

Tourist Expectation on UNESCO World Heritage Sites Brand Signals in Malaysian Historical Cities

Salmiah Abdul Hamid, Qistina Donna Lee Abdullah, Teo Miaw Lee

Abstract: *The UNESCO World Heritage (WH) brand signal uses a recognisable WH symbol which communicates with the public. However, there are limitations which most visitors tend to be unnoticed of the existence of the symbol. The emblem of UNESCO WH is known as the symbol that represents the World Heritage sites under the 1972 World Heritage Convention. Even though one of the primary functions of the symbol is an identifier of properties inscribed in the UNESCO WH list, there is still lack of awareness among visitors to the WH sites especially in Malaysian WH cities. In this article, the authors explore the participatory research method through interviews with the visitors around two WH inscribed historical cities in Malaysia; Melaka city and George Town city. The authors not only draw through the transcripts of interviews among visitors/tourists but also take note of participants' observations through visual method at the WH cities. The empirical data from the on-site participatory research methods uncover the experiences through the lenses of researchers as well as the tourists. The findings of this research show that the WH brand signal are unnoticeable by the tourists due to the visibility of the WH signal and lack of awareness. This research can be used as a guideline in establishing the 'UNESCO' brand in Malaysia.*

Index Terms: *Brand signal, Tourist expectation, UNESCO World Heritage Sites*

I. INTRODUCTION

The brand identity which includes the 'visual appearance and communication' is reflected through the brand owner. It is illustrated by statement of [1] that;

"The UNESCO designation of World Heritage Sites is used for national aggrandizement and commercial advantage within the international competition for tourists, more often than it is a celebration of an international identity."

In 2006, the UNESCO Creative Cities Network which was convened in Santa Fe, New Mexico highlighted that term 'creative tourism' as "travel directed toward an engaged and authentic experience, with participative learning in the arts, heritage, or special character of a place, and it provides a connection with those who reside in this place and create this living culture"[9]. However, in a field observation conducted by [7], the authors discovered that none of their study locations in Australia applied the WH mark (symbol) throughout the site or external road signage. WH logos or

emblem are not being used fully by authorities due to restrictions of law and regulations [5]. Since the inscription on Melaka and George Town Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca in 2008, there have been development of conservation and management plans and structure to maintain the World Heritage Sites in the UNESCO list. The George Town World Heritage Incorporated is an organization that was set up by the Penang State Government to manage the site by working closely with all relevant stakeholders [4]. Thus, in their plan of maintaining and preserving the George Town as the historical city in Malaysian, the organization has also included 'wayfinding system' as part of their programme to "improve and unify the signage of sites of importance within the World Heritage Site" [6]. This shows how important the WH brand as to encourage and attract more tourists to Malaysia. In order to further investigate experiences of tourists who visited the Malaysian historical sites as inscribed by UNESCO, the following research question is used as a guide for this study: What are the factors that determine the reliability of the signages?

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The researchers have adopted the case study approach [12] and the sites for data collection are selected according to the frequencies of visitors at the locations in Melaka and George Town cities. There are two main zones which are outlined by UNESCO as to maintain the sustainable use of resource through collaborative management as illustrated in Figure 1. The zones are divided into Core and Buffer Zones [11];

- i. **Core area(s):** securely protected sites for conserving biological diversity, monitoring minimally disturbed ecosystems, and undertaking non-destructive research and other low-impact uses (such as education);
- ii. **Buffer zone(s):** Buffer zones are an important tool for conservation of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List. All along the history of implementation of the World Heritage Convention, the protection of the "surroundings" of the inscribed properties was considered an essential component of the conservation strategy, for cultural and natural sites alike. The World Heritage Committee valued the concept and included it into the Operational Guidelines as one of the elements to be considered in the preparation of a nomination proposal.

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Salmiah Abdul Hamid, Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Kota Samarahan, 94300 Sarawak, Malaysia.

Qistina Donna Lee Abdullah, Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Kota Samarahan, 94300 Sarawak, Malaysia.

Teo Miaw Lee, Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Kota Samarahan, 94300 Sarawak, Malaysia.

