

Revisit Intention: A Preliminary Investigation of GCC Tourists' Electronic Word of Mouth, Destination Image, and Perceived Risk

Reem Abdulrahman Alfaisaly*, Yusuf Kani**, A. Y. M. Atiquil Islam***, Abdulrahman Saleh Alalyani****, Norzalita Abd Aziz*****

Abstract *Despite the substantial economic contribution of the tourism sector globally, studies on revisit intention have been rather scarce, particularly within the Malaysian context. Addressing that, the present study aimed to determine the determinants that influence revisit intention among Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) tourists in Malaysia. A conceptual model that comprised of electronic word of mouth (eWOM), destination image, perceived risk, and revisit intention was proposed for testing. Furthermore, destination image was assessed in terms of cognitive image, affective image, and unique image. The study successfully sampled 401 GCC tourists, specifically from Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, and the UAE, in several popular tourist spots in Malaysia. AMOS (version 18) was used to perform the main analysis of the present study, specifically structural equation modelling (SEM). Based on the obtained results, eWOM was found to directly influence cognitive image, affective image, and unique image. These three dimensions of destination image were also found to directly influence revisit intention. Surprisingly, only affective image was found to mediate the relationship between eWOM and revisit intention whereas perceived risk did not directly influence destination image and revisit intention. Overall, this study provided pertinent insights on revisit intention and its significant determinants, which were expected to largely benefit researchers and practitioners in the tourism sector.*

Keywords: *Revisit Intention, Electronic Word of Mouth, Destination Image, Perceived Risk, Structural Equation Modelling*

INTRODUCTION

As one of the main economic sectors, the tourism sector (Lin & Yeh, 2013; Baumgarten & Kent, 2010) offers job opportunities and becomes the main source of revenues and trades—the Malaysian tourism sector is of no exception (Omar, Othman & Mohamed, 2014). According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) international tourist arrivals had a negative growth within the range of 1% to 3%, turning into an estimated loss of US\$30 – US\$50 Billion in revenues. Before the outbreak of the pandemic, UNWTO estimated an upward growth of 3% to 4% for 2020. Asia and the Pacific were the worst

hit, with a drop in tourist arrivals of 9% to 12% (UNWTO, 2020). According to the scenario analysis of the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) from June, 2020, which is a reflection of the current uncertainty of the Travel and Tourism sector as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to the period of travel restriction, job losses in the sector in 2020 reached 121.1 million for the baseline scenario and 197.5 million for the downside scenario (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2021).

Accordingly, about 25 million tourists visited Malaysia in 2012 alone, which places Malaysia as the tenth most desired destination globally (United Nations World Tourism

* College of Business Administration, Taif University, Taif 21944, Saudi Arabia.

** Faculty of Business Administration, University of Medical Sciences and Technology, Khartoum, Sudan.
Email: kaniyusuf@yahoo.com (Corresponding Author)

*** Faculty of Education, East China Normal University, China.

**** College of Business Administration, Taif University, Saudi Arabia.

***** Graduate School of Business, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia.

Organization, 2013). Since the mid-1980s, the Malaysian government has intensified the development plans for the tourism sector across the country, including highlands and islands. After the oil and gas sector and manufacturing sector, the tourism sector is the third largest source of income in Malaysia (Lo, Mohammad, Songan & Yeo, 2012), which explains the focus of the Malaysian government in expanding the tourism industry as a high-yielding industry (Nair, Munikrishnan, Rajaratnam & King, 2015). With the target of attracting 36 million tourists by 2020 and a projected revenue of RM 186 million (Malaysia Tourism Report, 2014), it is a challenge to prompt more tourists to revisit and extend their stay considering that the average duration of stay among the tourists in Malaysia reduced from 6.8 nights in 2013 to 6.6 nights in the subsequent year (Malaysia Tourism Report, 2014). Addressing these challenges, enhanced quality of tourism products and services are highly imperative to boost the Malaysian tourism sector (Musa, Mohammad, Thirumoorthi, Moghavvemi & Kasim, 2015).

The increasing globalisation has diversified the categories of tourists (e.g. non-Western tourists, postmodern tourists, and post-tourists) (Sheng & Chen, 2013). Tourists from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, and the UAE recorded the highest average per capital expenditure and average duration of stay (Malaysia Tourism Report, 2014). For instance, tourists from the Middle East region, particularly from the GCC countries (e.g. Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE), were found to dominate the tourism market in Switzerland (Chen, Mussalam & Scagnolari, 2014). Although the number of Arab tourists in various countries has remained consistent (Abodeeb, Wilson & Moyle, 2015), the number of GCC tourists in Malaysia has drastically reduced (Tourism Malaysia with the Cooperation of Immigration Department, 2015). The behavioural patterns of tourists, such as the frequency of visiting a specific destination, are subjected to specific conditions, which highlight the imperative need to explore the context of GCC tourists, unlike how most prior studies focused on the Western tourists. The number of GCC tourists travelling as a family depends on the occasion and the original source of market. GCC tourists share almost similar attributes as they are part of the diverse demographic background in their home country. Hence, a specific characterisation of the GCC community can be established. However, despite the similar religion and cultural background, the practices and civilisations of GCC tourists can be slightly different, resulting in a unique source market (Chen et al., 2014). Hence, the present study exclusively focused on tourists from four leading GCC countries (i.e. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, and the UAE) who visited Malaysia.

Although numerous studies have explored tourism (Su & Lin, 2014; Akın, 2015; Hagag, Clark & Wheeler, 2015; Lai, 2015; Li & Ryan, 2015; Llodrà-Riera et al., 2015; Shakona,

Backman, Backman, Norman, Luo & Duffy, 2015; Pereira, Correia & Schutz, 2015; Tang, 2015; Merinero-Rodríguez & Pulido-Fernandez, 2016), particularly on revisit intention, the obtained findings have remained ambiguous (Mat Som et al., 2012) and inadequate (Quintal & Polczynski, 2010). Only a few studies assessed the circumstances prior to the visit, during the visit, and after the visit as well as the influence of multiple dimensions and reasons for revisiting (Chang, Backman & Huang, 2014). Among these studies, eWOM (Albarq, 2014; Isa & Ramli, 2014), destination image (Gartner, 1993; Chew & Jahari, 2014; Abodeeb et al., 2015; Kong, Cros & Ong, 2015), and perceived risk (Li, Cai, Lehto & Huang, 2010; Chew & Jahari, 2014) were identified as factors influencing their revisit intention. Nevertheless, there have been limited insights on the measurement of GCC tourists' revisit intention given the lack of studies on the behavioural patterns of Muslim tourists (Shakona et al., 2015). In view of the above, the present study aimed to assess the influence of eWOM, destination image, and perceived risk on the GCC tourists' intention to revisit Malaysia.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Relationships of eWOM, Destination Image, and Revisit Intention

The growing recognition of Internet and advancement of information technology have transformed how communication today works, resulting in the growing attention on the significance of eWOM (Rong et al., 2012; Fakharyan et al., 2012)). WOM is an informal sharing of information on specific products or services (Liao et al., 2010). Consumers tend to research about the products and services before they decide whether to purchase (Torlak, Ozkara, Tiltay, Cengiz & Dulger, 2014), which have established eWOM as an effective means for the organisations to gain competitive advantage given its direct link to consumers (Akyüz, 2013). The use of eWOM is highly significant given its wide availability and accessibility. There are numerous online platforms for them to share information with ease, such as blogs, consumer review sites, forums, e-mail, online communities (Cheng & Zhou, 2010; Rong et al., 2012), and social networks, which have boosted the value of eWOM (Dellarocas, 2003). Unlike the interaction via conventional media, Litvin et al. (2008) described eWOM as an informal online communication among consumers and between consumers and sellers or manufacturers regarding the products, services, and the sellers or manufacturers themselves. Hence, it is essential to gain a better understanding on the consumers' online behaviour, especially in the social media platform, in relation to eWOM. Effective promotional strategies and media tools to connect with the potential and existing consumers can only then be

identified. In the case of the tourism sector, eWOM is deemed fitting considering the approach of tourists in deciding their destination (Albarq, 2014).

The significance of destination image in tourism has been widely explored since the 1970s (Kong et al., 2015), particularly in its development, determinants, and impact (Chew & Jahari, 2014; Setiawan, 2014). The direct influence of eWOM on destination image was found in several prior studies (Jalilvand, Samiei, Dini & Manzari, 2012; Fakharyan et al., 2012; Setiawan, 2014) but destination image in these studies was only assessed as a single dimension. Fakharyan et al. (2012) recommended the need to explore the influence of eWOM as well as the affective, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions on the tourists' behaviour. Gartner (1993) conceptualised destination image as an integration of cognitive image, affective image, and unique image. Firstly, Cognitive image in the context of tourism has been the focus of numerous studies (Qu et al., 2011; Agapito & Mendes, 2013; Ayyildiz & Turna, 2013; Stylos & Andronikidis, 2013); these studies identified cognitive image as an important dimension of destination image in the tourism context. Secondly, affective image is linked to the tourists' emotional attachment to the visited destination (Chew & Jahari, 2014). Similarly, prior studies identified affective image as a significant dimension of destination image (Qu et al., 2011; Agapito & Mendes 2013; Ayyildiz & Turna, 2013; Chew & Jahari, 2014; Papadimitriou, Apostolopoulou & Kaplanidou, 2015). Lastly, unique image is basically a combination of the tourists' perception and emotional attachment of the destination they visit; thus, the influence of this dimension generally depends on the cognitive and affective features (Lin et al., 2007). The uniqueness of a destination can be a rather persuasive justification in the selection of a specific destination among tourists (Qu et al., 2011). The general impression of tourists towards a specific destination critically depends on their unique impression of the destination; a unique general impression potentially overpowers their first impression (Qu et al., 2011). Studies have explored unique image as a significant predictor of destination image among the tourists (Qu et al., 2011; Agapito & Mendes 2013; Papadimitriou et al., 2015). However, unlike cognitive image and affective image, studies on unique image remain limited.

With that, all three dimensions of destination image were incorporated into the conceptual model of the present study for validation. Therefore, the following hypotheses were tested in the present study:

H1a: The eWOM directly influences cognitive image.

H1b: The eWOM directly influences affective image.

H1c: The eWOM directly influences unique image.

Goldenberg, Libai, and Muller (2001) found a significant relationship between WOM and the decision-making process of consumers. Rong et al. (2012) also demonstrated

the significance and direct influence of eWOM on the preference and behaviour of readers in relation to the online travel information—despite the distinct characteristics in handling online travel information, the relationship between browsers and sharers was established. Meanwhile, Chang et al. (2014) recommended incorporating WOM as one of the potential determinants of revisit intention in order to improve the predictability of the proposed model that incorporated experience, perceived value, and revisit intention. Clearly, eWOM is an important source of information that influences the destination of choice and intention to travel (Milman & Pizan, 1995; Yun & Good, 2007; Soderlund & Rosengren, 2007; Zhou & Lai, 2009; Fakharyan et al., 2012; Isa & Ramli, 2014). Qu et al. (2011) identified the intention to revisit a specific destination and to disseminate encouraging WOM as the most essential consequences in the context of destination image. The tourists' revisit intention has been extensively assessed in tourism research due to its consistency and reliability (Bigne, Sanchez & Andreu, 2009; Qu et al., 2011; Mat Som et al., 2012; Maggon & Chaudhry, 2015). Thus, the following hypothesis was tested:

H2: The eWOM directly influences revisit intention.

Relationships of Perceived Risk, Destination Image, and Revisit Intention

Perceived risk reflects the extent of one's acceptance of a specific behaviour that is considered negative, which subsequently affects the decision made and the ensuing behaviour (Floyd, Gibson, Pennington-Gray & Thapa, 2003; Mansfeld, 2006; Reichel, Fuchs & Uriely, 2007; Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). The perceived risk of tourists can be rather vague (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005; Hsu & Lin, 2006). Various elements of risk have been widely explored in order to gain an understanding of perceived risk among tourists (Chew & Jahari, 2014). Earlier studies mainly linked perceived risk to safety and crime-related aspects. When one recognises the threat of visiting a specific destination, perceived risk often affects his or her travel decision (Mansfeld, 2006; Reichel et al., 2007). Certain tourists may view a particular destination as risky and eventually avoid visiting such destination (Floyd, Gibson, Pennington-Gray & Thapa, 2003). Studies have also explored the influence of perceived risk if the economic circumstances of the destination are unfavourable (Korstanje & Clayton, 2012; Pérez, Mafé & Blas, 2013; Chew & Jahari, 2014; Mlozi, 2014; Ritchie, Chien & Watson, 2014). Besides that, the variation in the preferences and demands of tourists have been extensively explored and acknowledged, resulting in the formation of unique business segments. Based on the above arguments we hypothesize as follows:

H3a: Perceived risk directly influences cognitive image.

H3b: Perceived risk directly influences affective image.

H3c: Perceived risk directly influences unique image.

Perceived risk has been viewed as one of the critical predictors of one's intention to visit. Despite the perceived risk, tourists in certain studies demonstrated revisit intention (Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty, 2009; Li, Cai, Lehto & Huang, 2010; Fuchs & Reichel, 2011). This suggests that tourists who express revisit intention may cognitively perceive the destination differently from first-time tourists (Sirgy & Su, 2000). Unlike the findings by Quintal and Polczynski (2010) on the insignificant influence of perceived risk on satisfaction and revisit intention, other studies concluded otherwise—perceived risk was said to negatively influence the online purchase of flight tickets (Kolsaker, Lee-Kelley & Choy, 2004; Kim, Qu & Kim, 2009), the intention to purchase travel online (Jensen, 2012; Amaro & Duarte, 2015), thoughts towards online travel shopping (Bigne, Sanz, Ruiz & Aldas, 2010), and revisit intention (Sonmez & Graefe, 1998; Hu, 2003). Hence, the proposed hypothesis was tested:

H4: Perceived risk directly influences revisit intention.

Relationship of Destination Image and Revisit Intention

Costa (1987) described the concept of destination image as to how tourists objectively or psychologically perceive a specific destination based on their own understanding. Meanwhile, Crompton (1979) and Kotler, Haider, and Rein (1994) defined destination image as the extent to which individuals link a specific destination to a specific impression, notion, and opinion. Several studies identified destination image as the most crucial element of revisit intention in several studies (Mechinda, Serirat, Anuwichanont & Gulid, 2010; Mat Som et al., 2012). Although destination image has been widely explored given its significance (Llodrà-Riera et al., 2015; Lai, 2015; Abodeeb et al., 2015; Nassar et al., 2015; Henderson, 2015; Kong et al., 2015), Quintal and Polczynski (2010) particularly claimed the lack of studies on the relationship between destination image and revisit intention. Chew and Jahari (2014) empirically demonstrated the direct influence of dimension image in terms of cognitive image and affective image on revisit intention whereas Nassar et al. (2015) identified affective image as the most important determinant of the intention to visit Islamic destinations among Kuwaiti tourists. However, Isa and Ramli (2014) reported an insignificant (direct) relationship between destination image and tourist visitation. Thus, the following hypotheses were tested:

H5a: Cognitive image directly influences revisit intention.

H5b: Affective image directly influences revisit intention.

H5c: Unique image directly influences revisit intention.

Mediating Role of Destination Image

Jeong and Jang (2011) noted that positive WOM would result in favourable destination image, resulting in higher intention to visit. With that, the present study opted to test the following hypotheses:

H6a: Cognitive image mediates the relationship between eWOM and revisit intention.

H6b: Affective image mediates the relationship between eWOM and revisit intention.

H6c: Unique image mediates the relationship between eWOM and revisit intention.

Meanwhile, according to Chew and Jahari (2014), the mediating impact of destination image on the relationship between perceived risk and revisit intention has not been explored and destination image was often explored in terms of cognitive image and affective image only. Chew and Jahari (2014) further revealed a significant and indirect influence of socio-psychological risk and financial risk, unlike the physical risk, on revisit intention via destination image in terms of cognitive image and affective image. Therefore, the following hypotheses were tested:

H7a: Cognitive image mediates the relationship between perceived risk and revisit intention.

H7b: Affective image mediates the relationship between perceived risk and revisit intention.

H7c: Unique image mediates the relationship between perceived risk and revisit intention.

In view of the above, Fig. 1 presents the proposed conceptual framework of this study that combined the destination image framework (Gartner, 1993), eWOM, and perceived risk.

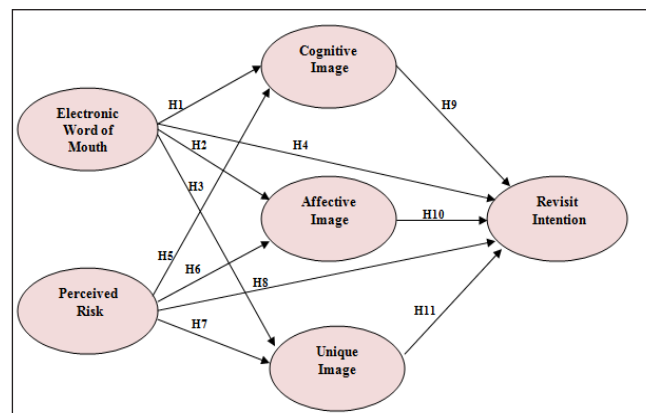


Fig. 1: Conceptual Model

METHODOLOGY

According to Malaysia Tourism Report (2015), most of the tourists were from Saudi Arabia, followed by Oman, Kuwait, and the UAE (Table 1). The total GCC tourists in Malaysia decreased from 189,080 in 2014 to 163,328 in 2015. As this study exclusively focused on GCC tourists in Malaysia from January 2015 to December 2015, the total population of 163,328 GCC tourists established the sampling frame.

Table 1: GCC Tourist Arrivals to Malaysia, 2014 – 2015

| Sr. No. | Country of Nationality | January - December | | |
|---------|------------------------|--------------------|---------|------------|
| | | 2014 | 2015 | Growth (%) |
| 1 | Saudi Arabia | 113,921 | 99,754 | -12.4 |
| 2 | Oman | 34,534 | 31,934 | -7.5 |
| 3 | Kuwait | 20,853 | 15,871 | -23.9 |
| 4 | UAE | 19,772 | 15,769 | -20.2 |
| Total | Tourist Arrivals | 189,080 | 163,328 | -13.6 |

Source: Source: Tourism Malaysia (2015).

Referring to Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010), the expected sample size for the present study was 400. The respondents for the present study were selected using quota sampling according to the following equation:

$$\left(\frac{\text{Expected sample size}}{\text{Total tourist arrivals}} \right) \times \text{Tourist arrival from the country} \quad (1)$$

where the expected sample size = 400; the total tourist arrivals = 163,328. The calculated sample size from Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, and the UAE are tabulated in Table 2.

Table 2: Required Sample Size for Each Country

| Expected Sample Size | Number of Tourists | Country | Calculation | Quota Sampling |
|----------------------|--------------------|--------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| 400 | 99,754 | Saudi Arabia | $(400/163,328) * 99,754$ | 244 |
| | 31,934 | Oman | $(400/163,328) * 31,934$ | 78 |
| | 15,871 | Kuwait | $(400/163,328) * 15,871$ | 39 |
| | 15,769 | UAE | $(400/163,328) * 15,769$ | 39 |
| Sample Size | 163,328 | Total | | 400 |

The developed instrument (see Appendix-A) for the online survey comprised of 60 adapted items from prior studies to assess eWOM, perceived risk, cognitive image, affective

image, unique image, and revisit intention. The instrument was pilot tested to ensure its accuracy and consistency. The actual data collection was conducted from September 2016 to November 2016 at several tourist spots in Malaysia, including the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA). A total of 480 GCC tourists were personally approached and asked whether they were willing to participate in the survey.

Data Collection Procedure

A survey questionnaire was distributed among GCC tourists who were visiting Malaysia during this period for the pilot test as well as the final study. Primarily the researcher targeted the tourist who were leaving the country from Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA). They were only approached for consent to participate in the survey questionnaire and not approached during arrival as the tourist need to stay at least a minimum of 1 night before they are qualified as tourist. Apart from the KLIA, the researcher selected these following shopping centers in and around Kuala Lumpur which are frequented by GCC tourists. The details of the shopping centers are as provided in Table 3.

Table 3: Shopping Centers where GCC Tourists were Approached

| Sr. No. | Shopping Centres | Date |
|---------|---------------------------------|---|
| 1. | Pavilion Kuala Lumpur | 9 th Feb 2017 – 8 th May 2017 |
| 2. | Suria KLCC | |
| 3. | Berjaya Times Square | |
| 4. | Fahrenheit88 Kuala Lumpur | |
| 5. | Starhill Gallery Kuala Lumpur | |
| 6. | Sunway Pyramid | |
| 7. | The Curve | |
| 8. | Mid Valley Megamall | |
| 9. | One Utama Shopping Mall | |
| 10. | Sungei Wang Plaza Bukit Bintang | |

The participating respondents were required to indicate their agreement towards the items presented according to a six-point Likert scale (Chomeya, 2010). After acquiring their permission, the online survey forms were emailed to the email address that they provided. As a follow-up procedure, the respondents were contacted via email or phone call. The study successfully obtained 401 completed survey forms between the 9th February, 2017 – 8th May, 2017. The survey responses were compiled and analysed using IBM SPSS (version 23) and AMOS (version 18). The proposed conceptual model in the present study was validated using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and a full-fledged SEM approach.

RESULTS

Demographic Information of Respondents

Table 4 presents the demographic profile of respondents. Most of the respondents were mainly male (81.3%) and

from Saudi Arabia (59.9%). A large proportion of these respondents were between 30 and 39 years of age (37.2%). Only 2.7% of the total respondents were less than 19 years of age. As for the annual income, most of the respondents (24.7%) earned USD 10,000 per year. The respondents were generally educated.

Table 4: Demographic Profile of Respondents

| Demographic Information | Category | Frequency (N = 401) | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| Gender | Male | 326 | 81.3 |
| | Female | 75 | 18.7 |
| Country of Nationality | Saudi Arabia | 240 | 59.9 |
| | UAE | 40 | 10.0 |
| | Oman | 82 | 20.4 |
| | Kuwait | 39 | 9.7 |
| Age (Years) | < 19 | 11 | 2.7 |
| | 20 - 29 | 95 | 23.7 |
| | 30 - 39 | 149 | 37.2 |
| | 40 - 49 | 120 | 29.9 |
| | 50 - 59 | 23 | 5.7 |
| | > 60 | 3 | 0.7 |
| Annual Income (USD) | Below USD 10,000 | 99 | 24.7 |
| | USD 10,000 - USD 20,000 | 77 | 19.2 |
| | USD 20,001 - USD 30,000 | 54 | 13.5 |
| | USD 30,001 - USD 40,000 | 46 | 11.5 |
| | USD 40,001 - USD 50,000 | 28 | 7.0 |
| | USD 50,001 - USD 60,000 | 17 | 4.2 |
| | USD 60,001 - USD 70,000 | 26 | 6.5 |
| | Above USD 70,000 | 54 | 13.5 |
| Education Level | < High school certificate | 12 | 3.0 |
| | High school certificate | 29 | 7.2 |
| | Post-secondary (diploma) | 56 | 14.0 |
| | Bachelor's degree | 149 | 37.2 |
| | Master's degree | 103 | 25.7 |
| | Professional | 49 | 12.2 |
| | PhD (Doctorate) | 3 | 0.7 |
| Number of Children | 1 | 36 | 9.0 |
| | 2 | 50 | 12.5 |
| | 3 | 74 | 18.5 |
| | 4 | 62 | 15.5 |
| | More Than 4 | 82 | 20.4 |
| | No Children | 97 | 24.2 |
| Employment Status | Unemployed | 61 | 15.2 |
| | Employed | 316 | 78.8 |
| | Retired | 24 | 6.0 |

| Demographic Information | Category | Frequency (N = 401) | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------------|---|---------------------|----------------|
| Marital Status | Single | 61 | 15.2 |
| | Divorced/Widowed | 12 | 3.0 |
| | Married | 327 | 81.5 |
| | Other | 1 | 0.2 |
| Number of Visits to Malaysia | 1 | 145 | 36.2 |
| | 2 | 90 | 22.4 |
| | 3 - 4 | 54 | 13.5 |
| | 5 - 6 | 45 | 11.2 |
| | 7 - 10 | 39 | 9.7 |
| | 11 - 15 | 12 | 3.0 |
| | > 15 | 15 | 3.7 |
| Travel Arrangement Method | Group package tour | 8 | 2.0 |
| | Non-group package tour | 56 | 14.0 |
| | Individually arranged/DIY tour | 307 | 76.6 |
| | Other (e.g. Government-sponsored visit) | 30 | 7.5 |

CFA for Measurement Model

The convergent and discriminant validity of the six-factor measurement model was tested. The model that comprised of eWOM, perceived risk, cognitive image, affective image, unique image, and revisit intention was initially analysed with the pool of 40 valid items from the earlier outcomes of EFA. The items were expected to only load on the corresponding dimension but the measurement model did not meet the statistical requirements: (1) the value of the model chi-square (χ^2) over the degree of freedom (df) should not exceed 5; (2) the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) value should not exceed 0.080; (3) the values of Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) and comparative fit index (CFI) should exceed 0.90 (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Marsh, Hau & Wen, 2004); thus, reaffirming the plausibility of multicollinearity issue. Consequently, the following items with high modification indices were removed: (1) affective image (AI): AI1, AI2, and AI8; (2) cognitive image (CI): CI3; (3) unique image (UI): UI4; (4) revisit intention (RI): RI2, RI3, RI5, and RI9; (5) perceived risk (PR): PR1, PR6, and PR8. Following the removal of these items, the overall fit statistics demonstrated an adequate model fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.75$; p-value= .000; RMSEA = 0.066; CFI = 0.914; TLI = 0.903). Fig. 2 presents the six-factor measurement model. Meanwhile, Table 5 describes

the retained valid items (factor loadings of between 0.51 and 0.87) of the measurement model.

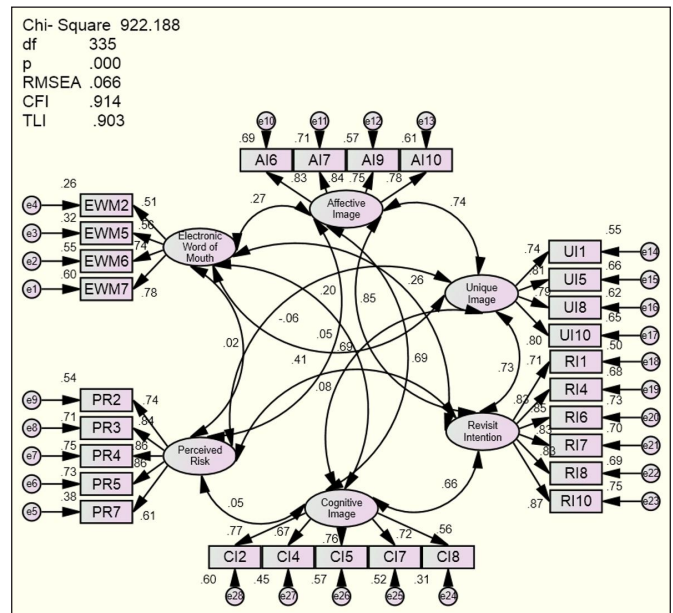


Fig. 2: Six-Factor Measurement Model

Table 5: Description of Items of the Measurement Model

| Description of Items | | Factor Loading | α |
|--------------------------|---|----------------|----------|
| Perceived Risk | | | |
| PR2 | Risk of suffering any delinquency act. | 0.74 | 0.888 |
| PR3 | Fear of suffering any disease or infection. | 0.84 | |
| PR4 | Fear of suffering a natural disaster. | 0.86 | |
| PR5 | Fear of any kind of accident. | 0.86 | |
| PR7 | Risk of being tricked as a tourist. | 0.61 | |
| Electronic Word of Mouth | | | |
| EWM2 | To make sure I choose the right destination, I often read other tourists' online travel reviews. | 0.51 | 0.734 |
| EWM5 | If I don't read tourists' online travel reviews when I travel to a destination, I worry about my decision. | 0.56 | |
| EWM6 | When I travel to a destination, tourists' online travel reviews make me confident in travelling to the destination. | 0.74 | |
| EWM7 | I feel good when I share my experience with others online. | 0.78 | |
| Affective Image | | | |
| AI6 | Makes me feel overwhelmed with emotions. | 0.83 | 0.874 |
| AI7 | Makes me feel attached to a destination. | 0.84 | |
| AI9 | Ideal to live. | 0.75 | |
| AI10 | Ideal to visit. | 0.78 | |
| Cognitive Image | | | |
| CI2 | Interesting cultural heritage. | 0.77 | 0.823 |
| CI4 | Good gastronomy. | 0.67 | |
| CI5 | Interesting cultural events. | 0.76 | |
| CI7 | Attractive historical centre. | 0.72 | |
| CI8 | Good value for money. | 0.56 | |
| Unique Image | | | |
| UI1 | Natural environment. | 0.74 | 0.862 |
| UI5 | Friendly and helpful local people. | 0.81 | |
| UI8 | Clean environment. | 0.79 | |
| UI10 | Safe and secure environment. | 0.80 | |
| Revisit Intention | | | |
| RI1 | I consider Malaysia as my first choice compared to other countries. | 0.71 | 0.922 |
| RI4 | I would recommend Malaysia to other people. | 0.83 | |
| RI6 | I intend to visit Malaysian modern cities in the near future. | 0.85 | |
| RI7 | I have a strong desire to visit Malaysian exceptional islands again. | 0.83 | |
| RI8 | I intend to visit Malaysian modern shopping malls in the near future. | 0.83 | |
| RI8 | I intend to visit Malaysian modern shopping malls in the near future. | 0.83 | |
| RI0 | I intend to visit Malaysia several times. | 0.87 | |

In order to achieve adequate convergent validity and discriminant validity for a model, the value of composite reliability (CR) should be equal to or exceed 0.70; the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) of each construct should exceed the correlation coefficient between

the constructs (Fornell & Lacker, 1981); the items should significantly load on the corresponding dimension with at least critical ratio (t-value) of 15.61 (p-value < .001) (Hair et al., 2010). As shown in Table 6, the six-factor measurement model demonstrated adequate validity for the ensuing testing.

Table 6: Results of Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

| | CR | AVE | UI | EWOM | AI | PR | CI | RI |
|---------------------------------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Unique Image (UI) | 0.867 | 0.620 | 0.787 | | | | | |
| Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM) | 0.747 | 0.533 | 0.408 | 0.658 | | | | |
| Affective Image (AI) | 0.880 | 0.647 | 0.743 | 0.270 | 0.884 | | | |
| Perceived Risk (PR) | 0.890 | 0.622 | -0.057 | 0.019 | 0.052 | 0.789 | | |
| Cognitive Image (CI) | 0.827 | 0.592 | 0.694 | 0.198 | 0.691 | 0.052 | 0.701 | |
| Revisit Intention (RI) | 0.925 | 0.674 | 0.734 | 0.264 | 0.852 | 0.084 | 0.663 | 0.821 |

Full-Fledged SEM for Conceptual Model

Using the revised six-factor measurement model, the SEM results for the testing of hypotheses were subsequently obtained, as shown in Fig. 3. The negative path coefficient between electronic word of mouth and revisit intention ($\beta = -0.38$) was contradicting with the hypothesis 4 (H4). Due to this reason, the proposed conceptual model was modified for completing the fit statistics. The revised conceptual model met the statistical requirements ($\chi^2/df = 2.98$; p-value = 0.000; RMSEA = 0.070; CFI = 0.916; TLI = 0.904).

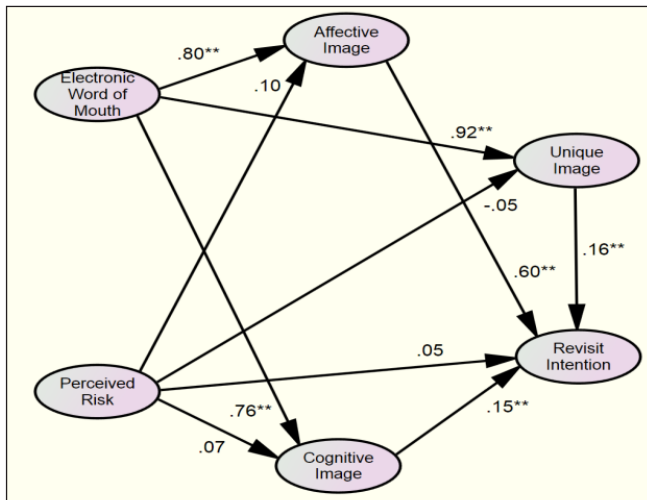


Fig. 3. Proposed Conceptual Model

Besides that, eWOM was found to significantly and directly influence cognitive image ($\beta = 0.76$; p-value < .000; CR = 6.316), affective image ($\beta = 0.80$; p-value < .000; CR = 7.416), and unique image ($\beta = 0.92$; p-value < .000; CR = 7.924), which supported H1a, H1b, and H1c, respectively. On the other hand, the direct influence of perceived risk on cognitive image ($\beta = 0.07$; p-value = .209; CR = 1.255), affective image ($\beta = 0.10$; p-value = .066; CR = 1.840), unique image ($\beta = -0.05$; p-value = .298; CR = -1.041), and revisit intention ($\beta = 0.05$; p-value = .218; CR = 1.232) was found insignificant. In other words, H3a, H3b, H3c, and H4 were rejected. Meanwhile, cognitive image ($\beta = 0.15$; p-value < .015; CR = 2.448), affective image ($\beta =$

0.60; p-value < .000; CR = 7.886), and unique image ($\beta = 0.16$; p-value < .025; CR = 2.237) were found to directly influence revisit intention, respectively. Hence, H5a, H5b, and H5c were supported. However, using the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982), only affective image ($\chi^2 = 2.866$; p-value = .002) was found to mediate the relationship between eWOM and revisit intention, which supported H6b. Cognitive image ($\chi^2 = 1.36152406$; p-value = .086) and unique image ($\chi^2 = 1.417$; p-value = .078) did not mediate the relationship between eWOM and revisit intention. Thus, H6a and H6c were rejected. Additionally, cognitive image (H7a), affective image (H7b), and unique image (H7c) did not mediate the relationship between perceived risk and revisit intention considering that this relationship was also found insignificant. As presented in Table 7, eWOM was identified as the most significant factor that influences destination image in terms of cognitive image, affective image, and unique image among GCC tourists in Malaysia.

Table 7: Standardised Effect Size and Variance of the Model

| Standardised Effect Size | | | |
|--|---|-------------------|--------|
| Electronic Word Of Mouth | → | Affective Image | 0.804 |
| Electronic Word Of Mouth | → | Cognitive Image | 0.757 |
| Electronic Word Of Mouth | → | Unique Image | 0.922 |
| Electronic Word Of Mouth | → | Revisit Intention | 0.748 |
| Affective Image | → | Revisit Intention | 0.600 |
| Cognitive Image | → | Revisit Intention | 0.152 |
| Unique Image | → | Revisit Intention | 0.163 |
| Perceived Risk | → | Affective Image | 0.097 |
| Perceived Risk | → | Cognitive Image | 0.068 |
| Perceived Risk | → | Unique Image | -0.054 |
| Perceived Risk | → | Revisit Intention | 0.105 |
| Squared Multiple Correlations (Variance) | | | |
| Unique Image | | | 85% |
| Cognitive Image | | | 58% |
| Affective Image | | | 66% |
| Revisit Intention | | | 71% |

DISCUSSION

Malaysia is undoubtedly a unique destination for GCC tourists. However, the significance of unique image in the context of tourism is often overlooked (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991, 1993; Fakharyan et al., 2012). This study proved the direct influence of eWOM on cognitive image, affective image, and unique image. In other words, GCC tourists highly regard eWOM when they decide on Malaysia as their destination of choice. These results were in line with the reported results of prior studies (see Jalilvand et al., 2012; Fakharyan et al., 2012; Setiawan, 2014) that measured destination image as a single dimension. Evidently, eWOM plays a significant role in promoting the Malaysian tourism sector (Akyüz, 2013). After all, eWOM is more reliable and easily accessible than other conventional media for advertising or marketing given its direct link to the consumer base, particularly among avid social network users. Moreover, eWOM offers competitive advantage in gaining consumers' trust and confidence. The use of eWOM in the tourism sector is a useful tool to comprehend tourists' preference and opinion of a specific destination (Albarq, 2014).

Considering its dominant influence among consumers, studies have extensively explored eWOM in the tourism and hospitality domain for the development of improved eWOM technologies (Litvin et al., 2008). However, a negative path coefficient for the direct influence of eWOM on revisit intention was found in this study although the relationship between eWOM and the intention to travel was reported in past studies (see Fakharyan et al., 2012; Albarq, 2014). The hypothesised relationship between eWOM and revisit intention in this study was then eliminated from this study during the validation process of the proposed conceptual model given its contradictory result.

Meanwhile, this study found an insignificant influence of perceived risk on cognitive image, affective image, and unique image, and revisit intention among GCC tourists in Malaysia, which contradicted the reported results in past studies (see Sonmez & Graefe, 1998; Hu, 2003; Floyd, Gibson, Pennington-Gray & Thapa, 2003; Kolsaker, Lee-Kelley & Choy, 2004; Kim, Qu & Kim, 2009; Bigne, Sanz, Ruiz & Aldas, 2010; Jensen, 2012; Amaro & Duarte, 2015). Nevertheless, similar findings were found in several prior studies (see Li, Cai, Lehto & Huang, 2010; Fuchs & Reichel, 2011; Chew & Jahari, 2014).

On the other hand, this study proved the direct influence of cognitive image, affective image, and unique image on revisit intention among GCC tourists' intention to revisit Malaysia, which were supported by prior studies (see Jalilvand et al., 2012; Mat Som et al., 2012; Chew & Jahari, 2014). Affective image was found to be the most significant determinant of their revisit intention, which was consistent with the study of

Nassar et al. (2015) that focused on the intention of Kuwaiti tourists to visit Islamic destinations. This implies that GCC tourists are more likely to revisit Malaysia based on their positive emotional attachment to this country.

Unlike cognitive image and unique image, only affective image was found to mediate the relationship between eWOM and revisit intention among GCC tourists. This implies that eWOM influences not only their selection of destination but also their intention to revisit a specific destination. The positive experience of engaging with the people as well as the facilities and other resources offered at the destination enhances the tourists' intention to revisit (Jalilvand et al., 2012). At this point, it can be said that the influence of eWOM and the affective image of a specific destination are key determinants of revisit intention.

Lastly, this study did not obtain adequate evidence to support the mediating impact of dimension image (i.e. cognitive image, affective image, and unique image) on the relationship between perceived risk and revisit intention. In this study, perceived risk did not significantly influence destination image and revisit intention. Clearly, perceived risk is not a significant determinant of both destination image and revisit intention among GCC tourists with Malaysia as the destination of choice. Similarly, Chew and Jahari (2014) also found that cognitive image and affective image do not mediate the relationship between physical risk, on revisit intention but both dimensions of destination image mediate the relationships of socio-psychological risk and financial risk with revisit intention. Meanwhile, Kani et al. (2017) found that perceived risk moderates the relationship between destination image and revisit intention.

CONCLUSION

The tourism sector substantially contributes to the economic growth globally and Malaysia is of no exception. Malaysia is one of the top 10 leading popular destinations in the world. Studies have demonstrated the significant role of GCC tourists, particularly of those who choose Malaysia as their destination of choice. In particular, tourists from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, and the UAE recorded the highest average per capital expenditure and visits to Malaysia (Malaysia Tourism Report, 2014). Focusing on their revisit intention, this study proposed a conceptual model that integrated eWOM, destination image, perceived risk, and revisit intention for testing. Furthermore, destination image in this study was assessed in terms of cognitive image, affective image, and unique image. Consequently, this study obtained evidence on the direct influence of eWOM on all three dimensions of destination image and the direct influence of all three dimensions of destination image on revisit intention. Besides that, this study also proved the mediating impact of affective image on the relationship between eWOM and revisit intention. Adding

to that, perceived risk was found to exhibit no influence on destination image and revisit intention among GCC tourists. Most importantly, eWOM was found to play the most significant determinant of destination image, while affective image served as the most significant determinant of revisit intention in the present study.

From the theoretical perspectives, this study provided pertinent insights on the relationships of eWOM, destination image, perceived risk, and revisit intention among GCC tourists within the Malaysian context, which subsequently extended the existing knowledge base on tourism. Additionally, affective image plays an important role in enhancing the influence of eWOM on revisit intention. Besides that, this study also addressed the lack of studies on the significance of unique image as one of the dimensions of destination image. The obtained results on all three dimensions of destination image validated the significance of cognitive image, affective image, and unique image in explaining the tourists' revisit intention. These three dimensions of destination image accounted for 58% (cognitive image), 66% (affective image), and 85% (unique image) of the total variance, which reaffirmed how Malaysia is perceived as a unique destination among GCC tourists. The expansion of the destination image framework with the addition of eWOM and perceived risk in assessing significant determinants of revisit intention among tourists is noteworthy to explore, particularly in its application for different countries or destinations. From the managerial perspectives, the findings of the present study were also expected to benefit the tourism sector, particularly the managers and other key stakeholders, in their effort to enhance the tourists' intention to revisit by making use of the influence of eWOM, cognitive image, affective image, and unique image. The significant influence of eWOM and destination image are inevitably critical in sustaining the GCC tourists' revisit intention to Malaysia.

However, this study solely focused on GCC tourists in Malaysia. Thus, the obtained findings may not be generalised across other contexts or populations. It is recommended for future research to expand the proposed conceptual model of the present study by considering the dimensions of eWOM (e.g. WOM intensity, positive valence WOM, negative valence WOM, and WOM content) (Goyette, Ricard, Bergeron & Marticotte, 2010) and dimensions of perceived risk (e.g. physical risk, socio-psychological risk, and financial risk) (Chew & Jahari, 2014). Besides that, in order to acquire more robust findings, it is also recommended for future research to consider cross-validation by assessing the moderating impact of GCC countries, specifically Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman and the UAE.

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