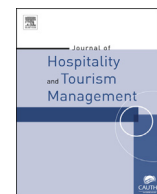




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Antecedents and outcomes of destination image of Malaysia



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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this paper is to analyse the antecedents and outcomes of destination image. Specifically, the antecedents considered are cultural values and destination source credibility; the outcomes considered are destination attachment, destination satisfaction, and revisit intention. This paper also investigates the moderating role of perceived risk between destination image and revisit intention. A questionnaire-based survey was conducted on international tourists from five countries of West Asia. The key findings of this study are the mediating roles of destination image, destination attachment, and destination satisfaction and moderating role of perceived risk. The results provide evidence concerning the role of mediators and moderators of the study. Theoretical contributions are discussed, with future research suggested.

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1. Introduction

Over the decades, an increasing number of tourist destinations have emerged, and investment in tourism related activities has increased. Throughout the world, development in tourist sector has been on the rise through continuous expansion and diversification, turning tourism into a key driver of socioeconomic progress through export revenues, creation of jobs and enterprises and infrastructure development (UNWTO 2013). With a 4.7% growth, 2014 marks the fifth successive year of vigorous progression of tourism sector on the average ever since the financial crises of 2009. One of the important factors that influence the tourists to choose one tourist destination over the other is destination image. According to Pike (2002), destination image plays a crucial role in a tourist's purchase related decision making and his/her satisfaction. Tasci and Gartner (2007) affirm that destination image is "an interactive system of thoughts, opinions, feelings, visualizations, and intentions toward a destination" (p. 200). A comprehensive image of the destination is formed by the interaction between these elements (Prayag & Ryan, 2011). Two questions are addressed in this research: What are the factors that influence formation of a

destination image? What does the destination image lead to?

Prayag and Ryan (2011) have comprehensively modelled the outcomes of destination image by considering place attachment, overall satisfaction, and revisit intention. They have argued that destination image has a direct effect and an indirect effect through place attachment on overall satisfaction and revisit intention of tourists. In the process of understanding how destination image leads to tourist's satisfaction and revisit intention, we are motivated by four major incidents linked to Malaysia that happened in 2014. The triple air disasters of MH370 (Malaysian airline flight that disappeared on its way to Beijing, China), MH17 (Malaysian airline flight that was shot), and QZ8501 (Air Asia flight that crashed) and the repeated kidnap cases in Sabah by armed militants from Philippines, have created an adverse impact on the image of Malaysia. These incidents and the aftermath bring forth an important question about the effect of perceived risk of the tourists on their revisit intention. In this research, we argue the need to study the role of perceived risk in light of the major disasters that afflict a country. A few attempts have been made to associate perceived risk to some form of destination image (e.g. Chew & Jahari, 2014; Lehto, Douglas, & Park, 2008; Lepp, Gibson, & Lane, 2011). Despite the significance of these issues, the examination of perceived risk and destination image within a single study is lacking (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Chew & Jahari, 2014) and this aspect has been addressed in this research.

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This study argues that the cultural values and destination source credibility are important antecedents of destination image. The psychological factors of tourists such as cultural values have a significant impact on the image of a destination (Lopes, 2011; San Martin and Del Bosque, 2008). The inclusion of cultural values as an antecedent is an opportunity to further strengthen the positive image of a destination and therefore, increase the likelihood of a particular destination being selected (Lopes, 2011). Destination source credibility has an influence on consumer attitudes towards products or service brands (Veasna, Wu, & Huang, 2013). Among the marketing practices related to tourism, the credibility of the source of destination branding is critical in shaping the overall attitude and behaviors of tourists towards a destination (Bianchi & Pike, 2011; Veasna et al., 2013).

Malaysia faces a stiff competition from a number of neighboring countries in the region that have similarities in terms of natural resources, tours, infrastructure, culture, traditions and hospitality (Badaruddin, 2009). The country is blessed with abundant natural resources, such as agriculture, mineral, and forestry. However, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC 2002), Amran (2004) and Mintell (2011), the major problem facing Malaysia's tourism industry is its image. Malaysian destination managers have a problem in selecting an ideal image to brand the country (Abdul and Lebai, 2010). This problem has been compounded by the disasters that shook Malaysia in 2014.

The contributions of this study are threefold. First, we have addressed the role of cultural values and destination source credibility as the antecedents of destination image. Earlier studies have looked at these constructs in isolation (Lopes, 2011; Veasna et al., 2013) and we have considered both the affective and cognitive dimensions of destination image as recommended by San Martin and Del Bosque (2008). Second, this study has analyzed the impacts of (1) destination image on destination attachment, (2) destination attachment on satisfaction, (3) satisfaction on revisit intention, and (4) destination image on revisit intention. Another significant feature of this research is the analysis of the moderating role of perceived risk between destination image and revisit intention. Perceived risk is a significant construct to consider if destination of a country or city suffers a setback because of major disasters. Third, this study has analyzed the mediating role of destination image between the antecedents (cultural values and destination source credibility) and destination attachment. Besides, this study has also analyzed the mediating role of (1) destination attachment between destination image and destination satisfaction and (2) destination satisfaction between destination attachment and revisit intention. The logical question at this point is: What are the research gaps and objectives that led to the development of framework and hypotheses? The next section addresses this question.

2. Research gaps and objectives

The central construct of this research is destination image. The image of a destination is considered to be a key determinant that has a relationship with the way tourists make decisions to select destinations they intend to spend their vacations. The concept of destination image can be facilitated by the strengths of a destination in the mind of potential tourists (Augustyn & Ho 1998; Hui, Wan, & Ho 2007). A number of studies have defined destination image as an individual's overall perception of a destination (Alhemoud & Armstrong 1996; Bigné, Sánchez, & Sánchez, 2001) and it has been identified to have a significant influence on decision-making (Um & Crompton 1990; Woodside, Frey, & Daly 1989). The importance of perception of tourists has been explained succinctly by Pike (2017) as follows: "perception is

reality, given what consumers believe to be true will be real in their decision making. Again, this presents challenges for emerging destinations that have little or no image in the market, or for destinations suffering negative perceptions. While negative perceptions might not be based on fact and actually be wrong, they nevertheless guide an individual's travel planning. Thus, whether a consumer's perceptions of a destination are correct is not as important as what that individual actually believes to be true." (p. 127). Therefore, destination image is a key determinant that influences the behavior of tourists towards a destination (Oh, 1999; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). This research addresses both the cognitive and affective components of destination image unlike some earlier studies (Veasna et al., 2013).

Veasna et al. (2013) have argued based on brand marketing theory that destination image has to translate to destination attachment of the tourist before it can lead to satisfaction. The emotional and physical attachments with the destination are keys to satisfaction and continuous patronage of a destination (Hou, Lin, & Morals 2005; Prayag & Ryan, 2011). According to Yuksel, Yuksel, and Biliim (2010), "tourists may develop attachment to a destination because of its ability in fulfilling specific goals or activity needs and/or because of its symbolic meaning and thus, attachment could be an important measure of tourist satisfaction and loyalty." (p. 274). Therefore, in this research, destination attachment is considered as an immediate outcome of destination image that translates into satisfaction and revisit intention of tourists.

Even though the literature on destination image has been studied for four decades, few studies have addressed the potential mediating role of destination image to advance destination image literature (e.g., Qu, Kim & Im, 2011; Veasna et al., 2013; Chen, Hua & Wang, 2013 and Chew & Jahari, 2014). As a result, the mediating effect of destination image remains widely unexplored in the field of tourism. Meanwhile, few attempts have also been made to extend theoretical attention to compare the mediating effect of destination image in relation to cultural values, and destination source credibility and destination attachment.

Much of the tourism literature has focused on destination image and there is a lack of research concerning the impact of culture on tourists' perceptions (Abodeeb, 2014). According to Chen and Tsai (2007), cultural values influence destination image and tourist behavior. Tourists from different cultural backgrounds tend to have differing perceptions about the same destination. Besides, the perception of a tourist destination is significantly influenced by psychological factors such as cultural values which have a significant impact on the image of a destination that is developed (Lopes, 2011; San Martin and Del Bosque, 2008). The inclusion of cultural values as an antecedent to destination image is an opportunity to further strengthen the positive image of a destination and therefore, increase the likelihood of a particular destination being selected (Lopes, 2011). Therefore, while studying the destination image of international tourists such as this study, it is essential to consider cultural values of tourists as an antecedent to destination image.

Few attempts have been made to associate perceived risk to some form of destination image (e.g. affective response in Lehto et al. (2008); organic image in Lepp et al. (2011); and effects of perceived risk of destination image in Chew and Jahari (2014)). Despite the significance of these issues, the risk literature has barely examined perceived risk and destination image as distinct constructs within a single study to understand their impacts (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Chew & Jahari, 2014). In this research, besides addressing the role of destination image on destination attachment, satisfaction, and revisit intention, the study also analyzes the moderating role of perceived risk on the relationship between destination image and the intention of tourists to revisit Malaysia.

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