

## **A theoretical lens of the nexus between spa technology consumption and one's psychosocial and economic development**

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**ABSTRACT:** Despite the long-lived interest on spa technology consumption by different scholars, a lack of a systematic theoretical analysis to illuminate its link with human development has been noted. A deficit of theoretical capital with which to understand the nexus between of spa technology consumption and one's psychosocial and economic development has been identified as a gap in existing literature sources. Most of behavioral theories reviewed fall short of essential characteristics to illuminate this link. Thus, Erving Goffman's dramaturgy theory has the potential to capture various roles an individual adopts to achieve desired goals. Goffman offers a more reliable tool for understanding the dynamics of spa technology and one's psychosocial and economic development. From his line of thinking, spa technology consumption assists individuals to impress their audience. In the process the consumer is rewarded psychosocially and economically in both the public and the private arena. Thus, the dramaturgy theory acquaints itself as a close fit to illuminate the nexus between spa technology consumption and one's psychosocial and economic development. However, a more rigorous and systematic theoretical engagement with this phenomenon is required to obtain a holistic picture of the psychosocial and economic motives for spa technology consumption.

**Keywords:** Spa technology, nexus, theoretical lens, development

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

This paper is a theoretical reflection on the nexus between spa technology and an individual's psychosocial and economic development. While spa technology can be variably understood (Capillin, 2010), in this paper it is understood as the skilful aptitude to manipulate the human mind, his/her spirit and the body using relevant knowledge, processes, skills, techniques, tools/machinery and hands with water and or other cosmetics as media within a spa facility. Psychosocial development is used herein to mean actions, emotions, feelings, cognition, beliefs and individual affect in response to spa technology consumption. Economic development as viewed from a micro level perspective concerns the acquisition of one's livelihood or an achievement of economic interests from the consumption of spa technology.

Despite the long-lived interest on spa technology by different researchers (Bowden, 2009; Capillin, 2010; Abbas, *et al*, 2012; Boekstein and Spencer, 2013; Ellis, 2013; Yeung and Johnston, 2014; Hashemi, *et al*, 2015 and Vicente and Akarapong, 2016), spa technology lacks a systematic theoretical analysis to illuminate its link with an individual's psychosocial and economic development. The existing knowledge base has looked at how spa technology is used as a tool to relieve pain, stress, rejuvenation of the skin, relaxation of the body and the healing of diverse health problems (Vetitnev and Dzubina, 2012; Yeung and Johnston, 2014 and Farzana and Priya, 2015). However, the theory expose' about the nexus between spa technology consumption and an individual's psychosocial and economic development has been overlooked a gap which this paper seeks to bridge.

#### **1.1 Background to the problem**

Visiting spas has been a global phenomenon from time immemorial (Capillin, 2010; Tarabella and Burchi, 2011; Abbas, *et al*, 2012; Deswal, 2014 and Fazarna and Priya, 2015). The earliest lodging facilities were built near thermal and mineral springs (Teralovicova, *et al*, 2010 and Okech, 2014). As a result, spas have made a significant contribution to the history of the present day Tourism and Hospitality industry (Teralovicova,

*et al*, 2010; Okech, 2014 and Deswal, 2014). This technology has been applauded for providing relaxation, therapeutic, recreational and aesthetic solutions to its consumers (Vetitnev and Dzubina, 2012; Deswal, 2014; Farzana and Priya, 2015; Yeung and Johnston, 2014 and Vicente and Akarapong, 2016). Research also reveals that spa technology has been used to alleviate mental, emotional and physical conditions of health and wellness tourists (Tawil, 2011; Boekstein and Spencer, 2013; Farzana and Priya, 2015 and Hashemi, *et al*, 2015). Some scholars have also appraised the same technology's contribution to promoting health and wellness tourism on the global plane (Voigt, *et al*, 2010; Johnston, *et al*, 2011; Boekstein, 2012; Yeung and Johnston, 2014 and Okech, 2014). As a result, the tourism industry is realising a lot of revenue from resort and hotel spas.

The twenty first century 'spa technology' has become a cocktail of processes with an interdisciplinary framework of interrelated services and products (Starr, 2013; Roanghes-Mureanu and Tudoricu, 2014 and Hashemi and Priya, 2015). These processes include health and wellness therapies, beauty treatments as well as relaxation and recreational services (Tawil, 2011; Boekstein, 2012; Smith and Puczko, 2013; Okech, 2014; Deswal, 2014 and Vicent and Akarapong, 2016). Tawil, (2011) also observed that some state-of-the-art spa facilities have been constructed in and around hotels and resorts for tourists of diverse needs. This is an indication that spa technology has a lot to contribute to an individual's development despite the differences in the human taxonomy. However, the existing theoretical expose' on this phenomenon is generally too weak to provide a comprehensive explanation on the contribution of spa technology to an individual's psychosocial and economic development. As it is, there is lack of theoretical clarity in terms of explaining the nexus between spa technology consumption and an individual's psychosocial and economic development by spa technology researchers. Therefore, this paper seeks to engage a relevant theory to illuminate the interface between spa technology and the consumer's psychosocial and economic development.

## **1.2 A Theoretical Disjuncture**

There is a deficit of theoretical capital with which to understand the contribution of spa technology to an individual's psychosocial and economic development. Spa technology is consumed by individuals globally for diverse benefits (Global spa summit, 2011; Horton & Lowman, 2012; Okech, 2014; Deswal, 2014; Lo and Wu, 2015 and Farzana and Priya, *et al*, 2015). Meanwhile, the existing knowledge base is not providing a suitable theory to illuminate the link between spa technology consumption and one's psychosocial and economic development. Noteworthy is that the contribution of spa technology consumption to humanity may never be understood unless its centrality to a consumer's psychosocial and economic development is theoretically elucidated. Thus, this paper reflects on the explanatory validity of a gamut of theories with reference to the connection between spa technology consumption and an individual's psychosocial and economic development.

## **II. THEORETICAL INSIGHTS**

The nexus between spa technology consumption with one's psychosocial and economic interest rests upon an individual's motives and satisfaction (Hashemi, *et al*, 2015). In order to illuminate this nexus, a number of theories are interrogated in this paper. However, only those theories that focus on an individual's behaviour and actions to achieve a desired goal are considered. Theories such as the Looking Glass Self Theory, the Theory of Reasoned Action, the Expectancy Theory, the Social Learning Theory, the Social Identity Theory and the Dramaturgy Theory were interrogated.

### **2.1 The Looking Glass Self Theory (LGST)**

Charles. Horton. Cooley, (1902) posits that the individual's self concept is based on self reflection through others, that is, how one must look or behave. It is concerned with editing the self through others. Yeung and Matin (2003), state that perceptions of others should be comprehended in shaping and moulding the self. This theory is applicable throughout one's entire life sandwiched by self modification. Isaksen (2013) is of the view that people in our society serve as mirrors that reflect images of individuals. Thus, society becomes a determinant of an individual's behaviour change or modification. Jones (2014) calls this aspect seeing the self in part through the reflection, response, and the reactions of others. The LGST suggests that individual actions are virtual and simulated. This is due to the internal dialogue held between the self with a social situation and dramatisation is conducted in one's mind (Jones, 2014). Therefore, one imagines how he or she will look after consuming spa technology and the image of the individual that will be carried by the audience or the public in their memories. However, these imaginations can be illusionary depicting an uncanny sense of imagination (Isaksen, 2013).

Confirming how well one's imaginations are when utilising judgements given by others may lack validity due to varying lenses through which people see others, an act of self deceit. As a result, the confirmation of that erroneous assumption by the individual becomes difficult and hence remains embedded in one's mind. However, one salient limitation of the LGST as relevant theory to illuminate the nexus between spa

technology consumption and one's psychosocial development is that mirrors are of diverse types. It is noteworthy that different social mirrors project varying images depending on the type of social lens (context), angle of focus (perception) and the amount of light striking on the image to be reflected (cognition of concept). Social media, photographs of models also act as mediated social mirrors that aggravate situations that an individual may find him or herself in (Jones, 2014). Therefore, the certainty about one's imagination of how they are judged by others calls for a common 'Looking Glass' with a universal lens from which one can view the self for informed actions. Thus, this perspective exposes the limitation that the LGST has to warrant it as ideal in explaining the nexus between spa technology consumption and one's economic development.

## **2.2. The Social Identity Theory (SIT)**

In this theory, Tajfel and Turner, (1979) explain one's place in a social context. SIT is concerned with how an individual behaves or make sense of the self when surrounded by other people. This theory illuminates how different social contexts influence an individual's behaviour and attitudes at the same time shaping one's identity. However, Korte, (2007: 167) argues that "*individuals do what they do because of who they believe they are – their identity*". SIT regards the social-self as unstable and multifarious because some individuals depend on others for their behaviour and actions. The theory exposes the effects of belonging to a certain group over the other (Baird, 2001). It is characterised by categorisation, discrimination and prejudice of the out-group by the in-group (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). This characteristic makes the social-self precarious within diverse social situations where one is prone to adopt behaviour commensurate with the favoured group. In such an instance, an individual can stage an act in-order to identify with the favoured group especially (the in-group) (Korte, 2007). Therefore, spa technology can be consumed by an individual in order to identify with the other or to achieve same status with members of a certain group leading to categorisation, discrimination and prejudice of the out-group by the in-group. Thus, the fact that spa technology consumption can be used as tool by an individual to achieve a certain mileage or to please his or her in-group cannot be ruled out.

However, SIT cannot be a genuine fit in explaining the nexus between spa technology consumption and one's psychosocial and economic development because it exhibits a tendency where similarities or differences are over appraised in the process of categorisation, discrimination or prejudicing of out-groups by in-groups. This result in isolating the salient similarities or differences values and the importance attached to the group in shaping one's identity. Korte, (2007) is of the view that one' history, personality, status and opportunity pose as a limitation to the choice of an appropriate group. SIT also seems to overlook factors that influence or limits one to consume spa technology including their concept comprehension, the context in which the technology is to be consumed, the availability of resources and the insinuating circumstances. This constraint can affect one's motivation to consume spa technology and it impinges on connecting spa technology consumption to an individual's psychosocial and economic development.

## **2.3 Social Learning Theory (SLT)**

Albert Bandura (1967)'s states that individuals learn behaviours from others through observation, imitation and modeling. SIT is also known in some spheres as the Social Cognition Theory (SCT). The theory looks at the learning process involved in the shaping and the socialisation of individuals under social influences (Culatta, 2012). The SLT has been useful in explaining how human beings learn novel concepts and develop new behaviours by observing, imitation and positive reinforcement of the concept or behaviour (Bandura, 1989; Cherry, 2012 and Raingruber, 2014). This makes identity shaping a conscious phenomenon done in response to the expectations of others (Schunk, 2012 and Cherry, 2012). While Bandura used this theory to explain how children model their behaviour after admiring those around them, it may also be equally applicable where adults feel the same when considering their identity shaping through behaviour change. Thus, individuals are compelled to consume spa technology to achieve a mutual connectedness with the prevailing social environment. Bandura (1989) also argues that motivation and feelings of frustration associated with repeated failures influence behaviour. In the process, perceptions about the individual are changed, so are his or her psychosocial and economic interests.

It is indeed a fact that certain behaviour can be more rewarding but at times difficult to explain or describe but rather enacted through modeling. Therefore, SLT also helps us to comprehend the processes involved in an act where learning is by duplicating behaviour observed from others basing on anticipated rewards such as being appreciated, loved, praised, approved; or being valued among others (Observational learning). This unnatural learning comes in different types. There is direct modeling from observing models; symbolic modelling from books, movies or films involving real or fictional characters and synthesised modelling comprising acts by different models that use verbal and instructional materials (Culatta, 2012). The outcomes of modelling include adoption of new behaviour, uphold existing behaviour, re-enacting behaviours observed, change inhibitions or arouse emotions (Bandura, 1989; Culatta, 2012; Cherry, 2012 and Schunk,

2012). As such, one can be compelled to consume spa technology in order to look like a certain person in a book or screened on television and also yearn to achieve a similar recognition.

While this theory can be a paragon in examining the nexus between spa technology consumption and one's psychosocial and economic development, its weakness is that it requires one to be attentive, retain observed behaviour, reproduce it and be well motivated to change one's behaviour. Change is also determined by the environment, social, personal and behavioural elements. Apparently, modeling limits creativity in the presentation of the self in our everyday lives (Goffman, 1959) therefore reproducing behaviours that may be despised by society.

#### **2.4 The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)**

Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen (1967) suggest that individuals consider the consequences or benefits of their action before engaging in certain behaviour (Down and Housenblas, 2005 and Shareef, *et al*, 2009). There is reason for action by a spa technology consumer and every step taken is well calculated. One thinks about the gains and losses of engaging in a certain act. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) are of the view that the three main pillars of TRA are behavioural intentions, attitudes and subjective norms. They also state that intentions, attitudes and some standards can influence spontaneous actions in addition to existing habits and cravings. As such, human behaviour can be predicted and behaviour is consciously intended (Sutton, 2002). Once predicted or purported, the significant others such as family, friends and peers have an effect on what a person intends to do. Thus, this can impinge on one's confidence or control over engaging in an act such as the consuming of spa products and services eventually affecting one's development. However, positive comments can boost one's self-esteem and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) while the negative ones can destroy one's ego.

While this theory can be used to explain the link between spa technology consumption and an individual's psychosocial and economic development, it lacks rigour in explaining the parameters of an individual's control over engaging in certain behaviour or an act. Some behaviour is controlled by one's social environment and the prevailing economic environment which are overlooked by this theory.

#### **2.5 The Expectancy Theory (VIE)**

Victor, H. Vroom, (1964) posits that VIE is a process theory of motivation. Vroom was of the view that motivation to behave in a particular way is based on expectation that the effort exerted will result in a desired goal (expectancy) or will be rewarded (Instrumentality) or will be worth the effort (valance) (Lunenburg, 2011). The theory is also known as Valance-Instrumentality-Expectancy Theory (VIE). The theory is more of a decision making process, which explains why an individual decides to act out a specific behaviour as opposed to another. The Expectancy Theory appraises the motivational powers of diverse behavioural options as a means to obtaining a desirable reward at the end (Parijat and Bagga, 2014). The motivation to engaging in certain behaviour involves computation of benefits one gets in the end over losses. Therefore, it may be concluded that an individual can consume spa technology with the assumption that it will increase his or her chances of being aesthetically appealing, emotionally stable, be healthy and live longer (Farzana and Priya, 2015 and Vicente and Akarapong, 2016).

Expectancy refers to the effort-performance relation; while Instrumentality is concerned with performance-reward relation and Valance is the value that the individual associates with the outcome (reward) (Vroom, 1964). In this case Motivation Force (MF) is  $\text{Expectancy} \times \text{Instrumentality} \times \text{Valancy}$ . Therefore, if any of these factors are zero (0) the individual will lack motivation to act. However, the theory overlooks the fact that some individual can consume spa technology out of interest while others are motivated by members from their in-groups rather than the rewards. The results can affect one from adhering to the processes involved for spa technology consumption and it misses the connection between the technology exploitation and the individual's psychosocial and economic development. Meanwhile, the consumer is the one who spells out what he or she wants to gain or benefit from this technology consumption (see Hashemi, *et al* 2015 and Farzana and Priya, 2015). In most cases effort is exerted in anticipation of first order outcomes or rewards such as life longevity, pain and stress relief; beauty enhancing among others at the expense of second order outcomes such as status, recognition and acceptance by colleagues; employment, job security and promotion, love and marriage and so forth as observed by Desousa (2016). One striking limitation of the Expectancy theory is that it does not consider the challenges associated with an individual's motivation to partake in a task. While some individuals may be motivated by certain rewards to consume spa technology others usually lack concern over the sustainability issues to do with the consumed technology. It also fails to recognise differences in personality, experiences and knowledge as factors that may affect the outcomes of utilising the same theory in explaining the nexus between spa technology consumption and one's psychosocial and economic development. While each of the above theories have an explanatory validity to a certain extent in illuminating the nexus between spa technology and individual psychosocial and economic development: the interrogation of these theories has

helped to isolate Erving Goffman (1959)'s Dramaturgy as the overarching theory for understanding the nexus between spa technology consumption and the individual's psychosocial and economic development.

## **2.6 The Dramaturgy theory**

Life is a drama and people are actors who are always on and off the stage (Urlick, 2014). This theory helps us to capture the various roles that individuals adopt in-order to achieve a goal. It helps to illuminate the intrinsic reasons and explain processes that help us understand the link between spa technology consumption and one's psychosocial and economic development.

### **2.6.1 Dramaturgy Theory and Spa technology consumption**

Erving Goffman's works have spawned a lot of interest with regards to personality development, consumer research and behavior (Schulz, 2012). Goffman's dramaturgical perspective (1922-1982) also referred to as the dramaturgy theory (Urlick, 2014) illuminates interface between spa technology consumption and one's psychosocial and economic development. The dramaturgical perspective is a development of George Herbert Mead's theories of the self from 1913 to 1934. From a Symbolic Interactionist's perspective, Goffman explored the details of an individual's identity, group dynamics, environmental impact, and interactive meaning of information and its movement (Harvey, 2015). Harvey states that Goffman uses the theatre as the leading metaphor for presentation of the self in social interaction which he refers to as 'impression management' adopted from his book '*The presentation of self in everyday life*' published in 1959. In his dramaturgical approach to Symbolic Interactionism, Goffman adopts the idea that the world is a stage and people stage an act as per situation or context (Harvey, 2015). Thus, life is a drama and people are actors who are always on and off the stage. This theory helps us to capture the various roles and motivations that spa consumers adopt in-order to achieve certain goals. The dramaturgy theory helps to illuminate the intrinsic reasons and explain processes that help us understand the contribution that spa technology makes to one's psychosocial and economic development.

Social scientists have also used Goffman's Dramaturgy theory to study an individual's behavior within a public sphere (Schulz, 2012). Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) are of the view that Goffman saw a connection between kinds of acts that people stage in their day-to-day lives. This is a reflection that individual spa consumer's behavior changes after consuming this technology to suit a prevailing social context. The absence of good health, less appealing looks and emotional imbalances can compel one to consume the technology in order to correct the identified anomaly (Deswal, 2014; Hashemi, et al, 2015 and Farzana and Priya, 2015). Thereafter, an act is performed by the consumer in the presence of other people who are a part of the wider society. The action is deliberate so that certain impressions are created in a bid to fulfill certain desired goal or a need in society (Urlick, 2014) by the consumer. Tashmin (2016) also argues that appearance is a signifier of who we are and how we want to be perceived in a particular situation. The consumption of spa technology can be driven by the situation one finds one's self in. However, the underlying reasons for the consumption of the technology besides improving one's health condition and physical appearance have not been explicitly explained by researchers and have since remained a mystery.

From Goffman's line of thinking, situation or context, space, appearance or manner is critical in staging an act and the audience also responds according to the performance. Therefore, the way one acts can change depending upon the prevailing circumstances (Urlick, 2014). However, the contribution of such an act is only illuminated through interaction with the consumers and by taking note of the observable norms. Seemingly, the missing link between the consumption and the contribution of this technology to an individual's development lies with what the consumer achieves from the performance and the interpretation of the message relayed to the audience by the act.

In support of Goffman, Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) state that in a social interaction, there is a stage which represents a public sphere and where the actor appears before the audience. In their view, the public sphere is the arena where a spa technology consumer creates his or her self concepts and tries to maintain the impressions created. The actor can display attributes such as being confident, assertive, also projecting a favourable appearance and image. In return for such a performance, they can gain recognition, status, love, self-fulfilment, self-efficacy and appreciation among other benefits. Harvey (2015) argues that central to dramaturgy is the idea that each person endeavours to 'manage' the impressions made about them by others. As a result, the management of impressions helps to boost one's self image and esteem leading to one's psychosocial development. The actor's expectations, cognition, feelings, emotions and affect also differ with roles played at the front or the backstage. Therefore, this justifies the need to explore the contribution of spa technology to one's psychosocial and economic development using Goffman's dramaturgy theory. Goffman's theory proves to be the ideal tool for examining the inherent contribution of spa technology consumption to an individual's psychosocial and economic development. The way one presents oneself after utilising spa technology (in the private or the public domain), can assist to deduce these hidden contributions to an individual's development.

Thus, the dramaturgy theory should be applauded for revealing the creative ways in the presentation of the self by the actor for the sake of not disappointing the audience with whom meaning is shared.

Therefore, Goffman's Dramaturgy theory is close fit for assessing the nexus between spa technology and one's psychosocial and economic development. It reveals the manipulative aspects actors so as to achieve one's goals in any social setting. This theory is about living according to what others should view one in terms of status, identity, appearance, deportment, beliefs and self presentation. It provides an interface between spa technology consumption and an individual's psychosocial and economic development. However, this theory neglects how the real person feels in the absence of the observers or the audience. Goffman's theory seems to ignore the development of the internal self or the ideal person in the absence of the social mirror. It is concerned with the external person and the stage managed concept of the self. It puts emphasis on the notion that the self does not exist independent of the others but depends on them for its success.

### III. CONCLUSION

Generally there is lack of theoretical capital to illuminate the nexus between spa technology consumption and human development. This paper isolated Goffman's dramaturgy theory as a vital tool for one's understanding of the nexus between spa technology consumption and one's psychosocial and economic development. Goffman offers a more reliable tool in terms of understanding the dynamics of spa technology and one's psychosocial and economic development. From Goffman's line of thinking, the consumption of spa technology helps individuals to impress the audience who happen to be the significant others. In the process a lot is achieved psychosocially and economically when in the public arena (the front stage). The back or off stage are also rewarding in diverse ways to the technology consumer.

Nevertheless, as noted earlier on, the dramaturgy theory though overarching in scope also fails to explain the off-stage motivation for individuals' consumption of spa technology. Hence, there is need for further search of theories that can be leveraged to shed light on the consumption of spa technology solely for personal reasons outside the public mirror. The dramaturgy theory acquaints itself very well more than most of the theories consulted with reference to explaining processes involved in spa technology consumption and the individual's psychosocial and economic development. Therefore, there is need for a more rigorous and systematic theoretical engagement with the phenomena of spa technology consumption to obtain a holistic picture of the psychosocial and economic motivations for the consumption of spa technology.

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