

## **A Preliminary Study of Local Customers' Perception towards the Image of the Spa and Their Intention to Visit**

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**Abstract :** There is a potential of growth in the spa industry due to the influx of domestic and international tourist coming to Sabah, Malaysia. It is a good opportunity to venture into this industry for the country's economic future growth, and therefore, it is essential for this area to be researched. Being one of the fastest growing industries in the world, has led to enormous challenges, which need to be addressed. Malaysia is also riding with this phenomenon. The President of the Malaysian Association of Wellness and Spa stated that the misconception about the Spa industry's image, especially amongst the elderly is the biggest challenge faced by the industry, as they perceived the spa industry is equivalent to a prostitution center. Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore the issue by analyzing whether image can be added in the theory of planned behavior to better understand the consumer's intention to visit, in the spa context. The Theory of Planned Behavior by Ajzen, a theory or model in predicting intention, has three constructs; such as Attitude as the first construct, the second construct is Subjective Norm and the third construct is Perceived Behavioral Control. Qualitative research is used as this is an exploratory research. The site of study will be at Jari Jari Spa, located in Kota Kinabalu, the only spa in Sabah that was awarded as the Center of Excellence (CoE) by the Ministry of Tourism and Culture in Malaysia. The findings propose to provide useful information to the relevant stakeholders on ways to approach local customers to convince them to visit the spa and for spa marketers to help them develop and design effective marketing strategies. Future investigation should consider more on the perception and loyalty of the local customers.

**Keywords :** consumer's perception, image, local customer, spa, visit intention

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