

AN EXTENDED APPLICATION OF THE THEORY OF REASONED ACTION (TRA) MODEL IN PREDICTING TOURIST LOYALTY: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF DESIRE IN HEALTH & SPA TOURISM

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Abstract

This research sought to examine the predictive power of an extended version of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) model that incorporates desire to understand tourists' loyalty intentions towards a health & spa center. The findings substantiate the model's high explanatory capacity and underline its relevance in the context of health tourism. It was found that positive attitudes towards health tourism services and the influence of subjective norms, which embody the opinions of tourists' social contacts, significantly influence loyalty intentions. Importantly, desire, which was included as an extension of the traditional TRA model, emerged as a crucial factor in this relationship, serving as a significant mediator between both attitudes and subjective norms and loyalty intentions. Our study highlights the central importance of understanding and considering desires when designing management strategies and recommends the implementation of targeted marketing campaigns, personalized offers and the continuous collection of customer feedback based on desire-based segmentation. This study contributes to the existing literature by extending the application of the TRA model to the health and wellness tourism sector and emphasizing the crucial role of desire as a mediator in promoting customer loyalty.

Keywords: Health tourism; loyalty; desire.

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1. Introduction

Health tourism, an amalgamation of health and tourism services, has witnessed substantial growth in recent times, propelled by the advancement of the social economy and the burgeoning demand for travel aimed at enhancing physical and psychological well-being (Vetitnev et al., 2016). While health tourism can trace its origins back to ancient times in Ancient Greece (Bauer, 2015), the formal conceptualization of the term was introduced by Goodrich and Goodrich in 1987, and it has since evolved with ongoing scientific research in the field. Nevertheless, there is still no consensus on its exact definition.

Health tourism encompasses a wide range of activities that can be categorized as either mandatory or optional, depending on the decision-making process of the tourists. Mandatory travel involves individuals venturing beyond their habitual place of residence due to the unavailability of essential treatments in their immediate vicinity. On the other hand, optional travel occurs when tourists choose to engage in health tourism activities despite the availability of comparable services in their home regions (Jones and Keith, 2006). Another current approach regarding health tourism, is to divide it into three parts (medical tourism, wellness tourism and spa tourism), with the assertion that the latter two overlap (Mainil et al., 2017).

The health tourism market within the European Union (EU) is best described through the statistical insights derived from European Parliament. In 2019, the aggregate volume of health tourism in the EU encompassed approximately 56 million domestic arrivals and 5.1 million international arrivals, with a primary focus on wellness, spa, and medical treatments. Notably, health tourism accounted for 4.3 percent of the total EU arrivals. Financially, health tourism generated €46.9 billion in revenue, signifying 4.6 percent of the overall tourism revenue and 0.33 percent of the EU28 GDP (Mainil et al., 2017).

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Romania remains a peripheral market in European health tourism, despite its significant growth potential, partly due to its frequently mentioned possession of "one-third of Europe's total number of mineral and thermal springs" (Nistoreanu and Aluculesei, 2021). Data published in a 2017 study about cohesion in health tourism at the European level, attribute Romania with a total volume of 1.1 million accommodated individuals and revenues of 301 million euros (Mainil et al., 2017), and with low interest from foreign tourists. Based on a memorandum issued by the Romanian Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Tourism, it has been determined that 98.6% of the overall influx of tourists visiting balneary resorts consists of Romanian nationals (RMET, 2023).

Tourists are considered key to business success for healthcare providers in any destination (Kamassi et al., 2020). Therefore, studies from the consumer perspective are essential. Due to its development perspective, it is important for the health tourism industry that consumers remain loyal to this concept.

Research on loyalty in tourism leads to a multitude of approaches, necessitating a rethinking of how loyalty is understood due to the unique nature of the tourism domain (McKercher et al., 2012). Niininen (2022) provides a contemporary definition for destination loyalty, which encompasses the notion of "behavioral consistency" characterized by recurrent visits to a specific destination. This pattern of behavior is driven by a psychological inclination or desire to revisit the destination.

Among the common approaches, we can mention the vertical loyalty hierarchy, wherein tourists may exhibit loyalty across multiple tiers of the tourism system concurrently (e.g., to both a travel agent and an airline); horizontal loyalties, where tourists may demonstrate loyalty to multiple providers within the same tier of the tourism system (e.g., multiple hotel brands); and experiential loyalty, pertaining to loyalty towards specific holiday styles (McKercher et al., 2012).

Within the field of tourism research, attitudinal loyalty frequently serves as a measurement construct, incorporating psychological components such as intentions and willingness, emotions and feelings, as well as thoughts and beliefs (Oppermann, 2000). From another perspective, the assessment of tourist behavioral loyalty primarily relies on observable actions, such as repeated visits to a destination, and loyalty is predominantly quantified through metrics such as the frequency of product or service purchases or the number of visits to a specific destination (McKercher et al., 2012). Loyalty can also be viewed from a perspective that integrates both attitudes and behaviors (Rundle-Thiele, 2005).

In previous research, attempts have been made to employ socio-psychological models to understand the formation of customers' loyalty (Han and Kim, 2010). However, these studies primarily concentrate on factors that influence and shape individuals' loyalty behaviors, including their conscious intentions and decisions, as well as subconscious or automatic responses, while giving less emphasis to factors as desires, needs, and goals that influence individuals' decision-making processes, which hold central importance in repurchase decision-making (Han and Ryu, 2012; Han and Back, 2007).

Previous studies have analyzed the development of health tourism in Romania a spa tourism cluster (Fundeanu, 2015), or Changing tourism demand in Central Europe: the case of Romanian tourist spas (Cooper, 1995). Other perspectives of research were regarded to the development of Romanian medical tourism (Vasile, 2019), or if the Romanian spa tourism can enhance water resources and turn them into a national brand (Nistoreanu and Aluculesei, 2021).

Regarding guest loyalty in all branches of health tourism in Romania, it cannot be said that there is solid research evidence that contributes to a comprehensive understanding of how the decision to remain loyal is made, particularly in this industry. Consequently, there is currently a lack of scientific basis to propose effective strategies to promote loyalty in this particular form of tourism.

This study attempts to fill these gaps by deepening the understanding of the emergence of customer loyalty in Romanian health tourism. Using an attitudinal approach, this study aims to provide a consolidated and improved perspective on the factors that contribute to customer loyalty in this context (Han et al., 2017). It is expected that the findings of this study will provide practical recommendations that offer concrete directions and strategic actions for the development and maintenance of loyalty within the local health tourism industry. This study seeks to address these gaps by aiming to consolidate the understanding of customer loyalty formation in Romanian health tourism. Using an attitudinal approach, this study aims to provide a consolidated and improved perspective on the factors that

contribute to customer loyalty in this context (Han et al., 2017). It is expected that the results of this study will lead to practical recommendations and provide concrete directions and strategic actions for the development and maintenance of loyalty within the local health tourism industry.

2. Literature review

2.1 Health Tourism in Romania

In Romania, balneary spa tourism represents the health tourism component with the highest popularity and spend among consumers. In addition, Romania also has several private clinics and hospitals that offer specialized medical services for tourists, such as cosmetic surgery, dental implants, and other surgical interventions (Vasile, 2019). Wellness falls under the category of the wellness sector, encompassing recreational and preventive activities that do not require a medical prescription, this form of tourism relies on substantial investments in equipment (Fundeanu, 2015). Most of the new assets and approaches appeared in this industry in the last 20 years, represents the vision of private investors who have started investing in the development of health tourism in Romania, building private clinics and wellness and spa centers (Nistoreanu and Aluculesei, 2021).

The Masterplan for spa tourism in Romania, approved in 2019 by the Ministry of Tourism, offers a wide and updated description of the variety of local balneary resources, giving us as follows, a classification of these resources and the healing effect they have.

Among the tourist destinations in Romania that offer medical and wellness services are the spa resorts in the Carpathian Mountains (eg: Baile Herculane, Baile Felix, Sovata), but also those on the Black Sea (eg: Eforie Nord, Mangalia). Due to the vast spreading of this facilities, many of the ones who are seeking for cure, will need to travel. Research made on this topic, shows that even when the resource for treatment is not in their vicinity, 93.5% of respondents confirmed that they are willing to travel to another city from Romania, for medical purposes (Vasile, 2019).

2.2 The theory of reasoned action

In our research, we leverage the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), initially conceived by Icek Ajzen and Martin Fishbein in 1980, to investigate and prognosticate the loyalty intentions of tourists within the domain of health and spa tourism. TRA, at its core, suggests that a person's behavior - in our study, the tourists' loyalty intentions - is primarily shaped by their intention to perform the behavior. This intention is largely determined by two factors: their attitudes toward the behavior and subjective norms.

The first part of TRA considers behavioral beliefs and attitudes, indicating that a tourist's positive or negative appraisal of a health and spa tourism destination influences their intent to return, thus reflecting loyalty. The second component encompasses normative beliefs and subjective norms, positing that perceived social endorsements or disapprovals can likewise affect a tourist's loyalty intentions (Ajzen, 1991).

However, to more thoroughly account for the complex nature of tourist behavior, we extend the traditional TRA by integrating the construct of 'desire'. This added dimension allows for a more nuanced understanding of tourist behavior by acknowledging the role of intrinsic motivation and emotional inclination towards revisiting a health and spa tourism destination.

TRA, including our proposed extension, offers a robust framework for understanding behaviors that individuals consciously control, thus making it well-suited for our study's purpose. The theory has been successfully employed in various fields such as marketing and tourism behaviors, and with our expansion, we anticipate providing a deeper understanding of factors influencing tourists' loyalty to health and spa tourism destinations.

2.3 Desire

Desires play an important role in the motivational state of an individual, where appraisals and reasons transform into a compelling drive to act, defined as a mental state, desires emerge when an agent possesses a personal motivation to engage in an action or attain a specific goal (Perugini and Bagozzi, 2004). Desires serve as the initial step towards making a decision to act, often followed by the formation of intentions. It is crucial to differentiate desires from related constructs such as intentions, attitudes,

and goals. Curiously, the concept of desires has received limited attention within social psychology, particularly within attitude theory, but with an increasingly broader applicability in intention studies (Han and Ryu, 2012; Han et al., 2017). Notably, the theory of planned behavior, a prominent attitude model developed by Ajzen (1991), does not explicitly consider desires, instead, it posits that intentions directly arise from the combined influence of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, but there have been some exceptions who recognizes the significance of desires in the realm of social psychology (Perugini and Bagozzi, 2004). Overall, further exploration and integration of desires within theoretical frameworks are warranted to enhance our understanding of human action and motivation.

2.4 Research model and hypotheses development

The following relationships have been previously studied and validated in constructs within the tourism field. The hypotheses presented, encompassing exclusively the component factors of TRA, have been approached in various studies by Nezakati et al. (2015), Ryu and Han (2010), Han and Ryu (2012), examining the relationship that exists among them. A comprehensive examination of the mediating role of Desire within a tourism construct has been previously investigated by Han and Ryu (2012), while Perugini and Bagozzi (2001, 2004) offer us a perspective from the realm of social psychology on the interaction of Desire with factors within the framework of TRA.

A. The relationship between behavioral beliefs and attitude

Attitude is shaped by the beliefs about the behavior and it represents an individual's overall judgment of a behavior based on the perceived consequences of the action, while behavioral beliefs focus on the perceived consequences of performing a behavior in a specific situation (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). In a study conducted in the US (2010), Ryu and Han concluded that behavioral beliefs influence tourists' attitudes when trying local cuisine. Based on this context:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Behavioral beliefs (BB) have a positive influence on attitude (Att).

B. The relationship between normative beliefs and subjective norm

The subjective norm construct is conceptualized as being influenced by normative beliefs and the individual's motivation to comply with majority. Subjective norm refers to an individual's perception of whether influential individuals expect them to engage in a particular behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). Normative beliefs incorporate the perceptions of an individual who believes that others have developed opinions regarding their appropriate course of action in a given situation, while the motivation to comply reflects the adherence to the perceived expectations of others (Ryu and Han, 2010). Considering these arguments, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Normative beliefs (NorB1) have a positive influence on subjective norm (SbN).

C. The relationship between attitude and loyalty intention

In numerous researches exploring the association between attitude and intention, was commonly rely on the pioneering work conducted of Ajzen and Fishbein (1975, 1980, 1991). It is worth mentioning a few studies, one of which focused on intention in the context of medical tourism in Malaysia and concluded that attitude significantly predicted tourists' propensity to engage in medical tourism (Na et al., 2016). Another study specifically focusing on attitude as a determinant of loyalty in spa tourism was conducted by Kim et al. (2010) and found that a positive emotional attitude is likely to encourage spa visits, while exceeding guests' expectations plays a crucial role in cultivating a positive attitude towards spa visits. Based on the above arguments, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Attitude (Att) has a positive influence on loyalty intention (LyInt)

D. The relationship between subjective norm and loyalty intention

Similar to the connection between attitude and intention, a comparable connection between subjective norm and intention can be observed. One of the most frequently cited contributions in this area is the research conducted by Ajzen (1991), in which the constituent factors of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) were described. Ryu and Han (2010), in their study about tourists' intention, found positive

influence of subjective norm to intention, while using the TRA. Notably, the investigation of loyalty within the hospitality industry extensively relies on this association. Acknowledging the significance of subjective norms, it is imperative to highlight the contributions made by Lam and Hsu (2006). Their study emphasized the relevance of subjective norms in shaping the intentions of Taiwanese tourists to visit Hong Kong, revealing that subjective norms also exerted a positive influence on decisions regarding holiday destination choices. Additionally, the research conducted by Na et al. (2016) merits attention for illustrating the positive impact of subjective norms on purchase intentions within the realm of medical tourism. In relation to health tourism, it is worth mentioning the contribution of Kim et al. (2010), who found in their study that subjective norms significantly influence revisit intention, as it is highly recommended to promote and maintain positive word-of-mouth among wellness and spa visitors. With this in mind, we propose the following considerations:

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Subjective norm (SbN) has a positive influence on loyalty intention (LyInt)

E. The relationship between attitude and desire

The relationship between attitude and desire has been extensively studied in numerous research endeavors that aimed to investigate the influence generated by these factors. Desires represent the motivational state of mind wherein appraisals and reasons to act are transformed into a motivation to do so (Perugini and Bagozzi, 2001). Drawing on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) as the foundation for their inquiry, Han and Ryu (2012) also revealed a positive relationship of influence. Similarly, Perugini and Bagozzi (2001), in their study on the role of desires and anticipated emotions in goal-directed behaviors, demonstrated the influential power of attitude on desire. In other words, when an individual's attitude towards something increases, it is expected that the corresponding desire related to that action or objective will also increase accordingly. Considering these arguments, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 5 (H5): Attitude (Att) has a positive influence on desire (Des)

F. The relationship between subjective norms and desire

The theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), formulated as an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), does not incorporate the construct of desire explicitly. However, it postulates that intentions are primarily determined by the combined influence of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Moreover, the common assumption in this line of work is that desires are not needed because intentions already entail motivation (Ajzen, 1991). Returning to the study conducted by Han and Ryu (2012), a direct impact of subjective norms on desire was found. The subjective norm refers to an individual's perception of social pressure or influence from important others regarding a specific behavior or action. On the other hand, desire represents an individual's motivational state or inclination towards engaging in a particular behavior, and within the context of the TRA, the studied relationship between subjective norm and desire, was proved as a significant aspect of understanding human behavior (Perugini and Bagozzi 2004; Ryu and Han, 2004). Based on the aforementioned arguments, we posit the following proposal:

Hypothesis 6 (H6): Subjective norms (SbN) have a positive influence on desire (Des)

G. The relationship between desire and loyalty intention

Firstly, considering the synonymous treatment of these two terms within the theory of attitude, it is necessary to address the attempts made to clarify the ambiguity regarding their similarity. Perugini and Bagozzi, through their research in 2004, which encompassed two case studies, argue that they have identified theoretical motivations that differentiate desire from intention. Thus, the first study revealed that desires are less performable, less action-connected, and have longer time frames compared to intentions. Furthermore, the second study demonstrated a higher perceived feasibility for desired and intended actions, particularly within shorter time periods. In another study conducted by Perugini and Bagozzi (2001), the two researchers formulated a novel conceptual framework of purposeful behavior, positing that desires serve as the immediate determinants of intentions. Considering these arguments, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 7 (H7): Desire (Des) has a positive influence on desire (LyInt)

H. Desire (Des), as mediator between Att and Lyint

Although the present article is based on an extended framework of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), and in addition explores the mediating role of desire, the most accurate portrayal of desire as a mediator between the relationships of Att and LyINT, as well as SbN and LyInt, has been extensively examined through the lens of the Model of Goal-Directed Behavior (MGB). Essentially, the MGB is an extended form of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which in turn is an extended form of the TRA. Within the MGB, which can be viewed as a greatly expanded version of the TRA, desire serves as the most proximal determinant of decisions and behavior (Han and Ryu, 2012).

By presenting empirical evidence, researchers have substantiated the involvement of desire in the process of intention formation. They have shown that desire operates as a mediator within the proposed associations among the theoretical constructs, and intention directly depends on this variable (Perugini and Bagozzi, 2001; Han and Ryu 2012;). Based on the aforementioned arguments, we posit the following proposal:

Hypothesis 8 (H8): Desire (Des) mediates the relation between Att and Lyint

G. Desire (Des), as mediator between SbN and Lyint

For this research model and hypothesis, we will take into consideration the enumerations presented earlier, using desire as a mediator between the relationships of SbN and LyInt, as a previous study of Ryu and Han (2010) have posited the existence of a potential correlation between the attitudinal and normative aspects within the TRA model. The hypothesis falls within the considerations of Perugini and Bagozzi's (2001) regarding MGB, and Han and Ryu (2012) regarding TPB, both representing improved forms of TRA. In this context, the following research hypotheses is proposed:

Hypothesis 9 (H9): Desire (Des) mediates the relation between NorBl => SbN and Lyint

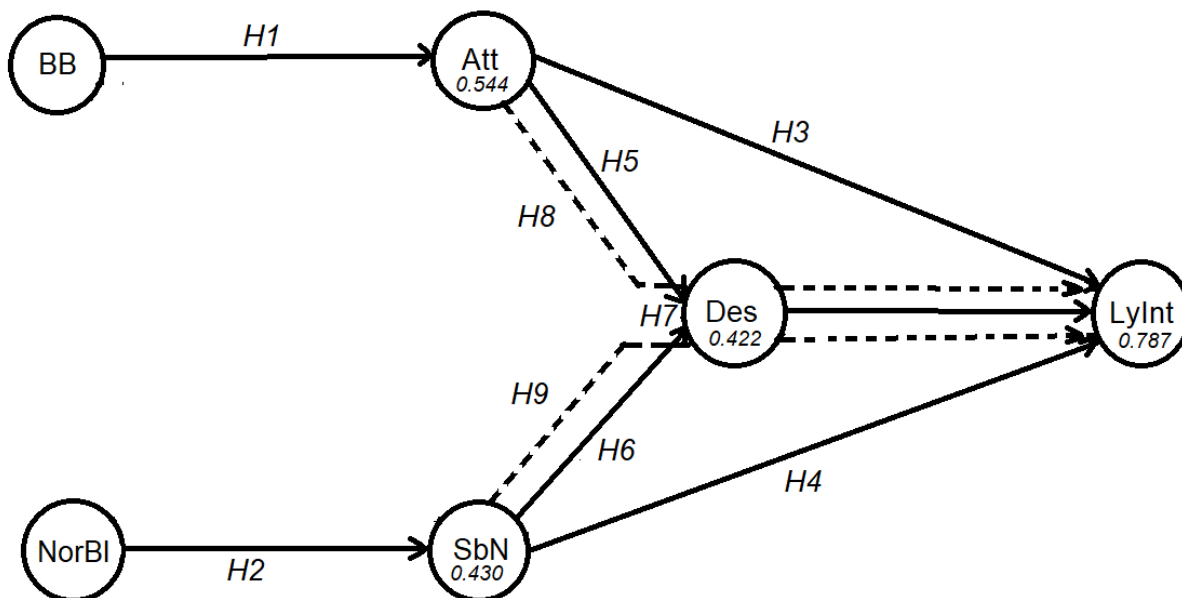


Figure 1. Proposed research model
 Source: Self-developed based on SmartPLS calculations

3. Methodology

3.1 Measures and survey questionnaire

To examine the impact of the assessed variables in this research investigation, a comprehensive measurement tool was developed utilizing a 7-point Likert scale, incorporating components of TRA, and in addition, desire. This framework was constructed by drawing upon prior research conducted on loyalty within the hospitality industry and employing scientifically validated constructs (Kim et al., 2011; Han and Ryu, 2012; Han et al., 2017, Perugini and Bagozzi, 2001). These constructs were adapted to fit the specificity of this study. The questionnaire included 6 constructs as follows:

- 8 items to evaluate behavioral beliefs regarding health tourism practiced within the studied health & spa center (e.g. Revisiting this health & spa center would enable me to enjoy comfortable interactions with staff.);
- 3 items to evaluate normative beliefs regarding health tourism practiced within the studied health & spa center (e.g. My family (or relatives) think I should revisit this health & spa center when looking for spa related cure.);
- 3 items to evaluate desire regarding health tourism practiced within the studied health & spa center (e.g. I desire to revisit this health & spa center in the next months and benefiting once again from the "health resource" that it has.);
- 3 items to evaluate subjective norms (e.g. Most people who are important to me think I should come to this health & spa center for spa related cure.);
- 4 items to evaluate the attitudes consumers have (e.g. I think that returning to this spa in the next months would be attractive.);
- the intention to repurchase was evaluated using 4 items (e.g. I intend to be a frequent guest at this health & spa center within the next months.).

The construct validity of the measures used was verified by practitioners in the industry and by members of the academic community in the hospitality industry.

3.2 Data collection

During data collection, personalized email invitations were sent to potential study participants. The questionnaire was sent exclusively to individuals who had used wellness, medical and spa services in the specified tourism complex between June 2022 and February 2023 and had given their consent to participate in surveys in accordance with GDPR regulations. The specified health tourism destination had a total of more than 4,300 different customers in the specified period, of which 450 people were invited to complete the questionnaire. The first 90 responses received were used for the purposes of this study.

The questionnaire was developed in the Romanian language and exclusively completed by native speakers of Romanian. No incentives or rewards were offered to respondents to be utilized during their subsequent visits to the location.

3.3 Sampling profiles and measurement model

Among the participants, a significant majority (90.1%) of them engage in utilizing the services provided by this health & spa center for a minimum of six days annually. Notably, the distribution of respondents across genders is considerably uneven, with females accounting for 51.6% of the sample. Furthermore, a substantial proportion (87%) of the respondents indicated traveling distances exceeding 200 km to access this spa, while only 6.6% of the respondents can be considered locals, traveling from less than 50 km.

Regarding age demographics, the respondents' distribution is as follows: 4.4% were under the age of 35, 10% were between 35 and 44 years old, 21.1% were between 45 and 54 years old, 32.2% were between 55 and 64 years old, 23.3% were between 65 and 74 years old, and 8.9% were over 75 years old. Notably, the questionnaire did not include a query regarding income levels, but it can be considered that the guests have above-average incomes, given that this health & spa center charges the highest rates in its geographic region.

In terms of visit frequency, 7.8% of the respondents reported visiting this health & spa center only once, 57.8% reported an annual visitation pattern, and 34.4% reported multiple visits within a year. The data collected was analyzed using SmartPLS 4 software, an advanced analytical tool that specializes in modeling relationships among variables to ascertain the reliability and validity of confirmatory factor analysis.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Measurement model

The measurement model elucidates the connections between constructs and the indicators of variables. The initial three indicators of the measurement model assess the composite reliability through three distinct measures: Cronbach's alpha, which gauges the coherence of items within the construct; Composite Reliability (rho_a), which employs the classical formula of composite reliability (Cronbach's alpha) with an alternative method of calculating error variance, and Composite Reliability (rho_c), which evaluates the internal coherence of latent constructs within the research model. These composite reliability measures utilize different formulas and calculation methods. A desirable threshold criterion value for composite reliability is 0.60 (Ringle et al., 2020). Consequently, all latent constructs in the model exhibit satisfactory composite reliability (see Table 1).

The final component of the measurement model is convergent validity. The indicator of convergent validity employed is Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with a desirable threshold value of 0.50 (Ringle et al., 2020). Therefore, the constructs demonstrate adequate convergent validity (see Table 1).

Table 1. Reliability and validity

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Att	0.920	0.924	0.944	0.807
BB	0.933	0.951	0.945	0.658
Des	0.949	0.919	0.967	0.907
LyInt	0.909	0.912	0.936	0.786
NorBl	0.965	0.983	0.977	0.934
Sbn	0.981	0.981	0.987	0.963

Source: Self-developed based on SmartPLS calculations

In order to assess the discriminant validity of the constructs, the Heterotrait Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio procedure is employed. As recommended by Henseler et al. (2015), a conservative threshold for the HTMT ratio is set at 0.90 or lower to establish discriminant validity. Within the scope of this study, all HTMT values are below the threshold of 0.90, thus confirming the discriminant validity of the constructs (see Table 2).

Table 2. Discriminant validity using HTMT

	Att	BB	Des	LyInt	NorBl	SbN
Att						
BB	0.769					
Des	0.648	0.790				
LyInt	0.833	0.841	0.860			
NorBl	0.480	0.567	0.477	0.588		
SbN	0.452	0.567	0.481	0.599	0.666	

Source: Self-developed based on SmartPLS calculations

4.2 Structural model

The structural model presents the paths and relationships between the constructs within the proposed model. The "Original sample (O)" represent the path coefficients denoted as " β ," which indicate the direction and strength of influence one variable has on another within the model. The T statistics, represented as "t," indicate the statistical significance of the β (path coefficient). The "P" values, denoted as "p," determine the statistically significant relationships, where a value of "p" < 0.05 signifies the rejection of the null hypothesis with a 95% confidence level (Ringle et al., 2020).

The results showed that "BB" has a significant impact on "Att" ($\beta=0.738$, $t=11.508$, $p<0.05$), therefore, H1 was accepted;

"NorBl" has a significant impact on "SbN" ($\beta=0.656$, $t=7.637$, $p<0.05$), therefore, H2 was accepted;

"Att" has a significant impact on "LyInt" ($\beta=0.401$, $t=5.065$, $p<0.05$), therefore, H3 was accepted;

"SbN" has a significant impact on "LyInt" ($\beta=0.176$, $t=2.566$, $p<0.05$), therefore, H4 was accepted;

"Att" has a significant impact on "Des" ($\beta=0.503$, $t=4.113$, $p<0.05$), therefore, H5 was accepted;

"SbN" has a significant impact on "Des" ($\beta=0.248$, $t=2.553$, $p<0.011$), therefore, H6 was accepted;

"Des" has a significant impact on "LyInt" ($\beta=0.473$, $t=5.533$, $p<0.000$), therefore, H7 was accepted.

Table 3. Hypothesis testing / Total direct effects / Path coef

	Original sample (O)	T statistics	P values
H1:BB→Att	0.738	11.508	0.000
H2: NorBl→SbN	0.656	7.637	0.000
H3: Att→LyInt	0.401	5.065	0.000
H4: SbN→LyInt	0.176	2.566	0.010
H5: Att→Des	0.503	4.113	0.000
H6: SbN→Des	0.248	2.553	0.011
H7: Des→LyInt	0.473	5.533	0.000

Source: Self-developed based on SmartPLS calculations

4.3 Mediation analysis

H8 evaluates whether "Des" mediates the relationship between "Att" and "LyInt". Initially, the direct effect (H3) between the independent variable and the dependent variable was found to be significant with a path coefficient of 0.401 and a t-value of 5.065, direct influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable. After introducing the mediator variable "Des" into the model, the total effect remained significant with a path coefficient of 0.639 and a t-value of 8.045. The indirect effect mediated by the "Des" variable was found to be significant with a path coefficient of 0.238 and a t-value of 3.605 at a significance level of $p<0.05$, as shown in Table 4. These findings suggest that the variable "Desire" acts as a partial mediator in the relationship between the Att and LyInt. It provides evidence that the influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable is not only direct but also occurs indirectly through the mediation of the "Des" variable. Consequently, H8 is accepted.

Hypothesis 9 (H9) aims to evaluate the mediating role of the variable "Des" in the relationship between "SbN" and "LyInt". The results of the analysis indicate that there is a significant and positive total effect (H4), with a path coefficient of 0.176 and a t-value of 2.566. Upon introducing the mediator into the model, the direct effect between "SbN" and "LyInt" remains significant ($\beta=0.294$, $t=3.851$, $p<0.05$). This suggests that "SbN" independently contributes to the outcome variable "LyInt". However, the inclusion of the mediator reveals a significant indirect effect ($\beta=0.117$, $t=2.153$, $p<0.05$). Therefore, the results indicate partial mediation, indicating that the impact of "SbN" on "LyInt" is not fully explained by the mediating variable "Des". In other words, while "Des" partially mediates the relationship, there are other factors at play as well.

Based on these findings, Hypothesis 9 (H9) is supported, suggesting that "Des" mediates, to some extent, the relationship between "SbN" and "LyInt".

Table 4. Mediation analysis

Hypotheses	Total effects		Direct effects		Hypotheses	Indirect effects		
	Coef.	t-value	Coef.	t-value		Coef.	t-value	p value
Att → LyInt	0.639	8.045	0.401	5.065	H8 Att -> Des -> LyInt	0.238	3.605	0.000
SbN → LyInt	0.294	3.851	0.176	2.566	H9 SbN -> Des -> LyInt	0.118	2.153	0.031

Source: Self-developed based on SmartPLS calculations

Conclusions

5.1 Theoretical implications

The primary objective of this research was to assess the validity of a modified version of TRA model and its ability to predict tourists' behavioral intentions to remain loyal to a particular health & spa center. The findings provided empirical support for the notion that the TRA model effectively predicts tourists' intentions regarding their engagement with the studied health & spa center, as evidenced by a substantial proportion of the variance explained ($R^2 = 0.787$). This indicates the practical relevance and applicability of the model within the context of the hospitality and tourism sectors. However, it is important to note that while the results partially supported the overall structure of the TRA model in comprehending tourists' specific behavior, there were certain aspects that did not align completely with the proposed framework.

The results of our study indicate that a tourist's attitude towards health tourism services has a positive effect on their intention to remain loyal. When tourists experience a state of physical and mental balance, refreshment, happiness and relaxation during their stay, they are more inclined to consider revisiting, intend to be loyal customers, speak positive word of mouth and share positive experiences with friends and family. These findings are consistent with the core tenets of TRA, which states that a person's behavior is influenced by their attitudes toward that behavior and associated subjective norms (Ajzen, 1991). These findings are consistent with previous research that emphasizes the relationship between customer attitudes and loyalty. For example, it has been demonstrated that tourists who have positive attitudes towards wellness and spa services or brands are more likely to make repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth recommendations (Han et al., 2017). Consequently, companies that offer exceptional health tourism services that promote positive attitudes among their customers can increase loyalty intentions.

In the context of the present study, subjective norms refer to the impact of the opinions of important social contacts such as friends and family on the intention to show loyalty. The study found that tourists who perceive a strong consensus among their significant others regarding the importance of a visit or express a desire to return are more inclined to consider a particular health and wellness center as their preferred choice, more likely to become repeat guests, generate positive word-of-mouth, and share positive experiences with friends and family. If the health tourism industry focuses on promoting a positive social influence, it can improve customer retention intentions. In addition, the finding that subjective norms positively influence loyalty intentions is consistent with previous research in the tourism industry that has shown that word-of-mouth recommendations from friends and family have a significant influence on customer attitudes and behavior (Kim et al., 2010).

Our findings showed that desire had the most significant influence on loyalty intention, as evidenced by a path coefficient of 0.473. This result aligns with previous research, where desire was consistently identified as a key factor in understanding individuals' decision-making processes (Perugini and Bagozzi, 2001; Han and Ryu, 2012). This finding can indicate managers to pay relevant attention to creating a unique guest experience within the health & spa centers, so that guests increase desire.

5.2 Managerial implications

The results of the mediation analysis highlight the significant role of desires in the motivational state of an individual and their influence on loyalty intentions. Desires, as a mental state driven by personal motivation and the aspiration to attain specific goals, serve as a crucial factor in decision-making and subsequent formation of intentions. Understanding and addressing customers' desires for travel experiences is essential for managers to positively influence their loyalty intentions.

The findings emphasize the importance of addressing desires in managerial strategies. By identifying and catering to customers' desires, managers can enhance customer loyalty. This can be achieved through personalized offerings, tailored experiences, and targeted marketing campaigns that resonate with customers' desires. Recognizing desires as a mediating variable between attitude towards travel and loyalty intentions suggests that addressing and fulfilling these desires can have a significant impact on customer loyalty. Nurturing positive attitudes towards travel is also crucial. The direct effect between attitude towards travel and loyalty intentions underscores the need for managers to invest in strategies

that promote favorable attitudes. Effective marketing campaigns, personalized experiences, and exceptional customer service can all contribute to fostering positive attitudes, which indirectly influence loyalty intentions.

Desire-based customer segmentation divides a target market into different groups or segments based on the specific desires and motivations of customers. It goes beyond traditional demographic or psychographic segmentation by focusing on the underlying desires that drive customer behavior and decision-making. Managers should segment their customer base based on their desires for health tourism at the health and wellness center. By understanding the specific desires of different customer segments, managers can develop targeted marketing strategies and customized offers to meet their unique needs. This can include developing different packages, services and experiences tailored to each segment's desires. Furthermore, using desires as a competitive advantage can set companies apart from their competitors. Understanding your customers' desires and tailoring your offerings to them can set you apart from your competitors. Tailored offers, unique experiences and customized marketing messages that cater to customers' travel desires can help companies win more loyal customers and gain a competitive advantage.

The findings also suggest the importance of designing targeted marketing initiatives that appeal to customers' desires and preferences. Highlighting the specific benefits, features, and experiences that fulfill their desires can be effective in attracting and retaining customers. This can be done through various marketing channels such as social media, website content, and advertising campaigns. Continuous improvement based on customer feedback: Managers should actively collect and analyze customer feedback regarding their desires and satisfaction levels. This can be done through surveys, reviews, and direct communication channels. By understanding customers' evolving desires and addressing any gaps or areas for improvement, managers can continuously enhance the offerings and experiences to better align with customer expectations.

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