

**EXPLORING THE PERCEPTION OF THE LOCAL
COMMUNITY TOWARDS THE IMAGE OF THE
SPA INDUSTRY AND THEIR INTENTION TO
VISIT OR WORK IN KOTA KINABALU**

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Felsy binti Joseph Sandi

10 November 2021

ABSTRACT

The term "wellness" comes from a modern world but has an ancient root. During the olden civilizations, the Greeks and Roman discovered that water has healing properties. They are willing to travel miles away from home to search for mineral springs and thus, came the term "spa", which means *Sanitas Par Aqua* or healing through water. Today, people travel and visit spas to relax, escape from a busy life, and for health and wellness purposes. In Malaysia, the spa industry growth is contributed by increased leisure time, personal income, and health consciousness amongst the population. The Ministry of Tourism and Culture in Malaysia intends to make the spa industry the fifth largest income earner for the country and potentially provide thousands of jobs to Malaysians. But, before the country can achieve its' objective the industry is facing negative perceptions from the local community. The local community thinks immoral activities are happening in the spas and therefore, are reluctant to let their children work there causing a shortage of local therapists for the industry. According to the former president of the Malaysian Association of Wellness and Spa (MAWSpa), there is a need to conduct a study to find out what is the local's perception of the spa industry, thus, the reason this study is conducted. Another reason is that there is a limited amount of research has previously been carried out in the spa industry, particularly in Kota Kinabalu. The objectives of this research are 1) to explore what is the image of the spa, whether it is favorable or otherwise, 2) to explore the motivation factors to visit the spa by the local community, 3) to explore whether the perception of the locals towards the image of the spa affect their intention to visit, and 4) to study the image component contribution to the theory of planned behaviour. The methodology for this research is qualitative as the researcher intends to explore the mentioned objectives with a semi-structured face-to-face interview as the data collection method. The respondents are the local community (22 participants), the business sectors (12 participants), and the Government and associations sectors (six participants). The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) by Azjen (1985) is used to find out whether the image can be incorporated as a possible predictor of intention to visit or work in the spa industry using the TPB framework. The results indicated that the image theme can be incorporated in the TPB as a possible predictor of intention with the beliefs that a good image attracts clients to visit and the youth to work in the industry, whereas, a bad image deter clients visit or youth from working in the industry. The push and pull motivation theory is also applied to find out the local community's motivation factors to visit or work in the spa industry. The findings indicated that the significant motivating factors for the local community to visit the spa is the push factors such as relaxation and health. The results also found that some local communities perceived the spa industry negatively. However, the perception is slowly evolving from negative to positive. Overall, this study has fulfilled the objectives.

ABSTRAK

MENEROKA PERSEPSI MASYARAKAT SETEMPAT TERHADAP IMEJ INDUSTRI SPA DAN HASRAT MEREKA UNTUK MELAWAT ATAU BEKERJA DI KOTA KINABALU

Istilah "wellness" berasal dari dunia moden tetapi mempunyai akar-umbi purba. Semasa tamadun lama, Yunani dan Rom mendapati bahawa air mempunyai sifat penyembuhan. Mereka sanggup mengembara jauh dari rumah untuk mencari mata air mineral dan dengan itu, datang istilah "spa", yang bermaksud 'Sanitas Par Aqua' atau penyembuhan melalui air. Pada zaman ini, orang ramai mengembara dan melawat spa untuk berehat, melarikan diri dari kehidupan yang sibuk dan untuk tujuan kesihatan dan kesejahteraan. Di Malaysia, pertumbuhan industri spa disumbangkan oleh peningkatan masa lapang, pendapatan peribadi, dan kesedaran kesihatan di kalangan penduduk. Kementerian Pelancongan dan Kebudayaan di Malaysia berhasrat menjadikan industri spa sebagai pendapatan kelima terbesar negara dan berpotensi menyediakan ribuan pekerjaan kepada rakyat Malaysia. Tetapi, sebelum negara mencapai objektifnya, industri ini menghadapi persepsi negatif daripada masyarakat setempat. Masyarakat setempat berpendapat aktiviti tidak bermoral berlaku di spa dan oleh itu, enggan membiarkan anak-anak mereka bekerja di sana menyebabkan kekurangan ahli terapi tempatan untuk industri. Menurut bekas Presiden Persatuan Kesihatan dan Spa Malaysia (MAWSPA), terdapat keperluan untuk menjalankan kajian untuk mengetahui apakah persepsi tempatan terhadap industri spa, justeru, sebab kajian ini dijalankan. Sebab lain ialah jumlah penyelidikan yang dijalankan dalam industri spa sebelum ini, khususnya di Kota Kinabalu, adalah terhad. Objektif penyelidikan ini adalah 1) untuk meneroka apakah imej spa, sama ada ia positif atau sebaliknya, 2) untuk meneroka faktor motivasi untuk melawat spa oleh masyarakat setempat, 3) untuk meneroka sama ada persepsi penduduk tempatan terhadap imej spa menjejaskan niat mereka untuk melawat, dan 4) untuk mengkaji sumbangan komponen imej kepada teori tingkah laku yang dirancang (TPB). Metodologi penyelidikan ini adalah kualitatif kerana penyelidik berhasrat untuk meneroka objektif yang disebutkan dengan kaedah temu bual secara bersemuka separa-berstruktur sebagai kaedah pengumpulan data. Responden adalah masyarakat setempat (22 responden), sektor perniagaan (12 responden), dan sektor Kerajaan dan persatuan (enam responden). Teori TPB oleh Azjen (1985) digunakan untuk mengetahui sama ada imej itu boleh dimasukkan sebagai peramal kemungkinan niat untuk melawat atau bekerja dalam industri spa menggunakan rangka kerja TPB. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa tema imej boleh dimasukkan dalam TPB sebagai kemungkinan peramal niat dengan kepercayaan bahawa imej yang baik menarik pelanggan untuk melawat dan belia untuk bekerja dalam industri, manakala, imej yang buruk tidak menggalakkan pelanggan melawat atau belia daripada bekerja dalam industri. Teori motivasi pendorong (push) dan penarik (pull) juga digunakan untuk mengetahui faktor motivasi masyarakat setempat untuk melawat atau bekerja dalam industri spa. Penemuan kajian menunjukkan bahawa faktor motivasi yang signifikan bagi masyarakat setempat untuk melawat spa adalah faktor pendorong seperti bersantai dan kesihatan. Hasil kajian juga mendapati sesetengah masyarakat tempatan menganggap industri spa secara negatif. Walaubagaimanapun, persepsi tersebut perlahan-lahan berkembang dari negatif kepada positif. Secara keseluruhannya, kajian ini telah memenuhi objektif.

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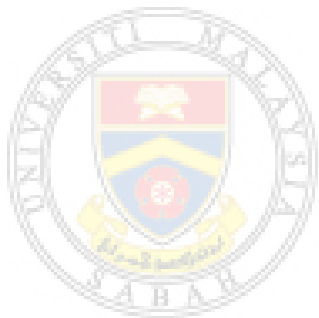
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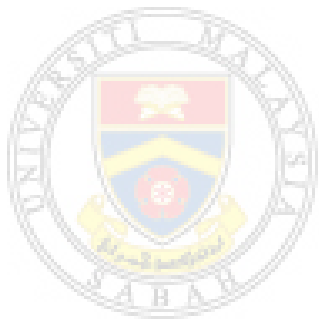
AMSPA/(AMSpa)	-	ASSOCIATION OF MALAYSIAN SPA
BSF	-	BRITISH SPAS FEDERATION
DBKK	-	DEWAN BANDARAYA KOTA KINABALU
EPP	-	ENTRY POINT PROJECTS
ESPA	-	EUROPEAN SPAS ASSOCIATION
GW	-	GLOBAL WELLNESS INSTITUTE
ISPA	-	INTERNATIONAL SPA ASSOCIATION
MAWSPA	-	MALAYSIAN ASSOCIATION OF WELLNESS AND SPA
MOTAC	-	MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND CULTURE
NKEA	-	NATIONAL KEY ECONOMIC AREA
PEMANDU	-	PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND DELIVERY UNIT
RQ	-	RESEARCH QUESTION
RO	-	RESEARCH OBJECTIVE
SPA	-	SOLUS PAR AQUA / SANITAS PAR AQUA
SpaBa	-	SPA BUSINESS ASSOCIATION
SRI	-	STANFORD RESEARCH INSTITUTE
TCM	-	TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE
TPB	-	THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOUR
UM	-	URUTAN MALAYSIA
UPT	-	UNIT PERUBATAN TRADISIONAL



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This thesis explores the perception of the local community towards the image of the spa industry and their intention to visit or work in Kota Kinabalu. The participants for this research are stakeholders which include the local community, the business sectors (spa operators), and the government and associations. The sites are selected from the various spas located around Kota Kinabalu. This chapter will begin by explaining the research background of the evolution of wellness, wellness as a concept, and the spa industry.

Then, the common dimensions of wellness will be briefly described. To follow suit is wellness tourism, wellness tourism in Malaysia, and spa as tourism products. The spa industry today and the spa industry in Malaysia will be presented too. Then, the research issues, problem statements, the research questions, the research objectives, the significance of the study, and the scope of the study will be described as well. Chapter one will end with a summary of the above.

1.2 Research Background

The evolution of wellness, wellness as a concept, and the spa industry will be described in this chapter. The term 'Wellness' comes from a modern world, but it has ancient roots. As a contemporary concept, wellness has gotten popular since the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Today, the way we think, understand, and talk about wellness has been shaped by the ideas and writings of the informal network of

physician leaders in the United States. However, the origins of wellness are ancient or much older. The views of wellness are deeply rooted in several scholars, religious, and medical activists in the 19th era in the United States and Europe. The code of belief of wellness can also be found in the olden civilizations of Greece, Rome, and Asia. Historical traditions have permanently shaped the modern wellness society and spa. A diagram regarding the evolution of wellness, wellness as a concept, and the spa industry are presented below followed by the descriptions in the following paragraph:

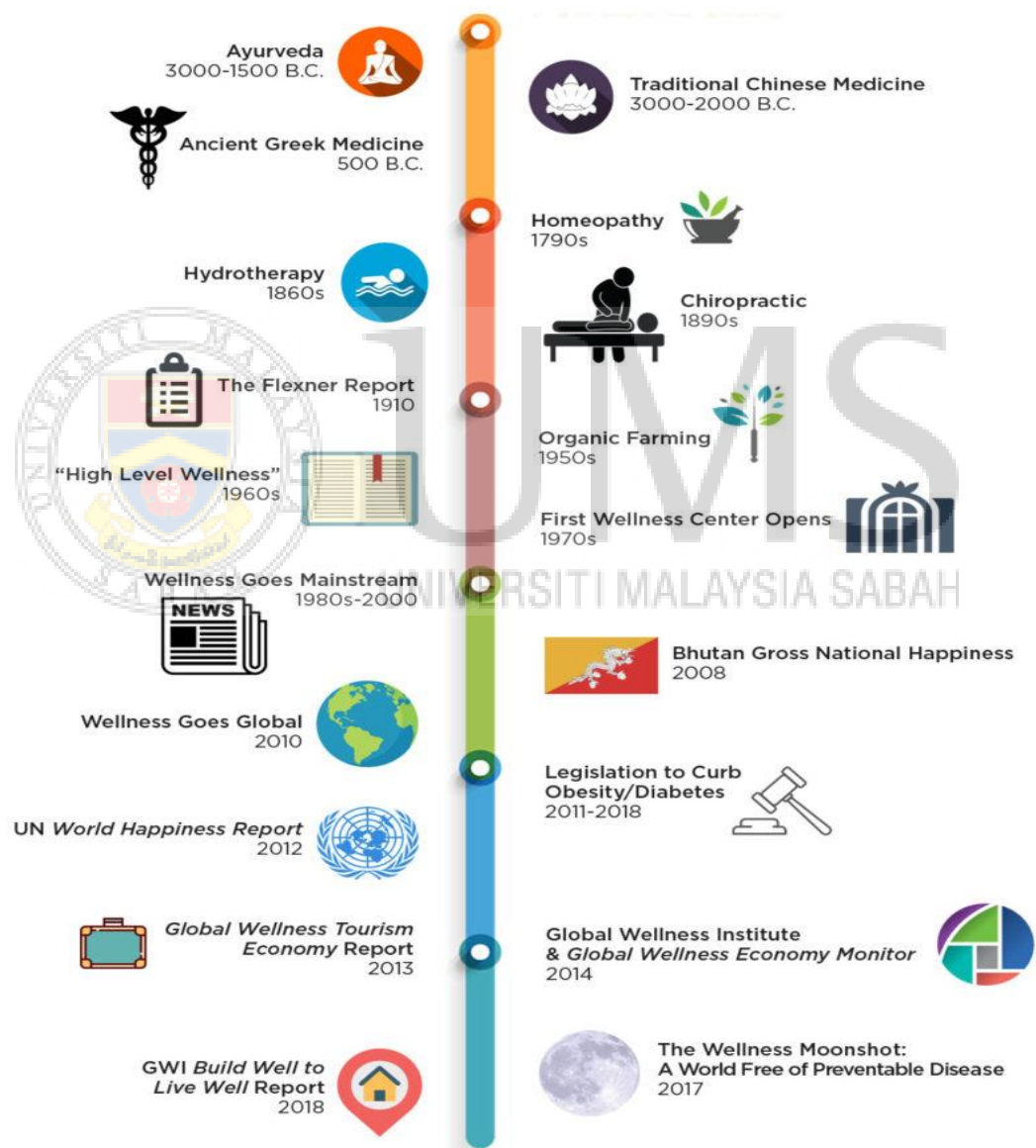


Figure 1.1 : The Evolution of Wellness extracted from the Global Wellness Institute¹(GWI)

¹ Global Wellness Institute (GWI) The Evolution of Wellness <https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/industry-research/history-of-wellness/>

The Descriptions on the Evolution of Wellness, Wellness as a Concept, and the Spa Industry.

The Global Wellness Institute²(GWI) described the evolution of wellness, its' concept, and indirectly described the spa industry stating that wellness was first developed in ancient times which was around 3,000 – 1,500 BC. During those eras, wellness began by taking Ayurvedic medicine orally to treat specific health problems. During the 50BC, Ancient Roman believed in disease prevention rather than cure. The Romans adopt the Greek belief that illness was a product of what we eat and how we live our life. To maintain a clean environment and a healthier population, ancient Rome improved their public health system by building an advanced system of aqueducts, drainage, and public wash baths.

During the 19th century, academicians, spiritual thinkers, and medical movements flourished in Western countries and Europe. Medication treatments are replaced with self-healing, spiritually oriented therapy, and precautionary measure treatment. These include homeopathy, osteopathy, chiropractic, and naturopathy. In this era, contemporary philosophers stressed that healthy well-being can be achieved by eating nutritious food, doing a workout, and living a healthy lifestyle.

Throughout the 1790s – 1900s, Homeopathy therapy, “Kneipp Cure” treatments, holistic methods to treat muscular tissues and joints, consuming healthy food; fruits, and vegetables, chiropractic treatments, and naturopathy healing of the body thrived during this time. But then, in 1910, the Western Medical Education System was condemned and questioned by the Carnegie Foundation’s Flexner Report because there were no standards and scientific studies conducted of its validity. The North America Medical Education System was no longer being taught in the conventional Medical Education and a new way of healing prevailing disease-centered, scientifically proven-based medicine was introduced.

Around the 1650s, the term “wellness” was used by physician Halbert L. Dunn to mean the state of being well and in good health but received less

² Global Wellness Institute (GWI) The Evolution of Wellness <https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/industry-research/history-of-wellness/>

attention. In the 1970s, Dunn's ideas were approved by an unofficial band of citizens in the US, amongst whom are Dr. John Travis, Don Ardell, Dr. Bill Hettler, and others. These bands are named the "fathers of the wellness movement," introduced their detailed wellness standard, developed new means to measure wellness, and write out and conversed devotedly on the concept.

Towards the end of the 20th century, many companies started to develop workplace wellness programs. The fitness and spa industries are emerging globally. The ever-increasing of celebrities and self-help specialists began to incorporate wellness concepts into wider society. However, despite all these irregular popularities, this development had not yet merged under the umbrella of a "wellness industry."

By the 21st century, the term "wellness" was used by more than half of the global employers in their health promotion strategies. During this time, fitness, diet, healthy living, and well-being concepts and offerings have flourished outrageously.

In 2014, the global market wellness was booming. The Global Wellness Institute (GWI) launched and released research finding that the global wellness industry was a \$3.4 trillion market or 3.4 times larger than the worldwide pharmaceutical industry. The market for the wellness industry was billion dollars. The wellness industry includes Beauty & Anti-Aging (\$1.03 trillion), Healthy Eating/Nutrition/Weight Loss (\$574 billion), Fitness & Mind-Body (\$446 billion), Wellness Tourism (\$494 billion), Preventative/Personalized Health (\$433 billion), Complementary/Alternative Medicine (\$187 billion), Wellness Lifestyle Real Estate (\$100 billion), Thermal/Mineral Springs (\$50 billion), and Workplace Wellness (\$41 billion). During this time the Spa emerged as a huge industry that was worth billions of dollars at \$94 billion and growing. Today, the word "wellness" is used as an everyday vocabulary by everyone.

In 2017, the wellness industry continues to grow. Global Wellness Institute worked together with Dr. Richard H. Carmona, 17th Surgeon General of the United States, to combine the health and wellness industry, to wipe out chronic,

preventable diseases globally. In October 2018, the GWI produced a Global Wellness Economy Monitor report stating that the world wellness economy grew from a \$3.7 trillion market in 2015 to \$4.2 trillion in 2017—increasing nearly twice the rate of the global economy (3.6 percent annually). The report stated that wellness spending is now more than half as large as total global health spending (\$7.3 trillion), and the wellness industry represents 5.3 percent of global economic output.

In November, the GWI presented the latest Global Wellness Tourism Economy Monitor, reporting that wellness tourism increased from a \$563 billion market in 2015 to \$639 billion in 2017, or 6.5 percent yearly, more than double as fast as tourism in overall (3.2 percent). And the report indicated, wellness tourism is predicted to grow rapidly towards 2022 (7.5 percent yearly) to touch \$919 billion.

The Common Dimensions of Wellness

At present times, society prefers to use the term “wellness” as a common word (Panchal, 2012) and describe it as alternative medicine, e.g. encouraging the healthy well-being of the body, mind, and spirit (Halbert L. Dunn, 1950). Dunn’s, an American Doctor, introduced the concept of wellness together with its wellness philosophy. He concluded that wellness is *“a continuum rather than a fixed state... a holistic approach to health, encompassing physical, mental, social, cultural and spiritual dimensions”* (P. 90). Dunn’s further elaborated that wellness is like a *‘holistic approach to health’* (p.90), implying that wellness is healing that surrounds the physical, mental, social, cultural, and spiritual aspects or dimensions. The author pointed out that there are many dimensions of wellness. The common dimensions of wellness as categorized by Panchal (2012) are as stated in figure 1.2 below: