

IMPACT OF DESTINATION IMAGE ON TOURIST SATISFACTION: THE MODERATING EFFECT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT)

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Abstract: Tourism is a multifaceted field and in order to understand its complexity, none of its components should be excluded. Based on the opinions and thoughts of tourists, this research aims to determine to what extent the destination image has an impact on the satisfaction towards that destination. Survey data was collected from tourists who visited key tourist attractions in Kuching, Sarawak. SmartPLS 3 was applied to assess the developed model based on path modeling and bootstrapping. The results revealed that political images, cultural images, and infrastructure factors on destination image are positively related to tourist satisfaction. It was found that information technology (IT) does not play any moderating role in the relationships between destination image and tourist satisfaction. Results further indicated that the tourism industry can be improved for getting satisfaction among tourists by offering a better development on significant destination image in Sarawak.

Key words: destination image, tourist satisfaction, information technology, tourism, Sarawak

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism plays a main role in contributing to economic growth which is an integral part of economic, social, regional and physical development. In 2018, tourism performance of the world grew 5% of international tourist arrivals which successfully reached to the 1.4 billion arrivals as well as generated USD 1.7 trillion of export earnings from tourism (UNWTO, 2019). Based on the fact, the tourism industry is one of the most important contributors to the growth of Malaysia (Kushwah and Chaturvedi, 2019). The tourism industry is the third-largest contributor in Malaysia which is accounting for more than 7.0% of the country economy. In 2018, the tourism industry has generated revenue with a total of RM 11.0 billion for Sarawak as well as contributed 7.5% to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Sarawak (DOSM, 2018). Based on the statistics provided by the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Sarawak, the visitor arrivals into Sarawak were decreased from 4.9 million in 2017 to 4.4 million in 2018. Sarawak consists of various resources, indigenous long-house cultures and famous with its colonial White Rajahs which could be the base for a formidable extraordinary interest tourism industry (Douglas and Douglas, 1999).

Moreover, countries that experience low levels of tourist satisfaction witness significant reductions in tourism businesses. Tourists will not revisit the same destination if they feel dissatisfied, which may cause a significant decline in the tourism economy (Khoshnevis Yazdi et al., 2017). The global competitiveness of the tourism industry has underlined the importance of destination image as one of the best ways to strengthen the competitive advantages of a destination as well as increasing the quality of tourism destination. Park et al. (2019) demonstrated that tourists reported lower satisfaction level with destination quality as well as its image after they have revisited the destination. This underlines the need for a better understanding of the factors that influence tourist satisfaction and revisit intention which are needed for developing a desirable destination in a region (Zainuddin et al., 2016). In this regard, the power of destination image is acknowledged universally due to its effect on perception, consequent behavior, and destination choice of tourists (Zhang et al., 2018). This connotation has accelerated tourism authorities and tourism destinations to constantly develop sustainable destination image among the tourists (Bornhorst et al., 2010; Buhalis, 2000; Pike and Page, 2014). Various ways could enhance tourists' visitation and one of them is through information technology.

The use of information technology may influence the stereotypical images of people to a certain destination and hence, information system (IT) is used as a moderator in this research to identify whether it has an impact on destination image delivery on tourist satisfaction. In short, this research examines the direct impact of destination image (political, economic, environmental, cultural and infrastructure) towards the tourists' satisfaction. The present study investigates tourists who visited Kuching Waterfront, Damai Beach, and Sarawak Cultural Village in the city of Kuching, Sarawak. By understanding the potential strengths and vitality of Sarawak tourism destination through destination images among tourist, this enables researchers to identify the main thrust in developing a tourism destination *competitiveness for Sarawak*.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESES

Social Exchange Theory and Tourist Satisfaction

Social exchange theory explains a framework which indicates how individuals are contingent on rewarding actions from others

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