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Destination Image through the Perspectives of Travellers to State of Perak, Malaysia

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Abstract
In selecting tourism destination, travelers based their decisions on the perception of destination image attributes which they received from multiple information sources. Thus, the objective of this study was to explore and identify the dimension of *image as* perceived by travelers to the state of Perak, Malaysia by employing an exploratory factor analysis. The results exhibited that local attraction and facilities is the main indicator that attracts tourists to Perak followed by natural setting. The findings also showed the need for facilities maintenance and development of quality infrastructures and facilities while minimizing detrimental impacts on the natural surroundings. This study confirms that 'affective construct' of destination image is the highest indicator that attracted visitors to state of Perak. Henceforth, strategic image management should be in place in both designing and implementing advertising, promotional campaign and maintaining the infrastructure. Implications for marketing as well future development of tourism in Perak are discussed and presented in this paper.
Keywords: Tourist, Travelers, Image.

Introduction
The advancement of destination images is developed through the creations of tourist memories, experiences, facts and figures thru various information sources (Jamaludin, Azlizam, Mariapan, & Lin, 2017; Jamaludin, Azlizam, Yusof, & Idris, 2013). These destination images would shape and develop over times. Hence, it will construct a strong mental impression later, would influence a decision making process by potential individuals to a preferred destination. Researchers in the past five decades have demonstrated that destination image is a powerful, integral and influential factor to boost tourism destinations worldwide. It is accepted as one of the major concepts in predicting tourist behavior. From destination marketers' point of view, image represents a useful construct to design effective destination marketing programs as well as to

develop tourism products through multiple information sources including mass media and social media (Jamaludin, Azlizam, Mariapan, & Lin, 2017).

Tourism in Perak
Currently, tourism organizations in the state of Perak remain uncertain with destination image after two decades of long term campaign to boosts tourism image in the state. Each year the state authorities face stiff challenge from other states in Malaysia to charm and impress as many guests as possible to visit to their destinations. It has become a modest industry due to the presence of enormous selection of destination especially in the presents of communication technologies and convenience transportation systems (Pikkemaat, 2004). Further, destinations image in the state are not correspondingly well to benefit the accelerations among local tourist even though in 2017 Perak received the highest domestic visitors among all states. The local and federal organizations, profit and non-profit organizations are responsible together for destination development and promotion. They need to be aware the destination image for state of Perak must be coherent with the promotions and development. Frequent changes on the destination promotion create confusion among visitors. Knowledge about how the state's images was being perceived by the travelers would help to identify the position of its destinations in the mind of the targeted market and possibly will lead to a stronger repositioning strategy as needed

Literature Review
Image
The importance of destination image among tourist is extensively accepted since it touches general prospective visitors' personal perception, resulting positive behavior towards the place (Echtner & Richie, 1991). The evaluation of destination image can help marketers to identify the competitive advantages of their destination, help to predict tourists' behavioral intentions thus provide critical insights for managing and developing tourist destinations (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). Destination image has been used extensively by tourism marketers as a basis to segment market. It is also being known as a key selection factor for visitors decisions making in vacation (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Chen & Tsai, 2007).

Visitors and guest that have positive image of a particular destination are more likely to select that destination for vacation (Aliman, Hashim, Wahid, & Harudin, 2014). The destination image signifies the tourist expectancy of the destination. Affirmative image would promise the tourist a pleasing experience and memorable memories in the future. For sure, the beautiful memories will be shared and passed to friends and families. This perception would lead tourist to develop an attachment to the destination. The most accessible target markets are among travelers that perceive optimistic and positive images perception.

Image Components
The important of image formations in tourism has encouraged many researchers to forward many behavioral theories based on those previously developed by psychologist for further testing and validation. Most believes that destination images consist of mainly cognitive and affective dimensions (Baloglu & McCleary, 1997). Cognitive is a term which psychologist reserve for the

process that includes perception, thinking, problem solving, and the organization of information and ideas (Holbrook, 1978). In tourism image, cognitive could be based on any functional, structural, elemental or physical characteristics of destination.

The affective component refers to feelings travelers have placed on destination including factors like comfort, safety, serenity, enjoyable, friendliness of hosts and cool surroundings (Sonmez & Sirakaya, 2002). Findings from an earlier research conducted by Jamaludin, Johari, Azlizam, Kayat, Yusof, (2012) in Perak proposed the image for the state to be in consistent with natural environment as the main attractions that draws travelers the state ,mainly through the use of the North-South Highway. Coban (2012) further validated and supported the notion that mode of transportation and facilities would bring in more demand for travelers to a designated tourist area. She further stated that image have direct effect towards satisfaction and loyalty. However, image as mediator was not tested in their framework.

Conceptual Framework
The framework for destination image is using the attribute-functional and holistic-psychological, continuums developed by Echtner and Ritchie (1991) contributed greatly to the conceptualization of tourism destination image. This theory acknowledges the existence of three axes which supported the image of any destination. It consists of functional-psychological, the common- unique, and the holistic- attribute axes.

This framework suggests that the measurement of image involves methodologies to capture the perceptions of individual functional attributes or cognitive (e.g. low prices, cool climate) and psychological attributes or affective (e.g. safe place, friendly local people). The functional holistic images are based on physical or measurable characteristics, such as a mental picture of the physical characteristics (mountainous, villages). The psychological holistic images concern about feelings towards the overall impressions of the atmosphere or mood of a particular destination. Based on this conceptual framework, destination image is defined as not only the perception of individual destination attributes, but also the holistic impression made by the destination.

This conceptualization of image developed by Echtner and Ritchie (1991), was adapted in the present study to measure the tourists' images of visitors to the state of Perak. Furthermore, most destination image previous study was placed at the western country that had different environment, people, culture, space and time. Additionally, the list of destination image attributes was based on the 'common' functional and psychological characteristics in terms of their importance or belief, which were held by the tourist who came to visit these destinations. Other studies which had also adapted this concept were conducted by Jamaludin, Johari, Azlizam, Kayat, Yusof, (2012); Baloglu & Managalogly (2001); Azlizam & Nurul Amirah Zainol (2009)

Considering the apparent lack of understanding on how Malaysian travelers use image in their vacation decision, this study was designed specifically to identify the dimension of *image* as perceived by tourists travelling to the state of Perak in Malaysia.

Methodology

The study was carried out at the main entry points of the north bound (Gunung Semanggol) and south bound (Ulu Berham) of the North-South Highway rest areas in Perak. A set of questionnaire was prepared to cater for both local respondents. The respondents were asked to rate the importance of 22 items of image attributes using a 7-point scale, ranging from '1' (extremely not important) to '7' (extremely important). The attributes for the image dimension were adopted and adapted from the previous studies by Baloglu (1998) Berli and Martin, (2004) and Mou Yu, (2008) with specific destination characteristics. Cronbach's reliability coefficients were also calculated to examine the stability of a set of items used to measure the variables (Ary, Jacobs & Razavich, 1996). Two experts from the field were also interviewed to verify the questionnaire instrument for face validity.

The survey was conducted over a period of three weekends from   4th Jun 2017 to 26th Jun 2017. The questionnaire was personally administered to the respondents. One survey point was chosen to cover the main focal point of tourist which was at two rest and service area state of Perak. The study used a convenient sampling technique. Two separate time interval; 1) morning session (9 a.m. – 12.00 noon) and 2) afternoon session (3.00 p.m. – 5.00 p.m). 182 questionnaires were collected and used for analyses. A total of 83 set of questionnaires forms were gathered from the north bound point and 99 set of questionnaires forms were gathered from south bound point. An exploratory Factor Analysis was used to identify the destination image dimensions.   Principal component method, using varimax rotation using IBM-SPSS version 24 was used to examine the dimensionalities of destination image.

Results and Discussion
The Identification of Images from Tourist
An Exploratory Factor Analysis was commenced to categorize the underlying dimension for the image state of Perak. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was   found to   be 0.839, more than the recommended value of 0.6 (Kaiser, 1970; 1975), and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) was specified as x^2 = 2051.882, df= 153. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test was significant, measured the adequacy of sampling. It delivered ample proof that the sample used for the study was satisfactory. The reliability of each factor was obtained using the calculation of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from 0.746 to 0.900, which was found to be relatively between the ranges of good to high. All three factors were above the cut off criterion of 0.7 recommended by Nunnally (1978).

Kaiser's rule of selection found that, a total of three dimensions were extracted. The dimension accounted 64.77 % of the total variance. This finding provided evidence to construct the validity of the scale (Churchill, 1979). The result was also almost consistent with the other findings gathered in the previous studies, whereby the average total variance accounted was 59% (Berli and Martin, 2004; Chen and Tsai, 2006; Sonmez and Sirakaya, 2002) and 54.73% Azlizam & Nurul Amirah Zainol, (2009) in their study on destination image of three highlands in Malaysia.

The three dimensions were subsequently labeled as follows: 1) local attractions and facilities; 2) natural surroundings; 3) tourist general mood. The results of the factor analysis are presented in Table 1. The first factor, is "*local attractions and facilities*" (α=.889), explained most of the variance (35.2%) in the model and it contained 7 items. The second factor, "*Natural surrounding*" (α=.864), explained an additional variance 17.06% of the variance and this contained   7 items. Finally, third factor, "*General Mood*" (α= 0.935%), explained another 12.51% of the variance explained in the model and it contained 4 items. Consequently, it was decided that this factor was pertinent and applicable of other researchers test and replicate in the future. Two variables were excluded from the actual measurement. 20 variables were left, which loaded above 0.4 in this study.

Conclusion
This study offers preliminary findings on destination image for the state of Perak, perceived by local and foreign visitors. The findings of this study indicated the first dimension of '*local attractions and facilities*' falls into 'cognitive construct' of destination image provide the highest indicator that attract visitors. This finding strongly suggests that tourism destinations need to maintain facilities systematically and according to proper maintenance schedules to avoid maintenance costs. All facility users must be educated about the proper usage of the facilities to ensure that everybody could share and use good facilities and services such as toilet hygiene, food court, recreation area and facilities. Managers of tourism should create a niche in their tourism products which could attract more visitors such as authentic cuisine, culture and historical heritage, water recreations sports and nature activities. These would create a memorable experience and could bring in potential new tourist and repeat tourists to the state.

Second dimension of destination image was '*natural surrounding*'. The development works on infrastructures and facilities need to be controlled to minimize the effects on the natural surroundings. Illegal logging activities must be investigated urgently and stopped to protect the natural ecosystem of the state. All developments must be properly planned to protect natural resources from further deteriorations. This authentic experience would instil memorable memories thus, would promote positive image and favourable word of mouth.

Thirdly, the final dimension is '*General Mood- affective'.* This dimension stated that state of Perak must have an affective image that is associated to the mood of its travelers and visitors to capture the presents of visitors to be at any recreation site, theme park, commercial centers, museum, zoo, state parks and other tourist spots. The mood must be included in all facilities and infrastructure either tourism areas or non-tourism areas to ensure the hospitality mood and positive experience can be sustain further. It is hope that good memorable experience can be shared with others and to bring in more repeat visitors. It is hope that this affective mood could create successful loyalty tourism programs and travel packages and to the state.

Tourism organizations who seek for repeated visitors to the state of Perak should jump efforts to create a consistent destination image in a long term. A strong and consistent image of Perak is initially formed through all kinds of consistent information channels. Hence, enhance through constructive and memorable personal experience about Perak in long period of time.   The

findings of this study would help tourism organizations to analyze their strengths and weaknesses in the image building process henceforth, improve integrated marketing approach. It is advise that social media could be a strong image brand building that could be explore further.

A number of imperative limitations need to be reflected in this study in the future. First, the survey carried out in this study was conducted over a period of three weeks which covered travelers using the north south highway. In future, it is suggested that multiple modes of transportation links is encourage. Second, a better measurement instrument needs to be used specifically to measure the image of state of Perak that could explain more variances in the concept, further and to identify the uniqueness of the state. Thirdly, comparing destination image state of Perak with different states such as Melaka and Penang should be taken into consideration in the future.

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TABLE 1. Dimension of the image for the state of Perak

Dimension	Loading	Mean	Eigenvalue	% Variance Explain	α
Local Attractions and Facilities-			6.336	35.20	0.889
Accommodation/hotel	0.831	4.621			
Good shopping opportunities	0.827	4.584			
Service standard	0.803	4.868			
Variety of food	0.763	5.082			
Animal	0.680	4.692			
Water sport	0.663	4.723			
Nightlife	0.657	4.890			
Natural surrounding-			3.070	17.06	0.864
Clean & neat environment	0.855	4.863			
Landscape & resources	0.777	4.863			
Foreign & exotic atmosphere	0.769	4.577			
Nature scenery	0.727	5.275			
Farms and orchards	0.712	4.797			
Pleasant climate	0.692	4.940			
Peaceful environment	0.511	5.346			
General Mood- affective			2.253	12.51	0.935
Gloomy	0.922	4.989			
Distressing	0.910	4.885			
Unpleasant	0.897	4.951			
Sleepy	0.893	4.769			

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