content strategies, healthcare marketers can effectively build trust, ensuring resonance with diverse audiences in the medical tourism landscape. This study proposes a robust conceptual framework aligning social media content strategies with cultural nuances, cultivating trust among varied global audiences. The synthesis of Hofstede's theory and tailored social media approaches emerges as a potent means to reinforce India's position as a preferred destination for medical tourism and advance the broader discourse on cross-cultural healthcare communication.

Keywords: Heal in India, Medical tourism, Economic growth, Healthcare marketing, Social media, Trust-building, Cultural dimensions, Cross-cultural communication, Healthcare destinations

1. Introduction

In an era marked by escalating healthcare costs, prolonged waiting periods, and regulatory complexities in developed nations (Medhekar, 2018), India emerges as a beacon, drawing global attention as a premier destination for medical tourism. This burgeoning trend is not just a testament to India's advanced allopathic therapies seamlessly interwoven with time-honoured traditions (Medhekar, 2020) but a transformative force with immense economic potential, job creation prospects, and a model of cross-ministerial collaboration (Shandilya et al., 2021; Subbaraman et al., 2021).

Central to India's meteoric rise in medical tourism is the visionary "Heal in India" initiative, a concerted government effort fortified by an exclusive website. Beyond the immediate healthcare implications, this initiative stands as a catalyst, promising economic prosperity through job creation, increased foreign exchange inflows, and the flourishing of ancillary sectors such as hospitality and tourism.

However, the efficacy of the Heal in India strategy pivots on robust information dissemination concerning the nation's medical infrastructure. John et al. (2018) illuminate medical tourism providers' crucial role in engaging with online users and shaping travel decisions. While these providers excel in maintaining customer intimacy, the untapped potential exists to stimulate deeper customer involvement and glean invaluable insights.

This study significantly contributes to global society by highlighting the extensive societal benefits available to medical tourists engaging with India. In aligning with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to good health and well-being (SDG 3), this research underscores its commitment to ensuring wellness for global citizens while contributing to the broader agenda of creating a more interconnected and a healthy world. (SDG 17).

1.1 Statement of Purpose

As global tourists increasingly turn to social media for health-related information, particularly in the context of Indian hospitals, the pressing need for comprehensive knowledge dissemination in the global medical tourism business becomes evident. This paper goes beyond the confines of conventional medical discourse. It aims to intricately explore the cross-cultural trust dynamics in social media marketing, which is so essential for the medical tourists choosing medical tourism destination. Through an in-depth analysis of existing literature and discussions, the study seeks to build a conceptual framework of building trust in cross cultural context through Social media.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- Analyze the factors influencing trust formation and perception on social media platforms, considering cultural nuances and variations.
- Develop a comprehensive cross-cultural trust model within the realm of social media, drawing upon Hofstede's cultural trust theory.
- Provide insights and recommendations for enhancing cross-cultural trust-building strategies in social media environments, catering to diverse user backgrounds and preferences.

2. Literature Review

Since the advent of Social media, many authors have studied the impact of social media on the consumption of various services. Medical tourism is not exempt. This section provides an overview of diverse studies from 2010 to date, examining the multifaceted dynamics of medical tourism, social media's impact on healthcare, and factors influencing consumer behaviour. This timeframe was chosen to encapsulate the rapid evolution and widespread adoption of social media across diverse business sectors. Additionally, it encompasses a period marked by significant growth in academic research focused on understanding the impact and implications of social media in various domains. The studies encompass themes such as patient trust, satisfaction, technological innovation, the role of social media in healthcare branding, and the impact of COVID-19 on vaccine tourism, collectively contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the evolving landscape in medical tourism and social media marketing of healthcare.

2.1 Use of Social Media to Build Trust In Medical Tourism

In exploring various dimensions of medical tourism, several studies have consistently identified trust as a pivotal factor influencing the decisions and behaviours of medical tourists. Mechinda et al. (2010) emphasized the critical role of trust in shaping the attitudinal loyalty of medical tourists, particularly highlighting its significance for hospital tourists. This sentiment was echoed by Crooks et al. (2015), who delved into the impact of medical tourism on the trust relationship between physicians and patients, emphasizing that trust becomes vulnerable when patient decisions contradict the best interests of physicians. Furthermore, Moslehifar et al. (2016) evaluated the trust features of top medical tourism websites, underscoring the importance of trust in the online health information sought by medical tourists.

Interestingly, the transformative role of social media in fostering trust has emerged as a consistent theme across multiple studies. Anita et al. (2013) emphasized social media's low-cost nature and diverse forms, presenting it as a valuable tool in health promotion and education. Cluster et al. (2015) highlighted the critical role of up-to-date information provided by social media platforms, offering real-time insights into medical tourists' perceptions and concerns. Vidyanata (2022) substantiated this by demonstrating that social media marketing

activities generate Brand Trust, mediating between social media activities and purchase decisions in the healthcare industry.

Furthermore, Kaewkitipong et al. (2021) identified trust in the foreign healthcare system as a significant factor in the context of vaccine tourism. Balouchi and Aziz (2023) provided empirical evidence that various factors, including self-efficacy, contribute to the belief in using social media for medical travel planning, reinforcing the role of trust in online information sources.

The synthesis of these studies suggests that trust is a crucial factor for medical tourists, influencing their decisions and behaviours. The multifaceted nature of trust encompasses aspects such as trust in healthcare providers, online health information, and the foreign healthcare system. Importantly, social media emerges as a facilitator of trust, providing real-time information, fostering brand trust, and contributing to the overall trustworthiness of medical tourism services. As the medical tourism industry continues to evolve, cultivating and enhancing trust, mainly through social media channels, can be a strategic imperative for healthcare providers and destination marketers seeking to attract and retain medical tourists.

2.2 Trust

Trust, a fundamental concept in various disciplines, represents a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). In medical tourism, trust manifests itself in different contexts, from consumers trusting information provided by healthcare organizations (Järvenpää et al., 2006) to relying on e-commerce platforms for online transactions (Gefen and Straub, 2004). Cultural dimensions, particularly Individualism and collectivism, significantly influence the meaning and perception of trust. Research by Hofstede (1980) suggests that consumers from individualistic countries exhibit a higher level of trust in information provided by healthcare organizations than those from collectivistic countries. This cultural context is crucial in understanding the diverse impacts of trust on individuals across different nationalities.

Cross-cultural studies by Zaheer and Zaheer (2005) and Yin et al. (2019) underscore the importance of cultural dimensions in shaping trust imbalances and influencing consumer behaviour in various contexts. Jenkner et al. (2022) emphasized that cultural dimensions play a crucial role in shaping trust, particularly in situations requiring the disclosure of sensitive health information. The findings highlight the intricate nature of trust across different nationalities, affecting social interaction, business relationships, and consumer behaviour.

In the broader context of e-commerce, trust is multifaceted, encompassing dimensions like credibility, integrity, reliability, and confidence (Pavlou et al., 2007). Trust in online environments is influenced by technical competence, concerns over opportunistic behaviours, and website quality (Davidavičienė et al., 2020). Cultural dimensions play a pivotal role in shaping trust in e-commerce, emphasizing the need to consider these dimensions when examining trust and social interaction (Jenkner et al., 2022).

In social media marketing, trust is complex and influenced by information exchange and community interactions (Puspaningrum, 2020). Trust in social media platforms like Facebook (Meta) is built upon consumer experiences within interactive communities, involving credibility, care, empathy, and consumers' previous interactions with the brand (Vingirayi, 2021). Trust in social media plays a mediating role between social media marketing and purchase intentions (Ibrahim et al., 2023). Moreover, interpersonal trust between users within online communities contributes to brand trust and loyalty (Anastasiei & Chiosa, 2018).

Understanding the cultural dimensions of Individualism and collectivism is crucial in delineating the nuances of trust. In certain cultures, Individualism places importance on information-based trust, where the reliability and performance of the brand play a pivotal role. Conversely, collectivist cultures may emphasize community-based trust, where interpersonal relationships within the community significantly influence trust in social media marketing and brand loyalty. The review indicates that the Individualism/Collectivism construct underscores the importance of considering cultural dimensions in understanding trust. For countries high in Individualism, information-based trust becomes crucial, emphasizing reliability and performance. Community-based trust, rooted in interpersonal relationships, holds significance in collectivist countries. The complex interplay of these trust dimensions shapes consumer behaviour in medical tourism, e-commerce, and social media marketing, providing essential insights for fostering trust and enhancing experiences in these diverse contexts. Hence, Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory emerges as this research paper's apt and comprehensive theoretical framework. The theory's emphasis on individualism-collectivism provides a nuanced understanding of how cultural norms and values impact trust, with individualistic societies favouring information-based trust and collectivist societies leaning towards community-based trust. In the critical decisions of medical tourism, the virtual transactions of e-commerce, and the interactive nature of social media marketing, Hofstede's framework

offers a robust lens to decipher the cultural intricacies influencing trust. By employing this theory, the research not only gains depth in exploring the multifaceted nature of trust but also provides valuable insights for stakeholders in these industries, emphasizing the significance of cultural dimensions in fostering trust and enhancing experiences across different cultural contexts. **Theoretical Framework**

3.1 Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, with its six dimensions impacting cross-cultural management studies, challenged the assumption of universally applicable management practices. Despite criticisms, the theory has endured, shaping the examination of global management theory over decades.

Individuals in highly individualistic cultures prioritize pleasure-seeking, while those in collectivistic cultures value conformity (Roth, 1995). Cultural differences influence the impact of others on consumer decisions, with collectivist cultures, like Hispanic consumers in the United States, being more susceptible to social influence (Nicholls et al., 1997).

Examining the cultural scale by Hofstede (1980), the USA ranks first in Individualism, indicating a highly individualistic society, while India ranks around 40, depicting a collectivistic society. Consequently, elements influencing brand trust through social media may significantly vary between the two societies. Men and Tsai (2012) investigated how companies use social network sites in culturally distinct countries, emphasizing the nuanced impact of cultural dimensions on social media usage for brand trust. This reinforces the relevance of Hofstede's theory in understanding cross-cultural dynamics in contemporary business practices.

3.2 Use of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory in Context of Social Media.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory sheds light on the interplay between cultural dimensions and trust in social media marketing. These dimensions, encompassing Power Distance, Individualism vs. Collectivism, Masculinity vs. Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long-Term vs. Short-Term Normative Orientation, and Indulgence vs. Restraint, shape behaviors within societies. Marketers, armed with insights from these dimensions, can tailor social media strategies to resonate globally. The theory, linked with social media, influences information-based and community-based trust dynamics.

Studies like Mcknight et al. (2002) and Guftométros and Guerreiro (2021) explore trust measures in e-commerce and online environments, revealing how cultural dimensions impact trust perceptions. Yin et al. (2019) and Abbas and Mesch (2015) emphasize the significance of cultural dimensions in social interaction, trust, and purchase intention in social commerce.

In social media marketing, Individualism vs Collectivism aligns with Information-Based Trust, relying on facts and transparency, while Community Interactions-Based Trust corresponds to collectivist values built through shared experiences and communal interactions (Guftométros & Guerreiro, 2021). These dimensions, rooted in cultural values, provide frameworks for understanding trust in social media marketing, especially in the context of medical tourism.

This research aims to enhance understanding of how individualistic and collectivist tendencies influence trust in social media interactions in medical tourism, laying the groundwork for informed hypothesis formulation.

3.3 Hypothesis Development and Model Formulation

Hofstede (1980) emphasized that Individualistic cultures emphasize autonomy, personal achievement, and independence. Individuals from these cultures may be more inclined to engage in content that provides detailed information transparency and addresses their needs and preferences in social media. On the other hand, collectivist cultures prioritize group harmony, shared experiences, and communal well-being. This collectivist orientation may lead individuals from such cultures to seek content that emphasizes community interactions, endorsements, and collective benefits. The cultural dimension's theory suggests that the cultural dimension of individualism-collectivism will influence the engagement patterns with social media content on various SNS sites. Hence, we frame our first Hypothesis as

H1: Potential medical tourists from individualistic cultures would engage more with the information and remunerative posts of social networking platforms than the potential medical tourists of Collectivist cultures.

In the social media marketing landscape, trust unfolds as a dynamic interplay between information exchange and community interactions (Puspaningrum, 2020). Platforms like Facebook (Meta) intricately construct trust

through consumer experiences within interactive communities involving credibility, care, empathy, and past brand interactions (Vingirayi, 2021). Studies by (Sousa & Alves, 2019), (Mele et al., 2021), and Myungkeun et al. (2017) underscore the transformative impact of social media on consumer behaviour, particularly in the context of medical tourism. Crooks et al. (2015) provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by family physicians while navigating the intricate landscape of medical tourism. Their work offers valuable insights into the delicate balance required to support effective decision-making. Ghanem et al. (2020) make a strong case for the imperative nature of diversifying the forms of trust within the tourism sector, as they play a crucial role in mediating the adoption of information systems (IS).

Drawing from these insights, it can be inferred that Social media marketing communications seem poised to evoke information-based trust more prominently in potential medical tourists from individualistic cultures than their counterparts from collectivist cultures. This alignment resonates with the observed positive association between trust in foreign healthcare systems and the intention of travellers to recommend medical tourism, as evidenced by Kaewkitipong et al. (2021). Furthermore, Guftométros and Guerreiro's (2021) study on the impact of cultural differences on social media behaviour, viewed through the lens of cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede, 1980), suggests that medical tourists seeking content from individualistic cultures may lean towards trusting information-rich content, addressing their individual needs. Hence, we frame our second and third Hypothesis as

H2: Information-rich social media content induces higher trust levels in potential medical tourists from individualistic cultures than collectivist cultures.

H3: Social media content fostering extensive community interaction induces higher trust levels in potential medical tourists from collectivist cultures than those from individualistic cultures.

Robinson (1996) said that collectivist societies value consensus, which makes them loyal to the dominant brand. Research into the symbolic meaning of brands indicates that brand names are an essential symbol of group identity in collectivistic societies (Johansson—et. al (1994). Previous literature has found that the degree to which other people influence consumer trust is a factor that may affect brand attitudes across national cultures. Particularly Nicholls. et al. (1997) show that a collectivist subculture (Hispanic consumers in the United States) tends to be more susceptible to social influence than an individualistic subculture (their Anglo counterparts). For example, collectivist consumers considered friends' influence essential in choosing a favoured brand. In their work, Ibrahim et al. (2023) provided evidence that trust in social media mediates between social media marketing and purchase intentions. Anastasiei & Chiosa (2018) proved that interpersonal trust between users within online communities contributes to brand trust and loyalty. Again, from Hofstede's Cultural dimensions theory,

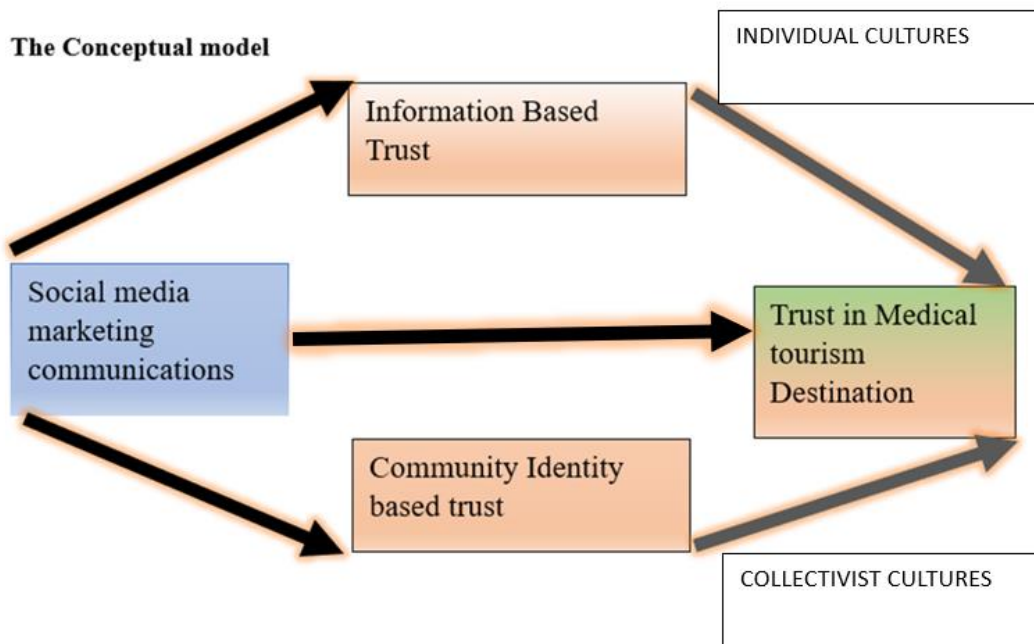
We frame our fourth and fifth hypotheses as

H4: Information-based trust would mediate the relationship between social media marketing communications and medical tourism destination trust in potential medical tourists from individualistic cultures rather than those from collectivist cultures.

H5: Community Interaction trust would mediate the relationship between Social media marketing communications and Medical tourism Destination Trust in potential medical tourists from Collectivist cultures than the potential medical tourists of individualistic cultures

3.4 The Conceptual Model

From the Proposed Hypothesis, we derive our proposed model as follows.



4. Findings of the Study

Based on the objectives of the study, We find

- Cultural nuances and variations significantly influence trust formation on social media. Factors such as communication styles, social norms, and individualistic vs. collectivistic values impact how trust is perceived and established.
- The study develops a comprehensive cross-cultural trust model for social media in context of medical tourism, integrating Hofstede's cultural trust theory. This model identifies key dimensions of trust influenced by cultural factors, as information based trust and Community based trust and offers a framework for understanding trust dynamics in diverse cultural contexts.
- The Insights from the study provide valuable recommendations for enhancing cross-cultural trust-building strategies on social media platforms. Strategies suggested include tailoring communication approaches, fostering cultural sensitivity, and leveraging cultural values to build trust among diverse user backgrounds and preferences.

5. Contribution of the Study

The study significantly advances theory in three key areas:

- **Cultural Dimensions Integration:** By applying Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, it explores cross-cultural trust in medical tourism's social media marketing, revealing how Individualism and Collectivism influence trust perceptions.
- **Nuanced Trust Understanding:** It distinguishes between Information-Based Trust and Community Interaction-Based Trust, offering insights into the intricate nature of online trust, especially in medical tourism.
- **Cross-Cultural Social Media Insights:** Through analyzing responses across different cultural backgrounds, it provides valuable insights for crafting effective strategies that resonate with diverse global audiences in medical tourism.

6. Limitations and Scope for Further Research

Addressing these limitations and pursuing these avenues for further research can enhance the depth and breadth of knowledge in the intersection of cultural dimensions, trust, and social media marketing in medical tourism.

- **Cultural Generalization:** While focusing on Individualism and collectivism, the study may oversimplify cultural diversity. Future research should explore additional dimensions like power distance or uncertainty avoidance for a more comprehensive analysis.
- **Contextual Constraints:** Findings may be specific to medical tourism and social media marketing. Generalizing to other industries or platforms should be approached cautiously. Examining trust dynamics across various sectors could reveal sector-specific nuances.
- **Cross-Cultural Dynamics:** The study mainly explores trust between individualistic and collectivist cultures. Further investigation into subcultures within these categories could provide deeper insights.
- **Lack of Empirical Support:** The model lacks empirical validation. Future studies should employ scales and conduct empirical research for validation.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study advances the understanding of cross-cultural dynamics in trust formation within social media marketing for medical tourism. Integrating Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory unveils nuanced insights into the influences of Individualism and collectivism on Information-Based Trust and Community Interaction-Based Trust. Despite certain limitations, the findings offer valuable implications for marketers navigating diverse cultural contexts, emphasizing the importance of tailored strategies in building trust. This research lays a foundation for further exploration, urging future studies to expand cultural dimensions, delve into industry-specific dynamics, and employ qualitative approaches to comprehend trust in this evolving landscape comprehensively.

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