



The Effect of Cognitive Image, Affective Image and
Internet Platform on Overall Destination Image of
Bako National Park, Sarawak

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The Effect of Cognitive Image, Affective Image and Internet Platform on
Overall Destination Image of Bako National Park, Sarawak

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DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. Except where due acknowledgements have been made, the work is that of the author alone. The thesis has not been accepted for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature of any other degree.

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ABSTRACT

Destination image is an impression held by individuals towards a tourist attraction. It has been a powerful affect to tourist as they may start their holiday by doing informal analysis of several destinations that they are considering to visit. The aim of this research is to examine the effect of demographic, cognitive image, affective image and internet platform to visitor and non-visitor of Bako National Park. The method used for data collection was convenience sampling where a total of 210 questionnaires were distributed at Kuching City. The respondent of this study are the visitor (those who have visited) and non-visitor (those who have not visited) of Bako National Park. Research framework was developed based on past studies and each variable were explained thoroughly. Moreover, the effect between variables were identified and examined using t-test analysis, one-way ANOVA and stepwise regression. The findings indicated that only several variables have significant effect to overall destination image and the results differ between visitor and non-visitor. It is revealed that the type of tourist whether they are visitor or non-visitor had no effect to overall destination image. As for visitor, variables such as affective image and internet platform had significant effect to overall destination image. Non-visitor on the other hand showed contradict result whereby cognitive image and affective image had significant effect to overall destination image. The research findings not only will help tourism operators to improve their understanding towards destination image held by visitor and non-visitor but it will also benefit them in planning and executing their management and marketing operations effectively.

Keywords: Affective image, cognitive image, destination image, internet platform

***Kesan Imej Kognitif, Imej Afektif dan Medium Internet Terhadap Imej Keseluruhan
Destinasi Taman Negara Bako, Sarawak***

ABSTRAK

Imej destinasi merupakan tanggapan individu terhadap sesebuah tempat tarikan pelancong. Imej destinasi memberi kesan yang kuat kepada pelancong kerana mereka akan membuat analisa mengenai sesebuah tempat tarikan pelancongan yang mereka berminat untuk kunjungi. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk menyiasat kesan demografi, imej kognitif, imej afektif dan medium internet terhadap pelawat dan bukan pelawat Taman Negara Bako. Kaedah yang digunakan dalam pengambilan data adalah persampelan mudah dimana sebanyak 210 set borang penyelidikan telah diedarkan di Bandaraya Kuching. Responden untuk kajian ini adalah pelawat (individu yang pernah melawat) dan bukan pelawat (individu yang tidak pernah melawat) Taman Negara Bako. Rangka kerja penyelidikan dihasilkan berdasarkan kajian terdahulu dan setiap pembolehubah telah dibincangkan. Kesan di antara pembolehubah telah dikenalpasti and dianalisa dengan menggunakan analisa ujian t, ANOVA satu hala dan regresi berkala. Keputusan analisa menunjukkan hanya beberapa pembolehubah yang mempunyai kesan signifikasi terhadap keseluruhan imej destinasi dan keputusan adalah berbeza diantara pelawat dan bukan pelawat. Pembolehubah yang mempunyai kesan signifikasi terhadap keseluruhan imej destinasi untuk pelawat adalah imej afektif dan medium internet. Selain itu, pembolehubah yang mempunyai kesan signifikasi terhadap keseluruhan imej destinasi untuk bukan pelawat adalah imej kognitif dan imej afektif. Keputusan penyelidikan akan memanfaatkan pengendali pelancongan dari segi perancangan dan pelaksanaan operasi pengurusan dan pemasaran dengan lebih berkesan.

Kata kunci: *Imej afektif, imej kognitif, imej destinasi, medium internet*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AF	Affective Image
AI	Amenities and Infrastructure
IP	Internet Platform
NC	Natural Characteristic
OD	Overall Destination Image
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Science

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The world has witnessed an upsurge in the tourism industry over the decades. For some countries, it is one of the most important industries as it becomes the largest contributor to their Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This growth has caused an expansion in the tourism products and other components such as transportation, lodging and food business which resulted in the significant growth in business and job opportunities, both to the locals and foreigners. Tourism has been one of the most rapidly growing service sectors and economic generators to Malaysia. This aspect has urged the Malaysian government to set tourism as a key sector in order to embrace Malaysia's long-term economic growth (Tang & Tan, 2015). In the 10th and 11th Malaysia Plans, tourism sector has been identified as one of the National Key Economic Areas (NKEAs) for transforming Malaysia into a high-income nation by 2020. Due to the tourism ability to drive Malaysia's economic growth and development, policymakers, therefore, have been focused on diversifying Malaysian economy in promoting inbound tourism.

In order to increase the number of tourists, it is of utmost importance for the country to identify the product that they want to offer and the way to promote it. Tourists are not able to know the existence of a tourism destination unless it is properly introduced and promoted. In that regard, destination image plays a major role. Kani et al. (2017) explain that destination image is one of the main factors that can drive tourists to visit a destination. Nowadays, tourists are keen to search for information about the tourism destinations. They would research various information regarding the destination prior to their visit. Hence, it is

essential to ensure that these information sources share attractive destination images because tourists often rely on this content when making travel decision.

Aksoy and Kiyici (2011) mention that it is necessary to continuously examine the effectiveness of a destination's image as it will help to determine the demand to visit a specific destination. The effectiveness is proven when the perceived image is similar to the one promoted by the tourism players (Mohamad & Ghani, 2014). The advantage of effective destination image is not only to differentiate a tourism destination to its competitors, but it also helps to attract the targeted market groups. Thus, tourism players play a major role to ensure that the destination image is promoted through various tourism information sources so that it is accessible to everyone. In 2017, Tourism Malaysia (2018) listed several best tourist sources of information; own experience (64.5%), friends or relatives who visited Malaysia (54.6%), internet (46.2%), friends or relatives living in Malaysia (32.5%), travel guide books (15.1%), travel agents (13.8%), airlines (9.1%) and business colleague (3.1%). With these data, Tourism Malaysia can certainly examine the effectiveness of destination image.

There are two ways to retain a competitive edge of a destination as proposed by Uysal et al. (2000); (1) create a new destination image, or (2) strengthen the established positive destination image as perceived by the tourists. Through a continuous analysis of destination image, tourism players can recognize the image perceived by tourist and it is important to ensure that it is a favourable and constructive image. Any destructive images have to be amended immediately and the launching of a new destination image is essential. A new destination image requires a lot of research whereby the destination has to develop a new product that can attract tourists to visit. If the established destination images are likeable,

there is a need for the tourism players to constantly maintain the images and take this opportunity to maximise tourist arrivals.

Malaysia has experienced several issues in regard to its destination image. According to Mohamad and Ghani (2014), in 2002, tourism industry in Malaysia fell short compared to neighbouring tourism destinations such as Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore. Furthermore, a report by WTTC (2002) states that Malaysia failed to portray a clear image as a tourism destination in contrast to Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore which are specifically known for its nightlife, unique traditions and entertainment respectively. These reports have triggered Tourism Malaysia to take an initiative to establish a more perceptible image that could represent the country in this highly competitive industry. For that matter, they rigorously promote Malaysia's ecotourism to the world.

In 2014, Malaysia faced several air tragedies and abduction cases. These terribly affected the country's image as a whole. The air tragedies include the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines MH370, the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines MH17 and the crash of AirAsia QZ8501 into the Java Sea. In addition, the country also witnessed continual abduction cases in several islands of Sabah. These calamities had tarnished the image of Malaysia and caused a major drop in the number of tourist arrivals in 2015. The total numbers of tourist arrival in 2014, 2015 and 2016 are 27.4 million, 25.7 million and 26.8 million respectively (Tourism Malaysia, 2018). Since then, Tourism Malaysia has been putting an enormous effort in reviving the tourism industry in order to cultivate a positive image to the tourists.

Malaysia is known as a nation rich in culture and biodiversity which lead to the growth of ecotourism. One of the top ecotourism attractions in Malaysia is the national parks. National parks, by their nature, are vital places for the protection of ecological systems and

natural resources as well as for the provision of recreational and tourism opportunities for the public (Manning et al., 2017). National parks throughout the world are recognized as an important tourism and recreational resources to local people and non-resident visitors (Manning et al., 2017). National parks in Malaysia are important recreational and tourism attractions to domestic visitors and international tourists. The first national park in Malaysia is Taman Negara and it was established in 1938. National parks in Malaysia have several unique aspects and they are mostly surrounded by mountains, waterfalls and thick forest that house rare species of flora and fauna.

Sarawak is the largest state in Malaysia that has the most totally protected areas (TPAs). These TPAs are operated by Sarawak Forestry Corporation (SFC) and it consists of 32 national parks, eight nature reserves and five wildlife sanctuaries. The primary aim of these TPAs is conservation. The main difference between these TPAs is that wildlife sanctuaries are strictly for conservation and research, so public access is limited. National parks, in contrast, are for tourism and public recreation. Nature reserves have the exact functions as national parks but are smaller in size, approximately less than 1000 hectares (Iman, 2005).

Some of these national parks in Sarawak are world famous. Bako National Park for instance, is remarkably known for its diverse ecosystems and Niah National Park is notable for its 40,000-year history of human habitation. Moreover, Mulu National Park is even listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site where its cave is one of the world's largest cave systems (Iman, 2005).

Apart from that, Sarawak is best known for its CAN – culture, adventure and nature. National park is one of the products of CAN and it is mostly located in the rural area. The relationship between rural area and tourism has been developed since the past few decades.

Nowadays, visitors prefer relaxing places to release their stress (Lin et al., 2014). Hence, ecotourism is the right choice as it offers nature setting which is a total opposite to the visitor's usual environment. Kamri and Radam (2013) state that visitors are interested to visit national park as it offers various range of activities, from easy strolling on the trails to dipping in the waterfalls.

However, people will not have the schemata of the national park if they do not have an image of it. A destination image is undoubtedly crucial because it gives people an idea of how a place would look like. Past studies addressed the importance of destination image in influencing tourist's travel choices (Baloglu, 1997; Souiden et al., 2017; Subandi, 2016). For instance, Baloglu (1997) states that the promotion on appropriate image would help tourist in making a favourable impression which will lead to a preferential travel destination. Additionally, any destination image promotions should include sociodemographic features in order to meet the demand of the targeted demographic group.

Tourists usually start their holiday by doing informal analysis of several destinations that they consider to visit. This process includes comparing information of the destinations that they gather from various sources such as attractions, activities, accommodations and transportations offered. Then, each destination will be evaluated based on the holistic images that come to their mind when they think of the destinations.

The image that the tourists have on a destination is important as it does not only manipulate their travel decision-making but also helps them to predict behavioural intentions of the locals (Stylidis et al., 2017). Lin et al. (2007) believe that tourist's decision on travel preference is subjected to their perceptions on the destination's cognitive and affective attributes.

To see how destination image and tourist behaviour are interrelated, it is of paramount importance to (1) investigate the factors that may affect visitor's and non-visitor's images towards a destination and (2) examine the effect of destination images in influencing tourists' decision for travelling to a certain destination.

1.2 Problem Statement

Tourism players realize that the destination image is vital to attract more tourists. Tourism destination products and services are intangible. They cannot be tested prior to purchase and this aspect has led to the importance of images. Consumers have to build their own image as it will lead to the purchase decision. Therefore, it is important for the tourism players to showcase more favourable images of destination in order to assist tourists creating images based on the existing information given by the marketers.

Tourism marketing strategies have been applied as one of the initiatives to create a positive and favourable destination image to potential tourists. Thus, it is better to understand the needs and wants of tourists when it comes to travel decision making. The possibility of tourists to travel to a destination is greatly influenced by the images and marketing activities. Kotler et al. (2017) mention that tourism marketers may change the current image of their destination strategically if they want to establish and strengthen the destination image. In order to enhance the image, tourism marketers have to be creative and innovative with their marketing approach. They have to be alert to the current trends and effectively engage with the reliable marketing tools such as internet platform as a medium to channel the destination images.

Besides marketing, there are also other components that influence the making of destination image such as socio-demographic. The common demographic variables used in

destination image studies are gender, age and education background. These variables can influence the way tourists form their destination image. For instances, females are said to be more comprehensive in building image compared to males; different age groups hold different images towards destination based on their needs; individuals with higher education level tend to have more refined destination image (Kim et al., 2018).

Yung-Kun et al. (2016) state that it is vital to take demographic components into consideration so the target market can be easily identified. Once they have been identified, tourism players can perform their roles effectively. The marketers can present specific information in regards to tourism destination which will help visitors and non-visitors in forming destination images. As a result, the destination management team is able to meet their customers' needs and wants by serving the best product that they can offer (Kotler et al., 2017).

There are studies that highlight the importance of destination image (Andersson & Abbasian, 2017; Jiang et al., 2017; Piramanayagam et al., 2020) and the focus is mostly on the destination images possessed by visitors. Visitor's destination images are created prior to their visit to and experience the destination. These images are easily created as long as the tourism destination has what it takes to fulfil the visitor's needs and wants. The initial image from the tourist will be developed according to the amount of information the tourists get throughout the information searching process. With sufficient information and initial development of the destination image, tourists will be able to make their decision to visit and the image will improve accordingly based on their visit experience (Kim & Chen, 2016). In that regard, the destination management team has a significant role in ensuring the promoted information becomes a reality. Consequently, it will make the tourists feel satisfied and there will be a possibility that they will revisit the place again.