

Measurement of Mature Spring/Spa Travellers' Beliefs in Taiwan

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Abstract—Spring/spa tourism has been playing an important role in many countries around the world, particularly, the exceptionally rich in natural springs throughout the Island of Taiwan. The mature travel market is significantly becoming one of specific groups in health tourism relative industry. Due to the different beliefs, knowledge, and cognition of health spring travel may influence mature travellers' decision-making by time changes. This study investigated the relevant of mature traveller's beliefs related to travel behaviour in choosing health spring destination. Furthermore, the research were analysis the effect of travel motivation, attitude towards, and cognitive on mature spring traveller's decision-making in health spring/spa destination. The results revealed similarities and differences between mature travellers relating to mature travel beliefs at spring/spa. The findings could be applied as new empirical academic knowledge of mature traveller behaviour in health, spring/spa tourism and has implications for the spring/spa mature travel market.

Index Terms—Hot spring, spa, mature traveller, spring cognition, traveller's beliefs.

I. INTRODUCTION

With the increasing interest in pursuing health and fitness among the Taiwanese, visiting spring and spa destinations has become a popular mainstream activity in Taiwanese society. Health travel has undergone a century of development and has presented some unique features in its development pattern, scale, and business models in Taiwanese society. People have started to believe that natural spring/spa water has some medicinally beneficial and curative features for various physical illnesses (e.g. skin diseases, arthritis). Travelling for health is a specialisation in the mature market and many people have experienced hot springs since the time of the Japanese occupation (1895-1945), when the use of hot springs for medicinal purposes first became popular. Under increasingly competitive conditions, marketers nowadays are developing new forms of spring/spa services and products to help understand and meet travellers' specific needs and desires.

By reviewing the spring/spa tourism around the world, the original concept of spring/spa tourism can be traced back to the Roman times, with the first baths born in the second century B.C. "Taking to the waters" became a pleasure activities, giving rise to people seeking destination to use waters at mineral spas and hot springs in the form of a public bath, or drinking some of the water for supposed health

benefits [1], [2]. The English spa town or bath became a health resort destination for the English society commencing around the 1700s. People nowadays believe that bathing at sea with the British Medical Association's recommendation in the 1870s of a cruise to improve their health [3]. This concept of healthful is also popular in the Dead Sea because it has a high mineral content (for example, sodium chloride, bromine, calcium chloride, and potassium chloride). In USA, the mineral springs spas are still existing with its original treatment facility in many centre of the city [4]. Chen and Chang mentioned that the other forms of spa still accure in different parts of the world such as Japanese style bathhouses, Russian bath, Chinese foot and seabed hot springs [5].

Current mature travellers have sufficient savings, ample time, a high motivation to enjoy themselves, and to spend freely on springs/spas or activities focused on personal health. It seems that there is a lack in knowledge: many of them appear unaware of the function of spring/spa resources and product differences. Alongside this, there has been an increase in the number of baby-boomer travellers (who were born 1946-1964) and an increase in mature travellers' purchasing power in the area of travel [6]. Thus, mass marketing and health-care services have mushroomed in the mature products sector of the health tourism industry. For example, the number of people from western countries who now travel to engage in medical tourism for healthcare in Asia (i.e. Thailand, India, Singapore, Taiwan, and Malaysia) has increased each year [7]. The statistics show that 1.2 million patients travelled to India for healthcare purposes and 1.1 million medical tourists travelled to Thailand in 2004. Medical tourism therefore represents another vital source of income; spring/spa tourism is the emerging trend and a popular activity for people wishing to maintain good health in Taiwanese society. Thus, understanding Taiwan's social evolution is important to the spring/spa tourism study.

The growth of hot spring tourism since the 1900s is well-known in Taiwan society. Spring tourism in Taiwan's travel market has long been considered therapeutic, as different types of natural springs offer their own specific medicinal advantages for improving people's health. In 1999, the Taiwanese government ran a promotional campaign on spring/spa activities, known as the 'Taiwan hot spring tourism year'. The programme represented an attempt to improve the quality of springs provided by destination operators. Subsequently a 'Hot spring/Spa Law' was introduced in 2003 to formulate the conservation and sustainable use of natural springs resources. Since that time, visitors are increasingly seeking a healthier lifestyle. Spring and spa tourism is expected to become one of the pioneering "value sectors" during the modernisation process in Taiwan.

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Despite the growth of health spa industry currently taking an important position, there are many spa provider still face different challenges to open their mind and prepare for the future. Even though spa travel has been popular in the modern times, many consumers are still not clear on what a spa is and do not see themselves in the spa market [8]. Particularly, mature travel market has been investigated either by SERVQUAL dimensions [9], the decision of hotel selection [10], information sources for making vacation decisions [11], [12], shopping behaviours [13], or travel experiences [14]. There are very little literatures have attributed the motivation and decision-making behaviour of mature travellers to select the health spa destination or judge the attraction of their service and marketing strategies. Therefore, this research will to highlight on the relevant of mature traveller's motivation in choosing health spring/spa destination in this competitive market in Taiwan.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Definition of Health Spring/Spa

According to the record of thermal springs, where is from depths through fissures in the rock or a result of volcanic activity that forces water to the surface in the form of geysers and hot springs. "Most thermal water contains minerals in solution and iron. For example, carbonated salt springs help rheumatic and neuralgic conditions and radioactive springs are put forward as a treatment for depression [3]."

Spa is the Latin *solus per aqua*, meaning "health from water". The town of spa was found in 1326 and William Slings by founded the chalybeate spring at Spa in 1551 in England. The word spa is used to only in English-speaking countries. For centuries Europeans have been "taking the waters", which either soaking in them or drinking them. In Germany, they term Kurort, meaning "place of cure," spread to Eastern Europe, which include prescribe treatment, herbal wraps, dry and wet heat treatments, massages, and more. The Kur towns are acts as the office medical spa facility. It is open to all visitors to the town staying at surrounding hotels (whom many have their own cure department and doctors). The French equivalent *let bains*, indicates more specifically a spa, the Italian word term and the Spanish word Baños [4].

Health Organisatoin (WTO) describes health as a state of complete mental, physical and social well-being. The International Union of Tourism Organisations (1973) defined the health tourism as "the provision of health facilities utilizing the natural resources of the country, in particular mineral water and climate (IOUTO)". Other literature defined health tourism is the destination to attract tourists by health service and facilities, promoting and regular tourism amenities [15], seeking different climate or taking a cruise, completely spa experience and specific medical reason [16], calm the nerves of anxious businessmen [17], and survival-related needs and escape stress travel [18]. Those concepts are driving factors of growing demand in health spa industry.

Hall mentioned that the health tourism is a person travelling overnight away from home for the express benefit of maintaining or improving health and well-being [1]. In

France, health care is combined with leisure facilities and entertainment [19]. Monteson and Signer; Spivack note the spa resorts in the health services and facilities are provided and emphasized by various degrees such as spa treatments, beauty services, salon services, medical affiliation, health and fitness program, and treatment facilities [4], [15], [17], [20]-[23]. Monteson and Singer had been defined that spa services usually participate in a programme based on exercise, healthy eating, and various bath services [24]. Therefore, the definition of spa and health service in this study is the senior travellers consider more of a 'lifestyle attributes', it is not only equipment and exercise circuits for relaxation seekers, but also a large variety of exercise classes, personal training services provides, senior special events, spa vacation packages, fine dining to maintain their physical and mental health.

B. Mature Travellers' Beliefs about Visiting Springs/Spas

Many Taiwanese mature people have experienced bathing in a frigid climate in mineral spring waters, which has been common since the late 1800s. Even spring tourism has been acknowledged for a century in Taiwan's travel market. People continue today to search for the reason for the re-birth of mineral springs and the boom in health spas in Taiwan in the first decade of the 21st century. Why were spring/spa activities so popular both during Japanese times and in the present day? And did people really believe the water could cure illness? Some spring/spa destinations are rather old or in faraway locations; even so, travellers were willing to believe they had medicinal effects for their ill-health. In answer to those questions, people may have realised that different types of natural springs have diverse and unique medicinal effects for improving health. That is to say, the benefits of soaking their body in the mineral springs or health spas are multi-functional. This perception is similar to those people who believe in drinking bottled water and taking vitamins in their daily lives.

Belief in psychological theory refers to subjective judgments and perceptions within the cognitive system, which affect a wide range of specific attitudes on the basis of individual situational factors. Spring/spa travel behaviour particularly is an individual experience to understand what psychological factors motivate the traveller. Therefore, the traveller's belief becomes a crucial pattern to understand the needs of particular groups. For example, the traveller may make judgments about the differences between spa/spring functions. These evaluations may affect the traveller's perceived beliefs. On the other hand, we might ask what kind of beliefs will influence the mature traveller's attitude toward the choice of health spa destination. For example, do the beliefs stem from their previous spring/spa experiences or social phenomena?

Psychographic variables have been found to be useful in determining their impact on the travel mode choice and positively influencing marketing as well as promotion strategies. A number of psychological theories have explained how the consumer's perception and social cognition influences their decisions and behaviour in order to understand specific underlying traveller beliefs [25], [26]. Expectancy theories, one theory in the cognitive system,

clarify individual attitude, motivation, performance and satisfaction. This theory identified that people engage in activities with expectations that they will lead to a certain goal [27]-[29]. In other words, people's expectations might influence their beliefs by having an effect on anticipated actions.

With much research has present interest in adventure, health, and sport akin the attention on the physical, moral, and spiritual damage of urban living at the turn of the 21st century in North America, Europe, and Australia [16]. The desire of healthy lifestyle and attractive destination development are appreciable reward of more on aspect of demand and supply. Spring/Spa tourism has also been studied in the field of sport tourism, which is only focus on the types of spa and the benefits related with spa as a leisure activity [1], [30].

Nowadays, most of individual tourists seek more than a single benefit from their travel experience, they may have multiform reasons for travel [31]. The fashionable and body image, for example, may influence on individual motivation to attend spas. For mature spring traveller, visit friends or maintaining socialise purpose may be important than other reasons or activities such as beauty appearance or escape [3], [23].

Spring/spas are providing a myriad of opportunities for improving the mind, body, health and wellness. Particularly, the 'baby boomers' enter this market, the potential for growth on global scale is significantly. The marketer is also facing more challenges than ever before to meet consumer needs effectively, as they have flexible income and time to travel [32], [33]. McNeil and Ragins indicated that spa goers have health concerns, moreover, visitors go to the spa destination are looking for a nurturing and healing place, sharing experiences with their friends, relatives and spouses [8]. Specifically for senior travelers, they want to feel safety and cared for as well as comfortable on the social relationship [3].

Health spring travel market varied from traditional guests receiving health treatments, incentive travellers, couples, educational visitors, exploring experience and business people to families on holiday [23]. Many spring/spa goers choose resort may not only spa purpose, but can also participate in other recreational and activities in the destination resort such as improve lifestyle, feel pampered, massage and beauty treatments, various body services, meet new friends, learning local culture and historical as well as experience series outdoor activities.

The spring/spa products are diverse from mud springs, seabed hot springs, crystal bubble spring, hot/cold springs, green tea spring, family spring, seawater hydrotherapy, massages to health menu, and outdoor exercise with facilities treatments. The benefits of spa and hot spring travel are including cure and maintenance for personal health. In terms of advantage of mature spring travel are varied from essentially relief stress to environment involvement among people.

Several theoretical studies report that the underlying dimensions of psychology such as beliefs, affect, perceptions, knowledge, and experience may influence travel behavior [28], [34]; therefore, focus has shifted to individual subjective indicators of travel destination. For instance,

mature travellers may evaluate the health spring/spa, accumulating knowledge or beliefs and feelings about the spiritual experiences of health spa products before the particular behaviour.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

With a considerable knowledge influenced the variation of views of the respondents, including social context; it is practically difficult for the researcher to be completely objective [35]. The interpretive paradigm is primarily concerned with understanding social actors' meanings, and emphasised qualitative methodologies. In other words, the qualitative method emphasises a person's point of view to interpret their social world. Numerous consumer behaviour research projects have been concerned with how to use appropriate philosophical and methodological foundations to answer questions about the nature of the world and to establish a reliable knowledge of human behaviour for understanding social context. Thus, the author's design tries to obtain a reality of objective research in different ways (both qualitative and quantitative) by formulating research problems to seek reality and knowledge in this research.

A variety of approaches may enhance the validity of findings, for the quantitative approach could test theories while the qualitative approach may help to explain and generalise the underlying dimensions of phenomena. Socio-psychological variables may weak using the quantitative approach. Thus, qualitative research can be construed by providing background information. This research therefore is divided into two stages: in the first stage, the documentary method was used, as well as participant semi-structured personal interviews to discover important mature spring/spa travel motivations and beliefs variables in Taiwan. The second stage used the quantification of data to enhance the validity and the reliability of information on travel motivation, destination attributes, beliefs, and to generalise the findings by testing the hypotheses of the research. The empirical evidence for the relationship between motivation and destination choice is investigated in order to see what those factors may mean for particular spring/spa groups, government policy reform, and market management.

The research survey is comprised over 250 mature travellers who age over than 55-year have been visited or stayed in spa destination in Taiwan at least once in the last two or three years. Two age groups of mature spring traveller will be created: groups aged over 55-65, and over 65. The managers (includes General Manager, Sales & Marketing Manager, and Front Office Manager) of spa resorts/hotels or destinations will be interviewed as well.

The pilot study was conducted to test the validity and reliability, including question wording, layout and improvements were made to listed items. Following this, the final standardised structured questionnaire was developed and improved for the main survey. The research instrument part comprised three sections to answer research questions and examine hypotheses.

The questionnaire was designed to gather information on traveller's motivation and beliefs related to their

consumption behaviour of health spa destinations. It developed based on the literature review, through conversations with spa/spring-travellers, and an amendatory pilot survey. A traditional Chinese-language version of the questionnaire was translated from the English version. Validation of the translation instruments was considered important to ensure avoidance of error. The first part of the questionnaire referred to the respondents' previous experience in health spring/spa destination attributes and features related to travel behaviour. Variables such as frequency of visit, times of visits made in the last two years, kind of destination visited, amount of money spent in spring/spa destination, region of destination visited, accompanying of groups, and destination features were addressed. The second part contained 24 interrelated attitude statements to measure push factor motivations on what beliefs encourage them to visit health spring/spa destination. The attitude statements section contained questions concerning respondents' attitudes towards a wide range of beliefs and motivations of health spa destinations.

The sample frame will take randomisation from the spa destination or resort/hotel in Taiwan basis. To ensure the data collection is produced trustworthy evidence of search question asked and to enhance the validity and reliability of variables, a pilot test will be used firstly. A draft questionnaire will first inspect by researchers, mature travellers, and hotel managers. In order to test the relative similarity and difference of potential mature travel market segmentations, the behaviour, and decision making in spa destination. Both quantitative and qualitative methods will be used in the light of the forward mentioned research objectives. The decision-making of mature spring traveller, consumer behaviour will be used Likert scales technique and attitude statements to find out the similarities and differences in relation of mature travellers with different market segmentations. The descriptive analyses will be used to investigate the health spa service preferences and trip typologies.

IV. RESULTS

The medians, means and standard deviations of mature travellers' beliefs (push factors) were significantly different with spring/spa destination behaviour. T-test and One-way-ANOVA techniques were undertaken to test for a significant difference in motives among the spring/spa destination behaviour. Tukey's HSD tests were conducted to identify the source of those differences ($p < 0.05$). These behaviour include visiting frequency with 'Education & Learning' factor ($p = 0.040$); number of past visits with 'Relaxation' factor ($p = 0.043$); length of stay, annual spend with 'Relaxation' factor ($p = 0.004$); destination area with 'Personal Health & Building Relationship', 'Relaxation', 'Arranged Treatment' factor ($p < 0.05$); kind of spa destination with 'Relaxation' factor ($p = 0.028$); function of spring with 'Education & Learning', 'Arranged Treatment' factor ($p < 0.05$) motivate the mature traveller to visit a spring/spa.

Data contained in Table I–IV were used to determine

whether mature travellers' beliefs (push factors) were significantly different with spring/spa destination behaviour. These behaviour include visiting frequency with 'Education & Learning' factor ($p = 0.040$); number of past visits with 'Relaxation' factor ($p = 0.043$); length of stay, annual spend with 'Relaxation' factor ($p = 0.004$); destination area with 'Personal Health & Building Relationship', 'Relaxation', 'Arranged Treatment' factor ($p < 0.05$); kind of spa destination with 'Relaxation' factor ($p = 0.028$); function of spring with 'Education & Learning', 'Arranged Treatment' factor ($p < 0.05$) motivate the mature traveller to visit a spring/spa. In terms of reference group and the main purpose of visiting the spring/spa destination characteristics were not statistically significant difference to form beliefs.

TABLE I: FREQUENCY OF VISITING DIFFERENCES IN RANKING OF PUSH MOTIVATIONS

	Frequency of Ranking		t	P
	Mean	SD		
Frequency of visiting				
Education & Learning				
Once a year	-.2598	1.1818		
More than once a year	.0836	.9231	-2.065	.040*

Note: * $p < 0.05$

Table II Comparison of Mean Cross Push Motivation in Number of Past Visits

Spring/spa beliefs dimension	Number of past visits				Tukey
	A (44)	B (90)	C (58)	F	P
Personal Health & Building Relationship	-.0697	.0053	.0317	.154	.857
Relaxation	-.0682	-.1268	.2490	3.195	.043*
Education & Learning	-.1652	.0124	.1146	1.147	.320
Arranged Treatment	-.1504	.0941	-.0042	1.087	.339

Note: * $p < 0.05$

Number of past visit: A: first time; B: 2nd-4th; C: 5th or more

Table III Comparison of Mean Cross Push Motivation in Length of Stay at the Destination

Spring/spa beliefs dimension	Length of stay at the destination				Tukey
	A (71)	B (85)	C (37)	F	P
Personal Health & Building Relationship	.15357	-.09809	-.06934	.154	.217
Relaxation	.12223	.09056	-.44262	5.645	.004**
Education & Learning	.08341	-.10424	.06024	.975	.379
Arranged Treatment	.07630	-.09111	.06288	.717	.489

Table IV Comparison of Mean Cross Push Motivation in Destination Area

Spring/spa beliefs dimension	Destination Area				Tukey
	A (33)	B (68)	C (61)	D (27)	P
Personal Health & Building Relationship	.24898	.00729	.01468	-.4666	3.109
Relaxation	.12761	.06031	-.28112	.36185	3.744
Education & Learning	-.18703	-.04737	.23656	-.21627	2.328
Arranged Treatment	.33034	.02484	-.24706	.02202	2.831

Note: * $p < 0.05$

Destination area: A: Northern; B: Central; C: Southern; D: Eastern

V. DISCUSSION

A number of researchers have found that using specific psychographic variables is more effective and useful for predicting the impact on the choice of travel behaviour, as well as positively influencing marketing strategies [36], [37]. And despite the growing popularity of healing springs/spas in Taiwan, what motivates mature travellers to travel and why they visit has largely been ignored by tourism research in the past. Use of push and pull factors to understand the influences on mature travel motivations have been developed and more commonly used to explain what influences people in terms of choice of destinations.

Spring/spa tourism is one of the fast-growing sectors of the travel industry in Taiwan, which has often been regarded as a destination where a traveller can relax, make new friends,

treat an illness, or prevent disease. In order to connect the research findings and discussions, the research suggests practical marketing implications for the spring/spa related market. In this regards, the finding of socio-demographics, spring/spa destination feature, travel characteristics, beliefs in destination, and available services and products would be useful in supporting marketing strategies. In short, spring/spa operators are becoming core competency and substantial business driver for health springs/spas [38]. Those elements help to define and recognise its market segmentations for particular cohort groups. Spring/spa destination operators must understand the needs different or similar aspects of findings provided in regard to mature travellers' beliefs, demand in the choice of spring/spa destinations, and travel behaviour. The findings show similarities and differences among mature travellers' beliefs and destination selection behaviours at spring/spas. They were examined by comparing the results with previous research. It could be concluded that there is some similarity in terms of individual characteristics and travel patterns among the push and pull factors. There is a distinct type of Taiwanese mature spring/spa travel behaviour. In conjunction with the research findings, the results indicate need to better target the different mature groups in marketing strategies for further product and services development. The findings also led to new empirical knowledge of heterogeneous traveller behaviour in the field of health spring/spa tourism, wellness tourism, healthcare tourism, and medical tourism.

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