Information Source Before Travelling and Choice of Traveling Mode

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ABSTRACT

The ability to attract tourists is crucial for the success of tourism firms in Malaysia. This has therefore raised a major concern on which information sources tourists use when making choices on their traveling mode as well as the destination. It is on this basis that tourism operators, tourism providers and managers of tourist destinations are particularly concerned with which information source or media to use to attract tourists to tourism destinations. This study investigates the relationship between information source before traveling and choice of traveling mode among Arab tourists coming to Malaysia. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design with convenient sampling technique to generate questionnaire data from 358 participants who are mainly tourists from three major tourism attraction centers in Malaysia. The questionnaire data was analysed using multiple regression analysis technique to determine the relationship between information source and choice of traveling mode among Arab tourists coming to Malaysia. First, the overall findings show that information source before traveling among Arab tourists coming to Malaysia is significantly related to the choice of traveling mode. Further findings revealed that both tourism service providers and tourism information centers sources but not travel agent source are significantly related to the choice of traveling mode among Arab tourists coming to Malaysia. The study concludes that the choice of traveling mode among Arabs coming to Malaysia is mainly determined by tourism service providers and tourism information centers sources of information and not travel agent source of information. The outcomes of the study have significant managerial implications for tourism operators, tourism providers and managers of tourist destinations as well as tourism policy makers in Malaysia.

KEYWORDS

Malaysia, Tourism Information Centers, Tourism Service Providers, Travel Agent, Traveling Mode

INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that studies on tourism are fast drawing attention among the academics, practitioners including governments in different countries of the world (Chetthamrongchai, 2017; Chiappa & Balboni, 2019). In some countries across the globe, tourism has become an important sector or subsector of the economy generating significant revenue for any country (Chu and Luckanavanich, 2018). Most Asian countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, etc., are presently benefiting from the huge revenue from the tourism sector. Globally, tourism business is in its booming period. For instance, the projection by the world travel and tourism Council for the tourism industry in Southeast Asia has been deemed to be very significant and strong (Malaysian Tourism Promotion Board (MTPB), 2019).

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In Malaysia for instance, tourism industry is currently at its boom, call it “tourism boom”. It is recorded that tourist’s arrivals in Malaysia has continued to increase by 14.3% (2,078,485) in October 2009 compared with 1,818,304 in the same month in 2008 (New Straits Times, January 4, 2010), despite the financial crisis facing the world. From January to October in 2009, Malaysia has seen an increase of 7.2 per cent in tourists’ arrival to 19.45 million compared with 18.14 million in the same period in 2008. Also, the current tourism arrivals in Malaysia in 2018 showed about 25.8 million tourists with RM84.1 billion receipts (Malaysian Tourism Promotion Board (MTPB), 2019). This is a tremendous and significant increase compared to 2009 and 2008 when only 2,078,485 and 1,818,304 were recorded respectively. This is equally restated by the Tourism, Art and Culture Minister (MoTAC), Datuk Mohamaddin Ketapi that the Malaysian tourism sector has contributed RM84.1 Billion to the national economy in 2018 compared to the previous year which recorded RM82.2 billion, about 2.2 percent increase. This shows the resilience of Malaysia’s tourism industry (Malaysian Tourism Promotion Board (MTPB), Head Office, 2019).

Concerning the Arab tourists coming to Malaysia, it is observed that Malaysia has become a destination of choice for Arabs, with the country attracting a larger number of tourists from the Middle East compared to previous years. For example, the data provided by Mat, Zakaria, & Jusoff (2009) shows that there have been yearly increase in the number of Arab tourists coming to Malaysia. For example, the data showed an increase of 23.9% in 1999; 46.5% in 2000 and 87.1% increase in 2001 while it is expected to soar higher by 90% in the near future. As expected, in 2018, nearly 33,000 Arab tourists visited Malaysia, up from 27,000 in 2017 (Arabnews, 2019). Still the number of Arab tourists coming to Malaysia is expected to rise further as Malaysia continues to position itself as a Muslim-friendly, halal haven. However, one major problem that is of concern to the Arab tourists coming to Malaysia is the sources of getting information before embarking on their tourism adventure. For instance, the tourists have just discovered that the sources of their information before traveling play a crucial role in determining their choice of traveling mode such as the use of air, water and train. This has therefore raised a major concern on which information sources tourists use when making choices on their traveling mode as well as the destination. It is on this basis that tourism operators, tourism providers and managers of tourist destinations are particularly concerned with which information source or media to use to attract tourists to tourism destinations (Korneliussen & Greenacre, 2016).

In their study on cross-cultural information sources used by European tourists, Chu and Luckanavanich (2018), noted that although travelers happen to receive abundance of information from many sources before they actually visit the place, however, this amount of information from several sources have directly or indirectly influence the receiver’s travel intention. Apart from that, this amount of information from different sources equally affects the choice of traveling mode the tourists choose. Also, Fisher, Petersen & Burstein (2017) observed that there is lack of awareness on information sources among the tourists. They argued that tourists need reliable information sources which are however scattered but not easy to find. In this case of Arab tourists, often decisions are made based on unreliable sources which then affect their choice of travelling mode. Thus, there is a limited awareness and understanding of the background of those travelling and how information is sourced for decision making on traveling mode (Fisher, Petersen & Burstein, 2017). Also, earlier studies such as Fodness and Murray (1997) and Grønfaten (2009b) have acknowledged that there is a problem of information sources among tourists, that is, who provides information about tourism to them? To this end, Fodness and Murray (1997) claim that the most pressing need is for more systematic research describing how and why travelers-tourists source for and use information regarding tourism especially before embarking on tourism adventures. As a result, they suggested that future research is required in order to examine travelers’ use of different information choice strategies through the analysis of perceptions of the alternatives available to them for trip planning, and that such research should address the dimensions underlying information choice strategy preferences. For example, it is important to know what causes different tourists to choose specific sources to plan their trips (Fodness & Murray, 1997). (Grønfaten, 2009a) and Fodness and Murray (1997) have identified several
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