FACTORS DETERMINING MUSEUM VISITATION DECISION
AMONG COMMUNITIES IN KEDAH

Nizar Bin Nazrin

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FACTORS DETERMINING MUSEUM VISITATION DECISION AMONG COMMUNITIES IN KEDAH

NIZAR BIN NAZRIN

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AUTHOR’S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. It is original and is the result of my work, unless otherwise indicated or acknowledged as referenced work. This thesis has not been submitted at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak or to any other academic institution or non-academic institution for any other degree or qualification.

Name of Student : Nizar bin Nazrin
Student ID No : 13020098
Programme Degree : Art Management
Faculty : Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts
Thesis Title : FACTORS DETERMINING MUSEUM VISITATION DECISION AMONG COMMUNITIES IN KEDAH

Signature of Student : 
Date : 
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To my family, for their love and support.

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ABSTRACT

Museum has long served as cultural bridges between past and future. Museums are reflections of a society as they are repositories of historical, unique, precious and significant objects and artifacts. As other leisure and learning competition such as art gallery and aquarium emerge, museums are finding themselves competing competitively to attract numbers of visitors. Global trends are showing stable or declining numbers of visitations and the types of people who visit them has remained the same. Museums are said to be focused on programs organized instead of understanding visitors. When museums failed to understand their visitors, they fail to attract new and recurrent visitors. This shows how important for museums to understand their visitors and tailor their program towards making visitors satisfied whenever they visit. At this juncture, museums need to find out why and what motivates visitors’ visitation to museums. The problem faced by Kedah Museum management is when the visitor’s amount is not equal to all its existing museums. The latest museum under their management which is the Muzium Padi received tremendous amount of visitors compared to other museums and this raised question of why visitors are keen to visit Muzium Padi which is situated nine kilometer away from city center and not other museums which located within the city vicinity. This research highlights on the decision making process which covered three factors influencing visitation decision, namely psychological influences, situational influences and sociocultural influences. Research was done on locals in the state of Kedah, Malaysia. Results of this study indicated that psychological influences are the most significant factor influencing visitation decision. The study confirmed that the feel of interacting in gaining information and experience excites visitors more than having majestic exhibition.
ABSTRAK

mengesahkan bahawa keinginan untuk mendapatkan ilmu itu lebih menyeronokan daripada hanya melihat pameran yang hanya gah dimata.
Table of Contents

Author’s Declaration i
Acknowledgement ii
Abstract iii
Abstrak iv
Table of contents vi
List of Tables x
List of figures ix

Chapter One INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction 1
1.2 Research Background 3
1.3 Problem Statements 4
1.4 Research Questions 8
1.5 Research Objectives 8
1.6 Scope
   1.6.1 Location 9
   1.6.2 Demography 9
1.7 Research Significance 10
1.8 Research Rational 10
Chapter Two LITERATURE REVIEW

2

2.1 Introduction 19
2.2 Tourism 19
2.3 Tourist 22
2.4 Economic Aspects of Museum 24
2.5 The Establishment of Museums 27
2.6 Roles of Museums 29
2.7 Museums in Malaysia 34
2.8 Museums in Kedah 37
2.9 Visitors Expectation of a Museum 39
2.10 Decision Making Theory 44
2.11 Psychological Influences 46
2.12 Situational Influences 62
2.13 Sociocultural Influences 78
2.14 Summary 83
### Chapter Three  RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Population / Sample</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Unit of Analysis</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Variables</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Data Analyses</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Pilot Test</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter Four  RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Profile of Respondents</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Museum Visited</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Reliability Analysis</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Descriptive Analysis</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Correlation Analysis</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Regression Analysis</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Five  DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5

5.1 Introduction  102

5.2 Recapitulation of the Study  102

5.3 Discussion of the findings

5.3.1 Reasons behind a visitor’s visit to museums in Kedah  103

5.3.2 The factors that influence visitor’s visitation decision process

a) Relationship between psychological influences with visitor’s visitation decision process  107

b) Relationship between situational influences with visitor visitation decision process  109

c) Relationship between sociocultural influences with visitor’s visitation decision process  112

d) The importance of all three influences as perceived by visitors in making their visitation decisions  114

5.4 Implication of study  114

5.5 Limitation of study  115

5.6 Recommendation and conclusion  116

REFERENCES  123

APPENDIXES  150
## List of Tables

1. Table 4.1  Demographic Profile of Respondents  
2. Table 4.2  Museum Visited  
3. Table 4.3  Reason of Visit according to museum visited  
4. Table 4.4  Reliability coefficients for the Major Variables  
5. Table 4.5  Descriptive Analysis  
6. Table 4.6  Pearson Correlation results  
7. Table 4.7  Regression Analysis
List of Figures

1. Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework 12
2. Figure 2.1 Statistic of visitors to Kedah Museums, 2013 60
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Tourism industry in Malaysia has grown by leaps and bounce. Recognized as a major source of revenue to Malaysian economic reawakening, Malaysia saw how tourism sector has attracted great number of tourist between both international tourist as well as Malaysian domestic travelers. Having a great strength in tourism product diversity, Malaysia has established a distinct image in the international tourism arena. Heritage and culture are among the niche products for Malaysia’s tourism development. Cultural tourism is a branch under tourism that promotes heritage sites, cultural centers and museums that represents a country. It represents local’s lifestyle, history, religion, economy, education and other elements that shape the local’s life. This new branch of tourism includes tourism in urban areas, especially historical cities and cultural facilities like museums and theatres and also tourism in rural areas such as traditional of indigenous cultural communities and their way of life (Rotich, 2012). Cultural tourism is significant as it celebrates, preserve and promote a state’s unique heritage, and boost economic development. Despite varied cultural tourism resources like performing arts and archaeological/historical sites, it was evident that these attractions have not found enough attention (Mohamed et al, 2005). Cultural institutions like museums should be capitalized to generate development of cultural tourism. As one of the main attraction of cultural tourism, museums contribute to the development of tourism as they work with cultural and heritage assets.
Museums’ inputs to the development in the field of cultural tourism are certainly significant and valid.

Museum has long served as cultural bridges between past, present and future. Museums are reflections of a society as they are repositories of historical, unique, precious and significant objects and artifacts. Museums are symbol of community pride. Most destinations’ cultures can be found in museums. Museums become an important part of a destination and in some cases museums are the destinations. Museums, particularly local museums play significant role in preserving, gathering, displaying and interpreting knowledge of artifacts that have historical values for the purpose of public view and learning process. Museums display objects of aesthetic to our sensory as well as to educate us visually, socially and historically. Although known as repositories of knowledge and objects, museums should now shift in taking the role as hosts who invite visitors inside to explore, encounter and learn. Museums need to be more audience-oriented to pull more visitors. In fact, since 1990s museums have changed their practices and policies to become more audience-oriented, behaving more business-like compare to the traditional museums where museums reached only small narrow and self-selected audiences (Mclean, 1997).

As other leisure and learning competition such as art gallery and aquarium emerge, museums are finding themselves competing competitively to attract numbers of visitors. Museums have the obligation to society in terms of preservation as well as to educate and entertain. Museums must reach out to larger audiences and proactively design arrangements, services and offerings that will able to generate visitors’ satisfactions and positive outcomes. Global trends are showing stable or declining numbers of visitations and the types of people who visit them has remained the same. From our daily environmental scanning to quantitative
research by global researchers on museum visitation, we can see that museum visiting is not evenly spread in our population and some museums have lost its attractiveness.

At this juncture, museums need to find out why and what motivates visitors’ decision making process to visit museums. As museums values changed with time, when museums are able to figure out all the reasons, it will have a great impact on the management as well as the service in which museums will be able to provide in the future. Addressing the above challenge will enable us to understand and suggest ways to make museums more attractive to visitor. Museums can be reposition once we have assessed the factors behind a museum visit.

1.2.  Research background

Museums in Malaysia were established as early as the 19th century. Started by the British, Malaysia’s first museum was opened in Taiping, Perak followed by a museum in Selangor (Hassan, 2005). Today, there are more than 100 museums built to keep and display collections on Malaysia cultural heritage consist of collection from diverse ethnicity of Malaysia, natural history and ethnography. The main objective of museums in Malaysia is to preserve the national identity and heritage, and to educate the community about it (Muzium Negara, 2014). These museums are either managed by the Federal or the State governments.

There are many museums situated in every states in Malaysia that showcase their own local culture and heritage. Kedah Museums have spent their entire effort in preserving the valuable cultural heritage of Kedah. Museums in Kedah have been positioned to respond to social pressures and to the needs of the society. These state museums not only preserves heritage but hold responsibility to inform and entertain. These museums are working under pressure from the
society in terms of representing them and they have to respond appropriately to be effective to the needs of plural society. Museum managements are pressured by lobbying groups for broad and full coverage of multicultural society histories (Hassan, 2005).

Clearly the rapid changes in time have forced museums to develop sophisticated techniques that can generate attractive exhibition to motivate visitor’s visitation. When all lifestyle and life attitude are changing, the philosophy and objectives of museum follows to change. To date however, these museums have found that general public is less keen on paying attention or getting interested towards museum’s exhibition.

Why the numbers of visitation has failed to improve or why the numbers start to decline? Literature reviews have identified several factors that determine a visitor’s decision making to visit museums. These factors include several psychological, situational and socio-cultural factors. It is important to researchers to focus their attention on visitor visitation decision process and it helps them to understand the factors that influences visitor of museums.

1.3. Problem Statements

In a book written by Hope & Hope (1997),’ Competing in the Third Wave’, there were three separate waves that changed the society today, first were the agriculture wave from 1750 – 1850, second wave the industrial wave 1850-1960 and the latest are the information wave 1960 – 2000. Societies today are keen towards quick information instead of requiring traveling and spending time acquiring one. Since the development of digital camera and internet, photographs can be snapped and uploaded instantly for the world to view (Moenius, 2013). People can simply view the situation of a place thousand miles away with a single click. Museums and libraries are
becoming obsolete due to this technology advancement. Most researches in the world had proved that museums are actually the economic regenerator where it helps to boost local economy through the visitors visit. (Smith, 1994). This proved that no matter how advance the technology surrounding the society, physical display such as museum are still needed in order to fill the content of the technology.

Undeniably, museums are important resource of tourism industry. Many tourism strategy plans had considered museums as the core element in the urban attraction and a crucial element in generating a good urban environment (Verbeke and Rekom, 1996). Museums act as social organizations that are involved in education, the economy, the community and family life. In most countries museums these days have taken on a more active role in justifying their existence compare to the past were museums were often well kept secrets and visited only by a minority of people.

Despite the above mentioned effort, almost every museum in the world face problems in attracting visitors. According to Farrell and Medvedeva (2010), barriers to visitations and participation in museums are due to historically-grounded cultural barriers such as it’s not a norm for certain community to visit museum and there were perception that only the elites visit such places (European Commision, 2006). On top of that, several other reasons why people are not visiting museums include no strong tradition of museum-going habits, lack of specialized knowledge and cultivated aesthetic taste to understand and appreciate what are perceived by many as elite art forms, the perception that museums are intimidating and exclusionary and no social network encouragement.
In Malaysia, the state of Kedah alone has six museums made available for tourists and locals visit. Out of these 6 mentioned museums, only one museum which is *Muzium Padi* has recorded an impressive number of visitations. (*Muzium Kedah*, 2013). Based on feedback given by Museums of Kedah Management, efforts made by them to attract museum visitors seemed inadequate. Ringgits spent on attractive marketing promotions and events were not able to change local perspective of Kedah museums. Locals do not view museums as an appealing attraction to visit. Based on that fact as well as on observation, it is fair to say that museums in Kedah are unable to attract visitors because they failed to understand reasons behind decision making of museum visitation.

In addition to that, personal observation and word-of-mouth has highlighted that museum management failed to understand factors that influences visitation decisions hence the insufficient development of attractive promotional strategies. Kotler & Kotler (1998) mentioned that by the early 20th century, museums have shifted its objective towards educational purposes. In modern time, museums have understood the function and evolved better in providing better and more memorable experiences. Visitors now expect more than just a normal display in a glass, they expect to get involve actively in the exhibitions, to learn informally and at the same time get entertained (*Caulton 1998*). Due to lack of attractive events, with dull display, gloomy ambience has made visitors dispassionate in visiting any museum at all. Kedah Museum was unable to recognize these mentioned factors that influences visitor’s visitation decision process.

The imbalance visitor’s amount visiting Kedah’s museums need to be address seriously as these problems could not be explain by the management. According to Senior Assistant Curator at Kedah Museum, Mr Zulkhiberi bin Mat (*Mat, Zulkhiberi, personal communication, June 12, 2013*), efforts had been made to promote all museums equally but the flow of visitors still heavy
towards *Muzium Padi* covering more than fifty percent of total visitors comparing to other museums (refer to appendix G). This had left the museum management puzzled as the location of *Muzium Padi* is out of town and it is nine kilometers away from the main museum (*Muzium Negeri Kedah*) where else all the other museums such as *Balai Senilukis Negeri Kedah, Muzium Diraja Kedah* and *Memorial Tunku Abdul Rahman* are located less than two kilometers away from the main museum.

With reference to the above mentioned problem, undeniably there is a link between psychological, situational and socio-cultural influences with visitor’s visitation decision making. And it is important for Museums in Kedah to identify whether all the three influences perceived as equally important by visitors in making their visitation decisions.

It was claimed that if these influences are present during the museum visitation decision process, visitor will have the tendency to visit museums more. Therefore, this research will try to uncover the visitation decision factors and correlate with the influences. This research hopes to give museums in the state of Kedah the opportunity to understand the dimensions of influences to ensure better numbers of museum visitations thus making them understand better on the visitor’s demands and needs.

The unsteady visitors’ amount visiting Kedah’s museums had raised inquiries from State Tourism Exco, Mr Aminuddin Omar (*Omar, Aminuddin, personal communication, August 14, 2013*). He questioned on the issue of why *Muzium Padi* received big amount of visitors but other museums received only small portion of the total visitors (refer to appendix G). This big question left a gap to the problem and there’s a need to identify and understand the visitor’s demands and needs. Before answering to this question, research need to be done to recognize what influence the visitors for visiting. It is significant for all to see the relationship between psychological,
situational and socio-cultural influences with visitor’s visitation decision and in future to plan and strategize better in segregating the visitors equally to all museums in Kedah.

1.4. Research Questions

This research explores visitor visitation decision and what influence the decision. It is to determine whether it correlates with each other. As the museums strive to maintain their reputation and establish its name in the industry, identifying ‘what effecting visitor visitation decision and what influence them is critical. This leads to the following main research questions.

1. What are the reasons behind a museum visitation?
2. What are the factors that influence visitor visitation decision process?
3. Are all the three influences perceived as equally important by visitors in making their visitation decisions?

1.5. Research Objectives

From the literature review, there are almost no researches done on in identifying the visitation decision of the museum’s visitors in Malaysia. As a result, this research is carried out with the main objectives of understanding the relation between museum and the visitors. This research specifically aims;

1. To identify reasons behind a museum visitation.
2. To investigate the factors that influence visitor’s visitation decision process.
3. To determine whether all three influences perceived as equally important by visitors in making their visitation decisions.

1.6. Scope of Study

This study will be focused on museum and narrowed down to visitor’s visitation decision.

1.6.1. Location

Location where this research was done was around Museums in Kedah (managed by Kedah State) approximately within five to nine kilometer radius in Alor Setar, Kedah and also other main district like Sungai Petani, Kedah. Empirical studies such as museum visits and interviews with curators and museum’s staffs in understanding how neighboring state museums handling the same issue were also done with Penang State Museums, Terengganu State Museums, Pahang State Museums, Selangor State Museums, Melaka State Museums and also Sarawak State Museums. Furthermore International’s Museums community were visited and interviewed to get a different perspective like museums in Istanbul, Turkey, museums in Jogjakarta, Indonesia, museums in Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam and museums in Vientiane, Laos.

1.6.2. Demography

Respondents of this research were from Kedah state’s community which comprises students from age 18 and above, government servants and private sector workers to differentiate income background. Marital status of respondents was also identified to understand the family influence.
1.7. Research Significance

This research has not been done by any researcher and it can help museum management to improve attractiveness and profitability of museums as well as contributing to the well-being of surrounding economy. Kedah museums will become part of tourist itinerary thus helping the museum with its objective to deliver knowledge or information to the society. Through this flow of tourists, it will benefit the local businesses. Impact of a well-managed museum will also flourish local community in terms of social development through the understanding of their background culture and heritage.

The research will also help to make individual visitors aware that their visitation decision could be influenced by psychological, situational and sociocultural factors. It will serves as a tool for other researchers to understand more on the visitation decision that will help their research on developing marketing strategies for other area.

1.8. Research Rational

Maintaining a museums do involve overhead cost that rises every year depending on materials costing (cost of renovation and setup), human resource (salary), preservation, articulation and up to exhibition of artifacts. Most public museums did not make profit directly due to free entry, but did contribute in local economic through tourism. Non-profitable government agencies or bodies who maintain the museums are vulnerable of being shut down like what had occured in United Kingdom, where Members of Parliament debated on the rising cost of maintaining museums and whether they should or not shut down the entire museums in
United Kingdom. This research will investigate the reasons behind a visitor’s museum visit, obstacles that stop visitors from visiting museums. By exploring why community least visit state run museums, we will be able to provide suitable solutions and suggestions to state museums so that they can remain relevant for more centuries to come and perhaps become a tourism magnet that will benefit Kedah State as a whole.

1.9. Limitation

In order to control the result outcome from straying away from its main objective, few limitations have been set.

1. This research is limited to community 10 kilometer radius within Kedah Museums and Sungai Petani town only with 300 respondents thus might not represent the majority of the community intended.

2. This research is limited to understand the reasons and causal that influence visitor’s visitation decision aspect of the Museum thus might not represent the actual reason of problem occurred.