Cultural Crossroads of Online Medical Tourism Promotion from a Multimodal Perspective

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Contents

List of Table & Figures ... 7
Preface ... 9

CHAPTER 1 Medical Tourism in Southeast Asia ... *11*

CHAPTER 2 Promotional Discourse of Medical Tourism and Multimodal Analysis ... *29*

CHAPTER 3 Multimodal Characteristics of Malaysian, Singaporean and Thai Private Hospital Websites ... *50*

CHAPTER 4 Intercultural Analysis of Malaysian, Singaporean and Thai Private Hospital Websites ... *64*

CHAPTER 5 A Proposed Framework of Multimodality and Intercultural Approaches for Online Medical Tourism Websites ... *86*

References ... 115
Index ... 131

Preface

Medical tourism is considered as one of the tourism sectors that contributes to the stability and dynamics of a country's economic development. However, since it was seriously affected by COVID-19 due to international border closures, attention needs to be given particularly to the online promotional message strategy to boost the industry. In global medical tourism industry, studies involving cultural variability have only focused on examining monomodal discourse namely the linguistic mode while overlooking multimodal texts.

This book examined the way in which selected Malaysian, Thai and Singaporean private hospital websites are presented, and how the verbal and visual modes in the hospital websites converged to deliver promotional messages to international medical tourists. Within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics, three webpages from two hospital websites from each country were selected and analysed. This study employed Halliday's metafunction theory for language analysis and Kress and van Leeuwen's model for image analysis. The ways in which the multimodal features of the website reflect communicative style from three different cultures were also explored. The multimodal data were further analysed using Hall's cultural dimension of context dependency which classifies cultures into high-context that exhibits indirect communication and low-context that demonstrates direct communication.

The selected webpages combined features of both low- and high-contexts but differed to a varying degree. The selected Malaysian, Thai, and Singaporean webpages had elements that were mainly encountered in low-context cultures such as elaborated code system, explicit message, highly structured message, focalisation of information and linear organisation. These findings were not consistent with the existing intercultural communication consulted in the literature which has been associating Asian countries to high-context culture. The findings can assist copywriters, website designers and medical tourism stakeholders to be aware of the communicative strategies in designing medical tourism

websites. Apart from the meaning making through texts and images, possible cultural interpretation is also significant for a country's successful international promotion.

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