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MODELING REVISIT INTENTION IN MEDICAL TOURISM UNDER DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF WORD OF MOUTH

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ABSTRACT

The rapid digitalization of healthcare services has transformed how patients assess hospital quality, interact with service providers, and establish loyalty intentions. This study examines the effects of telemedicine utilization, destination image, medical tourism experience, and digital platform reviews on Word of Mouth (WOM), and further analyzes the impact of WOM on revisit intention in Hospital X, Surabaya. A quantitative method was employed with data obtained from 160 patients. The relationships among variables were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with AMOS. The analysis results show that telemedicine utilization, destination image, and digital platform reviews significantly enhance WOM. However, medical tourism experience does not demonstrate a significant effect. WOM is also found to strongly influence re-visit intention, highlighting its essential role in converting patient satisfaction perceptions into behavioral loyalty. These findings indicate that digital service convenience, online information credibility, and destination attractiveness are more influential determinants of patient advocacy than experiential factors alone. This study contributes to healthcare and medical tourism literature through an integrated digital behavior model. Practically, hospitals are encouraged to strengthen telemedicine systems, manage online reputation, and optimize branding strategies to stimulate positive WOM and increase return visits in a highly competitive digital era.

KEYWORDS: Telemedicine utilization; Destination image; Digital platform reviews; Word of mouth; Revisit intention; Healthcare services.

1. INTRODUCTION

The global healthcare industry is experiencing an unprecedented digital transformation driven by rapid technological advancement and post-pandemic structural shifts. The COVID-19 crisis significantly accelerated the adoption of telemedicine worldwide, transforming it from an emergency response mechanism into a sustainable healthcare delivery model (Koonin et al., 2020). Telemedicine now enables remote consultations, digital diagnostics, and real-time patient monitoring, fundamentally reshaping how healthcare services are accessed and evaluated. Beyond operational efficiency, telemedicine influences patients' trust formation, perceived service quality, and behavioral intentions (Wootton, 2012). In developing countries such as Indonesia, telemedicine has become a strategic instrument to overcome geographical disparities and improve access to specialist care, particularly in urban healthcare centers such as Surabaya (Ministry of Health Indonesia, 2023). As digital health becomes embedded in routine medical practice, its impact extends beyond technological adoption toward relational and loyalty outcomes.

Parallel to digital transformation, medical tourism has emerged as a rapidly expanding segment within global service industries. Patients increasingly travel across regions seeking affordable, high-quality treatment combined with favorable recovery environments. Within this context, healthcare institutions operate not only as medical service providers but also as integral components of destination branding ecosystems. Destination image—defined as the aggregate of beliefs, impressions, and perceptions associated with a place—has been consistently identified as a key determinant of travel-related decision-making (Stylos et al., 2017). In medical tourism settings, a positive destination image enhances perceived safety, infrastructure reliability, and environmental comfort, all of which are particularly salient in high-risk services such as healthcare (Han & Hyun, 2015). Consequently, patients evaluate hospitals within broader destination frameworks rather than purely clinical parameters.

In addition to destination perceptions, medical tourist experience plays a pivotal role in shaping satisfaction and advocacy behavior. Healthcare services are characterized by high involvement, perceived risk, and emotional vulnerability, intensifying the importance of both functional and affective dimensions of experience. Functional quality includes treatment effectiveness, professional competence, and facility standards, whereas affective quality encompasses empathy, communication clarity, and psychological reassurance. Empirical evidence confirms that positive healthcare experiences significantly influence emotional attachment and loyalty behavior (Liu et al, 2021; Tika & Sayid, 2025). Particularly in medical contexts, experiential evaluations form the cognitive and affective foundation upon which recommendations and repeat decisions are constructed.

Simultaneously, digital platform reviews have become dominant sources of healthcare information. Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) reduces uncertainty and perceived risk by providing peer-generated narratives about service quality and treatment outcomes (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Ismagilova et al., 2021). In high-risk service settings, consumers often perceive peer reviews as more credible than institutional promotion (Filieri et al., 2018). However, while online reviews increase transparency, they also introduce complexity, as patients reconcile digital narratives with personal expectations and destination impressions. The interplay between telemedicine experience, destination image, service encounter quality, and digital reviews thus represents a multidimensional evaluative process.

To conceptually integrate these dimensions, this study adopts the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Within this perspective, telemedicine utilization, destination image, medical tourist experience, and digital platform reviews function as external stimuli that shape internal cognitive and affective evaluations (organism), which subsequently generate behavioral responses. In this study, Word of Mouth (WOM) represents a key behavioral response reflecting patient advocacy and interpersonal communication about healthcare services (Litvin et al., 2008). WOM is particularly influential in healthcare contexts because patients rely heavily on experiential narratives when making high-stakes decisions (East et al., 2008).

Importantly, WOM does not merely represent a communication outcome but also functions as a relational mechanism reinforcing revisit intention. Revisit intention reflects a patient's willingness to reuse services at the same institution for future treatment or continuing care (Han & Hyun, 2015). Strong WOM strengthens perceived reliability, trust, and emotional attachment, thereby transforming satisfaction into long-term behavioral commitment (Zeithaml et al., 2006). While revisit intention has been widely examined in tourism and hospitality research, empirical integration of telemedicine

utilization, experiential quality, destination image, and digital review dynamics within medical tourism contexts remains fragmented.

Despite growing scholarly attention, prior research predominantly investigates telemedicine adoption, e-WOM, destination image, and healthcare experience independently rather than within a comprehensive framework explaining how these dimensions collectively shape WOM and subsequently influence revisit intention (Ismagilova et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Stylos et al., 2017). Moreover, empirical studies focusing on developing medical tourism destinations remain limited. Although Surabaya is increasingly recognized as a regional healthcare hub, academic examination of its integrated digital and experiential healthcare ecosystem is still scarce.

Addressing these gaps, the present study develops and empirically tests an integrative conceptual model examining the effects of telemedicine utilization, destination image, medical tourist experience, and digital platform reviews on Word of Mouth, and subsequently assessing the impact of WOM on revisit intention in Hospital X, Surabaya. Theoretically, this research extends medical tourism and healthcare marketing literature by integrating digital health adoption within a destination-based behavioral framework. It reconceptualizes WOM as both an evaluative outcome and a mediating mechanism linking service stimuli to long-term loyalty. Practically, the findings provide strategic insights for hospital management to design patient-centered telemedicine systems, align healthcare services with destination branding, enhance experiential quality, and strategically manage digital review platforms to foster sustainable patient advocacy and loyalty.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the relationships among telemedicine utilization, destination image, medical tourist experience, digital platform reviews, Word of Mouth (WOM), and revisit intention within the context of Hospital X in Surabaya. A quantitative approach was selected due to its suitability for testing causal relationships and validating theoretical models through statistical inference (Creswell, 2014). Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire, enabling the standardized measurement of perceptions and behavioral intentions among healthcare consumers. A similar approach is also used in Hermawan (2025), who emphasizes the importance of structured surveys in measuring health service experiences and community behavior so that the results obtained are more objective and can be analyzed statistically.

The study population comprised patients who had utilized healthcare services at Hospital X in Surabaya, either through on-site visits or telemedicine services, within the previous 12 months. Using purposive sampling, respondents were selected based on two criteria: (1) being at least 18 years old, and (2) having prior experience using tele-medicine or undergoing direct treatment at the hospital. A total sample of 160 respondents was obtained, meeting the recommended minimum sample size for SEM, which generally requires samples between 100 and 200 to achieve stable and robust path estimations in complex structural models (Hair et al., 2019).

All study variables were measured using multi-item scales adopted and adapted from established literature to ensure content validity. Telemedicine utilization was assessed through perceived convenience, efficiency, accessibility, and information clarity (Wootton, 2012; Ching & Priya, 2025). Destination image captured perceptions of safety, infrastructure quality, accessibility, and overall reputation of Surabaya as a medical tourism destination (Stylos et al., 2017). Medical tourist experience measured service professionalism, staff empathy, communication quality, clinical effectiveness, and facility comfort (Kim et al., 2019; Sultan & Wong, 2014). Digital platform reviews reflected the perceived credibility, usefulness, valence, and influence of online testimonials and ratings (Filieri et al., 2018; Ismagilova et al., 2021). Word of Mouth was measured based on willingness to recommend, positive sharing behaviors, and advocacy intentions (East et al., 2008), while revisit intention focused on likelihood of repeat usage, preference continuity, and treatment loyalty (Han & Hyun, 2015). All items used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Participation was voluntary, and all respondents provided informed consent before completing the questionnaire. Respondents' anonymity and confidentiality were ensured throughout the data collection and analysis process. The study adhered to standard ethical guidelines for social science research governing privacy protection and responsible data management (Creswell, 2014).

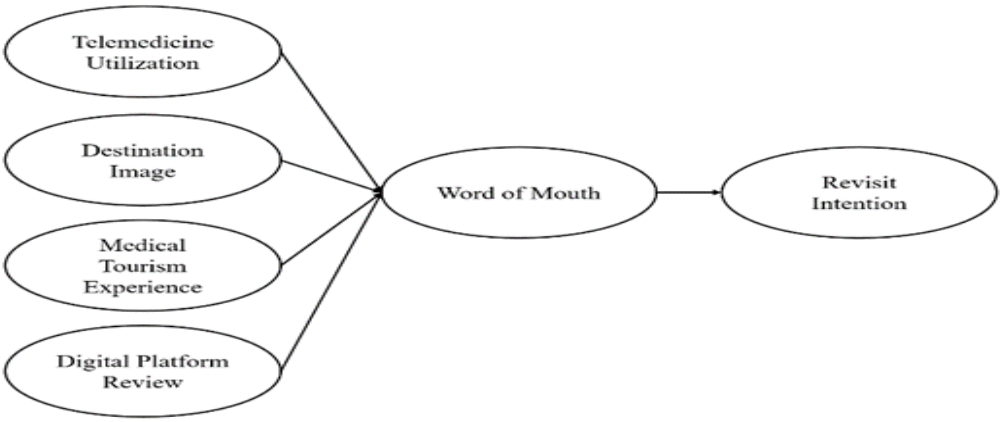

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework.

3. RESULTS

Based on the conceptual framework developed in the preceding section, this study proceeds to the empirical testing of the proposed research model by examining the causal relationships among the latent constructs. The framework positions Telemedicine Utilization, Destination Image, Medical Tourism Experience, and Digital Platform Review as exogenous variables that are theoretically expected to influence Word of Mouth (WOM). Furthermore, Word of Mouth is conceptualized as a mediating variable that transmits the effects of these antecedent variables on Revisit Intention in the context of medical tourism.

To simultaneously assess both the measurement properties of the constructs and the structural relationships among them, this study employs Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) as the primary analytical technique. The SEM approach enables the estimation of complex causal relationships while accounting for measurement error, thereby providing a comprehensive evaluation of the proposed research model.

The structural model consists of two interrelated components. First, the measurement model (outer model) specifies the relationships between each latent construct and its observed indicators, all of which are modeled as reflective constructs in this study. Second, the structural model (inner model) represents the hypothesized causal paths among the latent constructs in accordance with the proposed hypotheses.

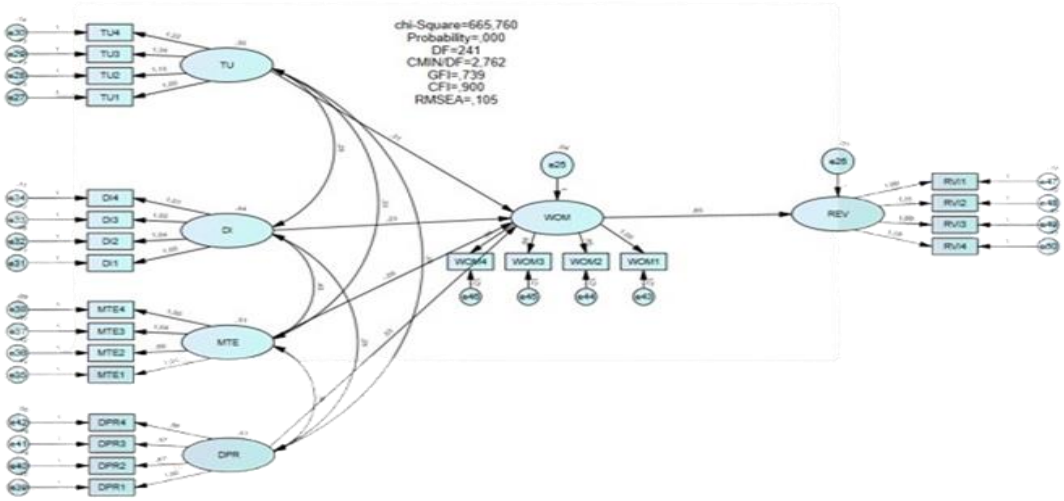

Figure 2: Diagram Path.

3.1. Loading Factor

The loading factor reflects the strength of the relationship between an observed indicator and its underlying latent construct. In Structural Equation Modeling using AMOS, an indicator is deemed to

have acceptable validity when its standardized loading reaches a minimum threshold of 0.50, although values exceeding 0.70 are generally preferred to ensure stronger convergent validity (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 1: Loading Factor.

			Estimate
TU1	<---	TU	,753
TU2	<---	TU	,870
TU3	<---	TU	,840
TU4	<---	TU	,877
DI1	<---	DI	,813
DI2	<---	DI	,925
DI3	<---	DI	,893
DI4	<---	DI	,898
MTE1	<---	MTE	,885
MTE2	<---	MTE	,898
MTE3	<---	MTE	,942
MTE4	<---	MTE	,922
DPR1	<---	DPR	,825
DPR2	<---	DPR	,839
DPR3	<---	DPR	,858
DPR4	<---	DPR	,911
WOM	<---	WOM	,851
WOM	<---	WOM	,846
WOM	<---	WOM	,846
WOM	<---	WOM	,847
REV1	<---	REV	,852
REV2	<---	REV	,868
REV3	<---	REV	,912
REV4	<---	REV	,875

3.2. Hypothesis Testing

Significance of path coefficients is tested using bootstrapping, which provides p-values ≤ 0.05 indicate statistical significance at the 5% level (two-tailed).

Table 2: Hypothesis Testing.

Variable	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Criteria
Telemedicine Utilization » Word of Mouth (WOM)	0,287	0,111	2,777	0,005	Significant

Variable	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Criteria
Destination Image » Word of Mouth (WOM)	0,256	0,08	2,852	0,004	Significant
Medical Tourist Experience » Word of Mouth (WOM)	-0,111	0,09	-1,015	0,31	Not Significant
Digital Platform Review » Word of Mouth (WOM)	0,591	0,069	7,641	***	Significant
Word of Mouth (WOM) » Revisit Intention	0,914	0,071	11,848	***	Significant

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. The Effect of Telemedicine Utilization on Word of Mouth

The empirical results indicate that telemedicine utilization has a positive and statistically significant effect on Word of Mouth (WOM), as evidenced by a p-value of 0.005. This finding suggests that patients who actively utilize telemedicine services at Hospital X in Surabaya are more likely to share positive experiences and recommendations with others. In the context of digital healthcare services, effective telemedicine implementation appears to encourage patients to communicate their service experiences, thereby contributing to positive WOM behavior.

One possible explanation for this relationship is that telemedicine improves service accessibility and convenience. Through telemedicine platforms, patients can obtain consultations, follow-up care, and medical information without significant time or distance constraints. Such convenience reduces service effort and enhances the overall service experience, which may encourage patients to share their experiences with others. Previous studies have similarly indicated that telemedicine services can improve patient satisfaction and communication efficiency, which subsequently increases the likelihood of positive WOM behavior (Koonin et al., 2020; Wootton, 2012).

The results are also consistent with prior research suggesting that positive digital healthcare experiences strengthen patients' evaluations of healthcare providers. When telemedicine platforms are easy to use, responsive, and reliable, patients tend to perceive higher service quality (Almutairi et al, 2021; Adeogun & Faezipour, 2025). These positive perceptions can encourage patients to voluntarily recommend the hospital to others through informal communication channels (Ching & Priya, 2025). In this study, such digital service experiences appear to play an important role in shaping patients' willingness to advocate for the hospital.

In addition, telemedicine may reduce uncertainty and perceived risk in healthcare interactions by facilitating continuous communication between patients and healthcare professionals. Healthcare services often involve high levels of perceived risk, and patients generally rely on trusted experiences before recommending services to others. As suggested by Sugesti (2025) and East et al. (2008), positive service experiences that increase trust and reduce perceived risk are more likely to generate WOM communication.

Overall, the findings indicate that telemedicine utilization contributes not only to operational service efficiency but also to patient advocacy behavior. Positive telemedicine experiences encourage patients to communicate their satisfaction to others, which ultimately strengthens WOM. For hospital management, this result highlights the importance of investing in reliable telemedicine infrastructure and user-friendly digital health services to enhance patient experiences and stimulate positive WOM.

4.2. The Effect of Destination Image on Word of Mouth

The results of this study indicate that destination image has a positive and statistically significant effect on Word of Mouth (WOM), as shown by a p-value of 0.004. This finding suggests that patients who perceive Surabaya positively as a medical tourism destination are more likely to share favorable recommendations about Hospital X. In medical tourism contexts, patients often evaluate healthcare services not only based on clinical quality but also on their overall perception of the destination where the treatment takes place.

One possible explanation is that a positive destination image enhances patients' sense of trust, safety, and comfort when receiving medical treatment. A destination with good infrastructure, accessibility, and supportive facilities can strengthen patients' overall perception of the healthcare experience (Hendarini et al, 2025). Previous studies suggest that destination image plays an important role in shaping tourists' behavioral responses, including their willingness to recommend a

destination or service to others (Stylos et al., 2017; Chen & Tsai, 2007). In this study, patients who perceive Surabaya as a convenient and reliable medical destination appear more willing to communicate their positive experiences through WOM.

The findings are consistent with prior medical tourism research indicating that destination-level perceptions influence post-consumption behaviors such as recommendation intention. Han and Hyun (2015) found that a favorable destination image can strengthen patients' satisfaction and trust, which subsequently encourages positive recommendation behavior. Similarly, when patients feel comfortable and secure in the destination environment, they tend to develop more positive narratives about their healthcare experience and share them with others.

Overall, the results highlight that destination image contributes to patients' willingness to engage in WOM communication. Positive perceptions of Surabaya as a medical destination appear to reinforce patients' evaluation of the healthcare services they receive. For hospital managers and policymakers, this finding suggests that strengthening the image of the destination through infrastructure quality, accessibility, and supportive healthcare environments may indirectly stimulate positive WOM and enhance the competitiveness of medical tourism services.

4.3. The Non-Significant Effect of Medical Tourism Experience on Word of Mouth

The results of this study show that medical tourism experience does not have a statistically significant effect on Word of Mouth (WOM), as indicated by a p-value of 0.310. This finding suggests that patients' treatment experiences at Hospital X in Surabaya do not directly encourage them to recommend the hospital to others. Although medical tourism experience remains an important aspect of service evaluation, its influence on recommendation behavior may not occur directly.

One possible explanation relates to the sensitive nature of healthcare services. Medical treatment involves personal health conditions and privacy considerations, which may limit patients' willingness to share their experiences with others (Semyonov-Tal, 2024). Unlike leisure tourism experiences that are commonly discussed in social interactions, patients may prefer to keep medical-related experiences private. Previous studies have suggested that privacy concerns and social norms can reduce patients' tendency to engage in WOM communication in healthcare contexts (East et al., 2008).

Another explanation is that medical services in urban hospitals tend to follow standardized clinical procedures and service protocols. As a result, patients may perceive the medical experience as meeting expected service standards rather than as an extraordinary experience that motivates them to actively recommend the service. Research suggests that WOM is more likely to occur when service experiences generate strong emotional responses or exceed expectations (Kim et al., 2019).

In addition, medical tourism experience may influence WOM indirectly through other psychological mechanisms such as satisfaction or trust. Previous studies indicate that experiential factors often shape post-consumption behaviors through mediating variables rather than through direct effects (Tika & Sayid, 2025; Han & Hyun, 2015). Therefore, the absence of a direct effect in this study does not necessarily imply that medical tourism experience is unimportant, but rather that its impact may occur through more complex relationships.

Overall, this finding highlights that recommendation behavior in healthcare settings may be influenced more strongly by other factors, such as digital services and destination-related perceptions. For hospital management, this suggests that improving patient experience alone may not automatically generate WOM. Instead, hospitals should combine service experience improvements with trust-building strategies and effective digital communication to encourage patients to share positive recommendations.

4.4. The Effect of Digital Platform Reviews on Word of Mouth

The findings of this study show that digital platform reviews have a positive and statistically significant effect on Word of Mouth (WOM), as indicated by a p-value of 0.000. This result suggests that patients who perceive online reviews about Hospital X in Surabaya as credible and informative are more likely to share positive recommendations with others. The finding highlights the important role of digital information sources in shaping patients' communication and recommendation behavior in healthcare services.

One possible explanation is that digital reviews serve as a form of social proof that helps patients reduce uncertainty when evaluating healthcare providers. Healthcare services are generally perceived as high-risk, and patients often seek reliable information before making decisions (Zhou et al, 2024). Positive online reviews can strengthen confidence in the hospital's service quality and

encourage patients to communicate these positive perceptions to others (Lloyd et al, 2023). Previous studies have shown that online reviews significantly influence consumers' attitudes and behavioral responses, including their willingness to recommend services (Filieri et al., 2018; Ismagilova et al., 2021).

The findings are also consistent with research on electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), which suggests that online platforms amplify the spread of experiential information among consumers. According to Litvin et al. (2008), digital platforms enable users to easily access and share service experiences, thereby strengthening the impact of WOM in service industries such as tourism and healthcare. In this study, exposure to positive digital reviews appears to reinforce patients' perceptions and encourage them to share favorable recommendations about the hospital.

Overall, the results indicate that digital platform reviews play an important role in stimulating WOM behavior in medical tourism services. Positive online evaluations not only influence patients' perceptions but also encourage them to communicate their experiences to others. For hospital management, this finding highlights the importance of monitoring and managing online reviews on digital platforms. Maintaining positive digital interactions and responding to patient feedback can help strengthen hospital reputation and encourage positive WOM among patients.

4.5. The Effect of Word of Mouth on Revisit Intention

The results of this study indicate that Word of Mouth (WOM) has a positive and statistically significant effect on revisit intention, as evidenced by a p-value of 0.000. This finding suggests that patients who recommend Hospital X in Surabaya to others are more likely to return for future medical services. The result highlights the role of WOM not only as a form of interpersonal communication but also as an indicator of patient loyalty in healthcare services.

One possible explanation is that patients who share positive recommendations tend to reinforce their own favorable evaluations of the hospital. By recommending a service to others, patients indirectly validate their service choices, which strengthens their commitment to the healthcare provider. Previous studies have shown that positive WOM is closely associated with stronger customer loyalty and repeat service usage (East et al., 2008; Zeithaml et al., 2006; Paisri et al., 2022; Kusumawati et al., 2020). In healthcare settings, where trust and reliability are essential, such recommendation behavior can increase patients' confidence in returning to the same provider.

The findings are also consistent with previous research in medical tourism and service industries, which suggests that trust and positive service perceptions contribute to revisit intention. Han and Hyun (2015) found that favorable service evaluations and trust significantly increase patients' likelihood of returning to the same healthcare provider. When patients feel confident about the quality and reliability of medical services, they are more inclined to maintain long-term relationships with the hospital.

Overall, the results confirm that WOM plays an important role in encouraging revisit intention in medical tourism services. Positive recommendations not only influence other potential patients but also reinforce patients' own intention to reuse the service. For hospital management, this finding emphasizes the importance of encouraging positive patient advocacy by maintaining service quality, strengthening trust, and fostering positive patient experiences that can generate favorable WOM.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study provides empirical evidence on the determinants of Word of Mouth (WOM) and its role in shaping revisit intention within the context of healthcare services at Hospital X in Surabaya. The findings demonstrate that telemedicine utilization, destination image, and digital platform reviews significantly influence WOM, highlighting the importance of technology adoption, perceived place reputation, and online information credibility in encouraging patients to share positive recommendations. In contrast, medical tourism experience was found to have no significant effect on WOM, suggesting that experiential factors alone may be insufficient to stimulate advocacy behavior when patients prioritize functional efficiency, trust, and service reliability in healthcare decision-making.

Furthermore, the study confirms that WOM has a strong and significant impact on revisit intention, emphasizing its critical role as a behavioral mechanism that transforms patient evaluations into loyalty-driven outcomes. This result reinforces the notion that WOM functions not merely as an attitudinal response but as a strategic driver of long-term patient retention. Collectively, these findings extend the healthcare and medical tourism literature by integrating digital health utilization and online review dynamics into a unified model explaining revisit intention through WOM. The study also offers practical insights for hospital management,

indicating that fostering patient advocacy through reliable telemedicine services, strong destination branding, and credible digital platforms is essential for sustaining competitiveness in increasingly digitalized healthcare markets.

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