

# **Uses of Thai Dental Clinics/centers Websites for Marketing Communication in Dental Tourism: Content Analysis**

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## **Abstract**

Dental clinics and dental centers in hospitals followed medical hub policy of Thailand. They tried to use marketing communication channels especially in online including website and social media for providing information and promoting destinations' dental facilities, their staffs, dentist expertise, services, treatments and quality of equipment to foreign people. This study examines websites of Thai dental clinics/centers to promote their services. Content analysis was used to analyze data 38 items in 5 dimensions: clinic/center/hospital information and facilities, admission and dental services, interactive online services, external activities, and technical items from 35 active websites. The findings as follows.

1. Dental Centers/clinics performed well in providing content that highlights core business: dental facilities, equipment and staffs
2. Both dental centers/clinics have the same way of using communication strategy by using photo/video to tour facilities and provide patient's testimonial to convince other patients
3. In term of information dental centers/clinics provided lack of financial issues.
4. Blurred information between conventional dental services and other services
5. Few dental centers/clinics support non-dental services concerns such as consultation online, Booking process, ground transport, linguistic interpretation and post-discharge

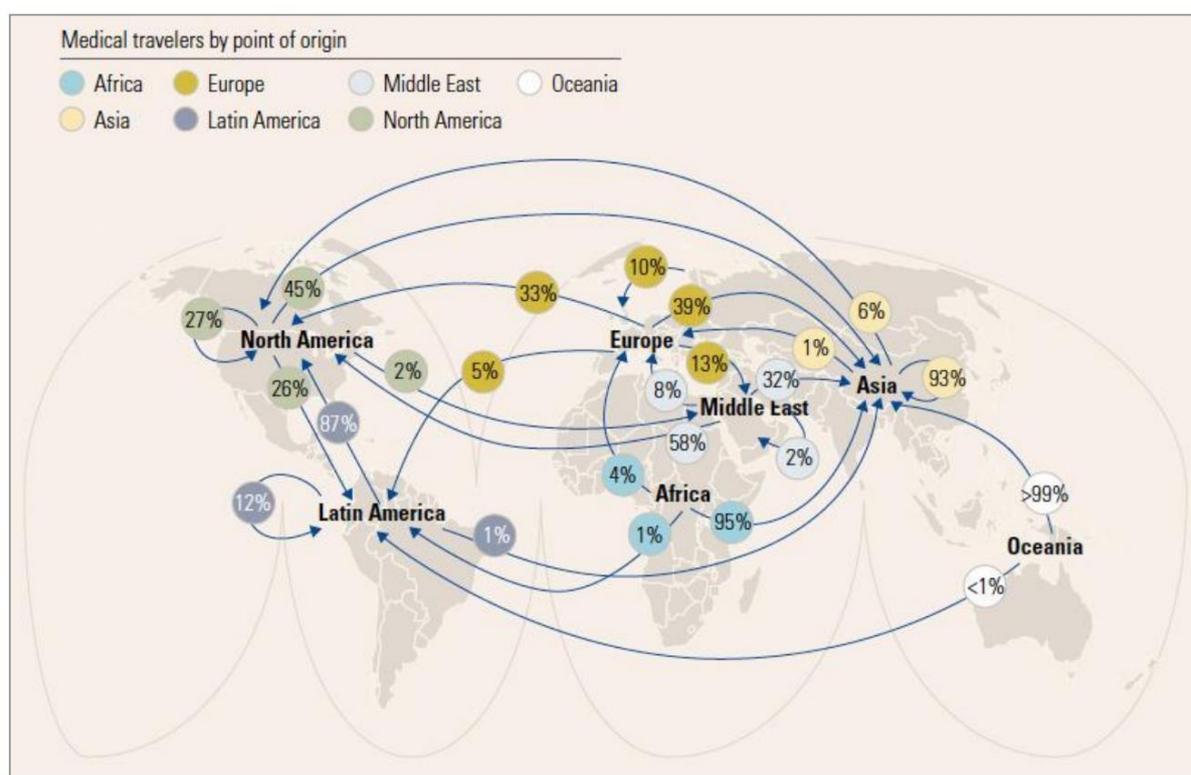
**Keywords:** Thai Dental tourism, Websites, Marketing Communication

## 1. Introduction

Thailand Dental Council revealed that dental services are an outstanding service in the health tourism industry. The number of foreigners using dental services ranked the third most popular service, accounting for 11% of health tourism industry of Thailand (13,382 million baht or \$426 million US). Health services, medical services, and dental services, including related services for the tourism industry, generated a total revenue of not less than 140,000 million baht or \$4.45 trillion US, which is an increase of 18% from the previous year. (Department of Health Service Support, 2016)

Medical tourists elect to travel across international borders to receive some form of medical treatment. Most common such as dental care, cosmetic surgery, elective surgery, and fertility treatment (Kelley, 2013)

Figure 1: Medical Traveler by point of origin



Source: (Ehrbeck, Guevara, & Mango, 2008)

This figure showed people around world interest and come to Asia to get medical treatment. Oceania >99%, Africa 95%, Asia 93%, North America 45%, Middle East 32%, and Latin America 1%. Top countries for growth in inbound/international and domestic wellness trips, 2012-2017 (Ehrbeck et al., 2008)

Unfortunately, when looking at the aspects of marketing promotion in tourism, there is no marketing communication to establish a brand for dental health tourism. Although Thailand has a huge advantage in providing dental services ranging from the quality of the dentist to the quality of service that meets the world standard. As Thailand is ranked as the 3rd most favourite country in the world for medical tourism with cost savings of 50 to 75 percent compared to the

US, it is a significant selling point for dental services in Thailand that it can compete with other countries. (Sutherland, 2017)

The internet, widely appreciated as one of the most important source of health and healthcare information, has played a significant role in the development of the medical and dental tourism industry. For example, the Medical Tourism Association (2009) found that 49% of the American medical tourists it surveyed learned about medical tourism via the internet and 73% sought specific information online about care abroad before going abroad.

Such web use attests to the growing active participation of users/patients, better informed than ever before, in caring for their own health and that of their families.

This study therefore aims to analyze the websites of Thai Dental Clinics/centers Websites promoting dental tourism in order to examine how such dental clinics/centers present themselves online and seek to appeal to the perceived needs of (prospective) dental tourists.

**1.1 Identified categories for assessing websites' effectiveness** In the field of healthcare service industry, researchers have identified categories for assessing websites' effectiveness (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2008) These include the information content, ease of communication and marketing effectiveness, aesthetic design features and appeal, customer service, technical and website service quality, and website inter-activity. The author can conclude in to 5 categories to analyse as follow

1. Hospital Information and facilities
2. Admissions and dental services
3. Interactive online services
4. External activities
5. Technical items

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Population and sample**

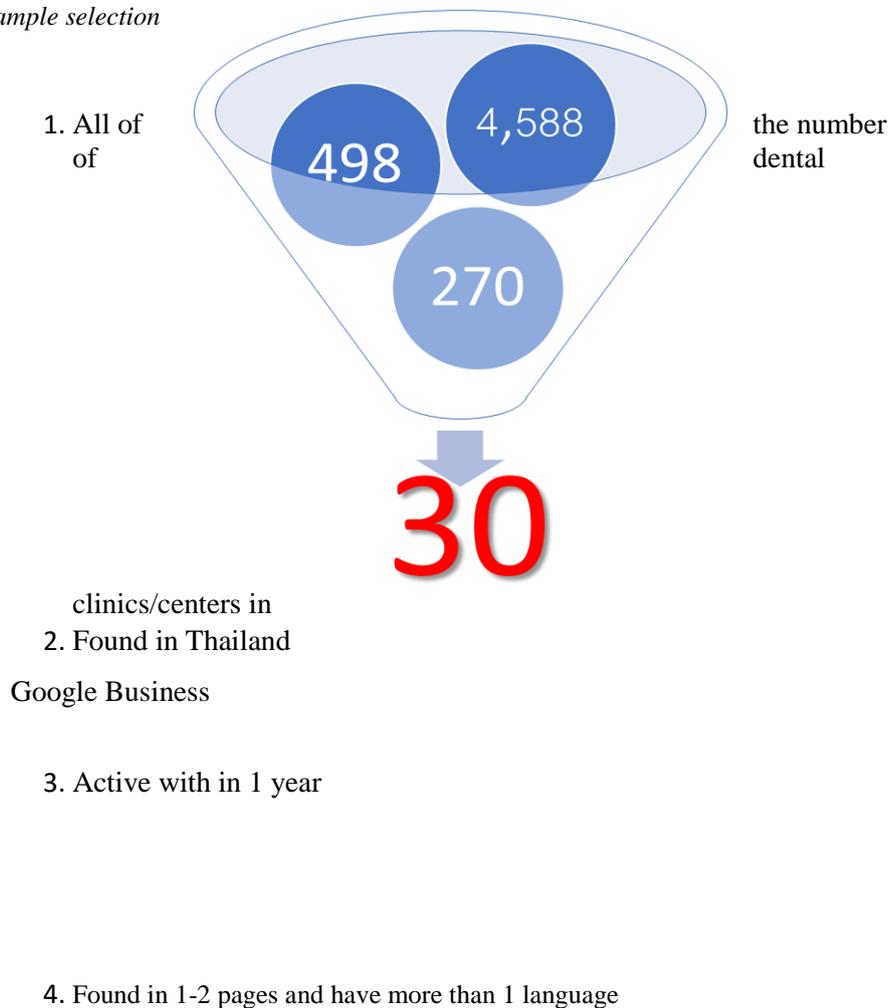
This paper used content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018) with quantitative research with descriptive analysis (Sidel, Bleibaum, & Tao, 2018). Purposive sampling was used to identify the sample. Inclusion criteria included the following steps.

1. Record of registered dental clinics/centers in Thailand revealed total 4,588 clinics/centers throughout Thailand.
2. Google search was used to identify websites of dental clinics/centers locating in the big city and popular areas in Thailand, list of 498 clinics/centers were reported from Google search.
3. Browe into each webiste and review their activities. Only 270 dental clinics/centers websites were still active.
4. Language of the website must be more than one language. Further screening yielded only 30 elegendible websites that use more than 1 languages.
5. Differentiate between dental clinics and centers by location and the number of dental unit

5.1 Dental clinics are located stand alone or the number of dental unit is less than 5 dental unit

5.2 Dental centers are located inside hospital or the number of dental unit is 5 or more dental unit

Figure 2: Sample selection



The researcher found the samples that meet criteria were 30 which was able to group as dental centers 18 and dental clinic 12.

## 2.2 Research instrument and data collection

The author adapted coding form modified from (Moghavvemi et al., 2017) as a research tool for collecting data follow by the 5 categories and 38 sub categories as follows

1. Hospital Information and facilities – general information and technology & facilities
2. Admissions and dental services – Admission process, financial issues and staffs
3. Interactive online services – online interactive tool for customers
4. External activities – other related services beyond dental treatment

5. Technical items – miscellaneous item on website You can see in the detail in table in results section.

### 3. Results

The author collected the data by using coding form as a research tool and the results will be presented by each categories as follow

#### 3.1 Hospital Information and facilities

Table 1: Hospital Information and facilities result

Item	Item Name	Center		Clinic	
		18 (n)	100%	12 (n)	100%
1.	Hospital contact information (e.g., address, phone and email)	18	100%	12	100%
2.	Hospital statement of purpose (e.g., mission or vision)	12	67%	5	42%
3.	Photos or videos featuring the hospital facilities and technology	18	100%	11	92%
4.	Getting to the hospital: Ground transportation arrangements (e.g., pick-up from airports or home)	5	27%	0	0%
5.	Getting to the hospital: Travel arrangements/bookings	11	61%	4	33%
6.	Getting to the hospital: Entry visa assistance	0	0%	0	0%
7.	Getting to the hospital: Partnerships with travel agents or hotels	5	27%	3	25%
8.	Patient privacy information	5	27%	0	0%
9.	Patient's rights and obligations	9	50%	0	0%
10.	Patient feedback (e.g., testimonials, survey results)	12	67%	7	58%
11.	On-site language interpretation services	9	50%	0	0%
12.	Food arrangements specific to international patients	2	10%	0	0%
13.	On-site pharmacy and prescription assistance	0	0%	0	0%
14.	On-site facilities for patients' companions (e.g., family lounge, accommodation within facility, etc.)	5	27%	1	8%
15.	Off-site accommodation arrangements for patients' companions and outpatients	4	22%	0	0%

In this category hospital information and facilities, the author collected the data by using coding form and found that both dental centers and dental clinics provide information and facilities especially, technology of dental treatment (100% and 92% respectively). Both dental centers and dental clinics provide patient feedback or testimonial to convince more patients to get dental treatment (67% and 58% respectively).

### 3.2 Admissions and dental services

Table 2: Admissions and dental services result

Item	Item Name	Center		Clinic	
		18 (n)	100%	12 (n)	100%
16.	Estimated costs (medical and hospital fees)	7	38%	6	50%
17.	Billing information	4	22%	0	0%
18.	Health insurance accepted (incl. Affiliated insurers)	9	50%	2	17%
19.	Payment information and facilities (e.g., credit cards accepted)	5	27%	0	0%
20.	Foreign currency exchange information and facilities	4	22%	4	33%
21.	Inpatient accommodation	5	27%	0	0%
22.	Medical specialties/areas of excellence	14	78%	10	83%
23.	Medical staff descriptions	5	27%	2	17%
24.	Appointment booking	14	78%	8	66%
25.	Post-discharge arrangements	0	0%	0	0%

In admissions and dental services category, the study demonstrated that both dental centers and dental clinics provide information especially, dentist's specialties (78% and 83% respectively). Both dental centers and dental clinics provided lack of financial issues especially for billing information (22% and 0%). Dental clinics (50%) seem to provide information about cost of dental treatment more than dental centers (38%).

### 3.3, 3.4 Interactive online services, External activities Table

3: Interactive online services, External activities result

Item	Item Name	Center		Clinic	
		18 (n)	100%	12 (n)	100%
26.	Interactive tools for online enquiries	4	22%	2	17%
27.	Pre-admission consultations at a distance (online or by phone)	2	10%	0	0%
28.	Medical records available via the Internet	0	0%	0	0%
29.	Links to online forums for patient feedback and social networking (e.g., Twitter and Facebook)	9	50%	6	50%
30.	Links to additional online venues for information generated by or about the hospital (e.g., YouTube and blogs)	9	50%	6	50%
31.	Healthcare joint ventures, international affiliations and overseas referral networks with other hospitals	5	27%	0	0%
32.	Referral services for international physicians (via teleconference, online enquiries or phone)	0	0%	0	0%
33.	Links to relevant agencies/tourist attractions	0	0%	0	0%

Interactive online services, external activities categories, the study found that few of dental centers and dental clinics interested in interactive online response (22% and 17% respectively). Both dental clinics and dental centers provide lack of external activities. They did not mention about other related services such as networks with other hospital or tourist attractions etc. (0%)

### 3.5 Technical items

Table 4: Technical items result

Item	Item Name	Center		Clinic	
		18 (n)	100%	12 (n)	100%
34.	Site map present	0	0%	1	8%
35.	Site-wide search tool present	12	67%	5	42%
36.	Availability of alternative language options for the website (besides English)	16	89%	2	17%
37.	Website accessibility for people with sensorial disabilities	0	0%	0	0%
38.	Live (no broken) web links	14	78%	4	33%

In technical items, the study demonstrated that dental centers (89%) provide alternative language more than dental clinics (17%). Both dental clinics and dental centers provided lack of technical items such as site map, accessibility for disabilities (0%)

#### **4. Conclusion & Discussion**

1. Dental Centers/clinics performed well in providing content that highlights core business: dental facilities, equipment and staffs
2. Both dental centers/clinics have the same way of using communication strategy by using photo/video to tour facilities and provide patient's testimonial to convince other patients
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The author suggest that websites of dental centers/clinics promoting dental tourism should be further developed to provide more reliable, credible and in-depth dental services and nondental services information that will satisfy the needs and concerns of dental tourists

Another way to signal accountability and confidence is the use of interactive online services and feedback processes to improve transparency of the organization. Interactive online activities is an important factors in influencing these consumers' perceptions of trust, positive attitudes towards dental centers/clinics and finally intention to purchase services

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