Tourists' Experience of Visiting Malaysia: An Analysis of Travel Blogs Using the Tri-component Model of Destination Image

Rohani Hashim[a*], Bahiyah Omar[b], Hosam Al-Samarraie[c]

[a] *School of Communication*[*], *Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia*
[b] *School of Communication, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia*
[c] *School of Design, University of Leeds, Leeds, United Kingdom*

*Corresponding author

Abstract
Bloggers tend to use various travel blogs to share their travel experience with others. Tourists' feedback about their visit have become an important source for acquiring travel information. Evidence shows, however, there is not much research done on tourists' experience of visiting Malaysia. This study used the Tri-component model of destination image to understand travelers' views about their visit to Malaysia. We used and analyzed 50 travel blogs written personally by foreign tourists. The results showed that feedback collected from travel blogs can offer a rich source of information to understanding tourists' perceptions of the place and willingness to recommend it to prospective tourists. We also found that the first-hand experience of travel bloggers as depicted in their blogs is a representative of the real thoughts and feelings of tourists, and their positive feedback affected the intention of potential visitors to visit Malaysia, as well as motivated experienced visitors to re-visit the country. By curating positive reviews, Malaysia's tourism can leverage travel blogs to build positive destination image awareness and loyalty. The Tri-component model led us to the conclusion that certain cognitive components would enhance individuals' perceived destination, thus leading the readers to experience a positive destination image perception. For the affective component, the expressions written in the blogs and the pictures accompanying the texts, enabled readers to experience the appeal of the country and even solicited their travel intention. Through the conative component, readers who already trusted the bloggers can be influenced by their suggestions to visit the destination. This paper presented empirical findings on the importance of travel blogs for tourism destination image in Malaysia.

1. Introduction

Tourism industry in Malaysia is very important and it accounted as at one of the largest sources of income from foreign exchange (Munan, 2002, The Star, 2012). In 2019, Malaysia received a total

of 26.1 million international tourists with the international tourism receipts of 19.8 billion USD (World Tourism Barometer, 2020). As a result, Malaysia has been ranked by United Nations World Tourism (UNWTO) as the 15th most visited countries in the world (World Tourism Barometer, 2020). However, Malaysia recorded an 84% decrease of international tourist arrivals in 2020, as compared to the arrivals recorded in 2019 (Tourism Malaysia, 2021, *International tourist arrivals*). The massive drop in the number of international tourist arrivals is attributed to the closure of Malaysian borders since 18 March 2020 in response to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic (Tourism Malaysia, 2021, *International tourist arrivals*).

In ensuring Malaysia remains as a major tourist destination, during the post-pandemic period, efforts must be made in promoting the image of Malaysia as a tourism destination. The image that exists in the mind of a tourist is a contributing factor in ensuring Malaysia as a major tourist destination (Kamarus et al., 2014; Ahmad et al., 2012). One of the methods in evaluating Malaysia as a tourist destination image is through on-line travel referrals such as travel blog. Travel blog is a consumer-generated media (CGM) or also known as user-generated content (UGC) which is user friendly and accessible freely. A survey done by PhoCusWright (2009) discovered that nine out of ten tourists read on-line reviews on tourism products and services before making any travel choice. It has been reported by several travel-related studies that the on-line travel referrals have changed the behaviour of tourists and can even have a significant influence on travel decisions (Gretzel, 2011). It clearly depicted the growing importance of travel blog within the travel industry as it offered substantial implications for the marketing of tourism destinations.

It is important to know what tourists think about Malaysia as a tourism destination and its offerings. However, it is very difficult to assess their feedback due to the lack of research on it. In Malaysia, there were a few research related to travel blogs. Kamal (2008) studied the role of blogs as a media alternative for propagation of information in the tourism industry by interviewing respondents in Johor Bahru. Senutha and Nor Hafizah (2017), explored female travel bloggers in Malaysia with strong self-sense of confidence and assertive voice to inspire others through their writings. A gap remains with a study focusing on Malaysian travel bloggers to understand their behaviour and strategies at the pre-visit stage of tourist experience (Rahman et al., 2019). A work which is closely

related to this current research was carried out by Wong et al., (2017). However, they evaluated the on-line destination image for Malaysian Borneo as projected by 25 travel blogs. Therefore, there is a need in studying the feedback and attitudes of visitors who have spent time in Malaysia. As Carson (2008, 112) remarks, "Feedback from visitors helps reveal the strengths and weaknesses of a destination."

Empirical studies on travel blogs have explored its psychological effects, stressing that travel blog could influence human cognitive processing and increase viewer attention to destination. Many researchers (Munar, 2011; Marine-Roig, 2014; Pan and Crotts, 2007; Choi et al. 2007; Douglas and Mills, 2006; Woodside et al., 2007) asserted that travel blog could motivate consumers to action and increase destination image recognition. However, these researches were done mostly in the western countries. In Malaysia, Ramzan and Jusang (2021) identified the extent of a travel blog (affective, cognitive, and interpersonal interaction in the blog) that could potentially affect the reader's desire to travel to a particular destination. However, the research evaluated only two travel blogs written by Malaysian bloggers and the data was collected using an on-line survey. Given the paucity of previous research on travel blogs, this study aims to explore international travel bloggers' cognitive, affective and conative visiting experience in Malaysia and exploring the relative impact on the readers.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In the second section a review of the important literature on travel blogs as destination marketing, Word-of-Mouth (WOM), and Travel Destination Image (TDI) is conducted. The third section of this paper gives an overview of how the study was conducted after which the findings are represented and analysed within the Tri-component Model of Destination Image. Also answers to the research questions are discussed in the conclusion that summarizes the presented study.

2. Literature Review

Travel Blog as a Destination Marketing

In planning a trip, blog is an important source of information (Carter, 2017) as it provides informal travel information source known as Word-of-Mouth (WoM). WoM is very important in

convincing prospective independent travelers to make travel purchase decisions (Carson, 2008). Travel blogs may be seen as more representative of the 'real' thoughts and feelings of consumers (Rak, 2005) which are not influenced by commercial interest. Sen and Lerman (2007) asserted that consumers trust peer consumers more than advertisers or marketers. This argument is supported by the result of a survey done by Carnoy (2017); the survey showed that 89% of millennials planned their travel activities based on content posted by their peers on-line.

Travel blogs provide primarily text information on the internet that describe tourists' experiences of their travel. This may include personal travel stories, commentaries on specific destination visited and recommendations supported by photographs and sometimes video and audio files. It is often updated and displayed in chronological order. Travel blog is interactive and allows sharing content with potential visitors (Lange-Faria and Elliot, 2012). This interaction can be done by posting comments, receiving feedback from readers and engaging others in the communication (Pan and Crotts, 2007; Cobanoglu 2006; Kelleher and Miller, 2006).

The travel blogs information can heavily influence the image and the reputation of a tourist destination (Pan and Crotts, 2007). If a travel blogger is unhappy about a service, the blogger might write negative feedback in his/her blog, thus, the information he/she shared with a large number of potential customers might ruin the reputation of the place (Russell, 2010). Therefore, blogs are seen as more credible source of information by tourists than professional guides (Johnson and Kaye, 2004). Hence, travel blogger is the communicator of marketing messages, a source of customer opinion and feedback which have been shown to be effective in destination image marketing (e.g. Munar, 2011; Marine-Roig, 2014; Pan and Crotts, 2007; Choi et al. 2007; Douglas and Mills, 2006). Travel blogs are also useful to monitor visitor's characteristics and attitudes towards a specific destination (Lange-Faria and Elliot, 2012) and valuable for Destination Marketing Organization (Woodside et al., 2007).

Travel Destination Image (TDI)
Travel Destination Image (TDI) has been widely accepted as an important variable that will influence an individual's decision to determine an appropriate tourist destination (Gallarza, et al,

2002). When a tourist visit a place, he or she has a compilation of ideas, knowledge, beliefs, perception and impressions about the destination (Gartner, 1994; Munar, 2011; Banyai, 2012; Chen et al. 2014; Marine-Roig and Clavé, 2016, Huete and López Ruiz, 2020). Thus, destination image is based on the image perceived by the visitors about the destination (Baloglu and Mangaloglu, 2001). The image formation is built up in the mind of the visitors by picking up pieces from messages, personal perceptions and experiences of the place, as they see it (Pike, 2008). It is also affected by recommendations and experiences from friends and family which is known as Word-of-Mouth (Chen et al., 2014). Their influence, in general, is based on the perceived credibility by the consumer (Banyai, 2012).
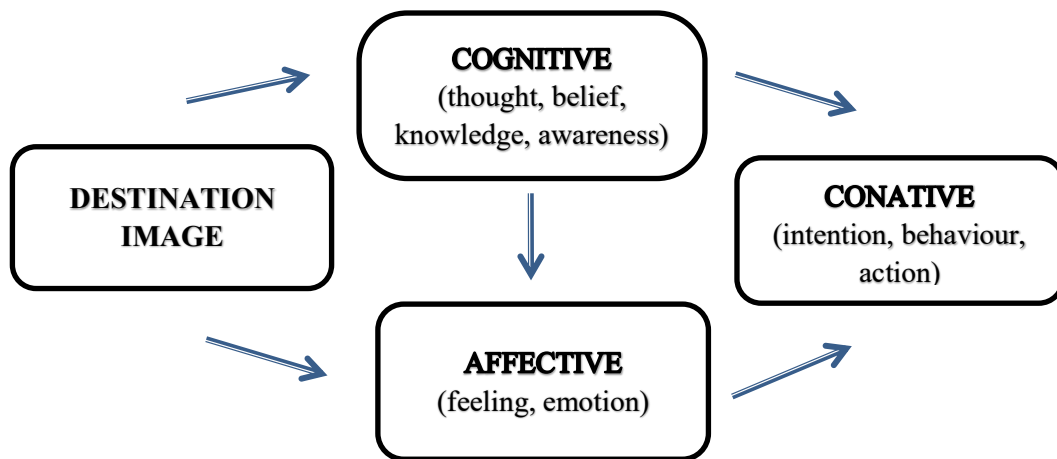

Figure 1 Tri-component Model of Destination Image

In analysing the travel blogs about Malaysia, the current research employed the Tri-component Model of Destination Image (Lavidge and Steiner, 1961; Gartner, 1993; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Schneider and Sonmez, 1999; Kim and Yoon, 2003; Tasci et al., 2007, Pike, 2008; Marine-Roig and Clavé, 2016). This model is used to study tourist behaviour with the help of destination image and the above-mentioned researchers argue that it contributes towards the formation of a complete and holistic image of a tourist destination. The Tri-component Model of Destination Image is widely used in understanding the formation of destination image through User-Generated Content (UGC) platform, and most prominently through travel blogs (Choi et al., 2007; Jani and Hwang, 2011; Kladou and Mavragani, 2015). It is also observed that the travel blogs are often

followed by queries, comments and reviews of potential tourist's regarding the destination. Meanwhile, Baloglu and McCleary (1999) further explain that the strength of TDI can shape rational and/or emotional interpretations (Pike and Page, 2014) that may not only influence pre-tourism decisions but studies over time also reveal that TDI also influences current experience (on-site travel experience) and as well as post-visit intentions (De Nisco et al., 2015; Prayag et al., 2017). Thus, the TDI as depicted in travel blogs which is analysed using the Tri-component Model of Destination Image can be a tool for marketers to increase the effectiveness of marketing activities to potential tourists (Akhoondnejad, 2015; Chiu et al., 2016).

The theory of TDI formation is composed of three main components of destination image, namely: cognitive, affective and conative (Lavidge and Steiner, 1961, Gartner, 1993; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Schneider and Sonmez, 1999; Kim and Yoon, 2003; Tasci et al., 2007). The cognitive dimension is the mental component and it refers to tourist's thoughts, knowledge and beliefs regarding the destination (Lavidge and Steiner, 1961). It may be affected by previous knowledge, and it shows awareness (Lavidge and Steiner, 1961). Gartner (1993) pointed that most image studies dealing with tourism employed attribute lists to assess the cognitive component of a destination image, which can be seen in buying behaviour processes where customers search for information and get the knowledge regarding the product or place to purchase. When a tourist wants to visit a place, he plans the trips for various aspects and infers his thinking ability. The thinking process comes under the cognitive component.

The affective dimension is based on tourist's feelings and emotions about the knowledge and destinations (Gartner, 1994). These feelings can be either neutral or positively or negatively charged (Marine-Roig and Clavé 2016; Banyai 2012; Pike, 2008). Thus, the image of a place is formed as a result of both perceptual (cognitive) and affective assessments of that place (Pike, 2008). After visiting the destination, the visitor gives feedback of the place he visited and shares it to others. This feedback infers his emotions and feelings of the place. If the feedback is positive, it may motivate others to visit the place and this comes under affective component.

The conative component is related to behaviour and is often seen as an action component that tourists tend to do in relation with the destination (Um and Crompton, 1990; Gartner, 1994), and refers to how tourists act on the information (Pike, 2008; Marine-Roig and Clavé, 2016). The action usually depends on the image perceived through cognitive and affective components (Pike, 2008; Ghazali and Cai, 2013). In other words, this component emphasizes possible behaviour toward a destination based on cognitive and affective influences (Tilaki et al., 2016). In addition, Lavidge and Steiner (1961) asserted that conation includes conviction and purchase. In past research studies on image formation of a destination, researchers have linked a conative component on tourists' satisfaction and loyalty to a destination, or desire to revisit the original destination (Tosun et al., 2015; Papadimitriou et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2014). Collectively, the three major components of image formation manifest what visitor knows about the destination (i.e. cognition), how the visitor feels about what is known (i.e. affect), and how the visitor acts in relation to cognitive and affective stimuli (i.e. conation) (Tasci et al., 2007). After getting motivated, other people may decide to visit the place, and this decision comes under conative component.

3. Methodology

The research is based on a quantitative approach which allows the researcher to understand the views, attitudes, and behaviours of the visitors (Middleton, 2009). The data analysed in this research were extracted from travel blogs which is one of the most prominent on-line travel review platforms. Purposive sampling was used, and the blog posts investigated were collected for 12 months, from January 2019 to December 2019, using the following steps:

The first stage in the research was aimed to locate relevant blogs relating to Malaysia tourism through Google search engine, with the keywords: "Top Travel Blog Malaysia". The first 100 results returned. From the list the researcher then selected the specific individual blogs' pages (entries) within the blog classified as referring to travel in Malaysia. Each selected travel blog must have an article about travelling in Malaysia. Blogs with no article on Malaysia were eliminated.

Only blogs which were owned by individual and represented personal publication were chosen. The relevant blogs were not obviously commissioned, paid for, or written on behalf of a commercial entity. The reason being, personal journal blog is the only one that possess almost UGC. Many scholars noted in their studies that on-line travel reviews are perceived as providing more honest and reliable information than content put forward by tourism organizations or accommodation providers (Munar and Jacobsen, 2013; Park et al., 2007). Other types including corporate blog and government blog may be created in-house or by external professional bloggers, and is more or less commercial, factual or political oriented. The marketer-generated sites were perceived as sending messages from a biased party. Therefore, travel blogs other than personal journal blog were excluded from this study. The blogs must be noticeable and visited. The blogs which are quietly stagnate, the content remains static for months and unvisited are dropped from the list.

The corpus analysed in the text under investigation consists of reviews posted in English. In this technique the researcher identified keywords and then systematically searched the corpus of text to find all instances of the words or phrases. A corpus (the plural form of this word is corpora) is a collection of machine-readable, authentic texts (including transcripts of written data) which is sampled to be representative of a particular text (McEnery, et al., 2006). Thus, the corpus in this research is a collection of texts in blog posts which were carefully selected to capture different aspects of traveling in Malaysia, which the researcher wanted to investigate. The selected entries were imported into NVivo file. NVivo helps the researcher to organize, analyze and visualize the texts, unstructured information and image data from the blog entries by providing tools for classifying, sorting and arranging the data in ways that enable the identification of themes and patterns (NVivo, 2021, *Using NVivo*).

The relevant words captured in the blogs' entries were coded at nodes. The nodes represented codes, themes or topics about the data in the blogs (Wong, 2008). For each relevant blog, an author demographic profile was taken, and for this purpose data on the following variables were recorded: blogs' name, URL, nom de guerre, gender, age, occupation, country of origin, travel party type, number of authors and, in the case of multiple authors, their relationship. And any additional

information such as date of blog started, number of articles written about Malaysia, destinations visited, activities participated in, number of words, number of comments and number of photos were also coded. The researcher, then, not only read the blog entries page-by page, but also and more importantly, searched them to find out the frequencies of different words and phrases in these texts.

Next, the data is analysed using the Tri-component Model of Destination Image: cognative, affective and conation. As mentioned above the Tri-component Model of Destination Image is widely used in understanding the formation of destination image and most prominently through travel blogs (Choi et al., 2007; Jani and Hwang, 2011; Kladou and Mavragani, 2015).

4. Results & Discussions

Travel Bloggers' Profiles

The search for travel blogs about Malaysia resulted in 416 blog entries with rich content and were written by 50 different authors. From these 416 valid blog entries, there were a total of 246 comments and 2841 pictures. The travel blogs under studied were recent media for personal publication and have specific content about travel in Malaysia. All the blogs are self-indulgent, regularly maintain, updating and have bright new content. Blogging styles are also varying from more traditional travel blogs that are sharing useful information to visitors, giving tips for what to do, suggestions on what attractions should be visited, lists of places to visit within limited times to blogs that share more personal stories. The blogs have started in various years, as earliest as 2005.

As illustrated in Figure 2, a trend in the population of travel bloggers' behaviour is reflected in our samples. Author profiling revealed that 62 per cent of the international bloggers in this study were travelling alone, with a further 20 per cent of all blogs were written by couples (usually one male and one female) who were travelling together. There were six family groups (12 per cent) and only one group (6 per cent) who co-wrote the blogs. A total number of 31 of the bloggers were solo travellers. Female solo bloggers stood at 59% of the solo blogging population, while male solo represents the remaining 41%. The findings also suggested that more entries were written by

female solo bloggers. This matches the studies of Perseus (2003) and Herring et al. (2004) as they report that more than half of all blog authors are women.
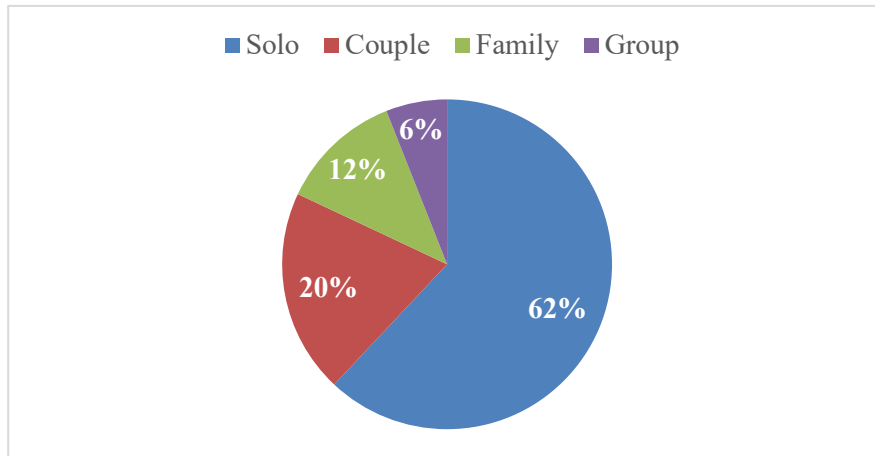

Figure 2 Travelling Behaviour

Locating information about the age of blog authors was difficult because only a few bloggers mentioned their ages. In addition to stated ages, age ranges were inferred from information about life cycle stage (graduation from university, working experiences and so on) and photos of the authors. Using these methods, it is estimated that over 67% of blog authors in the blogosphere were aged between 21 and 39 years old. A slightly lower percentage of bloggers, 24%, falls into the 40-50 demographic group, while the smallest portion of the blogging population represents bloggers who are 51 and up (9%). The profiles resemble that mostly international visitors were backpackers or youth travellers. In fact, several bloggers described themselves as such. This finding is in accordance with InsightXplorer (2007), which reported that generally blog users were less than 39 years old (70.3%).

As regards to foreign travel bloggers place of residence, Figure 3 showed their continent of origin. The findings indicated that the largest international travel bloggers who posted entries about Malaysia were shared by Europeans (36 per cent). The next largest entries were shared by North Americans (34 per cent), followed by Asians (20 per cent) and Australians (10 per cent). In the current study, it is noted that the majority of bloggers (70 per cent) are from North America and Europe.
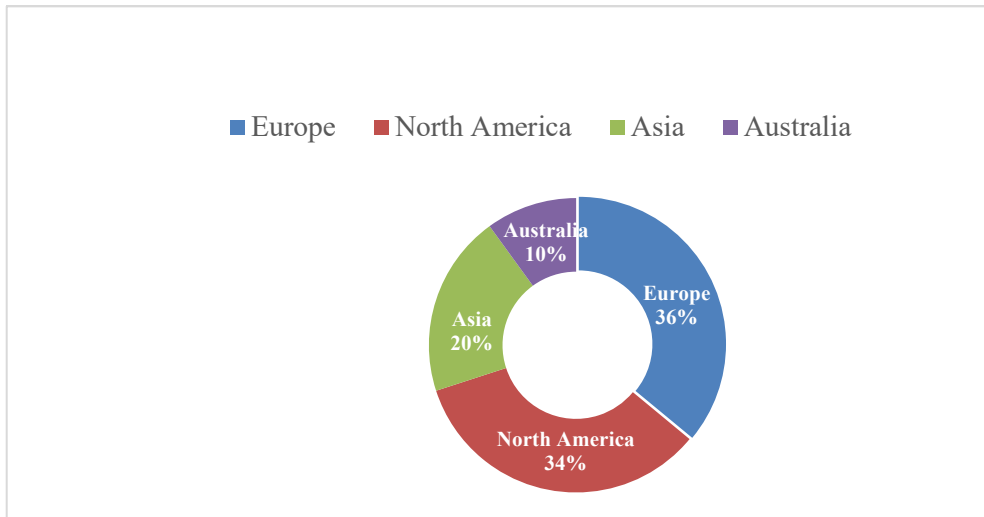
Figure 3 Continent of Origin of Travel Bloggers

The 50 blogs had entries relating to 416 unique travel articles about Malaysia. Most of the blogs contained multiple destinations, with new entries for new destinations visited. There were at least one entry to 75 entries about visiting to Malaysia featured in popular travel blogs as of December 2019. Only two of the blog authors wrote just one entry about Malaysia with multiple destinations.

Migrationology ranked first among popular blogs in the world which posted the most articles about Malaysia with 75 entries. *Migrationology* is written by Mark Wiens who has already received a high volume of views in his YouTube channel, has a large social media follower and capable of bringing in millions of traffic to his blog. Originally from Arizona, USA, Weins based in Bangkok and revisited Malaysia more than six times due to his interest in the country especially the food (Wiens, 2020).

Where's Sharon ranked second travel blog which has the most articles about Malaysia with 36 entries. This happened because Sharon and her family, who are Australians, were in Malaysia for many months, had visited Malaysia on multiple occasions while running an on-line business (Sharon, 2020). Similarly, the owner of *Home is Where Your Bagis* are two Germans named Tobi and Marcel (Tobi & Marcel, 2020) whose travel blog also ranked second in the list with 36 entries.
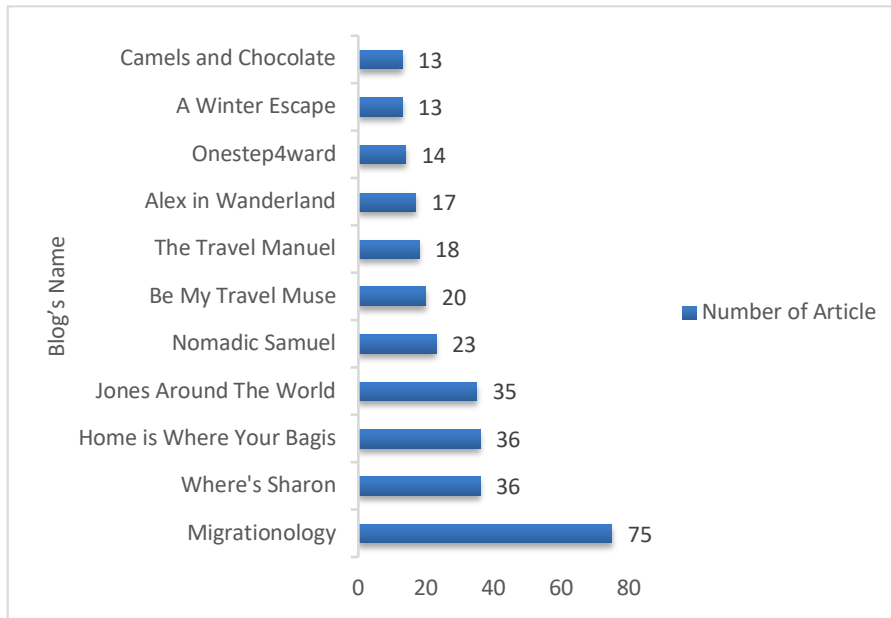
Figure 4 Ranking of Travel Blogs with the Most Entries About Malaysia

Jones Around The World with 35 entries, ranked third among the top blogs with the most articles about Malaysia. While travelling, Jones who is originally from Southern California worked as a web designer and registered as an on-line university student while travelling in Southeast Asia (Jones, 2020). In the current study, it is noted that the top rank bloggers are from English-speaking countries who tend to be Caucasian.

Destination Image

In order to get the result, the analysis is done by employing the Tri-Component Model of Destination Image by dividing them into three components: a) cognitive images b) affective images, and c) conative images

a) Cognitive Images

The first category of analysis provides subjective information on the cognitive images component. The cognitive images examine the nature of the mind and how mental processes influence behaviour (Holt et al., 2015). In this view, humans' actions are governed by thought. Buck (1988) defines cognition simply as knowledge. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) noted that the cognitive component refers to beliefs about the nature of the object and its relation to other objects. The

valid and reliable measures of knowledge and belief could be obtained by having the bloggers judged the destination on a series of feedback in their entries: blogs' content, places and activities.
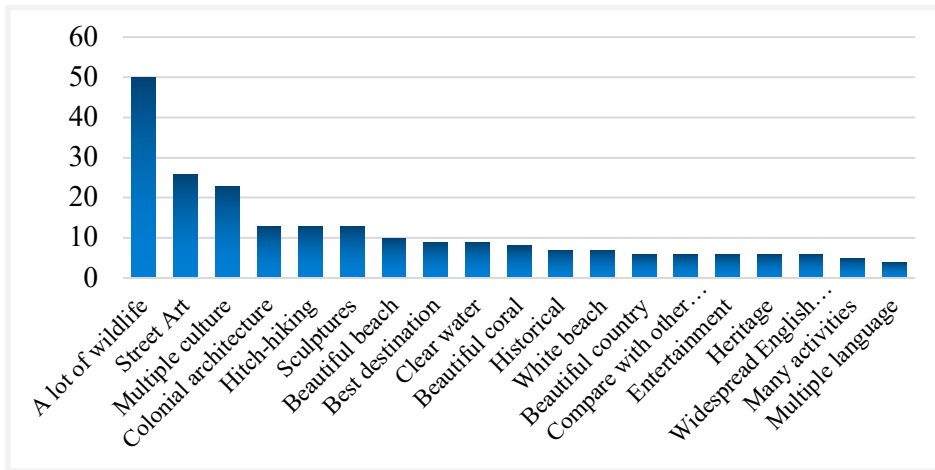

Figure 5 Most Popular Blogs' Content

This research counted the frequency of words used in the blog contents. From Figure 5, it is evident that "A lot of wildlife" is the most frequently used word in the blogs with a total of 50 nodes out of 428. In fact, "Street art" is no less impressive when it comes in second rank, with 26 nodes and "Multiple culture" were ranked third, with 23 nodes. Words about "Colonial architecture", "Hitch-hiking"and "Sculptures" were ranked fourth with 13 nodes each.

These findings indicated what were the primary attractions in Malaysia. Specifically, foreign travelers were likely to perceive Malaysia as a destination that abounded with a unique wildlife, street art, multi-cultural society, beautiful environment, colonial architecture and historical sites. Within our expectation, delivering knowledge does have a significant influence on the perceived destination image in the context of travel blogs.

Based on the blogs posts, Langkawi ranked first among the most popular place visited by travel bloggers during their trip with a rate of 28 per cent. George Town was the next most popular with 21 per cent rate. The third most visited place was Cameron Highlands (19 per cent), followed by Kota Kinabalu (9 per cent), Port Dickson (7 per cent) and Mersing (7 per cent).
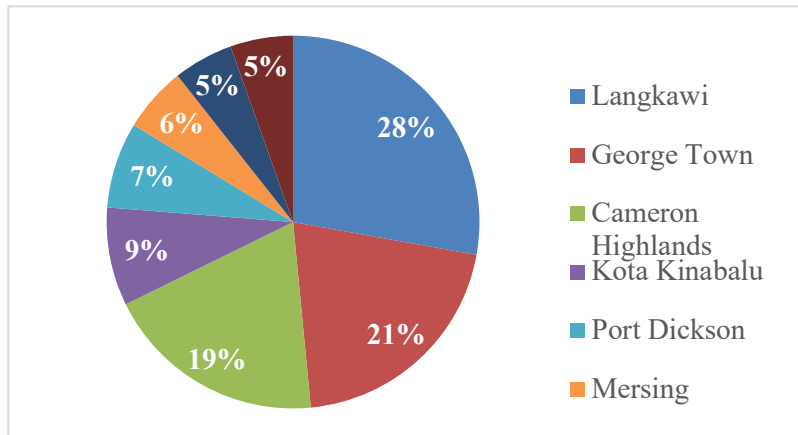
Figure 6 Most Visited Places

This study provides incontestable evidence that travel blogs could assist in establishing readers' cognitive destination image by presenting useful guides, such as suggesting cities to visit, what the cities have to offer as its tourism products and how to get to the cities.
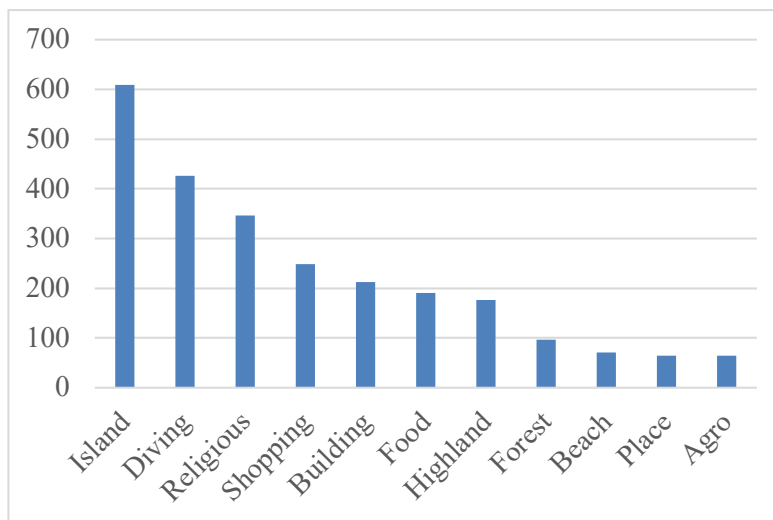

Figure 7 Most Activities Participated

In addition to places of attractions, the international travel bloggers wrote about their outdoor activities while on trips in Malaysia. Exploring island made up the most favourite outdoor activity that international travel bloggers engaged in while in Malaysia. Diving made up the second most favoured activity in Malaysia, followed by religious activities, shopping, visiting buildings, eating

food and highland tour. It can be concluded that visitors liked to pick islands as their favourite getaway.

Travel blogs in this study have provided information and delivering knowledge relating to tourism product. It could help readers to understand Malaysia's native wildlife, natural environment, multi-cultural heritage, local arts, local culture, local people, lifestyle and customs. It helped the readers to know where to find the beautiful islands and landscapes, good shopping places, quality accommodations, sight-seeing activities, good food, efficient tourist infrastructure and information about weather. As a result, it could be inferred that high evaluation of delivering knowledge will enhance the perceived destination. Accordingly, it is anticipated that the more guides travel blogs provide, the more likelihood that readers will have a positive destination image perception. This is consistent with the prior research on tourism that had interpreted perceived cognitive image from the standpoint of local culture and history (Beerli and Martı́n, 2004a, 2004b; Chen and Tsai, 2007; Rittichainuwat et al., 2008).

b) Affective Images

The next category of analysis provided subjective information on the affective image component. Experiencing appeal is another variable concerning building affective images; in this study, it referred to the extent to which reading travel blogs could cause readers to experience feelings of pleasure, excitement and attraction. Thus, the travel bloggers' feeling upon visiting and most photographs posted in their travel blogs were extracted from the texts. There were various words given by travel bloggers about the image of Malaysia and the detailed is explained below:

Figure 8 shows the words most frequently used by visitors about Malaysia's tourism products. The results of the study found that the average tourist gave positive words. The expression of 'Great' (24%) charted the most. Next words that are often used by visitors to describe Malaysia's tourism products are "Love" (18%), "Beautiful" (16%), and "Fantastic" (12%). Terms such as 'Enjoy', 'Cheap', 'Delicious', 'Friendly' and 'Happy' were commonly attached to descriptions of scenery, building, attraction, shopping and eating. These positive words indicated that Malaysia has a bright potential to shape its image as a top tourist destination.
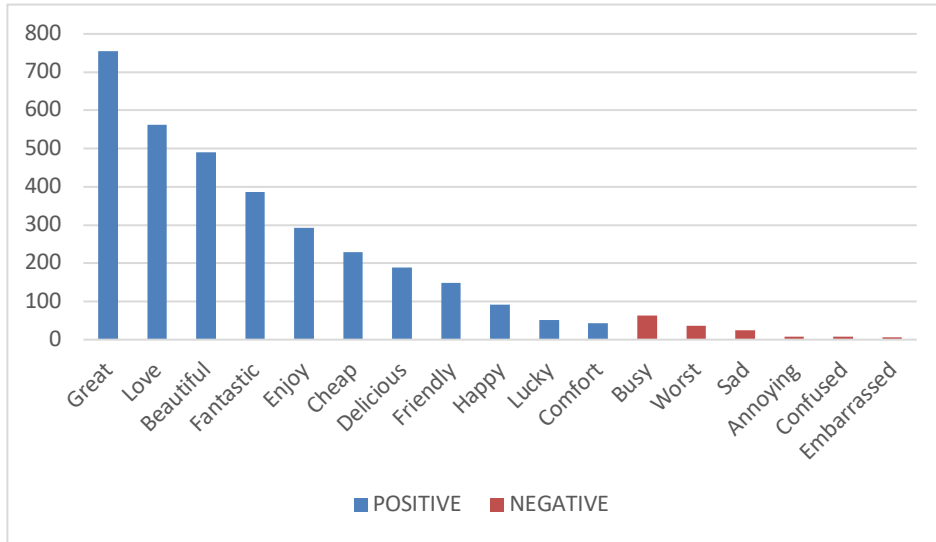
Figure 8 Travels Bloggers' Feeling Upon Visiting Malaysia

However, there is a few negative responses also linked to the stories of the sites in blogs. While these do not really affect the overall positive opinion, they include issues such as: 'Busy' (43%), 'Worst' (25%), 'Sad' (17%), 'Annoying' (6%), 'Confused' (5%) and '*Embarrassed' (4%)*. Although there are also negative words, it needs to be eliminated. For the small amount of negative response, one should keep in mind that these postings are small in number but can be large in impact. So, it is still important to take concern on this negative information.

The content of travel blogs under studied is composed of writers' stories and travel pictures. Moreover, many of the bloggers are photographers and journalists. Of the 22 travel bloggers' professions extracted in the study, 8 professions were found to be photographers and 3 were journalists. Travel bloggers are the journalists and the key influencers in the tourism industry (Marwick, 2016). Based on the research, majority of the bloggers cared about the needs of pictures accompanying the presentation of travel stories. It was found that 100 per cent of bloggers showcased their vacation photographs in their posts. The quality of pictures taken are pleasant, attractive and attention grabbing. With that, their approach could induce readers to generate emotional identification with the bloggers and enabled visitors to experience the appeal of the

country, thus, encouraged the readers to build affective destination image and encouraged their intention to visit the country. The following analysis has the details.
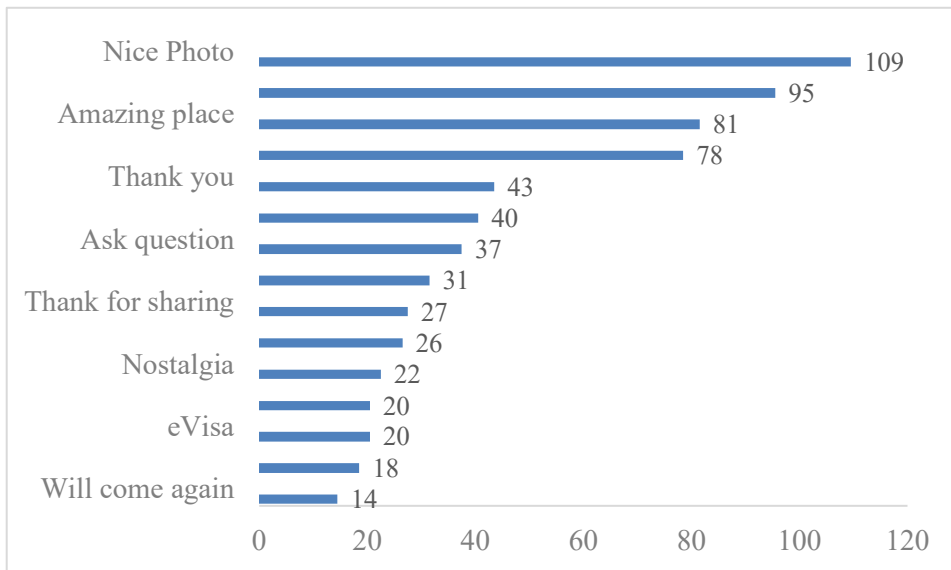

Figure 9 Comments by Readers on Content Posted by Bloggers

The findings revealed that most of the readers stated that they have been fascinated by the "Nice photos" posted in the blogs. The bloggers' stories about the places visited were also defined as inspiring and motivating, full of information for reference as the key words are: "Amazing place", "Thank you", "Ask question", "Thanks for sharing", "Nostalgia", "eVisa" and "Will come again".

These personal travel blogs with impressive photos enabled visitors to experience the appeal of the country and even solicited their travel intention. From a reader's point of view, the degree of appeal is a sort of affective evaluation, such that this study anticipated that a higher level of experiencing appeal is associated with a stronger destination image perception. Thus, the expressions of the travel blogs and the pictures accompanying the texts have positive effect on the perceived destination image. The findings of this research are in accordance with the findings of Lin and Huang (2006).

C) Conative Images

To measure conation responses such as the readers' intentions to visit the destination, readers' comment was employed. Readers' comment is important in travel blogs because it reflected that a

cyber community was formed and opened the opportunity for interpersonal interaction. The research found that all the comments in the travel blogs were mostly from people unknown to the authors, and often people who are authors of travel blogs who were active in writing comments on several blogs. The readers shared their experiences the bloggers reportedly had in Malaysia specifically related with the places visited by bloggers.
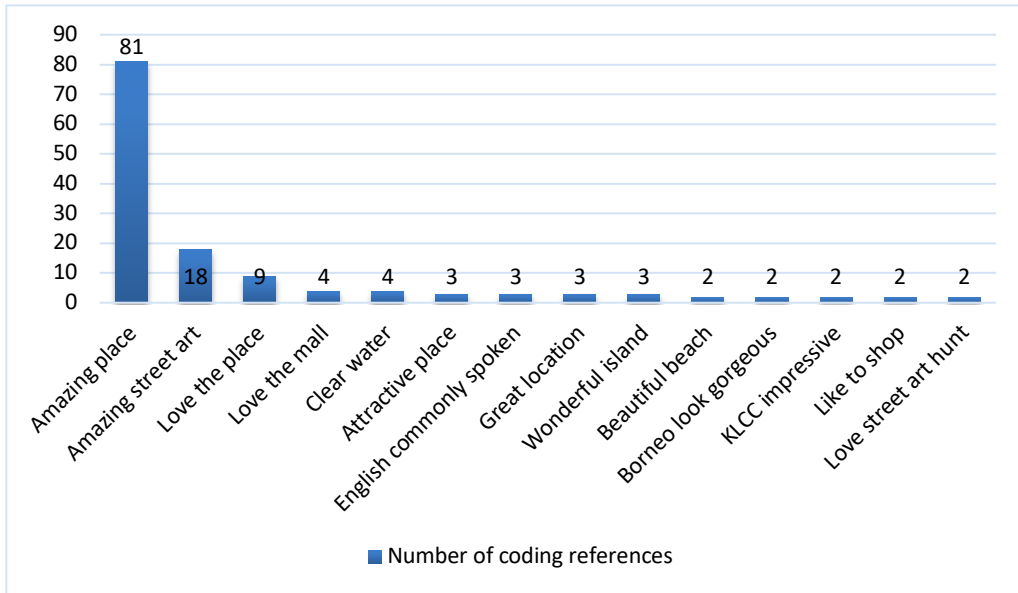

Figure 10 Readers' Comments on Places Visited by Bloggers

The readers gave comments on the places discussed by bloggers. The most common expressions by the readers were "Amazing place", followed by "Amazing Street art" and "Love the place". Other comments include: "Love the mall", "Clear water", "Attractive place", "English commonly spoken", "Great location", "Wonderful island", "Beautiful beach, "Borneo looks gorgeous", "KLCC impressive", "Like to shop" and "Love street art hunt".

From the data above, most readers gave positive feedback after reading the positive reviews of bloggers who visited Malaysia and solicited their intention to visit Malaysia as witnessed in Figure 8. The findings of this research are in accordance with the findings of Kassean and Gassita (2013), Kaplanidou and Vogt (2007) and Fakeye and Crompton (1991).

The feelings (affection) of travel bloggers towards the destination and their future action (conation) towards the destination had significant influence on potential tourists. Furthermore, reviews/queries seeking cognitive information were influenced mainly by the information provided in the blogs. The reviews and queries related to cognitive information were related to the action (conation) of the potential tourists towards the destination. This implies that the potential tourists who seeked and reviewed cognitive information about the destination were more likely to visit the destination.

The findings of the study revealed that potential tourists are more inclined to find information about the destination that invoked cognition and affection process. This study suggests that the formed cognition (knowledge gathered) from the recommended destination image and the intensified affect (feeling) from specific components of a destination (i.e. Malaysia) could incline visitor to act in regards to the destination image. The implication from this analysis is that a visitor with intensified cognition and affection will be influenced on conation as purchase behavior (i.e. intention to visit) when using travel blogs as stimulus. The findings also confirmed that travel blog plays an important role in the formation of visitor's attitude.

5. Conclusion

The results of this study have successfully highlighted the image construction of Malaysia as a tourist destination from the perspective of travel bloggers which also resembled the visitors. From this study we found that most of the bloggers are young travellers or backpackers under the age of 39 and majority of the bloggers are female solo travellers. The research found that most of the bloggers were from Europe, followed by North America, Asia and Australia and it showed that the findings of this research is inconsistent with the past researches. The top 10 travel bloggers posted as many as 73 entries. Those who wrote many articles were return travellers and were in Malaysia for a long haul either through studying in Malaysia or spending a long holiday in Malaysia.

There are bloggers who are making money by blogging. All the bloggers were not attached to any commercial organization but doing it on personal basis. Although women outnumbered men in the

travel blog population about Malaysia, men travel bloggers, who tend to be white, dominated the "A-list". It seemed that they were more influential, and most likely benefit more from blogging compared to women bloggers.

The Tri-component Model of Destination Image employed in the analysis was relevant. The travel bloggers have reflected on various aspects of tourist experience during their visits to Malaysia. According to them, Malaysia offered unique wildlife, artistic patrimony, multicultural society, beautiful scenery and quality infrastructure. Island getaway, diving, religious site visit, shopping, city sight-seeing and food tasting were visitors' favourite activities. Result shows that Malaysia is positively evaluated by their visitors and their reviews reflected more genuine opinions of tourists. The high evaluation posted by them enhanced the perceived destination. Accordingly, it is anticipated that the more guides travel blogs provide, the more likelihood that readers have a positive destination image perception.

The findings of the study found that affective images have been built among readers. This study suggests that travel blog could influence consumer perception of a destination image and purchase the product. By reading the travel blogs and seeing the impressive photos of the destinations, the readers experienced feelings of pleasure, excitement and attraction. That is to say, image published in the blog played an important role in human cognitive processing and, moreover, evoked specific types of positive emotions such as arousal. This study suggests that the formed cognition from the recommended destination image and the intensified affect from specific components of a destination could incline consumers to act in favour of the destination image.

Through the conative component, in which action could be taken, the bloggers have recommended the readers to visit Malaysia. Their posts in travel blogs could be representative of the real thoughts and feelings of the tourists because the blogs provided detail about tourists' expectations and satisfaction. In the travel blogs universe, once the author is considered as a trusted voice within the community, his/her point of view could influence readers' perceptions regarding the product or destination. Readers relied on the communication based on interpersonal relationships (Word-of-Mouth) in order to get the product information. Thus, we cannot ignore the development of

user-generated content, word-of-mouth, peer-to-peer web applications and cyber communities on travel blogs as one of the main tools for rating a destination. The research has identified Word-of-Mouth recommendations as a key source of trip planning information for a range of travel market segments, especially independent travel markets which includes backpackers and solo travelers. The findings in this study are comparable to previous research's findings that subsequent purchase behaviour is driven by intensified cognition and affection when consumers developed a strong and stable affection based on specific feature-based information from a reliable source, and by cognition generated from an evaluation process when consumers are highly involved with the product.

In order to continue become a tourist attraction in the post-pandemic period of Covid-19, various efforts need to be made in improving and enhancing the attractiveness of tourism destination. Travel blogs inevitably implied to be a vital tool to combat and revive the industry from the aftermath of the current pandemic. Predominantly travel blogs engagement can play an important role in spreading positivity. These findings support the study of Romagosa (2020) and Yu et al. (2021) as to them "Prioritizing social media and other digital platforms (e.g. blogs) as a source of inspiration could expedite the resurgence process of the tourism industry in the post-pandemic era in an effective manner." It is, therefore, clear that travel blogs represent a precious source of information, which cannot be overlooked by tourism management. By curating positive reviews, Malaysia's tourism can leverage travel blogs to build positive destination image awareness and increased destination loyalty. This study presents a validation of the importance of travel blogs in the enhancement and promotion of Malaysia as a tourism destination.

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