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Title	Factors Influencing Tourists' Overall Re-Participation Intention in Wellness Tourism and Their Loyalty to a Specific Destination [an abstract of entire text]
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Description	この博士論文全文の閲覧方法については、以下のサイトをご参照ください。 https://www.lib.hokudai.ac.jp/dissertations/copy-guides/
Degree Grantor	北海道大学
Degree Name	博士(観光学)
Dissertation Number	甲第16325号
Issue Date	2025-03-25
Doc URL	https://hdl.handle.net/2115/95260
Type	doctoral thesis
File Information	LI_Jiao_summary.pdf



Factors Influencing Tourists' Overall Re-Participation Intention in Wellness Tourism and Their Loyalty to a Specific Destination

(観光客のウェルネス・ツーリズムへの再参加意図と特定の目的地へのロイヤ
リティに影響する要因)

An extended summary of the dissertation presented

By

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to

The Graduate School of International Media, Communication, and Tourism Studies

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Hokkaido University

Sapporo, Japan

January 2025

Introduction

Wellness tourism is a subset of health tourism. Driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, the continuous expansion of the middle class, an aging population, increasing cases of chronic and psychological diseases, and growing health consciousness, the wellness tourism market is expected to expand rapidly. Despite its significant growth potential, the market faces challenges, such as high price tags limiting its penetration into the mass market and the lack of standardized regulations, leading to inconsistent service quality. Therefore, for the sustainable development of wellness tourism, the industry must conduct systematic market research to understand tourist behavior patterns, needs, and the critical factors influencing their intention to return.

Against this backdrop, this study focuses on Japanese tourists who have participated in wellness tourism, analyzing their behavior patterns at both macro and micro levels. Study 1 investigates tourists' overall re-participation intention in wellness tourism, while Study 2 focuses on the mechanisms behind tourists' loyalty to wellness tourism destinations. The findings of both studies aim to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for the sustainable development of wellness tourism.

Study 1: Tourists' Overall Re-Participation Intention (Macro Perspective)

Research Questions

Study 1 examines tourists' perceptions and acceptance of wellness tourism from a macro perspective, using a framework based on perceived value and perceived risk theories. It identifies the key factors influencing tourists' re-participation intentions and segments the market by tourists' health consciousness and health status to explore behavioral patterns across different groups. The research questions are:

RQ1: What factors influence tourists' re-participation intentions in wellness tourism?

RQ2: What groups of tourists can be categorized according to their health consciousness and health status?

RQ3: What are the differences in the formation process of re-participation intentions among different health groups?

Methodology

Study 1 targeted Japanese individuals who had participated in wellness tourism in the past year, collecting 305 valid responses. SmartPLS 4 was employed to test the hypotheses and evaluate model fit through partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). Cluster analyses were conducted using SPSS 27.0 to group respondents based on their health consciousness and health status. Finally, a multi-group analysis was performed to determine if there were any group disparities in the process of forming re-participation intentions.

Discussion

- Functional, social, emotional, and epistemic values significantly and positively influenced tourists' attitudes, with emotional value having the strongest influence.
- Time risk significantly and negatively influenced attitude.
- Among perceived values and perceived risks, only functional value and financial risk directly influenced tourists' re-participation intentions, with functional value's positive effect outweighing financial risk's negative effect.
- Attitude played a crucial mediating role in forming re-participation intentions and had the strongest influence on re-participation intention.
- Social, emotional, epistemic values, and time risk indirectly influenced re-participation intentions through attitudes.
- The influence of physical risk on both attitude and re-participation intention was statistically insignificant.
- Cluster analysis identified three groups: "Health-Conscious but Unwell", "Not Health-Conscious and Unwell", and "Health-Conscious and Well".
- For the "Health-Conscious and Well" group, functional value significantly influenced re-participation intentions.
- For the "Health-Conscious but Unwell" and "Not Health-Conscious and Unwell" groups, functional value did not significantly influence re-participation intentions.

Theoretical Implications

This study innovatively integrates multidimensional incentives (perceived value) and disincentives (perceived risk) into the tourism behavior framework and validates the critical mediating role of attitudes. Additionally, it proposes a novel approach to market

segmentation based on health consciousness and health status, offering new perspectives for wellness tourism research.

Practical Implications

The findings provide specific suggestions for enhancing tourists' perceived functional, social, emotional, and epistemic values while reducing financial and time risks. For example, service providers should offer high-quality tourism products to ensure efficacy of the activities. Creating a platform on social media for sharing experiences and insights on wellness tourism is crucial. Additionally, marketers need to manage the emotional state of tourists as well as take into account their desire for knowledge acquisition. To minimize the perceived financial risk of tourists, it is essential to provide clear and detailed information that allows them to clearly understand the breakdown of travel expenses and the specific services offered. Promoting tourists' understanding of the importance and benefits of wellness tourism can reduce time risks.

Tailored marketing strategies were also developed for different health groups. For "Health-Conscious and Well" tourists, service quality and tangible health improvements are key factors for re-participation. For "Health-Conscious but Unwell" tourists, marketing should emphasize psychological needs and comfort. For "Not Health-Conscious and Unwell" tourists, health improvement may not be the primary goal; thus, marketing could highlight the recreational and entertainment aspects of wellness tourism.

Study 2: Tourists' Loyalty to Destinations (Micro Perspective)

Research Questions

Study 2 starts from the micro level and builds a research framework based on the stimulus-organism-response (SOR) theory. Using information quality as the stimulus, destination image as the organism, and satisfaction and tourist loyalty as the response, it examines how information quality obtained via social media before and during trips influences post-trip loyalty. Additionally, it analyzes generational differences by dividing the sample into middle-aged and elderly groups based on Japan's generational classification. The research questions are:

RQ1: How does the quality of information about wellness tourism on social media influence tourist loyalty?

RQ2: What role does the destination image play in the formation of tourists' loyalty?

RQ3: Are there generational differences between middle-aged and elderly tourists' perceptions of information quality and their travel decision-making process?

Methodology

The study targeted Japanese tourists aged 38 and above (born in or before 1987) who had visited a wellness tourism destination in the past year and obtained destination-related information via social media before or during their trip. A total of 192 valid responses were collected. Measurement and structural models were evaluated using SmartPLS 4, and generational differences were analyzed.

Discussion

- Different aspects of information quality (intrinsic, contextual, and representational) had varying effects on cognitive and affective images.
- Cognitive and affective images were positively correlated, jointly influencing tourists' satisfaction.
- Cognitive and affective images had distinct effects on word-of-mouth and revisit intentions.
- Word-of-mouth intentions positively influenced revisit intentions, with satisfaction indirectly affecting revisit intentions through word-of-mouth.
- For middle-aged tourists, the contextual quality of information enhanced their cognitive image, but excessively high contextual quality might lead to “over-rational” expectations, limiting emotional experiences during travel. Moreover, they relied more on rational judgment to make evaluations and subsequent travel decisions.
- Elderly tourists valued representational quality more and had higher satisfaction levels than middle-aged tourists when affective image levels were similar.

Theoretical Implications

This study validates how information quality obtained through social media impacts tourists' loyalty to destinations and highlights the mediating role of destination image. It also identifies generational differences in loyalty formation processes.

Practical Implications

Destinations should develop targeted social media information quality management strategies based on the behavioral characteristics of different generations of tourists to guide and manage their expectations and design personalized service experiences that meet their needs. For example, ensuring the accuracy, credibility, timeliness, conciseness, completeness, and relevance of information to tourists' needs is critical. For middle-aged tourists, it is important to avoid excessive emotional rendering in case they focus more on the functionality of the destination and miss out on the actual emotional experience.

Additionally, promoting local specialties, maintaining attractions, and improving infrastructure can strengthen middle-aged tourists' cognitive image of the destination. For elderly tourists, who place greater emphasis on emotional experiences, designing personalized services, such as warm interactive activities or immersive natural therapy programs, can enhance their affective image of the destination.

Conclusion

Although this study has some limitations—for instance, Study 1 did not investigate the varying perceptual and behavioral responses that might be triggered by different types of wellness tourism activities, and Study 2 did not examine the differences associated with various social media platforms—it nonetheless makes significant contributions.

At the academic level, it systematically explores the driving factors influencing the re-participation intentions of wellness tourists and the multilevel process of loyalty formation through a combination of macro and micro perspectives, providing a new theoretical perspective for the study of wellness tourism and tourists' behavior. At the practical level, the specific recommendations will provide wellness tourism destination marketers and service providers with refined management and marketing strategies for the sustainable development of the wellness tourism industry and the destination.