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TRAVEL DURING COVID-19 IN MALAYSIA: THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 RISK KNOWLEDGE, DESTINATION IMAGE AND VALUE

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Abstract

The influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on travel behaviour is currently devastating the tourism sector. In this paper, we investigate the influence of destination image, COVID-19 risk knowledge, destination value and tourist intention to revisit. Empirical data were collected using an online survey distributed via social media platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp) and email. Our sample consisted of Malaysians who travelled several times during the movement control order periods (after February 2020) in Malaysia. The results of structural equation modelling reveal that destination value significantly mediates the relationship between both components of destination image and tourist intention to revisit. Most importantly, we probed the interaction effect of COVID-19 risk knowledge on affective destination image. The results indicate that even a moderate level of understanding and knowledge of COVID-19 risks significantly strengthens the influence of affective destination image on destination value.

Keywords: COVID-19, destination image, destination value, Malaysia, intention to revisit

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced most governments worldwide to curb travelling and restrict social movement through lockdowns, stringent outbound travel restrictions and the enforcement of quarantine to control the spread of the pandemic. As a result, many countries whose economies rely on tourism have experienced a steep fall in their tourism income, threatening the survival of tourism-related businesses (Matiza, 2020; Ruiz Estrada, Koutronas, & Lee, 2020; Yang et al., 2020). The Southeast Asia region is a major tourism destination with strong branding. It is known for gastronomy and cultural tourism (Hussin, 2018a). In Malaysia, the tourism sector contributed 15.9 percent or RM240.2 billion to the country's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2019. However, coupled with COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns by March 2020, its international arrivals declined by more than 78.6 percent in 2019, from 20.1 million tourists down to only 4.25 million tourists in 2020. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) stated that globally, international arrivals plunged by 73 percent in 2020 and by 87 percent in January 2021, with more than USD1.3 trillion in losses in total revenues from international tourists (UNWTO, 2021). Undoubtedly, tourism destinations must increase their marketing activities to reattract tourists to visit these destinations again as soon as government restrictions allow. These marketing activities, besides enhancing destination image and value, must educate tourists on standard operating procedures for them to travel safely during the pandemic. Additionally, marketing activities must address the risks that tourists may face and educate them about the safety procedures implemented that protect them from being infected with COVID-19. This adds to the preparation that tourists usually do before travelling; tourists often conduct information searches to ensure that there are limited uncertainties during their travels.

Understanding and assessing risks is critical in selecting a destination (Hasan, Abdullah, Lew, & Islam, 2019; Zhu & Deng, 2020). Previous studies examining the impact of diseases, epidemics and natural disasters on travelling decision making reveal that when tourists have a higher level of knowledge and understanding of the risks involved, they tend to be against travelling to a destination (Chew & Jahari, 2014; Matiza, 2020; Wang, Xue, Wang, & Wu, 2020). Gaining more knowledge about a destination and its image may enhance the perceived value of the destination, which in turn enhances intention to travel. However, additional risks such as epidemics, pandemics or natural disasters may affect the influence of destination image on destination value, and subsequently tourists' intention to revisit. This is mainly because these occurrences are not frequent (i.e., natural disasters) and, in the case of pandemics, may not be exclusive to a destination; therefore, they are not part of the overall construed destination image. Yet, the

effects of these occurrences can profoundly change the value of a destination. In sum, the influence of perceived risk, destination image, destination value and behavioural intentions has yet to be well investigated (Matiza, 2020). This study proposes that COVID-19 risk knowledge moderates the relationship between destination image, destination value and tourists' intention to revisit a destination.

COVID-19 and Malaysia's Tourism

The Malaysian tourism industry has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Since February 2020, the government has been forced to implement intermittent lockdowns, especially travel restrictions, to reduce the spread of the virus throughout the country. The government declared the Movement Control Order (MCO), barring the entry of tourists into Malaysia (PMO, 2020). The measures taken included 1) travel restrictions on entering and leaving the country, 2) travel restrictions on moving between states, 3) the closure of non-essential retailers and 4) the restriction of social activities. The government also provided the public with ample communication on the risks of COVID-19, focusing on the standard operating procedures (SOPs) that the public must adhere to when leaving their homes. The government announced high risk (red zone) areas to be avoided, and the number of infections in different districts and states. All Malaysians were obliged to install the MySejahtera app, which consolidates and collects information about individuals' whereabouts and provides updates on the current COVID-19 situation. Furthermore, through the Malaysian National Security Council, the government continuously sends SMS messages to update the public on the status of the pandemic in Malaysia. This constant and comprehensive information disseminated to Malaysians ensures good public understanding of the virus, allowing the government to control and contain the spread of the pandemic. By early September 2021, the government announced a loosening of the restrictions on travelling for those who have been fully vaccinated, as part of plans to jumpstart the tourism and service sector.

The Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, Malaysia (MOTAC) announced the cancellation of Visit Malaysia 2020 in March 2020. Domestic tourism decreased by 44.9 percent to 131.7 million visitors in 2020, compared to 239.1 million visitors in 2019. Total tourism expenditures declined by 60.8 percent (RM40.4 billion). The government, led by Tan Sri Dato' Haji Mahiaddin bin Md. Yasin (aka Muhyiddin Yasin), provided many financial stimulus packages to help the tourism industry cope with the sudden decline. These included tax incentives, the postponement of loan repayments, loan restructuring and stimulus packages.

Nevertheless, COVID-19 had a severe impact on Malaysia's tourism sector. Foo et al. (2020) found that airlines and hotels were adversely affected as tourists

cancelled bookings. Moreover, the travel restrictions and bans imposed by the Malaysian government contributed to the lack of tourism activities among local and international tourists. Razak (2020) stated that the impacts of COVID-19 were reflected in the loss of income and jobs and the closure of tourist attractions and hotels. Khan and Hashim (2020) conducted a study on the key issues and challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Malaysian tourism sector. They suggested that for the tourism sector to continue contributing to the country's economic growth, the sector's players must adapt to the new normal of doing business. In line with this, Nordin and Jamal (2021) proposed promoting hiking as a new tourism product in Malaysia; according to them, post-COVID-19, many people would like to participate in activities that promote mental and physical well-being.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Destination Image

Destination image is an integral part of studying tourist behaviour. It is essentially the branding of a destination (Hosany, Ekinci, & Uysal, 2006). It is a multi-attribute concept of three interrelated but distinctive components: cognitive, affective and conative components (Gartner, 1994). Most of the literature focuses on the cognitive and affective components (e.g., Mainolfi & Marino, 2018). Cognitive destination image refers to tourists' assessment of the attributes of a destination in an intellectual way, such as the price of accommodation and the logistics available at the destination (Gartner, 1994). This relates to the amount of knowledge that tourists have about a destination (Pike, 2002). Affective destination image refers to the emotions associated with a destination, such as romanticism, joy or excitement. It reflects tourists' feelings when they are experiencing a destination (Bigné, Sánchez, & Sánchez, 2001).

Destination image has a major influence on destination value (Lai, Griffin, & Babin, 2009). This is a key reason why destination marketing organisations (DMOs) and governments spend millions on destination marketing. A well-defined destination image enhances a destination's value. Increasingly, destinations are focusing on gastronomic experiences to attract tourists. As a soft power resource, gastronomy creates an attractive country image and familiarity with a destination (Hussin, 2018b). A strong destination image influences tourists' perceptions of the value of a destination (Pike, Bianchi, Kerr, & Patti, 2010). Destination awareness, image and quality are key antecedents of destination value (Kim & Qu, 2017). Marketing and promotional activities to create a destination image may increase the visitation of niche markets. For instance, parents with children may perceive theme parks which focus on a child-friendly image as

having a higher value. Thus, constructing the right image helps communicate value to the targeted tourist segments. The relationship between destination image and value has yet to be determined. Although several studies indicate a positive relationship between them, other studies reveal a negative relationship (Allameh, Pool, Jaberi, Salehzadeh, & Asadi, 2015; Nguyen & Alcantara, 2020). Therefore, we hypothesise that:

H1: Cognitive destination image has an effect on destination value

COVID-19 Risk Knowledge

By March 2020, the World Health Organization has imposed travel constraints to contain the rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its data show that international travel increases the probability of cross contamination that creates new virus strains. Therefore, most countries, including Malaysia, are promoting domestic travel among fully vaccinated citizens to sustain tourism industries during the pandemic. There are few studies which examine the effects of perceptions of risk related to contagious diseases on intention to visit. Previous studies in this area discussed diseases such as SARS (Brug et al., 2004), H1N1 (Kim, Zhong, Jehn, & Walsh, 2015), Ebola (Gee & Skovdal, 2017) and other bird flus (Meng et al., 2021). These studies show that there is very likely a link between high levels of uncertainty and risk of contracting COVID-19 and intention to travel. Yet, this area remains under-explored.

Risk knowledge among travellers may help them overcome the fear of uncertainty and travelling insecurities (Munnukka, Uusitalo, & Koivisto, 2017). Risk knowledge is attained by collecting information from various sources, such as personal experiences, word of mouth and advertising and promotions by DMOs and governments (Zhu & Deng, 2020). Tourists collect both general and social information prior to travelling through various forms of interaction and knowledge seeking activities. Previous experiences at the destination may provide tourists with a higher sense of security. Based on the four realms of experience concept, a destination that provides many educational experiences, such as guides, directional signages, information boards and other learning materials, gives tourists a sense of security (Musa, Najmin, Thirumoorthi, & Taha, 2017; Rebuya, 2020). Destinations that provide clear guidelines for tourists when conducting tourist activities tend to reduce levels of uncertainty and fear.

Perceived risk has a strong influence on intention to revisit (Uslu & Karabulut, 2018). This is probably because perceived risk is a part of destination image (Lepp, Gibson, & Lane, 2011). Tourists' knowledge of risk increases their ability to manoeuvre around risks or avoid them altogether in their travels. When faced

with high levels of uncertainty, such as that surrounding COVID-19 infection, tourists going to familiar destinations have some level of assurances based on the risks assessed. For example, a high level of knowledge and understanding of SARS led tourists to have a low-risk perception of a destination (Brug et al., 2004). A similar study also indicated that when tourists have a greater understanding of a pneumonia-related disease, their intention to visit increases (Zhu & Deng, 2020).

Post-visit experiences of a particular destination have the highest likelihood of influencing tourists' search behaviours and future decision making processes (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004). Specifically, we argue that perceived risk interacts with the affective component of destination image. Every destination has a unique set of risks that tourists need to overcome during their travels. By viewing destination websites prior to travelling and understanding the risks involved, tourists may develop greater intention to visit because they are prepared (Chew & Jahari, 2014; Lepp et al., 2011). Destination image and destination risks should be equally addressed by DMOs and governments to provide better guidelines for tourists to overcome constraints and increase travelling enjoyment (Chew & Jahari, 2014). Several studies which examine the relationship between different dimensions of risks in travel find that risks can mitigate behavioural intentions (e.g., Fuchs & Reichel, 2011). Pandemics such as COVID-19 can therefore change perceptions of the risk associated with a destination and lead to lower tourist arrivals. When it comes to affective destination image, deeper risk knowledge may have a positive influence on destination value. Emotional information arguably interacts with rational information to influence perceptions (Frank, Herbas Torrico, Enkawa, & Schvaneveldt, 2014).

In contrast, a lack of understanding of COVID-19 risks during travel can reduce intention to revisit, even when tourists are already familiar with the destination. During the pandemic, communications of destination image should convey high levels of competence, thus assuring tourists of the safety and health steps taken to reduce the chances of COVID-19 infection (Kolbl, Diamantopoulos, Arslanagic-Kalajdzic, & Zabkar, 2020). This study proposes that knowledge and understanding of the risks associated with COVID-19 can interact with affective destination image to influence destination value. Thus, we hypothesise that:

> H2: The influence of affective destination image on destination value is moderated by COVID-19 risk knowledge

Destination Value

In general, perceived value refers to purchase worthiness and consists of several components, generally functional, conditional, social, emotional and epistemic

value (Kolbl et al., 2020; Sheth, Newman, & Gross, 1991). Most of the time, tourists evaluate destination value based on economic and monetary worth (Boo, Busser, & Baloglu, 2009). In the current study, we adopt the financial definition of destination value (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). These valuations relate to tourists' spending versus what they received (i.e., value for money). The literature strongly associates brand value with destination value, as both reflect prices to help justify customers' choices and the standards of a brand or destination and how much it is worth (Tsai, 2005). Destination value has a strong influence on customer satisfaction and loyalty (Jeong & Kim, 2020). It is argued to be a key determinant of behavioural intentions and a mediator of emotional responses (Ryu, Lee, & Kim, 2012). It allows the consumer to feel that there is a positive trade-off for the cost of their stay at the destination (Sheehan & Dommer, 2020; Zeithaml, 1988). In other words, destination value results from an evaluation of the benefits and sacrifices associated with tourism offerings (Zeithaml, Verleye, Hatak, Koller, & Zauner, 2020). A higher level of destination value may increase tourists' intention to revisit a destination (Uslu & Karabulut, 2018). Therefore, we hypothesise that:

H3: Destination value has an effect on intention to revisit

Intention to Revisit

Studies on post-visit behaviour have focused on factors enhancing the long-term sustainability of tourist destinations. Studies adopting the Theory of Planned Behaviour framework reveal that tourist attitudes, social norms and perceived behavioural control have direct effects on behavioural intentions (Ajzen, 2012). The most common post-visit behaviours are intention to revisit, intention to recommend, positive word of mouth, destination loyalty and willingness to share experiences (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Jeong, Yu, & Kim, 2020). These behaviours are strongly determined by the value that tourists received from previous visits. Tourists' intention to revisit has positive outcomes equivalent to those of advertising and is an important source of potential visitors (Kim & Lee, 2019). It also indicates the success of marketing strategies, tourism products and businesses, as repeat purchases and recommendations occur. In domestic tourism, it is profitable to retain loyal customers (Hsu, Tsai, & Wu, 2009). Understanding the factors that lead to the retention of visitors can help construct an attractive destination image (Chen & Tsai, 2007) and increase its revenue (Abdullah, Jayaraman, & Kamal, 2016; Chen & Tsai, 2007).

Theoretical Framework

Based on the discussions above, we propose that the intention to revisit a destination during the COVID-19 pandemic is affected by tourists' perceptions of the cognitive destination image and the interaction between affective destination image and COVID-19 risk knowledge, with destination value as a mediator in this relationship. Figure 1 below illustrates the conceptual framework.

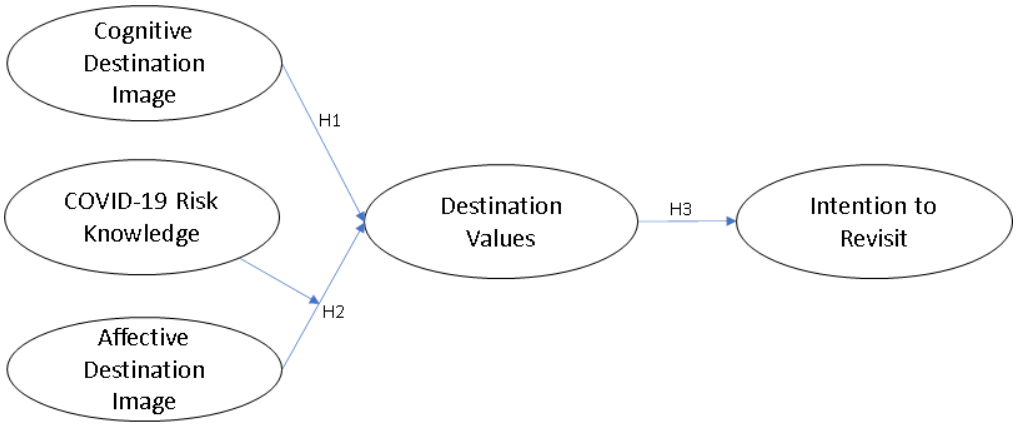


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Sampling Procedures

We adopted a survey design to examine the conceptual framework. Data were collected during a two-month period (February to March 2021). We used Google Forms to create the survey and distributed it online via social media platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp) and email. We used convenience and snowballing sampling, targeting any Malaysian older than 18 who had experienced travelling as a tourist within Malaysia. Respondents were encouraged to share the survey with friends and family who fit the criteria. These methods allowed us to overcome the MCO restrictions imposed throughout the country during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Measures and Survey Design

All measurements were taken from previous established studies. Table 1 below summarises the sources from where we adopted the measurements. We used a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree) for destination value, cognitive destination image, COVID-19 risk knowledge and intention to

revisit, and a 6-point semantic differential scale for affective destination image and intention to revisit. As a procedural remedy for common method variance (CMV), we varied the scales using 0–5 and 1–6 points (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012). It must be highlighted that all items which used 0–5 points were transformed to a 1–6 scale in further analyses. We included two attention check questions to ensure that respondents were not simply randomly selecting responses (Brannon, Sacchi, & Gawronski, 2017).

Table 1: Item Measurements

Construct	Authors	No. of Items	Items Removed After EFA	Items Removed After CFA	Items Remaining
Intention to Revisit	Huang & Hsu, 2009; Lam & Hsu, 2006; Pike et al., 2010	4	1	-	3
Destination Value	Boo et al., 2009; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001	5	-	1	4
Cognitive Destination Image	Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martín, 2004; Pike & Ryan, 2004	24	6	4	14
Affective Destination Image	Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Russell & Lanius, 1984; Russell & Pratt, 1980	7	-	2	5
COVID-19 Risk Knowledge	Zhu & Deng, 2020	7	-	1	6

Analyses and Results

We used JAMOVI 2.0, a free statistical app based on R (https://www.jamovi.org/), to analyse the data. We collected a total of n = 520 responses (female = 359, 67 percent aged between 31 and 50 years old). We first removed n = 8 respondents who had not travelled in Malaysia as tourists, and another n = 12 who were not Malaysian citizens. Of the remaining n = 500 responses, 68 percent reside in Klang Valley, 66 percent are married and the majority (44 percent) have a household income of between RM5,001 and RM10,000. About 52 percent work in the public sector, while 23 percent work in the private sector. Exactly half (50 percent) have a bachelor's degree and about 77 percent had travelled in Malaysia up to three

times since March 2020 (after the MCO). Of those who had travelled, approximately 65 percent stayed in hotels and 42 percent visited islands and beaches. We began the analyses by examining the respondents who failed the two attention check questions placed in the middle and at the end of the questionnaire (Brannon et al., 2017), then transformed the raw scores to z-scores to examine influential outliers. At this point, we removed n = 18 responses that failed the attention check questions, and a further n = 10 responses that were influential outliers (z-scores > ± 3.29) (Field, 2018). Thus, the number of responses remaining for further analyses were n = 472.

Exploratory Factor Analysis

The remaining n = 472 responses were first checked for construct reliability (i.e., Cronbach's α), then for construct grouping with exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using the principal axis method of extraction and Oblimin rotation with parallel analysis (Garrido, Abad, & Ponsoda, 2013; Horn, 1965). We removed n = 7 items with weak item loadings (< .50), then proceeded with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (Gerbing & Hamilton, 1996).

Measurement Model

We first assessed multivariate normality assumptions. Mardia's (1970) coefficients indicated that multivariate normality assumptions were not met (p < .05). Thus, we adopted ML estimation with robust standard errors for both the measurement and the structural model (Sardeshmukh & Vandenberg, 2017). By examining each item's modification indices, we further removed n = 8 weak items (MacCallum, Roznowski, & Necowitz, 1992). Table 2 below summarises the constructs' convergent and discriminant validity using Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion. Goodness-of-fit indices indicated that the data fit the model well (χ^2 (436) = 853, χ^2/df = 1.96, p < 0.001, RMSEA = 0.05, SRMR = 0.04, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.96) (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Marsh, Hau, & Wen, 2009). We used Harman's one-factor test to assess whether CMV was a serious concern. The results revealed that the first factor only accounted for 37.72 percent of the variance (Baumgartner & Weijters, 2021). Thus, CMV was not a concern.

Table 2: Convergent and Discriminant Validity

	CR (α)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
DCogA	.93 (.93)	**0.86**							
DCogB	.87 (.86)	0.71	**0.79**						
DCogC	.83 (.83)	0.47	0.49	**0.79**					
DCogD	.82 (.78)	0.34	0.43	0.46	**0.83**				

DAff	.94 (.94)	0.46	0.69	0.47	0.42	**0.87**			
KC19	.92 (.90)	0.28	0.45	0.24	0.27	0.41	**0.81**		
DVal	.91 (.91)	0.48	0.60	0.51	0.40	0.71	0.39	**0.85**	
IRV	.87 (.84)	0.38	0.50	0.37	0.25	0.50	0.24	0.45	**0.84**

Note: Diagonal values are square root of average variance extracted (AVE), below diagonal values are *r* (ϕ) values among constructs. CR = composite reliability, DCogA = cognitive destination image A, DCogB = cognitive destination image B, DCogC = cognitive destination image C, DCogD = cognitive destination image D, DAff = destination affective image, KC19 = COVID-19 risk knowledge, DVal = destination value and IRV = intention to revisit.

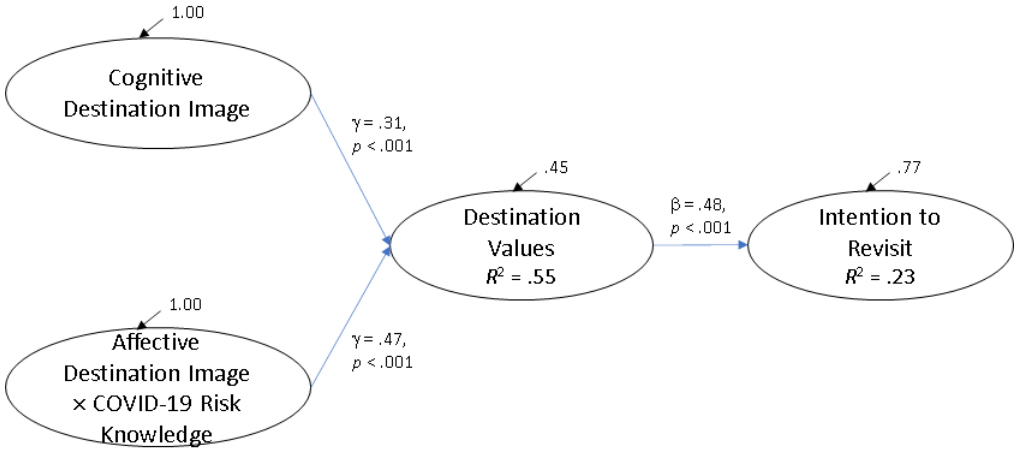
Second-Order Cognitive Destination Image

We further examined the four subdimensions of cognitive destination image as a second-order construct. Using CFA, the goodness-of-fit indices indicated that the data fit the model well (χ^2 (73) = 260, χ^2/df = 3.56, $p < 0.001$, RMSEA = 0.07, SRMR = 0.05, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95) (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Marsh et al., 2009). Thus, for the following structural model, we created four item parcels (i.e., single indicants) by mean scoring the four subdimensions of cognitive destination image, thus forming a parsimonious structural model (Weijters & Baumgartner, 2021). The Cronbach's α of the item parcelled cognitive destination image was .73.

Structural Model

Next, we created an orthogonalised product term of the interaction between affective destination image and COVID-19 risk knowledge (Little, Bovaird, & Widaman, 2006). The results indicated that the data fit the structural model well (χ^2 (199) = 437, χ^2/df = 2.20, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .06, CFI = .97, TLI = .97, AIC = 18,280). Figure 2 below summarises our structural model results. Approximately 55.3 percent of the variation in destination value is explained by cognitive destination image and the interaction term (affective destination image ´ COVID-19 risk knowledge), while 23.2 percent of the variation in intention to revisit is explained by destination value.

Figure 2: Standardised Values



Note: (χ^2 (199) = 437, χ^2/df = 2.20, p < .001, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .06, CFI = .97, TLI = .97, AIC = 18,280)

Competing Structural Model

As an alternative, we examined and added the direct effects of cognitive destination image and the interaction term to intention to revisit. The model achieved good fit statistics (χ^2 (197) = 283, χ^2/df = 1.44, p < .001, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .04, CFI = .98, TLI = .97, AIC = 18,230). The AIC values indicated that the competing structural model was marginally better than the hypothesised structural model. However, the indirect effects of both cognitive destination image and the interaction term on intention to revisit were nonsignificant: DCog → DVal → IRV (indirect effect (IE): .04, 95% CI [-.02, .10]); Interaction → DVal → IRV (IE = .08, 95% CI [-.05, .20]).

Indirect Effects

We examined the indirect effects of both cognitive destination image and the interaction term on intention to revisit via destination value. Results from structural equation modelling indicate that both indirect effects are significant: DCog → DVal → IRV (IE: .20, 95% CI [.09, .30]); Interaction → DVal → IRV (IE = .35, 95% CI [.22, .48]). We further supported the indirect effects results using Hayes' PROCESS model 7 (Hayes, 2018). The results from Hayes' PROCESS model 4 (with 5,000 bootstrap samples) supported the indirect effect of DCog → DVal → IRV (IE: .19, 95% bias-corrected CI [.10, .28]), and those of Hayes' PROCESS model 7 supported the indirect effect of interaction → DVal → IRV. To decompose the interaction effect, we used the Johnson-Neyman technique to identify the range(s) of the effect of COVID-19 risk knowledge (Spiller, Fitzsimons, Lynch Jr., &

McClelland, 2013). The results indicated that COVID-19 risk knowledge has a significant positive interaction effect, with a value of more than 3.67 (index of moderated mediation = .04, SE = .02, 95% bias corrected-CI [.003, .089]).

Findings and Discussions

Our findings indicate that destination image has significant indirect effects on intention to revisit. Mainolfi and Marino (2018) revealed that destination image does not directly affect tourists' post-visit behaviours. In this study, we prove that destination value mediates this relationship. In other words, destination image can only influence tourists' post-visit behaviours via perceived value. Most importantly, we prove that COVID-19 risk knowledge is a significant moderator in the process of affective destination image influencing intention to revisit via destination value. Even at a moderate level (i.e., marginally above the midpoint scale value), risk knowledge strengthens the relationship between affective destination image and destination value. We prove that tourists having sufficient information about COVID-19 influences destination value in a positive way. Even without the moderating effect of COVID-19 risk knowledge, cognitive destination image alone is enough to influence intention to revisit via destination value.

Undoubtedly, the role of destination image is important in destination marketing. For example, the 'Malaysia Truly Asia' campaign has successfully positioned Malaysia as a strong tourism brand (Hussin, 2018b). Destination image certainly influences tourist satisfaction, intention to revisit and willingness to recommend (Bigné et al., 2001; Chi & Qu, 2008). Our findings are in line with those of Bigné et al. (2001), which showed that affective destination image has a more significant influence on intention to revisit than cognitive destination image. Importantly, our results find an interaction effect between affect and risk knowledge. Within psychology, emotions and cognitive attributes are known to influence each other (Todd, Miskovic, Chikazoe, & Anderson, 2020).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, our results support two decades of research on destination image. The link between destination image and post-visit behaviours (such as intention to recommend and intention to revisit) can be enhanced or mitigated by many factors, including satisfaction (Mainolfi & Marino, 2018), self-congruence (Ahn, Ekinci, & Li, 2013) and destination identification (Hultman, Skarmeas, Oghazi, & Beheshti, 2015). Our study focuses on destination value, defined as the financial worthiness of an attraction, as a mediator. Our analyses of destination image decompose it into two subcomponents—cognitive and affective. Thus, we separate the

mediating effect of destination value in terms of these two subcomponents of destination image. This is in line with the practices in psychology and marketing, where images can differ in terms of their conceptual or schematic meaning (Giesler, 2012), thus supporting the destination image literature.

In the era of the new normal for tourism, the initiatives implemented by the Malaysian government are ensuring the survival of the tourism industry. Some of these initiatives are introducing a travel bubble and making COVID-19 data more transparent (Babulal & Mohamed Radhi, 2021; "Malaysia set to reopen Langkawi islands", 2021). This new information will shape the image and branding of destinations. Any new marketing campaigns planned should consider the influence of risk knowledge and the type of destination personality that DMOs and government agencies want to promote (Hultman, Strandberg, Oghazi, & Mostaghel, 2017). The influence of personality traits on developing an image is especially profound on social media, which can promote higher engagement (Sulaiman, Jaafar, & Tamjidyamcholo, 2018).

Moving forward during the pandemic and beyond, DMOs and government agencies should employ marketing communication tools to deliver messages that enhance destination image and simultaneously provide sufficient information on COVID-19 SOPs. Focusing on cultural routes could enhance Malaysia's tourism offerings (e.g., Auttarat, Sangkakorn, & Krajangchom, 2021). There is also a need to highlight measures taken to ensure social distancing, crowd control, logistical arrangements and sanitisation (Sigala, 2020). Ultimately, marketing and promotion activities should not only be promoting feelings of excitement, joy and love, but also focusing on how to make tourists feel safe. To increase their COVID-19 risk knowledge, tourists require information regarding the need for additional protections such as masks and hand sanitisers prior to travelling. DMOs could take more precautionary measures in maintaining social distancing and focusing on activities that are less intimate and take place in wide-open spaces.

The management of COVID-19 is standardised throughout Malaysia; the SOPs apply to every citizen and industry. Travel advisory information is issued constantly via the MySejahtera app, COVID-19 hotlines and social media platforms, specifically to mitigate risk knowledge among Malaysians. Within the tourism industry, the government has provided clear guidelines for tourism operators to continue running their businesses. Promoting domestic travel in Malaysia can help compensate for the lack of international tourism during the pandemic. MOTAC has created a colourful infographic that provides clear guidelines for domestic tourists. These SOPs encompass every aspect of travel, including transportation, accommodation, tour guides, tourist activities, recreational activities, spas and entertainment. They provide a clear

understanding of the dos and don'ts that can help tourists navigate the risks associated with COVID-19.

Study Limitations

This study is not without limitations. First, this is a cross-sectional study carried out between February and March 2021. A longer study could capture different responses from the respondents, especially as Malaysians experienced 18 months of MCOs. Perceptions and attitudes may change over a longer period if helplessness starts to develop (Wen, Huang, & Goh, 2020). Second, the current study only examines four constructs. There are other related constructs, such as destination personality (Hosany et al., 2006; Mohtar, Rudd, & Evanschitzky, 2019) and other types of risks (e.g., financial, physical, social), that could be adopted to gain a better predictive model (Baker, Shin, & Kim, 2016). Third, as more Malaysians become fully vaccinated, this could bolster confidence among tourists who were previously reluctant to travel during the pandemic. Such readjustments in social norms and behaviours may change the results.

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