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A Predictive Model of Behavioral Intention to Spa Visiting: An Extended Theory of Planned Behavior

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Kim et al.: Intention to spa visiting
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ABSTRACT

Spa is one of the fastest-growing market segments in the hospitality and tourism industry, but little attention has been paid to consumers' perceived benefits and motivational influences. An aim of the predictive model testing was to examine consumers' behavioral intention to spa visiting, by applying the extended theory of planned behavior. The theoretical model of spa visiting was tested and confirmed via Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Data was collected from athletic club members via a field survey. Results indicated that "perceived behavioral control," "past experience," and "spiritual wellness" appeared to be significant predictors to behavioral intention to spa visiting. Marketing implications of the study are discussed.

Key Words: Spa, theory of planned behavior, spiritual wellness, past experience

INTRODUCTION

Spas in hotels and resorts are one of the fastest-growing market segments in the hospitality and tourism industry (Keri, 2007). According to the International Spa Association (2009), the number of spa locations has grown at an annual average of 20% in the past eight years, reaching 18,100 in 2008. Spa business generated US$10.9-billion in revenue in 2007 and has employed over 303,700 employees in USA in June 2008. The main reason for this rapid growth and strong demand is believed to be that those who have high discretionary income are seeking self-indulgence, better health and well-being (Thorsteinsdottir, 2005).

Spas are classified into two types; amenity spa and destination spa. In the former, spa itself is not a core product but an augment product/service, which generates revenues for hotels and resorts. However, in the latter, the spa itself is a core product that generates revenues. In this study, spa refers to both types because both offer the same benefits of spa product/service such as life-enhancing-, stress-reducing- and skin-improving-techniques (Benini, 1999). For instance, spa studies indicate that spa-goers are expected to enhance their lifestyle, beauty and better heath (Withiam, 1993), and overall well-being through a variety of professional services that promotes revitalization of mind, body and spirit (Thorsteinsdottir, 2005).

Although spa is one of the fastest-growing market segments in the hospitality and tourism industry, previous studies mainly focused on operational profit aspects and spa-goers' demographic profiles. Little attention has been paid to perceptions of benefits and motivational influences. Hotel and resorts revenues will be helped by better satisfying spa-goers' needs and by promotions to potential spa-goers. Therefore, this study will employ the theory of planned behavior as a theoretical framework to test a predictive model of behavioral intention to spa visiting, with particular reference to five behavioral dimensions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) has three key constructs that explain and predict consumer behavior: attitude, subjective norms and perceived control. Ajzen (2001) demonstrated TPB utility in predicting intentions, which, in turn, is useful in predicting actual behavior. In the TPB concept, understanding of consumer's evaluation of attributes of a product is necessary (Sparks, 2007). Thus, it is important to understand how consumers evaluate various spa benefits available in the marketplace.

Link between Attitude and Spa Intention

In this study, the definition of attitude to an object is an individual's positive or negative feeling or evaluation regarding the target behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Hospitality and tourism research treats emotional attitude as an overall evaluation of behavior (Kempf, 1999; Lam & Hsu, 2006; Monuntinho, 1987; Sparks, 2007). Spa-goers seem to have hedonic benefits due to spa being a unique product and providing unique services. According to a study by Johanson (2004), 45% of women and 26% of men who visited spas responded that they visited spas because they "felt like splurging." Sparks (2007) suggested experiential emotional approach is often needed more than a cognitive information processing approach to evaluating people's behavioral intention.

H_1: Attitude to spa benefits will be associated with behavioral intention to spa visiting.

Link between Subjective Norm and Spa Intention

Subjective norm is defined as an individual's normative beliefs about what important others think one should do, and the motivational extent to which one wants to comply with what one's think (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). In hospitality and tourism literature, Lam and Hsu (2006) found subjective norm was important for Taiwanese tourists' intention to visit Hong Kong. Beerli and Martin (2004) found word of mouth through reference groups such as family and friends impacts the image of tourism destination. This finding is similar to a study of Sparks (2007), which indicated reference groups were influential when one considered pleasure travel to a wine region. Spa-goers appear to obtain much spa information through word of mouth and reference groups (Withiam, 1993).

H_2: Subjective norm will positively influence behavioral intentions to spa visiting.

Link between Perceived Behavioral Control and Spa Intention

Perceived behavioral control measures how well an individual can accomplish an action required to manage specific situations, and reflects consumers' perceptions of how easy or difficult they think it is to perform a behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In hospitality and tourism literature, Lam and Hsu (2004; 2006) and Sparks (2007) found that perceived behavioral control affected an individual's intention. Crawford, Jackson, and Godbey (1991) identified some barriers to participation in leisure activities due to time, money, season, climate or family lifecycle.

H_3: Perceived behavioral control will positively impact behavioral intention to spa visiting.

Link between Spiritual Wellness and Spa Intention

In *Merriam Webster*, wellness is defined as "the quality or state of being in good health especially as an actively sought goal" (p.1421). Hawks (1994) defined spiritual well-being as "a high level of faith, hope, and commitment in relation to a well-defined worldwide view or belief system that provides a sense of meaning and purpose to existence in general, and that offers and ethical path to personal fulfillment which includes connectedness with self, others, and higher power or larger reality" (p.6).

Some authors view wellness as more a spiritual- than a physical- aspect. Wellness is associated more closely with happiness than to health (Saracci, 1997). Smith and Kelly (2006) also suggested that wellness is "more of a psychological than a physical state" and "spirituality." According to a study by Mak, Wong, and Chang (2009), underlying motivating factors that significantly influenced spa-goers are spiritual-related factors: "relaxation and relief," "escape," and "self-reward and indulgence." In part, this finding may be because spa-goers want to use a spa experience to enhance their spiritual wellness.

H_4: Spiritual wellness will negatively impact behavioral intention to spa visiting.

Link between Past Experience and Spa Intention

TPB has been applied in many studies to predict consumer behavior; however, several studies (e.g. Lam & Hsu, 2004; Nysveen, Pedersen, & Thorbjornsen, 2005; Sparks, 2007) have suggested additional variables to better understand and predict consumer's behavioral intention in a TPB model. Past experience is believed to influence, significantly, behavioral intention such as repurchase and word of mouth. According to findings in studies by Lee and Choi (2009) and Lam and Hsu (2006), past experience is a useful predictor of behavior intention in hospitality and tourism research. Withiam (1993) observed that 30% of spa-goers visited spas at least thrice within two years, while they visited five resorts during the same period, indicating that spa-goers tend to be repeat guests.

H₅: Past experience will impact, positively, behavioral intentions to spa visiting.

The proposed path model, displayed in Figure 1, reflects the direct effects of main variables (attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control) in TPB and two additional factors (spiritual wellness and past experience) on intentions to spa visiting.
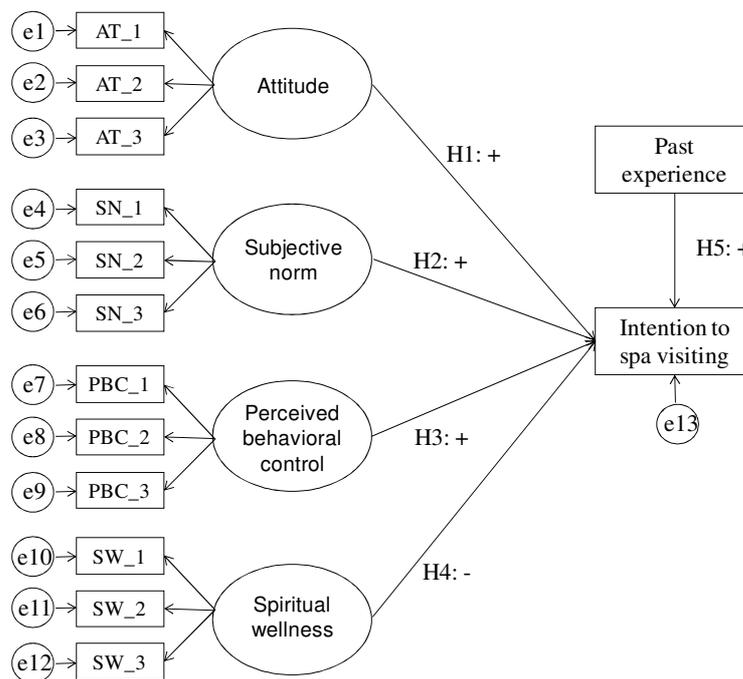

Figure 1
Proposed Model

METHODS

Sample

The respondents involved in this study are athletic club members. Questionnaires were distributed at two athletic clubs in Midwest USA: Total sample size is 145 individuals. After cleaning incomplete data, the final number of valid responses was 138 (95.2%).

Female respondents were dominant at 67.6%. The largest percentage of respondents had earned baccalaureates (39.9%), followed by graduate degree (25.2%) and high school (22.4%). Between 31 and 40 years was the age range of a majority of respondents (42.9%). Household income between $ 70,000 and $90,000 was reported by the largest percentage of respondents (33.6%), followed by $ 100,000 or more (22.4%). Of all respondents, 68.1% were married. A majority of respondents are Caucasian/White (72.2%) and Asian/Pacific Islander (11.8%).

Measures

Scales of attitude, perceived control and subjective norm were adopted from previous empirical studies using a theory of planned behavior (Ajzen & Driver, 1992). All items slightly were modified to reflect the context of spa setting. Attitudes to spa visiting were measured with three seven-point semantic differential scales. The following three adjective pairs were provided in this series: negative-positive, unpleasant-pleasant and unfavorable-favorable. Three items in perceived behavioral control were measured, with four seven-point rating scales. One example of an item is as follow: "I believe I have the resources required to go spa" (1: false to 7: true)." Subjective norms were measured by three items, using seven-point rating scales from Ajzen (1991). These questions consisted of: "Most people who are important to me approve / disapprove of my spa visiting." (1: disapprove to 7: approve).

Spiritual wellness was measured by a 3-item scale, developed by Saracci (1997). Examples of items are as follows: "I allow myself to experience a full range of emotions and find constructive ways to express them" and "I easily express concern, love and warmth to those I care about." Past experience was measured with one item worded as follows: "In the past twelve months, how many times have you been to any spas?" The dependent variable, behavioral intention to visit a spa, was also measured using one item worded "Within the next twelve months, about how many times do you expect to visit a spa?" Responses for past experience and intention are recoded to a 0 to 5 format (0 = "none" to 5 = "5 times or more"); any number exceeding 5 was coded 5.

RESULTS

The structural equation modeling was employed to test the proposed model as well as the hypothesized relationships. Following Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) two-step approach, a measurement model was estimated before the structural model using AMOS 17. The measurement model also allowed assessment of convergent and discriminant validity of the construct measures.

Testing Measurement Model

Prior to path analysis in SEM, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to test validity of the full measurement model, consisting of 14 items. The overall fit of the full measurement model was determined initially by examining chi-square statistics, but the significant chi-square value is often associated with the sample size. Other fit indices showed an adequate fit: AGFI = .90; NNFI =.90; CFI = .94; RMSEA= .06.

Discriminant validity was assessed by inspection of the correlations among factors. As can be seen Table 1, estimated correlations between factors were not excessively high, and none of the pairs for the 95% confidence interval approach 1.00, thus providing support for discriminant validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

Table 1
Correlations estimates, Means, and Standard deviations ($N = 138$)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	M	SD
1. Attitude	1						5.15	0.27
2. Subjective norm	.354	1					4.58	0.57
3. Perceived control	.228	.226	1				4.34	0.62
4. Spiritual wellness	.173	.147	.090	1			5.92	0.13
5. Past experience	.283	.252	.271	-.002	1		1.57	1.03
6. Intention	.314	.180	.493	-.385	.482	1	1.92	1.17

Fornell and Larcker (1981) recommended that discriminant validity can be evaluated by determining whether the variance extracted estimates for two factors are greater than the square of the parameter estimate between them. The largest squares of correlations is smaller than the lowest variances extracted (0.76), which meets the discriminant validity criterion of Fornell and Larcker (1981), as shown in Table 2.

Convergent validity is used to determine if different observed variables used to measure the same factor are highly correlated. In SEM, convergent validity can be assessed by reviewing the t-test for the factor loadings (Hatcher, 1994). As presented in Table 2, all standardized factor loadings for the observed variables measuring the same factor were statistically significant, ranging from .56 to .95, which supports evidence of the convergent validity. Reliability scores range from $\alpha = .69$ to $\alpha = .77$. All scales demonstrate generally good reliability.

Table 2
Confirmatory Factor Analysis results: Full Measurement Model (*N* = 138)

Constructs and Items	Standardized loading[a]	AVE	CCR	Item-to-total correlation	α
Attitude		.76	.70		.69
AT1	0.760(fixed)			.543	
AT2	0.849 (5.54)			.634	
AT3	0.704 (4.48)			.541	
Subjective norm		.79	.72		.73
SN1	0.633 (fixed)			.602	
SN2	0.922 (4.83)			.695	
SN3	0.786 (4.94)			.581	
Perceived behavioral control		.79	.77		.76
PBC1	0.856 (fixed)			.617	
PBC2	0.615 (5.86)			.548	
PBC3	0.802 (7.94)			.718	
Spiritual wellness		.78	.75		.77
SW1	0.667 (fixed)			.602	
SW2	0.949(6.27)			.719	
SW3	0.780 (5.46)			.527	
Past experience	-	-	-	-	-
Intention to spa visiting	-	-	-	-	-

Note: *Factor loadings were all significant at *p* < .001. Goodness-of- fit indices of full measurement model, χ^2 = 98.94 (*df* = 64), χ^2/df = 1.55, GFI = .92; AGFI = .90; NNFI =.90; CFI = .94; RMSEA= .06.

Hypothesis Model Testing

After confirming the valid measurement model, the proposed structural model was evaluated in assessing the hypothesized relationships and model fit. The proposed structural model adequately fits the data with RMSEA equal to .06 and χ^2/*df* equal to 1.55. Other fit indices included: χ^2 = 98.9 (*df*=64, p < .05), CFI = .94, and NNFI = .91. Path coefficients estimated by SEM and hypothesis testing results are presented in Figure 2. The path coefficient from subjective norms to intention (SN → INT) was not significant at .05 level, indicating a weak relationship (β =.005, t = 0.01, p < .05). The finding of non-significant path between subjective norms and intention is somewhat consistent with other studies. Several social psychology researchers have found that subjective norms are inadequate and rarely predict intentions (Ajzen & Driver, 1992; Amitage & Conner, 2001).

But, the path coefficients from perceived behavioral control to intention (PBC → INT: β =.380, t =11.2, p < .05), from past experience to intention (PE → INT: β=.349, t = 4.2, p < .05) were significant at .01 with strong and positive relationships. Further, path coefficients from spiritual wellness to intention (SW → INT: β = -.298, t = 5.3, p < .01) were significant with negative relationship. Path coefficient from attitude to intention (AT → INT: β = .195, t = 2.6, p<.05) was significant at .05 level with somewhat weak and positive relationships. The significant test results for path coefficients support all hypotheses (H1, H3, H4, and H5) excepting one (H2: SN → INT).
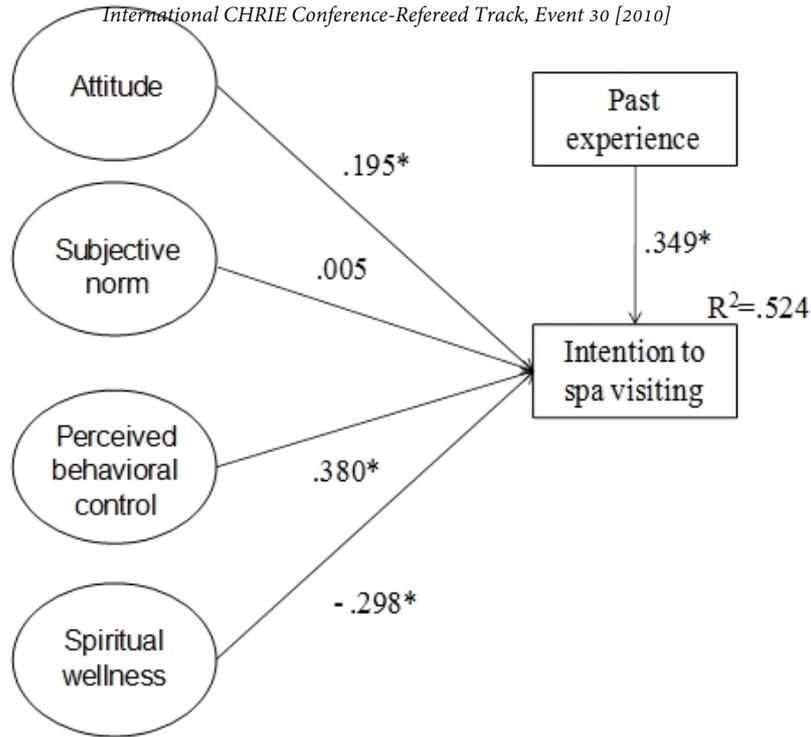
$\chi^2 = 98.9, df = 64, \chi^2/df = 1.55, NNFI=.908, CFI=.938. RMSEA = .060. * p<.05$

Figure 2
Hypothesized Model Testing Results

Regarding factors influencing intention, perceived behavioral control among five factors had the strongest effects on intention ($\beta=.380$). The effect of past experience and spiritual wellness on intention was shown by a statistically significant level of explanatory power ($\beta=.349, -298$). Compared to the other significant factors, effect of attitude on intention is weak ($\beta=.195$). These factors explain 52% ($R^2=.52$) of the variance in intention, as can be seen in Figure 2.

Comparison with the Theory of Planned Behavior Models

Table 3 shows a summary of explained variance in "intention" when comparing explained variances across the three models of theory of planned behavior. The contributions made by spiritual wellness and past experience were evident in comparisons of explained variances for intentions across the three models of interest. The addition of past experience increases the explained variance in intention. R^2 increases from .278 to .385, when past experience is added to the model of the theory of planned behavior. Further, Table 4 also shows that the inclusion of spiritual wellness also has more effect on the explained variance of intention: R^2 increase from .385 to .524, when spiritual wellness is added to the model of the theory of planned behavior plus past experience. Based on the results, it was concluded that the proposed model is an improvement on the model of the theory of planned behavior to explain intention to spa visiting.

Table 3
Comparison of competing models of the theory of planned behavior:
Explained variance in intention ($N = 138$)

Competing models	Intention to spa visiting (R square)
Theory of planned behavior	.278
Theory of planned behavior plus past experience	.385
Theory of planned behavior plus past experience and spiritual wellness	.524

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

By applying the theoretical framework of TPB, this study tested behavioral intention to spa visiting with respect to five behavioral dimensions. The proposed model fitted well with the data. The study's findings showed that the most significant predictors to visit spas are "perceived behavioral control" and "past experience," followed by "spiritual wellness" and "emotional attitude." Possible explanations are that those who have visited spas are most likely to revisit spas. They seem to be repeat visitors. Thus, membership programs or frequent-guest programs for repeat spa-goers are recommended strongly. Developing promotional programs to attract new guests is recommended, to generate more spa business. For instance, first visitors to a spa may be given their second visit *gratis*. In addition, spa-goers at a low level of spiritual wellness are most likely to visit spas because spas seem to ease emotional stresses. Advertising should emphasize stress reduction and mind revitalization via and after a spa experience. Activity programs such as meditation, Tai Chi, Chi Gong and yoga that help relax minds, could be provided with spa experience.

The potential of obtaining positive emotional attitudes is likely to encourage spa visiting. Meeting and exceeding guests' needs would create, in those guests, positive attitudes to spa visiting. And creating and maintaining positive word of mouth among spa-goers is recommended strongly. This can be accomplished by promoting special offers or discounts for any referrals that spa-goers bring to the spa, and communicating them via spa newsletters, a spa blog, or simple emails throughout the year. In this study, the perceived behavioral control was measured by perceived barriers (i.e., time and money) to spa visiting. Thus, pricing strategies such as product-bundle pricing (i.e., room with spa service) and promotional pricing should be considered also.

Generalization of this study's findings should be considered with caution because the predictive model tested in this study was geographically delimited to Midwest area of USA and total valid samples were 138 individuals, using convenience sampling. In addition, the term spa used in the questionnaire was not defined; this might occasion different perceptions of the definition of spa among respondents. The dependent variable (future intention to visit spas) was measured by only one item, so developing a multi-item scale that measures behavioral intention is recommended in future studies. Finally, more dimensions such as physical, financial, family, social, and career in wellness construct might build a more robust and/or better model.

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