Awareness of Kuala Lumpur as a Cultural Destination

- Influence of Information Source on Awareness and Behavioural Loyalty of Locals and Domestic Tourists -

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[ABSTRACT]

Cities around the world have been very competitive in branding themselves with many identities in order to target a wider market of tourists. Kuala Lumpur is an example of a city that has created awareness as a shopping, MICE, and leisure destination but not much has been said relating to the cultural diversity of its offering. Tourists may not be aware that Kuala Lumpur can be recognized as a cultural destination because other cities in Malaysia like Melaka has a higher global status as a cultural heritage destination compared to Kuala Lumpur. However, there are plenty cultural offerings in Kuala Lumpur that can be marketed and yet the awareness for these places is low even among the locals. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the awareness of Kuala Lumpur as a cultural destination amongst the locals and domestic tourists and to determine if information sources such as promotional materials and marketing campaigns by the cultural places play a role in contributing to the awareness and loyalty behaviour of locals and domestic tourists. A survey was conducted through self-administered questionnaire that was distributed within various states in Malaysia to identify the perceive image and awareness of Kuala Lumpur. The results of this study showed that locals and domestic tourists had low awareness of Kuala Lumpur as a cultural destination. This information is useful for destination managers to clearly understand the perceived image and awareness of locals and domestic tourists and how the information provided is useful in influencing their visiting behaviour.

Key Words: Information Sources, Destination Awareness, Behavioural Loyalty, Domestic Tourists.

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Introduction

Branding in commercial goods is nothing new but branding in destinations has been a relatively hot topic over the years among hospitality and tourism researchers (Carlo, Canali, Pritchard and Morgan, 2009; Brooker and Burgess, 2008). Many of the destination branding research activities have been developed to identify and evaluate branding strategies that can work for different profiles of a destination in order to compete with top destinations. These are vital for destination managers in sustaining the destination. However, for development of branding strategy to take place, one would want to know how much is known about a destination or what can the destination be branded as? This leads to the idea of destination knowledge, which has been a popular research stream that emerged from destination branding.

Most of the time, when tourists are selecting a holiday destination of their choice, they tend to refer to sources such as friends’ or family members’ recommendations, media sources or even through travel operators. These information sources have been linked to influence tourists’ behaviour (Lee, Floyd and Shinew, 2002; Fodness and Murray, 1999; Snepenger, Meged, Snelling and Worral, 1990) and it relates to the amount of knowledge that a tourist can gain in understanding the destination. Hence, information sources are relatively an important aspect of destination knowledge and in contributing to the awareness of the destination. A tourist with greater awareness of a destination may have an easier decision making in terms of destination choice. In addition, a high awareness tourist would very likely be willing to share information with potential tourists to a destination. A lack of awareness for destinations can eventually lead to lower interest from tourists and in the long run, the destination may not be able to sustain because tourists have not heard of the destination and are not sure what they can gain from visiting that particular destination. In some cases like Kuala Lumpur, the lack of awareness of all tourism offerings can actually reduce the opportunity for building additional appeal in other tourism offerings such as the cultural places, which have not been extensively promoted.

Kuala Lumpur has been promoted with various images as a shopping, MICE and leisure destination. However, little emphasis has been given to the cultural places in Kuala Lumpur because cities like Melaka and Penang have a higher global cultural status compared to Kuala Lumpur. Even in the Tourism Malaysia website, not much has been mentioned relating to the cultural places in Kuala Lumpur except Istana Budaya. In the website, the word modern sophistication is being used to introduce Kuala Lumpur and the Petronas Twin Towers have been used as the icon to represent Kuala Lumpur. This can create little awareness for the cultural places in Kuala Lumpur to both domestic and foreign tourists. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the awareness of Kuala Lumpur as a cultural destination amongst the locals and domestic tourists and to determine if information sources such as promotional materials and marketing campaigns by the cultural places play a role in contributing to the awareness and loyalty behaviour of locals and domestic tourists. The objectives of this study is of threefold: (1) to identify the current awareness of locals and domestic tourists towards the cultural places in Kuala Lumpur, (2) to determine if information