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An Investigation of Spa-goers' Intention to Visit a Luxury Hotel Spa: An Extension of Theory of Planned Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Over the past decades, the growth of the spa industry has enhanced an awareness of its significance to the hospitality industry. Unfortunately, however, this dynamic sector of the hospitality industry has not drawn serious attention from researchers in hospitality and tourism. Particularly, there is a lack of clarity in spa-consuming motives and spa-goers' decision-making process. Therefore, this paper investigates spa-goers' intention to visit a spa by extending the Theory of Planned Behavior. A total of 337 usable responses were collected from spa-goers through an online survey. The results of structural model evaluation revealed that attitude, perceived behavioral control, and spiritual wellness positively affects spa-goers' intention to visit a spa. Both theoretical and managerial implications are discussed.

Keywords: Theory of Planned Behavior, spiritual wellness, perceived behavioral control, subjective norm, attitude.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The spa industry is a rapidly growing industry that captures various market segments, including club spa, cruise ship spa, medical spa, day spa, destination spa, hotel spa, and mineral springs spa. Such diversity in spa segments implies that spas are not only seen as health purposes, but also continuously becoming lucrative with the wide-range of markets within the hospitality industry (Gustavo, 2010). In the past, spas were considered as a splurge, but it is now appeared to be essential part of an activity that involves treating one's appearance and spirituality, building a relationship, and seeking relaxation (Mak, Wong, & Chang, 2009; Monteson & Singer, 2002).

According to Thorsteinsdottir (2005), a hotel spa is a place where professionally administered spa services are offered with various kinds of spa-related amenities, including food and beverages, work-outs, and wellness. Since late 1990's, a health spa has become an important hotel amenity for travelers (Monteson & Singer, 2002). Monteson and Singer (2002) confirmed that more than 80% of hotels guests contacted at luxury hotels and resorts chose a particular hotel/resort that facilitates spa services. Also, Tabacchi (2010) concluded that more hotel guests look for spas in the hotels they are staying at and thus it is important for luxury hotel/resort organizers to facilitate spa services to meet guests' needs and eventually increase its financial performance.

While the spa industry has been rapidly growing, there is still a lack of clarity in its spa-consuming motives and spa-goers' decision-making process. Therefore, the main purpose of this empirical research was to examine spa consuming behaviors by applying and extending the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). The outcomes of this research can help luxury hotel/resort marketers and spa operators understand the complicated decision-making process of spa-consuming behaviors and develop marketing strategies to meet the needs of spa-goers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Background: Theory of Planned Behavior

According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), an individual's behavior is determined by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Walker, Courneya, & Deng, 2006). The TPB is a widely recognized human behavior model that has been playing as critical

role in understanding various human behaviors (Ajzen, 2011). The TPB depicts that a human behavior can be derived from a person's positive or negative attitude towards evaluation of a certain behavior. It can be also influenced by subjective norms that are influenced by acquaintances through the word of mouth, and the perceived behavioral control that indicates the barriers embedded in performing a certain behavior (Ajzen, 2011). In addition, a domain-specific factor, spiritual wellness, was added to the three determinants of TPB to explain spa-consuming behavior (See Figure 1). The TPB was chosen to explicitly examine the three determinants (attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control) to predict spa-going behaviors. In this study, a domain-specific construct (spiritual belief) was added to the TPB to enhance the explanatory power.

2.1.1. Attitude

An individual who plans to do a particular behavior is often apt to assess different benefits involved in the behavior before taking an action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2001). Individual's attitude toward the behavior reflects the evaluation of significance on certain performances. According to Sobh and Martin, (2011), individual's intention towards experiencing particular behaviors can be deeply influenced by the expected benefits and their main perceptions for a specific situation. In terms of spa consuming behavior, spa-goers first evaluate the consequences or benefits of spa consuming behavior, such as relieving stress, rewarding themselves, and enhancing the appearances. Huh, Kim, Noh, and Davis (2011) revealed that spa-goers tend to visit a spa expecting favorable outcomes and benefits which can be derived from spa treatments, such as minimizing stress level, seeking for a better lifestyle, and improving one's appearance. Moreau, Lehmann, and Markman (2001) supported that if a consumer fails to recognize any benefits from a certain product or service; it is likely that a consumer appears to have more negative behavior in return. Since most people are prone to expect different benefits prior to performing a certain behavior, the consequence can be either favorable or unfavorable (Ajzen, 1991). Individual attitude is vital in determining behavioral intention toward a specific service. Ram (1989) discovered in a study that perceived risk and cognitive resistance are the two major factors that have a considerable impact on individuals' changing attitudes. Thus, the attitude toward the benefits of spa consumption can be associated with a spa visit.

2.1.2. Subjective Norm

Subject norm is defined as a normative belief about what friends, family, and close relatives perceive importantly towards individuals' certain behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Subjective norm is inextricably related to word of mouth. Favorable referrals perceived by individuals show a stronger behavior which in turn, affects future intention (Ajzen, 1991). Lam and Hsu (2006) revealed that people will be more likely to behave in a way that was specifically considered salient to other people's past experiences. Shanka and Handley (2011) stated that because gift cards are usually referred by others who describe them useful, spa clients can also enjoy the treatments without having to severely concern about the outcomes and consequences. A recommendation generally motivates others to experience certain situation or products as it is often pre-confirmed by the recommenders. A number of researches have investigated the consequences of the word of mouth (Huh et al., 2011; Lam & Hsu 2006; McFarlane, Boxall & Watson, 1998). They agree on the findings that general opinions receiving from other parties can affect the subsequent behavior towards experiencing certain products or services (Ajzen, 1991; Sobh & Martin, 2011). If a person hears negative feedbacks from those who have already experienced spa services might tend to continue on consuming them, switch to alternatives, or simply stop consuming them (Ajzen, 1991).

Shanka and Handley (2011) revealed that individuals usually find it easier to purchase or trust products, and attend or visit a certain place, as opposed to individuals who do not receive any feedbacks through word of mouth from others. As explained by Mutlu and Ergeneli (2012), the subjective norm has a direct effect on perceived usefulness which indicates that if a relative, friend, or family recommends a certain place, product, or intangible services, a consumer may also be willing to experience the same services (Venkatesh & Davis, 1997). Likewise, spa-consuming behavior is heavily relied on word of mouth. In particular, spa-goers tend to value the messages from the media and individuals' recommendations importantly on their spa visits (Withiam, 1993).

2.1.3. Perceived Behavioral Control

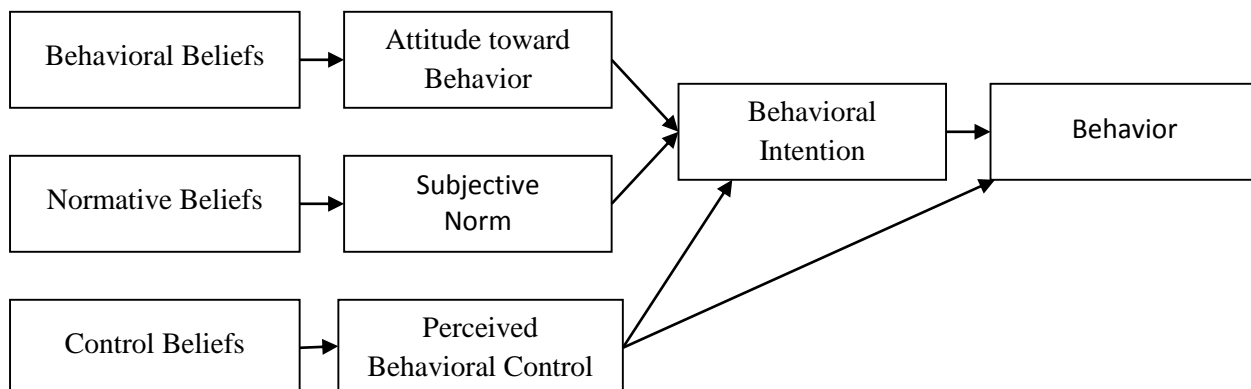
Perceived behavior control is regarded as perception towards one's ability to facilitate certain behavior to the extent that their perception will indicate the actual behavioral control (Han et al.,

2010). If external factors, such as money, location, weather, and other important resources associated with a spa visit, fail to positively influence spa-goers, they will have to search for alternatives to fill in the missing resources or it may otherwise constraint their spa-consuming behaviors (Ajzen, 1991).

According to Huh et al. (2011), time, money, season, climate, and lifecycle can be barriers that are affecting spa visits. Perception of risk varies widely across different set of circumstances (Hsu & Yang, 2013). It is generally a perception individuals have toward performing whether a particular situation is easy or difficult to be facilitated. Perceived values can be uncertain for spa-goers when they believe that a spa visit might cause harm to their safety or security. Huh et al. (2011) emphasized in a study that even though individuals want to experience a spa, the availability of resources determine their final decisions over visiting. According to Rittichainuwat, Qu, and Mongkhonvanit, (2008), a person becomes motivated to use the leisure activities, including spas, when they have a positive expectation that performing a certain behavior will bring favorable consequences which will also satisfy their needs. In order to meet this expectation, a person has to have all necessary things under control, such as available money and time.

In accordance to these, even though an individual desires to visit a spa, lack of resources can inhibit visiting (Hsu & Yang, 2013; Huh et al., 2011). Thus, spa-goers need to have necessary resources under control, such as money and time, to be free of major constraints to become motivated to visit a spa.

Figure 1. The Theory of Planned Behavior



2.1.4. Spiritual Wellness

Spiritual wellness refers to a search of higher purpose or meaning in individuals' lives and existence which magnifies things that cannot be fully explained, such as depth of life (Ayranci & Semercioz, 2011). Spirituality comes from the belief that having a comfortable inner life directly influences lifestyle as it minimizes the likelihood of being frustrated and mentally tired (Caldwell, 1998).

When a person feels in need of finding spiritual balance or experiencing spiritually relaxing feeling, he or she will have a favorable perception toward spa visit. Hilbers et al. (2010) found that meditation and prayers are spiritual beliefs that influence an individual's health and facilitate reflection, which contributes to well-being. According to Hilbers, Haynes, and Kivikko (2010), the relationship between spirituality and personal health has been receiving interests, and that there is an important link between spiritual belief and well-being. Often, spirituality and religion is interchangeably been called. While the religion is a concept that involves ritual beliefs that often requires faith coming from mind, spiritual belief is a broader concept that includes questioning the meaning of life and existence (Ayranci & Semercioz, 2011). Healing from a spa has been widely recognized among spa-goers because of its effects on relieving one's exhausted body, and mental stress (Okech, 2014). Majority of spa-goers tend to visit a spa to escape from hard-working or when in need of relaxing to balance their lives. A spa not only provides rejuvenating treatments to enhance one's appearance, but also helps being healthy by encouraging them to be free of spiritual exhaustions (Okech, 2014). Mak et al. (2009) also emphasized in a spa study that individuals who are seeking for spiritual wellness are likely to visit a spa to receive spa services and experience spa-related programs, such as fitness and physical trainings. According to Hilbers et al. (2010), spirituality comes when an individual makes a connection with the things they value important in their lives. When a spa-goer feels in need of finding spiritual balance or experiencing spiritually relaxing feeling, he or she will have a favorable perception towards spa visit.

3. METHODS

3.1.Measurement Development

The process of measurement development consisted of three steps. First, the initial set of measurement items for three belief constructs, four exogenous constructs (attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control and spiritual wellness) and one endogenous construct (behavioral intention) were identified through the thorough literature review (Hsu & Yang, 2013; Huh et al., 2011; Lee & Back, 2008; Mak et al., 2009; Tabacchi, 2010). Then, the items were tailored specifically to spa behavioral context through the expert panel discussion. Lastly, a pilot study with 50 spa goers was conducted to test the reliability and validity of measurement items, resulting in final set of measurement items. A 7-point Likert scale was used with 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*. The final measurement items for each construct are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive Summary of Measurement Items

Latent Constructs	Measurement Items
<i>Behavioral Beliefs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visiting a spa positively influences me to find a better lifestyle. • Visiting a spa helps me relax myself among friends, relatives, and family. • I believe that visiting a spa helps enhance my appearance. • I believe that I will be free of stress after a spa visit. • I have a strong interest in receiving spa-related services or products.
<i>Normative Beliefs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel under social pressure for not using a spa when others are using. • I believe that people who are my age regularly visit a spa. • I tend to listen to other spa-goers who frequently visit a spa.
<i>Control belief</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have all the time barriers under control when visiting a spa. • I have financial resources that prevent me from visiting a spa. • I do not have enough time to enjoy a spa. • Although I want to visit a spa, I am not familiar with the spa location.
<i>Attitude</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My attitude towards visiting a spa is definitely favorable. • I believe that a spa has a positive consequence. • I am excited about favorable outcomes from spa services. • I believe that a spa can be somewhat beneficial to me.
<i>Subjective Norm</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My close friends who enjoy a spa highly encourage me to experience. • My friends, colleagues, families, and relatives think I should visit a spa. • If I use spa services people who are special to me would approve. • I visit a spa only because people who are important to me enjoy it.
<i>Perceived Behavioral Control</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am confident that I can visit a spa without any difficulties (e.g., finance, time, or physically).

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- The decision to visit a spa is completely up to me.
 - I am able to manage any difficulties (e.g., finance, time, or physically) with a spa visit.
 - If I choose to visit a spa, I experience no barriers associated with it.

Spiritual Wellness

- I make time for relaxation in my day.
- I make time for meditation.
- I feel comfortable and at ease with my spiritual life.
- Prayer, meditation, or quiet personal reflections are important in my life.
- I have a strong sense of life optimism and use my thoughts and attitudes in life-affirming ways.
- I am trying to spend time in nature.

Behavioral Intention

- In the future, I intend to become a frequent spa-goer.
 - I am likely to go to a spa sometime within a short period of time.
 - I plan to use a spa within a short period of time.
 - I believe that I will be enjoying a spa near in the future.
-

3.2. Data Collection

A self-administered online questionnaire was distributed to spa-goers in the United States. The Qualtrics, an online survey service company, administered the questionnaire and collected the study samples. To participate in the online survey, respondents were more than 18 years old, and had experienced spa services in the past 12 months. A total of 351 usable responses under those sampling criteria were collected from August 22 to August 26, 2014. Fourteen samples were removed from the samples because answers were incomplete, resulting in 337 usable responses for the data analysis.

3.3. Data Analysis

The modified TPB model was tested through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM), using AMOS 20.0. Prior to the SEM test, descriptive statistics were conducted to profile respondents using various demographic variables. In the SEM process, the proposed structural framework was tested using covariance matrices with maximum likelihood estimation. Following the two-step approach recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), a CFA was first performed to determine whether the measured variables reliably reflect the hypothesized latent constructs. In the second step, the structural model was estimated to examine the causal relationships among the latent constructs. Overall, model fit measures were used to evaluate the structural model fit. The standardized path coefficients were then used to report the

causal relationships among the constructs and the relative importance of the exogenous variables (attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, and spiritual wellness) toward the endogenous constructs (behavioral intention).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 2 presents the descriptive profile of survey participants. Of the 337 respondents, the majority of respondents were female (70%). The age group of 28 to 37 constituted approximately a third of participants (35.9%). More than a third held a four-year college degree (36%), while 19% of respondents held a post-graduate degree. More than half of the respondents were also married (60.8%). As a result, typical spa goers are married female who are 28-37 years old and have either 4-year college degree or post-graduate degree.

Table 2
Demographic Profile of Survey Participants

Variable	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Gender		
Male	101	30%
<u>Female</u>	<u>236</u>	<u>70%</u>
Total	337	100%
Age		
18-27	78	23.0%
28-37	121	35.9%
38-47	51	15.2%
48-57	41	12.3%
<u>58 or older</u>	<u>46</u>	<u>13.6%</u>
Total	337	100%
Education		
High school or less	62	18%
Some college or associate (two-year) degree	81	24%
Baccalaureate (four-year) degree	122	36%
Post graduate studies	65	19%
<u>Others</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>2%</u>

Total	337	100%
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Single	131	39%
Married	176	52%
Divorced	16	5%
Widowed	6	2%
Separated	3	1%
<u>Other</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>1%</u>
Total	337	100%

4.2. Measurement Model Test

In order to specify the posited relationships of the observed variables to the latent constructs, the measurement model was tested through a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). First, reliability tests for each latent construct were performed by calculating Cronbach's alpha to measure internal consistency, which indicated satisfying reliability scores ranging from .71 to .91 in the model. Second convergent and discriminant validity were tested using composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE). All composite reliability scores surpassed .6 cut-off value and AVE values were higher than the threshold value of .5 confirming that discriminant validity was justified. Finally, an overall fit of the measurement model was accessed using the following indexes, the chi-square (χ^2) test, the comparative fit index (CFI), the normed fit index (NFI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The chi-square (χ^2) is recommended to examine the ratio of chi-square (χ^2) to the degrees of freedom (d.f.) for the model fit and it is suggested to be equal to or greater than 2 to equal to or less than 5. To be a reasonably good indicator of model fit, the values of CFI and NFI should be over .90. The acceptable value of RMSEA should be less than .08 (Meyers et al., 2006). The value of the Chi-square (χ^2) test indicated Chi-square/d.f is 3.02, indicating a good fit. CFI and NFI are .869 and .817, respectively, indicating a moderate fit. However, the value of RMSEA is .078, indicating a good fit. Overall, the proposed measurement model fits moderately with the data.

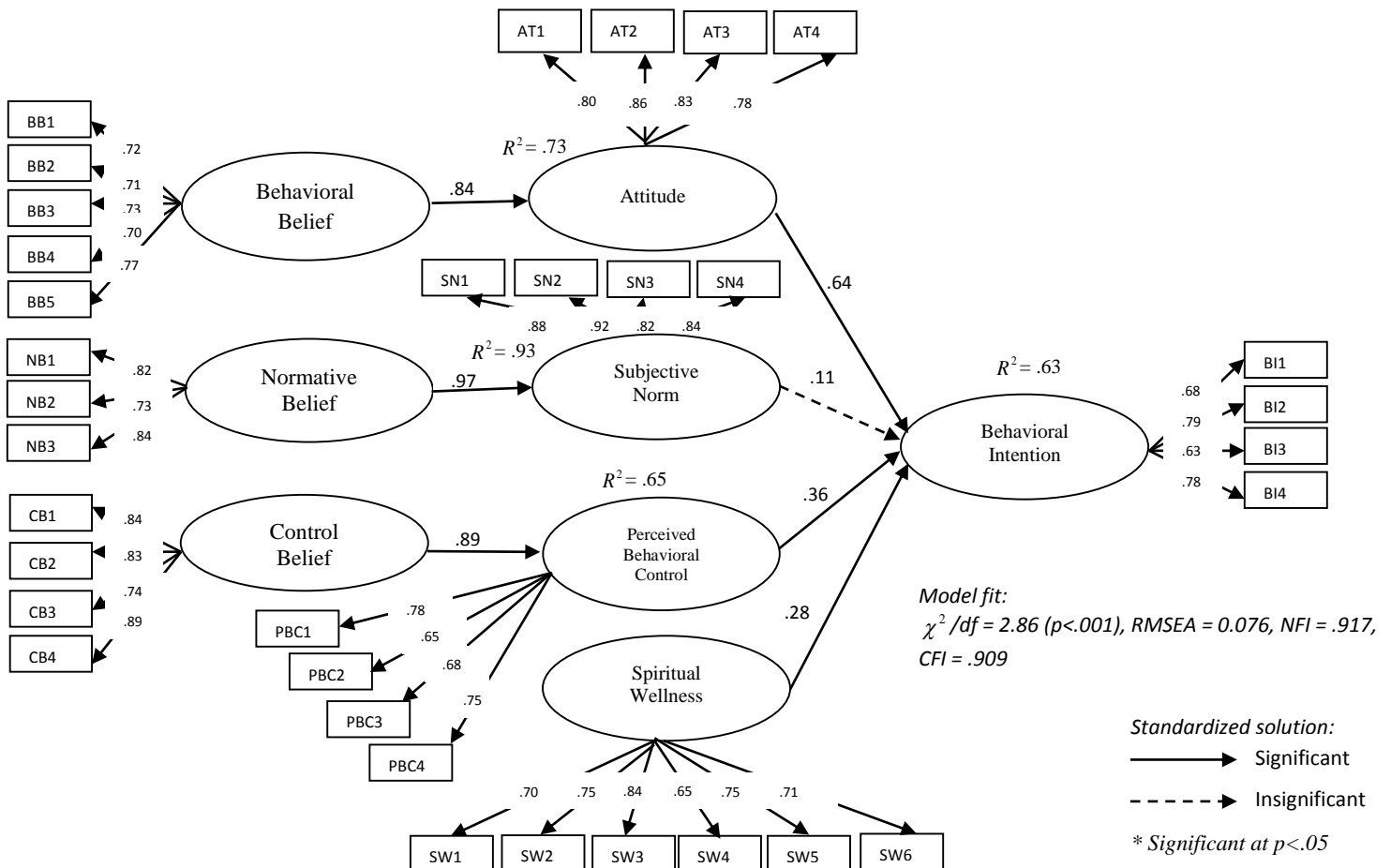
4.3. Structural Model Test

After satisfactory results of measurement model evaluation, the structural model was assessed to examine the overall fit of the model and test hypothetical causal relationships among the

constructs in the model. As shown in Figure 2, the entire model fit index fell into acceptable ranges ($\chi^2/df = 2.86$, RMSEA = 0.076, NFI = .917, CFI = .909), which confirmed that the structural model for this study provided a good fit to the data.

The majority of standardized path coefficients for the hypothetical relationships in the model were significant supporting the extended theory of planned behavior. Behavioral beliefs influence spa-goers' attitudes ($\beta = .84$, $p < .001$), which in turn, influence their intention ($\beta = .64$, $p < .001$) to visit the spa. Normative beliefs affect spa goers' subjective norm ($\beta = .97$, $p < .001$); however, it does not affect spa goers' intention ($\beta = .11$, $p > .001$) to visit the spa. Control beliefs affect spa goers' perceived behavioral control ($\beta = .89$, $p < .001$), which in turn, influences spa goers' intention ($\beta = .36$, $p < .001$) to visit the spa. A newly posited latent construct in this extension of theory of planned behavior, "spiritual wellness" indicated that it influences spa goers' intention ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$), enhancing explaining power of theory of planned behavior.

Figure 2. Results of structural equation model



The size of the standardized path coefficients shows the extent to which each determinant construct explains the behavioral intention. To this end, the size of path coefficients was compared. The absolute magnitude of the estimated standardized path coefficient shown in Figure 2 revealed that attitude toward spa going has the strongest effect on behavioral intention to visit spa ($\beta = .64$, $p < .001$), followed by perceived behavioral control ($\beta = .36$, $p < .001$) and spiritual wellness ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$). Jointly these three determinant constructs (attitude, perceived behavioral control, and spiritual wellness) explained 63% variance in spa going intention. Interestingly, subjective norm did not affect behavioral intention ($\beta = .11$, $p > .001$)

5. DISCUSSION

The proposed model in this study extends the line of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) research, supporting the foundations of attitude and perceived behavioral control in predicting a human behavior. Following the original concept of the TPB, this study adopted the method of a full-model test, including belief constructs, in order to provide more detailed insights into the root of a spa-going behavior. The results of this empirical research found strong correlations between predictor constructs (attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control) and their respective belief-based aggregates. This finding reaffirmed that attitude is derived from beliefs about the behavioral consequences, that subjective norms are derived from beliefs about the normative expectations of others, and that perceptions of the control are derived from beliefs about the presence of factors that may facilitate or impede performance of behavior. Another notable contribution of this research is that the proposed spa-going model added a domain-specific construct (spiritual wellness) to the original TPB, which substantially improved the predicting power of the TPB. Adding a domain-specific construct to the TPB is in line with recent theoretical development in intention-based human behavior research. This move furthered the understanding of sophisticated spa-going behavior in this research.

Of four predictor constructs, attitude turned out to be the strongest predictor variable. Spa-going is fully volitional. This finding suggests that spa-goers give much thought to the consequences of visiting a spa. Anticipated benefits, such as relaxation, appearance, stress

reduction etc., positively influence potential spa-goers' attitude to spa visit. Therefore, for spa marketers, it would be more effective to advertise these benefits. Effective marketing strategies should attempt to reflect these positive consequences of visiting spa by utilizing more persuasive communication channels.

Also, the role of perceived behavioral control was significant in explaining spa-going behavior. This finding indicates that spa-goers make conscious thinking to visit spa. Since control belief items (i.g. money, time, and location) may facilitate or impede spa-going behaviors, potential spa-goers carefully plan for their visit to spa in advance. Thus, spa marketers must identify potential spa-going barriers that prevent individuals from visiting a spa and reduce those barriers.

Another significant indicator of spa-going behavior is spiritual wellness. Although its relationship with behavioral intention is relatively weak compared with attitude and perceived behavioral control, spiritual wellness is a significant determinant of spa visit and thus provides ample implications for spa marketers. Potential spa-goers look for spiritual balance or spiritually relaxing feeling and personal health, which in turn, create favorable perception toward spa visit. Thus, spa markets must focus on potential spa-goers who have not recognized the spiritual and health benefits provided by a spa, and provide them with opportunities to feel spiritual wellness at spa. Such a marketing effort can ultimately lead potential spa goers to become regular spa-goers and become actively involved in various spa activities.

An interesting finding of this study is that subjective norm did not have significant influence on spa-going behavior. Generally, subjective norm is an important determinant variable in human behaviors requiring cooperation from colleagues, friends, boss/advisors, family members, etc. (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). In many situations, however, a spa-going behavior is not associated with business. Therefore, promoting positive word-of-mouth through public relations (PR) or advertising in professional and/or trade magazine is less effective in spa marketing. Instead, individual one-to-one marketing or so-called direct marketing that aims to enhance personal and individualized communication with customers can be more effective in spa marketing.

6. CONCLUSION

The paper tried to explain the spa-going behavior by extending the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). The proposed model indicated that spa-goers' attitude and perceived behavioral control

influence their intentions to visit a spa. The study also used spiritual wellness as a new indicator of spa goers' intention to visit a spa. The proposed model confirmed that the addition of spiritual wellness to the TPB substantially enhanced the explanatory power of the TPB model. The results of this empirical research can help researchers in hospitality and tourism extend and modify the TPB model to explain another important consumer behavior in the hospitality industry. At the same time, the findings of this empirical research can help spa industry professionals understand the sophisticated decision-making process of potential spa-goers.

Although this empirical research achieved its objectives, it also possesses a few limitations, which should be addressed in future research. First, this study focused only on the luxury hotel spa segment, and thus the findings and implications of this study should not be extended to the general spa industry. Also, the data were collected in the United States reflecting the trends of spa-going behaviors in the luxury hotel market segment in the United States. Therefore, this study should be replicated in different settings to validate the extended TPB model in explaining spa-going behavior.

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