



The Impacts of Destination Personality and Electronic Word-of-Mouth on Tourists Destination Choice

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this research is to examine the influences of destination personality and electronic word-of-mouth in the context of destination selection decision-making. It also examines the influence of environmental sustainability on individuals' sense of satisfaction and the mediating role of satisfaction in the context of destination choice and its subsequent effect on revisit intention. Langkawi's designation as a UNESCO Geopark underscores its significance in terms of environmental sustainability, which is a primary focus of this study. The findings indicate a significant roles of personality traits of a destination and the electronic word-of-mouth communicated by individuals in decision-making process for selecting a destination. Additionally, the findings reveal that satisfaction plays a mediating role in the relationship between destination selection and the desire to engage in future visits.

JEL Classification: G14

Keywords: Destination Choice; Destination Personality; Electronic Word of Mouth; Langkawi; Malaysia

Article history:

Received: 15 December 2022

Accepted: 16 June 2023

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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.47836/ijeam.17.2.04>

© International Journal of Economics and Management. ISSN 1823-836X. e-ISSN 2600-9390.

INTRODUCTION

The contribution of tourism activity to economic monetary growth and expansion has long been recognised and acknowledged. Globally, the tourism industry is one of the key sectors of the world economy that contributes massively to employment, generates huge income, and promotes economic wealth. Tourism industry is also one of the fastest-growing sectors. According to the World Tourism Organization UNWTO (2020), tourism is one of the favourable sectors in which tourism was able to contribute 2.8 percent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2019. However, compared with 2018, the figure showed a decreasing trend as number whereby tourism was able to contribute more (i.e. 3.6 percent) of world GDP in 2018 (UNWTO, 2019). This was largely due to the decreasing number in GDP was due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic which COVID-19 that started at the end of 2019 that negatively affected which gave an impact to world tourism industry.

As mentioned by Onyecheghe et al. (2022), Malaysia has a diverse economy, a stable financial system, strong public health measures, and pro-active macroeconomic policies. Moreover, tourism is a major GDP contributor for Malaysia. According to World Travel and Tourism Council WTTC (2019), travel and tourism contributed 13.3 percent of Malaysia GDP and it showed an increasing number of 2.6 percent as compared to 2018. Based on the statistics from Tourism Malaysia (2020) in 2019, Malaysia received 25.10 million tourist arrivals and generated RM86.1 billion. However, as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic in 2020, tourism revenue fell sharply to just RM12.7 billion (Mohamad et al., 2022). Malaysia is blessed to be gifted with diversity of natural assets and attractions. Langkawi is one of the unique destinations in Malaysia located at Kedah. According to CNN Travel (2019), Langkawi is ranked as top 20 destinations in Asia with beautiful beaches. Langkawi is also known as the one and only UNESCO Global Geopark in Malaysia and the first in Southeast Asia since 2007 (Lembaga Pembangunan Langkawi LADA, 2021). LADA (2021) also claimed that the number of tourist arrivals in Langkawi kept increasing since the number of tourist arrivals in 2018 was 3.62 million and it increased to 3.92 million in 2019.

As Langkawi is a unique travel destination, it is necessary to maintain its status as top travel destination in Malaysia. In order to sustain Langkawi as a competitive destination, the current study intends to investigate the factors that influence the tourists to choose Langkawi as their holiday destination. Many components are connected to the decision to choose a destination to visit such as destination attractiveness, the feedback from other tourists and sustainability of particular destination.

The personality of destination also plays an important role in attracting the tourists to choose the holiday destination. As mentioned by Hosany et al. (2006), much research has touched on destination personality, but it only focused on conceptual study. Moreover, Xie and Lee (2013) revealed that destination personality has not been fully discussed in tourism study. Due to this scenario, the current study attempts to explore the personality of Langkawi that attracts the tourists to choose Langkawi as their holiday destination. With the advancement of technology nowadays, most of the information can be gathered from cyber space. In today's world, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) has become more popular when people search for any reviews from the past travellers. In tourism study, many researchers have explored on e-WOM as a source of information such as the study by Sun et al. (2021) which measured e-WOM in the context of cruise industry. Meanwhile, research conducted by Yeh et al. (2020) looked at e-WOM from the customer's perspective of hotel. Moreover, research by Liu et al. (2019) and Israeli et al. (2019) investigated the elements of e-WOM in the area of service recovery. By analysing the past studies, the current study found that there is still a gap in measuring e-WOM as the source of information for travellers when they want to decide on travel destination. Thus, the current study tries to bridge the gap by exploring e-WOM in the context of destination choice. Since Langkawi is a popular destination in Malaysia, environment sustainability is very crucial for Langkawi as a competitive destination. However, as reported by New Straits Time (2017) and Salleh et al. (2014), Langkawi has faced environmental problem as well as issues regarding water quality, land structure and marine life. Since the issue has risen in Langkawi, it gives an idea to the current research to examine and investigate more on the sustainability of Langkawi and its effect on tourist's choice.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Destination Choice

Destination choice can be defined as the choice that has been made by tourists when they have many alternatives (Liu, 2014). As mentioned by Masiero and Qiu (2018), destination choice is a popular topic among tourism scholars. Destination choice is more related with tourist decision making process. Since there are many interesting and attractive destinations in the world, tourists need to choose a particular place as their holiday destination at one time. Much research has been done in the context of destination choice; however, based on past literature, the current study found that there are limited studies (Kozak and Kim, 2019; Mutinda and Mayaka, 2012) that explored on the factors that influence the choice of destination. Study by Kozak and Kim (2019) investigated destination choice for pleasure vacation among the Chinese tourists. The study measured the choice of destination from three major factors which are intrapersonal concerns, cost and destination borne concerns. On the other hand, the research by Mutinda and Makaya (2012) measured the factors that influence Nairobi, Kenya residents in choosing the domestic destination to visit. There are ten factors that determine destination choice which are knowledge and adventure, economic concern, personal safety, destination information, travel arrangement, destination features, family and friends, leisure and relaxation, religious and culture consideration, and travel bragging (Mutinda and Makaya, 2012).

Destination Personality

Nowadays, there are many tourism destinations being established and this has caused a negative impact to certain destinations. The consequences can be seen through how tourism destination can sustain their uniqueness and make sure their destination becomes the choice of tourist as compared to other destination. As mentioned by Kotler and Keller (2016), the uniqueness of destination can give a positive impact to tourism destination whereby it will help in positioning a tourism destination in tourist minds. Moreover, Suryaningsih et al. (2020) believed that the strength of one particular destination depends on the features and personality that are built by those destination. Destination personality has become a popular topic among tourism scholars due to the growth of tourism destination in the world. As defined by Mendez and Hine (2016), destination personality is the features of destination, and it is connected with the culture of the destination.

Destination personality is the extension of brand personality which has been developed by Aaker (1997). However, it appears that the dimension of brand personality is not suitable to measure travel destination because destination personality is quite different compared to brand personality (Kovacic et al., 2020). As mentioned by Xie and Lee (2013), the dimension of brand personality is not applicable with destination personality because brand personality focuses more on tangible product while destination personality considers tangible products and intangible services. Since this issue has arisen, the study by Ekinici and Hosany (2006) was the first to explore the dimension of destination personality, followed by other scholars like Chen and Phou (2013), Kumar and Nayak (2015), and Kumar (2016).

Destination personality is an important strategy to tourism destination because by highlighting the destination personality of one particular destination, it can attract the tourists to visit and make repeated visits (Suryaningsih et al., 2020). However, as stated by Sharifsamet et al. (2018), most business providers and marketers face some challenges to attract the tourists to visit by highlighting destination personality. By exploring past literature, the current research found that there is limited research that explored the relationship between destination personality and destination choice specifically in island destination which leads to the current research to bridge the gap between those relationship. Based on the above argument, the following hypothesis is projected:

H1: Destination personality significantly influences destination choice.

Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM)

As the number of travel destination keeps growing, consumers rely more on online resources for information in order to guide them with the choice of destination. As mentioned by Yang et al. (2018), past traveller plays an important role in providing information about travel destination since it is the second most popular source after search engine such as Google. With the popularity of consumer review, the service providers as well as

practitioners have begun to maximize the use of online customer review to promote their business by showing positive feedbacks from past travellers called as electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). As defined by Sun et al. (2021), e-WOM is communication between consumer via online media forms while Abubakar et al. (2017) claimed that e-WOM is a written memo posted on online platform by past travellers about their experience when they visit one particular destination.

Since hospitality and tourism industry are related with services, online review plays an important role as a reliable source of potential traveller. The information from e-WOM has become more popular because the information is more up-to-date, enjoyable, helpful and trustworthy (Yang et al., 2018; Abubakar et al., 2017). The growth of website, blog, and review platform has increased interpersonal interaction among the travellers to share their experience. As reported by TripAdvisor (2014), an online website such as TripAdvisor has become trendy among travellers and it appears that online review from this website can influence the travel decision of restaurants, hotels and destinations.

Much research has explored e-WOM in the context of tourism industry such as cruise lines (Sun et al., 2021), hotel performance (Yang et al., 2018), emotion tendency (Yan et al., 2018), destination trust (Abubakar et al., 2017) and online trust (Filiari et al., 2015). However, the current research explores on the effect of e-WOM on the choice of destination and the destination focuses on an island. The new proven relationship gives a novel contribution especially in the tourism area. The following hypothesis is hence proposed:

H2: e-WOM significantly influences destination choice.

Environment Sustainability

Over the past few years, sustainable development has been one of the most talked-about issues (Sumarta et al., 2023). The development of tourism area will reduce poverty, build the infrastructure as well as increase standard of living among local community but in return, the process of development at the tourism area also contributes a negative impact to the environment (Ahmed et al., 2020). As mentioned by Fang et al. (2021), unplanned development can cause environment disaster which will give an impact to marine life and natural sceneries. As highlighted by United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2018), sustainability in tourism industry can be classified under three main components which are economic, social-culture and environment. Nowadays, the awareness of the importance of sustainability development has become a main concern among practitioners, government agencies, tourist and local community (Obradovic et al., 2021).

In the context of Langkawi, tourism industry has fostered the economic condition in Langkawi by improving the standard of living and offering job opportunities to the local community. However, it gives a negative impact on the environment conditions (Marzuki, 2008; Salleh et al., 2014). Moreover, the report from New Straits Times (2017) also mentioned that Langkawi is at a worse condition whereby the natural environment at Langkawi has deteriorated, and water pollution and the issues on land structure have given harmful impact on the marine life. Similarly, as reported by Halim et al. (2018), Langkawi is also facing the issue of air pollution due to open burning from local community as well as from the neighbourhood country, Indonesia.

Research on sustainability has been widely explored by past research in various contexts such as urban sustainable (Fang et al., 2021), sustainable development (Obradovic et al., 2021), tourism sustainability (Ng et al., 2017), sustainable learning (Liu et al., 2017), and hotel practices (Reid et al., 2017). By reviewing the past literature, it obviously showed that the research on sustainable tourism has drawn so much attention. However, there is still a gap in the context of sustainable environment and the level of tourist satisfaction. Due to this gap, the current study tends to explore the environmental sustainability at Langkawi and how it affects the level of satisfaction among the tourists. Thus, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H3: Environmental sustainability significantly influences tourist satisfaction.

Satisfaction and Revisit Intention

For travel destination, tourist satisfaction is very important to ensure that the destination becomes the top choice among the travellers. Satisfaction refers to the emotional state and judgement from the person either they feel pleasant or unpleasant with their choice or experience (Cong, 2021; Pan et al., 2020). In the tourism context, satisfaction can be measured from the difference between what tourists expect before the visit and what they

experience after the visit (Cong, 2021; Albaity and Melhem, 2017). In other words, when the expectation of the tourist is met, it will develop a pleasant feeling but if the tourist experiences do not match the expectation, the tourist will feel dissatisfied, and this causes unpleasant feeling. As highlighted by Albaity and Melhem (2017), the level of satisfaction is different compared to one and other. This statement reflects the importance of exploring tourist satisfaction specifically on Langkawi in order to determine whether Langkawi has met the tourist’s expectation which can develop satisfaction among the travellers.

One of the ways to guarantee sustainable destination is by encouraging repeat visitation among the travellers (Hu and Xu, 2021). Revisit intention can be defined as the likelihood of a traveller to repeat an activity and revisit the destination in the future (Meng and Cui, 2020). As mentioned by Yu et al. (2021), since services are provided at travel destination, encouraging revisit by traveller is very crucial because it is more effective in terms of cost and time spent. The level of satisfaction plays a role in revisit intention. According to Vassiliadis et al. (2021), tourists with a high level of satisfaction have higher intention to revisit the destination and the finding supports the relationship by providing the result that there is a positive relationship between satisfaction and revisit intention.

Moreover, satisfaction can also be measured as a mediator between the two constructs. As studied by Albaity and Melhem (2017), they explored satisfaction as the mediator between novelty seeking, destination image and destination loyalty and the finding proved that satisfaction acts as a mediator between those three constructs. Moreover, the study by Khuong and Ha (2014) also managed to prove that satisfaction mediates the relationship between pull and push factors with revisit intention which explains that revisit intention depends on the level of tourist satisfaction that is generated from pull and push factors. With the support from past literature, the current study tries to explore the role of satisfaction as a mediator between destination choice and revisit intention. Thus, the hypothesis is portrayed as follows:

H4: Satisfaction mediates the relationship between destination choice and revisits intention.

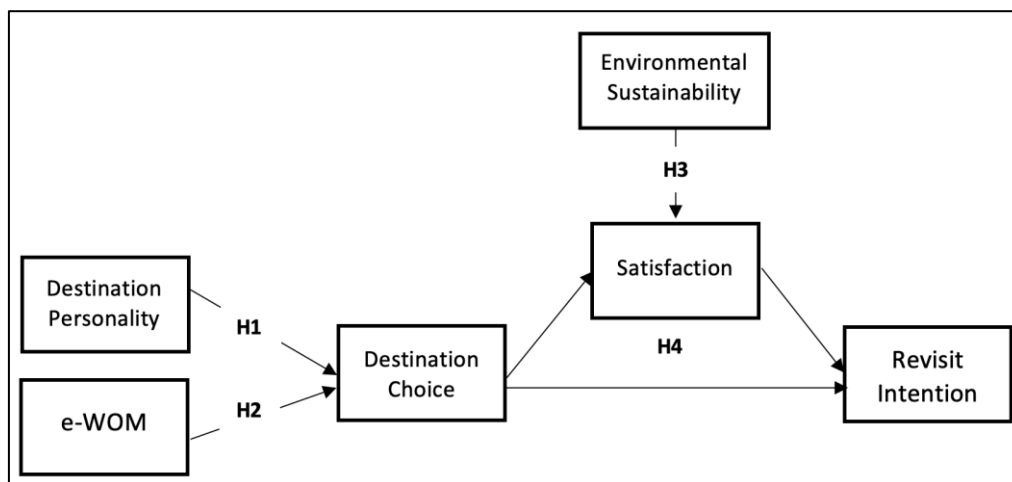


Figure 1 Proposed Research Framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sampling and Data Collection

In the process of gathering the data, the current study distributed survey questionnaire to the respondents. The current study applied quota sampling technique which divided the respondents into two groups of local respondents (80%) and international respondents (20%). According to LADA (2018), the number of tourists who visited Langkawi in 2017 was 3,679,158 whereby according to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), if the population is more than 100,000 people, the minimum sample size required is 384 respondents. However, to reduce errors in completing the survey or missing data, the current research allocated another 30% and the final number of the distributed questionnaire was 500. According to the finding, 50.9 percent of respondents were male and another 49.1 percent were female. The biggest age group who participated in this study was from 25

to 30 years old with 124 respondents followed by 31 to 34 years old with 103 respondents. For Malaysian respondents, 55.1 percent were Malays followed by Chinese (19.1%) and Indians (5.4%). There were 13 nationalities representing international respondents with the highest was China (4.8%) followed by Singapore (3.2%), Thailand (2.6%) and Saudi Arabia (2.0%). The details of the respondent profiles are presented in Table 1 as follows.

Table 1 The Profile of the Respondents

Description	Frequency (n=503)	Percentage %
Gender		
Male	256	50.9
Female	247	49.1
Age (year)		
18 – 24 years old	93	18.5
25 – 30 years old	124	24.7
31 – 34 years old	103	20.5
35 – 40 years old	101	20.1
41 years and above	82	16.3
Nationality – Malaysian (n=400)		
Malay	277	55.1
Chinese	96	19.1
Indian	27	5.4
Nationality – Non-Malaysian (n=103)		
China	24	4.8
Singapore	16	3.2
Thailand	13	2.6
Saudi Arabia	10	2.0
Indonesia	7	1.4
German	6	1.2
Pakistan	5	1.0
French	5	1.0
Polish	5	1.0
Australian	4	0.8
Dutch	3	0.6
New Zealand	3	0.6
British	2	0.4

Questionnaire and Measurements

There are seven sections in the questionnaire in which one section reflects the respondent's profile and the other six sections focuses on the main constructs that are modified from past studies which include destination personality (Hosany et al., 2007; Chen and Phou, 2013; Kumar and Nayak, 2015), e-WOM (Jalilvand et al., 2013; Ishida et al., 2016; Zarrad and Debabi, 2015), destination choice (Zgolli and Zaiem, 2018; Um and Crompton, 1990), environmental sustainability (Choi and Srikaya, 2005), satisfaction (Cong, 2016; Loi et al., 2017; Taher et al., 2015) and revisit intention (Cong, 2016; Abubakar et al., 2017; Stylos et al., 2016; Meng and Han, 2018). This study applied five-point Likert scale to all main constructs which represents (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree and (5) strongly agree.

RESULTS

Common Method Variance (CMV)

CMV analysis is conducted before other analysis tests. As highlighted by Podsakoff et al. (2003), if the value is higher than 40.7 percent, common method bias occurs especially in studies that measure consumer behaviour. The finding shows that the variance explained was 20.33 percent which does not exceed 40.7 percent. Thus, common method bias is not noteworthy in this study.

Measurement Model

The measurement model is the first phase before analysing the structural model analysis. As mentioned by Ramayah et al. (2018), a factor loading of 0.708 or higher is suggested but a loading between 0.700 to 0.500 is acceptable if the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR) are higher. For AVE, the score should be more than 0.500 while CR should be more than 0.700 (Hair et al., 2017). According to the

findings in Table 2, the values show that all factor loadings of AVE and CR were above the minimum threshold which meet the requirement. Moreover, the current research also measured discriminant validity by using Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio and according to Gold et al. (2001), the value of HTMT should be less than 0.90. As shown in Table 3, all values for the reflective items passed the threshold value; therefore, discriminant validity of the measurement model was established.

Table 2 Measurement Properties of Reflective Construct (Factor Loading, AVE and CR)

Construct	Items	Loading	AVE	CR
e-WOM	C1	0.729	0.657	0.905
	C2	0.836		
	C3	0.835		
	C4	0.837		
	C5	0.811		
DP	E11	0.782	0.546	0.856
	E12	0.698		
	E13	0.631		
	E15	0.771		
	E16	0.799		
DC	F2	0.771	0.507	0.802
	F3	0.564		
	F6	0.776		
	F8	0.716		
ES	G2	0.557	0.511	0.802
	G4	0.819		
	G6	0.828		
	G7	0.613		
ST	H1	0.688	0.599	0.881
	H2	0.690		
	H3	0.863		
	H4	0.747		
	H5	0.862		
RI	I1	0.885	0.695	0.901
	I2	0.886		
	I3	0.788		
	I4	0.768		

Note: DC (Destination Choice), DP (Destination Personality), ES (Environmental Sustainability), RI (Revisit Intention), ST (Satisfaction) and eWOM (Electronic Word of Mouth).

Table 3 Discriminant Validity using Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlation (HTMT)

	DC	DP	ES	RI	ST	eWOM
DC						
DP	0.636					
ES	0.621	0.759				
RI	0.68	0.806	0.795			
ST	0.645	0.868	0.814	0.865		
eWOM	0.538	0.521	0.641	0.514	0.446	

Note: DC (Destination Choice), DP (Destination Personality), ES (Environmental Sustainability), RI (Revisit Intention), ST (Satisfaction) and eWOM (Electronic Word of Mouth).

Structural Model

Before the current study measures the path-coefficient to evaluate the hypotheses, collinearity issue is first assessed. As mentioned earlier, the value of VIF should be less than 5 (Hair et al., 2011) in which the constructs for the current study met all the conditions (DC = 1.232; DP = 1.353; ES = 1.232; ST = 1.000; e-WOM = 1.854). Thus, collinearity issues do not occur in this study.

Next, the current study analyses path-coefficient to measure the significance hypotheses by using bootstrapping technique. Based on the finding in Table 4, all hypotheses were supported. The finding indicates that destination personality ($\beta = 0.292$, $t=7.325$, $p<0.00$) and e-WOM ($\beta = 0.093$, $t=2.349$, $p<0.01$) exhibit positive relationship with destination choice while environmental sustainability ($\beta = 0.568$, $t=19.681$, $p<0.00$) reveals a positive relationship with satisfaction; thus H1, H2 and H3 are supported.

Table 4 Path Coefficient Assessment

Hypothesis	R/ship	Std.Beta (β)	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	DP > DC	0.292	0.040	7.325**	0.000	Significant
H2	eWOM > DC	0.093	0.040	2.349**	0.010	Significant
H3	ES > ST	0.568	0.029	19.681**	0.000	Significant

Note: DC (Destination Choice), DP (Destination Personality), ES (Environmental Sustainability), ST (Satisfaction) and eWOM (Electronic Word of Mouth).

Mediation Effect Assessment

According to Hair et al. (2017), bootstrapping is the best analysis method to measure mediation variables and the current study proposed satisfaction as a mediator between destination choice and revisit intention. As recommended by Hair et al. (2017), the t-value should be greater than 1.645 and the p-value is less than 0.05. Moreover, when measuring mediation, there are three types of mediation that need to be considered which are full mediation, partial mediation and no mediation which can be measured through Variance Accounted For (VAF) value. As established by Ramayah et al. (2018), full mediation can be interpreted if the value of VAF is higher than 80% whereas partial mediation happens when the value of VAF is between 20% to 80%. Lastly, if the value VAF is below 20%, no mediation occurs. As indicated in Table 5, the finding shows that the VAF value for the current study is 44.5 percent which fell under the second category of partial mediation. Therefore, the findings conclude that satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between destination choice and revisit intention in which H4 is supported ($t=5.702$, $p<0.005$).

Table 5 Mediation Result

Relationship	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Stand. Dev	t-value	p-value	VAF	Result
H4: DC -> ST -> RI	0.191	0.193	0.034	5.702	0.000	44.50%	Supported (Partial Mediation)

Note: DC (Destination Choice), ST (Satisfaction) and RI (Revisit Intention).

Through the analysis of R^2 , the study can identify the model's predictive accuracy where R^2 will calculate the amount of independent construct which can be explained by the dependent construct (Hair et al., 2014). According to Hair et al. (2011), the R^2 value of 0.75 for social sciences study is substantial, 0.50 is moderate and 0.25 is weak. The finding indicates that the value for destination choice is 0.379 which shows a weak level, while satisfaction has the value of 0.513 and revisit intention has 0.566 which is at a moderate level. Moreover, effect size (f^2) is analysed to measure the effect of independent variables towards the dependent variable. As declared by Cohen (1988), there are four categories of effect size which are substantial (0.35), medium (0.15), small (0.02) and trivial (<0.02). In explaining destination choice, e-WOM (0.007) shows a trivial effect size while destination personality (0.102) shows a small effect size. On the other hand, in the context of satisfaction, destination choice (0.108) indicates a small effect size and environmental sustainability (0.538) shows a substantial effect size. Additionally, in describing revisit intention, satisfaction shows a substantial effect size of 1.304.

Finally, the current study measures predictive relevance by using Stone-Geisser's Q^2 (Hair et al., 2017; Stone, 1974; Geisser, 1974). The finding indicates that the Q^2 values for destination choice (0.174), satisfaction (0.287) and revisit intention (0.369) are higher than 0; thus, revealing that the model has predictive relevance and validity.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The current study has contributed to theoretical knowledge since the current study was able to prove that destination personality and e-WOM can influence the tourist decision in choosing travel destination, and this proven result has contributed to the knowledge of marketing field. In the case of destination personality, practitioners can develop interesting strategy by emphasising on the personality of Langkawi in their marketing strategy. As found in the research, one of the Langkawi's personalities is adventurous. So, the practitioners can stress on the activities that represent adventures such as skydiving, rafting and many more. As proven in the current research, e-WOM is one of the important tools for the tourists to get their source of information when they want to decide the holiday destination. The policymakers and practitioners can take this advantage by showing positive feedback of past travellers in their marketing campaign; thus, this will attract potential travellers to choose the destination as well as activities offered by practitioners.

Lastly, policymakers should apply proper development in managing Langkawi as a competitive destination. LADA should set up rules and regulations on environmental sustainability for business operators, services providers as well as hoteliers to avoid harmful impact on the environment. There are many ways to monitor tourism areas such as controlling the development of tourism area, creating awareness among business

providers as well as developing strong enforcement and penalties for illegal activities that harm the environment. Proper tourism development is needed to protect wildlife and natural habitats as well as the community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to extend their gratitude to the respondents who participated in this study and the reviewers of this paper for providing constructive comments.

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