



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF DESTINATION CHOICE  
AMONG TOURISTS IN LANGKAWI, MALAYSIA***

**AN NUR NABILA BINTI ISMAIL**

**SPE 2021 4**



**ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF DESTINATION CHOICE  
AMONG TOURISTS IN LANGKAWI, MALAYSIA**

By

**AN NUR NABILA BINTI ISMAIL**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia in  
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**June 2021**

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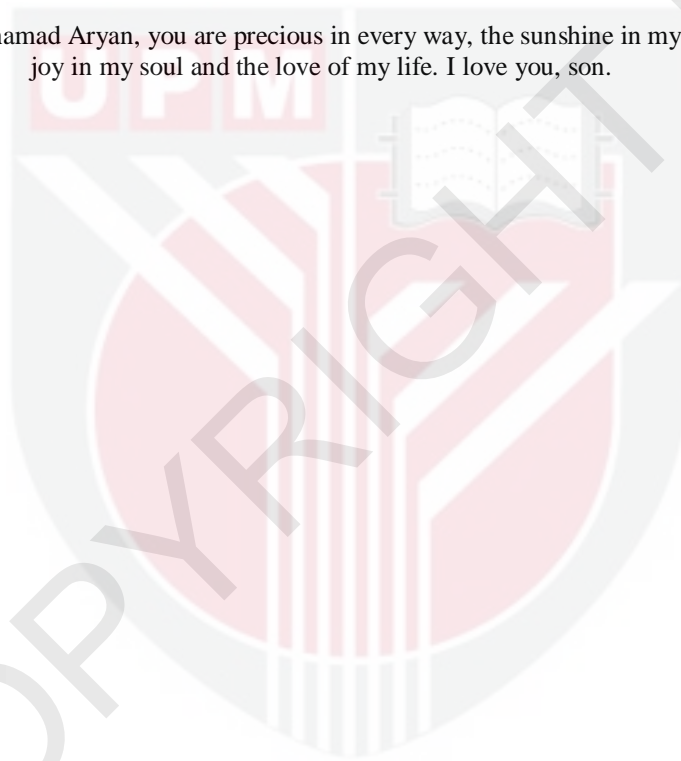


## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this study to my late father and mother, Allahyarham Haji Mohd M. Kassim and Allahyarhamah Hajjah Khatijah Abdul Kadir, who had always encouraged and supported me to pursue my dream. I miss both of you.

To my husband, Dr. Nik Mohamad Shamim, Alhamdulillah, we managed to finish this long memorable journey together. Thank you for your advice and encouragement to complete this study.

To Nik Mohamad Aryan, you are precious in every way, the sunshine in my day, the joy in my soul and the love of my life. I love you, son.



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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AMONG TOURISTS IN LANGKAWI, MALAYSIA**

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**June 2021**

**Chairman : Professor Yuhanis Abdul Aziz, PhD**  
**Faculty : School of Business and Economics**

Langkawi Island is considered one of the top tourism destinations in South East Asia. However, there are still many factors that can contribute to its competitiveness in the tourism industry. The study highlights the pull and push factor which includes travel motivation and destination personality as the drive that can influence holidaymakers in deciding holiday destinations. As information is considered crucial to tourists in choosing a holiday destination, the study also explores the marketing effort by examining the elements of electronic word of mouth and content marketing as sources for tourists to have an idea about the destination before they choose it. Langkawi is well known as a UNESCO Geopark, thus, environmental sustainability has become an essential issue and is explored in the study, as well as tourist satisfaction and intention to revisit. With the support of the Expectation Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) and Stimulus-Organism-Response Model (SOR), the research aims to examine the relationship between travel motivation (TM), destination personality (DP), electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), and content marketing (CM) towards destination choice (DC). Moreover, the study also explores the effects of environmental sustainability (ES) towards satisfaction (ST). Lastly, the study also examines the ST mediated by DC with the final impact on revisit intention (RI). A number of 503 tourists participated in this study and questionnaires were distributed at tourist attraction spots in Langkawi. The data was analysed using SPSS and Structural Equation Modelling in Smart-PLS. The finding indicates that there is a significant relationship between DP, e-WOM, and CM on DC, but not between TM and DC. Moreover, ES also shows a significant relationship with ST, and the finding also indicates that ST mediates the relationship between DC and RI. The research has extended the body of knowledge in EDT, SOR model, as well as consumer behaviour study. There are practical implications to practitioners and the policy makers, as they should emphasise on the factors that could make Langkawi a competitive destination and sustainable in the long term. Practitioners are encouraged to develop a variety of packages which shows that it can encourage tourists to revisit Langkawi in the future. Moreover, marketers can also highlight the personality of Langkawi in their marketing tools as the personality of Langkawi gives an impact on tourist destination choice.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

## LATAR BELAKANG DAN KEBERKESANAN PILIHAN DESTINASI DALAM KALANGAN PELANCONG DI LANGKAWI, MALAYSIA

Oleh

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Pulau Langkawi dianggap sebagai salah satu destinasi pelancongan teratas di Asia Tenggara. Namun, masih banyak faktor yang dapat menyumbang kepada daya saingnya dalam industri pelancongan. Kajian menekankan faktor tarikan yang merangkumi motivasi perjalanan dan keperibadian destinasi sebagai pendorong yang dapat mempengaruhi para pelancong dalam menentukan destinasi percutian. Memandangkan maklumat dianggap penting untuk pelancong dalam memilih destinasi percutian, kajian ini turut mengupas usaha pemasaran dengan meneliti elemen cakap mulut elektronik dan pemasaran kandungan yang menjadi sumber kepada pelancong untuk membuah idea mengenai tujuan tersebut sebelum mereka memilih destinasi pelancongan. Memandangkan Langkawi terkenal sebagai UNESCO Geopark, kelestarian alam sekitar menjadi isu penting yang diterokai dalam kajian ini dan terakhir, kajian ini turut meneroka kepuasan pelancong dan niat untuk melancong semula. Dengan sokongan Teori Diskonfirmasi Harapan (Expectation Disconfirmation Theory, EDT) dan Model Rangsangan Gerak Balas (Stimulus-Organism-Response Model, SOR), kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji hubungan antara motivasi perjalanan (TM), keperibadian destinasi (DP), cakap mulut elektronik (e-WOM) dan pemasaran kandungan (CM) ke arah pilihan destinasi (DC). Selain itu, kajian ini turut meneroka hubungan kelestarian persekitaran (ES) terhadap kepuasan (ST). Terakhir, kajian ini turut meneliti ST yang diantara oleh DC dengan kesan akhir terhadap niat melancong semula (RI). Sejumlah 503 pelancong mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini dan soal selidik diedarkan di tempat tarikan pelancong di Langkawi. Data dianalisis menggunakan SPSS dan Pemodelan Persamaan Berstruktur dalam Smart-PLS. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa terdapat hubungan yang bererti di antara DP, e-WOM dan CM pada DC tetapi tidak bererti di antara TM dan DC. Tambahan pula, ES turut menunjukkan hubungan yang bererti dengan ST dan penemuan tersebut turut menunjukkan bahawa ST mengantara hubungan antara DC dan RI. Kajian ini meluaskan pengetahuan dalam model EDT, SOR dan kajian tingkah laku pengguna. Terdapat implikasi praktikal kepada pengamal dan pembuat dasar untuk mereka menekankan faktor-faktor yang menjadikan Langkawi sebagai destinasi saingan dan mapan dalam jangka masa panjang.

Pengamal digalakkan untuk membangunkan pelbagai pakej dimana penemuan mendapati bahawa ia boleh menggalakkan pelancong untuk melancong semula ke Langkawi pada masa depan. Selain itu, pemasar juga dapat menonjolkan keperibadian Langkawi dalam pemasaran mereka kerana keperibadian Langkawi memberikan impak pada pilihan destinasi pelancongan.



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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CB	Consumer Behaviour
CB-SEM	Co-variance Based
CDT	Cognitive Dissonance Theory
CM	Content Marketing
CMV	Common Method Variance
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CR	Composite Reliability
CR	Construct Reliability
CV	Convergent Validity
DC	Destination Choice
DOSM	Department of Statistic Malaysia
DP	Destination Personality
EDT	Expectation Disconfirmation Theory
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
ES	Environmental Sustainability
e-WOM	Electronic Word of Mouth
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HTMT	Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlation
LADA	Lembaga Pembangunan Langkawi
MOTAC	The Ministry of Tourism and Cultural
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Square
RI	Revisit Intention

SD	Standard Deviation
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SOR	Stimulus-Organism-Response Model
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Science
SRT	Stimulus Response Theory
ST	Satisfaction
TM	Travel Motivation
T & T	Travel and Tourism
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WTTC	World Travel and Tourism Council
WTO	World Tourism Organisation
VAF	Variance Accountant For
VIF	Variance Inflation Tolerance

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Chapter Overview

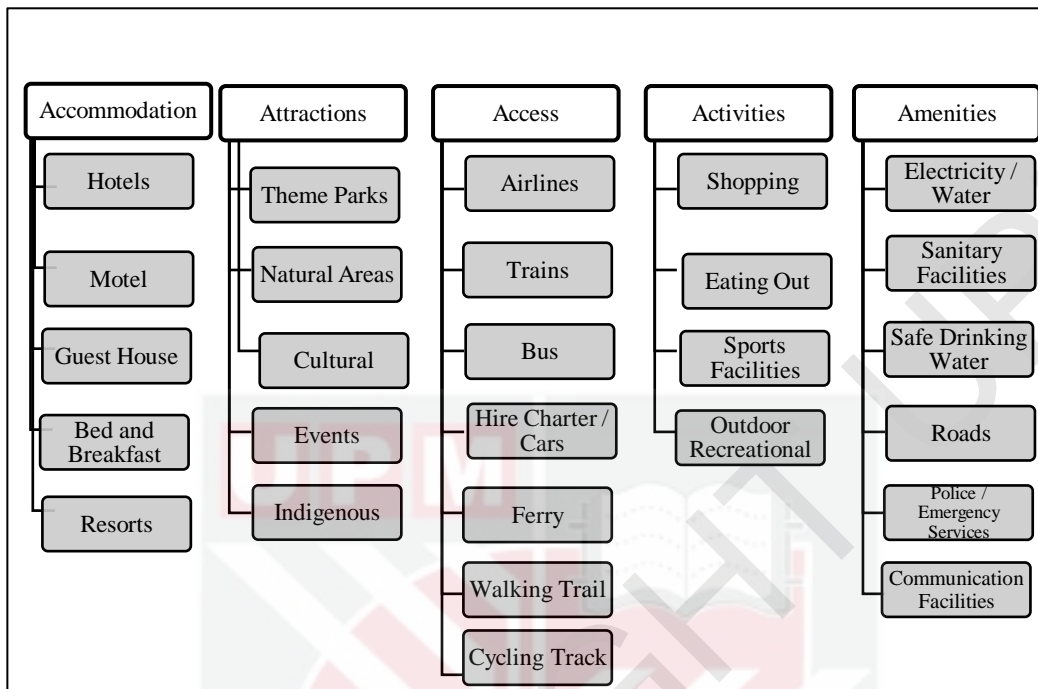
This chapter provides an overview of the research background by beginning with the background of the study. This chapter also discusses the problem statement, objectives as well as the research questions for the study. The chapter then extends to include the significance of the study and the scope of the study alongside the definition of key terms. The organization of the thesis is also outlined and the chapter concludes with a summary.

### 1.2 Background of the Study

According to Pearce (1997), tourism is a complex phenomenon comprising of interrelated goods and services from private and public sectors. Tourism can also be defined as activities of individuals who travel and decide to stay in places that are different from their usual environment for less than a consecutive year for leisure, business or other purposes (Libreros, 1998). According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2020), tourism involves the activities of individuals travelling staying in different place of their usual environment which not more than one year for relaxation, business and others.

Tourism includes the place, tourist and the myriad of activities involved (Zaei and Zaei, 2013). As mentioned by Camilleri (2018), the tourism industry can be divided into five categories: accommodation, attractions, access, activities and amenities as provided in Figure 1.1.





**Figure 1.1 : Elements of the Tourism Industry**

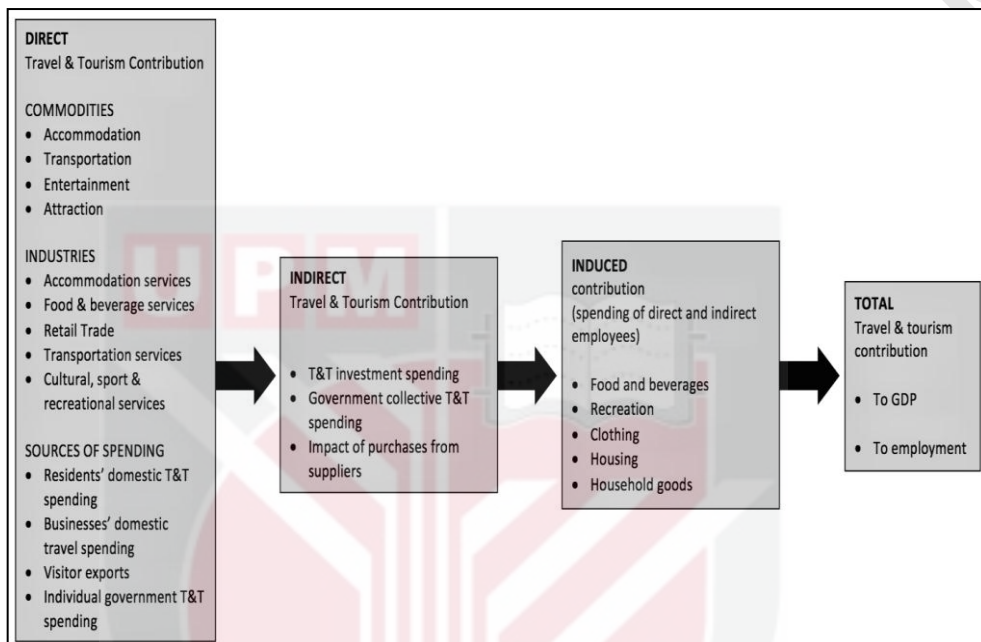
(Source : Camilleri, 2018)

Tourism is one of the leading and fastest developing industries in the world (Ababneh, 2013) and has become an important income contributor to many countries (Seddighi, 2002). According to World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC, 2020), the gross domestic product (GDP) of certain countries are influenced by direct, indirect and induced contribution where in the year 2019, the contribution of the tourism industry to the world's GDP was USD 8.9 trillion.

As shown in Figure 1.2, the direct contribution that supports the tourism industry can be divided into three main segments namely, commodities, industries and sources of expenditure. Direct contribution can be defined as the internal expenditure by government, residents and visitors for business and leisure purposes (WTTC, 2020).

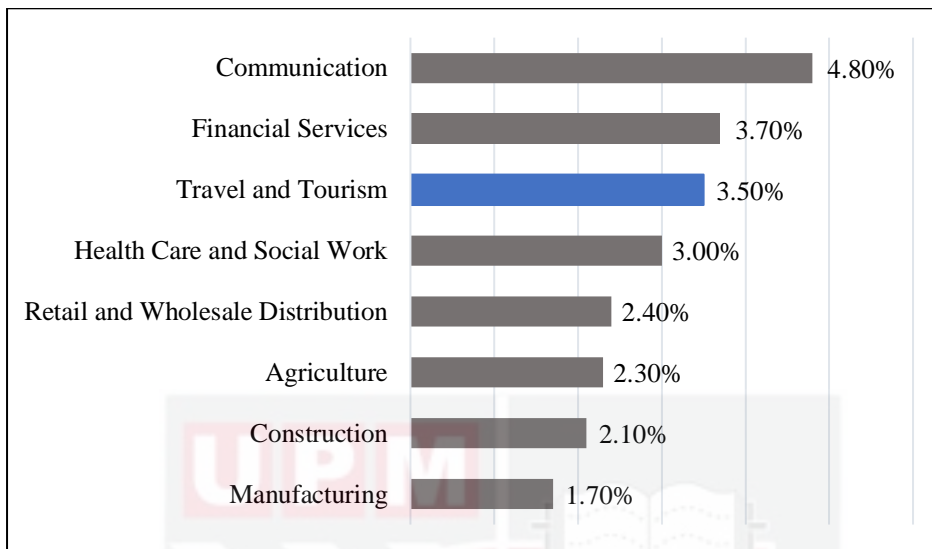
On the contrary, the indirect contribution is derived from travel and tourism investments which are very important to GDP such as the purchase of a new aeroplane and building new hotels. The indirect contribution also includes government collective tourism such as marketing and promotion for tourism, flight, management, security services and many more. Another element in the indirect contribution is the impact of purchases from suppliers that includes the purchase of food and cleaning facilities, petrol for aircraft and information technology (IT) services for travel agency.

The induced contribution is derived from the employees' spending exercise whereby, using their own salary paid by firms in direct interaction with tourist (Vellas, 2011). Thus, induced contribution comes from direct and indirect spending by employees on items such as food and beverages, leisure, clothing, and household goods.



**Figure 1.2 : Economic Contribution of Travel & Tourism**  
(Source : World Travel & Tourism, 2020)

The tourism industry is a key income for many nations since from an economic perspective, tourists are good consumers and service payees. In the year 2019, the travel and tourism sector performed well whereby it is the third-largest industry with rapid growth based on the gross domestic product (GDP) as shown in Figure 1.3.



**Figure 1.3 : GDP Growth for the World Industry**  
 (Source : World Travel & Tourism Council, 2020)

As seen in Figure 1.3, the growth in tourism and travel sector is faster than in health care and social work, the retail and wholesale distribution sector, the agriculture sector, the construction sector, and the manufacturing industry. However, the travel and tourism sector growth is slower than the communication and the financial service sector since the latter are large global sectors which are heavily important for business.

The travel and tourism industry has contributed about 10.3% of GDP, approximately USD8.9 trillion to international tourism in 2019. Its growth is predicted to be 11.3% by 2030 (WTTC, 2020). However, Coronavirus (COVID-19) has attacked the whole world, which also has a negative impact on the tourism industry. According to WTTC (2021), the tourism industry suffered a loss of nearly USD4.5 trillion (-3.7% of GDP) in 2020. Moreover, only 272 million jobs were offered in 2020 compared to 334 million in 2019 (-18.5%) which gives impact to the community (WTTC,2021). The tourism industry generates income from the taxes and fees paid by organizations who offer goods and services tax related to accommodation, transport services and travel agencies (Bunghez, 2016). Apart from contributing to GDP, it has also become a source for foreign exchange earnings which balances the payment of the country (Jaswal, 2014).

There is pros and cons to the development of tourism on the social and cultural aspect of the local community. The interactions between tourist and local community can improve community life since better services and infrastructure involving entertainment and exhibitions are required (Zaei and Zaei, 2013). However, the development of tourism industry causes grave harm to the economy, environment, society and culture. As mentioned by Piuchan, Chan and Kaale (2018), the development of the tourism industry

triggers negative effects such as the increased price for properties, overcrowding, damaged facilities, traffic congestion, cultural issues and many more.

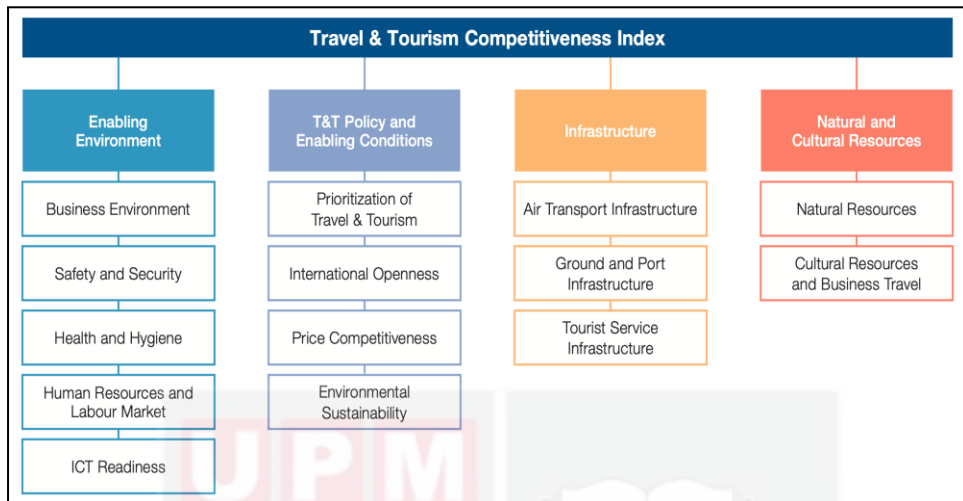
A study by Gladstone, Curley and Shokri (2013) which focused on the impact of tourism on the environment highlighted that the development of tourism industry causes air pollution through the emission of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon from petroleum, damages coral from water sport activities and disturbs wildlife. Similarly, Zhang et al., (2020) found that air pollution is keep increases at tourism sites.

Tourists often travel to other places to experience different environments. Thus, tourism will encourage the conservation of local heritage such as historical places and natural heritage where improvements will be made to attract more tourists (Zaei and Zaei, 2013). Additionally, the sustainability of travel destination needs to be emphasized to ensure steady and beneficial development. Destination competitiveness is defined as the capability of a destination to develop as a tourism destination by delivering services and maintaining the sustainability of destination in terms of economic, environmental, social, political and culture (Mohamed & Omar, 2008). Zainuddin, Radzi and Zahari (2016) put forth that destination competitiveness can be achieved when the tourism destination manages to meet tourist needs, indicating that tourism depends on the management of existing resources.

The concept of destination competitiveness is closely linked to destination choice. Heath and Wall (1992) mentioned that almost all tourist destination is in competition with each other and tourist will choose a destination that can offer them the best experience. As explained by Kozak (1999), there is a wide selection of travel destinations, however, the choice of destination among tourists depends on the competitiveness of travel destination.

According to World Economic Forum (2017), the competitiveness of each country can be measured by analysing the four competitiveness index for travel and tourism (Figure 1.4): enabling environment, travel and tourism policy, enabling conditions, infrastructure, as well as, natural and cultural resources. Based on Figure 1.4, there are many factors that serve as a guideline to measure the competitiveness of a country. For the enabling environment index, there are five indicators involved which are 1) business environment, 2) safety and security of the travel destination, 3) health and hygiene, 4) human resources and labour market and 5) ICT readiness.

For the travel and tourism policy and enabling conditions, the emphasized indicators are prioritization of travel and tourism, international openness, price competitiveness and environmental sustainability. The air transport, ground and port and tourist services infrastructure are the elements considered in measuring the competitiveness of infrastructure. Lastly, the competitiveness index also accounts for natural and cultural resources when measuring the competitiveness of one country in the travel and tourism industry.



**Figure 1.4 : The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index**  
(Source : World Economic Forum, 2019)

As postulated by WTTC (2017), the Southeast Asia region possesses a strong and competitive edge in the tourism industry (Salman & Hasim, 2012). Moreover, the World Economic Forum (2019) ranked Malaysia at 29<sup>th</sup> place among 136 most competitive tourism destination. Malaysia is even more competitive compared to its neighbours, whereby Thailand is at the 31<sup>st</sup> place and Indonesia is at 40<sup>th</sup> place. Despite the higher ranking, the WEF (2019) report shows that Malaysia's tourism competitiveness rank is on the decline. In 2017, Malaysia was ranked at 26<sup>th</sup> place compared to 2018 at 29<sup>th</sup> place. Neighbouring countries are charting an increasing trend whereby, Thailand rose from 34<sup>th</sup> place in 2017 to 31<sup>st</sup> place in 2018 whilst Indonesia rose from 42<sup>nd</sup> place in 2017 to 40<sup>th</sup> place in 2018 (WEF, 2019). A similar pattern is noted in other countries such as Vietnam, Philippines, Laos and Cambodia (Table 1.1)

Singapore takes the lead in many aspects including enabling environment, travel and tourism policy, and infrastructure. In terms of enabling environment, Singapore and Brunei rank higher than Malaysia when it comes to safety and security as well as health and hygiene. For travel and tourism policy alongside enabling conditions, Brunei scored a high 6.6. In terms of environmental sustainability, Singapore scored the highest point (4.3), followed by Brunei (4.1), while the Philippines scored a 4.1 just like Malaysia. For natural resources, Malaysia merely scored a 3.8 compared to Thailand who scored a 4.8 and Indonesia, a 4.5.

Malaysia is known as a multi-cultural country (Tourism Malaysia, 2018). However, for cultural resources and business travel, Malaysia only scored a 2.6 while Indonesia scored a 3.2, and Vietnam scored a 2.9, both scoring higher than Malaysia. This statistic shows that Malaysia needs further improvement and development in many aspects in order to be competitive in the tourism industry.

**Table 1.1 : Tourism Competitiveness among Asia-Pacific Countries**

Country	Global Rank 2019	Global Rank 2018	Enabling environment					T&T policy and enabling conditions				Infrastructure		Natural and cultural resources		
			Business environment	Safety and security	Health and hygiene	Human resources and labour market	ICT readiness	Prioritization of T&T	International openness	Price competitiveness	Environmental sustainability	Air Transport Infrastructure	Ground and port infrastructure	Tourist services infrastructure	Natural resources	Cultural resources and business travel
Singapore	17	13	6.0	6.4	5.6	5.6	6.1	6.1	4.8	5.0	4.3	5.5	6.4	5.1	2.2	2.5
Malaysia	29	26	5.5	5.9	5.3	5.4	5.4	4.8	6.3	4.0	4.6	4.5	4.5	4.5	3.8	2.6
Thailand	31	34	4.9	4.8	5.0	5.1	5.2	5.2	3.9	5.8	3.6	4.6	3.3	5.9	4.8	2.6
Indonesia	40	42	4.7	5.4	4.5	4.9	4.7	5.9	4.3	6.2	3.5	3.9	3.3	3.1	4.5	3.2
Brunei	72	-	4.8	6.1	5.5	4.6	5.4	3.4	3.7	6.6	4.1	3.3	3.8	4.0	2.4	1.1
Vietnam	63	67	4.4	5.6	5.0	4.8	4.3	4.1	3.7	5.9	3.8	3.4	3.0	2.8	3.8	2.9
Philippines	75	79	4.3	3.6	4.8	5.0	4.4	4.9	3.5	5.9	4.0	3.2	2.8	3.6	3.8	1.8
Laos	97	94	4.4	5.3	4.5	4.6	3.4	4.8	3.0	5.9	3.7	2.4	2.5	3.4	2.9	1.3
Cambodia	98	101	3.8	5.1	4.0	4.2	3.9	5.0	3.5	5.6	3.4	2.3	2.5	3.2	3.0	1.6

(Source : World Economic Forum, 2019)

The tourism industry is a fast-moving industry, especially in Malaysia. This is evident in the statistics by Tourism Malaysia (2020), where 26.10 million tourists arrived in 2019. Among the main tourist destination in Malaysia is the Langkawi Island which is recognised as a UNESCO Global Geopark. To date, it is the only Geopark in Malaysia since 2007 (LADA, 2017). Langkawi is one of the top 20 islands in Asia (CNN, 2017) and is charting an increase in the number of visitors annually. In 2019, Langkawi received 3,924,326 tourists as compared to the year 2018 with only 3,628,951 tourists.

Basic tourist attraction such as beaches or sunsets is no longer differentiating factors among travel destinations (George & Anandkumar, 2014). Therefore, the emphasis on destination personality creates a stronger branding for destinations as the unique identity of the destination is highlighted (Hosany, Ekinici & Uysal, 2007). The concept of brand personality is applicable as a strong fundamental to differentiate various travel destinations (Murphy, Moscardo & Benckendorff, 2007). The destination personality may differ according to the location of travel destination, while a city may have a different personality compared to an island (Greaves, Cowie, Fraser *et al.*, 2015). The studies are done to measure the personality of the island strongly prompts the current research to measure the personality of Langkawi as this may influence tourists' decision in making Langkawi as their destination choice.

In strongly positioning a destination to attract potential travellers, marketing effort should be given adequate attention. Wang and Chang (2019) found that approximately 60% of potential travellers use the Internet to seek information from travel forums and personal blogs with post-travel experiences, feedbacks and reviews also known as electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). Moreover, Kanje *et al.*, (2020) has highlighted that most of the tourists used e-WOM as a place to get to know others experience, gain some feedback about a certain destination and receive recommendation from others. Additionally, reliable information can also attract potential travellers to decide on their holiday destination. Thus, good content marketing is crucial in promoting a destination. The Content Marketing Institute (2016) defined content marketing as one of the marketing techniques that stress on generating and spreading valuable, relevant, and reliable content in choosing a holiday destination. Given the importance of marketing and e-WOM, the current study examines the relationship between e-WOM, content marketing and destination choice among holidaymakers specifically to Langkawi.

Marzuki (2008) mentioned that the tourism industry in Langkawi positively impacts the island's economy by providing job opportunities for the community, thereby increasing the standard of living. On the contrary, Salleh, Othman, Idris, Halim *et al.*, (2014) argue that the development of tourism industry in Langkawi island has caused harm to the environment and nature. The environmental issues are important to address since Langkawi is a UNESCO Global Geopark. Thus, it is crucial to sustaining the beaches, mountain, flora and fauna to ensure the Global Geopark title is maintained. As reported by past studies (Marzuki, 2008; Salleh *et al.*, 2014) Langkawi faced many environmental issues, motivating the current study to explore the environmental sustainability in Langkawi.

Several factors can influence tourist in choosing a holiday destination and understanding these factors is crucial. Masiero and Qiu (2018) stressed that the complexity in choosing a holiday destination proposed the inclusion of different consumer decision-making nuances. By understanding factors that influence destination choice, policymakers and destination operators such as hoteliers, travel agent, and business operators can develop and upgrade their market strategies to cater for the needs and wants of tourists, driving this study to examine destination choice when it comes to island.

Several researches have been conducted on the level of satisfaction in tourism areas (Zehrer & Raich, 2016; Jaapar, Musa Moghavvemi & Saub, 2017; Naidoo, 2011; Gil, Moreno & Fernandez, 2018). The current research analyses the level of satisfaction of tourist upon the decision of having Langkawi as their holiday destination. The effect of Langkawi's environmental sustainability on the level of satisfaction is also explored. The results concerning this variable can encourage authority to improve services to meet tourists' expectations and strengthen revisit intentions.

Revisit intention refers to the examination of tourist intention to revisit Langkawi. According to Som, Marzuki, Yousefi and Abukhalifeh (2012), tourists' behaviour can be divided into pre-visitation, during visitation and post-visitation. According to Thiumsak and Ruangkanjanases (2016), tourists who revisit contributes to more than 50% of the entire arrival. It is crucial for destination managers to understand tourist revisit intention since it will generate more income and can position Langkawi as one of the popular tourist destinations.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

The Malaysian tourism industry is one of the nation's income generators where the tourism industry was able to generate USD 47.2 billion of Malaysia's GDP (WTTC,2019) in 2018. However, as discussed in Section 1.2, Malaysia remains far behind when compared to neighbouring countries such as Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia. Table 1.2 shows the number of tourists' arrival for Malaysia has decreased in the year 2017 when compared to other countries, indicating that the Malaysian tourism industry is less competitive. Moreover, in terms of GDP contribution (Table 1.2), Thailand and Indonesia were able to generate a higher income compared to Malaysia. In 2018, the tourism industry in Thailand contributed USD 109.5 billion to its GDP while Indonesia was able to generate USD 62.6 billion. The same pattern was also recorded in the year 2016 and 2017.



**Table 1.2 : Tourist Arrivals and Tourism Contribution to GDP (2016-2018)**

Country	2016		2017		2018	
	Tourists Arrival (million)	Contribution to GDP (US billion)	Tourists Arrival (million)	Contribution to GDP (US billion)	Tourists Arrival (million)	Contribution to GDP (US billion)
<b>Malaysia</b>	26.76	40.4	25.95	41.9	25.83	47.2
<b>Singapore</b>	16.40	28.7	17.42	31.5	18.5	32.4
<b>Thailand</b>	32.60	82.5	33.83	95.0	38.27	109.5
<b>Indonesia</b>	11.52	57.9	14.04	58.9	15.8	62.6

(Sources : Tourism Malaysia, 2019; WTTC, 2019)

The current study focuses on Langkawi as one of the most popular holiday destinations in Malaysia. In 2019, Langkawi received 3,924,326 tourists as compared to 2018 where there were 3,628,951 tourist visits (LADA, 2020). Langkawi receives both local and international tourists. Given Langkawi's vital role as a tourist destination, the findings of the current study can be used to position Malaysia as a competitive country in the tourism industry. As Langkawi is recognized as a Global Geopark in Malaysia, extra attention should be given to Langkawi in ensuring Langkawi can hold the status for long term.

There are several factors which affect destination choices such as travel motivation, the attractiveness of destination, feedback from other tourists, exposure to a particular destination, and the sustainability of the destination. Marzuki (2008) and Salleh *et al.*, (2014) mentioned Langkawi's environmental predicament. According to the New Straits Time (2017), Langkawi's natural environment has deteriorated, involving issues on water quality, land structure and marine life. These issues negatively impact the tourism industry in Langkawi as it can affect the number of tourists visiting Langkawi. Based on personal communication (2018) with one of Langkawi's tour guides of 13 years, Langkawi's condition has deteriorated, lacking tourist safety and filthy. Rampant, careless development has also affected the beaches.

The high number of tourists also caused hefty damages. There are 700 to 1000 tourists on the beach daily and this number is on the rise. Boat operators reported that Langkawi has lost 50% of its natural heritage. Moreover, a recent study by Elfithri, Mokhtar and Abdullah (2021) found that Langkawi has serious environmental issues such as limited space due to rapid development, improper waste management, air pollution, noise pollution, water pollution as well as environmental pollution. In line with the study by Shafikhullah and Nayan (2021), the tourism development in Langkawi has been causing traffic congestion especially in the area Pantai Cenang. These issues led the present study to examine Langkawi's environmental sustainability and its effect on the tourist's choice.

Many travellers decide to travel to temporarily escape from daily routine and experience new hospitality, discovering the other side of the world (Marques, Mohsin and Lengler, 2018). Numerous research has been done on travel motivation (Lu, Hung, Wang, Schuett

& Hu, 2016; Kluin & Lehto, 2012; Mutanga *et al.*, 2017; Rittichainuwat & Rattanaphinanchai, 2015; Jang & Wu, 2006). However, there are gaps in which the current study aims to address travel motivation via Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory, contributing to the body of knowledge. Moreover, a study by Park *et al.*, (2019) has mentioned that exploring the travel motivation is crucial in order to comprehend and conceptualize travel behaviour, yet limited research has explored travel motivation on visit behaviour (Bayih & Singh, 2020).

Effective advertising plays an important role in influencing potential travellers' destination choice. Amar, Droulers and Legohere (2017) mentioned that the effectiveness of advertising is the main concern for travel destination authorities. Advertising helps marketers by informing, persuading and reminding target audience (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel, 2013). As technology develops, advertising has also evolved, moving towards content marketing where advertisement is focused on generating and spreading valuable, relevant, and reliable content. Content marketing can attract more tourists to visit a particular destination. Amar, Droulers and Legohere (2017) found that research has been done in the context of advertising. However, there is a need to explore content marketing to provide a clear understanding and contributes to the body of knowledge.

Tourists' feedback also plays a role in destination choice where word of mouth (WOM) is one of the marketing tools in promoting products and a feedback channel from consumers. According to Murphy, Mascardo and Benckendorff (2007), there are limited studies on word of mouth as a source of information in tourism. Additionally, Leung, Xue and Bai (2015) claimed that electronic WOM (e-WOM) is examined in studies such as economic, management and information system. Moreover, Tsai and Bui, (2020) mentioned that the impact on e-WOM on purchase intention in the scope of tourism remains unclear. The current study investigates e-WOM as a marketing tool in tourism and its effectiveness as an influential factor in choosing Langkawi as their holiday destination.

The 'personality' of a destination also plays a crucial role in attracting tourists to a particular destination. This assertion is supported by Kumar and Nayak (2014) who claims that destination personality has a significant effect on the behavioural intention of choosing a destination. Moreover, as highlighted by Chi, Pan and Chiappa (2018), destination personality is very important as it becomes critical factors that give an impact on tourist decision making including choice of destination. Hosany, Ekinci and Uysal (2006) argue that most of these discussions are based on conceptual studies whilst Xie and Lee (2013) argues that destination personality has not been fully explored in the tourism literature, requiring further investigation. Most research linked to destination personality is studied alongside variables such as destination image (Xie and Lee, 2013; Hosany, Ekinci and Uysal, 2006), satisfaction, promoting identification, revisit intention (Hultman, Skarmeas, Oghazi and Beheshti, 2015) and self-congruity (Kilic and Adem, 2012). The present study focuses on destination personality alongside destination choice contributing to the body of knowledge.

Past studies measured satisfaction in the area of tourist's experience (Baygloo, 2020), heritage destination (Su, Nguyen, Nguyen & Tran, 2020), public opinion climate (Xie, Huang, Lin and Chen, 2020) and destination loyalty (Joo, Woosnam, Lee & Lee, 2020). The current study explores the combination of travel motivation, e-WOM, content marketing and destination personality in affecting the choice of destination, besides examining the effect on environmental sustainability towards tourist satisfaction alongside the intention to revisit after tourists choose Langkawi as their holiday destination. According to Wang, Kirillova and Lehto (2017), the level of tourists' satisfaction is important in the tourism industry, and by understanding how tourists evaluate their experience towards holiday destination, we can help the practitioners as well as policy makers to improve their destination. Moreover, a study by Patwary and Omar (2020) found that 96% of dissatisfied tourists tend to ignore the destination and do not have attention to revisit it in future. This have a negative impact to holiday destination in term of competitiveness.

The revisit intention refers to the tourists' intention to revisit the same holiday destination after they have experienced the destination. As mentioned by Li *et al.*, (2020) and Pai *et al.*, (2020), revisit intention is strongly related to satisfaction whereby when a tourist satisfied with their visit, they will have an intention to revisit in the future. Lai, Yen and Choy (2020) stated that revisit intention is important to the travel destination as it represents competitiveness, reputation and profitability to the destination however, as discovered by Shariff and Abidin (2020), only 25.9 percent of tourists who visited Langkawi have intention to revisit in the future. Thus, this gives an idea to current research to explore whether tourists are satisfied with their choice of destination and how satisfaction can give an impact on tourists' intention to revisit Langkawi.

#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

The aim of this study is to examine the factors that influence tourists in choosing Langkawi as a destination and its effect on tourist satisfaction and revisit intention. The findings of this study are beneficial to many parties in developing and sustaining Langkawi as a top destination in Malaysia.

The current study proposes the following objectives:

1. To investigate the relationship between travel motivation and destination personality with destination choices.
2. To investigate the relationship between electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and content marketing with destination choices.
3. To evaluate the relationship between environmental sustainability and tourist satisfaction.
4. To examine the mediating effect of satisfaction between destination choice and revisit intention.

## 1.5 Research Questions

The current study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there any relationship between travel motivation and destination personality with destination choice?
2. Is there any relationship between electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) and content marketing with destination choice?
3. Is there any relationship between environmental sustainability and tourist satisfaction?
4. Does satisfaction mediate the relationship between destination choice and revisit intention?

## 1.6 Significance of the Study

This research is beneficial to academics, practitioners as well as policymakers. In terms of academic significance, this research expands literature on consumer behaviour in terms of destination choice involving island holidays. Numerous researchers such as Lyons, Mayor and Tol (2008) studied the importance of destination, household and seasonal traits that can influence the choice of destination. Mussalam and Tajeddini (2015) highlight the importance of facilities, infrastructure and attraction which acts as a stimulus in selecting a destination. Past studies were more focused on facilities, safety as well as, destination image, but not on factors that can influence the traveller to choose a particular holiday destination.

Moreover, empirical studies exploring the marketing effort influencing destination choice remains limited. The current research attempts to provide a clear understanding of content marketing. Another contribution to the tourism literature is the focus of the current study on environmental sustainability, particularly, island sustainability. While previous research measured sustainability through the local residents' perspective, the current study investigates travellers' perceptions.

This study also attempts to expand the Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (EDT), Stimulus Organism Response Theory (S-O-R) and Pull-and-Push factors within a single framework to examine the factors that influence destination choice. This combination consist of established theory has never been tested together thus far and can provide a better understanding of consumer/ tourist behaviour.

The elements of travel motivation, destination personality, e-WOM and content marketing are essential as they could provide useful information to practitioners such as service providers, travel agencies, and hoteliers in planning their marketing technique and strategies. The perception of tourist towards sustainability in Langkawi as a tourism area is useful to practitioners serving activities or services in ensuring that their business activities do not negatively impact the environment. Furthermore, this study also

highlights the revisit intention among tourist, prompting practitioners to provide services which can satisfy tourists' needs and wants.

By understanding the importance of emphasising travel motivation and destination personality which reinforces tourists' revisit intention, this study assists policymaker to plan strategically by emphasising the uniqueness of Langkawi and its personality which caters to different types of visitors. The findings on e-WOM and content marketing are equally important in helping policymakers deploy a suitable strategy in marketing communication such as providing appropriate incentives for business providers in creating a marketing strategy. The emphasis on sustainability will also further encourage policymakers to draw up suitable rules and policy which protects the environment besides developing certain strategies to control Langkawi's development by improving facilities.

## **1.7 Scope of the Study**

The research context in this study is the tourism sector which contributes to the national income. This study will focus on the two types of tourist: international and local tourists. As the number of international tourist's increases, the demand in the tourism sector also grows. Thus, it important to study the factors that may attract tourist in choosing Langkawi destination choice.

There were 500 respondents who were divided into two groups where 80% are local tourists while another 20% are international tourists. The target respondent was approach at major attraction sites such as Pantai Cenang, Kilim Karst Geoforest Park, Langkawi Sky Bridge, Eagle Square, Underwater World Langkawi and Langkawi Wildlife Park & Bird Paradise. The data collection commences with an introduction, the purpose of the study and screening questions to ensure these tourists are aware of Langkawi. The questionnaires were distributed and collected immediately after the respondent answered them. A token of appreciation was then given out to the respondents.

## **1.8 Definition of Key Terms**

The following are the definitions of the key terms to provide a better understanding to readers:

### **1.8.1 Travel Motivation**

Travel motivation can be defined as needs that will influence an individual to participate in tourism activities (Mutanga *et al.*, 2017).

### **1.8.2 Destination Personality**

According to Mendez and Hine (2016), destination personality is defined as the characteristic of a particular destination and associated with the culture of the destination.

### **1.8.3 Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM)**

Jalilvand, Esfahani and Samiei (2011) define e-WOM as any online declarations whether positive or negative from potential, actual or previous customers about products or services.

### **Content Marketing**

The Content Marketing Institute (2016) defines content marketing as one of the marketing approaches used to create and spread valuable, relevant and reliable content to attract and sustain an audience.

### **1.8.4 Destination Choice**

Destination choice is the choice made by the traveller when they have numerous alternatives (Liu, 2014).

### **1.8.5 Sustainable Tourism**

According to The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), sustainable tourism is an equal balance of development in the environment, economic and socio-cultural field.

### **Environmental Sustainability**

Environmental sustainability refers to the balance, flexibility, and interconnectedness that allows society to fulfil their needs while supporting its ecologies in surplus to continue regenerating the services necessary to meet those needs nor by actions weakening ecological (Morelli, 2011)

### **1.8.6 Satisfaction**

Satisfaction refers to the comparison on initial expectation and perception (Nasir et al., 2020).

### **1.8.7 Revisit Intention**

Som, Marzuki, Yusefi and Abu Khalief (2012) defines revisit intention as tourist arbitration on how they tend to revisit the same place.

## **1.9 Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis comprises eight main chapters.

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

In the first chapter the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives and research questions are explained to the readers. This chapter also explains the significance of this study alongside the scope of the study and the definition of terms for every construct. This chapter ends with a chapter summary.

### **Chapter 2: Tourism Industry**

The details on the tourism industry are fully explained in Chapter Two. An introduction to the industry will be provided followed by a global perspective on the tourism industry. The chapter also provides information on the tourism industry in Malaysia such as details on arrivals and the growth of the tourism industry in Malaysia, focusing on Langkawi.

### **Chapter 3: Literature Review**

In this literature review chapter, previous research is reviewed whilst the main construct applicable in this research is outlined. An overview of marketing and decision-making process alongside the explanation of variables (destination choice, travel motivation, electronic word of mouth, content marketing, destination personality, environmental sustainability, satisfaction, revisit intention) were provided. Finally, the chapter outline the gaps in previous literature and the chapter summary.

### **Chapter 4: Development of a Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses**

In Chapter Four, the research framework and hypotheses development were outlined. The chapter also explains the underpinning theories, proposed framework and hypotheses.

## **Chapter 5: Methodology**

Chapter Five describes the methodology used in this study. Under research design, the sampling design, sample size, sampling technique, questionnaire and measurement, pilot test, scale development and also data collection were explained. The chapter also includes data analysis, hypothesis testing and a chapter summary.

## **Chapter 6: Data Analysis and Finding**

Chapter Six reports the findings based on data collection. The data analysis is conducted using two software which is SPSS and SEM-PLS.

## **Chapter 7: Findings and Discussion**

This chapter discusses the findings in Chapter Six and answers the research hypothesis by establishing the connection between previous literature and the current study.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusion**

Lastly, Chapter Eight explains the contribution of the research from a theoretical aspect and managerial contributions. The chapter describes the limitations as well as suggestions for future research.

### **1.10 Chapter Summary**

The chapter provides an overview of this study by explaining the background of the study, the problem statement and the objectives of this study besides establishing the scope of the study. The key terms for all the variables were also defined. The organization of the thesis concludes this chapter



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