

# iscte

INSTITUTO  
UNIVERSITÁRIO  
DE LISBOA

---

**Look what you made me do: Social media influencers' impact on  
medical travel decisions.**

Réka Baán

Master in Tourism Development and Culture

Supervisor:

Professor Helena Maria Correia Neves Cordeiro Rodrigues, ISCTE  
Business School

June, 2023

# iscte

BUSINESS  
SCHOOL

---

Department of Tourism,

**Look what you made me do: Social media influencers' impact on  
medical travel decisions.**

Réka Baán

Master in Tourism Development and Culture

Supervisor: Professor Helena Maria Correia Neves Cordeiro Rodrigues,  
ISCTE Business School

June, 2023

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

Without the support, direction, patience, and counsel of my advisor, Professor Helena Rodrigues, I would not have been able to complete my dissertation.

Therefore, you have my deepest gratitude.

I would like to thank my mom, brother and partner for their unending love and support. For encouraging me to partake in this master's program and checking on me even when we were thousands of miles apart.

Finally, special thanks go out to everyone who participated in the interview process since without your time and work, this project would not have been possible.

## **ABSTRACT**

Medical tourism is a niche sector of tourism that involves traveling to a different country to engage in medical treatment or procedure. As in many other industries, social media influencers are also becoming essential players in the tourism industry. Since many influencers utilize image-based platforms such as Instagram, cosmetic procedures are often encountered on social media by Millennials and Generation Z. Therefore, this study examines the effect social media influencers have on the intent to engage in medical tourism, specifically cosmetic procedures.

This thesis is essential to providing a complete image of the factors influencing Millennials and Gen Z's attitudes and perceptions about medical tourism for cosmetic procedures. A qualitative method was chosen; semi-structured interviews were conducted to understand the depth of the subject in its entirety. Interviews were conducted with Generation Z and Millennials from different nationalities and experiences with cosmetic procedures to gather sufficient and diverse perspectives on the topic. The Leximancer program identified the factors influencing Millennials and Generation Z's intent as 1) procedures, 2) social, 3) information, 4) surgery, 5) money, and 6) place. Findings suggested a difference between Generation Z and Y; specifically, the latter found money and information more critical, while Generation Z was more concerned about the social aspects and the surgery.

As a result, the practical and theoretical contributions related to the existing literature about influencing factors in travel decisions and the effects of social media on engaging in cosmetic procedures.

**Keywords:** medical tourism, social media influencers, cosmetic procedures

**JEL:** Z33 Marketing and Finance, I19 Other

**Author:** Reka Baan

## **RESUMO**

O turismo médico é um setor de nicho do turismo que envolve viajar para um país diferente para se envolver em tratamento ou procedimento médico. Como em muitos outros setores, os influenciadores de mídia social também estão se tornando atores essenciais na indústria do turismo. Como muitos influenciadores utilizam plataformas baseadas em imagens, como o Instagram, os procedimentos cosméticos são frequentemente encontrados nas mídias sociais por Millennials e Geração Z. Portanto, este estudo examina o efeito que os influenciadores de mídia social têm na intenção de se envolver em turismo médico, especificamente procedimentos cosméticos.

Esta tese é essencial para fornecer uma imagem completa dos fatores que influenciam as atitudes e percepções da geração do milênio e da geração Z sobre o turismo médico para procedimentos cosméticos. Foi escolhido um método qualitativo; entrevistas semiestruturadas foram realizadas para compreender a profundidade do assunto em sua totalidade. Foram realizadas entrevistas com Geração Z e Millennials de diferentes nacionalidades e experiências com procedimentos cosméticos para reunir perspectivas suficientes e diversas sobre o tema. O programa Leximancer identificou os fatores que influenciam a intenção dos Millennials e da Geração Z como 1) procedimentos, 2) social, 3) informação, 4) cirurgia, 5) dinheiro e 6) lugar. Os resultados sugeriram uma diferença entre a Geração Z e a Geração Y; especificamente, este último considerou o dinheiro e a informação mais críticos, enquanto a Geração Z estava mais preocupada com os aspectos sociais e a cirurgia.

Como resultado, as contribuições práticas e teóricas relacionadas à literatura existente sobre fatores de influência nas decisões de viagem e os efeitos das mídias sociais no engajamento em procedimentos cosméticos.

**Palavras-chave:** turismo médico, mídias sociais influenciadores, procedimentos cosméticos

**JEL:** Z33 Marketing and Finance, I19 Other

**Autor:** Reka Baan

## INDEX

List of Tables .....	vi
List of Figures .....	vii
List of Acronyms .....	viii
1. Introduction .....	1
1.1 Contextualization .....	1
1.2 Research Objectives and Methodology .....	2
1.3 Structure of Dissertation .....	3
2. Literature review .....	3
Initial Remarks .....	3
2.1 Medical tourism .....	4
2.1.1 Cosmetic procedures .....	6
2.1.2 Cosmetic surgery among Gen Y and Z .....	7
2.2 Marketing medical tourism .....	9
2.2.1 The role of social media in the context of medical tourism .....	10
2.2.2 Influencers .....	11
2.3 Decision-making process, customer journey .....	13
3. Methodology .....	14
3.1 Research Objectives: .....	14
3.2 Research Approach .....	14
3.3 Data Collection .....	15
3.3.1 Interview Structure .....	15
3.4 Data Population .....	17
3.5 Data Analysis Tools .....	19
4. Results .....	20
5. Discussion .....	24
5.1 The difference between Generation Y and Generation Z .....	24
5.2.1 Procedures .....	26
5.2.2 Social .....	28
5.2.3 Information .....	29
5.2.4 Surgery .....	30
5.2.5 Money .....	31
5.2.6 Place .....	32
6. Conclusion .....	33
6.1 Theoretical Contribution .....	34

6.2 Practical Contribution .....	35
6.3 Limitations .....	35
6.4 Future studies .....	36
References:.....	37
Appendix .....	48
Appendix 1 – Preliminary Screening questions .....	48
Appendix 2 - Consent Form.....	49
Appendix 3 - Semi-structured interview structure .....	50

## List of Tables

Table 1 - Participants' demographics.....	19
Table 2 - Concepts, Counts and Relevance in percentage %.....	22
Table 3 - Themes and matching concepts.....	23



**List of Figures**

Figure 1- Conceptual Map .....21

**List of Acronyms**

IT	Information Technology
SE	Search Engines
SM	Social Media
SIMs	Social Media Influencers

# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1 Contextualization**

As a result of the drastic development of information technology (IT), travel and tourism significantly changed (Werthner & Klein, 1999). A couple of main tools that emerged because of IT are search engines (SE), social media (SM) and mobile computing (Xiang et al., 2015). Social media platforms notably impacted the way that information is obtained and used by tourists. Many travelers use these platforms to share their opinions, emotions, feelings, and experiences while travelling so people can access them anywhere at any given time, which makes these platforms extremely popular (Luo & Zhong, 2015). Social media influencers (SMIs) emerged due to the growing popularity of these platforms (Pop et al., 2021). This new class of “independent third-party endorsers”, known as social media influencers, utilize images, reels, TikToks, blogs, tweets, and other forms of social media to influence their followers’ opinions (Freberg et al., 2011, p. 90). Previous studies examined the role of trust in SMIs concerning travel decisions, intention to travel, and purchase intention of travel products (Ponte et al., 2015; Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016). Based on results from different studies, the credibility of social media influencers is a crucial factor in successfully influencing tourists' choice of destination or tourism product (Pop et al., 2021).

One of the growing fields of tourism is medical tourism which is “the act of seeking medical services in a foreign country” (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016). This industry division is a niche market, which provides an excellent chance for the tourism sector to expand its service offerings by combining medical care and holidays. According to a report by OECD (The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development), dental care, cosmetic surgery, and elective surgeries are the most popular treatments (Lunt et al., n.d.). Turkey, India, Thailand, and Taiwan are some popular countries among medical tourists (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016). According to different researchers, the low cost of treatment compared to the home country, highly trained medical staff, and well-developed healthcare infrastructure are all critical factors to visitors when opting for medical tourism (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016).

Like many other tourism-related products and services, this sector can be found on social media. Several social media influencers share the treatments or surgeries they chose to have abroad. In this case, the destination and the services are promoted. In addition, it is increasingly widespread that celebrities and influencers receive cheap or free cosmetic procedures from a medical provider in exchange for online promotion (Tenbarga, 2022). Since people feel social media influencers are relatable and trustable when they share about travel products or services,

it creates a positive association and makes purchases more likely (Rinka & Pratt, 2018; Pop et al., 2021). Suppose travel is combined with another service, such as a medical procedure. Would the influence still be the same even if the service might result in appearance changes and is a higher-risk decision? According to a study by Walker et al. (2019), in the case of young women, it was more desirable to undergo cosmetic surgeries if they saw images on SM of females who received cosmetic enhancements.

In the past few years, multiple types of research have been conducted about influencers' impact on travel decision-making (Pop et al., 2021). The influence of social media on the desire to have cosmetic procedures (Walker et al., 2019) and electronic word of mouth in the medical sector (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016). However, research needs to be conducted on the possible relationship between these subjects. Therefore, this research will examine if generation Y and Z would likely engage in medical tourism (specifically cosmetic surgery, plastic surgery, other minimally invasive cosmetic procedures, or cosmetic dentistry) influenced by social media influencers. Understanding this complex process of travel decision making especially in the case of medical tourism affected by social media influencers may contribute to the customer journey theory and practices of different medical tourism providers, Destination Marketing Organizations, clinicians, and policy makers.

## **1.2 Research Objectives and Methodology**

Research question: What effect do social media influencers have on the intent to engage in medical tourism (specifically cosmetic and dental procedures) among people from generations Y and Z?

To answer the research question, it is required to understand the medical tourism market, how people search for information online to plan their travels, and why they use social media when planning and organizing their trips. Furthermore, it is critical to comprehend how many of Y and Z generation social media users rely on influencer endorsements when purchasing any good or service. Additionally, it is essential to look at the decision-making process and the importance of trust. The literature review helps define the medical tourism market for generations Y and Z members and their relationships with social media influencers. Moreover, it focuses on decision-making journeys and how social media affects these age groups' intentions to engage in plastic, cosmetic or dental procedures while traveling. To further study medical travel decision-making and social media's role in it, qualitative research is conducted

through semi structured interviews to understand how influencer content affects willingness to engage in medical tourism.

### **1.3 Structure of Dissertation**

After the introduction of the topic and research, the literature review follows that helps to clarify definitions applied and the initial idea development regarding the cosmetic procedures done as part of medical tourism. Furthermore, it also focuses on the impact social media influencers have on people, and how it changes their decision-making, intent, and attitude towards these procedures. To understand this, semi-formal interviews are conducted as clarified in the methodology part, then a conceptual map was generated. These results are analyzed and explained in the discussion part. Finally, findings are summarized in the conclusion.

## **2.Literature review**

### **Initial Remarks**

According to an article by Hirose (2022), in January 2022, there were 4.62 billion social media users worldwide. On average, people spend around 2 hours and 27 minutes of their day on social media platforms, the most popular social media sites are Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram (Dixon, 2022). Most social media users are in the 20-29 years old category, and they report to use it for keeping in touch with friends and family (Kemp, 2022). As of right now, the sociological definition that is most widely accepted views generations as a group of people born within a roughly 15 to 20-year time frame, which is "united by age and life stage, conditions and technology, events and experiences" (McCrinkle & Wolfinger, 2014, p.3). Moreover, they "share a time and space in history that lends them a collective persona" (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Pew Research Center defined Millennials as those born between 1980-1996, and from 1997 to 2012, we talk about Generation Z (Dimock, 2019). As these generations spend the most time on social media, they are inevitably the most influenced by the platforms and the social media influencers on them. Especially on image-based platforms such as Instagram, physical appearance is crucial, which in some cases is enhanced by cosmetic procedures (Walker et al., 2019). Many influencers, as mentioned before, even get offered procedures for free or with a discount (Tenbarga, 2022). As many people do not have their desired, perfect look, cosmetic procedures are providing (in most cases) a permanent change to achieve their goal. Since these procedures do not come with discounts for average social

media users, medical tourism could be an option to save money on the procedure and achieve the desired look while enjoying the wonders of a foreign destination (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016).

## **2.1 Medical tourism**

Although there is no widely accepted definition of medical tourism for this study, the definition used is; “international travel to improve one's health” (Bookman & Bookman, 2007, p. 1). The various spas that still prevail in many regions of Europe and beyond are one example of an early form of tourism that directly focuses on improving health and well-being (Connell, 2006). “Taking the waters” had become a popular pastime by the 18th century, and these spas in some places attracted tourists to these locations (Cook, 2008). By the 19th century, there was a rise of hill stations almost everywhere in the tropical regions (such as the French Pacific territory of New Caledonia), highlighting the evident therapeutic qualities of travel and recreation in suitable, almost always secluded locations (Smyth, 2005). Slowly, a demographic shift happened when tourism and recreational activities became available not just to the elite but to the working class (Connell, 2006). While these tourism activities rarely included actual medical procedures, health and recreational tourism is somewhat the predecessor of medical tourism in the abovementioned forms. Specifically, medical tourism is a topic that has been discussed since people have been travelling to get treatment, but it is still a relatively under-researched area (Smith et al., 2011). According to Chew and Darmasaputra (2015), health and medical tourism is a growing worldwide phenomenon in the 21st century that has sparked attention in both academic and professional circles. It results from neoliberal policies and healthcare globalization (Hopkins et al., 2010; de la Hoz-Correa et al., 2018), as well as ongoing efforts to find more affordable, high-quality treatment and shorter waiting lists (Ngamvichaikit & Beise-Zee, 2014).

Before, medical tourists would come from underdeveloped countries to access medical services in developed countries. In contrast, nowadays, in many cases patients come from developed countries to receive medical care for less money in developing countries (Johnson et al., 2015; Misung et al., 2012). Medical tourism became a new niche market because its offering is diverse since the holidays are combined with medical service offerings (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016).

Measuring the market size of medical tourism and projecting future estimates is tricky because it is hard to classify the tourists; therefore, data needs to be treated and used cautiously

(Connell, 2006). According to the analysis released by VISA and Oxford Economics, there are about 11 million medical tourists each year who generate market values of USD 100 billion (Medical Tourism, 2022), representing a sizable business with an annual growth rate of 25%. Additionally, as living standards and individual finances have improved, so has the need for private healthcare, particularly aesthetic procedures (Dang et al., 2020). According to 2019 data, the US performed 4.36 million cosmetic procedures, with Brazil having the second-highest number with 2.3 million (Dang et al., 2020).

The Medical Tourism Index, which rates the attractiveness of nations for medical travel, states that a nation's economy and public image, healthcare expenses, and level of treatment are the main variables influencing the rise of medical tourism in a particular location (Stephano, n.d.). Based on this assessment the top 10 countries for medical tourism are: Canada, Singapore, Japan, Spain, United Kingdom, Dubai, Costa Rica, Israel, Abu Dhabi, and India (Medical Tourism Index, 2020). Although, Oman, Thailand and South-Korea are not in the top ten destinations, they still need to be mentioned as they are becoming more and more popular in the past years.

Currently, the market is driven by the low cost of treatments that are high quality and the fact that in many developed countries, procedure prices are high and often not covered by insurance (Lunt et al., n.d.). Therefore, marketing plays a crucial role in attracting patients from abroad since an attractive, well-branded online presence can be why the patient settles with one or another provider (Heung et al., 2011; Connell, 2013).

Some drawbacks of this market are; the issue of accurate medical record transfers and post-operative complications. In addition, it is crucial to consider the ethical issue, specifically the impact on local healthcare, where patients often have no financial means to seek medical care. This results in healthcare professionals leaving the public sector for higher wages in the private sector resulting in no accessible treatment for the poor or long lines when waiting for care (Connell, 2006).

There are also several market opportunities, such as for marketers to raise awareness of medical tourism and for governments to create initiatives that support medical tourism and protect both the tourists, the service providers, and the destinations. Other vital players include insurance companies, where the insurance provider makes agreements with hospitals abroad and encourages consumers to partake in medical tourism, decreasing waiting time and costs.

Under the umbrella of medical tourism, there are several different procedures available; however, cosmetic procedures and dental treatments are among the most popular ones, which led to this research (Rodrigues et al., 2017).

### **2.1.1 Cosmetic procedures**

Cosmetic procedures term is used because the research will include cosmetic surgeries and minimally invasive cosmetic procedures such as Botulinum toxin type A, laser hair removal, cosmetic dental procedures et cetera. Cosmetic surgery is defined as the “maintenance, restoration or enhancement of one’s physical appearance through surgical and medical techniques” (Swami et al., 2009, p. 1). According to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, cosmetic surgeries are carried out to enhance the appearance and form of healthy body parts (2018). In 2019 (before the pandemic), the most popular cosmetic surgical procedures were; breast augmentation, liposuction (fat-removal), eyelid surgery, and rhinoplasty (nose reshaping) (American Society of Plastic Surgeons, 2019).

On the other hand, neurotoxins, dermal fillers, deoxycholic acid, lasers, peels, and micro-needling are minimally invasive procedures that provide strong, less permanent alternatives to the surgery beneficial for specific individuals (Devgan et al., 2019). In 2019 the most popular minimally-invasive procedures were; Botulinum Toxin Type A, soft tissue fillers, chemical peel and laser hair removal, according to the Plastic Surgery Statistics Report (2019). Based on the National Clearinghouse of Plastic Surgery Procedural Statistics by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS), this method developed into one of the main ways to improve one’s appearance, with over 18 million cosmetic procedures performed in 2019 (2020).

This sector is significantly impacted by “popular culture”, which was shown by the increase in these procedures after the appearance of social media photo-sharing apps (Walker et al., 2019). According to other sources, body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, high weight, social environment, and the media are all key motivators to undergo cosmetic procedures (Sharp, 2018; Furnham & Levitas, 2012; Thompson et al., 1999). In addition, Rodrigues et al. (2017) found that women are more likely to be targeted with cosmetic procedure advertisements, especially older women living in the Western world who also have the means to opt for these procedures. According to data from 2019, in the US, 92% of all cosmetic procedures are done on women while only 8% on men; the majority are still done on people over 40 years old (ASPS, 2019). Although these procedures are not medically necessary, they can still



significantly impact people's well-being, self-esteem, and overall satisfaction (Delinsky, 2005).

As mentioned before cosmetic procedures also include cosmetic dentistry in the following research. According to the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (AACD), cosmetic dentistry is "dentistry aimed at creating a positive change to your teeth and your smile" (2022). It can include veneers, whitening, tooth-coloured restorations, fillings and many more (AACD, 2022). It is often debated that cosmetic dentistry should be separated from other dentistry because dentists sometimes become supporters of consumerist culture (Holden, 2017).

Many people are unsatisfied with the appearance of their teeth and smiles, which is bad for their self-esteem and exposes them to other people who judge each other's social status or affluence based on oral health (Rodrigues et al., 2017; Holden, 2017). Unsatisfactory smiles or facial aesthetics are often perceived as neglectful, leading to patients who would like facial aesthetic procedures, but could also benefit from cheaper dental aesthetic procedures (Schmidt & Tatum, 2006). Therefore, cosmetic dentistry plays a significant role in restoring and keeping a youthful appearance (Morley, 1999). In addition, in the case of adolescents and young adults, it was found that dental issues that affect their facial aesthetics influence their self-esteem significantly, which is another reason to choose cosmetic dentistry over other alternatives (Kaur, 2017; Gavric et al., 2015).

Cosmetic dentistry is also an essential player in medical tourism. As per Herrick (2007), retirement communities in Arizona organize trips to Mexico to obtain dental care for a lower price, while Northern and Western Europeans go to Eastern Europe for cheaper but high-quality dental procedures. Countries well-known for their dentistry catered towards medical tourists are Mexico, Costa Rica, Hungary, and Poland (Herrick, 2007).

As reported by Grand View Research, the global cosmetic dentistry market will be valued at USD 29.6 billion in 2021, with a projected growth rate of 13% (2022). These numbers show that the industry is booming, and medical tourism is one of the reasons why it continues to grow globally (Grand View Research, 2022).

### **2.1.2 Cosmetic surgery among Gen Y and Z**

There is a relatively fast and steady rise of cosmetic surgeries where the two young generations, Millennials (Gen Y) and Generation Z, represent an essential patient base. Since Millennials have already entered the workforce, they have increased spending power. Generation Z has also started entering the workforce while most are still in school.

Voelker and Pentina (2011) theorized that Generation Y consumers are more likely to accept cosmetic enhancements because of their technological proficiency, savviness, and awareness of high-utility technologies such as those used during these procedures. In addition, Generation Y started with procedures relatively early, even as young as 14, in some cases to prevent themselves from getting bullied, in others to fit in or gain more self-confidence (Sims, 2008). Another research examined women attending college (with an average age of 20.5, which means they belong to the Millennials); forty per cent said they would consider cosmetic procedures soon, while forty-eight per cent would wait till their middle age (Sarwer et al., 2005). On the other hand, it is also known that in the case of young men, positive social norms result in the consideration of cosmetic procedures (Sood et al., 2017). According to another research by the American Society of Dermatologic Surgery, because of Millennials, there was a 50% then a 200% increase in tissue filler procedures belonging to the cosmetic procedure category (2021). These results show that Millennials are already engaging in cosmetic procedures and are open to them.

Since Generation Z is relatively young, with the oldest born in 1997 and the youngest members in 2012, there needs to be more literature that examines their attitude towards cosmetic surgery. However, it is known that this generation is not only digitally aware and savvy, which means that brands must adapt quickly to their needs, but they also care a lot about their appearances, especially on social media. Many beauty brands, such as Sephora or Mac, have recognized that various digital technologies must be applied to win over this segment of consumers (Ameen et al., 2022). They use software that allows consumers to try on products online (Ameen et al., 2022). We live in a society where physical beauty is critical and social media is often a place for showcasing perfection (Binder, 2022). One can quickly make themselves seem brighter, smoother, and younger by applying filters and photoshop. For some generation Z members, filters and picture edits are not enough, which makes this generation more likely to consider cosmetic procedure choices, making it more commonplace than a luxury reserved for the wealthy (Binder, 2022). Younger generations view procedures like Botox as preventative measures on many occasions. Since they are very advanced in social media use, they are more informed about procedures and trust these sources, leading to increased cosmetic surgery numbers even during the pandemic (Binder, 2022; Wang et al., 2020).

Overall, The American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) released in 2019 that 16% of plastic surgeries were done on patients 20-29 years old (ASPS, 2019). Although, Generation X and Baby Boomers have economic superiority as of now; Millennials and generation Z already

have spending power in the health sector and want to utilize cosmetic procedures (Wang et al., 2020). Among these two generations, the most popular procedures included rhinoplasty, ear pinning, male breast reduction, and laser hair removal (ASPS, 2019). Many patients underwent these procedures to increase their self-confidence (Torgerson, 2022).

## **2.2 Marketing medical tourism**

How do people become patients and medical tourists? Nowadays, many people feel, especially when browsing online, that the advertisements they encounter display things they did not even know they wanted. Marketing experts became skilled at targeting advertisements, creating leads, and attracting people rather than converting them into customers.

In the case of medical tourism, marketing and advertising are rather tricky subjects, and the topic is considered under researched according to many scholars (Rydbäck, 2021). A book by Rydbäck (2011) categorizes medical tourism marketing under service marketing, specifically healthcare or health marketing. Health marketing was defined by Crié & Chebat (2013) as the “systematized application of marketing principles within the very broad, heterogeneous, and complex field of health” (p. 123). Medical tourism is a complex service offering since it depends on three main stakeholders: consumers (patients), governments and the medical provider (Manoj, 2017). Consumers have particular demands and are often vulnerable, as their decision-making can have long-term consequences; therefore, marketing principles must be applied cautiously (Crié & Chebat, 2013). Other stakeholders, such as the government's significance, come from the policies, protecting patients, protecting providers, or even supporting the promotion of this industry. Thirdly, the medical tourism provider has to perform the required service. Other stakeholders such as insurance companies, the customer's home country medical provider, or the transportation provider complicate this industry and marketing.

Because of the previously mentioned growth rate and potential market opportunity, the competition intensifies between different countries at large and the medical tourism providers as the smaller units. Therefore, medical tourism providers must be highly skilled at promoting their services and using the right tools and strategies to acquire customers successfully.

According to previous literature, an attractive branding strategy is vital in differentiating from competitors (Soltani et al., 2017). According to Cham et al. (2021), brand image is associated with the brand in the customers' minds, which they have based on the marketing and promotion they have been exposed to. In the medical tourism industry, branding is even more crucial since

patients have little information to evaluate the efficacy of a procedure which can have a long-term impact on their overall health (Cham et al., 2021). According to Cham et al. (2021), particularly before they purchase or use the service, branding has a significant impact on medical tourists' decision-making since it can be a tacit predictor of quality (Cham et al., 2016). The same study states that perception of a brand and brand trust plays the most prominent role in how customers view service providers. These will help visualize, reduce stress, and assess the medical services.

Advertisements are a marketing communication tool often used to promote medical tourism services. Advertisements might include newspapers, television, billboards, and magazines online and offline (Cham et al., 2021). This tool is excellent for generating customer interest and encouraging purchase behavior.

Social media communication is another essential tool to communicate the brand image. It provides a platform for interacting in a variety of ways; reviews, comments, chats, videos, online discussion forums and many more. It is an excellent channel for marketing different services and is a crucial tool for influencing customer views and purchases behaviors (Caber et al., 2021). There are two forms of social media communication; user-generated social media and business-created social media, both of which play a very significant marketing role in the medical tourism industry since, in many cases, it helps tourists select the destination, the provider or even the treatment (Cham et al., 2021; Sigala et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2014). With consumers actively participating in information and opinion sharing, brand image can also be influenced. On the other hand, business-created social media can target specific customers and facilitate quicker and easier buying decision-making (Cham et al., 2021).

### **2.2.1 The role of social media in the context of medical tourism**

According to Zeng and Gerritsen (2014), social media can provide information to current and potential tourists, improving brand recognition, perception, and brand loyalty. Social media is extensively utilized in communication and marketing in the tourism industry (Leung et al., 2013). Therefore, social media and other information are crucial in high-risk, high-participation industries such as medical tourism (Kang et al., 2014). Tourism literature about social media considers the motives, effects, and consequences of visitors' trip-planning processes (Amaro et al., 2016). The literature also looks at the advantages of social media for providers to use for marketing and promotion (Howison et al., 2015).

Considering the need for high involvement when deciding about a medical tourism provider, medical tourism seekers' search might involve social sources of information, including social

media (Kang et al., 2014). According to research by Singh (2013), online research prior to the trip and recommendations from the home country's healthcare provider are significant deciding factors. In addition, the costs of procedures, verification of safety and competence of the doctors are also essential to medical tourists (Singh, 2013; Wongkit & McKercher, 2016). The perception of the travel destination on social media is vital since medical tourists select the medical service provider and the location, sort of like a package deal (Pike & Page, 2014). Therefore, it is crucial that the medical tourism provider markets the destination through different channels. Under the umbrella of marketing, effective communication is critical with stakeholders, where social media is often used as a tool (John et al., 2018). Typically, medical tourism providers use social media to share the main advantages of medical tourism (Lee et al., 2014). The literature acknowledges three significant roles of social media in tourism: first, its capacity to gather data on consumer behavior, trends, and post-experience reviews (Chan et al., 2011; Denizci-Guillet et al., 2015); secondly, its use as a powerful channel for advertising (Phelan et al., 2013), thirdly its capacity to encourage interaction with customers (Hudson et al., 2015; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Overall social media offers a means to an end by providing a worldwide communication channel at minimal cost, which is an essential factor, especially in medical tourism (Amaro et al., 2016).

In contrast to conventional promotion methods, social media is a powerful instrument for interactive marketing. Given the significance of recommendations for tourism marketing, it has enormous potential when used in ways that foster participation and connection (John et al., 2018). Consequently, customer loyalty can be built in existing customers (Hays et al., 2013), and tailored interactions will be possible (Harrigan et al., 2017), both of which are beneficial for encouraging medical travel.

### **2.2.2 Influencers**

In the past twenty years, there has been a rise in people on social media who gained fame through posting and sharing on different platforms. These opinion leaders or influencers create an online identity through their posts and comments, where they share their ideas and aspirations with everyone. As their name “influencer”, they genuinely influence their followers’ decision-making and are often more relatable to followers than celebrities (Hudders et al., 2020; Schouten et al., 2019). Influencer marketing has emerged as a tool for online global marketing to communicate with customers directly (Backaler, 2018). This type of marketing is a collaboration between a company and an influencer where influencers use their online personality to showcase the products or services to their audience (De Veirman et al., 2017).

As a positive outlook towards a destination is very important in tourism, influencers are often employed to generate content that creates a positive attitude in possible customers. In addition, Dabija et al. (2018) proved that in the case of Millennials and Generation Z, social media marketing is a great way to appeal to and increase the popularity of the destination since social media influences these groups more than other generations (Khamis et al., 2016). On the other hand, Varkaris and Neuhofer (2017) discovered that negative content significantly affects travelers and has a more considerable influence than positive content. Lou and Yuan (2019) found that trust plays a vital role with influencers, and followers are more likely to purchase if they perceive the influencer as trustable and reliable.

In the case of plastic surgeries and cosmetic procedures, we can see two types of influencers: service providers and patients. Since plastic surgeries and other cosmetic procedures are often utilized to make people look more appealing, social media platforms, especially those used for image sharing, showcase patient results and procedure explanations by service providers and doctors. Many plastic surgeons use their platform to brand their business, stand out for patients and inform them (Cho et al., 2020). In the USA, it was reported that more than 60% of plastic surgeons have active, career-specific social media profiles as of 2018 (Mullens et al., 2020). In recent years, TikTok has been one of the most popular sites for medical professionals to educate about and promote these procedures. One of the most popular accounts is by Dr Anthony Youn American plastic surgeon, who has over 8 million followers and became popular with the “celebrity plastic surgery: real or sus” TikToks (Bushak, 2022). He entertains, educates, and advises his followers about cosmetic surgery and lifestyle. Dr Gary Linkov, a facial cosmetic surgeon influencer with over four hundred-thousand followers on YouTube, and similarly to Dr Youn, tries to educate those looking to invest in these procedures. VIVA Skin Clinics on YouTube is an excellent example of an account where doctors explain and showcase the procedures. In this case, multiple doctors explain different procedures. They have over twenty thousand subscribers and a very active account. Although there is no data about the nationality of patients, their fame and reputation attract people from all over the world.

An increasing number of influencers participate in medical tourism and undergo procedures abroad. Helin Doski from the UK, who became famous on TikTok and had over 2 million followers, posted multiple videos on YouTube where she discusses the nose job she received in Turkey. Another social media influencer from Canada @Jooshica (with over 4 million followers), has also been vlogging about the eye and nose surgeries she received in Korea. Based on the viewer number and comments under these videos and pictures, many people are



interested in the topic, the specifics of finding the right doctor abroad, and what these procedures cost. Many commenters support the influencers about their openness about this journey.

Multiple studies found that social media influencers positively influence people's intention and perception towards medical tourism, which suggests that the potential in this marketing area is enormous (John et al., 2018; Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016).

### **2.3 Decision-making process, customer journey**

Customer experience is defined as the customer's journey with a company across time while going through several touch points during a buying cycle (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). In the case of medical tourism, the company might be the hospital or facility providing care or even an intermediary between them and a patient. When examining the customer journey, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) identified three "touch points": the prepurchase stage, purchase stage and postpurchase stage. As for this study, the prepurchase stage is the most relevant, therefore, other stages will be discussed briefly.

Runnels and Carrera (2012) found that in the case of medical tourism, the first step is the identification of need. The second step is gathering information about treatment, needs and options. Thirdly, consumers weigh the alternatives, while in the fourth step, they identify the treatment they need. After, they need to find a foreign provider, consult with them or an intermediary, and finally decide if they want the foreign treatment. Information search and evaluation happen in the prepurchase part of the customer journey when consumers are susceptible to the information, experiences of others and suggestions, especially those acquired through social media (Pop et al., 2021). Electronic word of mouth significantly impacts the consumer's willingness to travel, especially in this initial stage according to Pop et al. (2021). It must be noted that social media has changed from the roots of how people look for, interpret and trust information that they have access to (Sigala et al., 2012).

Once consumers choose and pay for the medical travel package that matches their needs, they engage fully with the brand and are in the purchase stage (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Postpurchase behavior includes when consumers assess their experiences after their anticipations. Since a big part of the experience is intangible tourism products, the assessment happens after the experience is over (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). Afterwards, a favorable or unfavorable attitude is developed, frequently shared on social media in the form of comments, posts, and reviews (Kang & Schuett, 2012). As mentioned before, these opinions

shared on social media can affect the decision-making of other travelers if they trust the content creator (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). An important thing to consider in the case of medical tourism that after the patient returns to home country the cosmetic procedures results are long-term if not lifelong. However, complications might occur later which can change the overall assessment of medical tourism.

### **3. Methodology**

In the following chapter the methodological process for responding to the previously presented research question is described. The research strategy, data collection technique, interview structure and the data analysis tools used are introduced.

#### **3.1 Research Objectives:**

As mentioned before, this study aims to answer the research question: What effect do social media influencers have on the intent to engage in medical tourism (specifically cosmetic and dental procedures) among people from generations Y and Z?

Therefore, research is needed to understand the medical tourism market, how people search for information online, why they use social media, and how influencer endorsements affect decision-making. Qualitative research was conducted to understand how influencer content affects willingness to engage in medical tourism.

#### **3.2 Research Approach**

Upon analyzing the information in the Literature Review part, the study's research objectives are accomplished by gathering primary data. In order to access the data and extrapolate the sample's findings to the target population (Gen Z and Gen Y), a qualitative research design technique was used. Furthermore, this research design allowed for an assessment of a smaller sample in a more in-depth manner, which was then further examined to draw the necessary conclusions.

Out of the qualitative methods, the semi-structured online interviews method was selected based on its fundamental benefits; feels like a friendly conversation, can be tailored to the participant, has the structure of an interview but is more flexible. In addition, it was quick, cheap, and easy to access the target population since, as mentioned before, Generation Y and Generation Z spend significant time online, especially connecting with friends which is like the feel of an online semi-structured interview. Findings were dependent on the number of interview responders.



### **3.3 Data Collection**

All interviewees approached through social media or email and found through snowball sampling or convenience sampling. Possible interviewees received the screening questions (see Appendix 1) through platforms they were approached through. If they matched the target group's criteria, they received the consent from (see Appendix 2).

The following criteria must be met in order to be placed in one of the three interview groups:

A) Social Media user who has been exposed to influencers who had cosmetic procedures

- (1) is a Gen Z, born between 1997 and 2005
- (2) is a Gen Y, born between 1980 and 1996

B) Social Media user who had cosmetic procedures abroad and been exposed to influencers who had cosmetic procedures

- (1) is a Gen Z, born between 1997 and 2005
- (2) is a Gen Y, born between 1980 and 1996

Afterwards the Zoom interview was scheduled. All interviews were conducted on Zoom and were voice recorded. Before the interview the interviewer included a short explanation of this study's purpose. The questions of the interview are based on the previous literature found, and the objectives. However, not all questions were asked, interviewer adjusted them according to interviewees answers. The questions are adapted from the existing literature to match the purpose of this study (see Appendix 3).

It has to be noted that this study excludes those members of Generation Z who are younger than 18. All the interviews were conducted in English.

#### **3.3.1 Interview Structure**

The interview questions were divided into five sections based on the Condition the participant fell in (see Appendix 3). Overall, there were four screening questions, four about demographics and related to the research question; there were 21 questions for Condition A and 25 questions for Condition B participants.

Before the interview, possible interviewees are asked screening questions (see Appendix 1) to evaluate whether the respondent is a target group member, and to which Condition they belonged. Before the interview, these questions were asked of possible participants by email or in direct messages through social media platforms where they were approached. Therefore, those who do not belong to Generation Z or Y, do not have Instagram, or have not been exposed to any influencers who had cosmetic procedures were not considered for the interviews conducted through Zoom. Based on the preliminary screening questions, participants were divided into two groups Condition A (for those participants who did not have cosmetic procedures before) and Condition B (for those participants who had cosmetic procedures before). Condition B differs only in the extra section of the questionnaire where the interviewee is inquired about their previous experience.

Before proceeding, the consent form was sent and filled out by participants, then returned to the interviewer preceding the Zoom call.

The interview was scheduled according to the earliest convenience of the participant and the interviewer between the 2023 March-April. The interview was conducted through Zoom, and each interview was voice recorded with the Voice Memo Application. The Zoom call did not require the video availability of the participant.

At the beginning of the interview, the interviewer inspected if the consent form was signed correctly and dated, then shortly informed the participant about the course of the interview (see Appendix 3, I. Introduction).

To begin with, in Part 0 of the interview, respondent was enquired about their demographic information adapted from Cox et al. (2009). In section one, 'Social Media Influencers,' the interviewee was asked about the advertisements and posts relating to medical tourism involving cosmetic procedures and the perceived reliability. In section two, 'Intent to Engage in Medical Tourism,' participants were asked about their willingness to engage in medical tourism, their views on cosmetic procedures, and their concerns about them. In Part 3, 'Generation Z' or 'Generation Y' participants were asked how their age and generational attributes influence their view of medical tourism for cosmetic or dental procedures. Generation Z or Y questions only differ in the generational name to make the question more specific to the interviewee. In Part 4, 'Cosmetic and Dental Procedures', respondents are asked about their knowledge of the medical tourism industry, its benefits, and how they would improve this industry. The interview ends here for those who did not partake in medical tourism for cosmetic procedures—for those who had procedures done, continued with Part 5, '

Experience with Cosmetic Procedures'. In this part, interviewees are asked about their experience and the kind of procedure they have undergone.

After the interview, interviewees were thanked for participating and encouraged to ask questions and share their comments.

The factors used to create the semi-structured interview questions are organized as follows:

- **Screening Questions (before the interview)**
- **Part 0 - Demographic questions**
- **Part 1 – Social Media Influencers**
- **Part 2 – Intent to Engage in Medical Tourism**
- **Part 3**
  - o **Part 3.A Generation Y**
  - o **Part 3.B Generation Z**
- **Part 4 – Cosmetic and Dental Procedures**

*Here the questionnaire ended for those who did not have cosmetic procedures as part of medical tourism.*

- **Part 5 – Experience with Cosmetic Procedures**

Part 0 was Yes or No questions to understand if the participants belong to the target group and, if yes, which conditions questions should be asked. Not all questions seen in Appendix 3 were asked during the interview. The interviewer adjusted it according to what participants touched on by themselves or would not want to answer.

### **3.4 Data Population**

This study aims to examine the impact of social media influencers on the intention to engage in medical tourism (specifically cosmetic and dental procedures) among people from Generations Y and Z. Therefore, the target population is people who belong to Generation Y or Z (were born between 1980-2005), who have and use social media, specifically Instagram. Generation Z members who are not over 18 are excluded from this study.

The interview was only conducted with those who answered to the screening questions and were determined to belong to this specific target group. The four screening questions assess the age, social media use and exposure to influencers. The interviewees were chosen based on their interest in traveling and or cosmetic procedures as well as their age (Generation Z and Y).

Substantial research was performed across different social media platforms to identify the possible interviewees. Facebook groups for travel, and plastic or cosmetic procedures were observed, in addition hashtag and comment search was performed under images of cosmetic procedure recipients, doctors and procedures. Possible interviewees were then approached through the different social media accounts and email of the researcher (invitation for interview shared on Gmail, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp). The call for interview was also shared in travel related Facebook groups where group members were asked to share the invitation with their own friends who are interested in travel and possibly medical tourism.

Twenty-five interviews were conducted (n=25). Based on the prescreening questions, participants could qualify into two groups (see Appendix 1). In addition, interview questions regarding generational differences differed (see Appendix 3).

76% (n=19) of participants qualified for Condition 1 (did not participate in medical tourism involving cosmetic procedures), and 24% (n=6) qualified for Condition 2 (participated in medical tourism involving cosmetic procedures), which means that in this study, 24% of Generation Y and Z participants did have procedures done abroad.

Questions concerning the participant's demographics were asked as closed questions. As seen in Table 1, 56% of participants belonged to Generation Z (born between 1997-2005), and 44% belonged to Generation Y (born between 1980-1996). There were 13 females (52%), 9 males (36%) and 3 participants (12%) who preferred not to disclose their gender. There were 19 different nationalities represented; the majority (n=5) were American, and the second biggest group was Russian (n=3). The rest was from different countries. 36% of participants are still students.

**Table 1***Participants' demographics*

Participant ID	Condition	Generation	Gender	Nationality	Occupation
Participant 1	1	z	female	Russia	student
Participant 2	1	z	preferred not to answer	Russia	marketing specialist
Participant 3	1	y	male	Georgia	student
Participant 4	1	z	preferred not to answer	Netherlands/Belgium	student
Participant 5	2	z	female	Russia	student
Participant 6	1	z	female	USA	communication specialist
Participant 7	1	z	male	Croatia	house parent
Participant 8	1	y	female	Greece	student
Participant 9	2	z	female	Dominican Republic	preferred not to answer
Participant 10	1	z	male	Armenia	student
Participant 11	1	z	female	Bosnia and Hercegovina	NGO consultant
Participant 12	1	y	female	Mexico	student
Participant 13	2	z	female	Nepal	data and policy analyst
Participant 14	2	y	female	USA	stay at home mom
Participant 15	1	z	female	UK	videographer
Participant 16	1	z	male	Hungary	content reviewer
Participant 17	1	z	male	Indonesia	student
Participant 18	2	y	male	Germany	developer
Participant 19	2	y	female	Kosovo	SEO specialist
Participant 20	1	z	male	India	student
Participant 21	1	y	male	Turkey	tour guide
Participant 22	1	y	preferred not to answer	USA	service manager
Participant 23	1	y	female	Bangladesh	student
Participant 24	1	y	male	USA/Hungary	student
Participant 25	1	y	female	USA	HR data analyst

As seen on Table 1, participants who belonged to Condition 1 were marked yellow, Condition 2 was marked blue. Generation Y is marked with orange, Generation Z is marked with green. Finally, females are marked with pink, males are marked with light blue and those who preferred not to answer are marked with light yellow.

### 3.5 Data Analysis Tools

All interviews performed were analyzed through the Leximancer program. Leximancer is a software program that is made to analyze text data and spot trends and connections between ideas in text (Angus et al., 2013). It is helpful for many different purposes, such as market research, consumer feedback analysis, and scholarly work. Leximancer can assist researchers with locating important themes and subjects that arise from interview transcripts while conducting semi-structured interview analysis. Researchers can learn about the opinions and experiences of interviewees by examining the language they use. According to Angus et al, (2013) Leximancer is a useful tool for qualitative data analysis since it employs cutting-edge algorithms and machine learning approaches to find patterns and correlations in text data.

Leximancer creates heat maps where different colors indicate the significance of a theme mentioned in interviews. There are also lines connecting concepts which indicate co-occurrence.

The analysis allowed for a more detailed interpretation of the context and uncovered additional insights beyond what linguistic evidence alone could provide. The results of the study contribute to the existing literature on the topic and highlight the impact that social media influencers have on GenY and Gen Z users.

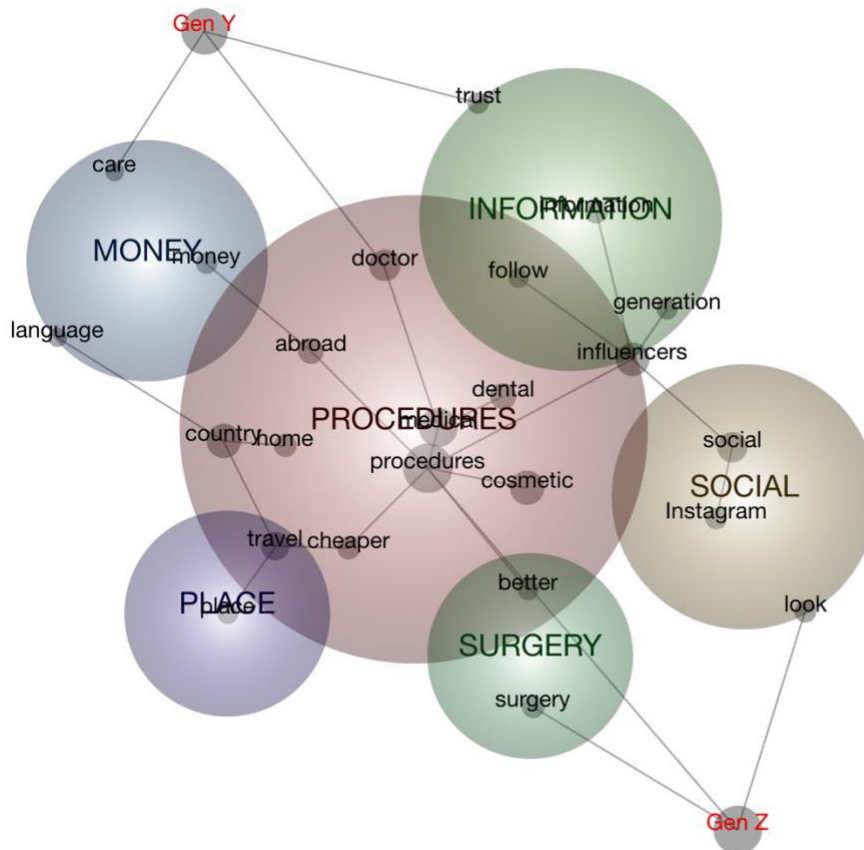
#### **4. Results**

This section presents a conceptual map generated through Leximancer (shown in Figure 1), developed by identifying data on how social media influencers impact the opinion and the intent of Gen Y and Gen Z users to engage in medical tourism, specifically cosmetic procedures. The output showcases the themes in large, multicolored circles while marking the concepts with smaller grey circles. The connecting concepts are linked with straight, grey lines.

The main themes are; procedures, social, information, surgery, money and place. Procedures had 834 hits; social had 262 hits; the information had 206 hits; surgery had 128. Money had 120, and place had 50 hits across the interview transcript. These are presumed to be the essential factors in the impact of influencers on the intent to engage in medical tourism among GenY and GenZ.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Map Illustrating the impact of influencers regarding medical tourism on Gen Z and GenY social media users*



The most mentioned theme, ‘procedures’, is placed in a red circle which indicates its importance. ‘Information’ and ‘surgery’ are green, while ‘social’ is yellow. ‘Money’ is marked with a blue circle, and ‘place’ is marked with purple, which indicates that it is the least essential topic in the output.

The association between the words can be seen from the phrases' closeness and the overlapping of the circles. As observable in Figure 1, a number of concepts are connected to two themes (placed in the intersections of circles).

Table 2 showcases the 25 relevant concepts, their counts, and relevance in percentage. There is one concept of Instagram that is categorized as a name; in addition, there are two user-defined Categories that will be Tags identifying the groups for comparison within the data, in this case, Gen-z and Gen-y.

**Table 2***Concepts, Counts and Relevance in percentage %*

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Relevance percentage (%)</b>
procedures	380	54
medical	236	33
country	208	29
influencers	198	28
cosmetic	174	25
doctor	174	25
social	168	24
travel	146	21
abroad	94	13
dental	88	12
surgery	82	12
information	78	11
look	76	11
trust	62	9
cheaper	54	8
money	54	8
Instagram	54	8
generation	54	8
home	52	7
better	52	7
place	50	7
follow	36	5
language	36	5
care	34	5
gen-z	707	100
gen-y	621	88



Furthermore, Table 3 exhibits the themes in the order of relevance and the concepts matching them.

**Table 3**

*Themes and matching concepts*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Matching concepts</b>
procedures	procedures, medical, country, cosmetic, influencers, doctor, travel, dental, abroad, home, cheaper
social	social, look, Instagram
information	information, trust, generation, follow, influencers
surgery	surgery, better
money	money, language, care
place	place, travel

As seen in Figure 1, Table 2 and Table 3, the ‘procedures’ theme has the most matching concepts. ‘Procedures’ as a concept has a count of 380 and a relevance of 54%. Matching concepts include medical, country, cosmetic, influencers, cheaper and many more. Indicating that price, the location of the procedure and the doctor are all essential factors.

The second theme, ‘social’ as a concept, had a count of 168 and 24% relevance, which matches the concept look and Instagram. This suggests that the social media platforms require a specific look, and it is more specifically Instagram which participants associate with the topic. The third theme, ‘information’, has a count of 78 and 11% relevance while matching the concepts of trust, generation and follow. The word trust and follow indicates that users need to ensure that the information they get is trustable and that information shared by others is worth following. The concept of generation might indicate that each generation looks for information differently. The fourth theme is ‘surgery’, which matches the concept better and has a count of 82 with 12% relevance. According to this connection, participants assume that surgery makes something better could it be their life, their look, or even their confidence. The fifth theme is ‘money’, which has a count of 54 and 8% relevance while matching with the word language and care. It indicates signs that care is expected in exchange. Finally, the place is the last word with a count of 50 and 7% relevance.

However, Table 2 displays that GenZ has a count of 707 with 100% relevance, and GenY has a count of 621 with 88% relevance, indicating that both are vital concepts that occur very frequently. Both of which were added manually to the concept list.

As seen in Figure 1, the concept GenZ is connected to concepts such as better, surgery and look. All of which can be found under the themes 'social' and 'surgery'. On the other hand, GenY is connected to trust, doctor and care concepts which can be found in the themes "information", "procedures" and "money" themes.

These results align with the research objectives to better understand the impact of influencers and the medical tourism market from the possible customers' perspective.

## **5. Discussion**

The results reveal six key themes associated with influencers' impact on the intent to engage in medical tourism, precisely cosmetic procedures, which are covered in this chapter. To retain the focus of the study, the discussion includes excerpts from the interviews and compares them to the body of existing literature.

### **5.1 The difference between Generation Y and Generation Z**

GenY and GenZ were manually added to the concepts map. Nonetheless, their role is very significant as the study also aimed to uncover if there is a difference between the two generations who both grew up surrounded by IT. Therefore, they are more tech-savvy and the most significant users of SM, especially Instagram.

The GenZ concept was connected to three other concepts: *surgery*, *better* and *look*. The first two matching concepts of the "surgery" central theme suggest that Generation Z associates cosmetic procedures with surgery. As it was mentioned by one of the participants (Participant 5), "And this is how it starts, you know, to implement this little idea of you to get your nails done first and then something bigger like Botox and then plastic surgery." Similarly, in the study by Sarwer et al. (2005), they found that most college-aged women (91%) are familiar with breast augmentation, facelift (87%) and other surgical procedures, while only half was familiar with minimally invasive procedures such as chemical peels or Botox.

*Better* was also a concept mentioned concerning this generation. Most participants regarded cosmetic procedures as those that can help improve people's lives by making them look better. Participant 7 mentioned when comparing Generation Z to older generations that cosmetic procedures "would be regarded as something much bigger... It was more like she got her nose done because there was an issue. While for us, it is just because she wants to look better." According to findings by Swami et al. (2009), those who have low self-esteem or low self-rated attractiveness are more likely to get cosmetic surgery to improve their appearance and, consequently, their self-esteem. Another study by Castle et al. (2002) suggests that most patients feel better about themselves and report changes in the quality of their lives, self-worth and self-esteem. However, it must be noted that essential factors such as the patient's expectations after the procedure or the patient's psychiatric health (such as body dysmorphic disorder) can cause poor psychological outcomes after the procedure (Castle et al., 2002). Both studies suggest that being physically attractive is becoming increasingly important, which is why more and more people often turn to cosmetic procedures.

The concept of *better* is also connected to *procedures*, which means that many of the representatives of this generation associated medical tourism with travelling for better procedures, as said by one of the interviewees (Participant 3); influencers "make me think that procedures abroad are better than in my homeland." An increasing number of researchers are examining the role of social media influencers in consumer decision-making. According to findings by Pop et al. (2021), influencers whom users trust have a positive effect on each stage of travel decision making which means people's decisions and opinions are highly impacted by SMIs. The quote above is an example of the impact of influencer content.

Look is a matching concept to the "social" key theme. As one of the Generation Z participants (Participant 7) mentioned, "I think that there's a lot of influencers in that sense because I do feel like that many people want to look like the people they see on Instagram etc." This quote aligns with the findings by Wang et al. (2022), who found that exposure to others' selfies on social media can be linked to facial dissatisfaction and consideration of cosmetic surgery. In addition, Walker et al. (2021) found that among young women, it is ubiquitous that they get comments on their looks on social media. Those exposed to SM to others who had cosmetic surgery were more dissatisfied with their looks, affecting their desire to change them. As the quote and the literature found, people's looks and whom they see on social media or who is in their online social circle are critical factors that impact the intent to engage in cosmetic procedures.

The GenY concept was found on the other side of the concept map, connecting to *care*, *doctor*, and *trust* concepts.

*Care* is a matching concept to the blue “money” themed circle. The concept and the theme appeared together mainly regarding what participants consider the biggest benefit of medical tourism. According to one of the Millennials (Participant 19), “The biggest benefit is money, you save a lot of money; you might be able to get better care because they're developing countries, cheaper countries that have much better doctors than the other.” Here the participant indicates that people are motivated by the value (better care for less money). This comment indicates that Generation Y participants seem more money-cautious than Generation Z.

The second matching concept was the *doctor*, which can be found under the key theme “procedures” and is connected to the concept *medical*. Many participants talked about the doctors concerning the question about what would make medical tourism providers more attractive. As one of the GenY participants stated (Participant 25), “This is probably a very large ask, but if medical tourism continues, having some level of global standards of rating systems so that maybe you could compare these doctors and the doctors in the US.” Other Generation Y members suggested global rating systems and more live connections to doctors through Zoom calls. According to a study by Rodrigues et al. (2017), who examined reviews on *treatmentabroad.com*, user-generated content in the form of reviews has increased significantly, and so did their credibility, which shows a tendency towards more reviews than the participant suggested.

### **5.2.1 Procedures**

One of the key themes identified on the conceptual map (see Figure 1) as the influencing factor when considering medical tourism is “procedures” themselves. Matching concepts include *procedures*, *medical*, *country*, *cosmetic*, *influencers*, *doctor*, *travel*, *dental*, *abroad*, *home*, and *cheaper*.

The procedure is one of the major factors considered when evaluating medical tourism. Since all of these procedures are service offerings, people can only assess their quality during and after it has been provided. This, and the permanent aesthetic results in many cases, make the decision very high involvement, which made the procedures both the biggest benefit and drawback of travel for medical purposes. As Participant 4 mentioned, “So you know, if something would happen, I would like to be in a country where I have all my information ready

because in the end, it's like every procedure that you have is a risk for your health.” Supporting the quote, Lee et al. (2013) found that in many cases, medical tourism websites downplay the risks and complicatedness of the procedures, which results in both legal and health concerns for patients.

When asked about their motivations to engage in medical tourism, many participants said the procedure must be unique or unavailable in their home country. For example, Participant 3 said, “I think, if it would be strictly necessary to do something for me, I would go abroad and if there would be no other substitution to this procedure in the country I live.” On the other hand, many of the interviewees mentioned money as the primary motivation, as Participant 11 said: “So, in our point of view, in our opinion, medical tourism, for cosmetic procedures is more than justifiable, because it's a lot cheaper than the one down in the United States.” This quote aligns with research by Connell (2006), who found that the differences in prices remained significant, especially in the case of cosmetic procedures, which are not covered by most insurance companies, leaving patients to either foot the bill at home or choose cheaper options in the form of medical tourism.

One of the matching concepts for the “procedures” theme was influencers which came up in a diversity of ways among different participants. A few participants said that although influencers do not impact their decision-making about having a procedure through travel, they think vetting the idea that one can get something done for a low price while travelling is SMIs’ effect. As mentioned by Participant 25, “I've seen influencers talking about going and getting cosmetic procedures. Well, I didn't know it existed until I saw social media influencers talking about it.” Supporting this quote, Pop et al. (2021) found that influencers who are considered credible by followers can raise brand awareness and can even change consumers’ purchase decisions. In another research, social media’s role in tourism is crucial, especially in information search, resulting in tourism providers getting opportunities to inform, advertise and interact with people on a new level (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014).

One of the other participants also mentioned deinfluencing, where influencers tell their followers not to try a service or product. Participant 22 said: “I would not travel abroad for medical procedures. But I think that's also due to influencers too because I think there has been a trend of deinfluencing. I have seen girls just talking about BBL with life-threatening results.” Since deinfluencing is a relatively new trend, there is no academic research paper about it, especially its connection to the medical tourism industry. However, research by Varkaris and

Neuhofer (2017) found that negative content that is personally significant would influence travel decision-making. Although this research examines user-generated content in the form of reviews, it is relevant to influencers since people find them more relatable and trustworthy (Rinka & Pratt, 2018).

The concepts of *doctor*, *medical*, *dental* and *procedures* are connected in this theme, emphasizing the importance of the type of procedure and the person performing it. Many people indicated that researching the doctor and finding a lot of information about them would make them feel safer about choosing medical tourism. Participant 19 said, “I would personally want to talk to people who have gone through using that agency and going to that doctor doing that procedure.” Supporting this quote, Walker et al. (2019) found that the more people hear about others’ cosmetic surgery experiences, the more likely they will have one too. Furthermore, research by Chen et al. (2015) found that the decision-making process for high-involvement products or services (such as medical tourism for a cosmetic procedure) is more likely impacted by electronic word of mouth, especially for first-time purchases.

Moreover, when examining the influencers' impact specifically on medical tourism, dental procedures were usually mentioned as the most accepted aesthetic change. Participant 11 said, “I think dental procedures and especially medical tourism for dental procedures does not evoke shame..”. In addition, participants from non-Western countries mentioned how the diaspora living in Western countries returns specifically for dental procedures, which makes these procedures more known and accepted. Supporting these findings, research by Mathijssen and Mathijssen (2020) found that diaspora medical tourists represent an already significant patient base, and their numbers are likely to increase, correlating with migration.

### **5.2.2 Social**

The theme “social” has 262 hits as a concept and a count of 168, with 24% relevance. Matching concepts include *social*, *look* and *Instagram*. The concept of *social* is also connected to the word influencers indicating the role influencers play on social media and people’s looks. Generation Z and Millennials both grew up with technology and using social media. When asked about where and how they encountered medical tourism for cosmetic procedures, Participant 22 said: “I think you see it on almost every social media platform, my main ones are probably Tik Tok and Instagram, and even, especially on like Tik Tok, it's kind of curated to what you like. And I think social media is just a condensed form of, you know, television

that makes it easier to digest and more fun to digest.” Supporting this quote, Ameen et al. (2022) found that Generation Z women interact with different technologies and are highly active on social media, influencing their body image, self-esteem and purchase behavior. Another study showed that television programs that focused on cosmetic procedures were predictive of the intent of cosmetic surgery (Sharp et al., 2014)

Furthermore, another participant (Participant 3) said: “I think that social media influencers have a big effect on engaging people into medical tourism because they have all the instruments of Instagram, have Photoshop, in their hands, they have a perfect image. And people from our generation, they want to look very much like, their favorite influencers.” Research supports that looks are important, especially on image-based platforms such as Instagram (Walker et al., 2019). As mentioned before, concerning Generation Z, that appearance comparison and attractiveness internalization often appear in connection with facial dissatisfaction (Wang et al., 2022). Furthermore, a study by Sood et al. (2017) found that subjective norms significantly impact the decision to have cosmetic procedures since people (especially young girls) seek approval from their social group, even in the case of attractiveness.

Another meaningful connection between the concepts is that Millennials and Generation Z are the two most active generation groups on social media (Kemp, 2022). Instagram, especially, is extremely popular among the two generations examined (Khamis et al., 2016).

### **5.2.3 Information**

The third key theme is “information”, with 11% of relevance and a count of 78. Information and the concept of *influencers*, *follow*, and *generation* are all connected. These connecting concepts indicate that different generations look at and find information differently, and the generations examined in this study have shared habits such as following influencers. However, many participants indicated trust is vital when considering an influencer's opinion. As Participant 8 described, “As I said before, I have many reservations regarding the credibility of the information provided by influencers because I know that influencers are getting paid to promote these products, so at least I wouldn't personally really trust them.” This quote could be explained by Lou and Yuan's (2019) findings; as social media influencer marketing is a growing marketing segment, the importance of having an informative value of the posted content has increased significantly. Purchase intention in this study was influenced by informative value, which also increases the trust between followers and influencers (Lou &

Yuan, 2019). The perceived value of the different influencer contents that many participants saw has impacted their view on the service offering (medical tourism for cosmetic procedures) and their trust in influencers.

Another important way information appeared in the interviews was how people would like to receive information about the procedures. Some mentioned how long testimonials and reviews are helpful; others talked about the doctors explaining it on social media, and some even mentioned influencers recording every step of the way. Some participants even mentioned that education would enable people to research and make decisions based on in-depth information. Medical tourism providers being upfront and transparent is vital since travelling to another country made other participants feel they needed all the necessary information, such as about the procedure, legal protection, local culture, or the language. Research by Lee et al. (2013) found that medical tourism providers often soften these worries by decreasing the information on their sites about the risks and possible drawbacks.

#### **5.2.4 Surgery**

Surgery as one of the main topics shows that procedures are often associated with surgeries. However, in the case of this study, they include minimally invasive dental procedures as well. This information was provided to all participants during the preliminary screening and the at the beginning of the interview.

*Surgery* as a concept had a count of 82 and 12% of relevance. As mentioned in Part 5.2, participants often used procedures and surgery interchangeably. The concept *better* was in both the “surgery” and the “procedures” circles. Better surgery can be connected to people feeling better in their bodies, as stated by Participant 4 “Then I feel like we went to plastic surgery because there were these pressures from society or like you have to look this way or like this and that especially now that we have social media and we see all these different people and all these different bodies, so we have different procedures that make it possible to look like someone else or a better version of yourself. We can reclaim it as a way of like, hey, I want to do this to me because I feel like it improves my life quality.” Supporting this quote, Castle et al. (2002) found that most patients who underwent cosmetic surgery reported an improvement in their quality of life and self-esteem. Another study by Sarwer et al. (2005) found that in contrast to 28% who disagreed, 45% of people approved of someone medically altering their looks to increase their life quality and psychological well-being.



On the other hand, *better surgery* was mentioned in the context of which place is better at certain surgeries because of how frequently they are done, their price or their reviews. Participant 20 mentioned: “The doctors in America are like, you know, here they do like two surgeries a week the guys down in Mexico they do like 50 Americans a day all kinds of cosmetic surgeries.” This participant indicated that the experience of the doctors and the clinic resulted in better surgery for them. In addition, it was also much cheaper compared to their home country. Supporting this quote Singh (2012) found that the most critical factor when deciding on medical tourism was the success rate of the patient’s desired procedure and, secondly, the number of procedures done by the doctor.

### **5.2.5 Money**

One of the other key themes is “money”. It has a count of 54 and 8% of relevance. The money key theme’s matching concepts are; *language, money* and *care*.

Money was the biggest motivation for medical tourism in most cases, as mentioned by Participant 18; “I think the biggest motivation for medical tourism is money. If you get it cheap but the same treatment, then it's the biggest motivation.” As mentioned earlier, research by Connell (2006), the price difference is one of the primary motivational factors for patients to travel for cosmetic procedures.

When asked about their most significant concern about medical procedures, many interviewees (regardless of generation or previous experience) mentioned the language barrier. As Participant 19 said, “The number one concern would be language barrier because I also ran into that issue while I was in Athens. They were fluent in English, but still, when I needed specific answers, I think they didn't clearly understand me.” Connell (2013) found a hierarchy between medical tourism provider countries, and it is highly influenced by the receiving country’s language differences, infrastructure, cost and political situation. Many of these businesses provide language training to their employees to bridge the language and cultural barriers (Connell, 2013)

While asked about the benefits of the medical tourism industry as a whole, participants mentioned not only the cheap procedures as discussed earlier but also the benefits for the receiving country, as Participant 1 said; “And if one clinic, sees that, some people from abroad with a lot of money come to the other clinic, they also want to do this, they want to improve something they want to introduce new, let's say services. So, it also helps the clinics to improve

the service and just to improve the general like health care system.” Supporting this quote, research by Bookman and Bookman (2007) found that medical tourism is very labor-intensive but brings foreign currency and new investments, which can spur the growth of the local economy.

### **5.2.6 Place**

Finally, “place” is the last key theme. It had 50 hits and a relevance of 7%.

The place was connected to the concept of *travel*, which is the matching concept of “procedures”. Many participants mentioned different places when asked about the medical tourism industry. Often, they associated different countries with different procedures. Participant 6 said; “So I know like BBL is good in Miami or Turkey and like face in Korea, but like that’s about it.” Some mentioned that Turkey is known for rhinoplasty and hair transplants. According to research by Chew and Darmasaputra (2015), there are a handful of destinations where the government successfully positioned the country as a medical tourism destination, often through policies supporting the industry, encouraging quality, and allowing easy travel (through specific visas).

Moreover, some interviewees mentioned that with access to the internet, it is easier to find which place is exceptional in which procedure (Participant 13); “I feel like with the expanse of Internet and access to like social media a lot of people know, and it's very easy for the information to assimilate among people so people have better ideas of like oh what's the best place for a rhinoplasty or what's the best for place for like I don't know some other procedures.” According to Connell (2013), the internet is now essential in targeting, marketing, and informing potential patients about almost all aspects of medical tourism, including cosmetic procedures.

Finally, the place was often used among participants to refer to the clinic where the medical tourism procedures are done, such as in the case of Participant 19; “I checked out a couple of places if they are mainly plastic surgery places. For some reason, I checked a bunch of places, read their reviews, checked the prices, and then decided on one.”

## **6. Conclusion**

The research identified the way how representatives of Generation Y and Z's intent to engage in medical tourism is impacted by social media influencers. The study revealed that although social media influencers solely do not drive people to engage in these procedures, they have a significant role in making cosmetic procedures as part of medical tourism more accepted and well-known. Since this generation spends significant time on social media platforms, their exposure is highest to cosmetic procedure-related content on SM.

According to the interviews, both generations are familiar with medical tourism but mostly were not informed about the size or significant companies. On the other hand, all interviewees could associate certain procedures with specific countries and have encountered people before who engaged in medical tourism. Cosmetic dentistry was the most accepted and well-known by all participants; otherwise, there was no significant difference in the likeliness of travel for any of the procedures.

The findings suggest a difference between Generation Z and Generation Y when traveling to engage in cosmetic procedures. Generation Z primarily associated cosmetic procedures with surgeries and found the procedures necessary for the betterment of oneself both physically and mentally. Gen Z also suggested that social media influencers play a role in creating the ideal image of physical beauty and showing how to become that (in this case, through cosmetic procedures). On the other hand, Generation Y considered money and information essential to committing to these procedures abroad. Moreover, value and the quality of service, doctors, and the procedure itself were essential to Millennials, and influencers were often named as one of the many sources of information about cosmetic procedures.

The decision-making process was affected by influencers in different ways. As reported by participants, SMIs often planted the idea and created the need in the prepurchase stage. Influencers also played an important role as a source of information. In this case, trust was essential because most participants suggested that they only follow and consider the opinion of SMIs whom they perceive trustable and honest. Another way influencers were important is deinfluencing. Deinfluencing was an essential component, as negative content demotivated people from engaging in medical tourism and cosmetic procedures.

Moreover, it is essential to note that most participants regarded the price as the most significant motivational factor to engage in medical tourism abroad. The biggest concerns were the language barrier and the need for legal knowledge in receiving country.

Finally, most participants said that long, detailed testimonials and globally followed standards for all clinics engaging in medical tourism would make them feel safer and more likely to engage in these procedures.

In summary, influencers primarily have a positive effect; their primary role is informing and planting the idea in people's heads. However, SMIs are not the sole source of information used before engaging in medical tourism, specifically cosmetic procedures.

## **6.1 Theoretical Contribution**

This study examined social media influencers' effect on the intent to engage in medical tourism (specifically cosmetic and dental procedures) among people from generations Y and Z as a theoretical contribution to existing literature. The research builds on earlier research that primarily focuses on social media influencers' impact on tourism and destination marketing, such as Pop et al. (2021), who highlighted the impact SMIs have on travel decisions and the role of trust. The given research gap was that the mentioned study only examined trust as an influencing factor in a limited geographical setting, making the research less generalizable. However, current research's findings align; in the medical tourism segment involving cosmetic procedures, trust in SMIs is critical among all nationalities.

Moreover, this research built on findings about the effects of social media use on demand for cosmetic procedures by Walker et al. (2019). The study mentioned was focused on female students within the same age group making these findings non-generalizable.

These previously mentioned studies focused solely on social media influencers' impact on tourism or medical tourism, or cosmetic procedures without combining the mentioned areas. This research fills the gap in the literature by identifying and understanding the SMI's impact on Generation Y and Z and their intent to engage in medical tourism, precisely cosmetic procedures, as these generations are reportedly the most active on social media and their spending power is increasing. In addition, this study examined the difference between Generation Z and Y regarding attitudes and experience with cosmetic procedures.

## **6.2 Practical Contribution**

Practical contributions include the motivations identified among Generation Z and Y to engage in medical tourism and cosmetic procedures. The main motivations include quality, a lower price, and the betterment of oneself physically to increase overall well-being. It must be noted that Generation Y was most concerned about cosmetic procedures' information and money aspect. At the same time, Generation Z was mainly focused on the procedure itself and its social aspect. These might serve as valuable insights for all stakeholders but especially for managers of medical tourism providers.

The research also offers empirical evidence that SMIs successfully promote cosmetic procedures as part of medical tourism. Influencers are most successful in familiarizing and informing potential patients about the available procedures, prices, and results in the form of long testimonials. This study also revealed that social media users consider social media influencers' content if SMIs are perceived trustable and honest. In addition, non-influencer testimonials that include the procedures' negative and positive sides were mentioned to make medical tourism providers more trustable.

## **6.3 Limitations**

Although these findings contribute to a greater understanding of the impact of social media influencers on members of Generation Y and Z regarding cosmetic procedures as part of medical tourism, there are limitations to this study. The sample size was 25, which was too small to represent two generations accurately. The data collection was limited to a combination of snowball sampling and convenience sampling which resulted in a more significant number of students in the participants, which does not accurately represent Generation Y and Z. Because of legal reasons, this study did not examine representatives of Generation Z who are under 18, therefore not the entire generation Z was represented accurately.

Secondly, this study examined all cosmetic procedures, including minimally invasive procedures, cosmetic surgeries, and cosmetic dentistry, and did not focus on one particular procedure. Participants who partook in procedures and those who did not were not compared and were not examined if this played a role in SMI's impact.

#### **6.4 Future studies**

Future research is suggested that examines a larger sample size, including under 18 members of Generation Z. This would be beneficial to understand different trends even within a single generation.

A future study could also examine if there is a difference between the impact on potential patients if the social media influencer is the medical service provider (doctors, nurses, experts) or another patient.

Lastly, a longitudinal study would be beneficial, where people are examined for a more extended period, especially regarding their opinion about engaging in medical tourism for cosmetic procedures as they progress through different life stages and social media trends change.

## References:

- Abubakar, A. M., & Ilkan, M. (2016). Impact of online WOM on Destination Trust and intention to travel: A medical tourism perspective. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 5(3), 192–201. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2015.12.005>
- Amaro, S., Duarte, P., & Henriques, C. (2016). Travelers' use of social media: A clustering approach. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 59, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2016.03.007>
- Ameen, N., Cheah, J. H., & Kumar, S. (2022). It's all part of the Customer Journey: The Impact of Augmented Reality, Chatbots, and social media on the body image and self-esteem of generation Z female consumers. *Psychology & Marketing*, 39(11), 2110–2129. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21715>
- American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry. (n.d.). *Dental patients*. What is Cosmetic Dentistry | AACD Dentists. Retrieved February 1, 2023, from <https://aacd.com/patients>
- American Society of Plastic Surgeons. (n.d.). *2019 Plastic Surgery Statistics Report*. Retrieved February 1, 2023, from <https://plasticsurgerycal.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/plastic-surgery-statistics-full-report-2019.pdf>
- Angus, D., Rintel, S., & Wiles, J. (2013). Making sense of big text: A visual-first approach for analysing text data using Leximancer and discursis. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 16(3), 261–267. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2013.774186>
- Backaler, J. (2018). Then vs. now: Influencer Marketing (re-)defined. *Digital Influence*, 5–18. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78396-3\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78396-3_2)
- Barnhart, B. (2023, January 3). *Social media demographics to inform your Brand's strategy in 2022*. Sprout Social. Retrieved February 1, 2023, from <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/new-social-media-demographics/>
- Bookman, M. Z., & Bookman, K. R. (2007). Introduction to Medical Tourism. In *Medical tourism in developing countries* (p. 1). essay, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Binder J. W. (2021, August 23). *How millennials and gen Z have normalized getting Botox*. doctorbinder.com. Retrieved February 1, 2023, from <https://doctorbinder.com/the-evolution-of-botox-how-millennials-and-gen-z-have-normalized-getting-injections/>.
- BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF AESTHETIC PLASTIC SURGEONS. (n.d.). *The bust boom busts*. THE BUST BOOM BUSTS | The British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons. Retrieved February 1, 2023, from [https://baaps.org.uk/media/press\\_releases/29/the\\_bust\\_boom\\_busts](https://baaps.org.uk/media/press_releases/29/the_bust_boom_busts)
- Burkett, L. (2007). Medical tourism. *Journal of Legal Medicine*, 28(2), 223–245. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01947640701357763>

- Caber, M., Drori, N., Albayrak, T., & Herstein, R. (2021). Social media usage behaviours of religious tourists: The cases of the Vatican, Mecca, and Jerusalem. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 23(5), 816–831. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.2444>
- Cafri, G., Yamamiya, Y., Brannick, M., & Thompson, J. K. (2005). The influence of sociocultural factors on body image: A meta-analysis. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 12(4), 421–433. <https://doi.org/10.1093/clipsy.bpi053>
- Castle, D. J., Honigman, R. J., & Phillips, K. A. (2002). Does cosmetic surgery improve psychosocial wellbeing? *Medical Journal of Australia*, 176(12), 601–604. <https://doi.org/10.5694/j.1326-5377.2002.tb04593.x>
- Cham, T. H., Lim, Y. M., & Sigala, M. (2021). Marketing and social influences, hospital branding, and medical tourists' behavioural intention: Before- and after-service consumption perspective. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 24(1), 140–157. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.2489>
- Cham, T. H., Lim, Y. M., Aik, N. C., & Tay, A. G. (2016). Antecedents of hospital brand image and the relationships with medical tourists' behavioral intention. *International Journal of Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Marketing*, 10(4), 412–431. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijphm-02-2016-0012>
- Chan, N. L., & Guillet, B. D. (2011). Investigation of Social Media Marketing: How does the hotel industry in Hong Kong perform in marketing on social media websites? *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 28(4), 345–368. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2011.571571>
- Chen, C.-H., Nguyen, B., Klaus, P., & Wu, M.-S. (2015). Exploring electronic word-of-mouth (ewom) in the consumer purchase decision-making process: The case of online holidays – evidence from United Kingdom (UK) consumers. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 32(8), 953–970. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2014.956165>
- Chew, Y. T., & Darmasaputra, A. (2015). Identifying research gaps in medical tourism. *Destination marketing: An international perspective*, 119.
- Cho, M.-J., Li, A. Y., Furnas, H. J., & Rohrich, R. J. (2020). Current trends in the use of social media by Plastic Surgeons. *Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery*, 146(1). <https://doi.org/10.1097/prs.0000000000006936>
- Connell, J. (2006). Medical tourism: Sea, sun, sand and ... surgery. *Tourism Management*, 27(6), 1093–1100. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2005.11.005>
- Connell, J. (2013). Contemporary Medical Tourism: Conceptualisation, culture and commodification. *Tourism Management*, 34, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2012.05.009>
- Cook, Peta S. (2008) What is health and medical tourism? In: The annual conference of the Australian Sociological Association, 2 to 5 December 2008, The University of Melbourne, Victoria.



- Cox, C., Burgess, S., Sellitto, C., & Buultjens, J. (2009). The role of user-generated content in tourists' travel planning behavior. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 18(8), 743–764. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19368620903235753>
- Crié, D., & Chebat, J.-C. (2013). Health Marketing: Toward an integrative perspective. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(1), 123–126. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.09.002>
- Dabija, D.-C., Bejan, B. M., & Tipi, N. (2018). Generation X versus millennials communication behaviour on social media when purchasing food versus Tourist Services. *E+M Ekonomie a Management*, 21(1), 191–205. <https://doi.org/10.15240/tul/001/2018-1-013>
- Dang, H.-S., Nguyen, T.-M.-T., Wang, C.-N., Day, J.-D., & Dang, T. M. (2020). Grey system theory in the study of medical tourism industry and its economic impact. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(3), 961. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17030961>
- de la Hoz-Correa, A., Muñoz-Leiva, F., & Bakucz, M. (2018). Past themes and future trends in medical tourism research: A co-word analysis. *Tourism Management*, 65, 200–211. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2017.10.001>
- De Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2017). Marketing through Instagram influencers: The impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude. *International Journal of Advertising*, 36(5), 798–828. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2017.1348035>
- Denizci Guillet, B., Kucukusta, D., & Liu, L. (L. (2015). An examination of social media marketing in China: How do the top 133 hotel brands perform on the top four Chinese social media sites? *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 33(6), 783–805. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2015.1064337>
- Devgan, L., Singh, P., & Durairaj, K. (2019). Minimally invasive facial cosmetic procedures. *Otolaryngologic Clinics of North America*, 52(3), 443–459. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.otc.2019.02.013>
- Dimock, M. (2022, April 21). *Defining generations: Where millennials end and generation Z begins*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved February 1, 2023, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>.
- Dixon, S. (2022, July 27). *Global facebook user age & gender distribution 2022*. Statista. Retrieved February 1, 2023, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/376128/facebook-global-user-age-distribution/>
- Dixon, S., & 25, N. (2022, November 25). *Global Instagram User Age & Gender Distribution 2022*. Statista. Retrieved February 1, 2023, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/248769/age-distribution-of-worldwide-instagram-users/>

- Femenia-Serra, F., & Gretzel, U. (2019). Influencer marketing for tourism destinations: Lessons from a mature destination. *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2020*, 65–78. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-36737-4\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-36737-4_6)
- Freberg, K., Graham, K., McGaughey, K., & Freberg, L. A. (2011). Who are the social media influencers? A study of public perceptions of personality. *Public Relations Review*, 37(1), 90–92. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2010.11.001>
- Furnham, A., & Levitas, J. (2012). Factors that motivate people to undergo cosmetic surgery. *Canadian Journal of Plastic Surgery*, 20(4), 47–50. <https://doi.org/10.1177/229255031202000406>.
- Gavric, A., Mirceta, D., Jakobovic, M., Pavlic, A., Zrinski, M. T., & Spalj, S. (2015). Craniodentofacial characteristics, dental esthetics–related quality of life, and self-esteem. *American Journal of Orthodontics and Dentofacial Orthopedics*, 147(6), 711–718. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajodo.2015.01.027>
- Grand View Research. (n.d.). Cosmetic Dentistry Market Size & Share Report, 2022-2030. Retrieved February 1, 2023, from <https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/cosmetic-dentistry-market>
- Harrigan, P., Evers, U., Miles, M., & Daly, T. (2017). Customer engagement with Tourism Social Media Brands. *Tourism Management*, 59, 597–609. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2016.09.015>
- Hays, S., Page, S. J., & Buhalis, D. (2013). Social media as a destination marketing tool: Its use by national tourism organisations. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 16(3), 211–239. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2012.662215>
- Henderson-King, D., & Henderson-King, E. (2005). Acceptance of cosmetic surgery: Scale Development and validation. *Body Image*, 2(2), 137–149. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2005.03.003>
- Herrick, D. M. (2007). (rep.). *Medical Tourism: Global Competition in Health Care*. Dallas, Texas: National Center for Policy Analysis.
- Heung, V. C. S., Kucukusta, D., & Song, H. (2011). Medical Tourism Development in Hong Kong: An assessment of the barriers. *Tourism Management*, 32(5), 995–1005. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2010.08.012>
- Hirose, A. (2022, April 5). 114 Social Media Demographics that Matter to Marketers in 2023. Retrieved February 1, 2023, from <https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-demographics/>.
- Holden, A. C. (2018). Cosmetic Dentistry: A socioethical evaluation. *Bioethics*, 32(9), 602–610. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bioe.12498>
- Hopkins, L., Labonté, R., Runnels, V., & Packer, C. (2010). Medical tourism today: What is the state of existing knowledge? *Journal of Public Health Policy*, 31(2), 185–198. <https://doi.org/10.1057/jphp.2010.10>

- Howison, S., Finger, G., & Hauschka, C. (2014). Insights into the web presence, online marketing, and the use of social media by tourism operators in Dunedin, New Zealand. *Anatolia*, 26(2), 269–283. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13032917.2014.940357>
- Hudders, L., De Jans, S., & De Veirman, M. (2020). The commercialization of Social Media Stars: A Literature Review and conceptual framework on the strategic use of Social Media influencers. *International Journal of Advertising*, 40(3), 327–375. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2020.1836925>
- Hudson, S., Roth, M. S., Madden, T. J., & Hudson, R. (2015). The effects of social media on emotions, Brand Relationship Quality, and word of mouth: An empirical study of music festival attendees. *Tourism Management*, 47, 68–76. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2014.09.001>
- Industry Interviews & Documentary*. Medical Tourism. (n.d.). Retrieved January 30, 2023, from <https://www.medicaltourism.com/mti/industry-interviews-documentary>
- John, S., Larke, R., & Kilgour, M. (2018). Applications of social media for Medical Tourism Marketing: An empirical analysis. *Anatolia*, 29(4), 553–565. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13032917.2018.1473261>
- Johnson, T. J., Youngquist, J. S., Garman, A. N., Hohmann, S., & Cieslak, P. R. (2015). Factors influencing medical travel into the United States. *International Journal of Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Marketing*, 9(2), 118–135. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijphm-02-2013-0004>
- Kang, I., Shin, M. M., & Lee, J. (2012). Service evaluation model for medical tour service. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 38(4), 506–527. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1096348012461542>
- Kang, M., & Schuett, M. A. (2013). Determinants of sharing travel experiences in social media. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 30(1-2), 93–107. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2013.751237>
- Kaur, P., Mathur, A., & Singh, S. (2017). Impact of dental disorders and its influence on Self Esteem Levels among adolescents. *JOURNAL OF CLINICAL AND DIAGNOSTIC RESEARCH*. <https://doi.org/10.7860/jcdr/2017/23362.9515>
- Kemp, S. (2022, May 4). *Digital 2022: Global Overview Report - DataReportal – Global Digital Insights*. DataReportal. Retrieved February 9, 2023, from <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-global-overview-report>
- Khamis, S., Ang, L., & Welling, R. (2016). Self-branding, ‘micro-celebrity’ and the rise of Social Media influencers. *Celebrity Studies*, 8(2), 191–208. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2016.1218292>
- Lee, H., Wright, K. B., O’Connor, M., & Wombacher, K. (2013). Framing medical tourism: An analysis of persuasive appeals, risks and benefits, and new media features of medical tourism broker websites. *Health Communication*, 29(7), 637–645. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2013.794412>

- Lee, M., Han, H., & Lockyer, T. (2012). Medical tourism—attracting Japanese tourists for medical tourism experience. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 29(1), 69–86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2012.638564>
- Lemon, K. N., & Verhoef, P. C. (2016). Understanding customer experience throughout the customer journey. *Journal of Marketing*, 80(6), 69–96. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.15.0420>
- Leung, D., Law, R., van Hoof, H., & Buhalis, D. (2013). Social Media in tourism and Hospitality: A literature review. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 30(1-2), 3–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2013.750919>
- Lou, C., & Yuan, S. (2019). Influencer marketing: How message value and credibility affect consumer trust of branded content on social media. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 19(1), 58–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2018.1533501>
- Lunt, N., Smith, R., & Exworthy, M. (n.d.). Review of *Medical Tourism: Treatments, Markets and Health System Implications: A scoping review*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Retrieved February 1, 2023, from <https://www.oecd.org/health/health-systems/48723982.pdf>.
- Luo, Q., & Zhong, D. (2015). Using social network analysis to explain communication characteristics of travel-related electronic word-of-mouth on social networking sites. *Tourism Management*, 46, 274–282. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2014.07.007>
- Magno, F., & Cassia, F. (2018). The impact of Social Media Influencers in tourism. *Anatolia*, 29(2), 288–290. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13032917.2018.1476981>
- Malhotra, N. K. (2020). *Marketing research: An applied orientation*. Pearson.
- Manoj, S. (n.d.). *Medical Tourism Marketing Strategies in the modern world*. LinkedIn. Retrieved April 4, 2023, from [https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/medical-tourism-marketing-strategies-modern-world-international/?trk=public\\_profile\\_article\\_view](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/medical-tourism-marketing-strategies-modern-world-international/?trk=public_profile_article_view)
- Mathijssen, A., & Mathijssen, F. P. (2020). Diasporic Medical tourism: A scoping review of quantitative and qualitative evidence. *Globalization and Health*, 16(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-020-00550-x>
- McCrinkle, M., & Wolfinger, E. (2009). The ABC of XYZ: Understanding the global generations. The ABC of XYZ. [https://books.google.hu/books?hl=en&lr=&id=BDPHKP311QEC&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&ots=NLKikLnFbV&sig=xmCOVFvPwQo2vTwoWFrhQmv7h08&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.hu/books?hl=en&lr=&id=BDPHKP311QEC&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&ots=NLKikLnFbV&sig=xmCOVFvPwQo2vTwoWFrhQmv7h08&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false)
- Medical Tourism. (n.d.). *Industry Interviews & Documentary*. Medical Tourism. Retrieved February 1, 2023, from <https://www.medicaltourism.com/mti/industry-interviews-documentary>

- Michas, F. (2022, July 27). *Cosmetic procedures number by top countries 2020*. Statista. Retrieved January 30, 2023, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/293356/leading-countries-by-total-number-of-cosmetic-procedures/>
- Morley, J. (1999). The role of cosmetic dentistry in restoring a youthful appearance. *The Journal of the American Dental Association*, *130*(8), 1166–1172. <https://doi.org/10.14219/jada.archive.1999.0370>
- Mullens, C. L., Hardy, K. M., Hernandez, J. A., McCulloch, I. L., Henderson, J. T., Gabbay, J., & Ueno, C. M. (2020). #plasticsurgery: A comparative deep dive analysis into social media and plastic surgery. *Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery*, *146*(2), 413–422. <https://doi.org/10.1097/prs.00000000000007001>
- Munar, A. M., & Jacobsen, J. K. (2014). Motivations for sharing tourism experiences through social media. *Tourism Management*, *43*, 46–54. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2014.01.012>
- NATIONAL PLASTIC SURGERY STATISTICS. (n.d.). *Methodology and validity - american society of plastic surgeons*. Retrieved February 1, 2023, from <https://www.plasticsurgery.org/documents/News/Statistics/2019/plastic-surgery-statistics-report-2019.pdf>
- Ngamvichaikit, A., & Beise-Zee, R. (2014). Communication needs of medical tourists: An exploratory study in Thailand. *International Journal of Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Marketing*, *8*(1), 98–117. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijphm-10-2012-0010>
- Noree, T., Hanefeld, J., & Smith, R. (2014). UK medical tourists in Thailand: They are not who you think they are. *Globalization and Health*, *10*(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1744-8603-10-29>
- Phelan, K. V., Chen, H.-T., & Haney, M. (2013). “like” and “check-in”: How hotels utilize Facebook as an effective marketing tool. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, *4*(2), 134–154. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jhtt-jul-2012-0020>
- Pike, S., & Page, S. J. (2014). Destination Marketing organizations and Destination Marketing: A narrative analysis of the literature. *Tourism Management*, *41*, 202–227. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2013.09.009>
- Ponte B., E., Carvajal-Trujillo, E., & Escobar-Rodríguez, T. (2015). Influence of trust and perceived value on the intention to purchase travel online: Integrating the effects of assurance on trust antecedents. *Tourism Management*, *47*, 286–302. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2014.10.009>
- Pop, R.-A., Săplăcan, Z., Dabija, D.-C., & Alt, M.-A. (2021). The impact of social media influencers on travel decisions: The role of trust in consumer decision journey. *Current Issues in Tourism*, *25*(5), 823–843. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2021.1895729>
- Richard, M. (2011). Limit theorems for supercritical age-dependent branching processes with neutral immigration. *Advances in Applied Probability*, *43*(1), 276–300. <https://doi.org/10.1239/aap/1300198523>

- Rinka X., & Pratt, S. (2018). Social Media influencers as endorsers to promote travel destinations: An application of self-congruence theory to the Chinese Generation Y. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 35(7), 958–972. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2018.1468851>
- Rodrigues, H., Brochado, A., Troilo, M., & Mohsin, A. (2017). Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the fairest of them all? A critical content analysis on medical tourism. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 24, 16–25. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2017.07.004>
- Runnels, V., & Carrera, P. M. (2012). Why do patients engage in medical tourism? *Maturitas*, 73(4), 300–304. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.maturitas.2012.08.011>
- Rydbäck, M. (2021). *Healthcare Service Marketing in medical tourism: An emerging market study*. Business studies, Politics, economy and organisation of society, School of social sciences, Södertörns högskola, (Södertörn University), The Library.
- Sarwer, D. B., Cash, T. F., Magee, L., Williams, E. F., Thompson, J. K., Roehrig, M., Tantleff-Dunn, S., Agliata, A. K., Wilfley, D. E., Amidon, A. D., Anderson, D. A., & Romanofski, M. (2005). Female college students and cosmetic surgery: An investigation of experiences, attitudes, and Body Image. *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*, 115(3), 931–938. <https://doi.org/10.1097/01.prs.0000153204.37065.d3>
- Schmallegger, D., & Carson, D. (2008). Blogs in tourism: Changing approaches to information exchange. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 14(2), 99–110. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356766707087519>
- Schmidt, C. J., & Tatum, S. A. (2006). Cosmetic Dentistry. *Current Opinion in Otolaryngology & Head & Neck Surgery*, 14(4), 254–259. <https://doi.org/10.1097/01.moo.0000233596.68928.39>
- Schouten, A. P., Janssen, L., & Verspaget, M. (2019). Celebrity vs. Influencer endorsements in advertising: The role of identification, credibility, and product-endorser fit. *International Journal of Advertising*, 39(2), 258–281. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2019.1634898>
- Seo, Y. A., & Kim, Y. A. (2020). Factors affecting acceptance of cosmetic surgery in adults in their 20s–30s. *Aesthetic Plastic Surgery*, 44(5), 1881–1888. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00266-020-01761-8>
- Sharp, A. C. (2018). *The Relationship Between Body Dissatisfaction and Cosmetic Enhancement Surgery* (Doctoral dissertation). Walden University, Minneapolis, Minnesota.
- Sharp, G., Tiggemann, M., & Mattiske, J. (2014). The role of media and peer influences in Australian women's attitudes towards cosmetic surgery. *Body Image*, 11(4), 482–487. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2014.07.009>
- Sigala, M., Christou, E., & Gretzel, U. (Eds.). (2012). *Social media in travel, tourism and hospitality: Theory, practice and cases*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd..

- Sims, P. (2008, August 28). Children having cosmetic surgery to escape school bullies, surgeon reveals. Daily Mail Online. Retrieved February 1, 2023, from <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1049624/Children-having-cosmetic-surgery-escape-school-bullies-surgeon-reveals.html>
- Singh, N. (2013). Exploring the factors influencing the travel motivations of US Medical tourists. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 16(5), 436–454. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2012.695341>
- Smith, R., Álvarez, M. M., & Chanda, R. (2011). Medical tourism: a review of the literature and analysis of a role for bi-lateral trade. *Health policy*, 103(2-3), 276-282.
- Smyth, F. (2005). Medical geography: Therapeutic places, spaces and Networks. *Progress in Human Geography*, 29(4), 488–495. <https://doi.org/10.1191/0309132505ph562pr>
- Soltani, A., Pieters, J., Young, J., & Sun, Z. (2017). Exploring city branding strategies and their impacts on local tourism success, the case study of Kumamoto Prefecture, Japan. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 23(2), 158–169. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10941665.2017.1410195>
- Sood, A., Quintal, V., & Phau, I. (2017). Keeping up with the Kardashians: Consumers' intention to engage in cosmetic surgery. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 23(2), 185–206. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10496491.2016.1267677>
- Stephano, R.-M. (n.d.). *Top 10 medical tourism destinations in the world*. RSS. Retrieved March 9, 2023, from <https://www.magazine.medicaltourism.com/article/top-10-medical-tourism-destinations-world>
- Strauss, B., Strauss, W., & Howe, N. (1991). *Generations: The history of America's future, 1584 to 2069*. William Morrow & Company.
- Straits Research, S. R. (2022, November 1). *Medical tourism market size is projected to reach USD 47.72 billion by 2030, growing at a cagr of 30%: Straits research*. GlobeNewswire News Room. Retrieved February 1, 2023, from <https://www.globenewswire.com/en/news-release/2022/11/01/2545794/0/en/Medical-Tourism-Market-size-is-projected-to-reach-USD-47-72-Billion-by-2030-growing-at-a-CAGR-of-30-Straits-Research.html>
- Swami, V., Chamorro-Premuzic, T., Bridges, S., & Furnham, A. (2009). Acceptance of cosmetic surgery: Personality and individual difference predictors. *Body Image*, 6(1), 7–13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2008.09.004>
- Tenbarge, K. (2022, April 27). *Young influencers are being offered cheap procedures in return for promotion. they say it's coming at a cost*. NBCNews.com. Retrieved February 1, 2023, from <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/internet/followers-cheaper-lips-young-influencers-detail-allure-cosmetic-proced-rcna14463>
- The Economist Newspaper. (n.d.). *Covid-19 is fuelling a zoom-boom in cosmetic surgery*. The Economist. Retrieved February 1, 2023, from

<https://www.economist.com/international/2021/04/11/covid-19-is-fuelling-a-zoom-boom-in-cosmetic-surgery>

- Thompson, J. K., Heinberg, L. J., Altabe, M., & Tantleff-Dunn, S. (1999). Exacting beauty: Theory, assessment, and treatment of body image disturbance. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10312-000>
- Tiggemann, M., & Zaccardo, M. (2015). “Exercise to be fit, not skinny”: The effect of fitspiration imagery on women's body image. *Body Image*, *15*, 61–67. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2015.06.003>
- Torgerson, D. C. (2022, May 6). *The new plastic surgery from A to gen Z: 2022 trends by dr. Torgerson*. Toronto Facial Plastic Surgery and Laser Centre | Dr. Torgerson. Retrieved February 1, 2023, from <https://drtorgerson.com/the-new-plastic-surgery-from-a-to-gen-z/>
- Varkaris, E., & Neuhofer, B. (2017). The influence of social media on the consumers' hotel decision journey. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, *8*(1), 101–118. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jhtt-09-2016-0058>
- Virginia Phelan, K., Chen, H.-T., & Haney, M. (2013). “like” and “check-in”: How hotels utilize Facebook as an effective marketing tool. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, *4*(2), 134–154. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jhtt-jul-2012-0020>
- Voelker, T., & Pentina, I. (2011). Cosmetic surgery intent among generation Y consumers: A Social Network Perspective. *Health Marketing Quarterly*, *28*(1), 38–56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07359683.2011.545315>
- Walker, C. E., Krumhuber, E. G., Dayan, S., & Furnham, A. (2019). Effects of social media use on desire for cosmetic surgery among young women. *Current Psychology*, *40*(7), 3355–3364. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-019-00282-1>
- Walker, L. (2022, October 26). *Gen Z: Trends changing the beauty and cosmetic industry*. Digital Aesthetics. Retrieved February 1, 2023, from <https://digitalaesthetics.co.uk/news/marketing/gen-z-beauty-trends-changing-the-industry>
- Wang, J. V., Akintilo, L., & Geronemus, R. G. (2020). Growth of Cosmetic Procedures in millennials: A 4.5-year clinical review. *Journal of Cosmetic Dermatology*, *19*(12), 3210–3212. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jocd.13768>
- Wang, J. V., Noell, C., Sodha, P., Albornoz, C. A., Friedman, P. M., Zachary, C. B., & Saedi, N. (2020). Comparing medical spas and physician practices for cosmetic procedures. *Dermatologic Surgery*, *Publish Ahead of Print*. <https://doi.org/10.1097/dss.0000000000002861>
- Wang, Y., Qiao, X., Yang, J., Geng, J., & Fu, L. (2022). “I wanna look like the person in that picture”: Linking selfies on social media to cosmetic surgery consideration based on the tripartite influence model. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, *64*(2), 252–261. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjop.12882>



- Wongkit, M., & McKercher, B. (2015). Desired attributes of medical treatment and medical service providers: A case study of medical tourism in Thailand. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 33(1), 14–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2015.1024911>
- Xiang, Z., Magnini, V. P., & Fesenmaier, D. R. (2015). Information Technology and consumer behavior in travel and tourism: Insights from travel planning using the internet. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 22, 244–249. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2014.08.005>
- Zeng, B., & Gerritsen, R. (2014). What do we know about social media in tourism? A Review. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 10, 27–36. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2014.01.001>

## Appendix

### Appendix 1 – Preliminary Screening questions

Dear Participant,

Thank you for considering participating in the following study. This study is supervised by ISCTE as part of the Erasmus Mundus Program. Your contribution is highly appreciated. Please answer to these preliminary screening questions according to your best knowledge. Keep in mind the following information:

*Cosmetic procedures include: breast augmentation, liposuction (fat-removal), eyelid surgery, and rhinoplasty (nose reshaping), botox, dermal fillers, deoxycholic acid, lasers, peels, and micro-needling*

*Cosmetic dentistry procedures include: veneers, whitening, tooth-colored restorations, fillings*

1. Were you born between 1980-2005? (If yes please indicate if you are Millennial 1980-1996 or Generation Z 1997-2005)
2. Do you have an Instagram account?
3. Have you been exposed to any social media influencers who had cosmetic procedures or promoted related service or product (dental, plastic surgery, other minimally invasive procedures like botox)?
4. Did you undergo any cosmetic procedure abroad (includes both cosmetic dentistry, plastic surgery or small procedures? *(If the answer is 'Yes' they are asked condition 2 questions)*)

## Appendix 2 - Consent Form

Dear participant,

Millennials and Generation Z spend the most time on social media, therefore they inevitably encounter social media influencers promoting different products or services. As physical appearance is often important on image-based platforms such as Instagram, it is more common these days that influencers use cosmetic procedures to achieve the desired look. **This interview aims to study how people feel about influencers and medical tourism involving cosmetic procedures.** The data collected will be used for my master's dissertation, and the interview will take no longer than 20 minutes to complete. The interview will be voice recorded.

Please read and consent to the rules of this study:

- I confirm that I am over 18 years old.
- I confirm that I was born between 1980-2005.
- I confirm that I have an Instagram account.
- I confirm that I know about or follow influencers.
- I can withdraw during the interview at any point and do not have to answer all questions.
- The purpose of this study is clear to me.
- I had the opportunity to clarify any doubts or questions.
- I confirm that I am aware and consent to my interview getting recorded.
- I understand that all answers are confidential and will not be used for purposes other than the present study.
- I acknowledge that I will be assigned a participant number, my identity will be kept anonymous.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study and confirm all the statements above:

Participant's name: .....

Date: .....

Your participation is highly appreciated.

If there are any questions, feel free to contact me through mail: [baan.reka@gmail.com](mailto:baan.reka@gmail.com). Thank you.

## Appendix 3 - Semi-structured interview structure

### I. Introduction

Dear Participant,

Thank you for considering participating in the following study. Your contribution is highly appreciated, and I wish you all the best. This is a huge help for me to finish my Master's degree in Tourism development and culture, and to contribute something to tourism research. This research aims to study how people feel about influencers and medical tourism involving cosmetic procedures.

Please answer to these questions according to your best knowledge. You can withdraw during the interview at any point and do not have to answer all questions. You will be assigned a participant number; therefore, your identity will remain anonymous.

Keep in mind the following information:

**Medical tourism:** the definition used is; “*international travel to improve one's health*”  
(Bookman & Bookman, 2007, p. 1)

**Cosmetic procedures include:** *breast augmentation, liposuction (fat-removal), eyelid surgery, and rhinoplasty (nose reshaping), botox, dermal fillers, deoxycholic acid, lasers, peels, and micro-needling*

**Cosmetic dentistry procedures include:** *veneers, whitening, tooth-colored restorations, fillings*

### II. Questions

**Condition 1 - Those who did not have procedure:**

**Demographics:**

1. Do you belong to Millennials (1980-1996) or Generation Z (1997-2005)?
2. What is your nationality?
3. What is your gender?
4. What is your occupation?

#### 1. Social Media Influencers

1. Have you ever seen a social media post or advertisement from an influencer promoting medical tourism for cosmetic or dental procedures?
2. To what extent do/would social media influencers affect your perception of medical tourism for cosmetic or dental procedures?
3. How do you evaluate the credibility of the information provided by social media influencers regarding medical tourism for cosmetic or dental procedures?
4. To what extent do social media influencers affect your intent to engage in medical tourism for cosmetic or dental procedures?
5. Do you think that social media influencers are a reliable source of information for medical tourism for cosmetic or dental procedures?

## **2. Intent to Engage in Medical Tourism**

6. How likely are you to consider traveling outside of your home country for a medical procedure in the next 5 years?
7. What are the factors that would motivate you to travel abroad for a medical procedure?
8. How does your social and cultural background influence your attitudes toward medical tourism for cosmetic or dental procedures?
9. What are your concerns about traveling abroad for a medical procedure? (e.g. language barriers, cultural differences, lack of legal protections, etc.)
10. What are the potential risks or drawbacks that you associate with traveling abroad for a medical procedure, and how do these factors affect your decision-making process?
11. How does the information provided by social media influencers affect your intent to engage in medical tourism for cosmetic or dental procedures?

## **3.A Generation Y**

12. How do you think your age and being a Millennial influence your attitudes toward medical tourism for cosmetic procedures?
13. How do you think your age and being a Millennial influence your attitudes toward medical tourism for dental procedures?

14. Have you noticed any differences in attitudes toward medical tourism for cosmetic procedures between your generation and older generations?

15. What role do you think technology (smart phones, television or computers) and social media play in shaping the attitudes of your generation toward medical tourism for cosmetic or dental procedures?

16. What effect do you think social media influencers have on the intent to engage in medical tourism (specifically cosmetic procedures) among people from generation Y?

### **3.B Generation Z**

12. How do you think your age and being GenZ influence your attitudes toward medical tourism for cosmetic procedures?

13. How do you think your age and being GenZ background influence your attitudes toward medical tourism for dental procedures?

14. Have you noticed any differences in attitudes toward medical tourism for cosmetic procedures between your generation and older generations?

15. What role do you think technology (smart phones, television or computers) and social media play in shaping the attitudes of your generation toward medical tourism for cosmetic or dental procedures?

16. What effect do you think social media influencers have on the intent to engage in medical tourism (specifically cosmetic procedures) among people from generation Z?

### **4. Cosmetic and Dental Procedures**

17. What do you know about the medical tourism industry?

18. What is your opinion on the safety and reliability of medical tourism for cosmetic and dental procedures?

19. What do you think are the benefits of medical tourism for cosmetic and dental procedures?

20. How do these benefits compare to receiving the same procedures in your home country?

21. What recommendations would you make to improve the safety and transparency of medical tourism for cosmetic or dental procedures?

***Condition 2 - Those who had procedure abroad:***

**Demographics:**

1. Do you belong to Millennials (1980-1996) or Generation Z (1997-2005)?
2. What is your nationality?
3. What is your gender?
4. What is your occupation?

**1. Social Media Influencers**

1. Have you ever seen a social media post or advertisement from an influencer promoting medical tourism for cosmetic or dental procedures?
2. To what extent do/would social media influencers affect your perception of medical tourism for cosmetic or dental procedures?
3. How do you evaluate the credibility of the information provided by social media influencers regarding medical tourism for cosmetic or dental procedures?
4. To what extent do social media influencers affect your intent to engage in medical tourism for cosmetic or dental procedures?
5. Do you think that social media influencers are a reliable source of information for medical tourism for cosmetic or dental procedures?

**2. Intent to ReEngage in Medical Tourism**

6. How likely are you to consider traveling outside of your home country for a medical procedure in the next 5 years?
7. What are the factors that would motivate you to travel abroad for a medical procedure?
8. How does your social and cultural background influence your attitudes toward medical tourism for cosmetic or dental procedures?

9. What are your concerns about traveling abroad for a medical procedure? (e.g. language barriers, cultural differences, lack of legal protections, etc.)

10. What are the potential risks or drawbacks that you associate with traveling abroad for a medical procedure, and how do these factors affect your decision-making process?

11. How does the information provided by social media influencers affect your intent to engage in medical tourism for cosmetic or dental procedures?

### **3.A Generation Y**

12. How do you think your age and being a Millennial influence your attitudes toward medical tourism for cosmetic procedures?

13. How do you think your age and being a Millennial influence your attitudes toward medical tourism for dental procedures?

14. Have you noticed any differences in attitudes toward medical tourism for cosmetic procedures between your generation and older generations?

15. What role do you think technology (smart phones, television or computers) and social media play in shaping the attitudes of your generation toward medical tourism for cosmetic or dental procedures?

16. What effect do you think social media influencers have on the intent to engage in medical tourism (specifically cosmetic procedures) among people from generation Y?

### **3.B Generation Z**

12. How do you think your age and being GenZ influence your attitudes toward medical tourism for cosmetic procedures?

13. How do you think your age and being GenZ background influence your attitudes toward medical tourism for dental procedures?

14. Have you noticed any differences in attitudes toward medical tourism for cosmetic procedures between your generation and older generations?

15. What role do you think technology (smart phones, television or computers) and social media play in shaping the attitudes of your generation toward medical tourism for cosmetic or dental procedures?



16. What effect do you think social media influencers have on the intent to engage in medical tourism (specifically cosmetic procedures) among people from generation Z?

#### **4. Cosmetic and Dental Procedures**

17. What do you know about the medical tourism industry?

18. What is your opinion on the safety and reliability of medical tourism for cosmetic and dental procedures?

19. What do you think are the benefits of medical tourism for cosmetic and dental procedures?

20. How do these benefits compare to receiving the same procedures in your home country?

21. What recommendations would you make to improve the safety and transparency of medical tourism for cosmetic or dental procedures?

#### **5. Experience with Cosmetic Procedures**

22. What kind of cosmetic procedure did you undergo?

23. How many times have you undergone a cosmetic procedure?

24. How satisfied were you with the results of your cosmetic procedure?

25. Did you experience any complications or negative outcomes as a result of undergoing the procedure?

Thank you again for your participation!

If you have any comments or suggestions, feel free to send me an email:

[baan.reka@gmail.com](mailto:baan.reka@gmail.com)