

THE PARALLEL MEDIATORS OF TOURIST SATISFACTION AND PLACE ATTACHMENT ON PERCEIVED VALUE AND DESTINATION LOYALTY RELATIONSHIP

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Abstract: Langkawi Island, the first Global Geopark in Southeast Asia, is believed to experience an unstable and sluggish growth rate pattern of domestic tourist arrivals. Hence, to curb the situation from persisting, the main objective of this study is to enhance the destination loyalty through its factors, namely, perceived value, tourist satisfaction, place attachment. The target population of this study is domestic tourists who have visited Langkawi Island. A self-administered questionnaire using google form has been distributed to the respondents who have visited the island for at least 24 hours and staying not more than a year. The 244 data collected were analysed using SMART-PLS version 4.0. Interestingly, this study has verified two parallel mediators, tourist satisfaction and place attachment on the relationship between perceived value and destination loyalty. Focusing on these factors, the study would provide practical strategies and plans for tourism management on this island to enhance loyalty among domestic tourists. Furthermore, it is believed that the findings would assist local business enterprises and tour agencies to grasp continuous benefits from loyal tourists to this island.

Key words: Parallel Mediators, Perceived Value, Tourist Satisfaction, Place Attachment, Destination Loyalty

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism activities play a crucial role in the development of a country or region because tourism sector has a significant impact on the growth of economy (Umam et al., 2022). In Malaysia, the tourism and hospitality industry are considered the third most significant contributor to the national GDP after the manufacturing and commodities industry (Hirschmann, 2020). Malaysia offers world astonishing peaceful and gorgeous islands, all of which are ideal for a dreamy holiday. Most of the islands in Malaysia look no less than shining gemstones. The fantastic features and characteristics of the islands in Malaysia would offer valuable experiences to tourists for any types of holiday such as spending time with family, romancing with the loved one, and chilling with friends. In other words, if someone wants to get some time off from their daily monotonous schedule, choosing any commercialised islands in Malaysia for short gateway is the perfect choice. Hence, tourists' expenditure on the consumption tourism products and services generates revenues for the tourism and hospitality industry (Nasir and Wongchestha, 2022). One of the renowned Malaysia's islands among tourists is Langkawi Island. It is located in Northern West Malaysia around 30 kilometres from Kuala Perlis, 51.5 kilometres from Kuala Kedah, and 109 kilometres from Penang. This island was formed by 99 islands making it unique, famous for its stunning beaches and richness in fauna and flora (Nasir et al., 2020). Back in 2007, this island was nominated as the first Global Geopark in Southeast Asia. Therefore, like other popular islands in neighbouring countries such as Phuket in Thailand, and Bali in Indonesia, Langkawi is actively staging itself as a world-class tourism destination to provide a more significant economic

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contribution to the country. Normally, tourists will choose to spend their time on this island during public holidays, thus the island is not only popular among domestic tourists but also international tourists.

However, before the covid-19 hits the whole country, statistics demonstrated a slow-moving and unstable growth rate pattern amongst domestic tourist arrivals to Langkawi Island (Figure 1). This is an unfortunate situation to Langkawi as one of the famous islands in Malaysia and the first Global Geopark in South East Asia. Hence, it is imperative to improve the destination loyalty among domestic tourists because they will repeat their visits and recommend to other potential tourists. Consequently, it will raise the percentage of domestic tourist arrival rate. The destination loyalty among domestic tourists visiting Langkawi Island can be improved through its predicting factors. Past studies suggested that perceived value (Sato et al., 2018; Nadarajah and Ramalu, 2018; Huang et al., 2019), tourist satisfaction (Haji et al., 2021; Muhamad Nasir et al., 2021), and place attachment (Jiang and Hong, 2021) are pivotal in increasing the level of loyalty among tourists.

Thus, past studies have proven that perceived value, tourist satisfaction and place attachment are the important predicting factors to improve the level of the destination loyalty. Hence, the main objective of this present study is to determine the effect of these variables on destination loyalty. More importantly, this study intends to prove the parallel mediating effects of tourist satisfaction and place attachment on the perceived value and destination loyalty relationship. The outcome of the study is valuable to the existing literature since lack of past studies have proven two parallel mediators (place attachment and tourist satisfaction) and tested these latent constructs simultaneously in one model.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Destination Loyalty

In the field of business marketing, the key concept of destination loyalty is crucial to determine the destination's success (Nasir et al., 2022). In the context of tourism marketing, the concept of destination loyalty has been explained broadly by past scholars, such

as the desire to repeat visits (Prayag et al., 2017; Morais and Lin, 2010) and intention to recommend (Cheng et al., 2016; Morais and Lin, 2010). To be exact, destination loyalty refers to the tourist's intention to revisit and recommend the destination to other tourists (Nasir et al., 2021). Hence, based on the previous studies, loyalty of tourists towards certain destination can be seen from their repeated visits and advising the destination to the other people such as families and friends. The intention to revisit the destination (destination loyalty), which is deemed as the level of satisfaction after the consumption of tourist products and services in a particular tourist destination, is seen as a behavior planning for the future of tourist destination (Aksoz and Cay, 2022). Hence, it is crucial to improve the level of loyalty among visitors to guarantee the sustainability of tourism industry (Kawada and Naoi, 2018), because devoted tourists will increase sales through recurrence purchases or visits and recommend the destination to their families and friends (Mohamad et al., 2019). Consequently, it will increase the number of tourist arrivals and income generation to the destination. Past studies explained that the concept of destination loyalty focused on how visitors are associated with destinations to develop long-lasting and beneficial connections between them (Almeida-Santana and Moreno-Gil, 2018). This is the reason destination loyalty is treated the main variable of the study since improving the destination loyalty could help in increasing the number of tourist arrivals. Hence, the main objective of the study is to determine the factors to enhance the destination loyalty among the tourists.

Perceived Value

Bajs (2015) claimed that studies on perceived value in the tourism and hospitality industry is still insufficiently investigated. However, most of the marketers in tourist destinations devote their effort to enhance tourist value as it appears to be the key determinant of tourist decision-making. This perceived value concept is crucial in determining tourist decision making since positive perception among tourists while evaluating time and effort values of a destination will indirectly trigger their revisit intention. Several scholars have defined the concept of perceived value. One of the plausible explanations of perceived value concept contended by Suhartanto et al. (2020) which refers to a comparison between the benefits (what tourists receive from their trips) and sacrifices (what the tourists spend) on the tourism products or services utilised during their holidays to the destination. Hence, the tourists will feel worthiness of their trip, if the destination can accommodate their needs significantly based on what they have spent. Previous empirical researches in the context of tourism marketing found that perceived value has a significant effect on place attachment (Jiang and Hong, 2021) and tourist satisfaction (Nasir et al., 2021). Hence, based on this background, two hypotheses are established:

H1: Perceived value has a significant influence on place attachment

H2: Perceived value has a significant influence on tourist satisfaction

Place Attachment

The concept of place attachment has been widely researched by the scholars across disciplines. It was also applied to tourism studies to comprehend individual-place relationships and subsequently, to effectively manage and promoting tourism destinations (Dwyer et al., 2019). Place attachment relates to an individual connection with one particular destination (Suntikul and Jachna, 2016). This concept explains how an emotional relationship between people and destination is built from the interaction between them. For this reason, developing attachment to the destination may affect tourists' thinking and emotions, and enhance their knowledge about the place so it can build strong emotional ties between individuals and places. Therefore,

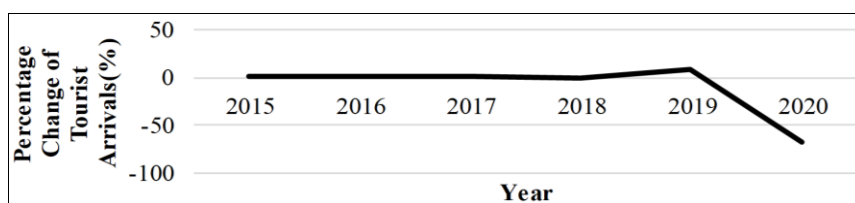


Figure 1. Percentage Change of Domestic Tourist Arrivals to Langkawi (Source: Langkawi Development Authority, 2021)

building a strong connection between the place and individuals would create a strong sense of loyalty among tourists to the destination (Xu and Zhang, 2016). Moreover, destination loyalty is predicted by place attachment (Patwardhan et al., 2020, Nasir et al., 2020, and Nurbasari et al., 2021) and place attachment is predicted by perceived value (Jiang and Hong, 2021). However, lack of studies has combined these three constructs to examine the mediating effect of place attachment on the relationship between perceived value and destination loyalty, especially in the context of Langkawi. Hence, this study proposed this mediation as research gap that needs to be fulfilled. Therefore, two more hypotheses are proposed in this study:

H3: Place attachment has a significant influence on destination loyalty

H4: Place attachment mediates the relationship between perceived value and destination loyalty

Tourist Satisfaction

The concept of tourist satisfaction is being studied broadly in the context of the tourism and hospitality industry. Normally, tourists will form an expectation on the destination’s offering, which mainly related to services and indirectly involves product perception before they travel to specific destination. Once they arrived at the destination, they will experience the destination’s tourism offerings, which in turn will build their perceptions of the experience based on their pre-travel expectations. This experience will determine whether they are satisfied or not on their travel to the destination. Therefore, Tran et al. (2018) claimed that tourist satisfaction refers to comparing real perceivable benefits and expectations. In other words, satisfied tourists can be seen when their perceived benefits meet their expectations before they travel to a certain destination. Thus, tourist satisfaction is important in developing destination loyalty among tourists (Haji et al., 2021; Thawornwiriyaatrakula and Meepromb, 2020). Moreover, Nasir et al. (2021) also claimed that tourist satisfaction is the mediator between perceived value and destination loyalty. Based on these findings, two more hypotheses are developed:

H5: Tourist satisfaction has a significant influence on destination loyalty

H6: Tourist satisfaction mediates the relationship between perceived value and destination loyalty

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Figure 2 depicts the flow chart of methodology for the current study. It explains the steps involve in the research methodology.

Research Design

The purpose of this current study is to test the changes in exogenous variables (perceived value, tourist satisfaction and place attachment) which may cause reciprocal changes in the endogenous variable (destination loyalty). By using quantitative approach, the data were collected from the respondents who are domestic tourists who had travelled to Langkawi Island for more than 24 hours but less than 365 days using self-administered structured questionnaires in the google form.

Questionnaire Design

A close-ended questionnaire was utilised to collect the data from respondents. A 7-point interval measure ranging from one (indicated as strongly disagree) to seven (indicated as strongly agree) was scaled for all items. There are five parts in the questionnaire to cover all constructs. The respondents have to answer screening questions to guarantee trustworthiness of responses based on selection of the right respondents. Qualified respondents will start to response to the first part of the questionnaire which is related to perceived value construct. The items to measure this construct were adapted from Lee et al. (2007). The second part and third part are related to tourist satisfaction and place attachment, which were also adapted from previous empirical findings (Lee et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2015; Xu and Zhang, 2016). Last but not least, the final part is related to destination loyalty construct, adapted from the study by Sun et al. (2013) and Mohamad et al. (2011). Meanwhile, questions for the demographic profile of the respondents were included to gain personal information related to their trip to Langkawi.

Pre-test and Pilot Test.

The pre-test and pilot test have been performed before the field study was conducted. The pre-test is to ensure that respondents understand the questionnaire that is posed to them. Hence, three experts in the field of statistic, linguistic and a professional in tourism marketing were appointed to review the questionnaire structure. Then, 100 respondents were selected to participate in the pilot test. The pilot test is crucial to ensure feasibility of the study especially on the survey instrument.

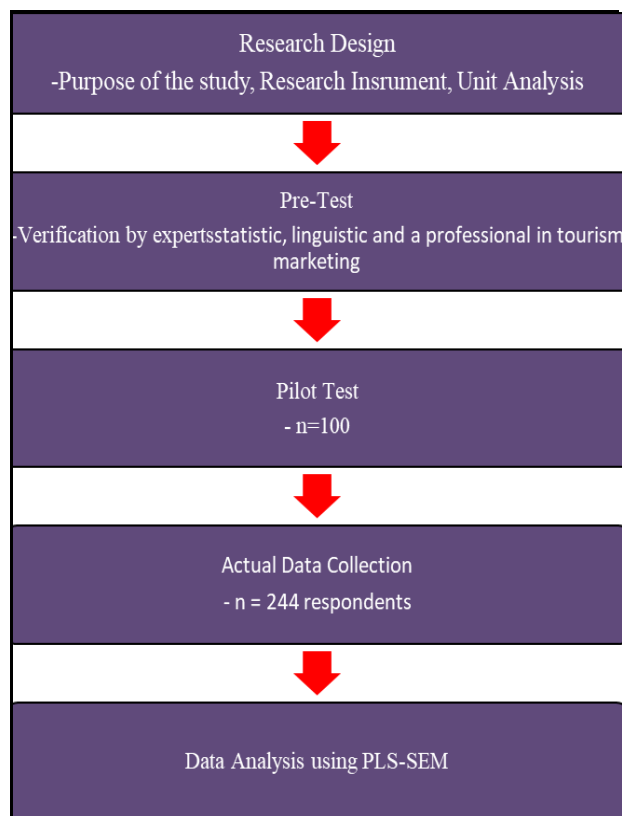


Figure 2. Flow Chart of Methodology

Table 1. Cronbach’s Alpha

Constructs	Cronbach’s Alpha value
Perceived Value	0.97
Tourist Satisfaction	0.97
Place Attachment	0.98
Destination Loyalty	0.96

Data collected during the pilot study stage were tested for the reliability analysis. Table 1 indicates that the items used are highly consistent in measuring the constructs with all Cronbach’s Alpha value exceeding 0.90.

Data Collection

Responses were captured using google form and purposive sampling method was used to select the respondents. The screening questions were included in the google form to ensure that individuals who respond to the questionnaire possess the required criteria for the study such as: (1) Stayed at the island for at least 24 hours but less than 365 days (2) 18 years old and above. Finally, 253 responses were collected but 9 responses were found to be invalid because respondents did not fulfil the screening criteria stipulated in the questionnaire. The remaining 244 responses were later analysed using PLS-SEM method. Most importantly, the data fit within the range of sample size recommended by Burn et al. (2017) that is between 96 and 384.

Demographic profile

A majority of the respondents are female (82.2%) and most of them attained bachelor degree qualification (79.5%). Their marital status is mostly single (67.2%) followed by married (30.3%) and the remaining are divorced (2.5%). Most of them are between the age of 18 to 27 years old (61.4%) and went to Langkawi for holidays (85.2%). Most of the respondents were at Langkawi as repeat-visitors (67.2%) and they chose to stay at hotels (60.7%).

Data analysis

Partial Least Square (PLS) based Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used to analyse the data collected from the respondents. This method is suitable to analyse the data whenever one dependent variable is acting as an independent variable in the subsequent relationships. Utilizing the Partial Least Square (PLS) based Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) is also useful when it does not include assumptions of homogeneity in covariances and variances of the dependent variable. As such, the PLS-SEM method provides a complete analysis for the inter-relationships among variables since it can simultaneously test the measurement and the structural models. The current study also utilizes the bootstrapping analysis (1000 resamples) to test on the significant levels of the loadings, weights, and path coefficients.

Examining the measurement model

In this present study, it involves a reflective model (Figure 3) which requires the measurement of reflective model such as convergent and discriminant validity analysis. The requirement that needs to be met in order to achieve a convergent validity are factor loadings, (2) composite reliability (CR) and (3) average variance extracted (AVE).

Table 2. Factor loadings, CA, CR, AVE and VIF

Constructs	Items	Factor loadings	CA	CR	AVE	VIF
Place Attachment (PA)	PA1	0.922	0.981	0.982	0.766	3.617
	PA10	0.926				
	PA11	0.936				
	PA12	0.861				
	PA13	0.828				
	PA14	0.851				
	PA15	0.827				
	PA16	0.763				
	PA17	0.751				
	PA2	0.901				
	PA3	0.895				
	PA4	0.926				
	PA5	0.888				
	PA6	0.823				
	PA7	0.913				
	PA8	0.904				
	PA9	0.937				
Perceived Value (PV)	PV1	0.844	0.969	0.972	0.700	1.000
	PV10	0.867				
	PV11	0.846				
	PV12	0.811				
	PV13	0.858				
	PV14	0.862				
	PV15	0.794				
	PV2	0.839				
	PV3	0.821				
	PV4	0.832				
	PV5	0.823				
	PV6	0.824				
	PV7	0.782				
	PV8	0.857				
	PV9	0.885				
Tourist Satisfaction (TS)	TS1	0.845	0.971	0.976	0.833	3.617
	TS2	0.896				
	TS3	0.911				
	TS4	0.928				
	TS5	0.934				
	TS6	0.926				
	TS7	0.939				
	TS8	0.918				
Destination Loyalty (DL)	DL1	0.938	0.961	0.969	0.840	-
	DL2	0.81				
	DL3	0.927				
	DL4	0.956				
	DL5	0.959				
	DL6	0.902				

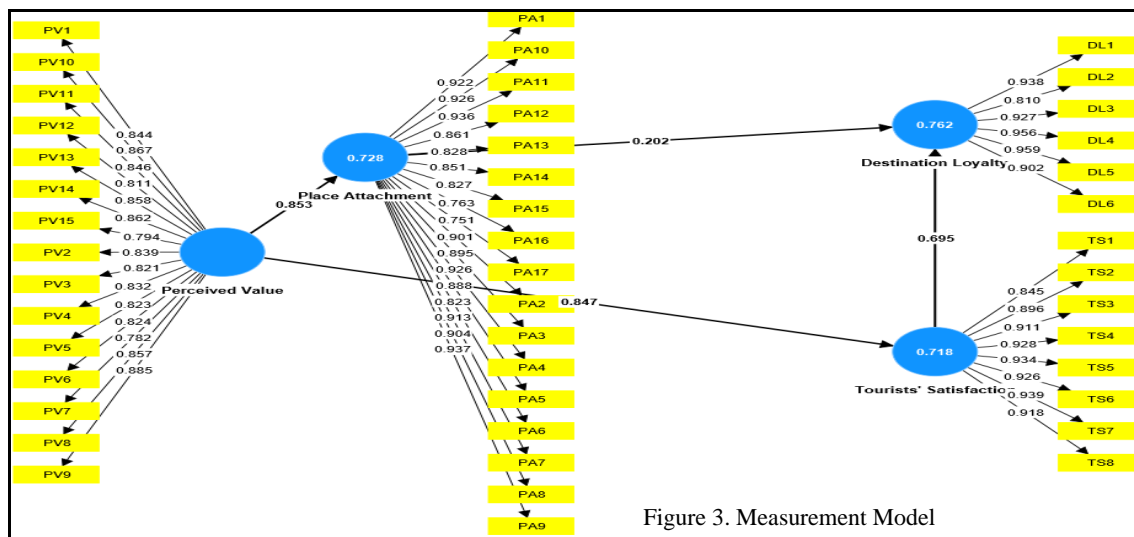


Figure 3. Measurement Model

The loadings for all items exceed the recommended value of 0.6, while the composite reliability values to which the items indicated the latent construct are more than 0.9 for all constructs which surpass the recommended value of 0.6 (see Table 2). Moreover, the range of average variance extracted are between 0.70 to 0.84, which is more than the recommended value of 0.5. Next, discriminant validity was verified through Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) in order to ensure the construct is conceptually different from other latent constructs used in this current study. The scores of the HTMT as depicted in Table 3 are in the range 0.810 to 0.897, which is lesser than 0.90 threshold suggested by Hair et al. (2022). As such, the results for HTMT criterion confirmed that discriminant validity has been fulfilled. The scores have met all of the requirements, hence indicating that the current model possess an adequate convergent and discriminant validity.

Examining the structural model

Direct Effect

Table 4 shows the results for structural model testing. Findings indicate that the perceived value construct has a significant impact on place attachment ($\beta = 0.853, p < 0.05$) and tourist satisfaction ($\beta = 0.847, p < 0.05$). Hence, the hypotheses H1 and H2 are supported. Furthermore, place attachment construct demonstrates significant effect on the destination loyalty ($\beta = 0.202, p < 0.05$). Therefore, H3 is also supported. Similarly, tourist satisfaction construct also shows significant effect on the destination loyalty ($\beta = 0.695, p < 0.05$), supporting H5. Meanwhile, Table 4 also provides the results for coefficient of determination (R-square). The R-square values for destination loyalty, place attachment and tourist satisfaction constructs are 0.762, 0.728, and 0.718 respectively. The result suggests that place attachment and tourists' satisfaction constructs could explain about 76.2% variations in destination loyalty, while perceived value construct could explain about 72.8% variations in place attachment. The finding suggests that perceived value is a major determinant of place attachment. Also, it is found that perceived value explained more than 70% variations in tourists' satisfaction.

Table 3. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) of the correlations

HTMT Criterion				
Construct	1	2	3	4
Destination Loyalty	-			
Perceived Value	0.860			
Place Attachment	0.810	0.866		
Tourists' Satisfaction	0.897	0.869	0.866	-

Table 4. Results for Structural Model

Direct Relationships	Beta	Std. Error	t-value	P values	R2	Decision
H1: Perceived Value → Place Attachment	0.853	0.018	46.639	0.000	0.728	Supported
H2: Perceived Value → Tourists' Satisfaction	0.847	0.019	45.356	0.000	0.718	Supported
H3: Place Attachment → Destination Loyalty	0.202	0.090	2.230	0.026	0.762	Supported
H5: Tourists' Satisfaction → Destination Loyalty	0.695	0.077	8.999	0.000		Supported

Mediating Effect

Regarding the mediation effect, this study follows the rule of thumb by Preacher and Hayes (2004). Two parallel mediating effects were tested: (1) the mediating effect of place attachment on the relationship between perceived value and destination loyalty (H4) and (2) the mediating effect of tourist satisfaction on the relationship between perceived value and destination loyalty (H6). Table 5 indicates the result of the bootstrapping analysis, where the indirect effect of place attachment construct is significant ($\beta = 0.172$) with a t-value of 2.217. This means that place attachment mediates the relationship between perceived value and destination loyalty. Hence, H4 is supported at five percent significance level. Meanwhile, the indirect effect of tourist satisfaction construct is significant ($\beta = 0.589$) with a t-value of 8.181. This also means that tourist satisfaction mediates the relationship between perceived value and destination loyalty. Thus, H6 is supported at one percent level of significance.

Table 5. Mediating Effect Results (Note: ** at 5% significant level, *** at 1% significant level)

Mediating Relationships	Beta	Std. Error	t-value	P value	Decision
H4: Perceived Value → Place Attachment → Destination Loyalty	0.172**	0.078	2.217	0.027	Supported
H6: Perceived Value → Tourists' Satisfaction → Destination Loyalty	0.589***	0.072	8.181	0.000	Supported

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Contribution

This study is considered as unique and original because it covers a wide variety of constructs, namely, perceived value, tourist satisfaction, place attachment and destination loyalty, simultaneously in one model, which were insufficiently investigated by previous similar studies. Most importantly, based on the current findings, this study has verified the existence of two parallel mediators of tourist satisfaction and place attachment on the relationship between perceived value and destination loyalty which have been tested simultaneously on the research model. The outcome contributes significantly to existing literature because lack of past studies had proven the two parallel mediators. Moreover, this study focused on the population of domestic tourists visiting Langkawi Island, in which limited number of past researchers has tested on this population. Most importantly, the findings of the study conform with the Oliver's (1999) Four Stage Loyalty Theory. The theory is structured based on the four components which is positioned in an orderly manner: (1) cognitive loyalty (2) affective loyalty (3) conative loyalty and (4) action loyalty. The development of destination loyalty starts with an individual cognitive loyalty, whereby, it relates with the perception of visitors on the worthiness of time and money spent on their holiday to Langkawi. The most appropriate variable in this study to represent this stage is perceived value. The next stage is affective loyalty which is related to emotional feeling of visitors. Hence, this stage is represented by two variables: tourist satisfaction and place attachment. The subsequent stage is conative loyalty which is related to the intentions of visitors, namely, intention to repeat visit and intention to recommend. These two are the components of

destination loyalty. Finally, when these three stages have completed, the intention will turn into an action. This means, in future, the visitors will repeat visit to Langkawi and recommend the destination to others.

Practical Contribution. Tourism Management

Several practical insights are useful for Langkawi tourism authorities to develop plans and strategies from the findings of this study, especially to improve the loyalty of the domestic tourists to the destination. First, this present study emphasizes on perceived value of Langkawi Island by the domestic tourists, which is deemed useful for the authorities in planning the tourism development strategies. Langkawi tourism authorities should offer valuable products and services as perceived by the tourists so that visiting the destination is acknowledged as their best decision and their overall visit to the island is valuable and worthy. This situation will lead to their overall evaluation of the destination being satisfactory. Moreover, it will build a strong personal connection between the tourist and the island, consequently lead to creating a strong sense of loyalty among the tourists to the destination.

Travel and tour providers

The travel agencies and tour providers should focus on providing authentic experience to the tourists including a list of interesting tour activities in their travel package, such as visiting water buffalo farms and learning on local plants and herbs to understand their medicinal value. On top of that, these agencies should also actively promote the Langkawi Homestay programme whereby the tourists would be able to stay together with the local community and be involved in their daily activities. This will portray Langkawi Island as a destination with good quality of tourism experience, and indirectly leads to getting positive evaluation by tourists in visiting the island. It is believed that their worthy visitation and memorable experience will encourage tourists to come again, more than other island destinations. They also would feel that visiting the island is satisfactory when considering their invested time and money. Eventually, they will start to be loyal to the destination, and it would bring a sustainable income to the travel and tour providers.

Local Business Enterprise: Local business enterprises such as restaurants and handicraft shops should provide affordable, tasty food and creative handicrafts as deemed by the tourists. It is important to please tourists' preferences especially in getting reasonable prices for good-quality products. Local food and souvenirs are part of Langkawi Island image representation and visibility; thus, tourists will repeat purchases during their next visit and recommend the shops to their families and friend. Indirectly, providing excellent local products will lead a long-lasting income for the local suppliers.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the PLS-SEM was executed to analyse the data. Based on the findings, four direct hypotheses are supported (H1, H2, H3 and H5) and the other two indirect hypotheses are also supported (H4 and H6). As a renowned island in Malaysia, Langkawi Island is believed to be a unique and worthy destination to be visited by tourists. Its amusing nature and richness of local products are definitely classified as pulling aspects, however there are more factors that need to be studied in order to retain tourists to revisit this island.

The study found that tourists' perceived value is the main determinant of their attachment to the island, which leads to their satisfaction in visiting Langkawi Island. Meanwhile, their sense of attachment to the destination and satisfaction has a significant influence on their loyalty in visiting Langkawi Island. More to the point, the place attachment and tourist satisfaction constructs were validated as parallel mediators and has the indirect effect to the relationship between perceived value and destination loyalty. Thus, all hypothesis for this study were supported.

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