

Antecedents of Medical Hotel Prestige and Online Word-of-Mouth Intention: Focusing on Medical Tourists to Korea

Jiyoung Yoon¹, Sunny Kim²

¹ Department of Consumer Studies, Ewha Womans University, Korea

² Gyeonggi Consumers Union of Korea, Korea,
graceyoom928@ewha.ac.kr

Abstract. Improvements in living standards and the medical developments that have been realized to date have led to increasing interest in wellbeing. This has led to the emergence of medical hotels—establishments that combine luxury hotel and medical services. These are attracting attention as a new high value-added industry. In this study, we looked at consumers' perceived prestige of medical hotels based on their experiences. Thus, we identified the impact of the perceived relational benefits of medical hotel services on the formation of prestige in the minds of foreigners using medical hotels. We also empirically studied the effect of customers' perceived prestige on their online word-of-mouth intention regarding these medical hotels. A conceptual model was developed and tested based on the random samples collected from 260 medical tourists in Korea. The results showed that all relational benefits studied had a positive effect on perceived prestige. And it was also confirmed that the formation of prestige has a positive effect on online word-of-mouth intention. The key managerial implications of these results reveal that medical hotels can use relational benefits to improve consumer satisfaction and the quality of their services, in turn enhancing their marketing efforts and referrals through word-of-mouth and, ultimately, growing the consumer Industry.

Keywords: medical hotel, relational benefits, prestige, online word-of-mouth, hospitality services, Korea

1. Introduction

As human beings' average life expectancy increases—due to the development of medical technology and the improvement of living standards—the rise in people's interest to live healthy lives is causing an upsurge in health-related consumption (Noh & Kim, 2008). Therefore, premium luxury services in the medical field are receiving increasing global attention (Shin et al., 2019), particularly since medical tourism is being viewed as a major strategic industry (Heung et al., 2010; Nikbin et al., 2019; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999).

Medical tourism indicates the combination of tourism and medical treatment for special health-related purposes. Recognizing the importance of medical tourism, the Korean government implemented medical tourism services in earnest in 2009 and established the “medical tourism hotel industry” to promote the medical tourism industry in 2013 (Lee, 2016; Korea Tourism Organization, 2016). Therefore, since 2014, medical firms have officially been able to attract foreign patients and travel services, raising interest in medical hotels that have a higher competitive edge in attracting foreign consumers (Korea Tourism Organization, 2016). In addition, as the relevant laws were revised to allow non-medical hotel operators to rent space in hospitals and operate convenience facilities for patients and medical workers, medical tourism hotels could operate in hospitals. It also became possible to rent a clinic-level medical institution in hotels to provide one-stop services (Korea Tourism Organization, 2016).

As a result, nowadays, Korea's medical tourism services have technological competitiveness in the medical industry and the number of foreign tourists visiting for beauty-related medical services is rising. “Medical hotels” provide medical services, such as medical procedures, beauty therapies, and medical treatments, along with hospitality services (Han & Hwang, 2013). In line with the changing needs and lifestyles of consumers, these establishments are expected to continue to increase in the future. In November 2013, Korea's medical tourism industry was established through the revision of “the Enforcement Decree of the Tourism Promotion Act.” This suggests that medical hotels are expected to make considerable contributions to Korea's medical tourism industry (Lee, 2016). Thus, owing to the increasing demand for medical services and the opening up of the medical industry, which are causing a spike in the number of medical tourists to Korea and the resulting economic ripple effects (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2019), empirical and in-depth studies on the so-called high-class medical tourism industry is necessary.

However, extant studies dealt with medical hotels only as a field of medical tourism; therefore, neglecting to explore the services of medical hotels or the effect of their hospitality services on medical consumers. In addition, studies on online word-of-mouth (WOM), which plays a role in the formation of attitudes toward new products

and businesses such as medical hotels, tended to focus more on acceptance than on generating WOM information (Bhattacharjee & Premkumar, 2004). Therefore, studies on the factors of online WOM activities should be conducted.

Consequently, this paper documents an empirical and academic study on the luxury services of medical hotels as perceived by medical tourists to Korea. To this end, the study intended to identify the impact of the perceived relational benefits of medical hotels' advanced services on the formation of prestige in the minds of medical tourist consumers, as well as the academic and practical significance of these benefits in luxury service industries. Second, this study explored the influence of prestige on online WOM intention. The results serve as basic data for enhancing the market competitiveness of medical hotels and other companies using prestige as a strategy, and further improving service satisfaction and quality.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Medical Tourism

The concept of medical tourism is defined in various ways by different scholars. Korea's medical tourism is a high value-added industry that combines advanced medical levels and diverse tourism resources, and is considered a potential path for the growth of tourism. Medical tourism in Korea was introduced as a convergence between medical and tourism services, but it is not a clear concept. Other terms for medical tourism include health tourism, medical travel, wellbeing tour, and wellness tourism. The category of medical tourism also exists in a variety of forms, from medicine-focused services to non-medicine-focused experiential programs (Korea Tourism Organization, 2020).

Those considered narrowly focusing on medical service include services provided in instances where one has crossed the border into a foreign country to receive medical services, including surgery or dental treatment. This means providing tourism services to patients in addition to the medical operations or other professional treatments that they need. In a broader sense, however, it can be defined as the promotion of combined tourist facilities to attract consumers to tourist destinations (Korea Tourism Organization, 2020).

This stresses that "information on the purpose of the tourism trip is useful for characterizing tourism expenditure patterns. It is also important in identifying key segments of tourism demand for planning, marketing, and promotion purposes". According to a report by the Korea Tourism Organization, Korea's medical tourism has been on a sharp rise from 60 201 in 2009 to 378 967 in 2018. In particular, foreign consumers entering the country for medical tourism use various services, including accommodation and shopping, in addition to the main purpose of the trip: medical services. The rate of foreign currency inflow is also high due to medical tourists' longer stay periods compared to general tourists (Shin et al., 2019). Based on the

various discussed academic definitions and the significance of medical tourism, this study defined medical tourism as instances where consumers leave their area of residence to purchase medical services such as plastic surgery, beauty, disease treatment, and medical checkups, as well as to enjoy cultural, tourist, and recreational activities.

2.2. Medical Hotel

Based on the various discussed academic definitions and the significance of medical tourism, this study defined medical tourism as instances where consumers leave their area of residence to purchase medical services such as plastic surgery, beauty, disease treatment, and medical checkups, as well as to enjoy cultural, tourist, and recreational activities.

Medical hotels offer both medical and luxury hospitality services. In other words, medical hotels provide consumers with accommodation services in conjunction with medical services such as remedial procedures, beauty care, and other treatments (Han & Hwang, 2013). As of 2020, the types of medical hotels that can be registered within Korea's medical tourism hotel industry are as follows. The first type is those businesses that are directly operated by a medical institution, such as The WE Hotel, which opened in Jeju Island in 2013. The second are those in which a non-medical institution that attracts foreign patients employs medical personnel to operate within their accommodation facilities. For example, the Riverarium Hotel, a medical hotel in Incheon that opened in 2019, has a hospital and medical clinic inside and provides services such as beauty-related procedures. Nevertheless, this study applied a broader definition of medical hotel—based on these two types and the type analysis in Wu et al. (2013)—including hotels located in hospital-concentrated areas and tourist hotels that have medical institutions as types of medical hotels as well. Preceding studies on Korean medical hotels are as follows. Han and Hwang (2013) looked at the formation of attitudes based on the attributes of medical hotels and medical tourists' perceived benefits. Jeon and Shim (2014) organized the meaning of the term “medical hotel,” a new field of research, by conducting a study on medical tourism workers' perception of medical hotels and ways to promote them. Lee (2016) discussed the effectiveness of medical hotels for potential medical tourists. Lee (2016) demonstrated that consumers' perception of prestige represents a positive correlation to online WOM effectiveness through a study of service scapes in medical hotels. Others include the “Research on the Development of a Global Healthcare Convergence Business Model” conducted on foreigners, “Korea Medical Tourism Marketing 2016,” and “18-19 Recommended Wellness Tourist Satisfaction Report” (The Institute for Health Industry, 2015; Korea Tourism Organization, 2016; 2020). Based on these studies, this study considered the benefits of the various luxury hospitality services

offered at medical hotels as relational benefits to consumers and attempted to clarify whether these services affect the formation of prestige among consumers.

2.3. Relational benefits

Relational benefits refer to all types of benefits provided by the service provider to consumers to build and maintain a relationship with them (Gwinner et al., 1998). They defined relational benefits as attractive factors for businesses' long-term relationship with consumers and actual benefits that customers obtain. In other words, relational benefits are benefits for both sides forming a continual relationship, which is a key component of the ongoing relationship between service providers and consumers. Service providers ultimately gain consumer satisfaction and loyalty by providing various relational benefits through means that consumers perceive as friendly (Gwinner et al., 1998; Woo et al., 2004).

Several earlier studies looked at sub-variables of relational benefits. For example, Gwinner et al. (1998) divided relational benefits into social, trust, and special treatment benefits. They divided it into social, economic, and informational benefits. Ra and Woo (2015) examined it through social, psychological, economic, and informational benefits. Thus, earlier studies of relational benefits focused on the effect of relational benefits on consumer confidence building or consumer satisfaction, as well as on the loyalty necessary for maintaining a lasting relationship. Nasution and Mavondo (2008) showed that in the hotel industry, consumers feel a higher level of satisfaction when they recognize that they received individualized benefits from hotel managers. In a study of luxury hotel users in Seoul, Ra and Woo (2015) showed that social, psychological, economic, and informational benefits have a significant impact on consumer trust and emotional solidarity. Gwinner et al. (1998) showed that the relational benefits consumers receive directly from businesses affect consumer satisfaction, and that the relational benefits associated with service conversion act as a barrier to relationships with consumers. Yoon (2019) and Alelaimat et al. (2020) showed that greater perception of social benefits leads to greater satisfaction and loyalty to the service provider. In a study of consumers using airlines, Lee et al. (2014) found that a higher perception of the psychological and informational benefits in consumers leads to a more positive attitude toward the enterprise. In a study of bars at luxury hotels, Min and Lee (2012) showed that higher relational benefits lead to more consumer trust and immersion toward the service provider. As such, it was found that the higher the consumers' perception of receiving relational benefits from businesses or service providers, the higher their loyalty. In recent years, various informational, psychological, and social benefits have been provided using social media and the Internet, along with new services. Service providers are able to use content marketing, which causes customers to perceive a more specialized service in terms of managing relationships with consumers. Thus, this study examines the

relationship between the sub-variables of relational benefits (i.e., informational, psychological, and social benefits) and prestige, which have been found to have higher significance in previous studies, and considers its meaning.

2.3.1 Informational benefits

This study intended to identify the influence of informational benefits as an antecedent variable on prestige. Here, informational benefits were defined as relational benefits that can be gained through continuous communication wherewith more customized information about medical hotels is provided. First, from a managerial perspective, informational benefits can be seen as important in increasing customer satisfaction and repurchase. By providing consumers with “after-sales” information, managers can be in constant contact with consumers, which not only gives the consumers information about their purchases, but also causes them to feel a higher level of satisfaction from the additional information provided after their choice (Kim, 2005; Ra & Woo, 2015). Informational benefits can reduce the risk of trust associated with consumers' purchases, and a two-way communication positively affects the intention of repurchase by making the customer feel as if he/she is receiving special treatment. Kim (2005) argued that IT technology developments could lead to improvements in consumer choice by providing information that helps customers shop or that stimulates their desire to buy, even if they do not come to the service site. It was found that consumers are more satisfied with these informational benefits. Therefore, the following hypothesis was made.

Hypothesis 1: Informational benefits of medical hotel services will be positively related to prestige.

2.3.2. Psychological benefits

Psychological benefits are defined as the confidence and trust that can be cultivated in a customer based on the services of the service provider. The customer develops confidence in the service provider by identifying the latter's attitude and ability during their relationship: the customer feels confident if they perceive that the service will be performed more correctly (Choi, 2005). From the perspective of social exchange theory, it has been proven that consumers voluntarily take positive actions, such as feeling a higher level of satisfaction and recommending the service provider to other consumers, when the psychological benefits they receive from the service provider are high (Choi, 2019).

Gwinner et al. (1998) showed that customers who perceive psychological benefits are more satisfied, and that the perception of psychological benefits is higher when service providers give customers psychological comfort and stability. A study

showed that in Korea, psychological benefits are seen as a factor that increases customers' intention to revisit and their level of satisfaction in using hotel services (Woo et al., 2004). For consumers who perceive such psychological benefits, it is inferred that the positive influence on prestige could also be significant. Therefore, the following hypothesis was made.

Hypothesis 2: Psychological benefits of medical hotel services will be positively related to prestige.

2.3.3. Social benefits

The last sub-variable of the relational benefits to be examined in this study is social benefits. Social benefits are defined through friendship, consideration, intimacy, personal recognition, and customer-recognized connections to employees that are indicated by the interaction between the service provider and the customer (Lee et al. 2015). Social benefits are manifested by interactions between service providers and customers (Gwinner et al., 1998; Hennig-Thurau, 2000; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2000). They argued that close relationships between service providers and customers are mainly found in highly connected service industries and social benefits such as intimate feelings, friendships and personal acceptance have been found to increase consumer satisfaction with service providers (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Ra, 2013). Based on prior research, this study defines social benefits as the degree to which customers feel emotionally connected to the service provider based on their interactions. Therefore, the following hypothesis was made.

Hypothesis 3: Social benefits of medical hotel services will be positively related to prestige.

2.3.4. Online Word-of-Mouth (WOM) Intention

WOM is defined as face-to-face communication based on personal experience (Brown et al., 2007), or as communication where consumers communicate with their acquaintances after experiencing a product or service. Modern society is a world in which Internet-based ICTs are developing at a fast rate, and one that can overcome time and space limitations to search for and communicate convenient information. These changes have brought many changes throughout society. In terms of consumer life, few modern people would deny that the first thing many consumers do before making a purchase decision is conduct an Internet search to reduce risk. This is even more so for online consumers. Given the proliferation of online services in recent years, online WOM through platforms such as official websites, related cafés,

personal blogs, community online bulletin boards, reviews, and social networking sites plays a key role in consumers' decision-making based on other consumers' recommendations. Hence, it has been a significant factor in customers' purchasing decisions. Online WOM intention is defined as the intention to communicate information about one's experience to others online (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Bing et al., 2020).

To demonstrate the usefulness of WOM, because the quality of travel products cannot be physically checked in advance—and because their satisfaction level is determinable after the travel period, WOM information, such as reviews and recommendations by other people, serves as an important purchasing decision factor. On the other hand, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) showed that consumers' online WOM intention is stronger when they achieve what they were aiming for. Lee (2016) found that higher prestige awareness of medical hotels leads to higher perception of well-being, consequently having a positive impact on online WOM intention.

Consumers who use medical hotels—the subjects of this study—have a clear purpose of using medical services, unlike ordinary tourist customers. Thus, it was expected that they would have higher online WOM intention when they perceived prestige through their experience. Based on the above discussion, this study defined online WOM intention as the extent to which people communicate a favorable attitude to others after having used medical hotels through online platforms. Therefore, the following hypothesis was made.

Hypothesis 4: Consumers' perceived prestige of medical hotel services will be positively related to their online WOM intention.

2.4. Conceptual model for the Research

To meet the purpose of this study, the research model used here attempted to identify, based on prior research, the impact of the benefits that medical hotels provide to consumers through advanced services on consumers' perception of status. To this end, luxury services that consumers experience at medical hotels were classified into three sub-factors of relational benefits: informational, psychological, and social benefits. The study then looked at the relationship between these sub-factors and prestige, and set online WOM intention as the final dependent variable. This study's research model is shown in Figure 1.

Fig. 1: Conceptual model

3. Method

3.1. Survey and samples

The range of medical hotels defined for this study included hotels in areas with many hospitals and medical institutions, based on the classification of the Wu et al. (2013). A survey was conducted from November 3 to 20, 2019 on the streets of Nonhyeondong, Seoul, where hospitals, plastic surgery clinics, and dermatology are concentrated at Gangnam-gu, Gangnam Severance Hospital, and Gangbuk Samsung Hospital. Random samples were surveyed only for consumers who had experienced medical hotels. The questionnaire had three versions: Korean, English, and Chinese.

We collected 266 completed questionnaires from South Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Singaporean, and Vietnamese respondents aged between 20 and 60. However, six samples were excluded because of non-responses and response errors. Thus, 260 samples were included in the final analyses. The present research conducted various analyses, including descriptive statistics, validity and reliability tests, confirmatory factor analysis, correlation analysis, and structural equation modelling using SPSS and AMOS statistical program.

3.2. Measurement

A meeting of experts was held to create measurement questions for identifying the relationship between relational benefits and prestige formation, something that was rarely done in previous research. On October 1 and October 10, 2019, the first measurement questions were compiled through meetings with a professor of consumer studies and another of business administration, as well as two marketing researchers. Using the questionnaire, the first survey was conducted on 15 Chinese and Japanese tourists in their 20s who had used medical hotels between October 15 and 17, 2019. After checking the answers, the measurement questions were further revised and supplemented, and the final measurement questions were created for this

study. These are shown in Table 1. The survey items for all the variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree (= 1),” “disagree (= 2),” “neither agree nor disagree (= 3),” and “agree (= 4)” to “strongly agree (= 5).” Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of all the variables.

Table 1 : Measurement of variables

Variables	Measurement	Cronbach's alpha	Literature evidence
Informational benefits	1. The medical hotel provides various information on its homepage and mobile site. 2. The medical hotel provides reasonable promotion information. 3. The medical hotel continues to provide information on new services. 4. You can enjoy more discounts by using the information provided by the medical hotel.	.801	Gwinner et al. (1998),
Psychological benefits	1. I feel comfortable when using the medical hotel. 2. I feel secure when using the medical hotel. 3. This medical hotel offers reliable service. 4. I am confident that the medical hotel's service will be carried out accurately.	.916	Ra & Woo (2015) Choi (2019)
Social benefits	1. I feel intimacy from the staff of the medical hotel. 2. The staff at the medical hotel tries to accommodate my needs as much as possible. 3. The staff at the medical hotel is friendly and nice to me.	.867	
Prestige	The medical hotel is very prestigious. The medical hotel has high status. The medical hotel is more upscale than other similar hotels.	.924	Baek et al. (2010) Lee (2016)
Online WOM intention	Intention of posting about medical tourism information on online platform(s). Intention of posting about medical tourism story/review on online platform(s). Intention of posting about medical tourism picture/video on online platform(s).	.821	Oliver (1997) Lee (2016)

Table 2 : Descriptive statistics of all the variables

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
-----------	------	-----------	-----	-----

Informational benefits	3.857	0.695	1	5
Psychological benefits	3.692	0.705	2	5
Social benefits	3.872	0.671	2	5
Prestige	4.140	0.659	1	5
Online WOM intention	3.250	0.861	1	5

4. Analyses

4.1. Survey respondents' profile and frequency

Table 3 provides a brief overview of the characteristics of the 260 survey respondents chosen for this study; the gender distribution leaned heavily toward female respondents, who were numbered at 184 (70.8%) versus 76 (29%) men. Regarding age, 91 (35%) respondents were in their 20s, 85 (32.7%) in their 30s, 42 (16.2%) in their 40s, 24 (9.2%) in their 50s, and 18 (6.9%) in their 60s or older. By nationality, China had the largest number of respondents (52.3%), followed by Japan with 38 (14.6%), and Taiwan with 30 (11.6%). Other nationalities such as Hong Kong, Singapore, and the United States were collectively represented by 56 (21.5%) respondents. For the monthly average household income distribution, most (78 or 30%) of the respondents earned \$2,000 or less, followed by 51 (19.7%) between \$3,000 and \$4,000, 46 (17.7%) between \$2,000 to \$3,000, and 11 (4.2%) earning \$7,000 or more.

Table 3 : Characteristics of survey respondents (N=260)

Characteristics	n	%
-----------------	---	---

Gender	Female	184	70.8
	Male	76	29.2
Age	20s	91	35
	30s	85	32.7
	40s	42	16.2
	50s	24	9.2
	over 60s	18	6.9
Education	High school or below	54	20.8
	Bachelor's degree	173	66.5
	Master's degree or above	33	12.7
Nationality	China	136	52.3
	Japan	38	14.6
	Taiwan	30	11.6
	Others (Hong Kong, Singapore, US)	56	21.5
Occupation	Student	69	26.5
	Professional	63	24.2
	Self-employed	19	7.3
	Office job	86	33.1
	Others	23	8.9
Monthly income	Less than \$2,000	78	30
	\$2,000 ~ \$3,000	46	17.7
	\$3,000 ~ \$4,000	51	19.7
	\$4,000 ~ \$5,000	36	13.8
	\$5,000 ~ \$6,000	24	9.2
	\$6,000 ~ \$7,000	14	5.4
	More than \$7,000	11	4.2

4.2. Validity, reliability, and correlation analyses of constructs

To examine whether the 17 survey items constitute five composite variables, this research conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The results demonstrated that the measurement model fitted the data well, showing the model fit indices to be better (lower or higher) than the recommended standards. Specifically, χ^2 was not statistically significant at the 0.001 level ($\chi^2 = 513.320$, $\chi^2/df = 2.393$, $p = .001$). RMSEA and RMR were 0.067 and 0.026, respectively, while CFI and IFA were 0.921 and 0.9027, respectively. Then, we checked for internal consistency; that is, the reliability of all the constructs. We calculated the composite reliability (CR) of each construct. According to Hair et al. (2010), the recommended standard for this is 0.70.

As shown in Table 4, the reliability of each construct was greater than 0.70. Therefore, it was confirmed that all the constructs of this research had a satisfactory level of reliability. Further, we checked the discriminant validity of the constructs. It employed Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion, which holds that if each construct's AVE is greater than its squared correlation coefficients with other constructs, the discriminant validity is established. This criterion was met for these constructs, as shown in Table 4. Then, looking at the correlations between the constructs, all the constructs were statistically significantly correlated with each other. However, there was no convincingly strong correlation. This research also checked Cronbach's alphas. Each construct was found to have a satisfactory level of Cronbach's alpha: 0.801 for Informational benefits, 0.916 for Psychological benefits, 0.867 for Social benefits, 0.924 for Prestige, and 0.821 for Online WOM intention, as shown in Table 1.

As shown in Figure 2, all paths were shown to be suitable. The analysis results showed that all the hypotheses were supported, as in Table 4.

Table 4: Standardized estimates for this structural model

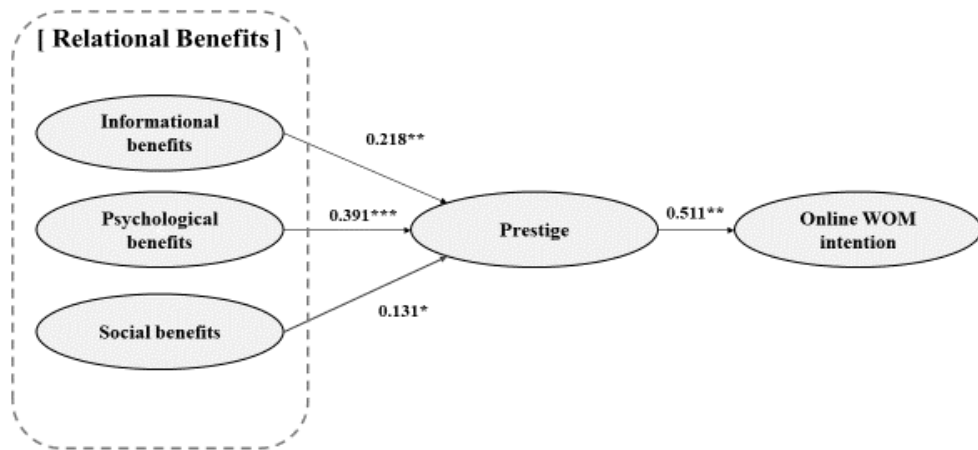
Hypothesis		Path		S.E	t-value
H1	Informational benefits	→	Prestige	0.218	4.132**
H2	Psychological benefits	→	Prestige	0.391	6.392***
H3	Social benefits	→	Prestige	0.131	2.607*
H4	Prestige	→	Online WOM intention	0.511	7.204***

5. Conclusions and Discussion

Based on modern people's interest in a well-being-focused lifestyle, this study considered the concept of prestige in the medical hotel field. The purpose was to identify the impact of a medical hotel's relational benefits as a hospitality service, which has been highlighted as a high value-added business, on prestige, as perceived by consumers. It also sought to establish the relationship between prestige and online WOM intention. The results of the analysis are summarized as follows.

First, all the sub-factors of relational benefits examined in this study; that is, informational, psychological, and social benefits, had a positive impact on prestige formation in consumers of medical hotel services. The study showed that the more aware the medical tourism consumers are of the relational benefits provided by medical hotels, the more positive the impact on reputation formation. In particular, psychological benefits were identified as the most influential factor. Unlike tourism

based on normal hotels or medical services, consumers using medical hotels use medical and hotel services with clearer purposes.



Notes: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; $\chi^2 = 513.320$ ($df = 2.393$), NFI=.903, IFI=.902, TLI=.917, CFI=.921, RMR=.026, RMSEA=.067

Figure 2: SEM results for this research

Therefore, consumers of medical hotel services, such as medical treatment and procedures, will consider whether the service they receive is reliable and accurately rendered. Thus, medical hotels that provide relational benefits need to employ marketing strategies that provide accurate, reliable, and quality medical information services, enhance psychological stability and trust in customers, and achieve social differentiation.

Second, it was confirmed that higher consumer prestige leads to impact that is more positive on online WOM intention. It may be that medical consumers' perception of higher prestige leads to stronger desires to express their experiences. In other words, when consumers' goals are met, there seems to be a positive impact on online WOM intention.

Based on the above findings, the implications of this study are as follows.

This study confirmed that the relational benefits variables that were previously applied in the marketing services research field can be applied to that of medical hotels. In addition, the validity of each variable of the research model was confirmed, implying the possibility of developing this research topic into consequential academic study.

In particular, the results of this study showed that informational benefits, along with psychological benefits, have important effects. This is because prospective consumers who want to use medical hotels collect information about the basic

infrastructure of the facilities and medical services they are looking for, and informative marketing material has good utility for this. Thus, it will be necessary to actively carry out marketing that emphasizes elegant hotel services, along with more accurate and detailed information on medical services. Second, medical hotels provide luxury hospitality services, and at the same time, one can access medical treatments, procedures, and checkups through a one-stop service.

This is a different upgrade strategy from existing individualized services, and accordingly, prestige is a very significant variable. Of the factors of relational benefits offered by medical hotels, psychological benefits showed the greatest influence on prestige formation.

Consumers assigned higher values to medical hotels that provided them a reliable, psychologically comforting, and stable service. Third, medical hotel managers should take advantage of the dynamics of their location to enhance their relational benefits. For example, given the inflow of attention to Korea due to the Korean Wave and the growing popularity of its medical services, Korean medical hotels could use these events in their marketing, not only for disease treatment, but also for cosmetic therapies and procedures, as well as promotional occasions.

Finally, this study has the following policy implications. It is necessary to support the revitalization of this field by allowing medical hotels to actively market their services and by providing various tax benefits through the designation of special medical zones for medical hotels. In addition, if medical hotels could be classified under the “special industrial classification system,” stability may be ensured by securing budgets in policy projects, and the industry could play a leading role in industrial classification and statistics preparation, both at home and abroad. Lastly, if these improvements in the system would result in the emergence of more specialized medical hotels, the industry could grow into a more competitive luxury sector.

Despite these various implications, some of the limitations of this study are as follows. This study introduced the concept of relational benefits to prestige formation in consumers who use medical hotels, focusing on a few specific sub-factors as variables. However, in addition to the variables of relational benefits covered in this study, further variables affecting prestige formation, such as special treatment, economic benefits, and preferential service provision, should be considered in future research. In addition, it is possible to expand the study using the psychological benefit variables confirmed through the results of this study.

References

Alelaimat, A. & Marchuk, V. (2020). Analysis of corporate pricing strategy based on word-of-mouth communication on social networks. *International Journal of Smart Business and Technology*, 8(2), 13-24.

Bhattacharjee, A. & Premkumar, G. (2004). Understanding changes in belief and attitude toward information technology usage: A theoretical model and longitudinal test. *MIS Quarterly*, 28, 229–254. <http://eli.johogo.com/Class/p4.pdf>.

Bing, Y. & Mo, Y. (2020). The relationship of consumer perceived value, online word-of-mouth and behavioral intention in mobile e-commerce. *International Journal of Smart Business and Technology*, 8(1), 11-18.

Brown, J., Broderick, A., & Lee, N. (2007). Word of mouth communication within online communities: Conceptualizing the online social network. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 21(3), 2-20. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/dir.20082>.

Chevalier, J. & Mayzlin, D. (2006). The effect of word of mouth on sales: Online book reviews. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 43, 345-354. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1509/jmkr.43.3.345>.

Gwinner, K. P., Gremler, D. D., & Bitner, M. J. (1998). Relational benefits in service industries: The customer's perspective. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 26, 101-114. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0092070398262002>.

Han, H. & Hwang, J. (2013). Multi-dimensions of the benefits in a medical hotel and their roles in international travelers' decision-making process. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 35, 100-108. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0278431913000819>.

Hennig-Thurau, T., Gwinner, K. P., Walsh, G., & Gremler, D. D. (2004). Electronic word-of-mouth via consumer-opinion platforms: What motivates consumers to articulate themselves on the Internet? *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18(1), 38-52. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1094996804700961>.

Heung, V. C. S., Kucukusta, D., & Song, H. (2010). A conceptual model of medical tourism: Implications for future research. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 27(3), 236-251.

<http://kto.visitkorea.or.kr/kor/notice/data/statis/tstatus/forstatus/board/view.kto?id=441609&isNotice=false&instanceId=295&rnum=3>.

http://tong.visitkorea.or.kr/ktobiz/upload/business/marketing/WellnessReport_201912.pdf.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/009207039502300402>.

Jeon, I. S. & Shim, H. B. (2014). A study on the activation plan and awareness of medical tourism personnel about Medi-tel. *Health Service Management Review*, 8(3), 13–22. <https://kiss.kstudy.com/thesis/thesis-view.asp?key=3270454>.

Kim, J. (2005). The effect of perception of fashion product consumers' relationship benefits on long-term relationship orientation. Doctoral dissertation, Seoul National University Graduate School, Korea. <http://hdl.handle.net/10371/22707>.

Korea Tourism Organization. (2016). Korea medical tourism marketing 2016 - present and future of Korean medical tourism. *Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism*, 1-182. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6123590/>.

Korea Tourism Organization. (2020). '18-19 Recommended wellness tourist satisfaction report, 1-41.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0738399199001081>

Lee, E. (2016). The effects of medical hotel service scape on prestige, well-being perception. *Korean Journal of Hospitality & Tourism*, 25(1), 97-110.

Min, C. -H. & Lee, M. -S. (2012). The effect of relationship benefit on trust and commitment: Focused on bar of five-star hotels. *Service Industry Research*, 9(1), 31-46.

Lee, M. J., Min, I. S. & Seo, B. J. (2015). A Study among Chinese Tourists in their 20s and 30s for Determining their Choice of Medical Tourism Destinations. *International Journal of u - and e - Service, Science and Technology*, NADIA, 8(9), 13-20, <http://dx.doi.org/10.14257/ijunnesst.2015.8.9.02>.

Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. (2019). 2019 International visitor survey, 1-138. <https://koreascience.kr/article/JAKO201911338887791.page>.

Nasution, H. N. & Mavondo, F. T. (2008). Customer value in the hotel industry: What managers believe they deliver and what customer experience. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 27(2), 204-213. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0278431907000758>.

Nikbin, D., Batouei, A., Iranmanesh, M., Kim, K., & Hyun, S. S. (2019). Hospital prestige in medical tourism: Empirical evidence from Malaysia. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 36(4), 521-535. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10548408.2019.1582397>.

Noh, J. & Kim, K. (2008). Analysis on economic factors for foreign direct investment in the reinvigoration of the Korean tourism industry. *Korea Academic Society of Tourism Management*, 23(1), 125-144.

Ra, C. & Woo, C. (2015). The effect of relationship benefits on relationship solidarity and long-term relationship orientation: Focusing on hotel customers. *Tourism Research*, 40(3), 169-190.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0278431904001197>.

Shin, S., Choi, H., Ha, H., Shim, K., & Son, J. (2019). Establishment of statistics on wellness tourism. *Korea Tourism Organization*, 19, 1-137.

The Institute for Health Industry. (2015). Research on the development of a global healthcare convergence business model, 1-168.

United Nations World Tourism Organization. (2007). *International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics 2008 (IRT2008)*. <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc08/BG-TourismStats.pdf>.

Wu, Z., Robsone, S., Hollis, B., & Tanner, L. K. (2013). The application of hospitality elements in hospitals, strategic facilities planner, hoag health system. *Journal of Healthcare Management*, 58(1). https://journals.lww.com/jhmonline/Abstract/2013/01000/The_Application_of_Hospitality_Elements_in.9.aspx.

Yoon, J. (2019). *A study on a eco-friendly product purchase process using expanded theory of planned behavior*. Doctoral dissertation, Ewha Womans University Graduate School, Korea.

<https://dspace.ewha.ac.kr/handle/2015.oak/249307>