
The Impact of Wellness Tourism Experiences on the Quality of Life of Tourists in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT: The research clearly defines the concept of "wellness tourism" and introduces the concepts of "service experience," "perceived value," "experiential satisfaction," and "quality of life" of tourists to illustrate the current situation of tourism in Vietnam and establish a foundation for the development of wellness tourism. Through a survey of 503 domestic and international tourists, the authors demonstrate the positive impact of factors such as "personal experience" and "value motivation" on "customer satisfaction" and "improvement in quality of life" among participants in wellness tourism experiences. Furthermore, the study reveals that the majority of Vietnamese people are highly interested in and desire to improve both their physical and mental health, as domestic tourists tend to spend more and dedicate more time to wellness tourism compared to international tourists. Based on the research findings, the authors provide specific recommendations and solutions for tour operators offering wellness tourism services in Vietnam, as well as for the government in general, aiming to enhance the tourist experience and further develop this promising tourism sector in Vietnam in the future.

KEYWORDS: wellness tourism, personal experience, value motivation, customer satisfaction, improvement in quality of life.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the current situation, with urban life becoming increasingly stressful and posing various health risks everywhere, the demand for improving health and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, especially through wellness tourism, has become a popular trend. Responding to this demand, "wellness tourism" has emerged as the most focused and potentially growing type of tourism worldwide. In 2020, tourism was severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, but from 2021–2022, it began to recover at a faster annual growth rate compared to overall tourism. By 2023, although this type of tourism has not fully recovered, it will still account for a significant portion, comprising 11.6% of total spending in healthcare economies. Additionally, revenue from healing tourism is expected to reach \$919 billion, equivalent to 18% of the global tourism industry in 2022. Although wellness tourism has been prevalent and developed in many countries worldwide, it has only recently been introduced in Vietnam and is gradually becoming a popular consumer market that many travelers love to explore and experience. However, there is currently no research focusing on analyzing the experience of wellness tourism as a strategy to enhance customer satisfaction, loyalty, and quality of life for tourists. This will pose difficulties in maintaining and developing service quality, failing to ensure customer satisfaction.

Therefore, the research topic is "The influence of service experience on customer loyalty towards wellness tourism tours in Vietnam. Recommendations for travel companies offering wellness tourism products in Vietnam" have been completed based on the arguments presented. The research results are expected to have a significant impact on the tourism industry in general and businesses operating in the wellness tourism sector in particular. This will provide a more detailed insight into the impact of wellness tourism and develop comprehensive and specific strategies to enhance tourists' experiences, satisfaction, loyalty, and quality of life in the future.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPHOTESIS DEVELOPMENT

A. Wellness tourism

Currently, the healthcare industry is experiencing strong growth, especially in the field of wellness tourism. This type of tourism has emerged as a powerful means of maintaining and improving health, both physically and mentally. From providing therapeutic treatments to offering a healthy and comfortable living environment, wellness tourism is not only a form of entertainment but also a comprehensive approach to human health and happiness. According to Heintzman (2010), this reflects a deep spiritual need of

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individuals to develop at a personal level and a desire to experience a sense of belonging in a world filled with constraints, stress, and an increasing sense of isolation.

Konu, Tuohino & Komppula (2010) emphasize that wellness and wellness tourism are widely used in the "health, welfare, and tourism" field. According to the research by Puczko and Smith (2008), the focus of wellness tourism has shifted from treatment to prevention, influenced greatly by popular media and psychology. Global wellness tourism was estimated to be around \$808 billion in 2020 (Dillette et al., 2021). This indicates the increasing emphasis on maintaining health and happiness in people's daily lives and the growing interest of travelers in wellness tourism.

Although the wellness tourism industry is experiencing significant growth in both volume and value, there are still many challenges ahead. As highlighted by Mintel's research (2007), this market is fragmented and difficult to understand, with many different brands and formats. It includes a wide range of diverse products and services and is also influenced by various influencing factors and localities. However, this also opens up opportunities for diversity and creativity in providing services and experiences for customers, as well as for the strong development of the market, especially with the increasing interest of affluent individuals in developed countries in personal development and the desire to enjoy extended longevity (Schalber & Peters, 2012).

According to Chen et al. (2008), wellness tourism is defined as trips that promote the health and well-being of individuals and establish physical connections between their mind, body, and soul. Wellness tourism also includes stays at spas, resorts, or treatment retreats aimed at improving well-being (DeMicco, 2017a, b; Thal & Hudson, 2019). The concept of wellness tourism differs from medical tourism in that while medical tourism is intended for travelers seeking treatment for a specific illness or condition, wellness tourism is sought by "healthy" individuals with the primary goal of maintaining or improving their health.

Hartwell et al. (2016) state that the "most common perspective is that tourists seek products, services, and experiences to achieve the desired state of health and well-being, understood comprehensively as a balance between body, mind, and spirit." In summary, wellness tourism is a form of tourism in which the main goal is for travelers to seek balance and enhance their overall health through physical activities and healthcare.

Wellness tourism can include various activities such as yoga, running, hiking, mountain climbing, participating in fitness classes like aerobics, zumba, swimming, and engaging in outdoor activities such as cycling, mountain biking, skiing, and nature exploration. Wellness tourism destinations often provide infrastructure and services to support travelers' participation in physical activities and healthcare: fitness centers, spas, fitness-oriented resorts, restaurants and hotels with healthy menus and diets, and stress-reducing activities such as yoga and massage.

Wellness tourism not only helps improve physical health, increase strength and flexibility, reduce stress, and improve mood, but it also provides exciting and enjoyable experiences during the travel process. Additionally, wellness tourism can provide opportunities for travelers to explore and experience culture and nature at unique tourist destinations. This can promote cultural understanding and enhance knowledge about the natural environment. However, before engaging in any health-related physical activities while traveling, travelers should research and consult healthcare experts. Furthermore, ensuring safety and adherence to local rules and regulations is also crucial.

Wellness tourism is not only a form of tourism but also a comprehensive approach to human health and happiness. With a focus on prevention and health improvement, along with diversity and creativity in service provision, wellness tourism is becoming a strong and promising trend in the modern tourism industry.

B. The Framework and Hypothesis

Building upon the framework established in the research by Campón-Cerro et al. (2020), the authors applied a modified version of their research model to align with the theme of this study. "Functional value" and "emotional value" are assessed to have an impact on tourists' "satisfaction" (Song et al., 2015). According to Schmitt (1999), if the products provided generate valuable experiences, customers typically recognize the high value of those products. Oh et al. (2007) also evaluate the experience of a destination as the origin of value and assessment of the destination. Therefore, regarding experiences, the authors still investigate the relationships with "satisfaction" and "quality of life" as in the original study but will pass through the intermediate variables "emotional value" and "functional value." However, the original study referenced by the author group is about wellness tourism related to water, so the experience will differ from healing tourism. Therefore, to fit the context of healing tourism research and to generalize the research subjects, the author group utilizes experiential attributes proven in the study by Kongtaveesawas et al. (2022). Experiences include physical, mental, spiritual, and environmental aspects.

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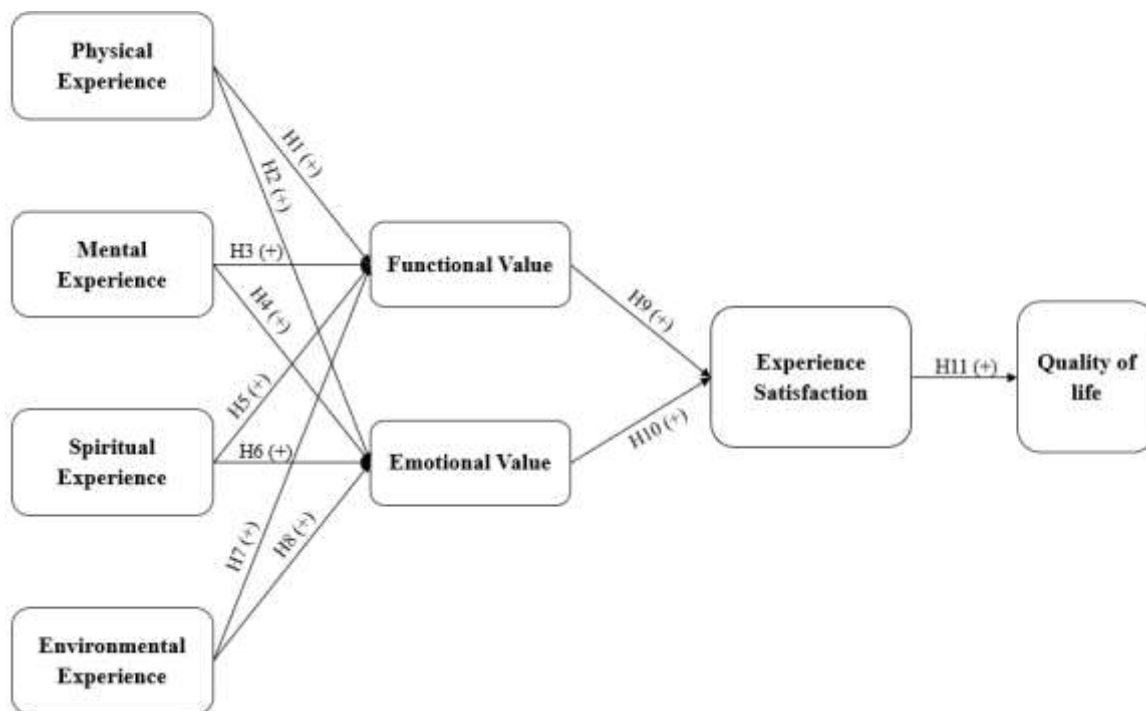


Figure 1. The proposed research model

The hypothesis in this study based on the conceptual research model, is as follows:

- H1: Physical experience positively influences functional value.
- H2: Physical experience positively influences emotional value.
- H3: Mental experience positively influences functional value.
- H4: Mental experience positively influences emotional value.
- H5: Spiritual experience positively influences functional value.
- H6: Spiritual experience positively influences emotional value.
- H7: Surrounding environmental experience positively influences functional value.
- H8: Surrounding environmental experience positively influences the mental value of tourists.
- H9: Functional value positively influences customer satisfaction in the travel experience.
- H10: Emotional value positively influences customer satisfaction in the travel experience.
- H11: "Tourist satisfaction in experiences helps improve quality of life."

III. RESEARCH METHOD

As indicated above, the target audience of the study comprises tourists, including both domestic and international tourists who participated in healing tours in Vietnam. After distributing and collecting survey results, a total of 551 responses were obtained. Following analysis and exclusion of 48 ineligible responses, 503 valid responses were remaining. The authors utilized this dataset to conduct detailed analyses and draw conclusions. We employed SPSS 26 and AMOS 24 software to analyze the data, running Cronbach's Alpha to assess the reliability of the scale, conducting Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test the relationships between variables in the model.

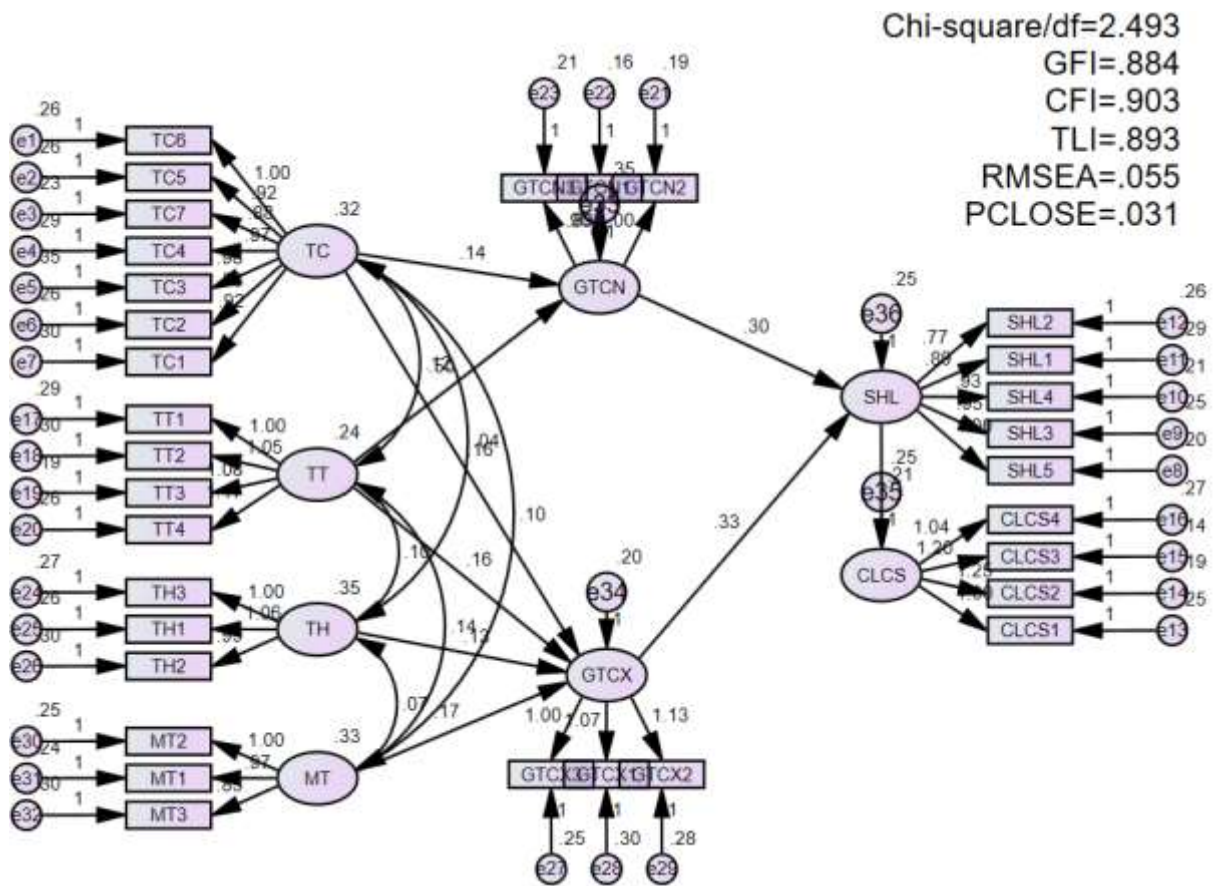


Figure 2. The SEM model is employed to analyze the impacts of factors based on the research framework.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

The findings demonstrated that every Cronbach's Alpha coefficient exceeded 0.6, and the Corrected Item-Total Correlation coefficients for all variables surpassed 0.3. This suggests a strong reliability of the measurement scale.

Next, the KMO value of 0.873, which exceeds the threshold of 0.5, along with Bartlett's Test significance of 0.000, less than the critical value of 0.05, indicates a significant correlation among the variables. The total variance extracted revealed that 8 factors could account for 66.773% of the variance in the 32 observed variables, with all factors demonstrating statistically significant loadings exceeding 0.5 and no problematic variables.

Following this, the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) method was utilized to examine the correlation among the factors. The findings indicated that the data input was suitable for the model, as evidenced by the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 0.946, exceeding the threshold of 0.95, Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) of 0.910 > 0.9, Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) of 0.938 > 0.9, and Probability of Close Fit (PCLOSE) of 0.999, well above 0.05. Additionally, the chi-square is divided by degrees of freedom (chi-square/df) ratio = 1.858 < 3, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.041 < 0.06. To sum up, the analysis of the data indicated that the proposed model was both reasonable and highly valid.

After conducting the SEM analysis, it was found that 9 out of 11 relationships are statistically significant (p ≤ 0.05). The standardized coefficients for H1 to H11 are 0.119, 0.180, 0.367, 0.150, 0.148, 0.189, 0.346, 0.290, and 0.231 respectively, except for H5 and H7, which have standardized coefficients of 0.097 and 0.122, respectively.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION.

In the era of renewal and development, people in Vietnam are increasingly concerned about and prioritize both physical and mental health, with a growing demand for improving their quality of life. However, wellness tourism remains a relatively new concept in the Vietnamese market. Yet, with the advantages of nature and the inherent beauty of traditional cultural heritage, Vietnam can become an ideal destination for those interested in physical or mental well-being and desiring to "rejuvenate" their lives for greater happiness. This study has clarified the definition of "wellness tourism" while introducing concepts such as "service experience", "perceived value", "satisfaction", "quality of life" and "loyalty" of tourists to highlight the current situation of tourism in Vietnam and lay the groundwork for the development of wellness tourism. Based on surveys of domestic and international tourists who have participated, are participating, or will participate in wellness tourism in Vietnam, the results have shown a positive influence from factors such as "personal experience" and "value motivation" to "satisfaction" and "improvement in quality of life" among tourists experiencing wellness tourism. Particularly, the "improvement in quality of life" also significantly impacts the "loyalty experience"

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and "loyalty to the destination" of both domestic and international tourists. Furthermore, the study also indicates that the majority of domestic tourists tend to spend more generously and dedicate more time to wellness tourism compared to international tourists, indicating that most Vietnamese people are highly concerned about and have a desire to improve both physical and mental health. Finally, based on the data, theories, and analysis conducted, the author team provides recommendations and specific solutions for travel businesses offering wellness tourism services in Vietnam, as well as for the government, aiming to enhance the tourist experience and further develop this promising type of tourism in Vietnam in the future.

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