

## Article

# Investigating the Relationship between Experience, Well-Being, and Loyalty: A Study of Wellness Tourists

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**Abstract:** The present research aims to determine the relationship between the construct of autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and tourist experience, as well as loyalty in the context of wellness and spa tourism. The exploratory–descriptive design was adopted in the present research. A research instrument was developed based on previous literature and was tested for a pilot study to check validity and reliability. A purposive sampling technique was used to collect the data from tourists who have gained spa experience. A total of 264 usable responses were received after distributing 400 questionnaires. The data were screened, processed, and analyzed using the SPSS 22.0 and Smart-PLS 2.0. The investigation showed that intrinsic motivation, autonomy, and experience positively impact positive emotions and life satisfaction. Besides, it also supported that positive emotions, experience, and life Satisfaction lead to loyalty. Furthermore, the present study tested the mediating role of experience, positive emotions, and life satisfaction; it was also found that experience mediates the relationship between autonomy, positive emotions, and life satisfaction. Positive emotions and life satisfaction were mediators in the relationship between experience and loyalty. Finally, the findings showed that destination images moderated the relationship between experience, positive emotions, and life satisfaction. The results of this investigation can be helpful for both the research community and marketers interested in investigating the well-being of tourists and destination loyalty.

**Keywords:** tourist experience; life satisfaction; positive emotions; loyalty; mediation; spa-wellness



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## 1. Introduction

Tourism is considered a mentally and physically healthy pursuit. Availing vacations and going on short trips for a change and relaxation are part of human life and detaching from their daily routines (Fritz and Sonnentag 2006). The researchers have expressed awareness of wellness and spa tourism and have discussed that people travel for health and medical purposes (Goodarzi et al. 2016; Page et al. 2017) due to the growing interest in seeking relaxation, happiness, rejuvenation, and well-being (Chen and Petrick 2016; Koskinen and Wilska 2019). According to Kucukusta et al. (2013), wellness tourism consists of mental balance, physical balance, and environmental and social balance. Destination suppliers put all their efforts into satisfying the tourists and providing them with all the necessary products and services to enhance their well-being and discover wellness tourism, intellectual development, growth of mind and body, and spirit enhancement (Rodrigues et al. 2010). Few studies concerning spas, including the health-oriented services and water treatments, springs, hot water, etc., are well connected with health and medical tourism, a renowned type of spa and wellness tourism (Dryglas and Salamaga 2017; Hall 2011; Mueller and Kaufmann 2001; Smith and Puczkó 2014). Previous research has discussed

wellness tourism's benefits (Smith and Kelly 2006; Smith and Puczkó 2008). The basic idea behind health or medical tourism, especially wellness tourism, is to be emotionally full, gain a psychological balance of the body, eliminate stress, and achieve mental peace that ultimately enhances general well-being (Dillette et al. 2021; Garvanova et al. 2021; Huang et al. 2019; Luo et al. 2018; Nicolaides and Grobler 2017).

Since the 1940s, scholars have studied motivation as a key factor in tourist behavior, which has been widely accepted. A few scholars have researched tourism and travel reasons; however, others have looked at the connections between tourism and other concepts, such as destination image (e.g., Li et al. 2010; Huang and Hsu 2009; Lee 2010; Yoon and Uysal 2005). Since satisfaction has been shown to have a positive impact on tourists' post-purchase behavior, such as recommendations (e.g., Hui et al. 2007; Prebensen et al. 2010) and intention to return (e.g., Alegre and Cladera 2009; Bigné et al. 2005), the motivation–satisfaction relationship has been a broad research interest of many scholars; to understand why people travel, why they choose a specific destination, and how they feel, and as a result, it is essential to look at the motives of tourists (Castaño et al. 2003). In this regard, measurement of tourist motivation is the key to pleasing present visitors, attracting additional visitors, projecting future demand, and designing products to match tourists' wants (Wolfe and Hsu 2004). From the perspective of psychological theories, however, Bright (2008) points out that tourist motivation is a thorny issue to study. Therefore, theories of tourist motivation should be dynamic and adaptable to different scenarios and the unique conditions of tourists (Pearce 1993).

Emotions are full of feeling states described by scenes of serious sentiments related to a particular referent (for example, an individual, an article, or an occasion) and incite explicit reaction practices (Cohen and Areni 1991). Previous investigations carried out by various researchers such as Lee (2014), and Lee and Kyle (2013) have focused on emotional experiences related to festivals, whereas Yuksel (2007) measured emotional measures with shopping. Other studies such as Han and Jeong (2013); Ladhari (2009) have worked in the context of restaurants, and work on theme parks was conducted by Bigné et al. (2005). Mitas et al. (2012); Nawijn et al. (2013); Hosany and Prayag (2013); Lin et al. (2014); have worked on emotional experiences related to holidays, while research related to heritage sites was carried out by Prayag et al. (2013). Faullant et al. (2011) researched emotional experiences in adventure tourism. More recently, Chang (2017) and Sharma and Nayak (2018) researched emotional experiences in dark and wellness tourism, respectively. According to Gretzel et al. (2006), it has become necessary for DMOs to realize the worth and experiential qualities of the tourism offerings to beat the competition. Otto and Ritchie (1996) defined tourism experiences as the “subjective mental state felt by participants during a service encounter.” Prior studies have explored tourist experiences in various settings such as natural and heritage environments (e.g., Beeho and Prentice 1997) and rural and urban destinations (Zhu et al. 2020). Other research carried out by Wearing and Foley (2017) has evaluated tourists' experiences in the context of cities and Chhetri et al. (2004) in the context of nature-based destinations. The study of Backman et al. (2022) showed that the restorative environment is an essential aspect of the wellness experience, contributing to positive emotions and life satisfaction and determining an individual's loyalty and intention to revisit; moreover, the findings of the investigation of Chen et al. (2021) found that both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being significantly affect consumers' intention to revisit the destination and to spread word of mouth online.

The various authors conducted studies on the experience economy concepts and their relationship with satisfaction and intention to purchase in the tourist and hospitality context, including (Manhas and Ramjit 2013), the survey of memorable tourism experiences (Kim et al. 2012, 2016), and the value of co-creation performance of travel experience (Binkhorst and Den Dekker 2009); it has been seen from these studies that the service providers are using service economy concepts to make their customers' experiences more memorable by designing and developing the same, especially in the context of spa-wellness tourism for their need for rejuvenation, physical and mental relaxation, overall improvement of

health/body, etc. (Hjalager and Konu 2011). The topic of spa wellness tourism, mainly in qualitative studies, has been conducted and has increased the attention of the various authors from one decade in the tourism literature, such as the relationship between travel experience and well-being. Therefore, the present study is an extension of the study of (Huang et al. 2019), who, by combining bottom-up and top-down theories of well-being, filled a research gap supported by Diener (1984). Researchers added autonomy as an interpersonal factor and investigated the relationship between experience and well-being as outcomes, and suggested further (Howell and Hill 2009; Newman et al. 2014) that the study may be conducted by considering the mediation role of various factors, such as satisfaction or demographical factors/interpersonal factors, etc. Therefore, the present study shall fill the gap by studying the interrelationship between travel autonomy and experience of loyalty through the mediation of life satisfaction and well-being that the previous researchers did not consider. The structure of the paper is arranged as follows. First, the literature review is presented and followed by hypothesis development. We then present a conceptual model and discuss the relationships among model elements and research methodology, including sources of the research instrument, data collection, and data analysis. Finally, we present the findings, discuss implications, and suggest future research directions.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Tourist Experience in Tourism and Hospitality Industry

Customer experience in hospitality and tourism perspectives has been discovered by various researchers (Loureiro 2014; Hosany and Witham 2010; Hwang and Lyu 2015; Oh et al. 2007) in the context of golf tournaments, temple stays, hotel experience, visitors' experience, wine trails, bed and breakfast settings, etc. (Hosany and Witham 2010; Hwang and Lyu 2015; Manhas and Ramjit 2013; Oh et al. 2007; Quadri-Felitti and Fiore 2013). Furthermore, Pine and Gilmore (1999) identified experience in four dimensions: entertainment, education, aesthetics, and escapism. The same has been applied in the tourism and hospitality literature. Based on the experience scale (Manhas and Ramjit 2013; Oh et al. 2007; Pine and Gilmore 1999), the four realms of experiences are considered essential for enhancing total quality services excellence, customer satisfaction, and repeat business. Further, the same scale was used by various scholars in their work concerning cruise, lodging, and golf, and they found that pleasing experiences would lead to encouraging emotions, unforgettable moments, trustworthiness, and word-of-mouth publicity (Hosany and Witham 2010; Hwang and Lyu 2015; Loureiro 2014). With the increase in global travel, tourists now focus on such tourism services or products which may create enjoyment, lifetime memory, a reasonable involvement of tourists, and hence "experience economy", which has now become a growing consideration for hospitality and tourism researchers (Oh et al. 2007; Pine and Gilmore 1999; Quadri-Felitti and Fiore 2013). Concerning the same experience in an economic context, it has also been revealed that the empirical aspect of hospitality and tourism service can be assumed to be a significant factor in attaining customer loyalty, subjective well-being, and positive emotion (Gilbert and Abdullah 2004; Knobloch et al. 2017; Newman et al. 2014). As per top-down and bottom-up well-being theories' outcomes (Diener 1984), the results of experience drive customers to hold the well-being perception significant during decision-making regarding hospitality/tourism products and services (Chen et al. 2016; Gilbert and Abdullah 2004; Uysal et al. 2016); it has also been observed that tourists' travel experience can impact the positive sentiments of life and its overall satisfaction, referring to the well-being of the tourist context. Profoundly worrying about the experiential part of tourists and its assurance of being related to the well-being of tourists, the examination of tourism involvement of tourists leading to sentimental and confirmative components of travel with tourist's comfort and honesty is significant (Diener 1984).

## 2.2. Tourism Experience and Well-Being

There is no doubt about the inter-relationship between tourism, travel, hospitality, and health. The tourism literature has recognized the benefits of traveling in earlier forms of tourism for the perceived benefits and well-being. Many travels offer relaxation, health purposes, a few for escapism and entertainment, and an emotional attachment to the destinations that offer spas (Hosany et al. 2015) and wellness services (Marmion and Hindley 2018). The emotional response to tourism products and services was found to be considerably influenced by the experience of tourists (Hosany et al. 2015; Woodruff et al. 1983) and, at the same experience, was found to be linked to the well-being of tourists (Hwang and Lyu 2015; Naidoo and Sharpley 2016). Other researchers have also developed related opinions of tourists' overall experience, contributing to tourists' well-being and positive feeling (Gilbert and Abdullah 2002; Morgan et al. 2015; Smith and Diekmann 2017). Therefore, the authors acknowledged the importance of tourism for improving the well-being and quality of tourist life and supported strong relations between the tourism experience and overall quality of life (Chen and Petrick 2016; Gilbert and Abdullah 2004; Uysal et al. 2016).

The bottom-up theory's idea of encouraging enjoyable life involvements leading to a higher level of subjective welfare was well understood (Diener 1984), which explained the association's foundation. On the same grounds, the experiential outcomes have revealed that tourists' well-being is positively influenced by tourists' overall tourism experience, which generally remains enjoyable and includes travel, lodging, dining, etc. (Chen et al. 2016; Knobloch et al. 2017). The results from Neal et al. (1999) work based on bottom-up theory examination recommended that people attain greater gladness in numerous life fields and improve overall life fulfillment with the help of positive travel experiences. Additionally, Nawijn et al. (2010) and their colleagues did further work to analyze the relationship between the tourist's emotions and vacation; it has been found that tourists' happiness remains high during vacation and gradually decreases with its end (Nawijn 2011; Nawijn et al. 2010, 2013). Other studies have also found that a vacation plays a significant role in lessening the work stress of full-time workers and boosting their morale and satisfaction with their lives (Chen et al. 2016).

While looking at the consumption practice of tourists concerning tourism products and services, it has been found to impact the well-being of tourists, and the same association has been well analyzed in many other hospitality and tourism perspectives, such as the studies conducted by Filo and Coghlan (2016) and Meng and Choi (2017). For defining tourists' well-being and future behavior, the experience of tourists is an essential element (Baloglu et al. 2019; Hwang and Lee 2019). Furthermore, other researchers have also worked to show the significance of the overall experiences of tourists in the tourism sector and have presented the same by explaining the association between tourists' experiences and concepts of life satisfaction, well-being, positive emotion, and future behavior (Suhartanto et al. 2020; Vada et al. 2019).

The spa sector has achieved speedy growth after experiencing rapid customer interest in tourism products and services, contributing to their well-being and raising several promotion opportunities (Spivack 1998). Researchers have also conducted various research to explain the probable breaks that spas could present to enhance the customer's minds and bodies (Laing and Frost 2016; McNeil and Ragins 2005). Additionally, scientific proof in the literature supports the value of spa therapy on persons' mental and physical welfare, such as in Strauss-Blasche et al. (2002) and Blasche et al. (2010). Hence, it is also necessary to analyze the possible benefits of spa therapy experience on the well-being of customers as it booms the principles of modern marketing by emphasizing the worth of life in hospitality and tourism business, but unfortunately, the same association of satisfaction, consumer experience, loyalty, and welfare remain unmapped. Thus, it has been suggested that researchers in the hospitality and tourism sector should make an effort to show the relations between tourist's experience, gratification, and their welfare, which can be later on used by ground-workers in the industry to upgrade overall tourism service and also

can disseminate the same benefits to the public which can eventually enhance the request for the hospitality services at spa resorts (Pyke et al. 2016). Literature has also revealed that the travel experience of a growing population (e.g., persons with disabilities and elderly tourists) can be improved through inclusive tourism to enjoy their tourism experience (Sica et al. 2021) entirely. Likewise, the needs of disabled people can also be enhanced through a participatory approach involving various tourism stakeholders that have subsequently improved the importance of enhancing accessibility to tourism services (Bianchi et al. 2020).

### 2.3. Spa/Wellness Tourism

Several new studies have pointed out the idea of experiencing increasing fame within spa services/practices from tourism and hospitality perspectives (Dimitrov 2012; Dryglas 2013; Han et al. 2017; Kim et al. 2017); it has been seen that many people used to travel to the Dead Sea to avail therapeutic properties, e.g., Romans traveled to take a bath in a hot spring to seek sound health and spiritual practices. Since ancient times, people have traveled to various tourist spots, such as the Dead Sea, for their therapeutic qualities, while the Romans have visited baths and hot springs for spiritual practices (GWI 2021). Concerning the few studies conducted on wellness tourism, those mainly focused on issues such as motivation to travel for well-being (Hun and Batra 2009; Mak et al. 2009; Medina-Muñoz and Medina-Muñoz 2013; Voigt et al. 2011), market demand analysis (Gabor and Oltean 2019; Heung and Kucukusta 2013; Pan et al. 2019), the features/characteristics of wellness tourists (Gabor and Oltean 2019; Kim et al. 2017) and the impact of wellness tourists on residential communities (Lehto et al. 2006).

The hotel and hospitality sectors have started wellness treatments and therapies through mineral springs and thermal water with the same hands-on concept to satisfy the guest's fitness retrieval and recovery (Wang et al. 2020). Furthermore, it has been found that spa therapies provide pressure relief, a pampering experience, and easing of the whole body, resulting in body, soul, and mind improvement, hence enhancing a person's overall health (McNeil and Ragins 2005). For drawing wellness tourists, destinations, spas, and fitness features have been the driving forces by researchers to inspect the spa and health tourism business through the qualitative domain (Erfurt-Cooper and Cooper 2009).

For further examination of the German health and spa resort sector, studies have recommended that multiple benefits gained from spa therapies involve health education, healthy nutrition, meditation, weight-loss programs, and beauty care for improving the community, and psychological and bodily welfare of persons (Azman and Chan 2010). With regard to the growing health consciousness of customers and analysis of adult traveler's evaluation of service on wellness tourism, it has been seen that spa resorts have thus assimilated various therapy treatments, such as yoga in India, salt therapy in Germany, mud therapy in Israel, and massage in Thailand, etc., to advertise wellness and health; moreover, it has been recommended to survey the connection between wellness and spa from the customer's view in Pforr and Locher (2012) that the wellness significance related to spa experiences improves people's bodily and psychological health (Choi et al. 2015). The investigation of spa excellence service impact on favorable emotional intakes declared that spa therapies involving five human senses, including the smell of essential oils, would lead to consumers' positive emotional involvement in fitness. Furthermore, it has been recommended in a study by Koskinen and Wilska (2019). based on an examination of the spa experience of tourists, spa therapies altogether provide numerous health benefits, such as easing, rebuilding, etc., thereby improving both the well-being and wellness of a person. Based on the existing literature and the rapid increase in the wellness tourism market in the last few years, a research gap exists linking variables such as autonomy, intrinsic motivation, experience, positive emotions, life satisfaction, and loyalty. Present writings recommend that the spa, as a subpart of wellness tourism, provides services and products for guests that aim for health improvement from tension, self-development, and sickness recovery, leading to overall life fulfillment.

#### 2.4. Hypotheses Development

Several studies investigated the relationship between experience and motivation; for instance, a study conducted by [Yan et al. \(2016\)](#) concluded that motivation partially impacts customer tourism experience. Likewise, [Kong and Chang \(2016\)](#) showed an essential connection between motivation and shopping background experience. Another study on hot spring visits revealed a strong link between Australian wellness customers' motivations and experiences ([Clark-Kennedy and Cohen 2017](#)). Thus, the literature shows that motivation has a connection with expertise, and accordingly, the hypothesis can be postulated.

**Hypothesis 1 (H1).** *Intrinsic motivation of tourists is positively related to Experience.*

Various studies have examined the relationship between autonomy, experience, positive emotions, and life satisfaction ([Howell and Hill 2009](#); [Sirgy 2010](#); [Vada et al. 2019](#)). Additionally, satisfaction with the psychological needs of self-reliance in leisure and recreation participation influences life satisfaction. Similar results were found in the study by [Huang et al. \(2019\)](#). Thus, for the present study, the following hypotheses are formulated.

**Hypothesis 2 (H2).** *Autonomy is positively related to the experience gained by the tourists.*

**Hypothesis 3 (H3).** *There is a significant positive relation between Autonomy and the positive emotions of tourists.*

**Hypothesis 4 (H4).** *There is a significant positive association between Autonomy and life satisfaction.*

Past investigations have tested the relationship between experience, positive emotions, and loyalty in different contexts ([Cetin and Dincer 2014](#); [Chua et al. 2017](#); [Kim et al. 2017](#); [Loureiro 2014](#)). Similar studies, such as [Huang et al. \(2019\)](#) and [Moon and Han \(2018\)](#), have found a strong connection between experience and loyalty. Keeping in view the previous findings, the present investigation postulated a hypothesis as follows:

**Hypothesis 5 (H5).** *Spa-based experiences positively impact tourists' loyalty.*

Past research has examined the impact of experience on emotions and well-being ([McCabe and Johnson 2013](#); [Milman 1998](#); [Nawijn et al. 2010](#); [Yüksel and Yüksel 2007](#)). Likewise, a study by [Knobloch et al. \(2017\)](#) examined the role of experience in enhancing emotions and life satisfaction. [Huang et al. \(2019\)](#) tested the same relationship. Thus, the following hypotheses are formulated for the present study.

**Hypothesis 6 (H6).** *Spa-based experiences have a positive association with tourists' emotions.*

**Hypothesis 7 (H7).** *Spa-based experiences have a positive impact on tourists' life satisfaction.*

Past studies show a relationship between positive emotions, life satisfaction, and loyalty ([Gilboa and Herstein 2012](#); [Hosany and Prayag 2013](#); [Jamaludin et al. 2016](#); [Yüksel and Yüksel 2007](#)). Furthermore, [Han et al. \(2017\)](#), [Huang et al. \(2019\)](#), and [Kim et al. \(2017\)](#) found a strong connection between positive emotions, life satisfaction, and loyalty; moreover, the study has tested the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty in eco-tourism. Besides, [Carrascosa-López et al. \(2021\)](#) have shown a connection between the recommendation's social and emotional value and positive word of mouth.

Accordingly, for the present investigation, the following hypotheses were postulated:

**Hypothesis 8 (H8).** *There is a significant positive relation between Positive emotion and tourist loyalty.*

**Hypothesis 9 (H9).** *There is a significant positive association between Life Satisfaction and tourists' loyalty.*

Studies such as (Chi and Qu 2008; Huang et al. 2019; Ramseook-Munhurrun et al. 2015). have tested the mediating role of variables, including experience, life satisfaction, and positive emotions in other contexts. Thus, accordingly, for the present study, the following hypotheses were formulated:

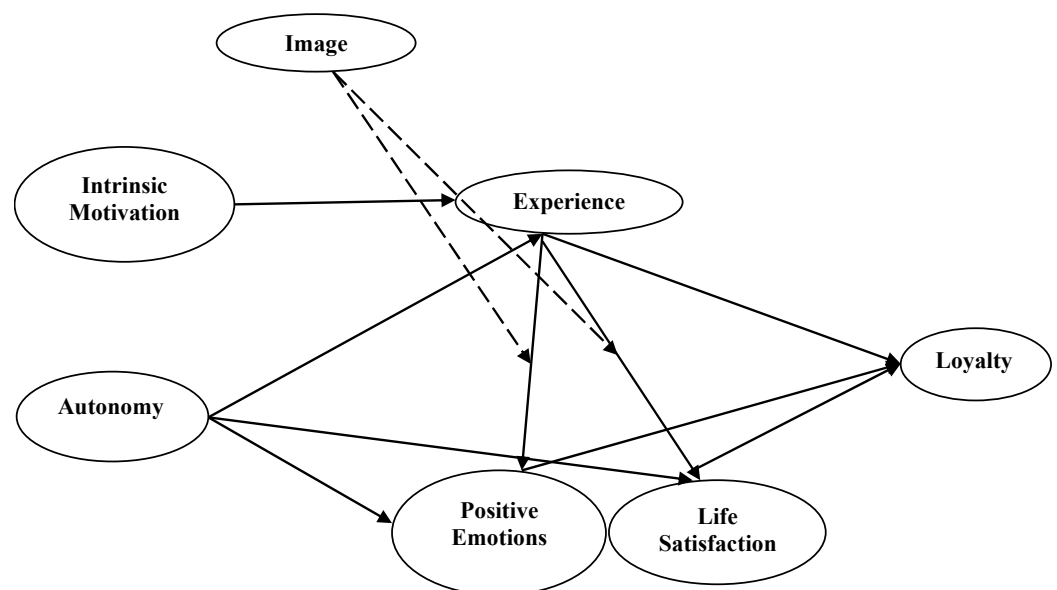
**Hypothesis 10 (H10).** *Experience mediates the relationship between autonomy and positive emotions.*

**Hypothesis 11 (H11).** *Experience mediates the relationship between autonomy and life satisfaction.*

**Hypothesis 12 (H12).** *Positive emotions and life satisfaction mediate the relationship between experience and loyalty.*

### 2.5. Conceptual Framework

The researcher adopted the following conceptual framework after critically reviewing the existing literature. The conceptual framework was developed in line with the study's aim, leading to an exhaustive review of the existing literature based on top-down and bottom-up theories of well-being (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework.

Based on theoretical background and research backgrounds following hypotheses were formulated for the present study.

**Hypothesis 1.** *Intrinsic motivation of tourists is positively related to Experience.*

**Hypothesis 2.** *Autonomy is positively related to the experience gained by the tourists.*

**Hypothesis 3.** *There is a significant positive relation between Autonomy and the positive emotions of tourists.*

**Hypothesis 4.** *There is a significant positive association between Autonomy and life satisfaction.*

**Hypothesis 5.** *Spa-based experiences positively impact tourists' loyalty.*

**Hypothesis 6.** *Spa-based experiences have a positive association with tourists' emotions.*

**Hypothesis 7.** *Spa-based experiences positively impact tourists' life satisfaction.*

**Hypothesis 8.** *There is a significant positive relation between Positive emotion and tourist loyalty.*

**Hypothesis 9.** *There is a significant positive association between Life Satisfaction and tourists' loyalty.*

**Hypothesis 10.** *Experience mediates the relationship between autonomy and positive Emotions.*

**Hypothesis 11.** *Experience mediates the relationship between autonomy and Life Satisfaction.*

**Hypothesis 12.** *Positive emotions and life satisfaction act as mediators in the relationship between experience and loyalty.*

**Hypothesis 13.** *Destination image moderates the relationship between experience and Positive Emotions.*

**Hypothesis 14.** *Destination Image moderates the relationship between experience and life satisfaction.*

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Design

The present study adopted a quantitative research approach, and a self-administered questionnaire designed from the previous studies was pre-tested before collecting the actual data. The instrument was initially pre-tested by four research scholars, four faculty members, and two industry experts. After pre-testing, the questionnaire was conveniently distributed among 20 local tourists for pilot study purposes. The essence of the pilot study is to test the instrument's reliability, which is used in the main study. A reliability test was conducted for each construct and found that the alpha value was sufficient above the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally 1978).

#### 3.2. Instrument/Measures

In the present investigation, various constructs were adopted from previously validated scales and modified for this study.

##### 3.2.1. Autonomy

Autonomy was evaluated by the following four items "when taking the vacation, I experienced a lot of freedom (AUT1); while taking the vacation, I did things because they interested me (AUT2); taking vacation provided me with interesting options and choices (AUT3), and I did not feel pressured to be a certain way when taking a vacation (AUT4)". The items were taken from the studies, and respondents were asked to rate on the five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree.

##### 3.2.2. Intrinsic Motivation

Five relevant statements were taken from 24 items of Voigt et al. (2011) motivation scale to measure this variable for the present study; these consist of "to gain a sense of renewal (IntrMot1); to enjoy an experience with all my senses (IntrMot2); to improve my health (IntrMot3); to improve my appearance (IntrMot4), and to share my experiences with people I am close to (IntrMot5)". The statements were captured on a five-point Likert scale from 1–5, where 1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree.

##### 3.2.3. Experience

The experience construct consisted of five statements from Oh et al. (2007). The items include "I have wonderful memories about my spa visit (EXP1); I remember many positive

things about my last spa visit (EXP2); I completely escaped from reality (EXP3); the setting pleased my senses (EXP4); the experience has made me more knowledgeable (EXP5)". The items were taken on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

#### 3.2.4. Positive Emotions

The positive emotions consist of "Cheerful (PostEmo1); Relaxing (PostEmo2); Inspired (PostEmo3); Active (PostEmo4); Excited (PostEmo5); and Interested (PostEmo6)". The items were taken from the studies of [Prayag et al. \(2017\)](#). The statements were measured on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

#### 3.2.5. Life Satisfaction

This variable consists of five statements taken from the studies of [Diener \(1984\)](#); these statements are "in most ways, my life was close to my ideal (LS1); the conditions of my life were excellent (LS2); I was satisfied with my life (LS3); I felt I had the important things I wanted in life (LS4); and if I could have lived my life over, I would change almost nothing (LS5)". Respondents had to rate these items on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 to 5 where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

#### 3.2.6. Loyalty

The construct of loyalty in this study is measured in the form of the attitudinal measurement, including "willingness to recommend (LOY1), saying positive things to other people (LOY2), and willingness to return to the travel destination in the future (LOY3)." Past studies ([Chi and Qu 2008](#); [Campón-Cerro et al. 2017](#)), have measured this construct by using attitudinal indicators.

To test the uni-dimensionality of the variables taken in the study, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) technique was applied by the researcher. A structural equation model (SEM) and Smart PLS 2.0 were used to test hypotheses.

### 3.3. Study Settings, Sampling, and Data Collection

Data were collected from tourists who experienced spa and wellness services across the various Jammu and Kashmir, union territory (UT) India, from December 2020 to March 2021. 400 questionnaires were distributed among the respondents using the convenience sampling method. Among the returned questionnaires, only 264 were found to be valid for further analysis.

### 3.4. Common Method Bias (CMB)

In PLS-SEM, common method bias refers to phenomena induced by the SEM analysis's measurement approach rather than the model's network of causes and effects. For instance, the instructions at the beginning of a questionnaire may influence the responses of many respondents in the same general direction, resulting in procedural bias. Another technique bias is the implicit social desirability associated with a particular style of question response, which results in indicators sharing a certain degree of variation. For the present investigation, common method bias was checked through the test of full collinearity ([Kock and Lynn 2012](#)). The results of full collinearity indicated that CMB was not present in the model/data as the values for full collinearity were below the suggested value of 0.5.

## 4. Data Analysis and Results

### 4.1. Reliability and Demographic Results

Initially, the data were screened for missing values and unengaged responses. After screening, the reliability of the instrument was checked through Cronbach alpha. The results of Cronbach Alpha for each construct were found to be above the recommended threshold of 0.70 ([Nunnally 1978](#)). The results of reliability statistics are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Results of Reliability Test.

| Dimension            | No. of Items | Cronbach Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) Value |
|----------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|
| Autonomy             | 04           | 0.903                             |
| Intrinsic Motivation | 05           | 0.825                             |
| Experience           | 05           | 0.828                             |
| Positive Emotions    | 06           | 0.894                             |
| Life Satisfaction    | 05           | 0.849                             |
| Loyalty              | 03           | 0.871                             |

Note: Cronbach Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) for all the constructs is above the threshold level of 70.

As shown in the demographic table (Table 2), the sample was almost equally split between males and females, with 52.27% males ( $n = 138$ ) and 47.73% females ( $n = 126$ ).

**Table 2.** Demographic Profile of Respondents.

| Characteristics | Number ( $n$ )             | Percentage |
|-----------------|----------------------------|------------|
| Gender          | Male (138)                 | 52.27%     |
|                 | Female (126)               | 47.73%     |
| Age             | 18–30 years (97)           | 36.75%     |
|                 | 31–43 years (84)           | 31.82%     |
|                 | 44–55 years (63)           | 23.86%     |
|                 | 56 Above (20)              | 7.57%      |
| Education       | Elementary school (11)     | 4.16%      |
|                 | Middle school (19)         | 7.20%      |
|                 | High school (31)           | 11.75%     |
|                 | Bachelor's degree (126)    | 47.72%     |
|                 | Master's degree (70)       | 26.51%     |
|                 | Higher (7)                 | 2.65%      |
| Occupation      | Employee (183)             | 69.31%     |
|                 | Unemployed (43)            | 16.28%     |
|                 | Student (32)               | 12.12%     |
|                 | Retired (6)                | 2.27%      |
| Annual Income   | Less than 50,000 Rs (05)   | 1.89%      |
|                 | 50,000 to 100,000 Rs (11)  | 4.16%      |
|                 | 100,000 to 150,000 Rs (17) | 6.44%      |
|                 | 150,000 to 200,000 Rs (83) | 31.43%     |
|                 | Above 200,000 Rs (148)     | 56.06%     |

Table 2 shows the demographic profile of the respondents. Table 1 shows that 52.27% were male respondents ( $n = 138$ ), whereas 47.73% were female respondents ( $n = 126$ ). The majority of the respondents were in the age group of 18–30 years ( $n = 97$ , 36.75%), followed by the age group of 31–43 years ( $n = 84$ , 31.82%), and only 7.57% ( $n = 20$ ) of the respondents were above the age of 55 years. Additionally, the findings showed that most of the respondents who took part in the survey were well-qualified (47.72%,  $n = 126$  were Bachelor's degree holders, followed by Master's degree holders ( $n = 70$ , 26.51%; and 2.65%,  $n = 7$  were those who have attained higher qualification). The results also showed that the majority of the respondents were employed ( $n = 183$ , 69.31%) and 16.28% ( $n = 43$ ) were unemployed, whereas 2.27% ( $n = 6$ ) were retired and 12.12% ( $n = 32$ ) were students. Furthermore, the findings showed that 56.06% ( $n = 148$ ) were those respondents who had an annual income above 200,000, followed by those who had annual income within the range of 150,000 to 200,000 Rs (31.43%,  $n = 83$ ), followed by those respondents whose income ranged between 100,000 to 150,000 Rs ( $n = 17$ , 6.44%).

#### 4.2. Measurement Model

The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) method verifies the factor structure of a set of observed variables (Hair et al. 2012). The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) process determines whether the hypothesized structure provides an excellent fit to the data. In other words, a relationship between the observed variables and their underlying latent, or unobserved constructs exists (Child 1990). The CFA would also verify that all items are correctly aligned with the correct facets within the general construct being measured. Structural equation modeling (SEM) is a comprehensive statistical approach to testing hypotheses about relations among observed and latent variables (Hoyle 1995) and is a methodology for representing, estimating, and testing a theoretical network of (mostly) linear relations between variables (Rigdon 1998). Structural Equation Modeling tests hypothesized patterns of directional and non-directional relationships among a set of observed (measured) and unobserved (latent) variables (MacCallum 2012).

In the measurement model, the item loadings were checked and found above the recommended value of 0.60 (Chin 1998). Composite reliability (CR) and AVE were used to check the convergent validity of the constructs. Both were above the recommended values of 0.07 and 0.50 (Hair et al. 2006), thereby holding the convergent validity. Finally, the discriminant validity was assessed. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), the discriminant validity is upheld “when the square root of the AVE (diagonal values) of each construct is larger than its corresponding correlation coefficients.” The overall results of CFA are shown in Tables 3 and 4.

**Table 3.** Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

| Dimensions                                                          | Items      | Loadings | AVE   | CR    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|----------|-------|-------|
| <b>Autonomy (AUT)</b>                                               |            |          |       |       |
| When taking the vacation, I experienced a lot of freedom            | (AUT1)     | 0.821    | 0.774 | 0.932 |
| While taking the vacation, I did things because they interested me  | (AUT2)     | 0.891    |       |       |
| Taking vacation provides me with interesting options and choices    | (AUT3)     | 0.910    |       |       |
| I did not feel pressured to be a certain way when taking a vacation | (AUT4)     | 0.895    |       |       |
| <b>Intrinsic Motivation (IntrMot)</b>                               |            |          |       |       |
| To gain a sense of renewal                                          | (IntrMot1) | 0.886    | 0.620 | 0.884 |
| To enjoy an experience with all my senses                           | (IntrMot2) | 0.890    |       |       |
| To improve my health                                                | (IntrMot3) | 0.788    |       |       |
| To improve my appearance                                            | (IntrMot4) | 0.878    |       |       |
| To share my experiences with people, I am close to                  | (IntrMot5) | 0.361    |       |       |
| <b>Experience (EXP)</b>                                             |            |          |       |       |
| I have beautiful memories of my spa visit                           | (EXP1)     | 0.878    | 0.621 | 0.886 |
| I remember many positive things about my last spa visit             | (EXP2)     | 0.879    |       |       |
| I completely escaped from reality                                   | (EXP3)     | 0.785    |       |       |
| The setting pleased my senses                                       | (EXP4)     | 0.872    |       |       |
| The experience has made me more knowledgeable                       | (EXP5)     | 0.430    |       |       |
| <b>Positive Emotions (PostEmo)</b>                                  |            |          |       |       |
| Cheerful                                                            | (PostEmo1) | 0.811    | 0.654 | 0.918 |
| Relaxing                                                            | (PostEmo2) | 0.862    |       |       |
| Inspired                                                            | (PostEmo3) | 0.885    |       |       |
| Active                                                              | (PostEmo4) | 0.874    |       |       |
| Excited                                                             | (PostEmo5) | 0.713    |       |       |
| Interested                                                          | (PostEmo6) | 0.686    |       |       |
| <b>Autonomy (AUT)</b>                                               |            |          |       |       |
| <b>Life Satisfaction (LS)</b>                                       |            |          |       |       |
| In most ways, my life was close to my ideal                         | (LS1)      | 0.794    | 0.774 | 0.932 |
| The conditions of my life were excellent                            | (LS2)      | 0.789    | 0.618 | 0.889 |
| I was satisfied with my life                                        | (LS3)      | 0.850    |       |       |
| I felt I had the essential things I wanted in life                  | (LS4)      | 0.818    |       |       |
| If I could have lived my life over, I would change almost nothing   | (LS5)      | 0.667    |       |       |

Table 3. Cont.

| Dimensions                                                     | Items  | Loadings | AVE   | CR    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|--------|----------|-------|-------|
| <b>Loyalty (LOY)</b>                                           |        |          |       |       |
| Willingness to recommended                                     | (LOY1) | 0.827    | 0.789 | 0.918 |
| Saying positive things to other people                         | (LOY2) | 0.928    |       |       |
| Willingness to return to the travel destination in the future" | (LOY3) | 0.906    |       |       |

Table 4. Discriminant Validity Results.

|       | AVE   | AUT          | EXP          | INMOT        | LS           | LOY          | POEMO        |
|-------|-------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| AUT   | 0.774 | <b>0.880</b> |              |              |              |              |              |
| EXP   | 0.383 | 0.342        | <b>0.788</b> |              |              |              |              |
| INMOT | 0.352 | 0.566        | 0.379        | <b>0.787</b> |              |              |              |
| LS    | 0.555 | 0.472        | 0.447        | 0.411        | <b>0.786</b> |              |              |
| LOY   | 0.259 | 0.272        | 0.261        | 0.356        | 0.182        | <b>0.888</b> |              |
| POEMO | 0.976 | 0.430        | 0.39         | 0.361        | 0.602        | 0.272        | <b>0.809</b> |

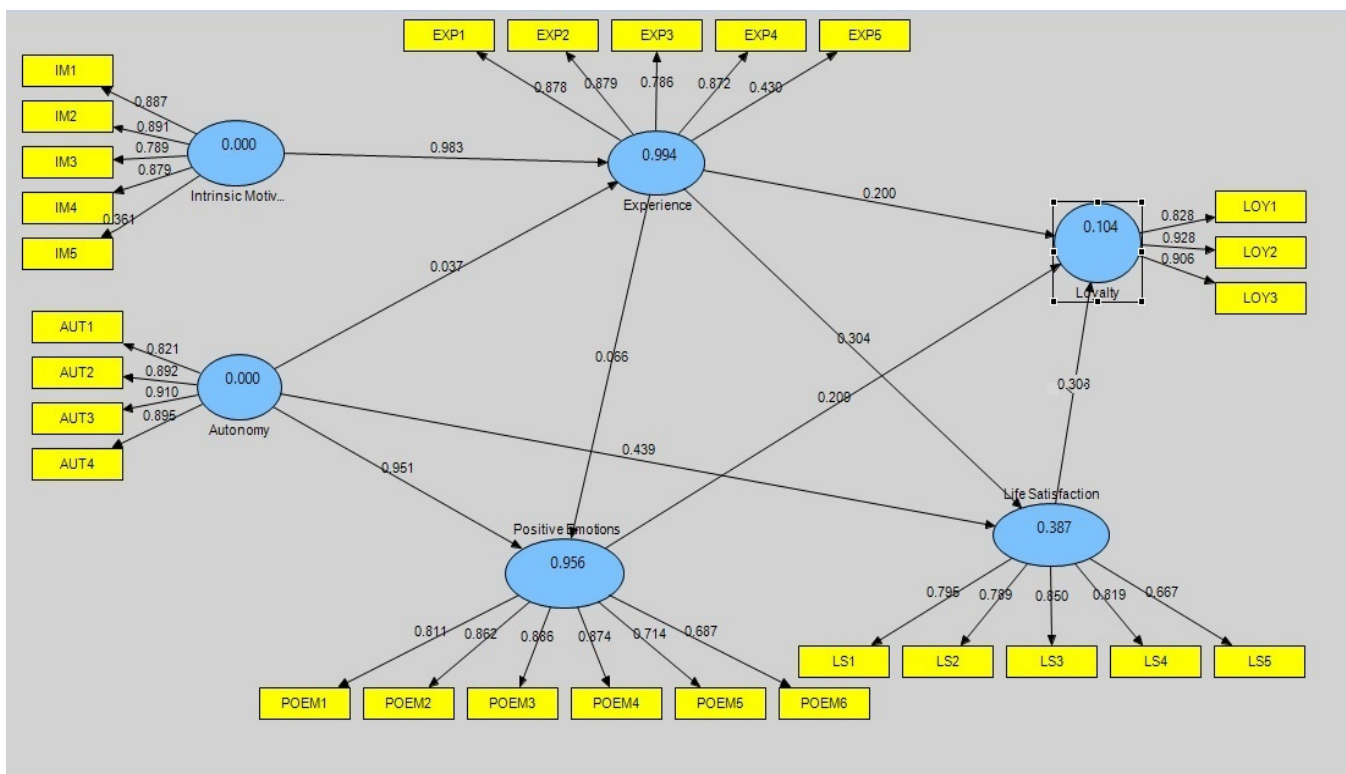
Note: The values in the above diagonal matrix are the AVE's square root. AVE = Average Variance Extracted, AUT = Autonomy, EXP = Experience, INMOT = Intrinsic Motivation, LS = Life Satisfaction, LOY = Loyalty, PEMO = Positive Emotions.

#### 4.3. Hypotheses Testing

After confirmatory factor analysis, the next step is to test the hypotheses. The proposed hypotheses were tested through SEM by using the software of Smart PLS 2.0. The findings of the study showed that intrinsic motivation positively influences experience ( $\beta = 0.983$ ,  $t$ -value = 138.31;  $p < 0.05$ ); autonomy positively influences experience ( $\beta = 0.037$ ,  $t$ -value = 2.60;  $p < 0.05$ ); autonomy positively influences positive emotions ( $\beta = 0.951$ ,  $t$ -value = 60.35;  $p < 0.05$ ); autonomy positively influences life satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.439$ ,  $t$ -value = 4.61;  $p < 0.05$ ); experience positively influences loyalty ( $\beta = 0.200$ ,  $t$ -value = 2.06;  $p < 0.05$ ); experience positively influences positive emotions ( $\beta = 0.066$ ,  $t$ -value = 2.16;  $p < 0.05$ ); experience positively influences life satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.304$ ,  $t$ -value = 3.01;  $p < 0.05$ ); positive emotion positively influences tourist loyalty ( $\beta = 0.209$ ,  $t$ -value = 2.18;  $p < 0.05$ ); and life satisfaction positively influences tourist loyalty ( $\beta = 0.308$ ,  $t$ -value = 3.76;  $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, H6, H7, H8, and H9 were supported. The hypotheses results are summarized in Table 5, while the results of structural equation modeling and the path coefficient are shown in Figure 2.

Table 5. Hypothesis testing results.

|                                   | Path Coefficients | T Statistics | <i>p</i> Values | Inference |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|-----------------|-----------|
| Intrinsic motivation → Experience | 0.983             | 138.31       | 0.005           | Supported |
| Autonomy → Experience             | 0.037             | 2.60         | 0.000           | Supported |
| Autonomy → Positive Emotions      | 0.951             | 60.35        | 0.011           | Supported |
| Autonomy → Life Satisfaction      | 0.439             | 4.61         | 0.049           | Supported |
| Experience → Loyalty              | 0.200             | 2.06         | 0.089           | Supported |
| Experience → Positive Emotions    | 0.066             | 2.16         | 0.007           | Supported |
| Experience → Life Satisfaction    | 0.304             | 3.01         | 0.000           | Supported |
| Positive Emotions → Loyalty       | 0.209             | 2.18         | 0.000           | Supported |
| Life Satisfaction → Loyalty       | 0.308             | 3.76         | 0.000           | Supported |



**Figure 2.** The estimated SEM path model. Source: Authors' elaboration.

#### 4.4. Mediation Results

The mediating role of experience in the relationship between autonomy and positive emotions and the relationship between autonomy, life satisfaction, and loyalty was tested from the model. Besides this, the mediators of positive emotions and life satisfaction were also tested in the relationship between experience and loyalty. The results of the investigation showed a positive direct impact of Autonomy on Positive emotions ( $\beta = 0.439$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), while the indirect effects of experience on positive emotions were also to be found significant ( $\beta_1 = 0.0024$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), thereby showing the partial mediation of experience in the relationship of Autonomy and Positive emotions. Furthermore, the results of the investigation showed a significant direct impact of experience on Life Satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.304$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and the indirect effect for the same relationship was also found to be significant ( $\beta_2 = 0.011$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Furthermore, the direct effects of positive emotions on loyalty were also found significant ( $\beta = 0.209$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and the direct effects of life satisfaction on loyalty were also found significant ( $\beta = 0.306$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). While the indirect effects of positive emotions and life satisfaction on loyalty were also significant ( $\beta_1 = 0.013$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ;  $\beta_2 = 0.093$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), thereby showing the partial mediation of positive emotions and life satisfaction in the relationship between Experience and Loyalty.

#### 4.5. Moderating Results

The moderating effects of destination Image were also tested. The respondents were asked about the destination image as high and low and were categorized into tourists with high destination image ( $n_1 = 219$ ) and tourists with low destination image ( $n_2 = 45$ ). First, the model was run for experience and positive emotions. The results showed a higher impact for experience and positive emotions ( $n = 219$ ;  $\beta_1 = 0.467$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ;  $n_2 = 45$ ,  $\beta_2 = 0.210$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, image moderates the relationship between experience and positive emotions. Lastly, the findings of the study showed that image also moderates the relationship between experience and life satisfaction ( $n = 219$ ;  $\beta_1 = 0.532$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ;  $n_2 = 45$ ,  $\beta_2 = 0.173$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

## 5. Discussion

Based on the top-down and bottom-up theories of well-being, the present study aimed to evaluate the impact of autonomy and intrinsic motivation on experience, positive emotions, and life satisfaction. Furthermore, the study investigates the impact of experience on positive emotions and life satisfaction. Besides, the present tested the mediating role of positive emotions and life satisfaction in the relationship between experience and loyalty. The findings of the investigation showed that intrinsic motivation leads to experience; this is consistent with the findings of [Baloglu et al. \(2019\)](#). Furthermore, the results showed that experience leads to positive emotions, life satisfaction, and loyalty; these findings are in line with the findings of [Huang et al. \(2019\)](#). Besides this, similar results were found in [Vada et al. \(2019\)](#) studies. The present investigation findings how important it is to offer tourism products and to experience value in spa hotel experiences. The model provides an explanation for the variability of the endogenous variables, which are positive emotions ( $R^2 = 95.62\%$ ); life satisfaction ( $R^2 = 38.7\%$ ); experience ( $R^2 = 99.4\%$ ); and loyalty ( $R^2 = 10.4\%$ ); it is worth mentioning that positive emotions and life satisfaction with experience determine loyalty. Scientific literature has largely confirmed the positive relationship between satisfaction and loyalty ([Chi and Qu 2008](#); [Ramseook-Munhurrin et al. 2015](#)).

The positive outcomes of the proposed model help offer a practical experience for health and wellness based on the spa experience; this offering will positively affect the quality of life of tourists, and life satisfaction, in general, will lead to the repeat patronage of guests; this, in turn, will have the social benefit to two beneficiaries: tourists and residents. Travelers benefit directly from the contact with a new tourist attraction that provides physical, mental, and rehabilitation. Indirectly, residents can benefit from the network of infrastructures and services and positively affect economic revenue and employment for the tourism industry. Therefore, tourists and the people of the areas where tourism is carried out benefit from tourism activities.

## 6. Implications

When considering our practical results from a spa and wellness industry's perspective, it can be quickly concluded that the spa experience is an essential element that generates positive feelings, improves well-being and maintains the desire of a consumer to visit spa destinations, increasing their chances of recommending spa treatments. The managers should develop unique and distinctive services and products that offer tourists pleasant experiences to promote tourism loyalty to hotel wellness ([Han et al. 2017](#); [Nunnally 1978](#)).

Spa managers should design spiritual awakening, lifestyle coaching, and practice classes ([Baloglu et al. 2019](#)). To improve the aesthetic elements of spa facilities, they should strive for physical environment sensation stimulations ([Loureiro et al. 2013](#); [Voigt 2016](#)); improved the aesthetic aspects of the spas, such as stress relieving and physical relaxation workshops ([Kucukusta et al. 2013](#)) and incorporate entertainment elements, such as emphasis on cultural events and regional fairs ([Loureiro 2014](#)).

As autonomy plays a significant part in influencing the spa wellness experience ([Thal and Hudson 2017](#)), thus, to cater to the needs of tourists, spa and wellness managers should provide a wide variety of services and specialized spa programs, such as aromatherapy services, meditation courses, and yoga; this will stimulate tourists' positive emotions, satisfy their lives, and create an intention to revisit and recommend ([Baloglu et al. 2019](#); [McNeil and Ragins 2005](#)). Furthermore, spa and wellness managers should provide more comprehensive options for participating in leisure activities; it activates the psychological mechanism of autonomy, which leads to positive emotions and life satisfaction ([Newman et al. 2014](#)). Tourists tend to participate in wellness spa activities, spa managers should thus take care of the psychological need for autonomy in well-being services and product design ([Carruthers and Hood 2007](#); [Goulimaris et al. 2014](#)). Wellness spa management must strive to develop customer-oriented wellness products and services to meet a traveler's need

for autonomy by actively gaining meaningful and enjoyable experiences in developing appropriate marketing strategies (Rodríguez et al. 2008; Ábrahám et al. 2012).

## 7. Conclusions, Limitations, and Directions for Future Study

Based on the existing literature, a research gap exists linking variables such as autonomy, intrinsic motivation, experience, positive emotions, life satisfaction, and loyalty. Thus, the present study tried to bridge this research gap and evaluated the impact of intrinsic motivation, autonomy, and experience of positive emotions and life satisfaction. The results showed that intrinsic motivation, autonomy, and experience positively affect positive emotions and life satisfaction. Besides, the study's findings showed that positive emotions, experience, and life satisfaction lead to loyalty. Furthermore, the present study tested the mediating role of experience, positive emotions, and life satisfaction. The results showed that experience mediates the relationship between autonomy, positive emotions, and life satisfaction.

Moreover, the findings showed that positive emotions and life satisfaction mediate the relationship between experience and loyalty. The proposed hypotheses were tested through a structural equation model using Smart PLS 2.0. The results of this investigation can be helpful for both the research community and marketers interested in investigating the well-being of tourists and destination loyalty.

There are several limitations associated with the present study. The investigation adopted top-down and bottom-up theories of well-being only. In the future, other theories, such as the place attachment theory, should also be integrated with these theories to develop an extended model of well-being. Besides, the present study was quantitative; a mixed-method approach should be adopted in the future to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon; moreover, future studies should use other moderators, such as demographics, to test the role of moderators in framing the experience and attitudinal loyalty. The link between satisfaction and loyalty is influenced by other factors that were not considered in the present study. Thus, future studies should be carried out considering factors such as facilities at the destination, destination attributes, image of the destination, etc. The study was based on cross-sectional data; future studies should focus on longitudinal studies. Lastly, the investigation has been confined to specific statistical tests such as CFA & PLS-SEM; in future investigations, advanced statistical tools such as PLS-Predict, Blindfolding, Neural Network, and IPMA should be applied to get deeper insights into the model. Future research also is conducted by applying the t-test and chi-square test to determine the significance level of the male and female perceptions of the variables undertaken in the present research.

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