



Experience Quality and Destination Loyalty in Malaysian Day Spas: Examining the Direct Role of the PMSE Model

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how experience quality at wellness day spas in Malaysia, conceptualised through physical, mental, spiritual, and environmental (PMSE) dimensions, influences destination loyalty. Grounded in the Experience Economy framework and recent PMSE developments, it tests a direct-effects model to identify which experiential factors most strongly drive repeat visits and recommendations. Data were collected from 320 spa-goers using a cross-sectional survey and analysed with PLS-SEM (SmartPLS 4). Measurement quality was satisfactory (loadings ≥ 0.70 ; CR = 0.84-0.94; AVE = 0.57-0.73; HTMT < 0.85). Model fit and predictive accuracy were acceptable (SRMR = 0.061; $R^2 = 0.61$; $Q^2 = 0.37$). Results show that Physical ($\beta = 0.28$, $P < 0.001$) and Mental ($\beta = 0.21$, $P = 0.004$) experiences significantly and positively influence loyalty, while Spiritual experience also contributes ($\beta = 0.16$, $P = 0.022$). Environmental effects were positive but not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.10$, $P = 0.078$). The findings highlight the importance of tangible service quality, treatment excellence, and cognitive-affective restoration in enhancing loyalty, with spiritual uplift offering additional benefits. The study contributes to experience-quality theory and provides practical insights for spa operators and policymakers. Future research should explore longitudinal designs and mediated relationships involving satisfaction and trust.

Keywords: Experience Quality, Physical Experience, Mental Experience, Environmental Experience, Spiritual Experience

JEL Specifications: I120, I310, M310

1. INTRODUCTION

The global wellness tourism industry has emerged as a pivotal segment of modern travel, propelled by travellers' increasing demand for holistic health, preventive care, and lifestyle sustainability (Smith and Puczkó, 2023). The Global Wellness Institute (2024) reports that this segment continues to expand more rapidly than general tourism, reflecting a structural shift in consumer preferences toward transformative and health-oriented experiences. Within this dynamic landscape, spa-based activities, particularly day spas, have become central in delivering wellness value. Such spas offer immersive treatments, ranging from massage and bodywork to aromatherapy and reflexology, that cater to visitors' needs for stress relief and rejuvenation (Sangpikul,

2019). These encounters not only nurture individual well-being but also enhance destination competitiveness and foster long-term visitor loyalty (Ali et al., 2016; Godovykh and Tasci, 2021).

Malaysia, endowed with cultural diversity and abundant natural resources, has designated wellness tourism as one of its priority sectors in the National Tourism Policy 2020-2030. Despite this commitment, Malaysia's spa industry remains less internationally recognised than its regional competitors, notably Thailand and Indonesia, which have effectively positioned their traditional spa practices as distinctive cultural identities. Although the number of licensed wellness and day-spa establishments has steadily risen, Malaysia was omitted from the global wellness economy monitor list of the world's leading wellness markets (GWI, 2023).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This omission signals the urgency for Malaysia to enhance its competitive standing by improving the overall visitor experience, particularly through experiential differentiation and strategies aimed at strengthening destination loyalty.

Research consistently indicates that in experiential services such as spas, experience quality rather than standard service quality plays the decisive role in shaping satisfaction, emotional attachment, and behavioural loyalty intentions (Ali et al., 2016; Chen and Chen, 2010; Godovykh and Tasci, 2021). Unlike functional service metrics, experience quality captures affective, cognitive, and transformative dimensions that influence long-term behavioural commitment (Oh et al., 2007; Smith and Puczkó, 2023). In this respect, the physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional/environmental (PMSE) framework proposed by Parakkal et al. (2024) broadens the understanding of experience quality by recognising the integrative and holistic nature of wellness consumption. The physical dimension concerns tangible factors such as facilities, treatments, and atmosphere; the mental dimension refers to stress relief and cognitive relaxation; the spiritual dimension embodies tranquillity and inner meaning; while the emotional or environmental dimension captures sensory pleasure and affective upliftment derived from the spa ambience. Together, these components portray a multidimensional view of wellness experience that resonates with the essence of Pine and Gilmore's (1999) Experience Economy theory, particularly its emphasis on transformative engagement beyond functional service delivery.

Nevertheless, much of the existing literature continues to employ hedonic well-being frameworks, such as the 4Es (education, entertainment, aesthetics, and escapism), to interpret spa visitors' emotional gratification (Wan Daud et al., 2025). Although these dimensions describe pleasurable involvement, they primarily emphasise stimulation and enjoyment, which may be inadequately address the restorative and transformative values that underpin wellness encounters. In contrast, the PMSE perspective provides a more holistic and enduring evaluation of well-being, consistent with the World Health Organisation's (2020) view of health as the integrated state of physical, mental, and social well-being rather than merely the absence of illness.

Despite growing attention to experience quality, prior studies still differ on which dimensions exert the strongest influence on destination loyalty. Some highlight the importance of physical or tangible factors, whereas others stress emotional or spiritual connection (Lesmana et al., 2022). Furthermore, most existing studies position experiential dimensions as antecedents of satisfaction rather than as direct predictors of loyalty, leaving the relative explanatory power of each dimension insufficiently examined. To resolve these discrepancies, a rigorous multidimensional approach supported by adequate sampling and advanced analytical techniques is required. Hence, this study aims to investigate how physical, mental, spiritual, and environmental experiences directly predict destination loyalty among visitors to Malaysian day spas, thereby extending the empirical validation of the PMSE framework within a Southeast Asian wellness context.

2.1. Conceptualisation of Experience Quality

Experience quality has emerged as a vital construct in the service and tourism literature, particularly in experiential settings such as spas and wellness centres. Pine and Gilmore (1998) first introduced the experience economy framework, highlighting that economic value increasingly depends on creating memorable and transformative experiences rather than merely providing services. Subsequent tourism scholarship has expanded this view by conceptualising experience quality as a multidimensional construct that integrates cognitive, affective, and behavioural responses.

In wellness tourism, where travellers seek rejuvenation and holistic well-being, experience quality reflects how effectively a destination or service provider fulfils the visitor's emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual expectations (Ali et al., 2016; Parakkal et al., 2024). Unlike traditional service quality, which focuses on tangible aspects such as responsiveness and reliability (Parasuraman et al., 1988), experience quality encompasses subjective, affective, and existential dimensions that determine how tourists feel, connect, and transform through their participation in wellness activities (Oh et al., 2007).

This distinction is particularly salient for spa-based experiences, where visitors pursue not just physical relaxation but also psychological restoration and inner balance. Therefore, experience quality is more holistic, addressing the experiential, sensory, and symbolic value that contribute to long-term behavioral loyalty in wellness tourism context (Oh et al., 2007; Ali et al., 2016; Smith and Puczkó, 2023).

2.2. The PMSE Dimensions in Wellness Experience

Contemporary research proposes that wellness experience quality can be captured through four interrelated dimensions, physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional (PMSE), each representing a core pillar of well-being (Ali et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2017). This multidimensional perspective reflects the integrative nature of wellness consumption, where bodily restoration, cognitive clarity, emotional balance, and spiritual alignment collectively shape overall experiential evaluation.

2.2.1. Physical experience quality

Physical experience quality focuses on tangible and sensory aspects such as cleanliness, ambience, temperature, aroma, and massage techniques. In spa contexts, the physical environment significantly shapes relaxation and perceived rejuvenation (Chen et al., 2008; Luo et al., 2018). Because wellness consumption is inherently embodied, the visitor's physical state often serves as the primary indicator of experiential satisfaction and trust formation.

2.2.2. Mental experience quality

Mental experience quality involves cognitive engagement and mindfulness. Wellness spas often employ meditative, educational, or reflective activities that help individuals focus, de-stress, and improve clarity of thought (Voigt et al., 2011; Jones and Brown, 2021). Unlike hedonic stimulation, mental experience contributes to deeper emotional attachment by facilitating perceived recovery from daily stressors.

2.2.3. *Spiritual experience quality*

Spiritual experience quality connects visitors who visit wellness spas with a deeper sense of purpose, transcendence, or connection with nature and self. Studies have shown that spiritual engagement in spa environments fosters a sense of meaning and long-term attachment to destinations (Heung and Kucukusta, 2013; Parakkal et al., 2024). This dimension differentiates wellness experiences from conventional leisure tourism by emphasising personal transformation rather than temporary enjoyment.

2.2.4. *Emotional experience quality*

Emotional experience quality captures feelings of calmness, happiness, trust, and gratitude. Emotions are the essence of loyalty formation in wellness settings, including a positive emotional bond that enhances satisfaction, word of mouth, and repeat visits (Godovykh and Tasci, 2021). This dimension also encompasses therapist empathy and emotionally supportive service encounters, which reinforce perceived authenticity and relational commitment.

Together, the PMSE model acknowledges the multi-sensory and transformative nature of spa experiences. It suggests that wellness experience quality is holistic and integrative, affecting tourists not just at the physical or hedonic level but at a deeper psychological and spiritual level.

2.3. Why PMSE Is Preferable to Hedonic Dimensions

Previous studies often applied Pine and Gilmore's (1998) four Es model, education, entertainment, aesthetics, and escapism, to measure experience quality in tourism. While these dimensions work well in theme parks or cultural attractions (Oh et al., 2007), they are less suitable for wellness spas, where experiences are restorative and inward-focused rather than externally stimulating. For instance, entertainment and escapism emphasise excitement, fun, and distraction from daily life, which contradicts the calm, introspective, and healing-oriented nature of spa environments (Ali et al., 2016). Similarly, education may be less relevant, as spa visitors seek relaxation rather than structured learning. Even aesthetics, while important, represents only the surface layer of sensory satisfaction without addressing inner transformation. Thus, the PMSE framework better reflects the transformative intent of wellness tourism by promoting balance, mindfulness, and inner renewal (Parakkal et al., 2024).

Moreover, wellness spas aim to generate eudaimonic rather than hedonic well-being, emphasising long-term fulfilment, self-connection, and personal growth over transient pleasure. By capturing multidimensional restoration rather than momentary stimulation, the PMSE model offers stronger explanatory potential for behavioural loyalty in wellness tourism contexts.

2.4. Experience Quality and Destination Loyalty

Destination loyalty is when a tourist is committed to returning to and recommending a particular tourist spot rather than others (Godovykh and Tasci, 2021; Ramesh and Jaunky, 2021). In the realm of spa and wellness tourism, loyalty is expressed not only through repeat visits but also through emotional attachment and advocacy, as evidenced by recommending a spa destination through word of mouth or favourable online reviews. In this context, loyalty goes beyond mere satisfaction with a transaction. It also includes trust,

emotional connections, and a sense of long-term value that fits with the tourist's lifestyle and health needs. Millennials are exceptionally loyal when the values of the destination align with their own, when they care about the environment, and when they feel the experience is authentic (Agrodimou, 2019).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Building upon the preceding literature review, this study proposes that multidimensional wellness experience quality directly influences destination loyalty. Drawing from Experience Economy theory (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), experiences that generate meaningful engagement and transformation are expected to shape behavioural outcomes beyond immediate satisfaction. In wellness tourism, restorative encounters that address physical, mental, spiritual, and environmental needs may strengthen emotional attachment and commitment toward a destination (Ali et al., 2016; Godovykh and Tasci, 2021).

Accordingly, the present study conceptualises four independent variables, namely physical experience, mental experience, spiritual experience, and environmental experience, as predictors of the dependent variable, destination loyalty.

3.1. Physical Experience and Destination Loyalty

The physical dimension represents tangible and embodied aspects of the spa encounter, including treatment effectiveness, hygiene, service professionalism, and overall comfort. Because physical comfort forms the foundation of perceived service competence, it is expected to enhance trust and behavioural intention (Luo et al., 2018). When visitors perceive high-quality physical outcomes from their spa experience, they are more likely to develop confidence in the destination's ability to deliver consistent wellness value.

H₁: Physical experience quality positively influences destination loyalty.

3.2. Mental Experience and Destination Loyalty

Mental experience reflects cognitive relaxation, stress reduction, and psychological restoration. Wellness tourism literature suggests that mental rejuvenation strengthens emotional attachment and revisit intention (Jones and Brown, 2021). When visitors experience psychological relief and mental clarity, they are more likely to associate the destination with positive well-being outcomes, thereby reinforcing loyalty behaviour.

H₂: Mental experience quality positively influences destination loyalty.

3.3. Spiritual Experience and Destination Loyalty

Spiritual experience captures inner reflection, transcendence, and meaningful engagement. Transformative wellness encounters that foster spiritual alignment may elevate destination commitment beyond transactional satisfaction (Parakkal et al., 2024). When visitors perceive deeper meaning and authenticity during their spa visit, their attachment to the destination may extend to long-term behavioural loyalty.

H₃: Spiritual experience quality positively influences destination loyalty.

3.4. Environmental Experience and Destination Loyalty

Loyalty

Environmental experience refers to sensory ambience, aesthetics, lighting, scent, and affective atmosphere. Although environmental cues primarily enhance immediate emotional response, they may also contribute to loyalty when integrated within a coherent and holistic experiential design (Lagrosen and Lagrosen, 2016). A supportive and calming environment can reinforce positive memory formation and encourage repeat visitation.

H₄: Environmental experience quality positively influences destination loyalty.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional design to examine the relationships among experience quality dimensions, including physical, mental, spiritual, and environmental, and destination loyalty among visitors to Malaysian day spas. The quantitative approach was chosen because it enables the testing of hypothesized causal relationships between latent constructs and provides generalizable insights into behavioural patterns (Bryman, 2012). The target population included both domestic and international spa-goers who had visited licensed day spas in Malaysia within the past 6 months. The study employed a non-probability purposive sampling method, targeting respondents with relevant and recent spa experience. This approach is appropriate in experiential tourism research where the study requires participants with specific service exposure (Hair et al., 2022).

Data were gathered from three Malaysian states, Kuala Lumpur, Johor, and Kedah, chosen for their high concentration of wellness establishments and tourism activities. A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed both physically (on-site at spa reception areas) and digitally (via Google Forms shared through spa-related social media platforms). After screening for missing responses and straight-lining behaviour, 320 valid responses were retained for analysis, resulting in a response rate of approximately 91%. Data were analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS 4.0. This variance-based approach was chosen for its suitability in exploratory models with multiple latent constructs and its ability to manage non-normal data distributions (Hair et al., 2022). The analysis was conducted in two stages: the measurement model and the structural model.

4.1. Instrument of the Study

All items were adapted from validated scales in prior research: Physical, Mental, and Spiritual dimensions from Otto and Ritchie (1996), Ali et al. (2016), and Parakkal et al. (2024) Emotional/ Environmental items from Oh et al. (2007) and Luo et al. (2018), and Destination Loyalty from Chi and Qu (2008). Respondents rated their agreement on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”). Pre-testing with 20 spa customers ensured clarity and contextual appropriateness of the items. Minor wording adjustments were made to align terminology with Malaysian spa settings (for example, substituting “facility design” with “spa ambience”).

5. FINDING

The results are based on data collected from 320 valid responses obtained from spa visitors who had experienced wellness treatments across several destinations in Malaysia. Using SmartPLS 4.0, both the measurement and structural models were assessed to ensure reliability, validity, and the robustness of the relationships proposed in the conceptual framework (Figure 1). The results of the findings begin with a discussion of the respondents’ demographic profiles, followed by an evaluation of the outer model (covering indicator reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity). Next, it reports the inner model results, including path coefficients, significance levels, and effect sizes for each hypothesised relationship. Finally, the moderating effect of trust is examined to determine whether it significantly influences the strength of the relationship between the PMSE dimensions and destination loyalty. The analysis focuses solely on the direct relationships between the PMSE dimensions and destination loyalty, consistent with the proposed research framework. Overall, the findings provide empirical evidence on which experiential dimensions most strongly drive loyalty of wellness spa goer in Malaysia.

5.1. Demographic

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 320 respondents in this study. The gender distribution was relatively

Table 1: Demographic

Demographic variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage
Gender	Female	171	53.4
	Male	149	46.6
Age group (years)	21-25	78	24.4
	26-30	68	21.3
	31-35	62	19.4
	36-40	52	16.3
	41 and above	60	18.8
Marital status	Single	150	46.9
	Married	148	46.3
	Divorced/Widowed	22	6.8
Education level	Secondary	25	7.8
	Diploma/Certificate	74	23.1
	Bachelor’s degree	150	46.9
	Master’s/PhD	71	22.2
Occupation	Employed (full/part-time)	188	58.8
	Self-employed	54	16.9
	Student	40	12.5
	Homemaker	22	6.9
	Retired/Unemployed	16	5.0
	Monthly income (RM)	<3,000	98
Spa visit frequency	3,000-5,999	105	32.8
	6,000-8,999	60	18.8
	≥9,000	57	17.8
	First time	69	21.6
	Occasionally (≤3 times/year)	142	44.4
Frequently (≥4 times/year)	109	34.1	

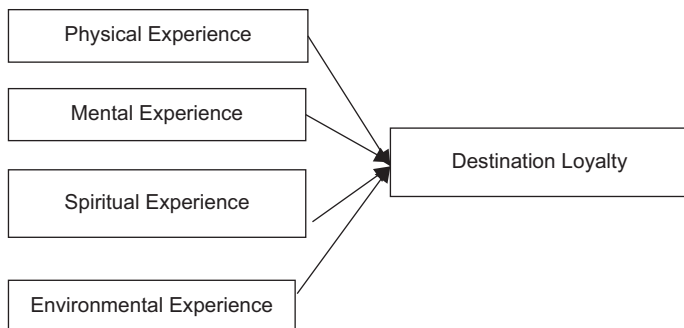
Table 2: Outer loadings and construct reliability summary (n=320)

Construct	Item code	Outer loading	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)	HTMT (Max)
Physical experience quality	PHY1	0.84	0.93	0.68	0.71
	PHY2	0.88			
	PHY3	0.82			
	PHY4	0.76			
	PHY5	0.78			
	PHY6	0.80			
Mental experience quality	MEN1	0.83	0.89	0.62	0.68
	MEN2	0.85			
	MEN3	0.81			
	MEN4	0.74			
	MEN5	0.86			
Spiritual experience quality	SPI1	0.84	0.91	0.66	0.73
	SPI2	0.87			
	SPI3	0.82			
	SPI4	0.77			
	SPI5	0.80			
Emotional/Environmental experience quality	EME1	0.83	0.92	0.63	0.75
	EME2	0.85			
	EME3	0.82			
	EME4	0.74			
	EME5	0.80			
	EME6	0.79			
Destination loyalty	DLY1	0.90	0.94	0.73	—
	DLY2	0.88			
	DLY3	0.86			
	DLY4	0.84			
	DLY5	0.79			

Table 3: Structure model result

Hypothesized path	Path coefficient (β)	t-value	P-value	Effect size (f ²)	Result
H ₁ : Physical→Destination loyalty	0.28	4.31	<0.001	0.10	Supported
H ₂ : Mental→Destination loyalty	0.21	2.90	0.004	0.06	Supported
H ₃ : Spiritual→Destination loyalty	0.16	2.30	0.022	0.04	Supported
H ₄ : Environmental→Destination loyalty	0.10	1.76	0.078	0.02	Not supported
Structural model results: Path coefficients (n=320)					
Model fit summary	Value	Interpretation			
R ² (Destination loyalty)	0.61	Substantial explanatory power			
Q ² (Predictive relevance)	0.37	Medium-large predictive relevance			
SRMR (Model fit index)	0.061	Acceptable fit (<0.08)			

Figure 1: Illustrates the proposed conceptual framework that presents the direct relationships between the four PMSE dimensions and destination loyalty



balanced, with 53.4% female and 46.6% male respondents. This pattern is consistent with previous studies showing that women are slightly more likely to visit spas for relaxation and self-care (Ali et al., 2016). Most respondents were young adults aged

21-35 (65.1%), suggesting that the spa market in Malaysia is mainly driven by millennials and working professionals seeking short, restorative experiences. Both single (46.9%) and married (46.3%) individuals were well represented, indicating that spa visits are popular for both personal relaxation and shared leisure activities.

The respondents were generally well educated, with almost 70% holding a bachelor’s degree or higher. A majority were employed full- or part-time (58.8%), followed by self-employed (16.9%) and students (12.5%), indicating that most spa customers have a stable income and the ability to spend on wellness services. In terms of income, about 63% earned below RM 6,000/month, reflecting the growing middle-income group that forms the main customer base for Malaysian day spas. Regarding spa visit frequency, 44% visited spas occasionally, 34% were frequent visitors, and 22% were 1st-time users. This suggests that while many people try spa services occasionally, there is also a loyal segment of repeat customers

who contribute to the stability of the spa market. Overall, the demographic profile shows a diverse and balanced sample across age, gender, education, and income. The findings also confirm that Malaysian spa customers are primarily young, educated, and health-conscious individuals who value relaxation, balance, and well-being. These characteristics make them exceptionally responsive to the physical, mental, spiritual, and environmental (PMSE) dimensions explored in this study.

5.2. Reliability and Validity

All indicator loadings ≥ 0.70 confirm strong reliability. Composite reliability (CR = 0.89-0.94) and average variance extracted (AVE = 0.62-0.73) exceed recommended thresholds (Hair et al., 2022). HTMT ratios (< 0.85) indicate satisfactory discriminant validity among constructs (Table 2).

5.3. Structural Model Results

5.3.1. Model fit

The PLS-SEM results indicate that three dimensions of experience quality, physical, mental, and spiritual, significantly and positively influence destination loyalty among wellness day spa visitors in Malaysia (Table 3). The Physical dimension ($\beta = 0.28$, $P < 0.001$) emerged as the strongest predictor, highlighting the importance of tangible service quality, facilities, and comfort. The mental experience ($\beta = 0.21$, $P = 0.004$) also showed a significant positive effect, confirming that psychological relaxation and stress reduction enhance loyalty. Spiritual experience ($\beta = 0.16$, $P = 0.022$) contributed moderately, showing that inner peace and mindfulness are relevant but secondary influences. The environmental experience ($\beta = 0.10$, $P = 0.078$) was not statistically significant, suggesting that ambience and sensory cues, while pleasant, may not independently determine loyalty in the absence of strong physical or mental outcomes. Overall, the model achieved strong explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.61$) and good predictive relevance ($Q^2 = 0.37$). The SRMR = 0.061 indicates an acceptable model fit. These findings confirm that the PMSE framework provides a robust theoretical and empirical basis for understanding loyalty formation in Malaysian wellness day spas.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The structural model results revealed that the physical, mental, and spiritual experience dimensions significantly predict destination loyalty, whereas the environmental dimension does not exert statistically significant effect. These findings suggest that loyalty formation in wellness day spas is grounded primarily in restorative and transformational outcomes rather than peripheral sensory cues.

Specifically, embodied and psychological restoration appear to function as core mechanisms through which wellness experiences translate into behavioural commitment. The Physical experience had the strongest influence on loyalty ($\beta = 0.28$, $P < 0.001$), reaffirming that high-quality facilities, hygiene, and professional service delivery are critical for customer satisfaction and retention. This finding aligns with studies by Ali et al. (2016) and Luo et al. (2018), who found that the physical service environment

directly impacts perceived value and behavioural loyalty in spa and hospitality contexts. It implies that tangible cues, such as comfortable treatment rooms, high-quality equipment, and professional therapists, form the foundation of customer trust and repeat visits.

The Mental experience ($\beta = 0.21$, $P = 0.004$) also demonstrated a strong positive relationship with loyalty. This confirms that spas function as psychological sanctuaries where relaxation, stress relief, and emotional balance drive positive behavioural intentions. The result supports Jones and Brown (2021), who argued that mental restoration fosters emotional attachment and destination commitment. Malaysian spa-goers, many of whom are working adults and millennials, value these mental benefits as a counterbalance to urban stress. The positive relationship between mental experience and destination loyalty suggests that visitors who achieve psychological relaxation and mental clarity during their spa visits are more likely to develop lasting attachment to the destination. When a spa successfully helps guests relieve stress, clear their minds, and restore emotional balance, it creates a memorable and meaningful experience that goes beyond physical comfort. This sense of mental renewal fosters satisfaction, positive emotions, and trust in the destination's ability to deliver genuine well-being. As a result, visitors are more inclined to return and to recommend the spa to others. In essence, the stronger the mental rejuvenation guests feel, the deeper their emotional connection and loyalty to the wellness destination.

The spiritual experience ($\beta = 0.16$, $P = 0.022$) demonstrated a moderate yet meaningful influence on destination loyalty, highlighting the growing importance of inner well-being, reflection, and mindfulness in spa consumption. Although spiritual aspects may not dominate as strongly as physical or mental experiences, they provide a more profound sense of personal transformation that elevates the spa visit from a simple treatment to a restorative journey.

Malaysian day spas can strengthen the spiritual experience by integrating treatments and settings that encourage inner calm and connection. Techniques such as aromatherapy massages, Balinese or Thai-inspired body rituals, and reflexology sessions can be paired with gentle background music, natural essential oils, and soft lighting to create a meditative ambience. Some spas also incorporate elements of local culture such as the use of pandan, lemongrass, or traditional herbal compresses that not only soothe the body but also evoke a sense of harmony with nature. Spaces that promote quiet reflection, like relaxation lounges, prayer-friendly areas, or garden views, can further help visitors detach from stress and reconnect with their inner peace. These experiences resonate particularly with Malaysian guests who value spiritual balance as part of holistic health, thereby enhancing satisfaction and long-term loyalty.

In contrast, the environmental experience ($\beta = 0.10$, $P = 0.078$) was found to be statistically insignificant, suggesting that sensory ambience alone, decor, scent, or lighting may not directly drive loyalty unless reinforced by strong physical and mental experiences. While a pleasant atmosphere certainly enhances

comfort, Malaysian spa-goers may perceive it as a basic expectation rather than a unique value proposition. Consumers today tend to prioritise service quality, therapist skills, hygiene, and tangible results (e.g., reduced fatigue, better sleep, or emotional calm) over purely aesthetic surroundings. Moreover, many customers remain loyal to a single spa they trust and feel comfortable with, making them less likely to switch based solely on ambience. This finding aligns with Lagrosen and Lagrosen (2016), who noted that environmental aesthetics support satisfaction but have limited direct influence on loyalty.

The R^2 value of 0.61 indicates that the four PMSE dimensions collectively explain 61% of the variance in destination loyalty, confirming the framework's strong predictive power. This means that more than half of customers' loyalty behaviours, including their intention to revisit and recommend, can be explained by the quality of their physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional experiences. However, the remaining 39% may be influenced by other factors such as price fairness, staff professionalism, brand reputation, trust in halal certification, or overall destination image. Future studies could explore these additional variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding of what drives repeat visits in wellness tourism.

6.1. Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research

In conclusion, this study confirms that customer loyalty in Malaysian day spas is primarily rooted in physical service quality, mental restoration, and spiritual balance, with environmental aesthetics serving as a supportive factor. Together, these findings reinforce the validity of the PMSE framework and offer both theoretical and managerial insights into wellness tourism. For spa operators, these results suggest that loyalty cannot be achieved through ambience alone, instead, it must come from creating meaningful experiences that nurture the body, mind, and spirit. Given the rising mental health concerns, heavy workloads, and fast-paced lifestyles among Malaysian adults, day spas can serve as mental and emotional sanctuaries. By offering personalised treatments focused on relaxation, mindfulness, and inner harmony, spas can help customers manage stress more effectively and encourage healthier lifestyles. Focusing on physical excellence (clean facilities, skilled therapists, hygienic practices), mental rejuvenation (stress relief, calm atmosphere), and spiritual well-being (reflective spaces, culturally rooted care) can significantly strengthen customer attachment and loyalty. In doing so, Malaysian day spas can position themselves not just as leisure outlets, but as essential components of urban wellness ecosystems that contribute to national health and sustainable tourism development. Future research could extend this study by examining how trust, price fairness, or brand authenticity further influence loyalty, or by comparing local and international spa visitors to understand cross-cultural differences in wellness perceptions.

6.2. Theoretical Implications

The finding that mental experience significantly influences destination loyalty ($\beta = 0.21$, $P = 0.004$) provides a significant theoretical contribution to the understanding of consumer behaviour in wellness tourism. It reinforces the idea that mental restoration is a core mechanism linking experiential quality to behavioural

loyalty, supporting the view of wellness consumption as not merely physical rejuvenation but also psychological recovery. From the lens of the experience economy theory (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), this result extends the framework by demonstrating that mental engagement, such as calmness, mindfulness, and cognitive relaxation, can elicit emotional attachment and revisit intentions in spa contexts. This expands traditional service quality models (e.g., SERVQUAL), which often emphasise tangible and functional dimensions, by integrating intangible mental benefits as key drivers of destination-based brand equity.

Furthermore, the result validates the integration of affective-cognitive perspectives in wellness destination branding. It shows that loyalty is not only a function of satisfaction or perceived quality but also of mental well-being experiences that fulfil deeper psychological needs. Thus, this study adds theoretical depth to the wellness tourism literature by positioning mental experience as a critical experiential construct within the broader brand equity-loyalty relationship.

For spa operators, the findings highlight the need to prioritise physical excellence, hygiene, comfort, and professionalism, as these are non-negotiable expectations that influence repeat visits. Regular staff training, quality assurance, and infrastructure maintenance should be key operational priorities. Simultaneously, operators should design experiences that foster mental restoration, such as quiet zones, meditation areas, or aromatherapy sessions that relieve cognitive stress. Spiritual enrichment can be subtly integrated through culturally appropriate elements such as mindfulness rituals, gratitude reflections, or calm music that promotes inner peace. These features resonate with Malaysia's diverse spiritual traditions and enhance the perceived authenticity of the wellness experience. For policymakers and tourism authorities (e.g., MOTAC), the study suggests revising spa accreditation standards to include PMSE-based experience criteria. Incorporating experiential dimensions into quality grading can strengthen Malaysia's wellness destination branding and align local practices with international wellness benchmarks. Encouraging collaboration between licensed spas and wellness associations could further standardise service excellence while promoting Malaysia as a regional hub for holistic well-being.

6.3. Practical Implication

The positive and significant relationship between mental experience and destination loyalty ($\beta = 0.21$, $P = 0.004$) carries strong practical implications for wellness spa operators and destination marketers. It suggests that fostering mental restoration, rather than focusing solely on physical relaxation, can significantly enhance visitor loyalty, word of mouth, and repeat visitation. First, spa operators should design experiences that actively promote mental calmness and mindfulness. This could include integrating guided meditation, aromatherapy, sound healing, and nature-inspired treatments that encourage mental relaxation and inner peace. The ambience, such as soft lighting, tranquil music, and natural scents, should be purposefully curated to reduce cognitive fatigue and stimulate a sense of serenity.

Second, destination marketers should position wellness spas not only as places for physical rejuvenation but also as mental

sanctuaries that help visitors disconnect from urban stress and restore psychological balance. Marketing narratives can highlight benefits such as “mental recharge,” “clarity,” and “mindful escape,” which appeal strongly to millennials and working adults seeking emotional stability in fast-paced environments.

Third, training spa staff to create emotionally intelligent interactions, showing empathy, calm communication, and attentiveness, can enhance the guest’s mental experience. When customers feel mentally at ease and understood, they are more likely to develop emotional attachment and loyalty toward the spa or destination.

Overall, the results underline that mental experience is a strategic asset in the competitive wellness tourism market. Destinations that deliver psychological renewal will not only differentiate themselves but also cultivate sustainable loyalty among wellness travellers.

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8. ETHICAL APPROVAL

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee (REC), Universiti Teknologi MARA, under the reference number REC/09/2025 (ST/MR/180). All procedures performed in this study complied with institutional and national research ethics standards.

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