



INFLUENCE FACTORS OF SPA AND WELLNESS TOURISM ON REVISIT INTENTION: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL TOURIST MOTIVATION AND TOURIST SATISFACTION

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Abstract:

Wellness and spa tourism has recently become a marketing strategy to attract tourists. It plays an important role in hotel industry, resorts and tourist destinations. Wellness and spa services are being required by local and international tourists. The interrelationship among motivations, satisfaction, and revisit intentions remain largely unexplored. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to facilitate understanding of the relationship among these constructs. In addition, very few studies on exploring consumers' needs for the spa and wellness have been conducted in Malaysian context. Previous studies revealed that gaining deep insights into customer profiles and their desire for wellness and spa within this context needs to be taken into considerations, which encourages the development of wellness and spa tourism business. The findings of this study are believed to be advantageous to the wellness and spa service providers. More specifically, appropriate marketing strategies and tourist motivation will be paying more attention and developed in future research.

Keywords:

Spa, Wellness, push and Pull Factors, Motivation, Revisit Intention, Tourists, Malaysia.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Wellness tourism has been considered as a rapidly growing sector of the tourism industry since there was an Asian financial crisis in Southeast Asia in 1997 (Okech, 2014). The concept of health and wellness has become an important theme in tourism research (Chen, 2008; 2009; McCabe & Johnson, 2013; Stace et al., 2007). Health conscious, active people enjoy tourism activities such as body pampering, attending spas, receiving medical treatments, improving



fitness and adventure. This type of tourism is defined as health tourism: people promote and maintain their health, highlighting holistic wellness of body, mind and soul while they are traveling (Lin, 2013; Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001; Smith & Puczko, 2009). A few studies showed that location is one of the important factors for the growth of wellness and spa products (Wightman & Wall, 1985; Smith & Kelly, 2006). In addition, wellness tourists from Asian countries are attracted by the reasonable prices of spa and wellness treatments (Smith & Kelly, 2006). In recent years, previous researchers have emphasized the issues on population health and health tourism. For example, Smith and Puczko (2009) claimed that health tourism refers to two perspectives including medical and wellness. Health tourism also involves spa, which is ranked between medical and wellness, depending on the purposes and types of treatments (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009).

2. REVIEW OF LITRETURE

Wellness as a lifestyle refers to a special state of health, incorporating the harmony of body, mind and spirit. This kind of life style is also dominant during vacation (Brymer & Lacaze, 2013). Most people have difficulty in getting a deep understanding of spa services and its real purposes because of the rapid growth of spa market. Some social classes and middle age customers prefer visiting spa services due to the demographic changes and higher standard livings in the Western countries. A limited knowledge of the actual SPA concept makes people become unaware of the real meaning and value of the spa definition. Many beauty entrepreneurs get a chance to misconduct their consumers by instilling this “new” spa concept, which can be considered as a threat to the real spa market and the customers. The actual spa market producers will lose their customers in case the customers hardly understand the actual spa concept due to their limited knowledge of spa (Sinaga & Mielniczak, 2006). The term “spa” is derived from the Latin acronym “sanities per aqua” or ‘health through water’. It is also regarded as water-based and non-water facilities that provide many types of treatments such as health, beauty, medical and relaxation. In the mid-1980s, resort operators perceived spas in their properties (Madanoglu & Brezina, 2011; Montenson & Singer, 2004). The term ‘spa’ is popular in places where there are natural mineral springs and many enterprise zones providing treatments for health (Lee & King 2009; Smith & Jenner, 2000). Most spas have been encouraged to develop in thermal and mineral springs so far. Regarding the geographic distribution of such resources, spas are commonly promoted in coastal places or in historical interest sites. Moreover, spas are developed regarding suitable natural resources such as mineral springs, beautiful landscapes or ideal climates (Hall, 2003). Today, health resort providers attempt to meet the requirements of the growth of the health tourism market in Asia (Bywater, 1990). According to Cockerell (1996), wellness and spa goers prefer to look for medical treatments or traditional tourist motivations. Factors encourage the wellness tourism, including health oriented social trends, the aging population and the desire to stay young and healthy (Lee & King, 2008). At the present time, spa and wellness tourism is being developed in India, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. It is clear that medical centres with good facilities are established in Singapore. India is also considered as



a main medical destination that offers a wide range of treatments including both alternative treatments and the most complicated procedures in the world (Connell, 2006). In Malaysia, healthcare programs, including medical care, wellness and fitness are seen as important components in health tourism (Wong, 2003). According to the International Spa Association (ISPA), spas are places to provide professional services that help increase people's well-being through refreshing mind, body and spirit (Hyde-Smith, 2012).

Table 1: The ISPA further categorizes spas

| Type of Spa | Definition |
|------------------------|--|
| Day | A day spa offers a variety of spa services, including facial and Body treatments on a day-use-only basis. |
| Resort/hotel | A resort/hotel spa offers a spa, fitness and wellness services, as well as spa cuisine menu choices and overnight accommodations within a resort or hotel |
| Destination | A destination spa is not part of another resort or hotel. The destination spa's primary purpose is guiding individual spa-goers To healthy lifestyles. Historically an extended stay, this transformation can be accomplished by a comprehensive program that includes spa services, physical fitness activities, wellness education, healthful cuisine and special interest programming |
| Medical | A spa in which a full-time, on site licensed health care professionals provide comprehensive medical and wellness care in an environment that integrates spa services, as well as traditional, Complementary and/or alternative therapies and treatments. The facility operates within the scope of practice of its staff, which can include both aesthetic/cosmetic and prevention/wellness procedures and services |
| Club | A facility whose primary purpose is fitness and that offers a variety of professional administered spa services on a day-use basis. A hotel, gym, or fitness club that has a sauna, steam or whirlpool bath is not a spa unless it explicitly offers spa products and services as an added benefit |
| Mineral springs | A spa offering an on-site source of natural mineral, thermal or seawater used in hydrotherapy treatments |
| Cruise ship | A spa aboard a cruise ship providing professionally administered spa services, fitness and wellness components and spa cuisine menu choices |
| Cosmetic | A spa that primarily offers aesthetic/cosmetic and prevention/wellness procedures and services such as facials, peels, waxing and other non-invasive procedures that are within the scope of practice of its staff but do not require on-site medical supervision |

Source: International SPA Association (2010)



Table 2: Specificity of Day, Resort and Destination SAP Services

| Category | Value for customer | Duration | Choice of service | Facilities | Package and assortment |
|------------------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Day spa | Pampering | 1 hour-1 day | Free choice | Salon equipment | Facial, body scns, massages, beauty care service and procedures |
| Resort spa | Vacation | 2-3 days | Free choice-wish to relax, get well | Accommodation natural surrounding | Accommodation, nutrition restaurant, wellbeing and trips, extra SPA services |
| Destination spa | Health improvement | 7-17 days | Depends on consultant | Medical-training equipment | Accommodation, consultants-professionals, educational programs |

2.1. SPA AND WELLNESS IN MALAYSIA

Malaysia is famous for the development of health tourism due to its traditional therapies that are the oldest treatments in the world in recent years (Smith & Puczko, 2008). Malaysia has become one of the competitive spa and wellness tourism destinations in Asia as a result of the attractive medical tourism packages. In fact, spa and wellness tourism in this country offers the excellent spa vacation packages (Puczko, 2010). Today, spa and wellness tourism is not a new service in Malaysia because there has been a rapid growth of health spas in this country in recent years. In fact, this service has been promoted due to health tourism packages (Mohd Yusoff, 2010). A survey of intelligent spas conducted in Malaysia indicated that the number of spas has been rising over 200% since 2002 (Hashemi & Hosseiniyan, 2014). More specifically, more than 170 spas are currently operating and earning an average of RM 1, 000 per day. According to Euro Monitor International 2007 Country Sector Briefing, the wellness and spa industry in Malaysia is still growing dramatically, and it is expected to have 250 spa centers by 2011 (Malaysia tourism, 2013). Spa and wellness centers with high-quality can be found in the resorts or hotels located in a major tourist area such as the Golden Triangle area in Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur. A specific and perfect spa experience is also provided in places of interest in Malaysia such as highlands, waterfalls, rainforest, hot springs and river sides (Tourism Malaysia, 2013).

2.2. TOURIST MOTIVATION

Motivation is a main subject of study in the area of psychology, and it is suggested that there are physiological, psychological or philosophical approaches (Holmes, & Collins, 2001). The study



of motivation, aims to understand human behavior. It can be found in the literature in different disciplines. In tourism, the concept of motivation has been used for exploring tourist behavior and their travel decision-making, which helps tourism providers understand tourists’ demand during their travel at a particular destination. Page (2009) viewed motivation as a “state of need, a condition that exerts a push on the individual towards certain types of action that are seen as likely to bring satisfaction”. It shows the intrinsic reasons why the individual selects a particular trip (Weaver & Lawton, 2002). This concept is also directly linked to the demand for tourism affected by many factors. In addition, it is related to consumer or tourist behavior, which affects the initial purchase and the tourist experience as well as future decisions (Montenson & Singer, 2004). As a result, motivation models and studies are seen in different perspectives to understand tourist behavior regarding many aspects of tourism such as the destination choice (Chan & Baum, 2007), tourists’ purchase decision or spending pattern and tourism business marketing and planning strategies (Oh et. al., 1995; Bansal & Eiselt, 2004; Hashemi et al 2014). In other words, the findings of previous studies provide a deep understanding of tourist behavior. That leads to creating an effective marketing strategy of the right tourist market. One of the concepts in tourist motivation and purchasing process is push-pull factors. These factors have been widely adopted in previous studies related to tourist behavior and segmentation from general holiday-takings to special interest tourism but rather in different contexts and countries.

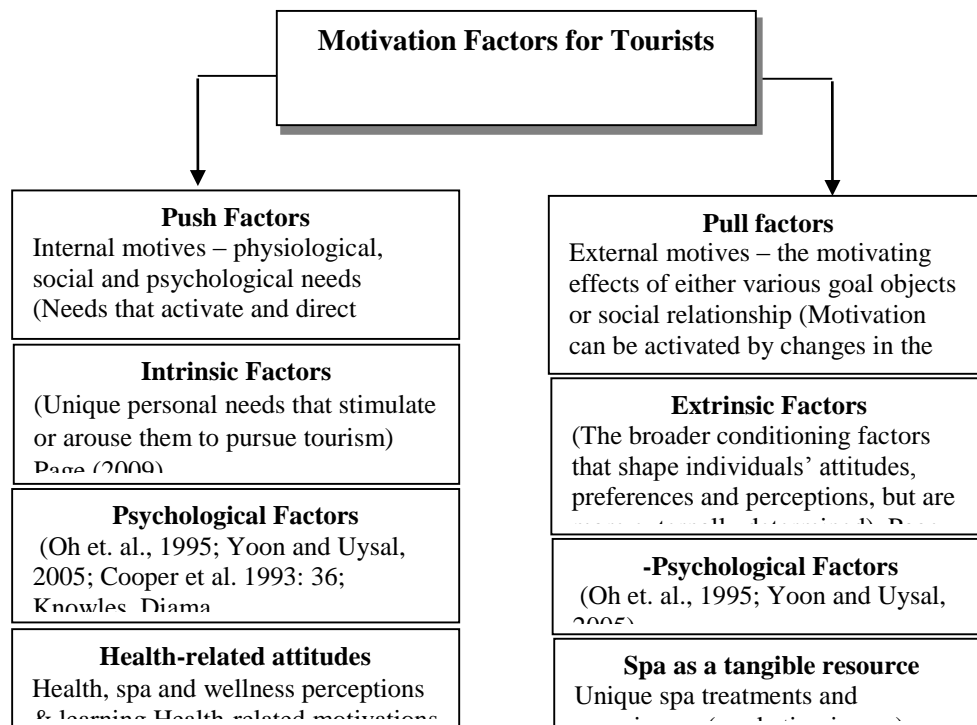


Figure 1: The Framework for Health and Spa Tourist Motivation Factors
 Source: Upgrade and Adopted From, Azman & Chan (2010)



2.3. SATISFACTION AND REVISIT INTENTION

Satisfaction can be described as the fulfillment gained by a tourist after consuming a product or service (Oliver, 1997). Chi and Qu (2008) and Santouridis and Trivellas (2010) has mentained that satisfaction is a significant determinant of a repeat visit. Similarly, previous studies have also suggested that when tourists' holiday expectations are met or exceeded, they are more likely to return in the future (Chen et al, 2007; Oliver, 2010). Chi and Qu (2008) observed that overall satisfaction of travel experience is a major antecedent of revisiting intention Santouridis and Trivellas (2010). However, Bigne et al. (2009) argue that in a competitive market even satisfied patrons may switch to rivals because of the opportunities to achieve better results.

The basic argument advanced by the proponents is that tourist visitation to a particular destination is a function of the push and pull factors. Accordingly, the push forces constitute the internal emotional desires of the tourist including, medical, experience, adventure, relaxation and sport and fitness among others, whereas the pull factors are those forces that define the tourist choice of a destination (e.g. attractions). They are largely destination specific enticing elements. Therefore, collectively the two generic factors explain why a tourist would want to use spa where they would go to satisfy this need. Consequently, just like a product, whenever tourists are satisfied with a spa experience in a particular destination, it has both the short run and the long run behavioral effects, of which revisit intentions is one (Hutchinson, Lai & Wang, 2009; Santouridis & Trivellas, 2010). Regarding revisit intention, it is shown in the framework as a part of satisfaction. Indeed, satisfaction can lead to revisit intention and likelihood to recommend the visited destination. Hence, focusing on revisiting intention in spa may make respondents more specific when expressing their sensation to the destination.

3. CONCEPTUAL RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

To guide the course of the study, a conceptual research framework by Yoon & Uysal (2005) was adapted. The framework provides some key variables which are germane to the current study. Based on the variables described in section 2.1 to 2.3, the partial conceptual framework has been developed (Figure. 2). The framework has the characteristics of Push Factors and Pull Factors as the independent variables (IVs). The International Tourist Motivations and Satisfaction Tourists are mediating variables (MVs), and Revisit Intention is a dependent variable (DV). The framework is used to study the direct effects of the relationships between Push Factors and Pull Factors constructs on Revisit Intention in Malaysia. Furthermore, Influential Factors of Spa it determines the indirect effects of International Tourist Motivations and Satisfaction Tourists on the relationship between Push Factors and Pull Factors and Revisit Intention.

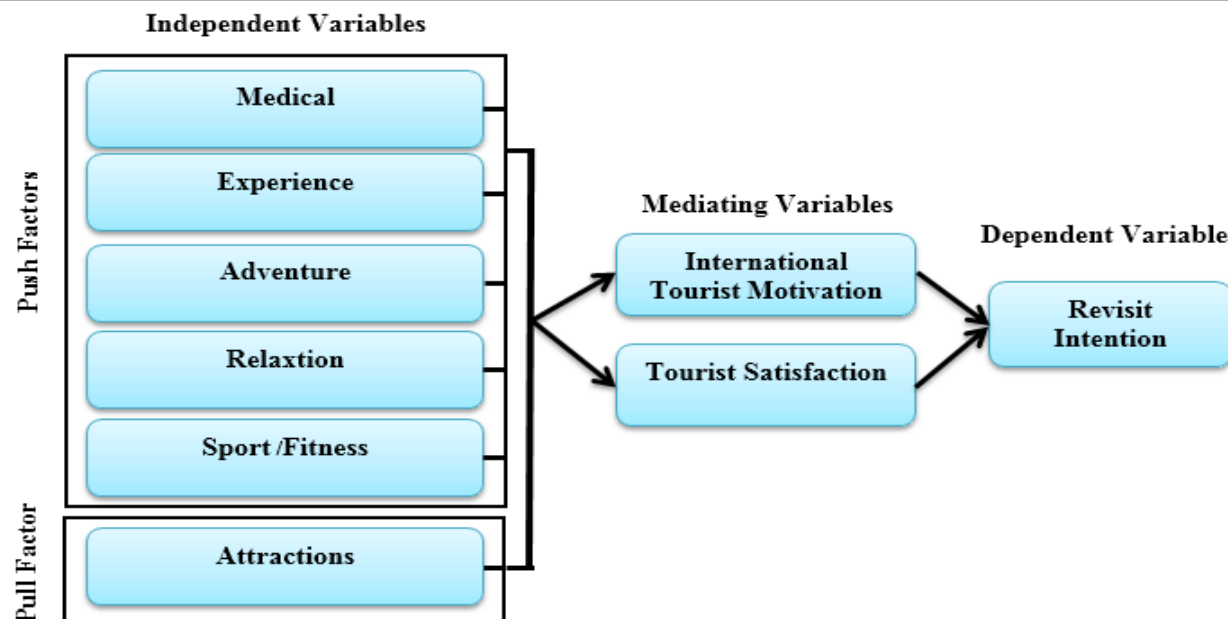


Figure 2: Conceptual Research Framework

4. DISCUSSION

More than the past twenty years, a number of studies tried to find out the factors behind tourists revisit intention to the location. Satisfaction as modelled in numerous researches had a significant relationship with repeat visitation intention. Van Hyft. (2009) mentioned that tourists who were satisfied from spa and wellness in the entire trip were likely to suggest the destinations to others instead of to revisit it in the upcoming. Spa and wellness tourism in Malaysia is still at a beginning stage. There are very few set up definitions of this developing market tourism business. Hence, it is crucial to carry out a research in this tourism context. Pearce (1989) stated that motivation is a set of needs and behavior which affects a person’s action in a specific tourist goal-directed way. It was found that the spa motivation relates to tourist motivation for relaxation. Therefore, the main aim of this paper is to explore and present the motivational factors of health and spa tourists in Malaysia to provide deep insights into what motivates health and spa tourists to visit the spa in Malaysia. It is obvious that both self-satisfying and self-fulfillment (push factors) and the spa attributes (pull factors) are the motivational factors to spa visitation (Smith & Puczko, 2009). Oppermann (1999, 2000) found that less satisfied spa visitors might revisit the same destination. Thus, requesting tourists only about their intention to return would refer by the way to their willingness to recommend it. Furthermore, measuring the temporal revisit intention should be more beneficial than being in common. It therefore leads to more specific responses of revisit intention and more clarification for the satisfaction level (Bigne et al., 2009).



5. CONCLUSIONS

There is a rapid growing of the spa and wellness market at the starting of the 21st due to the growing health awareness of people. Many of the hotels are outfitted with spa services and offer spa services for tourist. On the other hand, traditional spa hotels are highly competitive. It is true which the majority of tourist like visiting traditional spa services to visiting new spa hotels because traditional spa hotels provide various health care services rather exciting and relaxing services. It is true that the particular services in several hotels are deemed limited. Service quality remains questionable. Health tourism and spa business are very important aspects of the tourism sector for the state. It was perceived that tourism products attract visitors all the year round. Therefore, it is essential to take steps to make sure the quality of spa services in both national and international markets. One important stage to ensure the quality of spa services is related to the process to set up a system for the category of spas started by the Malaysia Spa Association. The categorization requirements for medical spas which were applied and developed based on the experiences of spa centres in several countries found in a survey of consumer satisfaction. It is obvious that quality is the most important necessity of tourism including health tourism. Quality plays an important role in the health business and health tourism, particularly in spa and wellness tourism. The categorization system of medical spa and wellness spa hotels is an efficient instrument of the self determination of spa hotels.

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