

## THE EFFECTS OF DESTINATION IMAGE ON TRIP BEHAVIOR: EVIDENCES FROM LANGKAWI ISLAND, MALAYSIA

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### **ABSTRACT**

**T**he positive relationship between destination image and satisfaction is well established in the tourism literature. However, the influence of destination image on other tourist behavior variables continues to be debated. Thus, this paper aims to explain the direct and indirect influence of destination image on trip behavior such as tourist expectation, perceived quality, perceived value, tourist satisfaction and loyalty. The present research was conducted in Langkawi Island, a well known tourist destination in Malaysia, with 500 targeted sample. Structured questionnaires were conveniently distributed to the tourists and 482 useable data were analysed. Regression analyses give support to all hypotheses tested. Destination image has a significant positive influence on tourist expectation, perceived quality, perceived value, tourist satisfaction and loyalty. In addition, satisfaction fully mediates the relationship between destination image and loyalty.

**Keywords:** Destination image, Trip behavior, Langkawi Island

## 1. Introduction

The antecedents and consequences of tourist satisfaction and loyalty have been investigated by many academic researchers (Mohamad et al., 2011; Chen & Chen, 2010; Quintal & Polczynski, 2010). Although no consistent findings have identified the main predictors of tourist satisfaction and loyalty, Chi and Qu (2008) suggest that positive destination image will result in tourist satisfaction and consequently has an important influence on tourist behavioral intentions. Other researchers have found that tourist satisfaction can also be affected by factors such as tourist expectations, perceived quality, perceived value, costs and risks and place attachment (Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Xia et al., 2009; Dmitrovic et al., 2009; Hui, Wan & Ho, 2007). While in most of the above tourism studies links among the variables were established, simultaneous examination of the direct and indirect effects of destination image and trip behavior is still limited. This is especially true for Langkawi Island in Malaysia. Thus, an investigation of this nature will contribute to a better understanding of the decisive factors that can generate customer retention especially at the level of organisations and individuals involved in the various subsectors within the tourism value chain.

Langkawi is a cluster of 99 islands situated in the northern state of Kedah, on the west coast of the Peninsula of Malaysia. It is within commutable distance by ferry to Perlis and mainland Kedah and by plane to Kuala Lumpur. Since 1984, the Malaysian government has been actively developing and promoting Langkawi as a premier island resort equipped with modern infrastructure and facilities. Subsequently, on January 1, 1987, Langkawi was designated as a duty-free port to serve as an important catalyst to spur the socio-economic development of the island and transform its economic base from a mainly agricultural community. With its natural attributes and diverse habitats including rainforests, mangrove wetlands and coral reefs, Langkawi has the potential to offer ecotourism to nature lovers. At the same, it is fast expanding as one of South-East Asia's premier meeting and exhibition destinations as a result of investments by both public and private sectors. The biennial Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition (LIMA), which was first held in 1991, continues to attract government officials, trade delegations and visitors from all parts of the world. The Langkawi Development Authority (2014) reported an increasing number of tourists over the last decade, and in 2012 alone, the island welcomed a total of 3.06 million domestic and international tourists. Although some of those tourists were first-timers, a sizeable number were repeat visitors. Despite the impressive figures, it remains a fact that Langkawi has to compete with other better-known island destinations such as Bali and Phuket for the tourist dollars. Thus, an understanding of the effects of destination image on trip behaviors may offer tourism operators and destination marketers some ideas on how to increase the island's competitiveness.

The present article sets out to examine simultaneously the direct and indirect links between destination image and other trip behavior variables in Langkawi Island, Malaysia. More specifically, the study aims to:

- i) examine the direct relationships of destination image on trip behavior; and
- ii) investigate the indirect relationship of destination image on trip behavior.

## 2. Prior studies

### 2.1 Destination image and tourism

A destination is defined as a blend of consumers' space and tourism products providing a holistic experience which is subjectively interpreted according to the consumers' travel itinerary, cultural background, purpose of visit and past experience (Fuchs & Weiermair, 2003), while destination image is "an interactive system of thoughts, opinions, feelings, visualizations, and intentions toward a destination" (Tasci, Gartner & Cavusgil, 2007, p. 200). In the same vein, Chin and Qu (2008) define destination image as an individual's mental representation of the knowledge, feelings and overall perception of a particular destination. Overall image is formed as a result of interactions between cognitive, affective and conative elements (Gartner, 1993; Lin et

al., 2007). Similarly, Echtner and Ritchie (1991) describe destination image as perception of destination features or attributes that is known as cognitive images – a combination of cognitive and affective images which refer to mental pictures or place imagery such as whether there are safety features for the family and whether the experience would be pleasant and enjoyable. Choi et al. (1999) concurs with this definition and adds that image reflects people's belief, idea or impression about a place.

Many researchers agree that destination image is important in terms of its effects on tourist behavior such as destination choice, decision making and satisfaction (Chen & Hsu, 2000; Court & Lupton, 1997; Schroeder, 1996; Ross, 1993), and it is a key factor in destination choice for first-timers (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). Chen and Kerstetter (1999) stress that tourists will choose one destination over another only when its positive image aspects exceed its negative image aspects. However, some researchers insist that destination image must be not only positive but also strong to be chosen by travellers (Ross, 1993; Hunt 1975).

The English Historic Towns Forum (1992) reveal that more than 80% of visitors consider the retailing mix and general environment of the town as the most important attraction of the destination. The following factors are deemed important by tourism and leisure shoppers:

- The cleanliness of the town;
- Pedestrian areas or pavements that are well maintained;
- Natural features such as rivers and parks;
- The architecture and facades or shop fronts;
- Street furniture (seating and floral displays); and
- Town center activities (e.g., outdoor markets and live entertainment).

## 2.2 *Direct effects of destination image*

A few studies have investigated destination image as an independent variable influencing several consumer behaviour variables concerning not only before (pre-visit), but also during and after visiting a destination (post-visit) (Mohamad et al., 2012; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Bigne, Sanchez, & Sanchez, 2001; Chen & Hsu, 2000; Schroeder, 1996; Ross, 1993). These studies confirm that the image formed by a tourist towards a destination may be positive or negative.

### 2.2.1 Destination image and tourists' expectations

Image is regarded as a driving factor in the formation of consumer expectations because to some extent, it represents the true capabilities of a service provider (Bosque, Martin & Collado, 2006). Tourist expectation is an affective variable in the service sector (Sadeh, et al., 2012), and tourists usually have initial expectations on a service before they consume it (Akama & Kieti, 2003). Their expectations are primarily formed through information from advertisements and word of mouth perceptions from other consumers during past experience. Expectations are also linked to the performance of a product or service as anticipated by the consumers (Ngobo, 1997; Xia et al., 2009). Although the importance of the link between consumer expectations and destination image has long been recognized by academicians, few studies have actually investigated the relationship between the two constructs. The results of one such study by Xia et al. (2009) indicate that destination image positively influences tourist expectations ( $\beta=0.54$ ,  $t=6.94$ ).

### 2.2.2 Destination image and perceived quality

In tourism research, the perceived quality of a destination has been viewed as a combination of tourists' trip experiences and perceived service received in relation to their expectations of the actual service performance (Bolton & Drew, 1991). Chen and Tsai (2007) define perceived quality as the "visitor's assessment of the standard of the service delivery process in association with the trip experience" (p. 1116). Bigne et al. (2005), Chen and Tsai (2007), as well as Zabkar, Brenc, and Dmitrovic (2010) reported a positive relationship between destination image and trip quality, suggesting that when destination images are higher,

the perception of quality also increases. Likewise, Dmitrovic et al. (2009) propose that destination image influences perceived quality. Consistent with Chan and Tsai (2007), Xia et al. (2009) too found a positive destination image-perceived quality relationship ( $\beta = 0.21$ ,  $t = 4.14$ ) in their study.

### 2.2.3 Destination image and perceived value

Zeithaml (1988) observes that perceived value represents the customer's assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given. Monroe (1990), on the other hand, defines perceived value as the consumers' trade-off between their perception of the quality of the products' benefits relative to their perceived sacrifice when paying the price. Likewise, Chen and Tsai (2007) describe perceived value as the tourists' evaluation of the net worth of the trip based on the benefits (what is received) and cost (what is given). In tourism research, Baker and Crompton (2000) view perceived value as "a measure of a provider's output" (p. 787). In addition, perceived value has been assessed as a cognitive evaluation of the time and/or money invested in a trip in comparison to the experiences tourist gained. Dmitrovic et al. (2009) propose that destination image influences perceived value. Findings from Xia et al. (2009) support Lee et al.'s (2005) and confirm a positive relationship between destination image and perceived value ( $\beta=0.23$ ,  $t=4.62$ ).

### 2.2.4 Destination image and tourist satisfaction

Lee et al. (2005) note that individuals who perceive a positive destination image would consequently express a greater satisfaction level and a more positive behavioral intention. Findings from a study by Um, Chon and Ro (2006) reveal that perceived attractiveness of destination positively influences satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.407$ ,  $t = 9.470$ ). This positive link is well established in the tourism literature for different types of destinations, including island destinations (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Bigne et al., 2001; Lee et al., 2005; Cheng & Tsai, 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008; Xia et al., 2009; Prayag, 2009). Research in Guilin (China) by Xia et al. (2009) suggests a positive relationship between destination image and satisfaction ( $\beta=0.45$ ,  $t=6.56$ ). In Malaysia, Mohamad et al. (2011) found that destination image is the antecedent to tourist satisfaction. Malaysia was perceived as offering natural scenic beauty supported by good facilities for food and accommodation. Furthermore, in Thailand, Yasamorn and Phokha (2012) conclude that tourist satisfaction is positively influenced by destination image ( $\lambda = 0.62$ ,  $t = 5.75$ ). Finally, Prayag and Ryan (2012) found a positive relationship between destination image and overall satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.514$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) in their research conducted in Mauritius.

### 2.2.5 Destination image and tourist loyalty

According to Chen and Tsai (2007), destination loyalty is the tourist's judgment of whether to revisit the same travel place or their willingness to recommend it to others. Empirical research offers strong support for the causal relationship between image and loyalty – if the destination images are attractive, the tourist will revisit the same destination again (Um, Chon & Ro, 2006; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Yasamorn & Phokha, 2012). Tasci and Gartner (2007) demonstrated that destination image influences behavioral intention. Um, Chon and Ro (2006) posit that perceived attractiveness has a positive relationship with revisit intention ( $\beta = 0.168$ ,  $t = 2.802$ ). Studies by Hunt (1975) and Pearce (1982) arrived at a similar conclusion: there is a positive relationship between destination image and behavioral intention. A more recent work in Malaysia by Mohamad et al. (2011) also indicate that the more favorable the destination image is, the more positive the loyalty intention. This finding is supported by Yasamorn and Phokha (2012) who found a positive relationship between destination image and destination loyalty ( $\lambda = 0.34$ ;  $t = 2.04$ ).

### 2.2.6 Tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty

Apart from satisfaction, destination loyalty is determined by a few other predictors. Nevertheless, Dmitrovic et al. (2009) identifies loyalty as the key consequence of satisfaction. Kozak and Rimmington (2000) argue that tourist satisfaction is essential for successful destination marketing because it influences the selection of destination, the consumption of products and services, and the decision to revisit. As such, an understanding of tourist satisfaction must be a basic parameter used to evaluate the performance of destination products and services (Noe & Uysal, 1997; Schofield, 2000). Numerous studies have also indicated that tourists who are satisfied would be more likely to revisit the same destination, and they share their positive travelling experience with their friends and others (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008; Quintal & Polczynski, 2010). Prayag and Ryan (2012) mention that as satisfaction levels increase, the propensity to return and recommend also increases. The positive relationship between satisfaction and loyalty has been highlighted in several other studies: Yoon and Uysal (2005), and Zabkar et al. (2010) have noted a positive relationship between the two constructs; research by Xia et al. (2009) has also demonstrated a positive relationship between tourist satisfaction and loyalty ( $\beta = 0.71$ ,  $t = 8.48$ ); Quintal and Polczynski (2010) too found a positive effect of satisfaction on revisit intention ( $\beta = 0.55$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ); and finally, the work of Yasamorn and Phokha (2012) lends support to the results of those researchers ( $\lambda = 0.68$ ;  $t = 2.86$ ).

### 2.3 Mediation effects

The mediating role of satisfaction on the destination image-loyalty relationship has been explored in a few studies (Chi & Qu, 2008; Quintal & Polczynski, 2010). Yasamorn and Phokha (2012), for instance, found that tourist satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between destination image and destination loyalty. Additionally, other studies related to trip behavior has investigated the mediation effects of perceived quality, perceived value and satisfaction. The perceived quality and customer satisfaction relationship was found to be mediated by perceived value (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Murray & Howat, 2002; Johnson et al., 2001). Bigne et al. (2005) point out that perceived quality acts as a mediator between destination image and satisfaction, while Chen and Tsai (2007) postulate that perceived quality mediates the relationship between destination image and perceived value. In addition, satisfaction mediates the relationship between perceived value and revisit intention (Quintal & Polczynski, 2010). In sum, an overview of tourism literature shows that there are no conclusive results with regards to the mediating effects of those constructs.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

The descriptive cross sectional design was used to investigate the effects of destination image on trip behavior. The respondents were individuals from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds.

### 3.2 Research constructs and measurement

The direct and indirect relationships between six constructs were examined. Destination image was expected to have direct effects on tourist expectations, perceived quality, perceived value, tourist satisfaction and loyalty, while tourist satisfaction was proposed to have a direct relationship with tourist loyalty. Further, the indirect relationship between the constructs was investigated. All constructs were measured using multiple items to avoid measurement errors and to provide robust findings.

Destination image as a predictor variable was measured using the six components of tourism destination proposed by Buhalis (2000) which include attractions, amenities, accessibility, activities, ancillary services, and available packages. Tourist expectation was measured using three dimensions: overall expectations of quality, expectations regarding customization, and expectations regarding reliability (Fornell et al., 1996). To assess perceived quality, the present research used seven items adapted from Wang, Gu, and Mei (2005), Hui et al. (2007), Chen and Tsai (2007), and Xia et al. (2009). Perceived value was measured using three

dimensions (price, time and effort). These dimensions were employed by Oliver and Swan (1989), Bolton and Drew (1991), Chen and Tsai (2007) and Xia et al. (2009) in their studies.

Tourist satisfaction was measured using nine items modified from Dmitrovic et al. (2009), Oliver (1980), Taylor and Baker (1994), Grace and O’Cass (2005) and Wu et al. (2008). In tourism research, tourists’ positive experiences, intention to revisit the same destination, and positive word of mouth effects on friends and/or relatives have been recognised as adequate measures for destination loyalty assessment (Bigne et al, 2001; Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Chi & Qu, 2008). Thus, the concept of loyalty in the present study included both behavior: revisit intention and willingness to recommend the destination to others. The tourist loyalty was measured using nine items adapted from previous research (Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Chi & Qu, 2008; Prayag & Ryan, 2012).

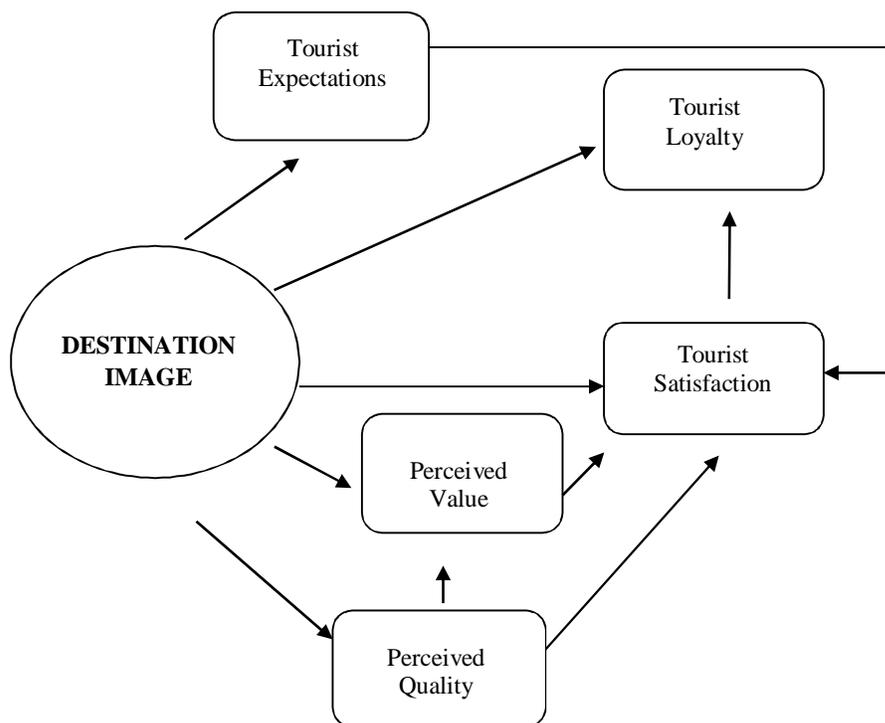


Figure 1: Propose Research Framework

### 3.3 Research hypotheses

Based on the research framework shown in Figure 1, the researchers posit:

- H1: Destination image has a positive effect on tourist expectations.
- H2: Destination image has a positive effect on perceived quality.
- H3: Destination image has a positive effect on perceived value.
- H4: The more positive the destination images are, the higher the satisfaction levels.
- H5: The more positive the destination images are, the higher the loyalty levels.
- H6: Tourist satisfaction positively affects destination loyalty.
- H7: Tourist expectations mediate the relationship between destination image and satisfaction.
- H8: Perceived quality mediates the relationship between destination image and satisfaction.
- H9: Perceived value mediates the relationship between destination image and satisfaction.
- H10: Perceived quality mediates the relationship between destination image and perceived value.
- H11: Satisfaction mediates the relationship between destination image and loyalty.

### 3.4 Data collection

The self-administered survey method was used to collect data from the tourists. A structured questionnaire consisting of Section A, Section B, Section C and Section D was developed and distributed to the respondents in 2013. All items used to measure the predictor and criterion variables used the 5-point Likert scale. A pilot test was conducted on 50 respondents, following which 500 questionnaires were later distributed to the visitors in Langkawi Island.

### 3.5 Data analysis

To analyze the demographic variables, descriptive statistics was employed. Reliability of the items was measured using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ). To test the hypotheses, regression analysis was run to examine the relationships between the variables.

## 4. Research results

### 4.1 Profile of the respondents

Out of the 482 respondents, 187 were first-time visitors and 295 were repeat visitors. The majority of the tourists were Malaysian 426 (88.4%) while 56 (11.6%) were foreigners (Canadian, Thai, Indonesian, Taiwanese, Indian, Italian, French, Norwegian and Austrian). More than 70% of the locals were Malay, and only 14% were Chinese or Indian. More than 60% of the tourists fell into the 21-39 age group and possessed diploma and/or Bachelor's degree qualifications. The number of single and married visitors were almost equal.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics (n=482)

	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
First visit	187	38.8	Malaysian	426	88.4
Repeat visit	295	61.2	Non-Malaysian	56	11.6
Malay	340	70.5	20 years and below	89	18.5
Chinese	35	7.3	21-29	182	37.8
Indian	32	6.6	30-39	109	22.6
Others	19	3.9	40-49	67	13.9
Non-Malaysian	56	11.6	50-59	29	6.0
			60-69	6	1.2
Single	244	50.6	Primary	3	0.6
Married	228	47.3	Secondary	132	27.4
Divorced	6	1.2	Diploma	153	31.7
Widowed	1	0.2	Bachelor's degree	145	30.1
Separated	3	0.6	Master	44	9.1
			PhD	5	1.0

### 4.2 Internal consistency of the measurement

An alpha of 0.60 or above is considered acceptable as a good indication of reliability (Hair et al., 1998, Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). Since all constructs in the present study have alpha values above 0.70, the items used to measure each construct have high internal consistency. Moreover, the mean score of each construct is above 4.0 and the standard deviation score for each construct is more than 0.70. See Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive and Reliability Analysis Results (n=482)

Variables	No.of Items	Mean	SD	$\alpha$
Tourist Expectations (TE)	3	4.553	1.287	0.813
Perceived Quality (PQ)	7	4.506	2.296	0.859
Perceived value (PV)	3	4.253	1.673	0.844
Destination Image (DI)	6	4.430	2.223	0.857
Tourist satisfaction (TS)	9	4.551	3.647	0.928
Tourist loyalty (TL)	9	4.447	3.970	0.904

**Note:** Likert 5-point scales was used

#### 4.3 Hypotheses testing (H1-H5)

Simple linear regressions were run to test the direct relationships between destination image and trip behavior. Six separate regression analyses were conducted. As can be seen in Table 3, destination image has a significant positive relationship with tourist expectations, perceived quality, perceived value, tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Furthermore, satisfaction significantly affects loyalty. These results support H1 to H5. The outcomes are consistent with findings of previous research (Lee et al., 2005; Xia et al., 2009; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Mohamad et al., 2011; Yasamorn & Phokha, 2012; Prayag & Ryan, 2012). The findings also prove that when visitors consider destination image as favorable, their expectations, perceived quality, perceived value, satisfaction and loyalty would increase. This implies that there is a strong likelihood that they would revisit the island in the future. There is an equally strong possibility that their positive testimony would spread by word of mouth, as they would most likely recommend Langkawi Island to others.

Table 3: Direct effects of destination image

	B	$\beta$	t-value	p-value	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F-value	F-sig.
D. Image → TE	0.609	0.575	15.386	0.000	0.575	0.330	236.725	0.000
D. Image → PQ	0.681	0.679	20.240	0.000	0.679	0.460	409.654	0.000
D. Image → PV	0.635	0.528	13.635	0.000	0.528	0.279	185.921	0.000
D. Image → TS	0.637	0.579	15.577	0.000	0.579	0.336	242.654	0.000
D. Image → TL	0.529	0.425	10.279	0.000	0.425	0.180	105.648	0.000
TS → TL	0.736	0.650	18.376	0.000	0.650	0.422	351.052	0.000

Note: Significant at the 0.05 level

#### 4.4 Mediating effects (H6-H8)

##### 4.4.1 Linking destination image, tourist expectation and tourist satisfaction

The mediating effect of tourist expectation on destination image-satisfaction relationship is shown in Table 4. The results demonstrate that tourist expectations partially mediates the relationship between the two constructs. The strength of the relationship between destination image and satisfaction becomes weaker ( $B = 0.460$ ;  $\beta = 0.418$ ) but the relationship remains significant ( $p = 0.000$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 7 is partially supported. However, no comparison can be made with other research.

Table 4: Destination image, tourist expectation and tourist satisfaction

	B	$\beta$	t-value	p-value	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F-value	F-sig.
Constant	1.566		9.948	0.000	0.623	0.389	152.230	0.000
D. Image	0.460	0.418	9.576	0.000				
Expectations	0.291	0.281	6.433	0.000				

#### 4.4.2 Linking destination image, perceived quality and tourist satisfaction

When perceived quality was entered into the model, the result indicates that perceived quality partially mediates the relationship between destination image and satisfaction. The strength of the relationship between destination image and satisfaction becomes weaker ( $B = 0.375$ ;  $\beta = 0.341$ ) but the relationship is still significant ( $p = 0.000$ ). Hence, Hypothesis 8 is partially supported, although no comparison can be made with other research.

Table 5: Destination image, perceived quality and tourist satisfaction

	B	$\beta$	t-value	p-value	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F-value	F-sig.
Constant	1.070		6.514	0.000	0.634	0.402	161.1114	0.000
D. Image	0.375	0.341	7.099	0.000				
P. Quality	0.384	0.351	7.293	0.000				

#### 4.4.3 Linking destination image, perceived value and tourist satisfaction

From Table 6, it can be seen that there is a positive relationship between destination image and satisfaction, and perceived value positively affects satisfaction. However, the strength of the relationship between destination image and satisfaction becomes weaker ( $B = 0.375$ ;  $\beta = 0.341$ ) as compared to the strength before perceived value was entered into the model ( $B = 0.637$ ;  $\beta = 0.539$ ). Thus, there is a partial mediation effect, meaning that Hypothesis 9 is partially supported. Again, the researchers are unable to compare the outcome with previous empirical work.

Table 6: Destination image, perceived value and tourist satisfaction

	B	$\beta$	t-value	p-value	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F-value	F-sig.
Constant	1.272		7.836	0.000	0.611	0.374	142.949	0.000
D. Image	0.504	0.458	10.758	0.000				
P. value	0.210	0.230	5.391	0.000				

#### 4.4.4 Linking destination image, perceived quality and perceived value

There is a strong relationship between destination image and perceived value ( $B = 0.635$ ;  $\beta = 0.528$ ) as shown in Table 3. However, when perceived quality was entered into the model, the relationship becomes weaker ( $B = 0.394$ ;  $\beta = 0.328$ ) – see Table 7. The relationship between perceived quality and perceived value is positive and significant. As such, it can be concluded that perceived quality partially mediates the destination image-perceived value relationship. This means that Hypothesis 10 is partially supported, although the finding contradicts the results of studies carried out by Chen and Tsai (2007) and Lee et al. (2005).

Table 7: Destination image, perceived quality and perceived value

	B	$\beta$	t-value	p-value	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F-value	F-sig.
Constant	0.940		4.934	0.000	0.571	0.326	115.991	0.000
D. Image	0.394	0.328	6.422	0.000				
P. Quality	0.354	0.295	5.786	0.000				

#### 4.4.5 Linking destination image, tourist satisfaction and tourist loyalty

When destination image and satisfaction was regressed with destination loyalty, it was found that satisfaction fully mediates the link between destination image and loyalty – see Table 8. Before satisfaction was entered into the model, destination image has a significant positive relationship with loyalty ( $\beta = 0.425$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). However, after satisfaction was entered into the model, the relationship becomes insignificant ( $\beta = 0.072$ ;  $p = 0.089$ ), giving support to Hypothesis 11. Thus, it can be concluded that satisfaction might be a better predictor of behavior than destination image. This corroborates the results of Chi and Qu (2008), Quintal and Polczynski (2010) as well as Yu and Dean (2001). On the contrary, the outcome is inconsistent with the findings of Yasamorn and Phokha (2012) who conclude that tourist satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between destination image and destination loyalty.

Table 8: Destination image, tourist satisfaction and tourist loyalty

	B	$\beta$	t-value	p-value	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F-value	F-sig.
Constant	0.700		3.839	0.000	0.653	0.426	177.678	0.000
D. Image	0.090	0.072	1.705	0.089				
Satisfaction	0.689	0.608	14.312	0.000				

## 5. Conclusion and recommendations

An investigation into the interrelationship between image of a destination and behavioural intentions is not only important from the theoretical but also from the managerial perspective. In this respect, findings of this study represents an addition to the study of perceived image at the destination level. The positive significant link found between destination image and trip behaviors can help managers, operators and policy makers acquire a more in-depth understanding of the important elements that can lead to a successful delivery of tourism products. More specifically, it highlights the need to explore marketing actions that may enhance and maintain loyalty.

This study has provided empirical evidence that satisfaction might be a stronger predictor of behavior than destination image. This implies that satisfied tourists are more willing to revisit a destination as well as spread positive word of mouth. Therefore, it is assumed that a focus on attaining a high tourist satisfaction level can create positive post-purchase tourist behavior. In reality however, ensuring customers are satisfied is only winning half the battle. As Solomon (2002) succinctly cautions, consumer indifference, availability of competitive options and low costs of switching may encourage customers to defect to other alternatives despite being satisfied. Indeed, with the proliferation of attractive destinations in the region and with more consumers seeking new experiences that suit their individual needs, the notion of hard-core loyals is becoming extinct. Thus, effective strategies for customer retention is needed for the long term survival of any destination.

Like many other destinations that rely on repeat visitors, Langkawi needs constant upgrading of its attractions, amenities, accessibility, activities, ancillary services and available packages. As suggested by a few respondents, the following measures should be taken in the near future:

- i) provide lifts or escalators at the Langkawi airport;
- ii) replace the small signages with bigger ones;
- iii) provide more public toilets at the beaches and at the small nearby islands;
- iv) build more affordable chalets for the low and middle income groups of visitors;
- v) offer affordable packages for the young visitors (school children and students); and
- vi) control the prices of food and private car rentals.

Policy makers and destination managers are thus advised to concentrate their efforts on addressing these weaknesses as failure to do so would jeopardise Langkawi's reputation and position as a premier island destination in Malaysia. To quote Chen and Kerstetter (1999) again, "Tourists will choose one destination over another only when its positive image aspects exceed its negative image aspects", so a single unpleasant incident, no matter how trivial, can lead to a negative overall evaluation which will cause a tourist to opt for other destinations in future.

Additionally, knowledge of visitation profiles is critical to successful marketing of the island. Generally, visitors who seek novelty or change may not consider revisiting a destination; however, those who have developed an emotional attachment to the place or prefer certainty and assurance may be interested to revisit. Yet, repeat visitors do have expectations – they expect to see new images and to have more choices of tourist attractions within the island so that their current trip would be more enjoyable than the previous one. Offering them with new exclusive attractions that can showcase the natural beauty of the island may encourage them to revisit, bring more companions, stay longer and spend more. While it may not be possible to control all the elements that shape the image of a destination, managers can still exert significant influence on the images portrayed to tourists through the use of creative advertising to promote tourist attractions, organizing cultural events that appeal to tourists, and delivering high quality service. To put it in a nutshell, presenting the right image, maintaining it and delivering appropriate products and services that fulfill tourists' needs and wants should be the focus of destination managers as these will affect visitors' post-purchase behavior and hence sustain destination competitiveness.

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