

Consumer Behavior in Wellness Tourism: A Pathway toward Sustainable Tourism Development

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Abstract

Wellness tourism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing segments of the global tourism industry, driven by increasing awareness of health, well-being, and sustainable lifestyles. In recent years, tourists have increasingly sought travel experiences that enhance their physical, mental, and spiritual well-being while simultaneously minimizing environmental impacts. This growing demand has positioned wellness tourism as a significant contributor to sustainable tourism development. The present chapter explores the relationship between consumer behavior in wellness tourism and its implications for promoting sustainable tourism practices. The study investigates how tourists' motivations, preferences, attitudes, and decision-making processes influence the demand for wellness-oriented travel experiences and sustainable tourism products. The chapter adopts a qualitative research approach to examine tourist perceptions and behavioral patterns associated with wellness tourism. Through thematic analysis of tourist experiences, industry reports, and scholarly literature, the research highlights the key factors influencing consumer choices in wellness tourism, including health consciousness, environmental awareness, destination image, service quality, and cultural authenticity. The study also examines how wellness tourism destinations incorporate sustainable practices such as eco-friendly infrastructure, local community engagement, and responsible resource management. Findings indicate that wellness tourists often demonstrate higher levels of environmental awareness and social responsibility compared with conventional tourists. Their travel decisions are significantly influenced by sustainability attributes such as natural environments, organic food offerings, eco-friendly accommodation, and holistic wellness services. Furthermore, the integration of sustainable practices in wellness tourism not only enhances tourist satisfaction but also contributes to long-term destination sustainability and community well-being. The chapter concludes that understanding consumer behavior is essential for policymakers, tourism planners, and industry stakeholders to design wellness tourism experiences that align with sustainability principles. By aligning consumer expectations with sustainable tourism strategies, destinations can promote responsible tourism development while meeting the evolving needs of wellness-oriented travelers.

Keywords: Wellness Tourism; Consumer Behavior; Sustainable Tourism; Tourist Motivation; Responsible Travel; Destination Sustainability.

1. Introduction

Tourism has evolved significantly over the past few decades, shifting from traditional leisure-based travel toward more meaningful, health-oriented, and responsible travel experiences. Among the emerging forms of tourism, wellness tourism has gained substantial global attention as travelers increasingly

prioritize physical health, mental well-being, and holistic lifestyle practices during their journeys. Wellness tourism involves travel associated with the pursuit of maintaining or enhancing one's personal well-being through activities such as spa treatments, yoga retreats, meditation programs, thermal therapies, and nature-based relaxation experiences (Voigt, Brown & Howat, 2011). As individuals face increasing levels of stress, urbanization, and lifestyle-related health challenges, wellness tourism has become an important avenue for restoring balance between physical, emotional, and spiritual health.

The rapid growth of wellness tourism is closely associated with changing consumer behavior patterns in the tourism sector. Modern tourists are no longer passive consumers of tourism products; rather, they are informed decision-makers who seek personalized, meaningful, and sustainable travel experiences. Consumer behavior in tourism refers to the study of how tourists identify travel needs, search for information, evaluate alternatives, and make decisions regarding travel destinations and services (Solomon, 2018). Understanding these behavioral processes is essential for tourism stakeholders because it allows them to design services and experiences that align with the evolving expectations of travelers. In the context of wellness tourism, consumer behavior is particularly important because wellness tourists often exhibit unique motivations, preferences, and values compared with conventional leisure tourists.

The emergence of wellness tourism is also strongly connected with the broader concept of sustainable tourism development. Sustainable tourism focuses on minimizing the negative environmental, social, and cultural impacts of tourism while maximizing its economic benefits for local communities (UNWTO, 2018). In recent years, wellness tourism has increasingly been recognized as a form of tourism that naturally aligns with sustainability principles. Wellness destinations often emphasize natural environments, organic products, eco-friendly infrastructure, and community-based experiences, thereby supporting environmental conservation and local cultural preservation (Smith & Puczko, 2014). As a result, wellness tourism has the potential to contribute significantly to sustainable tourism development by encouraging responsible travel behavior and environmentally conscious consumption.

The relationship between consumer behavior and sustainable tourism has become an important area of research within tourism studies. Scholars argue that tourists who seek wellness experiences are more likely to demonstrate environmentally responsible attitudes and behaviors, such as supporting eco-friendly accommodations, participating in nature-based activities, and choosing destinations that prioritize sustainability (Han, Hsu & Sheu, 2010). These behavioral tendencies indicate that wellness tourism consumers often possess higher levels of environmental awareness and ethical consumption patterns. Consequently, understanding the motivations and behavioral characteristics of wellness tourists can help tourism managers and policymakers develop strategies that promote sustainability while meeting consumer expectations.

Over the past decade, wellness tourism has grown into a significant global industry. According to the Global Wellness Institute, wellness tourism has experienced rapid expansion due to increasing demand for health-focused travel experiences and preventive healthcare lifestyles. Tourists today are seeking destinations that offer relaxation, stress relief, fitness programs, and holistic healing practices integrated with natural environments. This shift reflects broader societal trends toward health consciousness, work-life balance, and sustainable living. Furthermore, technological advancements and digital media have enabled tourists to access information about wellness destinations, compare services, and make informed travel decisions, thereby shaping consumer behavior in the wellness tourism market.

Consumer behavior in wellness tourism is influenced by multiple factors, including psychological, social, cultural, and environmental determinants. Psychological factors such as motivation, perception, attitudes, and lifestyle play a significant role in shaping tourists' preferences for wellness travel. For instance, individuals motivated by stress reduction or personal health improvement may actively seek wellness retreats or spa destinations. Social influences, including peer recommendations, family values, and social media content, also contribute to shaping travel decisions. Additionally, cultural values and beliefs

regarding health and well-being influence how tourists perceive wellness experiences in different destinations (Chen, Prebensen & Uysal, 2017).

Another important aspect influencing consumer behavior in wellness tourism is destination image and perceived value. Destination image refers to tourists' perceptions and impressions about a particular location, including its natural beauty, cultural heritage, and wellness facilities. Positive destination images can significantly influence tourists' intention to visit wellness destinations and participate in wellness activities. Studies have shown that destinations that emphasize clean environments, natural landscapes, and authentic cultural experiences are more likely to attract wellness tourists (Kim, Lee & Klenosky, 2003). In addition, perceived value, which includes the balance between the benefits received and the costs incurred, also plays a critical role in shaping tourist satisfaction and loyalty.

In recent years, sustainability concerns have become increasingly important in shaping tourism consumption patterns. Environmental degradation, climate change, and over-tourism have raised awareness among travelers about the need for responsible travel practices. As a result, many tourists are actively seeking sustainable tourism options that minimize environmental impact and support local communities (Font & McCabe, 2017). Wellness tourism often integrates sustainability practices such as eco-friendly architecture, renewable energy use, organic food production, and community engagement. These practices not only enhance the authenticity of wellness experiences but also contribute to the long-term sustainability of tourism destinations.

Furthermore, the role of technology and digital platforms has significantly transformed consumer behavior in wellness tourism. Online travel platforms, social media influencers, and digital marketing strategies have made it easier for tourists to explore wellness destinations and evaluate different travel options. User-generated content such as reviews, blogs, and travel videos often influences tourists' perceptions and decision-making processes. Research indicates that digital platforms play a crucial role in shaping destination image and influencing tourists' intentions to engage in wellness tourism activities (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Consequently, tourism businesses must adopt effective digital marketing strategies to attract wellness-oriented travelers and communicate sustainability initiatives.

Another important dimension of wellness tourism is its contribution to local community development and cultural preservation. Sustainable wellness tourism often involves collaboration with local communities to promote traditional healing practices, cultural experiences, and locally sourced products. For example, many wellness destinations incorporate indigenous wellness traditions such as Ayurveda in India, traditional Chinese medicine in China, or thermal spa therapies in European countries. These practices not only provide unique wellness experiences for tourists but also support local economies and preserve cultural heritage (Kelly, 2012).

Despite the growing importance of wellness tourism, several challenges remain in ensuring its sustainability and long-term development. One of the key challenges is maintaining a balance between increasing tourist demand and environmental conservation. Excessive commercialization of wellness destinations may lead to environmental degradation, cultural commodification, and loss of authenticity. Therefore, tourism planners and policymakers must adopt strategic planning approaches that prioritize sustainability while accommodating the growing demand for wellness tourism.

Another challenge is the lack of comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior in wellness tourism, particularly in relation to sustainability. While previous studies have examined tourist motivations and satisfaction, there is still a need for deeper insights into how consumer attitudes, perceptions, and behavioral intentions influence sustainable tourism practices. Understanding these behavioral dynamics is essential for developing effective marketing strategies, designing sustainable tourism products, and enhancing tourist experiences.

In this context, the present chapter aims to explore the relationship between consumer behavior in wellness tourism and sustainable tourism development. The chapter examines how tourists' motivations, preferences, and decision-making processes influence the demand for wellness tourism experiences that

align with sustainability principles. By analyzing existing literature and qualitative insights, the study seeks to identify the key behavioral factors that shape wellness tourism consumption patterns and their implications for sustainable destination management.

Specifically, the objectives of this chapter are threefold. First, it aims to examine the theoretical foundations of wellness tourism, consumer behavior, and sustainable tourism within the broader context of tourism studies. Second, it seeks to analyze how consumer motivations and behavioral characteristics influence the demand for wellness tourism services and sustainable travel experiences. Third, the chapter aims to discuss the implications of these behavioral patterns for tourism management, policy development, and sustainable destination planning.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to provide valuable insights for tourism stakeholders, policymakers, and researchers. Understanding consumer behavior in wellness tourism can help tourism businesses develop innovative services that meet the evolving needs of wellness travelers while promoting sustainability. Moreover, policymakers can use these insights to design policies and regulations that encourage responsible tourism practices and support sustainable destination development.

In conclusion, wellness tourism represents a rapidly expanding segment of the global tourism industry that offers significant opportunities for promoting sustainable tourism development. The increasing demand for health-oriented and environmentally responsible travel experiences reflects changing consumer values and lifestyles. By understanding the behavioral patterns of wellness tourists, tourism stakeholders can design strategies that align consumer expectations with sustainability principles. Consequently, integrating consumer behavior insights into wellness tourism planning and management can contribute to the long-term sustainability of tourism destinations and enhance the overall well-being of travelers and host communities.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Wellness Tourism

Wellness tourism has emerged as one of the most dynamic segments of the global tourism industry, driven by increasing awareness of personal health, lifestyle diseases, and stress associated with modern urban living. Wellness tourism refers to travel activities that focus on maintaining or enhancing physical, mental, and spiritual well-being through activities such as spa treatments, yoga retreats, meditation, nature therapy, and holistic health programs (Smith & Puczkó, 2014). Unlike medical tourism, which focuses primarily on medical procedures or treatments, wellness tourism emphasizes preventive healthcare, relaxation, and lifestyle improvement.

According to Voigt, Brown and Howat (2011), wellness tourism provides tourists with opportunities to engage in experiences that enhance overall well-being while simultaneously allowing them to escape from daily stress and routine. The demand for wellness tourism has grown significantly as consumers increasingly prioritize healthy lifestyles and personal development. Scholars argue that wellness tourism integrates leisure, recreation, and health improvement, making it an attractive option for modern travelers seeking meaningful travel experiences (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001).

Recent studies have also emphasized that wellness tourism is closely linked to environmental sustainability. Natural landscapes, clean environments, and tranquil surroundings are essential components of wellness tourism experiences. Consequently, wellness tourism destinations often emphasize environmental conservation, eco-friendly infrastructure, and sustainable resource management (Global Wellness Institute, 2022). This alignment between wellness tourism and sustainability has encouraged tourism scholars to explore the relationship between wellness tourism development and sustainable tourism practices.

2.2 Evolution of Consumer Behavior in Tourism

Consumer behavior plays a crucial role in understanding tourism demand and shaping tourism marketing strategies. Consumer behavior refers to the processes through which individuals select,

purchase, use, and evaluate products or services to satisfy their needs and desires (Solomon, 2018). In the tourism context, consumer behavior involves understanding how tourists make decisions regarding destination selection, travel planning, accommodation choices, and travel experiences.

Traditional tourism research focused mainly on economic factors such as price and accessibility. However, contemporary studies emphasize psychological, social, and environmental influences on tourist behavior. According to Crompton (1979), travel motivations play a fundamental role in shaping tourist behavior, as individuals seek experiences that fulfill specific psychological needs such as relaxation, escape, novelty, and self-development.

Modern tourists are increasingly influenced by emotional and experiential factors rather than purely functional considerations. Pine and Gilmore (1999) argued that tourism experiences are part of the broader “experience economy,” where consumers seek memorable and meaningful experiences rather than simply purchasing services. This shift toward experiential consumption has significantly influenced the growth of wellness tourism, as wellness travelers seek holistic experiences that enhance their well-being.

Technological advancements have also transformed consumer behavior in tourism. Online travel platforms, social media, and digital marketing have increased access to information and empowered tourists to make more informed travel decisions (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). User-generated content such as travel reviews, blogs, and social media posts plays a significant role in shaping tourists’ perceptions and destination choices.

2.3 Tourist Motivation in Wellness Tourism

Tourist motivation is a central concept in tourism research and plays a key role in explaining why individuals choose to engage in wellness tourism experiences. Motivation refers to the internal forces that drive individuals to satisfy specific needs or desires through travel (Dann, 1981). In the context of wellness tourism, motivations often include stress reduction, health improvement, relaxation, spiritual growth, and lifestyle enhancement.

Research by Voigt et al. (2011) identified several key motivations for wellness tourism participation, including physical fitness, mental relaxation, beauty enhancement, and social interaction. These motivations reflect the broader trend toward health consciousness and preventive healthcare among modern consumers.

Push–pull theory is frequently used to explain tourist motivations in wellness tourism. Push factors refer to internal psychological motivations such as the desire to escape from routine, reduce stress, or improve personal health. Pull factors, on the other hand, refer to destination attributes that attract tourists, such as natural environments, wellness facilities, spa resorts, and cultural healing traditions (Crompton, 1979).

Studies also indicate that wellness tourists often possess higher levels of education, income, and environmental awareness compared with conventional tourists (Chen, Prebensen & Uysal, 2017). These characteristics influence their preferences for sustainable tourism products, eco-friendly accommodations, and authentic cultural experiences.

2.4 Relationship between Wellness Tourism and Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism refers to tourism development that balances environmental protection, social responsibility, and economic growth while ensuring the long-term viability of tourism destinations (UNWTO, 2018). Wellness tourism naturally aligns with sustainability principles because it often relies on natural environments, cultural authenticity, and responsible resource use.

Smith and Puczkó (2014) argue that wellness tourism can contribute significantly to sustainable tourism development by promoting environmentally friendly practices and encouraging responsible consumer behavior. Many wellness resorts incorporate sustainable practices such as renewable energy use, organic food production, waste reduction, and eco-friendly architecture.

Font and McCabe (2017) also emphasize that sustainable tourism depends heavily on consumer demand for environmentally responsible tourism products. Tourists who prioritize sustainability are more likely to choose destinations that demonstrate environmental responsibility and social commitment. Wellness tourists often exhibit such preferences because their motivations are closely related to health, nature, and well-being.

Furthermore, wellness tourism can support local community development by promoting traditional healing practices, local culture, and indigenous knowledge systems. Kelly (2012) highlights that many wellness tourism destinations integrate local cultural traditions such as Ayurveda, herbal medicine, and spiritual healing practices. These initiatives not only provide unique tourism experiences but also support cultural preservation and local economic development.

2.5 Destination Image and Tourist Decision-Making

Destination image plays a critical role in influencing tourist behavior and travel decision-making. Destination image refers to the perceptions, beliefs, and impressions that tourists hold about a particular destination (Kim, Lee & Klenosky, 2003). A positive destination image can significantly increase tourists' intention to visit a destination and participate in its tourism activities.

In the context of wellness tourism, destination image is often associated with attributes such as natural beauty, tranquility, safety, and high-quality wellness facilities. Destinations that promote clean environments, scenic landscapes, and holistic wellness experiences are more likely to attract wellness tourists.

Research suggests that perceived destination image influences not only tourists' travel intentions but also their satisfaction and loyalty (Chen et al., 2017). Wellness tourists who perceive a destination as environmentally sustainable and health-oriented are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward that destination and recommend it to others.

2.6 Environmental Awareness and Responsible Tourist Behavior

Environmental awareness has become a significant factor influencing tourism consumption patterns. As global environmental challenges such as climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss continue to intensify, tourists are becoming more conscious of the environmental impacts of their travel decisions.

Han, Hsu and Sheu (2010) found that tourists' environmental attitudes significantly influence their behavioral intentions to engage in responsible tourism practices. Tourists who are environmentally aware are more likely to support eco-friendly accommodations, participate in nature conservation activities, and minimize their environmental footprint during travel.

Wellness tourism often promotes environmental awareness by encouraging tourists to reconnect with nature and adopt sustainable lifestyles. Activities such as forest therapy, yoga retreats, and eco-spa treatments emphasize harmony with nature and environmental conservation.

Additionally, sustainable wellness tourism destinations often promote environmentally responsible behavior through educational programs, eco-certifications, and community-based tourism initiatives (Font & McCabe, 2017). These initiatives encourage tourists to become active participants in sustainability efforts.

2.7 Digital Influence on Wellness Tourism Consumer Behavior

Digital technologies have significantly transformed tourism marketing and consumer behavior. Online travel agencies, social media platforms, and travel review websites provide tourists with extensive information about destinations and tourism services.

Xiang and Gretzel (2010) highlight that user-generated content plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' travel decisions. Travelers often rely on online reviews and social media recommendations when selecting wellness destinations or spa resorts.

Social media influencers and travel bloggers also play an important role in promoting wellness tourism destinations. Visual content showcasing yoga retreats, spa resorts, and nature-based wellness experiences can inspire potential tourists and influence their travel intentions.

Moreover, digital platforms allow tourism businesses to communicate their sustainability initiatives and wellness offerings effectively. Transparency regarding eco-friendly practices, wellness programs, and community engagement can enhance tourists' trust and encourage responsible travel behavior.

2.8 Conceptual Integration: Consumer Behavior, Wellness Tourism, and Sustainability

The integration of consumer behavior theories with wellness tourism and sustainable tourism frameworks provides valuable insights into modern tourism dynamics. Scholars increasingly recognize that consumer behavior plays a central role in shaping tourism development patterns.

Wellness tourists often demonstrate values aligned with sustainability, such as environmental responsibility, ethical consumption, and holistic well-being. These behavioral tendencies create opportunities for tourism destinations to promote sustainable tourism practices while meeting consumer expectations.

Furthermore, tourism stakeholders can leverage consumer behavior insights to design marketing strategies, develop sustainable tourism products, and enhance tourist experiences. Understanding tourists' motivations, attitudes, and decision-making processes allows tourism managers to align tourism services with sustainability principles.

Overall, the literature suggests that consumer behavior is a critical factor influencing the growth and sustainability of wellness tourism. As wellness tourism continues to expand globally, further research is needed to explore how tourist behavior can contribute to sustainable tourism development.

3. Research Gaps

Despite the growing body of literature on wellness tourism, consumer behavior, and sustainable tourism, several gaps remain in the existing research. Although numerous studies have explored these themes individually, limited research has examined their integrated relationship, particularly in the context of how consumer behavior in wellness tourism contributes to sustainable tourism development. The following sections identify the key research gaps based on the existing literature.

3.1 Limited Integration of Wellness Tourism and Consumer Behavior Studies

Many studies have explored wellness tourism from perspectives such as health benefits, destination marketing, and spa management (Smith & Puczkó, 2014). Similarly, consumer behavior research has focused on tourist motivation, decision-making processes, and destination choice (Solomon, 2018). However, relatively few studies have integrated these two domains to examine how consumer behavior specifically influences participation in wellness tourism activities.

Existing literature primarily investigates general tourism consumer behavior without considering the unique characteristics of wellness tourists, such as their health consciousness, lifestyle orientation, and preference for holistic experiences. As a result, there is a need for more comprehensive research that explores how wellness tourists make travel decisions and how these decisions influence tourism development.

3.2 Insufficient Research on the Link between Wellness Tourism and Sustainable Tourism

Although wellness tourism is often associated with natural environments, eco-friendly facilities, and holistic lifestyles, the direct relationship between wellness tourism and sustainable tourism has not been sufficiently explored in empirical studies. Several scholars suggest that wellness tourism can promote sustainability because it emphasizes environmental conservation, local cultural preservation, and responsible consumption (Font & McCabe, 2017).

However, there remains limited empirical research examining how wellness tourism activities actually contribute to sustainable tourism development in practice. More studies are required to evaluate how wellness tourism businesses adopt sustainable practices and how tourists respond to these initiatives.

3.3 Lack of Qualitative Insights into Wellness Tourist Behavior

Most existing research on wellness tourism relies heavily on quantitative survey-based methods, which primarily focus on statistical relationships between variables such as tourist motivation, satisfaction, and loyalty. While these studies provide valuable insights, they often overlook the deeper psychological and experiential dimensions of wellness tourism behavior.

Qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews, case studies, and thematic analysis can provide richer insights into tourists' personal experiences, perceptions, and motivations. There is a need for more qualitative studies that explore how tourists perceive wellness tourism experiences and how these experiences influence their attitudes toward sustainability.

3.4 Limited Focus on Sustainability-Oriented Consumer Behavior

Although sustainable tourism has been widely discussed in tourism literature, relatively few studies have examined how consumer behavior influences the adoption of sustainable tourism practices within wellness tourism contexts. Many tourism studies focus on sustainability from a destination management or policy perspective, rather than from the viewpoint of tourists themselves.

Understanding tourists' environmental attitudes, ethical values, and responsible travel behaviors is essential for promoting sustainable tourism development. Therefore, further research is needed to examine how wellness tourists' preferences and decision-making processes encourage tourism businesses to adopt sustainable practices.

3.5 Lack of Research on the Role of Destination Management in Wellness Tourism Sustainability

Destination management plays a critical role in ensuring the sustainability of tourism development. However, limited research has examined how destination managers and tourism stakeholders integrate wellness tourism with sustainable tourism strategies.

Many wellness tourism destinations focus primarily on service quality and luxury experiences, while sustainability initiatives may receive less attention. There is a need for research that investigates how destination managers can effectively integrate wellness tourism services with environmental sustainability, community development, and cultural preservation.

3.6 Limited Research in Emerging Wellness Tourism Destinations

Much of the existing literature on wellness tourism focuses on developed tourism destinations such as Europe, North America, and Southeast Asia. Comparatively fewer studies have examined wellness tourism development in emerging tourism markets, where wellness tourism may offer significant opportunities for sustainable economic development.

Research is needed to explore how emerging destinations can leverage wellness tourism as a strategy for sustainable tourism development while preserving local culture and natural resources.

Summary of Research Gap

The review of existing literature indicates that although wellness tourism, consumer behavior, and sustainable tourism have been widely studied individually, their interrelationship remains insufficiently explored. Specifically, there is a need for research that:

- Examines the behavioral characteristics of wellness tourists.
- Explores the connection between wellness tourism and sustainable tourism practices.
- Utilizes qualitative research approaches to understand tourist experiences and motivations.
- Investigates the role of destination management in promoting sustainable wellness tourism.

Addressing these research gaps will provide valuable insights for tourism policymakers, destination managers, and tourism businesses seeking to develop sustainable wellness tourism strategies.

4. Hypothesis

H1: *Tourists whose travel motivations are strongly oriented toward health improvement, mental well-being, and lifestyle enhancement are more likely to engage in wellness tourism activities than tourists whose travel motivations are primarily leisure- or entertainment-oriented.*

H2: *Wellness tourism destinations that incorporate environmental sustainability practices such as eco-friendly infrastructure, natural resource conservation, and community engagement are more likely to attract environmentally conscious tourists than destinations emphasizing wellness services without sustainability integration.*

H3: *The greater the level of environmental awareness and sustainability orientation among tourists, the more likely they are to adopt responsible travel behaviors such as supporting eco-friendly accommodations, sustainable services, and nature-based wellness experiences.*

H4: *Wellness tourism experiences that integrate physical, psychological, and environmental well-being are more likely to generate higher levels of tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty than wellness experiences that focus solely on physical relaxation services.*

H5: *Tourism systems that align consumer wellness motivations with sustainable tourism practices are more likely to contribute to long-term destination sustainability and responsible tourism development than tourism systems that treat wellness tourism and sustainability as separate strategic priorities.*

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the relationship between consumer behavior in wellness tourism and sustainable tourism development. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate for this study because it allows for an in-depth understanding of tourists' perceptions, motivations, and experiences associated with wellness tourism. Unlike quantitative methods, which primarily focus on statistical relationships between variables, qualitative research enables researchers to explore complex social phenomena, behavioral patterns, and meanings attached to tourism experiences (Creswell, 2018).

The qualitative approach is suitable for examining how tourists interpret wellness experiences, how they perceive sustainability practices in tourism destinations, and how these perceptions influence their travel behavior. Through qualitative analysis, the study aims to generate insights into the behavioral dimensions of wellness tourism and identify the underlying factors that shape sustainable tourism consumption.

5.2 Research Approach

The study follows an exploratory research approach, as the relationship between consumer behavior in wellness tourism and sustainable tourism development remains relatively underexplored in existing tourism literature. Exploratory research allows researchers to investigate new or emerging phenomena and develop a deeper understanding of complex issues through open-ended inquiry.

In the context of this study, the exploratory approach helps identify patterns in tourist motivations, sustainability perceptions, and decision-making processes related to wellness tourism experiences.

5.3 Study Context

The research focuses on wellness tourism destinations that emphasize holistic health experiences and sustainable tourism practices. These destinations typically offer services such as spa therapies, yoga retreats, meditation programs, herbal treatments, and nature-based wellness activities. Such destinations often integrate sustainability initiatives, including eco-friendly infrastructure, organic food production, and community-based tourism experiences.

Wellness tourism destinations provide an appropriate context for examining consumer behavior because they attract tourists who are often motivated by health consciousness, environmental awareness, and lifestyle improvement.

5.4 Sampling Technique

The study uses purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique commonly used in qualitative research. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to select participants who possess relevant knowledge and experience related to the research topic.

Participants in this study include individuals who have previously participated in wellness tourism activities such as spa retreats, yoga tourism, meditation retreats, or holistic wellness programs. These participants are selected because their experiences provide valuable insights into consumer motivations, perceptions, and behavioral patterns associated with wellness tourism.

A sample of approximately 40–45 wellness tourists is considered sufficient to achieve data saturation in qualitative research. Data saturation occurs when additional interviews or observations no longer provide new insights into the research topic.

5.5 Data Collection Methods

The study employs multiple qualitative data collection methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

5.5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are used as the primary data collection method. This method allows participants to express their experiences and opinions freely while enabling the researcher to guide the discussion around key themes related to wellness tourism and sustainable travel behavior.

The interviews focus on several aspects, including:

- Tourist motivations for participating in wellness tourism
- Perceptions of sustainability practices in wellness destinations
- Factors influencing destination choice
- Experiences and satisfaction with wellness tourism services
- Attitudes toward responsible and sustainable travel

Each interview lasts approximately 30–45 minutes, and responses are recorded and transcribed for further analysis.

5.5.2 Secondary Data Sources

In addition to primary interview data, the study also examines secondary data sources, including:

- Academic journal articles
- Tourism industry reports
- Wellness tourism marketing materials
- Sustainability reports of wellness resorts

Secondary data provides additional context and supports the interpretation of qualitative findings.

5.6 Data Analysis Method

The collected data are analyzed using thematic analysis, which is a widely used qualitative analysis technique in tourism research. Thematic analysis involves identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The data analysis process consists of the following steps:

- 1. Data Familiarization**

Interview transcripts and secondary data are carefully reviewed to gain an overall understanding of the data.

- 2. Coding**

Key statements and ideas from the data are coded to identify meaningful units of information.

- 3. Theme Development**

Related codes are grouped into broader themes that represent important patterns in the data.

- 4. Interpretation of Themes**

The identified themes are interpreted in relation to the research objectives, hypotheses, and existing literature.

Through thematic analysis, the study identifies major themes related to tourist motivation, environmental awareness, sustainability perceptions, and wellness tourism experiences.

5.7 Reliability and Validity

Ensuring reliability and validity is essential in qualitative research. Several strategies are employed to enhance the credibility of the study.

Triangulation is used by combining multiple data sources, including interviews and secondary literature, to validate research findings. This approach helps ensure that conclusions are supported by different types of evidence.

Additionally, member checking is conducted by sharing selected interpretations with participants to confirm the accuracy of their responses. This process helps ensure that the findings accurately reflect participants' experiences and perspectives.

Summary

This chapter adopts a qualitative exploratory research design to investigate the relationship between consumer behavior in wellness tourism and sustainable tourism development. By using purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis, the study aims to generate in-depth insights into tourist motivations, sustainability perceptions, and behavioral patterns associated with wellness tourism experiences.

6. Analysis and Interpretations

The qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews and secondary literature were analyzed using thematic analysis in order to identify patterns in consumer behavior related to wellness tourism and sustainable tourism development. The analysis revealed several key themes reflecting the motivations, perceptions, and behavioral tendencies of wellness tourists. These themes provide insights into how consumer behavior shapes the development of sustainable wellness tourism destinations. The findings are interpreted in relation to the hypotheses and existing tourism literature.

6.1 Tourist Motivation for Wellness Travel

One of the most prominent themes emerging from the analysis is the strong role of health and well-being motivations in influencing tourists' participation in wellness tourism. Most participants indicated that their decision to travel for wellness purposes was driven by a desire to improve their physical health, reduce stress, and achieve mental relaxation. Many respondents described wellness tourism as an opportunity to escape from the pressures of daily life and focus on personal well-being.

Several interview participants reported that modern lifestyles characterized by long working hours, urban congestion, and digital overload have increased the need for relaxation and stress management. As a result, wellness tourism destinations offering yoga retreats, spa therapies, meditation programs, and nature-based activities are perceived as ideal environments for restoring physical and psychological balance. These findings support the argument that health-oriented motivations significantly influence tourist participation in wellness tourism activities.

Furthermore, the analysis indicates that wellness tourists often view travel as a form of preventive healthcare rather than merely a recreational activity. Participants emphasized that wellness tourism experiences help them adopt healthier lifestyles and develop long-term wellness habits. This perspective suggests that wellness tourism is not only a leisure activity but also a meaningful experience that contributes to personal development and lifestyle transformation.

6.2 Environmental Awareness and Responsible Travel Behavior

Another significant theme emerging from the data relates to environmental awareness and sustainability consciousness among wellness tourists. Many participants expressed strong concern about environmental issues such as pollution, climate change, and the degradation of natural ecosystems. These concerns influenced their preferences for destinations that prioritize environmental conservation and sustainable tourism practices.

Participants indicated that they prefer wellness destinations located in natural and environmentally protected areas, such as mountains, forests, and coastal regions. The presence of clean air, natural landscapes, and tranquil surroundings was frequently cited as an important factor influencing

destination choice. These environmental attributes are considered essential components of the wellness tourism experience.

In addition, respondents reported that they actively seek accommodations that implement eco-friendly practices such as waste reduction, renewable energy use, organic food sourcing, and water conservation. Many participants also expressed willingness to support tourism businesses that demonstrate environmental responsibility. This finding suggests that environmentally conscious tourists play a significant role in encouraging tourism providers to adopt sustainable practices.

The analysis also reveals that wellness tourists often engage in responsible travel behaviors, such as minimizing plastic use, respecting local cultures, and supporting community-based tourism initiatives. These behaviors reflect the alignment between wellness values and sustainability principles.

6.3 Influence of Destination Image on Tourist Decision-Making

Destination image emerged as another critical factor influencing consumer behavior in wellness tourism. Participants frequently described their expectations of wellness destinations using terms such as peaceful, natural, healthy, and environmentally friendly. Destinations that project these characteristics are more likely to attract wellness-oriented travelers.

The findings indicate that tourists tend to associate wellness tourism destinations with natural beauty, cultural authenticity, and holistic healing environments. For example, destinations known for traditional healing practices, herbal medicine, or spiritual retreats were perceived as more authentic wellness tourism locations. These attributes contribute to the formation of a positive destination image.

The role of digital media was also evident in shaping tourists' perceptions of wellness destinations. Many participants reported that they discovered wellness travel opportunities through social media platforms, travel blogs, and online travel websites. Visual content showcasing yoga retreats, spa resorts, and scenic landscapes often influences tourists' travel decisions.

A positive destination image not only encourages initial visitation but also influences tourists' satisfaction and loyalty. Participants who had positive wellness experiences reported a strong intention to revisit the destination and recommend it to others. This finding highlights the importance of destination branding and marketing in promoting wellness tourism.

6.4 Role of Wellness Experiences in Tourist Satisfaction

The analysis revealed that the quality of wellness tourism experiences significantly influences tourist satisfaction and overall travel evaluation. Participants emphasized several factors that contribute to a satisfying wellness tourism experience, including quality of wellness services, natural surroundings, service professionalism, and authenticity of experiences.

Many participants highlighted the importance of holistic wellness experiences that integrate physical, mental, and emotional well-being. For example, wellness retreats that combine yoga sessions, meditation programs, healthy cuisine, and nature-based activities were perceived as more fulfilling and meaningful. Participants also emphasized the role of personalized wellness services in enhancing their travel experiences. Wellness tourism providers that offer customized wellness programs tailored to individual health goals are more likely to satisfy tourists' expectations.

Additionally, the presence of natural environments such as forests, mountains, and beaches significantly enhances the overall wellness experience. Participants reported that spending time in natural surroundings contributes to relaxation, emotional balance, and psychological well-being.

Overall, the analysis suggests that high-quality wellness experiences play a crucial role in shaping tourist satisfaction and encouraging repeat visitation.

6.5 Integration of Wellness Tourism and Sustainable Tourism Development

One of the most important findings of this study is the strong relationship between wellness tourism and sustainable tourism development. The analysis indicates that wellness tourism naturally aligns with sustainability principles because it emphasizes environmental preservation, cultural authenticity, and community engagement.

Participants frequently expressed appreciation for wellness destinations that incorporate sustainable practices such as eco-friendly architecture, organic food production, and local cultural experiences. These practices enhance the authenticity of the wellness experience while also contributing to environmental conservation.

The study also found that wellness tourism can support local community development by creating employment opportunities and promoting traditional cultural practices. For instance, some wellness resorts collaborate with local communities to offer cultural experiences, traditional healing therapies, and locally produced organic products.

Furthermore, wellness tourists often demonstrate higher levels of environmental and social responsibility compared with conventional tourists. Their travel choices reflect a broader commitment to sustainable lifestyles and ethical consumption patterns.

The integration of wellness tourism with sustainable tourism practices can therefore contribute to the long-term sustainability of tourism destinations. By aligning consumer preferences with sustainability initiatives, tourism stakeholders can develop tourism models that benefit both tourists and host communities.

6.6 Interpretation in Relation to Research Hypotheses

The analysis provides support for the proposed hypotheses. The findings indicate that tourist motivations related to health and well-being strongly influence participation in wellness tourism, confirming the relationship proposed in the first hypothesis.

Similarly, the data demonstrate that environmentally conscious tourists are more likely to engage in sustainable tourism practices, supporting the second hypothesis regarding environmental awareness and responsible travel behavior.

The importance of destination image in shaping tourist intentions also supports the third hypothesis, as participants indicated that perceptions of natural beauty, sustainability, and wellness facilities significantly influence destination choice.

Additionally, the findings confirm that high-quality wellness experiences lead to higher levels of tourist satisfaction and loyalty, supporting the fourth hypothesis. Finally, the analysis highlights that consumer behavior in wellness tourism contributes to the promotion of sustainable tourism development, supporting the final hypothesis.

Overall, the results suggest that understanding consumer behavior is essential for developing effective strategies for sustainable wellness tourism development.

7. Findings and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between consumer behavior in wellness tourism and sustainable tourism development. Through qualitative analysis of interview responses and secondary literature, several key insights were identified regarding tourist motivations, sustainability perceptions, and the broader implications of wellness tourism for sustainable destination management. The findings highlight the significant role that consumer behavior plays in shaping the development of wellness tourism and its contribution to sustainable tourism practices.

The results of the analysis reveal that wellness tourists exhibit unique behavioral characteristics compared with conventional tourists. Their travel decisions are influenced not only by leisure motivations but also by health consciousness, environmental awareness, and a desire for meaningful experiences. These behavioral patterns encourage tourism destinations to adopt sustainable practices that align with the expectations of wellness-oriented travelers. The following key findings summarize the most important insights derived from the study.

7.1 Health and Well-being as Primary Motivations for Wellness Tourism

One of the most significant findings of this research is that health and well-being motivations play a central role in influencing tourist participation in wellness tourism activities. The majority of participants

indicated that their decision to engage in wellness tourism was motivated by a desire to improve their physical health, reduce stress, and achieve mental relaxation.

Modern lifestyles characterized by work pressure, sedentary routines, and digital dependency have increased the need for relaxation and self-care among individuals. As a result, many tourists seek wellness tourism experiences that allow them to temporarily disconnect from daily responsibilities and focus on personal well-being. Activities such as yoga retreats, meditation sessions, spa therapies, and nature-based relaxation programs were frequently mentioned by participants as key attractions of wellness tourism destinations.

Furthermore, wellness tourism was perceived by many participants as a form of preventive healthcare. Instead of seeking medical treatment after health problems arise, wellness tourists prefer to maintain their physical and mental well-being through proactive lifestyle choices. This preventive health orientation differentiates wellness tourism from other forms of tourism and contributes to its growing popularity worldwide.

7.2 Environmental Awareness Influences Travel Decisions

Another key finding of the study is that environmental awareness significantly influences the travel decisions of wellness tourists. Participants demonstrated a strong preference for destinations that offer clean environments, natural landscapes, and eco-friendly tourism infrastructure.

Wellness tourists often associate their travel experiences with nature, tranquility, and environmental quality. Destinations located in forests, mountains, coastal areas, and other natural settings were perceived as ideal environments for wellness activities. The presence of natural surroundings enhances the overall wellness experience by promoting relaxation, mental clarity, and emotional balance.

In addition to preferring natural environments, participants expressed a strong interest in supporting tourism businesses that adopt sustainable practices. Many respondents reported that they actively choose accommodations that use renewable energy, reduce plastic consumption, and promote organic food production. These findings suggest that wellness tourists are more likely to support sustainable tourism initiatives compared with conventional tourists.

The results also indicate that environmental awareness among tourists can influence the behavior of tourism businesses. As demand for sustainable tourism services increases, tourism providers are encouraged to adopt eco-friendly practices in order to remain competitive in the wellness tourism market.

7.3 Destination Image Plays a Critical Role in Attracting Wellness Tourists

The findings also highlight the importance of destination image in shaping tourists' travel decisions and expectations. Wellness tourism destinations that project a positive image characterized by natural beauty, tranquility, and sustainability are more likely to attract wellness-oriented travelers.

Participants frequently described their expectations of wellness destinations using terms such as peaceful, healthy, natural, and environmentally friendly. These perceptions influence the attractiveness of a destination and play a significant role in the decision-making process. Destinations that successfully communicate their wellness offerings and sustainability initiatives are more likely to attract tourists seeking holistic travel experiences.

The analysis also revealed the growing importance of digital media in shaping destination image. Social media platforms, travel blogs, and online travel websites serve as major sources of information for tourists planning wellness trips. Visual content showcasing scenic landscapes, yoga retreats, spa resorts, and eco-friendly accommodations often inspires tourists to visit specific destinations.

Positive destination image not only influences tourists' initial travel decisions but also contributes to long-term destination loyalty. Tourists who have positive experiences at wellness destinations are more likely to revisit the destination and recommend it to others through word-of-mouth and online reviews.

7.4 Quality Wellness Experiences Enhance Tourist Satisfaction and Loyalty

Another important finding of the study is that the quality of wellness tourism experiences significantly influences tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Participants emphasized that their overall satisfaction with a wellness destination depends on multiple factors, including service quality, authenticity of experiences, natural surroundings, and the professionalism of wellness practitioners.

Wellness tourism experiences that integrate physical, mental, and emotional well-being were perceived as more meaningful and satisfying. For example, wellness retreats that combine yoga sessions, meditation programs, healthy cuisine, and nature-based activities provide a holistic experience that enhances tourist satisfaction.

Participants also highlighted the importance of personalized wellness services. Wellness programs that are tailored to individual needs and preferences are more likely to create positive travel experiences. Personalized services demonstrate a higher level of care and professionalism, which contributes to the perceived value of the wellness tourism experience.

High levels of satisfaction among wellness tourists often lead to repeat visitation and positive word-of-mouth promotion. Satisfied tourists frequently share their experiences with friends, family members, and online communities, thereby influencing the travel decisions of other potential tourists.

7.5 Integration of Wellness Tourism and Sustainable Tourism Development

The final key finding of this study is that wellness tourism can play a significant role in promoting sustainable tourism development. Wellness tourism destinations often emphasize environmental conservation, cultural authenticity, and community engagement, which are fundamental principles of sustainable tourism.

Participants expressed strong appreciation for tourism destinations that integrate sustainable practices into their wellness services. Eco-friendly architecture, organic food production, waste reduction initiatives, and support for local communities were frequently mentioned as desirable features of wellness tourism destinations.

The study also found that wellness tourism can contribute to local economic development by creating employment opportunities and supporting local businesses. Many wellness resorts collaborate with local farmers, artisans, and traditional healers to provide authentic cultural experiences for tourists. This collaboration not only enhances the uniqueness of the wellness tourism experience but also contributes to community development.

Furthermore, wellness tourism encourages tourists to adopt more sustainable lifestyles by promoting environmental awareness and responsible travel behavior. By connecting tourists with nature and encouraging mindfulness, wellness tourism can foster a deeper appreciation for environmental conservation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that consumer behavior plays a crucial role in shaping the development of wellness tourism and its contribution to sustainable tourism practices. Wellness tourists are motivated by health consciousness, stress reduction, and the desire for holistic well-being. These motivations influence their preferences for destinations that offer natural environments, eco-friendly services, and authentic cultural experiences.

The findings also indicate that environmental awareness among wellness tourists encourages tourism businesses to adopt sustainable practices. As tourists increasingly demand environmentally responsible tourism services, tourism providers must integrate sustainability into their operations in order to remain competitive.

Destination image and service quality also play critical roles in attracting wellness tourists and enhancing their satisfaction. Destinations that successfully combine wellness experiences with sustainable tourism practices are more likely to achieve long-term success and tourist loyalty.

Overall, wellness tourism represents a promising pathway for promoting sustainable tourism development. By aligning consumer preferences with sustainability principles, tourism stakeholders can

create tourism models that benefit tourists, local communities, and the natural environment. The integration of wellness tourism and sustainable tourism strategies can therefore contribute to the long-term sustainability of tourism destinations while enhancing the well-being of travelers worldwide.

8. Limitations and Recommendations

Although this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between consumer behavior in wellness tourism and sustainable tourism development, several limitations must be acknowledged. Recognizing these limitations helps identify areas for improvement and provides direction for future research and policy development. The following sections outline the key limitations of the study and present recommendations for enhancing the development of sustainable wellness tourism.

8.1 Limitations of the Study

8.1.1 Limited Sample Size

One of the primary limitations of this research is the relatively small sample size used in the qualitative study. Since the research relied on interviews with a limited number of wellness tourists, the findings may not fully represent the perspectives of all wellness travelers. A larger sample size could provide more diverse insights into consumer behavior patterns in wellness tourism.

8.1.2 Geographic Scope of the Study

The study does not focus on a specific geographic region or destination, which may limit the applicability of the findings to particular tourism markets. Wellness tourism practices and consumer preferences can vary significantly across different countries and cultural contexts. Therefore, the results may not fully capture regional variations in wellness tourism behavior.

8.1.3 Reliance on Qualitative Research Methods

The study primarily uses qualitative research methods, which focus on exploring perceptions and experiences rather than measuring statistical relationships between variables. Although qualitative research provides rich insights into consumer behavior, the findings cannot be generalized to a larger population without further quantitative validation.

8.1.4 Limited Examination of Tourism Stakeholder Perspectives

The research mainly focuses on the perspectives of wellness tourists and does not extensively examine the viewpoints of other tourism stakeholders such as destination managers, wellness resort operators, policymakers, and local communities. Including these stakeholders could provide a more comprehensive understanding of sustainable wellness tourism development.

8.1.5 Rapidly Evolving Wellness Tourism Industry

The wellness tourism industry is continuously evolving due to changing consumer preferences, technological advancements, and global sustainability concerns. As a result, some of the findings of this study may need to be updated in the future to reflect new trends and developments in wellness tourism.

8.2 Recommendations

8.2.1 Development of Sustainable Wellness Tourism Policies

Governments and tourism authorities should develop comprehensive policies that integrate wellness tourism with sustainable tourism strategies. Such policies should encourage environmentally responsible practices, protect natural resources, and promote community participation in tourism development.

8.2.2 Adoption of Eco-Friendly Practices by Tourism Businesses

Wellness tourism providers should actively adopt sustainable business practices, including renewable energy use, waste management systems, water conservation, and organic food production. Implementing eco-friendly initiatives can enhance the attractiveness of wellness destinations and meet the expectations of environmentally conscious tourists.

8.2.3 Promotion of Local Culture and Community Participation

Tourism stakeholders should promote community-based wellness tourism initiatives that involve local communities in tourism activities. Supporting local traditions, cultural heritage, and indigenous healing

practices can enhance the authenticity of wellness tourism experiences while contributing to local economic development.

8.2.4 Use of Digital Marketing for Sustainable Wellness Tourism Promotion

Tourism organizations should utilize digital marketing strategies and social media platforms to promote sustainable wellness tourism destinations. Highlighting eco-friendly practices, wellness programs, and natural attractions can attract tourists who value responsible travel experiences.

8.2.5 Future Research on Wellness Tourism Consumer Behavior

Future research should explore wellness tourism from multiple perspectives using mixed research methods, including both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Studies should also investigate emerging trends such as digital wellness tourism, post-pandemic wellness travel, and the role of technology in promoting sustainable tourism experiences.

Summary

This chapter has examined the relationship between consumer behavior in wellness tourism and sustainable tourism development through qualitative analysis. While the study provides important insights into tourist motivations, sustainability awareness, and destination management, it also highlights several limitations that future research should address.

By implementing the recommended strategies, tourism stakeholders can strengthen the integration of wellness tourism and sustainability practices, ensuring that tourism development benefits both travelers and host communities while protecting natural environments for future generations.

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