



**Investigating the Motivations and Determinants
Leading Individuals to Choose
Turkey for Aesthetic Procedures**

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Declaration

First of all, I declare and confirm that I wrote this research article entirely on my own. In order to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the article, I also cited all the academic sources I had to use in the literature. I also acknowledge and declare that I will not use any part of this academic article to qualify for any professional or academic award or for any other purpose. This study was completed with the support of my dissertation supervisor and was not used as the basis for any other exam or assignment.

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Abstract

In this qualitative study, the main motivations and determinants underlying individuals' choice of Turkey as a medical tourism destination for aesthetic procedures were investigated.

In order to thoroughly examine the medical aesthetic tourism market in Turkey, semi-structured interviews were used in this study to gather data for the thematic analysis method. Interviews with medical tourists were selected from different geographies in order to identify socio-cultural differences and consumer behaviours in different geographies, and for this reason, interviews were also conducted with both local and international medical tourists.

These interviews with industry stakeholders have shown that, rather than relying just on one aspect to guide their destination selection, medical tourists make decisions based on the intricate interactions of several factors. Furthermore, this study has shown that medical tourists who choose Turkey for cosmetic surgery are usually happy with the outcome, recommend aesthetic surgery procedures to their closer circle, and may return to Turkey for procedures that may be continuity-oriented.

This study investigates in depth why medical tourists prefer Turkey as a medical tourism destination; it aims to contribute to the literature both within the theoretical framework and to present practical implications regarding the preservation and further increase of Turkey's popularity in the medical aesthetic tourism industry with the findings obtained.

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INTRODUCTION

Overview of Medical Tourism

In the contemporary world, international travel has increased substantially due to the accelerated progression of globalisation. The influence of globalisation on international travel and tourism has contributed to the rise in popularity of medical tourism, which is a subset of tourism. Medical tourism was defined by Conell (2013) as the practice of individuals travelling internationally to acquire medical treatment, surgery, or other health services. According to Akasya Akdu (2009), although medical tourism, one of the alternative tourism types, has many definitions in the literature, it should be briefly defined as "travels for the purpose of medical treatment".

Medical tourism is a category of travel that is predominantly influenced by elements including the affordability, accessibility, quality, and cost of healthcare services. (Conell, 2013). Globalisation around the world has also led to the globalisation of healthcare services. The globalisation of healthcare services means increasing international trade in healthcare products and services, and especially the ability of patients to go beyond their national borders and access healthcare services abroad. (Pocock & Phua, 2011).

The tourism sector provides to a wide range of human experiences, including leisure activities, extreme sports, corporate travel, natural exploration, educational pursuits, and, increasingly, healthcare. In addition to its unquestionable economic importance, *medical tourism* is a notable and influential trend in the tourist industry. This emerging industry provides a distinct and advantageous benefit to patients globally, allowing them to receive medical treatment from other countries (Agudaru, A.M. and Taran, A., 2023).

Before examining medical tourism in depth and examining its history and development, it is useful to emphasize the basic differences that distinguish medical tourism from traditional tourism. Cook (2008) referenced Urry's (2002) academic studies and definition of traditional tourism to differentiate medical tourism from traditional tourism. Accordingly, in traditional tourism, individuals need touristic travels to escape from their daily worries, daily routines and familiar environments, and this is the basic need of traditional tourism. However, it is not possible to escape these concerns in medical tourism; Moreover, he emphasized that individuals traveling due to "health concerns" bring these concerns with them to the destination they choose for tourism. So, in short, we can say that; While in traditional tourism individuals travel to take a break from their daily worries, in medical tourism they bring "health concerns" with them and focus more on these concerns.

Regarding the historical development of medical tourism, it is possible to assert that contemporary tourism predates medical science. According to Subbaraman et al. (2007), the emergence of medical tourism dates back to Ancient Greece. In this history, which Bookman and Bookman also mentioned (2007), in Ancient Times, the Ancient Greeks frequently visited the place called "Epidauria" in the Saronic Gulf, which they considered the sacred place of Asklepios, the god of healing, for the purpose of healing. In other words, we can consider Epidauria as the first place where medical tourism was born or the first destination of medical tourism. In addition to being considered the sacred place of Asclepius, the god of healing of Epidauria, the presence of thermal health baths here was decisive for the first medical tourists of the period. While the birth and history of medical tourism in Europe is like this, it is mentioned in many sources in the literature that countries such as China and India were also suitable destinations for health tourism in ancient times. While there is no in-depth information about the Far East, it is said that health tourism, which started in Europe in the ancient Greek period, continued in the following years and ages. It is also said that it is increasing, especially due to the unhealthy conditions of Medieval Europe. (Badulescu, D. and Badulescu, A., 2014). At that time, Europeans began to travel to mineral waters, thermal lakes and areas, and sea shores, which were said to be healing, in order to find healing and improve their health. (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2007). Today, thermal waters, sea shores and mineral waters, which are said to be healing, continue to be popular destinations of health tourism for the same reason, that is, because they are thought to be healing.

For this reason, today the old Rooma healing and treatment centers have come to the fore again and again and have been the subject of various researches. However, in addition to these healing miracles, the popularization of medical tourism accelerated with the development of medical science and the popular doctors of the age. It is also known that especially individuals who have capital and sufficient financial means travel to receive services and treatment from these popular doctors for medical treatment. After this history, the emergence of globalization in the modern world, the rise of capitalism, the ease of traveling from one country to another, the development of medical science, etc. Due to many factors, "medical tourism" continues to become an increasingly popular phenomenon day by day. According to Fetscherin and Stephano (2016), traveling abroad to access quality health services is not a new phenomenon and was especially popular from the 18th century to the 20th century. During this period, individuals were traveling from their country to the United States and developed countries of Europe, which were developed in the field of modern medicine, in order to receive quality medical treatment and health services. While this trend included medical travel to developed countries between these centuries, it began to reverse towards the end of the 20th century with the influence of globalization and capitalism, and a medical tourism cycle emerged from developed countries to developing countries, and this phenomenon still continues today, from developed countries to developing countries.

Medical Aesthetic Tourism (Cosmetic Tourism)

In today's world, where the importance given to appearance is increasing, surgical and non-surgical aesthetic procedures are becoming a trend; therefore, a new type of medical tourism, called "cosmetic tourism" in the literature, has emerged within medical tourism. (Kim and Kim, 2020; Lee and Kim, 2018). Medical aesthetic tourism is a type of tourism that aims to eliminate appearance defects and signs of aging. The dominant motivation in this tourism journey is to improve the aesthetic appearance, increase the self-confidence of individuals with the new appearance they demand, and thus provide mental and spiritual well-being. (Eugenia, P. 2016).

Medical aesthetic tourism, which is a component of health tourism and is colloquially referred to as "cosmetic tourism" or "aesthetic tourism," allows individuals to experience plastic surgery, non-surgical medical aesthetic procedures (such as fillers and botox), and various

treatments for a healthy life and a more beautiful and younger look. It involves travelling to different regions for image and renewal purposes. Conell, who has authored numerous books and academic studies on the subject of medical tourism, highlights the contributing elements in his 2016 article: advancements in cosmetic surgery, hospital corporatization and privatisation, and globalisation.

Medical aesthetic tourism is considered a sub-branch of medical tourism. According to Lunt and Carrera (2010), medical aesthetic tourism, also known as cosmetic tourism, aims to integrate recreational and rejuvenating procedures to give individuals who have the procedures a younger and more aesthetic appearance, thus increasing their beauty and self-confidence. (Lunt and Carrera, 2010). These applications include many applications on individuals' faces and bodies, as well as hair procedures. For example, it may include body-related aesthetic procedures such as breast augmentation, breast lift, and liposuction, as well as surgical procedures focused entirely on the face area, such as rhinoplasty (rhinoplasty), facial rejuvenation, and face lift. While these are procedures that require surgery, there are also procedures that do not require surgery within cosmetic tourism. We will define these procedures as "non-surgical aesthetic procedures" throughout the study. Among the non-surgical aesthetic procedures, in addition to procedures that provide rejuvenation and beautification through injection in the facial area, such as Botox, filling, chemical peeling, cellulite removal, and similar procedures, there are also non-surgical procedures for the body area. On the other hand, hair transplantation is another aesthetic procedure preferred, especially by men.

Nowadays, the importance given to beauty and appearance worldwide is increasing day by day, especially with the influence of celebrities and social media phenomena. (Yıldırım, S, 2022) With the increasing popularity of cosmetic procedures, individuals began to resort to various aesthetic methods to make themselves look more beautiful and younger, under the influence of traditional and social media. While looking more beautiful, younger, and more attractive is shaped by the perception of beauty that is visible to society under the influence of the media, individuals' interest in cosmetic procedures that serve this perception is increasing day by day. (Jin et al., 2019).

In addition to the influence of traditional media and social media, advances in medical technologies have led to a much wider range of more effective and safer cosmetic procedures. Especially the recent medical changes and new cosmetic procedures that are less traumatic and have faster healing processes have further increased the interest of individuals in aesthetic procedures. Bae and Choi (2019) argue that this situation is also effective in increasing interest in cosmetic tourism. On the other hand, of course, cost is another important factor for individuals who request aesthetic procedures. The main reason for the increase in medical aesthetic tourism can be explained by the fact that countries such as Turkey, which offer treatment at much more affordable prices, offer these aesthetic procedures. When individuals who demand aesthetic procedures go into cost research, they encounter countries with relatively low costs, such as Turkey, which is seen as one of the important reasons that pushes individuals to cosmetic tourism. (Cavkaytar and Şahin, 2018).

Rationale and Objectives of the Study

Focusing on the above-mentioned issues, in recent years, with the influence of globalization, individuals' search for high quality and affordable medical treatment methods beyond the borders of the country has accelerated, and for this reason, the medical tourism industry has become increasingly popular.

In today's world, where medical tourism is becoming increasingly popular, another fact that is rapidly developing and becoming popular in the field of medicine is aesthetic procedures. Individuals' quest to change their appearance and increase their self-confidence by becoming more beautiful has led to an increase in the demand for aesthetic procedures worldwide. This created a new and niche category within the medical tourism industry, titled "medical aesthetic tourism". While individuals were seeking quality and affordable healthcare services for the aesthetic procedures they needed to change their appearance, medical tourism was opening the doors of an alternative world for these individuals.

Turkey, with its high-quality medical infrastructure, specialist doctors, modern hospitals and state-of-the-art medical devices, has become a country that specializes in "aesthetic" procedures and offers a wide range of alternatives to individuals' aesthetic needs, from facial rejuvenation to body shaping and even hair transplantation. When these features of Turkey are supported by factors such as affordable price structure and easy transportation, Turkey has become a prominent destination in medical aesthetic tourism. However, the factors affecting individuals' preference for Turkey as a medical tourism destination for aesthetic procedures have not been adequately investigated in the literature. Therefore, in this qualitative investigation, these factors will be examined in depth by conducting semi-structured interviews with both medical tourists and medical aesthetic providers, aesthetic doctors, after a comprehensive literature review.

This investigation aims to fill this gap in the literature with the following objectives:

- To determine the main factors affecting individuals' choice of Turkey as a medical tourism destination for aesthetic procedures,
 - To investigate the impact of the quality of Turkey's healthcare services and the expertise of doctors and healthcare personnel on individuals' preference for Turkey as a medical tourism destination for aesthetic procedures,
 - To question the reasons for Turkey's reputation and branding in the medical tourism sector and to understand the role of specialization in aesthetic procedures,
 - To question the role of the price advantage provided by Turkey in the medical tourism sector in individuals choosing Turkey for aesthetic procedures,
 - To question the effect of convenience and accessibility on Turkey's preference in the medical aesthetic tourism sector,
 - To analyze the communication and marketing strategies used by Turkey in the field of medical aesthetic tourism.
 - To analyze the impact of patient experiences on Turkey's development in the field of medical aesthetic tourism.
- This study aims to contribute to the literature by examining these objectives in broad outline and examining individuals' preference for Turkey as a medical tourism destination for aesthetic procedures.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Medical Tourism Growth Worldwide

In the "Introduction" section of the study, definitions of health tourism, medical tourism, and cosmetic tourism are included. It has been mentioned that medical tourism has gained momentum with globalization. In this part of our study, we will examine the development of healthcare services around the world after globalisation.

Globalisation is mentioned in many sources in the literature as an important reason why health tourism has become popular with the acceleration of international travel, the development of medical science, and, of course, technology. In their research investigating the relationship between globalisation and health tourism, Faisal and Dhusia (2022) highlight a shift from the industrial expansion of health tourism in the 20th century to its current emergence as a "niche" sector internationally and in many countries.

Health tourism, which is the subject of our study and defined as a "niche sector" by Faisal and Dhusia (2022), has changed considerably since its origin in recent years. According to Pocock and Phua (2011), the increase in demand for medical healthcare services is a global phenomenon that is completely dependent on economic development, causing an increase in income and education levels. Health tourism, whose history we have mentioned before, initially included travel from underdeveloped countries to developed countries that are highly competent in the field of health. However, in recent years, due to increasing costs and long waiting queues in developed countries, this situation has been the opposite today. It has turned into travels from developed countries to developing countries. (Conell, 2013; Gan and Frederick, 2011).

Today, medical tourism has turned into a travel movement from developed countries to developing countries such as Turkey, Thailand, Singapore, and India (Bookman and Bookman, 2007).

According to the report prepared by Grand View Research (GVR), the value of the global medical tourism market was 9.7 billion US dollars in 2022, and this rate is expected to grow by 25.2% in 2030. With advances in health technology, rising costs, long queues and waiting times in developed countries, and increasing demand for specialised treatments, more and more people are choosing to seek treatment and receive medical services abroad, according to report providers. This trend leads to the continuous expansion of the medical tourism market.

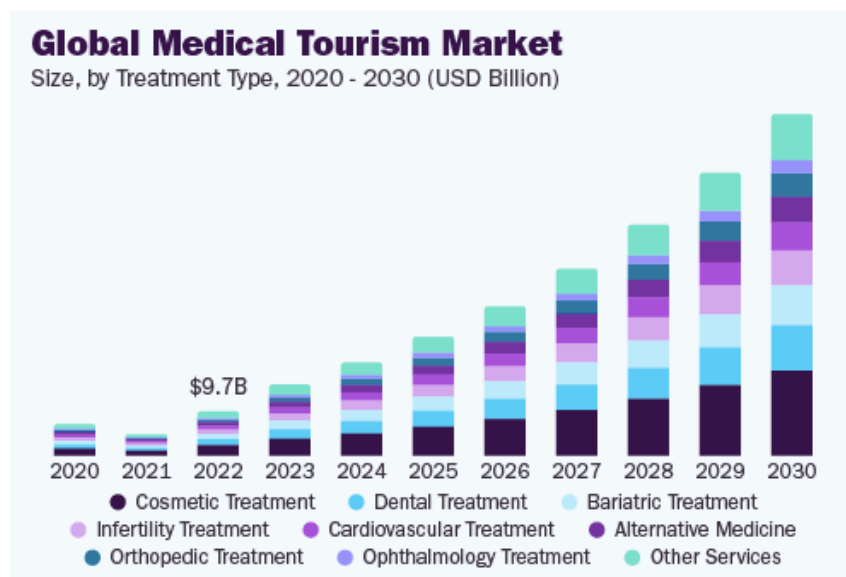


Figure 1 Global Medical Tourism Statistics (Grand View Research, 2024)

Undoubtedly, factors such as social media, traditional media, and word-of-mouth marketing (WOM) play an important role in this issue, which we will examine in detail in the following sections of our research. Another factor that may explain the significant growth in the industry is the increasing demand for uninsured procedures such as gender reassignment surgeries, reproductive therapy, dental reconstruction, and plastic surgery. The widespread popularity of health tourism can be attributed to its affordable cost, both financially and in terms of time. Especially in developed countries, long waiting conditions and queues consume time as well as high prices. Medical tourism stands out as an alternative rather than a time-consuming process and solves this problem. (GVR, 2024)

Medical Tourism Growth in Turkey

Turkey, a developing country, has become a popular destination in the field of medical tourism with its competitive prices compared to developed countries, modern hospitals with advanced technology, specialist doctors, and healthcare personnel. In this part of the study, the development of health tourism in Turkey will be discussed.

The tourism sector in Turkey began to gain importance after the Second World War and experienced significant growth in this sector in the following years. (Bahar and Brito, 2013). Thus, the economic returns of the tourism sector caused tourism to develop policies supported by the state, and with the "First Development Plan" implemented in Turkey in the 1960s, the health tourism sector became a state-supported policy. (Öztürk and Bayat, 2011). Another development that will give significant impetus to the development of this policy and medical tourism is the privatisation of the Turkish health sector with the decree announced in Turkey on January 24, 1980. (Öçal and Çiçek, 2017). With this privatisation initiative and the "Health Transformation Programme" (Kılavuz, 2018) implemented in 2003, the progress of medical tourism in Turkey was facilitated. Private hospitals in Turkey have begun to give importance to medical tourism since the early 2000s, and special departments have been established in hospitals to meet the needs of overseas patients for medical tourism purposes. (Çetinkaya and Özgür, 2016). According to Özşarı and Karatana (2013) medical tourism has gained momentum in Turkey, especially as private hospitals began to give privileges to this field. Many hospitals, especially first class private hospitals with the comfort of a five-star hotel, have started to participate in medical tourism fairs held around the world. In addition, these private hospitals have established satisfaction-oriented "Foreign Patient Departments" in order to provide better service to foreign patients

Health tourism has started to gain momentum since 2013, when health tourism-specific development plans for health institutions were published. (Yılmaz and Aktaş, 2021). In addition, special state funds have been allocated to support projects related to medical tourism within the country, and medical tourism has been supported by state policies and funds in every sense (Tontuş, 2017). In addition to all these government policies, UŞHAŞ (International Health Services Joint Stock Company) was established in 2019 by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Turkey in order to promote and provide the services offered in Turkey in the field of international health services. (Uşhaş, 2024)

Turkey, which has become the focus of many academic articles and research due to its increasing importance in the field of medical cosmetics, has also begun to attract the attention of medical tourists and has also been the subject of important research in the literature. Thanks to the momentum it has achieved, Turkey has achieved success in this field and has become one of the top 10 countries in the world in medical tourism rankings. (Kılavuz, 2018)

Many important factors play a role in Turkey becoming one of the most popular destinations for health tourism. The first of these is that Turkey is located at the intersection of the Asian and European continents and can easily reach many countries, offering easy access and accessibility for patients coming from abroad. (Cavkaytar, 2013). This location is especially advantageous for patients coming from developed countries in Europe. In addition, hospitals, clinics, and health facilities in Turkey have high-tech devices and medical equipment at the same level as developed countries. The technological and modern infrastructure in the health system is supported by trained, certified, expert, and qualified physicians and healthcare personnel. (Seker et al., 2019). In addition, by offering a more affordable price structure compared to developed countries, it offers a competitive price advantage to patients and promises serious cost savings. (Sungur et al., 2017).

On the other hand, it is seen that the Turkish population living abroad is also a serious factor in Turkey being one of the important medical tourism destinations. In addition to the Turkish population living abroad coming to Turkey as medical tourists, they also promote the health services and medical infrastructure in Turkey to other non-Turkish people living abroad through word-of-mouth marketing (WOM). (Fesen and Erdoğan, 2018). In this context, in the following sections of this study, this issue will be examined in more detail by interviewing patients who come to Turkey from different countries for medical aesthetic tourism and Turks living in other countries.



Figure 2 Statistics of Number of Healt Tourists Visiting Türkiye (USHAŞ,2024).

According to USHAS (International Health Services Joint Stock Company) data, a total of 1,398,504 people visited Turkey as medical tourists in 2023, and an income of 2,307,130 thousand US dollars was generated in the medical tourism sector in Turkey in the same year.

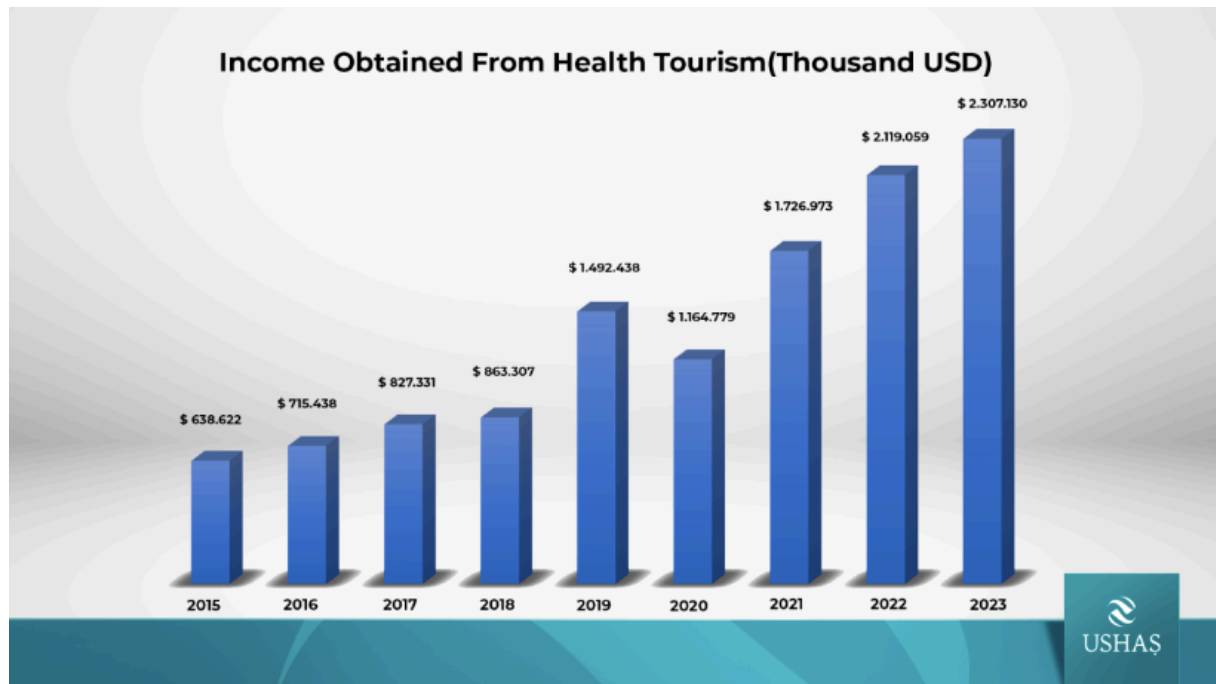


Figure 3 – Statistics of Income Obtained From Health Tourism for Turkey (USHAŞ, 2024)

According to USHAŞ data, Turkey's "Income Obtained From Health Tourism" graph can be seen in Figure 2, and "Number of Health Tourists Visiting Turkey" statistics can be seen in Figure 3. Turkey has had an increasing momentum in the medical tourism sector since 2015. It is seen that this increasing momentum only started to decline in 2020, when international travel obstacles were experienced, and it is appropriate to interpret this as the effect of the worldwide pandemic due to COVID-19.

In addition, serious efforts are being made by the Turkish government to promote medical health tourism in Turkey. In order to brand Turkey as a destination in health tourism and to create a brand from Turkey, the "Heal in Turkey" platform was created with the support of the Ministry of Commerce. This platform has received 100% support for 5 years with the new Ministry of Commerce support package published in the Official Gazette on April 20, 2022. (Özer, F. and Yıldırım, F. 2022).

In the following sections of this research, the development of medical tourism on an international scale will be examined, focusing especially on its development in Turkey. In addition, the main factors and motivations that influence individuals' choice of Turkey for cosmetic procedures, which is a sub-sector of medical tourism, will also be analysed.

The Rising Aesthetic Procedure Demand within The Medical Tourism Industry

In the medical tourism industry, especially in recent years, various aesthetic operations have become increasingly popular. While medical tourism, in its origins and past, generally focused on "life-saving" and necessary health procedures, recently, on the contrary, there has been a significant increase in the demand for cosmetic procedures, aesthetic operations, and aesthetic procedures that will enhance the self-confidence of individuals by beautifying their appearance. (Connell, 2013). This demand is even greater in developing countries such as Turkey, especially for individuals looking for both affordable and high-quality cosmetic operations. (Bookman and Bookman, 2007).

According to Gan and Frederick (2011), the rapid development of medical aesthetic tourism depends on the use of innovative medical technologies, the presence of trained physicians and medical personnel, and, of course, the competitive price structure in these countries, which attracts the attention of medical tourists. In addition to aesthetic operations such as rhinoplasty, breast aesthetics, and liposuction, aesthetic procedures that do not require surgery, such as botox and fillers, have become popular procedures for medical tourists. Moreover, in countries like Turkey, the idea of combining these procedures and medical needs with the holiday experience is quite attractive and effective. (Heung, Kucukusta and Song, 2011). Looking at the issue from an economic perspective, Naranong and Naranong (2011) focused on the economic advantages that medical tourism and its subtitle, medical aesthetic tourism, provide to countries. Accordingly, medical tourists extend their holidays after medical procedures in order to benefit from tourism privileges in the country they are in. This also contributes economically to the tourism industry through the medical tourism industry, causing large increases in income for the local economy. As a matter of fact, the support of the medical tourism industry in developing countries by government incentives and laws is one of the most important proofs of this.

According to the 2022 report, which is the most current report published in 2023 by the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ISAPS), which was founded in 1970, a total of 33 million, 844 thousand, and 293 aesthetic procedures were performed worldwide in 2022. While 14 million 986 thousand 982 of these are aesthetic interventions requiring surgery, 18

million 857 thousand 311 are botox, fillers, hair removal, chemical peeling, etc. It is divided into non-surgical aesthetic procedures.

According to the ISAPS (2022) report, the most popular aesthetic procedures requiring surgery worldwide are liposuction with a rate of 15.4%, breast augmentation with a rate of 14.5%, eyelid surgery with a rate of 9.4%, abdominoplasty with a rate of 7.9%, and breast lift with a rate of 6.4%. and rhinoplasty, with a rate of 6.3%. When we look at non-surgical procedures, the most preferred procedure around the world is botulinum toxin, which temporarily eliminates fine lines by freezing them with the help of an injection, popularly known as Botox. Hyaluronic acid applications are in second place with 22.9%, hair removal procedures rank third with 9.5%, and chemical peeling follows with 4.5%.

A demographic analysis of the report reveals, as anticipated, that women comprise a significant portion of this industry. In contrast to the 86.2% rate of female patients undergoing surgical cosmetic procedures, the 13.8% rate is attributed to male patients. The report reveals that the proportion of female patients undergoing non-surgical cosmetic procedures is 85.7%, whereas the proportion of male patients is 14.3%. In terms of age distribution, individuals between the ages of 18 and 34 have the greatest demand for aesthetic procedures, followed by those between the ages of 35 and 50. Patients under the age of 17 and those over the age of 65 are ranked last, while those between the ages of 51 and 64 are ranked third. Based on the information provided in the ISAPS (2022) report concerning medical tourism, it is observed that the global mean for aesthetic procedures in destinations frequented by individuals from other nations for "cosmetic tourism" is 18%. Turkey ranks fourth globally, with an average of 28.7% in this domain. Mexico is ranked first with an average of 33.8% medical tourism, followed by Thailand with 29%, Colombia with 30.9%, and Thailand with 30.9%. In particular, the significance and popularity of Turkey as a tourist destination in the realm of "cosmetic tourism" is unequivocally demonstrated by these figures. While "dental aesthetics" and "hair transplantation," which fall under the umbrella of "cosmetic tourism," are not addressed in this report, the country's ranking as the fourth in the world may be slightly deceptive. By including these figures, it is conceivable that Turkey, which is renowned for attracting a large number of travellers for hair transplantation and dental aesthetics, will rank among the top three in a forthcoming study. According to the data under the "cosmetic tourism" heading of the report, the highest number of tourists coming to Turkey for aesthetic procedures comes from Germany in the first place, England in the second place, and Switzerland in the third place. (ISAPS, 2022)

Factors Influencing The Choice of Destination for Aesthetic Procedures

In the medical aesthetic tourism sector, individuals' decision-making processes may result not from just one factor but from the interaction of multiple factors. According to Smith and Forgione (2007), while the country's security, economic and political situation, and regulatory standards are important considerations when individuals choose a medical tourism destination, factors such as costs, accreditation, quality of health services, and physician training are also important considerations when choosing medical facilities.

In this part of the study, all these factors that cause individuals to choose Turkey as a medical tourism destination for aesthetic procedures will be examined. In other words, the factors underlying the success of Turkey, which is the 4th most popular country in the world in medical tourism in the field of aesthetics, according to the data of the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ISAPS), will be examined.

In the field of aesthetic procedures, the decision-making process begins with individuals determining their needs. In this process, individuals enter into a comprehensive research process after determining their needs and desires, collect information, and after the information they collect, they communicate by choosing the alternatives that best match their expectations among the available options. Individuals can contact intermediary institutions to carry out these transactions, or they can also directly contact the doctor or healthcare institution. (Özcan, A., Simsar, A. and Erkasap, A, 2020)

But in this process, what are the factors that push or pull individuals to have aesthetic procedures in Turkey? This will be examined in this part of the study.

Quality of Health Services and Educated Doctors

First of all, one of the most important factors that make medical tourism attractive for international patients is the quality of the healthcare professionals of that medical tourism destination for individuals and the advanced level of healthcare technologies in that country. (Bookman & Bookman, 2007).

Although the literature generally emphasises the price advantage of developing countries, Turkey is known not only for its historical and natural beauties, cultural heritage, geographical location, and low price advantage, but also for its modern healthcare institutions, high-tech

medical devices, qualified, educated, and quality doctors and healthcare personnel. It has become one of the most preferred destinations for health tourism. (Bulut A. and Şengül H. 2019).

According Özsarı and Karatana (2013) the fact that there are many hospitals in Turkey that provide modern, high-quality services, have qualified healthcare personnel and high technological equipment is one of the important factors in Turkey's preference in medical aesthetic tourism.

In addition, in the literature by Bahar, B. and Akyürek, B.D. (2022), as a result of the interviews conducted with foreign tourists, the common opinions of medical tourists about Turkey's strengths in the health sector are as follows:

- Advanced technological infrastructure,
- Experienced and successful doctor staff,
- Fast execution of all decision processes,
- Attentiveness of support staff.

It is possible to summarize all of these issues with the quality of healthcare services and the presence of qualified doctors and healthcare personnel in Turkey.

Trust & Credibility

In a "vital" issue such as health, the reliability and reputation of healthcare institutions and professionals are one of the most important factors not only for international tourists but also for all local and foreign people. It is a very difficult process to gain the trust of tourists on a critical issue such as health in the international arena, especially in an industry such as medical tourism. In this context, international accreditation and quality assurance certificates are very important to document certain quality standards. (Aydin, G. and Karamahmet, B. 2017). According to Kılavuz (2018), Türkiye is the second country with the most accreditations with JCI in the world.

The inspections applied to health institutions in Turkey have gained the trust of medical tourists with the accreditation and internationally valid certificates of these institutions.

Cost-effectiveness

Affordable price and cost-saving effect are one of the most important factors for individuals to choose medical tourism destinations. (Crooks, et al. 2010). According to Connell (2006), the most important factors that push medical tourists to seek treatment in other countries are favourable exchange rates, low labour wages, and attractive health care prices determined by state-of-the-art equipment.

Especially individuals traveling from developed countries to developing countries such as Turkey encounter very affordable and accessible prices when compared to their own countries. (Connell, 2013). While affordable aesthetic procedures offer international patients the opportunity to save money on medical procedures, there is no doubt that experiencing holidays in countries such as Turkey makes Turkey a more attractive destination in terms of medical aesthetics. (Hanefeld et al., 2015). Additionally, offering financing alternatives and payment plans for medical aesthetic treatments is another financial advantage for medical tourists. (Hall, 2013). According to Bookman (2007), another detail that appeals to international patients is that they have the advantage of having multiple procedures performed in the same medical facility at relatively lower costs.

Time-effectiveness

According to Heung, Küçükusta and Song (2011), one of the most important reasons for medical aesthetic tourism is time efficiency. Patients who have long waiting times in their own countries prefer treatment abroad to save time and receive the treatment they request in a shorter time. This also applies to long waiting times and access to doctors, treatment and cosmetic procedures, with many patients experiencing long wait times for such procedures, sometimes exceeding several months. (Lunt et al., 2014). In developing countries such as Turkey, on the contrary, waiting times are relatively shorter and patients can access the treatment and medical services they request in a much shorter time. (NaRanong and NaRanong, 2011). Therefore, the efficiency it provides in terms of time management is one of the important motivations for choosing Türkiye and similar countries.

Location Advantage of Turkey

Numerous authors in the literature claim that Turkey's geographic position and "easily accessible" status actively contribute to its popularity as a destination for medical tourism. Turkey's physical location at the meeting point of Asia and Europe was highlighted by Conell (2011), who also highlighted that Turkey benefits from its closeness to Russia and the Middle East. According to Kılavuz (2018), Turkey is in a very central location, only 2-3 hours away from developed European countries and major cities in the Middle East. In addition, the fact that Turkey has one of the airline companies that fly directly to the most destinations in the world, such as Turkish Airlines (THY), is another important issue for its easy accessibility. (Tontuş,2018). Another advantage underlined by Kılavuz (2018) is that citizens from more than 110 countries can enter Turkey without a visa. In addition to all these advantages, Turkey is also located close to relatively low-income Albania, Georgia, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and former Soviet-bloc countries.

Specialized Procedures

The fact that Turkey has become a brand and specialises in some aesthetic procedures is one of the factors that make Turkey attractive in medical aesthetic tourism. According to the data of the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ISAPS), the fact that it ranks 4th in the world average in aesthetic procedures confirms this insight.

According to ISAPS (2022) data, liposuction, rhinoplasty, breast augmentation, and eyelid surgery are the most preferred aesthetic surgery procedures in Turkey. The most preferred non-surgical procedures in Turkey are botox, fillers, and hair removal. Although hair transplantation and dental aesthetics are not included in the ISAPS report, it is known that Turkey is very popular and branded in these two fields. According to Özsarı and Karatana (2013), thanks to this branding and specialisation, Turkey has a serious advantage over other countries in the field of medical tourism, especially in aesthetics, eye, dental, and in vitro fertilization. According to Sağ and Zengül (2019), aesthetic procedures and hair transplantation are the main services received by medical tourists in Turkey. For this reason, Turkey has become a popular destination for plastic surgery.

Özcan, Simsar, and Erkasap (2020) also emphasise that Turkey has become a global leader in aesthetic procedures, especially in the "hair transplant" sector, and they state that Istanbul is a global hair transplant centre.

Digital Media Impact

Nowadays, digitalization has become so widespread and affected our daily lives that the effects of digitalization are also seen in consumer behavior. Social media, in particular, seems to be a very effective tool that persuades and directs consumers to buy something. The influence of influencers and celebrities on their followers on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and X also affects the purchasing behavior of these followers. (Yıldırım, S., 2022) This situation plays a decisive role in the medical tourism sector in consumers' choice of doctors, surgeons and the country where they want to perform medical procedures. In this way, doctors and medical aesthetic centers have the opportunity to announce and promote themselves through social media tools and digital channels, while also having the advantage of communicating with their patients on the other side of the world. This means; Today, social media, websites and the digital world have a very important impact on shaping and determining consumer behavior regarding plastic surgery and other aesthetic procedures.

In addition, Yıldırım (2022) emphasizes the importance of social media such as Instagram, where aesthetics and visuality are at the forefront, in shaping the perception of beauty. Therefore, social media channels such as Instagram, where the perception of aesthetics and beauty is created, have also made a significant contribution to aesthetic procedures. Conell defined this issue in 2011 as the influence of the media and celebrity culture, at a time when digital media had not yet penetrated into every aspect of our lives. According to Conell (2011), media and celebrity culture have evolved into increasing materialism and commodification of the body, and this transformation has supported plastic surgery.

The "Holiday and Tourism" Attraction of Turkey

International patients are attracted to the opportunity to integrate medical travel into a holiday experience, while having their medical treatments provided by experts. This advantage is a factor that increases the motivation and comfort of medical tourists. (Heung, Kucukusta and Song, 2011). Undoubtedly, countries such as Turkey, where there are many touristic entertainment centers, shopping malls and different experiences in every city, can become centers of attraction for this reason.

The fact that a country has attractive touristic features may be one of the factors that play a role in choosing that country as a medical tourism destination. (Fetscherin and Stephano, 2016). While Turkey has the advantage of offering cultural and historical tourist sites, cities with magnificent views, shopping malls, and many attractive experiences for tourists, it is quite understandable that this advantage is also attractive for medical tourists.

Medical Tourism Agencies and Facilitators

Medical tourism covers a wide network that affects many sectors such as accommodation and transportation, as well as the health sector. While medical tourism travel agencies and service providers support the travel processes of international patients, they also provide services in many areas, from doctor-patient relations to guidance and translation services. (Connell, 2016) The convenience and accessibility of medical tourism destinations are also one of the most important determinants in the decision-making processes of medical tourists. (Lunt et al., 2014). In countries such as Turkey, agencies and intermediaries that provide convenience to patients at every stage, including pre- and post-operative care and needs, facilitate the experiences of medical tourists with the systematic measures they take. This is an important criterion for medical tourists to feel safe in a country they do not know. (Hanefeld et al., 2015). Such intermediaries and facilitators provide a multifaceted service to medical tourists through transportation coordination, accommodation, language translation and collaboration with healthcare providers. (Crooks et al., 2011). To summarise, the factors that lead individuals to have aesthetic procedures abroad are quite diverse and complex. It would be quite wrong for

any medical tourist to choose just one of these factors and say that this factor is the main motivation for getting treatment abroad.

Although it is not a direct determinant for tourists, another reason why they choose Turkey is undoubtedly the Turkish government's policies that contribute to health tourism. The Turkish government has taken proactive measures to encourage the growth of the sector due to the economic and social advantages of medical tourism. (Bookman and Bookman, 2007). Because medical tourism has very important benefits for countries, The primary reason for this is the economic benefits that medical tourism provides to the country. For this reason, governments are playing a strong role in supporting the medical tourism industry. (Pocock & Phua, 2011). Tourists' access to health infrastructure at affordable prices, the establishment of specialised medical tourism centres, and similar developments have been one of the important reasons why tourists prefer Turkey for aesthetic procedures. Supporting these factors were Turkey's policies and incentives in this field. (NaRanong and NaRanong, 2011). With the development of the government's health infrastructure and incentives in advertising and marketing, Turkey has become a centre of attraction not only in aesthetic procedures but also in many medical tourism fields.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Framework

In this study, we will proceed with the "Research Onion" model and the methodology of the study will be classified within the framework of this model. "Research Onion" is a model applied in academic research studies to classify the research methodology into different layers and to design and structure the research. (Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. 2009).

The research onion model is very valuable in defining and applying the research methodology starting from the outermost layer to the inner layers. At the outermost layer of the research onion model is the philosophical approach that shapes the epistemological and ontological orientations of the research and affects the types of knowledge that are sought to be revealed as a result of the research. (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). This is simply called "Research Philosophies". As we progress from the outer layer to the inner layer, there are research approach, research strategy, research selection, time horizon and finally research techniques and procedures. (Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. 2009).

In the next part of the study, the research methodology will be explained in all its layers by applying this onion model:

Research Philosophy

This study aims to investigate why individuals in the medical tourism industry choose Turkey for aesthetic procedures. While investigating these reasons, individuals are affected by many complex factors and an "interpretive" research philosophy is needed to explore these factors. The interpretive approach aims to understand these experiences in depth by interpreting them, as it will include the subjective experiences of the research participants, of course adhering to the literature. (Bryman, 2016).

The research is combined with the "interpretive" research philosophy; It will try to make sense of and explain the concepts of medical tourism and aesthetic medical tourism from the perspectives of all key stakeholders, including healthcare providers, doctors and both domestic and foreign medical tourists.

Research Approach

This research initially examines the phenomenon of medical tourism and reviews the existing literature and academic resources, and then, as a result of this academic information and data, the title of medical aesthetic tourism in Turkey, and finally how medical aesthetic tourism is implemented in Turkey and the factors affecting the preferences of medical tourists. follows with a "deductive" research approach. (Bryman, 2016).

Research Strategy

Since the basis of the research was based on medical tourism in the field of aesthetics in Turkey, the strategy of the research was a study design in which Turkey was the primary and only case. Therefore, we can define the research strategy as "case study". (Yin, 2017). The case study strategy is the most suitable strategy for this study because it allows the phenomenon of medical aesthetic tourism to be investigated in depth as a "case study" in Turkey. (Creswell and Poth, 2016).

Focusing on Turkey as the main case, it investigates why medical tourists choose Turkey as a medical tourism destination, and the reasons, factors and motivations that push individuals to choose Turkey in this choice are investigated by examining medical aesthetic tourism in Turkey in detail. In the research, Turkey was chosen as the "primary case study" because it is becoming an increasingly popular destination in terms of aesthetic treatments.

Research Choices

This study adopted a single-method qualitative approach and was based on in-depth and semi-structured interviews obtained through primary data collection method. (Bryman, 2016). Since the essence of the study aims to investigate the decision-making processes of individuals involved in medical aesthetic tourism in the selection of medical tourism destinations in a rich and contextual way, the "qualitative" approach is the most appropriate model. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018).

Semi-structured interviews aim to analyze the research questions by addressing the predetermined themes of the research and adhering to these themes, and while doing this, they enable the individuals participating in the interviews to share their experiences, insights and opinions in depth. Undoubtedly, this methodology is possible with a "qualitative" approach.

Time Horizon

This research should be defined as a "cross-sectional" research within the time horizon because it cross-sectionally examines the experiences of participants over a certain period of time. (Bryman, 2016). Because this research qualitatively addresses the cross-sectional views and experiences of the participants "over a certain period of time".

Techniques and Procedures

Data Collecting

In this research, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with the two most important groups of the medical tourism industry (aesthetic doctors dealing with medical tourism and medical aesthetic tourism patients).

"Purposive sampling strategy" was used when creating the samples. Because purposeful sampling, especially in qualitative research such as this research, aims to deliberately select participants based on their ability to provide the most appropriate and information-rich data for the research objectives. (Etikan et al., 2016). Therefore, it was very critical and important to use this method when creating samples of both patients and doctors in the research.

In the research, the selection of doctors who are the service providers of medical aesthetic tourism were chosen from three main areas of expertise. One of these doctors is an aesthetic dentist, another is a plastic surgeon specializing in rhinoplasty, and the other is an aesthetic doctor who specializes in non-surgical aesthetic procedures. These samples were specifically chosen because dental aesthetics, non-surgical aesthetic procedures, and rhinoplasty are among the most preferred aesthetic procedures by medical tourists in Turkey.

On the other hand, ten medical tourists were interviewed; five of them were international, and five of them were Turkish citizens residing overseas who travelled to Turkey for aesthetic procedures. All international tourists were selected from different countries. In the research, domestic tourists were as important as international tourists. Because, according to Connell (2016), local medical tourists and the Turkish diaspora living abroad are of great importance in medical tourism. Domestic tourists living abroad in developed countries generally return to their countries because they know the health services in the country they live in and because it is advantageous in price. Additionally, domestic medical tourists are generally underresearched and poorly documented because their economic importance is limited and they are not distinguished from local patients. (Connell, 2016) For precisely this reason, it is very important to include local medical tourists, who are not given sufficient importance in the literature, in this research in order to differentiate the research.

The professional participants in the study were determined months in advance by contacting online professional networks and personal networks. Medical tourists were identified and contacted through online and personal networks. In the next stage, references were taken from the participants in line with the research objectives and the "snowball sampling" model was applied with the suggestions of the individuals. (Patton, 2015). Since sufficient data saturation was reached, no further sampling was required. Due to the differences in geographical locations, the interviews were conducted over the phone, in the form of questions and answers, via WhatsApp voice recording or via teleconference, depending on the participants' preference. The duration of each interview was between 45 and 90 minutes. To protect the confidentiality of participants' personal data and facilitate the analysis process, these audio recordings were later transcribed. (Creswell ve Poth, 2016). The interviews were designed in the language preferred by the participants (Turkish or English), and different questions were asked to doctors and different questions to patients, adhering to the same goals and literature findings.

Developing Interview Guideline

Before conducting the interviews required for the study, the interviews were created to adhere to a certain guideline, even if they were conducted with different people and groups. The aim here was to not deviate from the subject of the study, to classify the research data, to ask research questions whose scope and purpose were determined to each group, and to facilitate analysis at the end of the research. For this reason, uniformity was ensured in the interviews

and all groups were asked questions appropriate to overarching themes in accordance with this interview guideline on basic topics. Interview questions created in accordance with this guideline are also included in the appendix of the study.

Data analysis

In this research, the data obtained through semi-structured interviews will be analyzed thematically, that is, the "thematic analysis" method, which is popularly used and accepted in qualitative data analysis, will be used as the data analysis method. The thematic analysis method enables recurring patterns in research data to be methodically recorded, examined and communicated. (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In this research, the factors affecting Turkey's aesthetic tourism destination selection, which is the subject of the research, were classified thematically, that is, coded, and analyzed with a "qualitative" approach, using the thematic analysis method. Thus, this data, which is repeated in the literature and within the scope of the research, will be coded throughout the research, allowing us to have a general understanding of the research and analyze the research in depth. Thematic analysis was employed in this study to enable the identification, categorization, and analysis of the key elements influencing individuals' decision-making processes regarding medical aesthetic tourism in Turkey, as well as the particular characteristics of this industry. (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Ethical Considerations

In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted in accordance with strict ethical rules and informed consent was obtained from all participants. In addition, transparency regarding the research process was ensured by ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. (Patton, 2015). Ethical approval for the research was also obtained from the institutional review board prior to the study.

Within the scope of the research, many precautions were taken to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the personal data of the participants. Voice recordings made with participants were transferred to written files, names and personal information provided by individuals were removed from the research files and stored, and are protected so that only the research team can access them. (Bryman, 2016).

Credibility and Trustworthiness of the Research

In this research, in order to ensure the reliability, accuracy and validity of a qualitative research, various special strategies recommended in the literature for the accuracy and reliability of the research methodology were used.

Prolonged Involvement: In this study, extensive time was spent in the research environment, a considerable amount of time was spent reviewing the literature, hospitals and clinics in Turkey—well-liked destinations for medical tourists—were personally visited, and solid relationships were formed with the participants in order to bolster the analysis and research findings and increase their reliability and accuracy. In this way, it was possible to conduct an in-depth rather than superficial examination during the research.(Creswell and Poth, 2016). Thus, a personal network was created, strong communication and trust relationships were established directly with the participants, and a comprehensive approach was made possible.

Triangulation: In this research, the "triangulation" strategy was applied to increase the reliability of the research findings. With this strategy, research findings are cross-checked and verified, thus their reliability is tested from different sources (Patton, 2015). During the research, the literature was scanned and academic sources were analyzed in depth, hospitals and clinics serving the medical tourism industry, which are the subject of the research, were visited and the necessary information, documents and resources were collected. In-depth interviews were conducted with expert aesthetic doctors, and the data collected from all these sources were compared with each other and their accuracy and reliability were checked. . (Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. 2009). Thus, a more comprehensive and accurate research was achieved by utilizing different perspectives and approaches, which is the main purpose of this strategy. (Bryman, 2016; Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Member Verification: After the interviews with the participants in the research, the "member verification" strategy was applied in order to increase the accuracy and reliability of the research. After the interviews, the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed, and all the data obtained from the interview, together with the findings obtained from the transcribed interviews, were shared with the participants again and their feedback and approval were requested. Thus, the accuracy and authenticity of the representation of interview participants was ensured and misunderstandings and margins of error were minimized. (Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. 2009).

Peer debriefing: In order to increase the accuracy and reliability of this research and also to improve the research, it was discussed with qualitative researchers who are experts in the field and their opinions and suggestions were received, and consultancy was also received during the research process. (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Thus, more meticulous and comprehensive research was enabled by including different perspectives in the process.

Thorough description: In this research, all comprehensive and specific descriptions of the research environment, interviews conducted in the field of medical aesthetic tourism in Turkey, and interview participants are presented, allowing for the generalizability of the data obtained from the research. (Bryman, 2016).

All of these strict methodologies mentioned above were meticulously applied throughout this research, thus trying to ensure the reliability and validity of the results of this qualitative research.

RESULTS

Demographics, backgrounds and characteristics of the participants

In this study, a total of 10 medical tourists, 5 Turkish and 5 international, were interviewed in semi-structured interviews with medical tourists to investigate why medical tourists prefer Turkey as a medical tourism location. It was important for Turkish medical tourists living abroad to be in different countries in order to compare the medical infrastructure of Türkiye and different countries. For this reason, although there was limited time, samples from different countries were selected whenever possible. Tables showing all necessary demographic information and which countries patients come from for which cosmetic procedures are provided are created as follows:

| Origin Countries of International Medical Tourists | Age | Gender | Operation |
|---|------------|---------------|------------------|
| Dubai | 29 | Woman | Botox + Filler |
| France | 36 | Woman | Rhinoplasti |
| Russian | 38 | Woman | Rhinoplasti |
| Ireland | 30 | Woman | Dental Aesthetic |
| U.K. | 42 | Man | Hair Transplant |

Table 1- Demographic Informations of International Medical Tourists Interviewed

| Countries Where Domestic Medical Tourists Reside | Age | Gender | Operation |
|---|------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Germany | 35 | Woman | Dental Aesthetic |
| Belgium | 38 | Woman | Dental Aesthetic |
| Japan | 36 | Woman | Rhinoplasti + Eyelid |
| Ireland | 36 | Woman | Rhinoplasti |
| U.K. | 39 | Man | Hair Transplant |

Table 2 - Demographic Informations of Domestic Medical Tourists Interviewed

Turkish medical aesthetic doctors were selected from a variety of speciality groups to provide a unique viewpoint for the study. In the research, there are an aesthetic dentist, a plastic surgeon specializing in rhinoplasty, and an aesthetic doctor who specializes in non-surgical aesthetic procedures. The dentist has specialised in aesthetic dentistry for 12 years, the plastic surgeon has 17 years of experience conducting rhinoplasties, and the aesthetic physician has 6 years of experience performing non-surgical treatments.

Emerging Themes from the Interview Data

As a result of the thematic analysis process meticulously conducted after verifying the data obtained from semi-structured interviews with doctors and domestic & international medical tourists, several main themes emerged that influence individuals' choice of Turkey as a medical tourism destination for aesthetic procedures. These themes are as follows:

- Quality of Medical Care & Expertise
- Affordability and Value for Money
- Specialised Treatments
- Reputation and Branding of the Destination
- Digital Channels & Social Media Impact
- Accessibility & Convenience
- Patient & Doctor Relations – Communication
- Safety & Regulatory Environment
- Sociocultural Factors

In the next stage of the study, the motivations and determinants that cause medical tourists to choose Turkey for aesthetic procedures will be investigated through these themes obtained from the interviews conducted with the thematic analysis method.

Main Motivations and Determinants That Affect Individuals' Preference for Turkey for Aesthetic Procedures

1- High-Quality Medical Care and Expertise of Healthcare Providers

All participants in all interviews stated that their main reason for selecting Turkey is that they value and prioritize quality healthcare services and the experience of their doctors over all other features, despite the literature placing more emphasis on Turkey's geographic location, cost advantage, and tourism attractions. Every medical tourist who joined the interview, whether domestic or international, acknowledges that "the quality of health and the expertise of their doctors are the most important motivation." In an interview, a Russian medical tourist who traveled to Turkey for a rhinoplasty operation stated the following: "Obviously, the country's climate, price advantage, and other factors made it an attractive option, but surgery is a highly serious and risky process. If you choose the incorrect doctor and medical service, you might die. For this reason, the quality of the medical care and the doctor were more crucial than the cost. I had surgery at one of Istanbul's top hospitals for this reason. I had a great surgeon and a comfortable operation after that. To be honest, I didn't believe I would heal from my surgery that quickly; so I am happy about this decision. I recommend my doctor to everybody who inquires about my nose, and I also recommend Turkey to anyone interested in plastic surgery."

All Turkish medical tourists living abroad said that the quality of Turkish healthcare services is similar to the healthcare services of the country they live in; nevertheless, Turkey has superior facilities and more experienced doctors in the field of "aesthetic procedures." A Turkish medical tourist living in Belgium also drew attention to the existence of luxury private hospitals in Turkey and summarised the situation as follows: "Except for the appointment system and lengthy wait times, Belgium's healthcare system is quite excellent when it regards "social healthcare services." However, Turkey has an advantage over other countries when it comes to special operations like "aesthetics" that are not covered by insurance because some private hospitals in Turkey offer services and they are as comfortable and high-quality as a five-star luxury hotel. Additionally, Turkish aesthetic doctors are very famous and well-known for their "aesthetic works" around the world. I believe that these factors are critical for the decision-making process for all of the medical tourists."

All international patients say that they are satisfied with the quality of healthcare services and doctors they receive in Turkey, that they will come to Turkey again "for plastic surgery," and that they recommend Turkey to their close circle.

All interviewed doctors also emphasised that Turkey's quality standards in the field of aesthetic procedures in the field of "medical tourism" are quite high and that, in addition to the education and experience of Turkish doctors, even other healthcare personnel are carefully selected.

2- Competitive Pricing and Value Proposition

Turkey's value proposition and competitive pricing advantage are unquestionably among the main reasons people choose the country for cosmetic operations. According to all of the domestic and international medical tourists who took part in the study, Turkey presents an attractive value at a lower cost than both their own countries and other countries. A Turkish medical tourist living in Japan expressed this price advantage as follows: "When I researched the cost of my nose surgery in Japan, I came across a price that was 4-5 times the price in Turkey. With this price, I can both have surgery safely, and I could have had a luxury holiday in Turkey with all of the expenses, and that's what I did."

A Turkish medical tourist living in Germany stated that her dentist in Germany performed an emergency intervention and directed her to Turkey for the remaining implant procedure. According to what the Turkish medical tourist said, the German dentist, knowing that she was Turkish, told his patient that she could get a more affordable and same-quality implant treatment for 1/3 of the price in Turkey.

International medical tourists also stated that one of the main reasons they prefer Turkey is the value proposition. A French medical tourist who underwent rhinoplasty commented: "The quality of healthcare I received in Turkey was outstanding, and the total cost, including travel and accommodation, was still well below what I would have paid in France. An easy decision to make."

Doctors also emphasise in their interviews that the price advantage is effective, and each of them stated that they make maximum efforts to maintain high-quality care services and standards while offering affordable price advantages.

In all interviews with both medical tourists and doctors, it has been revealed that the combination of high-quality medical care and a competitive price advantage is the most effective motivation for individuals to choose Turkey for their aesthetic procedures. Turkey's ability to offer high-quality aesthetic procedures at much more affordable prices than other countries gives the country a great advantage in the increasingly global medical tourism industry.

3- Specialized Procedures

Another key motivation for medical tourists coming to Turkey for aesthetic procedures is the availability of private treatments in the country that specialize in some areas, a very important factor that emerged in the interviews. In our interviews, both local and foreign medical tourists emphasized that they chose Turkey because it specializes in these special aesthetic procedures.

For example; The common point of local and foreign medical tourists coming from England was the "hair transplant" operation. Both medical tourists stated that they chose Turkey because it is one of the best countries in the field of "hair transplantation".

The rhinoplasty specialist plastic surgeon we interviewed said: "It is a known fact that some countries are the best in their field and carry out specialized treatments in some procedures. For example, just as Thailand is the first country that comes to mind in gender reassignment surgeries, Turkey is also in specialties such as rhinoplasty, dental aesthetics and hair transplantation." "It is a country that has doctors who are experts in these fields and has high successful surgery results and statistics. This is a very important factor for medical tourists."

The aesthetic dentist we interviewed confirmed this with the following words: "When it comes to dental aesthetics, Turkey is very famous, especially in European countries, for its price structure as well as its expertise in dentistry."

All the interviews we conducted have revealed that Turkey specializes in the field of "aesthetic procedures" and is therefore one of the reasons for preference in special aesthetic surgery operations. Hair transplantation, breast enlargement and breast reduction, dental aesthetics, eyelid aesthetics, etc. It turns out that Turkey, which has become an expert in many plastic

surgery procedures, is an important factor in why medical tourists choose Turkey, which is especially reputable in these areas. This reputation of Turkey, combined with its affordable price advantage and high quality health services, has made it an attractive destination for medical tourists.

4- Reputation and Branding of the Destination

According to the interviews, Turkey's reputation and branding in the field of health tourism has also been effective in individuals choosing Turkey as a medical tourism destination. In all our interviews, both local and foreign tourists stated that Turkey has become a brand in the field of aesthetic medicine and has a "positive" recognition.

All of the doctors interviewed stated that serious marketing activities were carried out on this issue, especially social media channels were used very professionally, and intensive promotional activities were carried out to make Turkey a leader in aesthetic medicine, and this was supported by the government.

All the patients interviewed said that the fact that Turkey is an expert and well-known country in the field of aesthetic medicine was effective in their decision-making process. A detail said by one of the doctors in the interviews was important: "The brand value and reputation created by the country in health tourism is a very strong factor to attract the attention of medical tourists. Recently, Turkey's increasing brand value has been reported in some countries in Europe to damage Turkey's reputation." Because there is a serious flow of money in health tourism, countries allocate special funds for this and follow serious policies. Despite this, a developing country has become one of the most important health tourism destinations in Europe and has become a brand in this field. It has reached a disturbing level. For this reason, complications and bad outcomes, which are perhaps even more frequent in Europe, have begun to be reported as if they were happening frequently in Turkey. The public should know this so that they can be careful when choosing their doctor and the health institution where they will have the procedure done, not only in Turkey but anywhere in the world. This is a very important and critical issue. However, I think that such exceptional and extreme situations are generalized and reported as if they were happening every day in Turkey, which is purposeful news made to damage Turkey's reputation and this branding process."

The medical tourist from Dubai whom we interviewed also said: "I come to Turkey once every 6 months for procedures such as filling and botox. I want to have my nose done in the near future, and of course, I will have it done in Turkey, as Turkey is the best in this field. "

In general, the interviews revealed that Turkey has a good brand reputation in medical aesthetic tourism and tourists are attracted by this reputation.

5- Digital Channels & Social Media Effect

Another important key motivation source that emerged in our interviews with both doctors and medical tourists is that the role of digital channels in choosing a medical tourism destination is quite large.

All of both domestic and international medical tourists stated that they made their decisions by searching on the internet and especially using social media channels when choosing a destination and their doctor. All medical tourists stated on social media channels that previous surgeries performed by their doctors were decisive in their decisions. They also added that they had their first interactions with doctors through digital channels and social media.

The French patient we interviewed explained this situation as follows: "I did a wide range of research on the internet before having rhinoplasty. The nose surgery results I saw on social media helped me choose both Turkey and my doctor. I remember looking at the social media images and saying yes, this is the nose I want. "

The rhinoplasty specialist plastic surgeon we interviewed summarizes this situation as follows: "Digital channels are very important to reach potential patients. We manage the pre-operative process through these digital channels before bringing the patient to Turkey. Since our geographical issues are different, we come to Turkey for pre-examination." We start video calls at least 3 months in advance with our patients who cannot come but reach us via the internet. They send us photos of the nose shape they want with images they found on social media, and we examine whether the nose shape they want is suitable for their facial features and skin and tell the patient "what needs to be done." "Then, we take photos from the patient in different perspectives and send them a preview of the nose shape we plan to create after the surgery, and by discussing it, we support our patients in the decision-making process. In short, the whole process is carried out through digital channels until the patient arrives in Turkey."

The Turkish patient living in Ireland explained her choice of doctor as follows: "Social media played a decisive role in my decision-making. I had a look that I dreamed of aesthetically, and to achieve this look, I reviewed the previous procedures performed by aesthetic doctors on social media. The one that best suited the look I wanted was "I started the process by contacting the doctors who received the results."

Another doctor we interviewed said: "Social media is one of the most effective promotional platforms for potential patients to see our references, and social media usage habits vary depending on the country. In some countries, Facebook, in some countries, Snapchat, in some countries, TikTok, in some countries "Instagram is more widely used. We are present in all these channels and we are getting returns from this."

The Turkish patient living in England said: "I found my doctor through social media. The procedures he had done before and the positive comments about these procedures played an important role in choosing my doctor. Later, apart from social media, I also looked at the comments about my doctor and the hospital where I would have the procedure on the internet. And they all affected me in a positive way."

In general, all our interviews have revealed that social media plays a decisive role in choosing a medical tourism destination, as well as in choosing a doctor based on the results of aesthetic operations.

6- Accessibility and Convenience

The interviews revealed that one of the most important factors in choosing Turkey for aesthetic procedures is convenience and accessibility.

The rhinoplasty specialist plastic surgeon, who is also a partner in the medical tourism agency, emphasized the following: "Another factor why medical tourists choose Turkey, especially for aesthetic procedures, is the convenience. There are many medical tourism agencies in Turkey, including the one in which I am a partner, and they provide services for aesthetic procedures."

They offer many services to patients who want to come to Turkey, from their travels to airport transfers, from luxury hotel accommodations to post-operative care services, and even from tourism guidance to translation services. Thus, a process such as "surgery", which is actually annoying and anxiety-provoking in every aspect, is thought out for the patients in advance. "And we are with them at every stage, which provides great convenience to medical tourists."

The international tourists interviewed also said that these opportunities were offered to them in almost every field of aesthetics in Turkey and that having so many facilitators made them feel comfortable. The patient from England stated the following on this subject: "I came with an agency that thought about details that I had not even thought about throughout the process and informed me in advance. They arranged my travel, hotel, and transfers, and this allowed me to get through such a stressful process very easily. I will need another aesthetic procedure in the future." "If I need it, I will come to Turkey again with the same agency."

In our interviews, we concluded that agency service is generally received in surgical procedures. Medical tourists tend to come without an agency for procedures that do not require serious and long-term care after the procedure, such as dental aesthetics and non-surgical aesthetic procedures. However, in operations that require long-term maintenance and operation, the choice may be towards a turnkey process. In addition, another result obtained from the interviews was that domestic tourists do not need the help of medical agencies. It has been determined that this need does not arise because they generally already know every detail of a country they have lived in in the past and Turkey is a country that domestic tourists can easily access.

However, all international patients stated that they received agency services for procedures requiring surgery and that these services were very effective in terms of accessibility and convenience.

In conclusion, the interviews showed that one of the main factors influencing people's decision about where to have aesthetic procedures is how easily accessible and convenient Turkey's medical tourism infrastructure is. This infrastructure includes travel, lodging, and after-care coordination for foreign visitors. In the context of international medical tourism, Türkiye has a considerable competitive edge thanks to this simplified patient experience.

7- Patient - Doctor Loyalty

All interviews revealed that doctor-patient communication and relationships are a very important factor in patients choosing Turkey for aesthetic operations. When both international and Turkish patients talked about their operations, their trust in their doctors was at the forefront. In addition, it was revealed in the interviews that patients adopted the doctors they chose for aesthetic procedures and described them with a positive adjective such as "my doctor". At this point, it can be said that doctor-patient communication also plays an important role in the selection of individuals and that this communication also creates doctor-patient loyalty.

All doctors interviewed stated that they had long-term communication with their patients and emphasized that this gave the patient confidence and comfort in a critical area such as "health" and "aesthetics". The aesthetic doctor, who specializes in non-surgical aesthetic procedures, stated the following: "I try to create a personalized experience with each of my patients. The work I do is an aesthetic job and the facial structure and aesthetic perception of each patient can be different from each other. For this reason, I personally analyze each of my patients, I listen to their requests and recommend the most suitable aesthetic procedures for each of their faces as a solution. Sometimes my patients may come to me with a request for a procedure that would not be suitable for their face. At this point, it is both ethical and professional for me to tell the patient that this treatment is not suitable for him or her and persuade him/her to do so. critical. This honesty and ethical stance generally pleases the patients and creates a certain trust between the patient and the doctor so that they completely entrust themselves to my aesthetic vision. In this way, I can establish long-term relationships with my patients and follow up their procedures regularly. I respond to their feedback after the transaction and I also take care of them after the transaction. This creates doctor-patient loyalty, I can establish long-term relationships with them, and this positive communication causes them to recommend me to others."

The aesthetic dentist also said the following on the subject: "I have had many international patients who initially came to Turkey for dental aesthetics only once, but then arranged their holidays in Turkey and started to have routine procedures done by me, such as regular dental check-ups and teeth cleaning. Dental treatment "Since it is a scary procedure for most people,

it is a great comfort for patients to do it with a dentist they trust. It is very important to establish correct communication and a trust-based relationship with the patient to ensure this continuity."

Rhinoplasty specialist plastic surgeon also stated that they started meeting and communicating with their patients at least 3 months before their aesthetic procedures, and that meeting patients' expectations and establishing a relationship of trust is critical for patients' satisfaction. "It is very important for us to meet our patients' expectations and ensure their satisfaction after the operation. This satisfaction motivates us. In addition, each patient who is satisfied with the procedure becomes our brand ambassador as a positive reference for us."

8- Safety & Regulatory Environment

In the interviews, all patients are very satisfied with the communication they established with their doctors and are positive about going to Turkey for a possible aesthetic procedure in the future. In addition, all patients said that they recommended their doctor to their friends, and some patients even referred people from their close circle to their doctor.

All interviews showed that the safety and regulatory environment in Turkey is an effective factor in individuals' decisions to have their aesthetic procedures performed in Turkey.

All the doctors we interviewed underlined that accreditations and all necessary regulations have been completed, they work in accordance with strict rules, regular inspections are carried out, patient safety is maximized and is their number one priority. They stated that all sanctions were applied for this and that patients were guaranteed that treatment was provided in a safe environment.

The British patient said the following: "The entire operation process was carried out in a very professional manner. Before the operation, I did a lot of research to be sure about safety and professionalism, and I came after making sure of Turkey's competence in this regard."

Positive feedback was received regarding this issue in all interviews, and it turned out that security is an important factor in individuals choosing Turkey for aesthetic procedures.

Strategies by Healthcare Providers to Attract Medical Tourists

Upon analysis of the interviews, it became evident that the reasons behind the people's choices and the tactics employed by the service providers significantly influenced Turkey's choice as a medical aesthetics destination.

We can list these strategies as follows:

- Investing in high technology, modern facilities and equipment
- Creating a healthcare team consisting of trained and experienced medical professionals
- Implementation of high quality standards and patient safety protocols
- Correct management of digital and social media channels
- Establishing long-term and healthy communication with patients and designing patient-doctor loyalty relationships
- Offering Personalized Treatment Methods to Patients
- To facilitate patient access and other concerns by establishing correct collaborations with reliable and accurate medical travel agencies and facilitators.

In the interviews, all doctors stated that they have been providing this service for years by applying these strategies and that this helps them maintain continuity.

In addition, the interviews showed that medical tourism agencies, as well as clinics, service providers and doctors, offer high quality standards to medical tourists, offer packages with different and alternative contents to patients, and move forward with the right marketing and communication strategies by using communication and media channels correctly, as well as service providers. proved to be critically important.

In Turkey, the sector of aesthetic medical tourism yields substantial economic advantages, including increased income, employment opportunities, and overall economic growth. Additionally, it enhances the expertise of healthcare personnel by promoting skill development and information transmission. Additionally, the sector has improved Turkey's standing as a centre for top-notch medical treatment. Nonetheless, there are a number of difficulties, including as capacity and infrastructural limitations, patient expectations and satisfaction

management, competition from other locations, and regulatory monitoring and enforcement. The nation's healthcare system is under pressure due to the industry's explosive expansion, especially in terms of facility capacity and specialised medical staff. For the sector to be competitive in the global market, it has to constantly innovate and enhance its offers. Despite these challenges, the industry's success is attributed to its ability to provide high-quality healthcare services.

Synthesis of Key Findings

Interviews with doctors and medical tourists serving in the medical tourism sector in Turkey have revealed that there are many important factors affecting Turkey's selection as a medical tourism destination in the field of "aesthetic procedures".

The quality and cost advantage of healthcare services in Turkey were the primary factors that all patients unanimously accepted and why they chose Turkey as a medical tourism destination. However, it turned out that Turkey's branding and becoming an expert country in the field of "aesthetic procedures" were decisive for all participants to choose Turkey. It turned out that Turkey's specialization in special procedures such as dental aesthetics and rhinoplasty had a significant impact on Turkey's preferability.

On the other hand, another key finding emerging from the interviews is that marketing and communication activities regarding health tourism in Turkey are also quite effective. In the interviews conducted as a result of these communication and marketing activities, all of the medical tourists stated that they found their aesthetic doctors through social media and contacted them through digital platforms. Doctors likewise underlined that they are in constant contact with their potential patients through both social media and digital platforms, and that digitalizing both appointments, preliminary meetings and communication activities is an essential and easiest way to contact and communicate with patients on the other side of the world. The interviews also revealed how important doctor-patient communication is and the fact that patients develop a loyalty relationship with their doctors due to their satisfaction. This doctor-patient loyalty was observed in all interviews with medical tourists.

Another important key finding that emerged from the interviews was the ease and accessibility that Turkey provides for aesthetic procedures. Especially with the influence of agencies and facilitators serving in the field of medical tourism, medical tourists can purchase a turnkey experience without having to think about other details such as travel and accommodation. This stands out as another important factor that makes Turkey attractive in the field of medical aesthetic tourism.

Another important finding that emerged from the interviews was the services provided by private hospitals in Turkey with the comfort of a 5-star hotel. We heard this important detail from both international and domestic tourists. It may not be a determining factor for patients coming to Turkey for the first time, but all medical tourists who have experienced aesthetic procedures in Turkey have stated that they recommend this comfortable experience to others and that they would definitely choose Turkey again for any health problems or aesthetic needs.

In all interviews, it was revealed that the safety and regulatory environment in the medical tourism industry in Turkey is also an important factor in choosing Turkey as a medical tourism destination. All of the interviews, the experiences of all local and international medical tourists were positive, and all of them stated that they would want to come to Turkey again if they needed a new medical procedure. They also added that they recommend aesthetic procedures in Turkey to all medical tourists to their close circle. We received similar data in interviews with doctors. Doctors stated that in addition to the marketing activities, a significant number of medical tourists also come to them upon recommendation.

DISSCUSSION

The main findings obtained as a result of the interviews conducted with medical tourists and doctors serving in the field of medical tourism within the scope of the research provided us with important information about why individuals choose Turkey as a medical tourism destination for aesthetic procedures. This part of the research is aimed at discussing the findings obtained as a result of the interviews by comparing them with academic sources.

First of all, it is stated in the literature that one of the most important factors that direct individuals to aesthetic operations in Turkey is the price advantage offered by Turkey. (Crooks et al., 2010; Connell, 2006; Hanefeld et al., 2015; Bookman, 2007). The interviews with both medical tourists and doctors confirmed that this price advantage is one of the important factors emphasized. Unlike the literature, all of the medical tourists who participated in the interview emphasized that their main source of motivation was the quality of health services in Turkey. In this respect, the research findings are similar to the research findings of Bahar and Akyürek (2022).

In the findings of this research, "perception of quality and safety" is included as the "primary source of motivation for medical tourists." In a "vital" issue such as health, which directly concerns human life, individuals stated that they are more sensitive to factors such as the quality of health services and the expertise of doctors rather than the cost.

One of the most important findings from the interviews is that Turkey has truly become a brand in the field of aesthetics. Medical tourists who come to Turkey, especially for hair transplantation and rhinoplasty, stated this in their interviews. This finding confirms Sağ and Zengül's (2019) claim that Turkey is specialised and branded in the field of aesthetics, especially "hair transplantation."

One of the research findings obtained from the interviews is that Turkey provides medical tourists with an advantage in terms of "access and convenience" to aesthetic procedures. In the literature, issues such as Turkey's geographical location and the abundance of direct flights due to the presence of an airline company such as Turkish Airlines have also been emphasised as factors that facilitate access to aesthetic procedures in Turkey. (Conell, 2013; Kılavuz, 2018; Tontuş, 2018). Although our research is actually a small sample, the fact that it consists of a wide target audience, from Japan to European countries and the Middle East, confirms this convenience.

The positive impact of medical travel agencies and facilitators on the medical tourism sector in Turkey was also confirmed in the interviews.

The interviews also show parallelism with the literature as they emphasise the long waiting lines of medical tourists living in countries such as Belgium and Germany. Therefore, the long waiting lines in developed European countries have confirmed the attractiveness of Turkey in the field of medical aesthetics, where service can be received in a much shorter time. (Heung et al., 2011; Lunt et al., 2014; NaRanong and NaRanong, 2011).

Although the research findings are parallel to the literature in many aspects, they also revealed topics for which academic resources are inadequate. One of these is the importance of digitalization in the medical tourism sector. All of the medical tourists we interviewed said that they had their aesthetic procedures done in Turkey and chose their doctor through social media and digital platforms. Although the importance of digital channels in medical tourism is mentioned in the literature, resources on this subject are limited. Our interviews with doctors also clearly reveal the importance of digital channels and social media communication. According to Yıldırım's research (2022), although these findings are quite common as a result of the digitalization process, the impact of social media and digital platforms is quite limited in the literature.

Although the research was conducted with a relatively small sample, all of the medical tourists who participated in the research stated that they were satisfied with the aesthetic procedures they performed. One of the important findings obtained during the research was the bond they established with their doctors and the doctor-patient bond. This positive communication and satisfaction actually creates a WOM effect for doctors and the medical tourism sector in Turkey. Lunt et al. (2014) also emphasised that recommendations and the WOM effect are very decisive

and effective in the medical tourism sector. The effect of word-of-mouth marketing and recommendation is also seen as the effect of Turks living abroad. Our research with local tourists has proven this. All local tourists stated that they recommended aesthetic procedures in Turkey to their close circle.

Another important point, which is limited in the literature but emphasised by medical patients in their satisfaction feedback, was that the service they received was quite luxurious and comfortable. Undoubtedly, this is an important detail for the comfort of patients during a scary process such as surgery.

In the research, medical tourists were also asked whether they were influenced by Turkey's other tourist attractions, and their motivations for coming back to Turkey for holiday and entertainment purposes were questioned. All international medical tourists answered this question positively, and even medical tourists who came to Turkey for non-surgical aesthetic procedures (such as dental aesthetics and botox) stated that they were already planning this. This is a finding that confirms that Turkey is an attractive destination for "holidays."

In summary, although the research findings are parallel to the sources in the literature, the other data it provides clearly reveal that the popularity of medical tourism in Turkey is fueled by multifaceted and complex motivations. This shows us that individuals who choose Turkey for plastic surgery depend on a multifaceted and complex set of factors rather than one or two main factors. Many factors, such as an affordable price policy, quality healthcare, doctors who are experts in their fields, Turkey's branding in some aesthetic applications, reputation, security, and the effect of social media and digital platforms, interact with each other and become motivation and driving forces for individuals.

CONCLUSION

This comprehensive qualitative investigation aimed to investigate the increasing importance of Turkey in aesthetic procedures as a medical tourism destination and individuals' motivations for choosing Turkey for aesthetic procedures. Interviews conducted with medical tourists and aesthetic doctors operating in the field of medical tourism within the scope of the investigation revealed the importance and popularity of Turkey in the field of "aesthetic procedures" through many different factors.

The findings of this investigation clearly reveal that Turkey offers quality health services at affordable prices to all citizens of the globalizing world, especially by branding itself in the field of "aesthetics". Turkey, which attracts the attention of medical tourists with affordable labor and costs due to increasing exchange rates, has also become a center of attraction for medical tourists with its quality healthcare services, high-tech medical devices and, of course, its expert and experienced doctors and healthcare personnel. Research findings have revealed the increasing reputation of Turkey in health tourism globally, especially in areas such as "rhinoplasty", "dental aesthetics" and "hair transplantation". On the other hand, research data has also determined that Turkey's attraction is not a coincidence, but is achieved by a strong marketing and communication strategy, as well as the use of digitalization and social media.

The study also revealed that Turkey offers comfort and convenience as well as trust and reputation to medical tourists with its modern hospitals and health services provided in the comfort of a five-star hotel. Another finding of the study in this context is Turkey's advantage in terms of "convenience and accessibility" in the field of medical aesthetic tourism. A significant portion of the international tourists interviewed underlined how the service they received from medical travel agencies made their lives easier during the surgery. In this respect, Turkey has become preferable due to its easily accessible geography and medical tourism agencies and facilitators that provide services in many areas such as travel planning, accommodation and airport transfers.

The findings of this investigation also revealed that marketing and communication issues are among the factors that favor Turkey's medical aesthetic tourism. Especially with the intense use of digital channels and social media, all of the medical tourists who participated in the research

said that they decided on Turkey and their doctor choices through digital media. Here, in addition to using social media as a "marketing" function, communication with potential patients is also very important. When this communication continues during and after the operation, the patient develops a loyalty relationship with his doctor and the likelihood of coming to the same doctor again for procedures that require routine check-ups and renewal increases. On the other hand, this positive communication brings satisfaction and patients can become brand ambassadors for both their doctors and medical tourism in Turkey. This situation was also encountered in the interviews; All of the patients who had aesthetic surgery and were satisfied with their procedures stated that they recommended the doctor and Turkey to their close circle. This satisfaction allows both Turkey as a medical tourism destination and the doctor to meet new and potential patients through Word of Mouth. Overall, the findings from this investigation have comprehensively revealed the factors that influence individuals' choice of Turkey as a medical tourism destination for aesthetic procedures. Quality of healthcare services in Turkey, expertise of doctors and healthcare personnel, price advantage, availability of special procedures, Turkey's strong brand perception and reputation, correct advertising and communication techniques, social media influence, access and convenience, doctor-patient loyalty and security. It has become clear that many factors, not alone but through their interaction, are a source of motivation for individuals. Thanks to these factors, Turkey is an attractive destination in the medical tourism sector in the field of "aesthetics".

These findings reveal some both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretical implications allow the development of a conceptual framework for understanding the factors in Turkey's selection as a medical aesthetic tourism destination. As practical inferences; The data obtained provides insights for Turkey to maintain and further increase its popularity in the medical tourism industry. These insights can be evaluated as follows: strategies in this field can be increased by accepting the impact of social media and digitalization, a wide range of options can be offered while maintaining the quality-price balance, more potential patients can be reached through word-of-mouth marketing by maximizing patient satisfaction, strategic marketing activities can be carried out with government supports, personalized and More studies can be done on specific procedures. With all these insights, Turkey can become one of the globally respected and branded leading destinations in the medical aesthetic tourism industry.

Limitations

This study aims to research aesthetic procedures in the medical tourism sector based on Turkey, and the aim of the research is to examine the factors affecting individuals in choosing Turkey as a destination for health tourism. While the research provides information in this aspect, it is also acknowledged that the study has limitations. These limitations will also be explained in detail.

First of all, although the subject of the study is the medical tourism industry, the medical tourism sector has spread to a wide area around the world and in order to analyze and research the subject in more detail and depth, we focused on Turkey, which is becoming an increasingly popular destination in the field of medical tourism. On the other hand, in order to examine the work in a more specific field in Turkey, the medical tourism sector in Turkey has focused only on "aesthetic procedures". Among these aesthetic procedures, non-surgical aesthetic procedures will be examined as well as procedures within the field of aesthetic surgery.

Another limitation is related to the sample size of the interviews conducted in the study. The sample consists of 2 doctors, a dentist and 10 medical tourists (5 local, 5 international medical tourists) who operate in the medical tourism sector in Turkey and specialize in aesthetic procedures. Although this sample is suitable for a qualitative research, it can also be accepted that it is relatively limited and small. (Creswell and Poth, 2018). This may limit the generalizability of the data obtained to a wider population since it was obtained from a limited sample. (Marshall et al., 2013). The research was originally planned to be interviewed on a much larger sample, but some of the people to be interviewed gave up on being interviewed. Some of them could not be reached due to geographical differences. In addition, the fact that the research is conducted through interviews, which is a qualitative research method, brings with it other limitations regarding the research. The first of these is based on the views that the potential biases and selective memories of the interviewed participants may affect the research. (Patton, 2015). Saunders et al. (2009) also claim that in such qualitative studies, researchers' ability to include their own experiences, opinions and prejudices at every stage of the research may create a potential bias. Various strategies were implemented throughout the research to show that such opinions are taken into consideration, to minimize the research being laced with such errors and prejudices, and to ensure the reliability of the research. These strategies will be mentioned in the next section.

Suggestions for Future Studies

This investigation, in which we investigated the main factors affecting Turkey's preference as a medical tourism destination, aims to benefit future studies. However, considering the limits of this investigation and the investigation methodology and strategies, it also contains suggestions for future studies.

- Longitudinal Research: Since this study is a cross-sectional research example, it may be more appropriate for future research to conduct a longer and longitudinal study.

- Comparative analysis: This study analyzes Turkey as a case study. For a more comprehensive analysis in future studies, another medical tourism destination can be selected and a more comprehensive theoretical framework can be created using the comparative analysis method.

- A More Comprehensive Sample: This study initially aimed to interview both doctors, local and foreign medical tourists, but after the medical tourism agency gave up the interview, only medical tourists and doctors were interviewed. In the future research, medical tourism travel agencies, facilitators and healthcare personnel can be included to ensure that different perspectives are included in the investigation and the number of samples can be increased.

- Conducting a Survey: In future studies, it may be possible to benefit from a larger sample by conducting a survey along with the interview method.

- Research on Specific Aesthetic Procedures: These research findings revealed that Turkey has specialized and branded some aesthetic procedures. In future research, the research can be carried out in a more detailed and focused manner by choosing one of these branded specific procedures.

Integration of Quantitative Methodologies: This research was conducted with a qualitative approach. To improve the research, a mixed method research can be made more comprehensive by adding a quantitative approach in addition to the qualitative approach.

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Appendix 1 – Interview Questions for Doctors Serving in The Field of “Medical Easthetic Tourism”

- Could you briefly tell us about your professional background and your past in the medical tourism industry?
- What are the basic motivations and expectations of foreign patients coming to Turkey regarding basic aesthetic procedures? What differentiates these from the expectations of your patients in Turkey?
- Why do medical tourists choose Turkey for aesthetic procedures?
- Why do medical tourists choose you as a doctor and your clinic?
- Could you tell us about Turkey's cost advantages and price structure for medical tourists?
- How do your overseas patients contact you? How do you progress the process before aesthetic procedures?
- How do you ensure post-treatment care coordination?
- How do you personalise your transactions according to each individual's needs and expectations?
- What do you think is the perception of medical tourists about the healthcare system in Turkey? Do their perceptions change after they arrive?
- Do you work with medical travel agencies and facilitators? What kind of cooperation do you have?
- What marketing and advertising techniques do you use?
- Which channels do you think are more suitable for advertising and marketing?
- What suggestions would you give to tourism stakeholders and policymakers for Turkey's further development in the field of medical tourism?

Appendix 2 – Interview Questions for Medical Tourists

- How old are you?
- Where are you from?
- From which country did you come to Turkey for aesthetic treatment?
- For which aesthetic treatment method did you come to Turkey?
- What are the main factors that brought you to Turkey for medical aesthetic tourism?
Why didn't you have this procedure done in the country you live in?
- How or where did you first learn that the aesthetic procedure you had was done in Turkey?
- How did you research and choose your clinic or doctor in Turkey for your aesthetic procedure? What were your criteria?
- What sources did you research during the decision-making process for the aesthetic procedure you requested?
- What was the quality of care, facility features, and expertise of the medical staff at the clinic in Turkey? Can you compare it with your own country?
- Did the cost factor factor into you? Can you compare the cost of your aesthetic procedure in Turkey with what you would pay in your country of current residence?
- What kind of support or assistance did the medical tourism agency or facilitator in Turkey provide you with before, during, and after your procedure?
- Did you encounter any problems during your medical aesthetic tourism experience in Turkey? What can be done to avoid such problems?
- What kind of service did you receive during the care and recovery process after your aesthetic procedure?
- Were you satisfied with the results of the procedure you had in Turkey?
- If you needed an aesthetic intervention again, would you come to Turkey again?
- Would you recommend Turkey to your close circle for aesthetic procedures or health services?
- Have you had the opportunity to travel to Turkey apart from your plastic surgery? How did you find Turkey? Would you consider coming to Turkey again just for holiday purposes?

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland Research Students Declaration Form (Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

Name: Gizem Arslan

Student Number: 22181032

Degree for which thesis is submitted: Master of Science in Entrepreneurship

Title of Thesis: Investigating the Motivations and Determinants Leading Individuals to Choose Turkey for Aesthetic Procedures

Date: 06 May 2024

Material submitted for award.

A. I declare that this work submitted has been composed by myself. Yes●

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