

**LOCATION BRANDING: EXPLORING ONLINE
DESTINATION IMAGE OF MALAYSIAN
BORNEO**

PERPUSTAKAAN
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH



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UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH

**FACULTY OF BUSINESS, ECONOMICS AND
ACCOUNTANCY
UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA SABAH
2018**

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**THIS IS SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**FACULTY OF BUSINESS, ECONOMICS AND
ACCOUNTANCY
UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA SABAH
2018**

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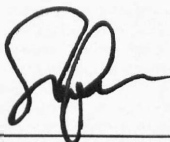
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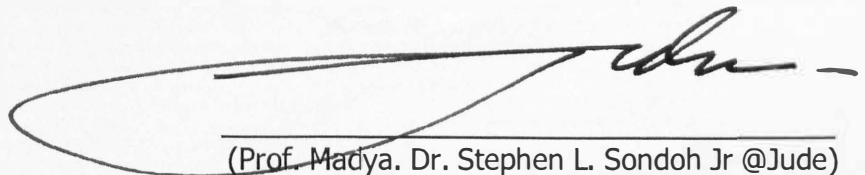
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deep gratitude goes first to my main supervisor Dr. Balvinder Kaur Kler for her endless and expert guidance throughout the process of this research. Without her this dissertation would not be completed. I pray that God will continue blessing her and her family in every aspect. Not forgetting, I would like to thank Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stephen Laison Sondoh Jr @ Jude, for getting me started on this.

My appreciation is extended to Dr. Bamini Kpd Balakrishnan, my academic mentor at the faculty for witnessing and supporting my journey from an undergraduate to postgraduate. I must express my thanks to the bloggers for being so cooperative in sharing information regarding their travel experiences of Borneo. I also wish to acknowledge the role of MyBrain15 scholarship for funding my study.

My heartfelt gratitude to my parents, Thony Chan and Wong Fui Fu, who have been my supporters, with endless prayers and had faith and motivated me to try my best towards the Ph.D achievement. Hopefully I could finally make you proud. A special thank you to my Grandmother, who was the first person to motivate me to continue my doctoral study, and I pray to God to bless my dear grandma, Wong Siew Lan.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my siblings, all my relatives and friends, Ph.D comrades, for the never ending efforts in making this dissertation a reality for me. It has been possible for me because of these great people I have met along the way. I pray that our friendship will continue to be blessed by God. The quest continues...

WONG SIAO FUJ

26th February 2018

ABSTRACT

Although Place Branding Theory (PBT) continues to advance in the tourism domain, location branding remains an understudied area. In this digital era, online destination image (ODI) is a vital component of tourism destination brands. ODI, especially User-Generated Content (UGC) is known to influence tourists' selection of travel destinations. In particular, bloggers are a new, trusted source, or, ODI formation agents who utilize travel blogs to convey their experiences. However, the unofficial nature of UGC raises a concern as it could produce ODI similarity for tourist destinations in different locations. An understanding of the formation of ODI could guide location branding. This study explored how Borneo, a geographical location on the world map is portrayed as a tourist destination online. In particular, this study questioned if bloggers produced similar ODI for Malaysian Borneo (Sabah and Sarawak) as both offer similar products, experiences, and promote 'Borneo' (location) as their brand name. A qualitative content analysis (QCA) explored the ODI of a homogenous, purposive sample of 25 blogs and compared it to the ODI projected in respective official DMO websites. The QCA on blogs indicated the ODI of Malaysian Borneo focuses on four experiences: nature (N), adventure (A), culture (C), and also, negative environmental impacts. For bloggers, Sabah is projected by its iconic orangutan, and Sarawak for its wilderness. Whereas, the QCA on DMO websites indicates ODI focused on three tourism attributes: NAC. A comparison of the two QCA data sets showed high ODI congruence suggesting strong location brand image and positioning for both Sabah and Sarawak. Findings also propose bloggers and DMOs use geographical characteristics to produce ODI as images and descriptions focus on physical, human-environment, and human geography. This structure more easily associates place with location for potential tourists. A Location Branding Model (LBM) is proposed which demonstrates the contribution of geography to the existing branding process. This study provides an understanding how UGC contributes to ODI formation, and produces ODI congruence in the case of Malaysian Borneo with implications for location branding in general. The LBM is a novel contribution of this study to the PBT literature and suggestions are made for future work.

ABSTRAK

Penjenamaan Lokasi: Penerokaan Imej Destinasi Dalam Talian Malaysia Borneo

Walaupun teori penjenamaan tempat (PBT) terus maju dalam domain pelancongan, namun penyelidikan terhadap penjenamaan lokasi adalah tidak mencukupi. Dalam era digital ini, imej destinasi dalam talian (ODI) merupakan komponen penting dalam jenama destinasi pelancongan. ODI, terutamanya kandungan yang dihasilkan oleh pengguna ('User Generated Content') ternyata mempunyai pengaruh terhadap pemilihan destinasi pelancongan. Khususnya, penulis blog adalah sumber yang baru, dipercayai, atau ejen pembentuk ODI yang menyampaikan pengalaman mereka melalui blog. Walau bagaimanapun, sifat tidak rasmi UGC menimbulkan kebimbangan kerana ia boleh menghasilkan kesamaan ODI untuk destinasi pelancongan di lokasi yang berbeza. Pemahaman pembentukan ODI mungkin dapat membimbing penjenamaan lokasi. Kajian ini menerangkan bagaimana Borneo, lokasi geografi di peta dunia digambarkan sebagai destinasi pelancongan dalam talian. Khususnya, kajian ini mempersoalkan sekiranya penulis blog menghasilkan ODI yang sama untuk Malaysia Borneo (Sabah dan Sarawak) kerana kedua-duanya menawarkan produk, pengalaman, dan mempromosikan 'Borneo' (lokasi) sebagai jenama mereka. Analisis kandungan kualitatif (QCA) meneroka ODI pensampelan homogenous, purposif daripada 25 blog dan membandingkannya dengan ODI yang diunjurkan di laman web DMO rasmi masing-masing. QCA di blog menunjukkan ODI Borneo Malaysia memberi tumpuan kepada empat pengalaman: alam semulajadi (N), pengembaraan (A), budaya (C), dan juga, kesan alam sekitar yang negatif. Bagi para penulis blog, Sabah diunjurkan oleh ikon orangutan, dan Sarawak oleh hutan liar. Manakala, QCA di laman web DMO menunjukkan ODI tertumpu kepada tiga sifat pelancongan: NAC. Perbandingan dua set data QCA menunjukkan keseragaman ODI yang tinggi, dan mencadangkan imej dan kedudukan jenama yang kukuh untuk Sabah dan Sarawak. Penemuan juga mencadangkan para penulis blog dan DMO menggunakan ciri geografi untuk menghasilkan ODI dimana imej dan deskripsi memberi tumpuan kepada geografi fizikal, persekitaran manusia, dan geografi manusia. Struktur ini memudahkan bakal pelancong untuk mengaitkan tempat dengan lokasi. Model Penjenamaan Lokasi (LBM) yang dicadangkan menunjukkan sumbangan geografi kepada proses penjenamaan yang sedia ada. Kajian ini menghasilkan pemahaman bagaimana UGC menyumbang kepada pembentukan ODI, serta menghasilkan keseragaman ODI dalam kes Malaysia Borneo, serta memberikan implikasi kepada penjenamaan lokasi secara amnya. LBM merupakan sumbangan baru dalam kajian ini kepada literatur PBT dan cadangan diberi bagi penyelidikan masa depan.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | | |
|------|---|--|
| DMOs | - | Destination Management Organizations |
| ODI | - | Online Destination Image |
| UGC | - | User Generated Content |
| ST | - | Sabah Tourism Board |
| STB | - | Sarawak Tourism Board |
| QCA | - | Qualitative Content Analysis |
| CA | - | Content Analysis |
| NAC | - | Nature, Adventure, and Culture |
| NACN | - | Nature, Adventure, Culture, and Negative Environmental Impacts |



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the Study

Place branding theory (PBT) is derived from the act of organizing and marketing places (Pedersen, 2004). Although PBT built its concepts and ideas from product branding (Kotler, Haider, and Rein, 1993; Rainisto, 2003; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005; Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2009; Andersson, 2014), most of its understanding has developed through travel and tourism research (Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Morgan, Pritchard, and Piggott, 2002; Hankinson, 2004; 2005; 2007; Kavaratzis, 2009; Anholt, 2010). Place branding is defined as the process of making place famous through enhancing brand image (Anholt, 2010; Andersson, 2014). Generally, place branding includes country branding, nation branding, region branding, city branding, and destination branding (Hankinson, 2010). In tourism literature, the terms place branding and destination branding are used interchangeably because both can be applied to city, nation, region, and country brands (Govers and Go, 2009) and deal with the context of competition between territories (Gertner, 2011a; 2011b). However, both differ in terms of focus, place branding focuses on developing economies, whereas destination branding focuses on developing tourism-related activities. Thus, most tourism literature focuses on the act of destination branding over place branding.

Destination branding is a process to manage an existing brand which serves to adjust destination image and enhance location awareness (Morgan and Pritchard, 2005; Baker and Cameron, 2008). A strong brand can strengthen a destination's position in the globally competitive marketplace (Crockett and Wood, 1999; Qu, Kim, and Im, 2011; Rinaldi and Beeton, 2015). As a result, destination brand can influence tourist's behavior, including their awareness, interest, preference, choice, recommendation, likelihood to visit, and repeat visitation (Tasci and Kozak, 2006).

However, the increasing choice of travel which promotes tourist attractions has made it harder to differentiate one destination from another (Morgan, Pritchard, and Piggott, 2003). To stand out from the crowd, destination marketers are urged to design branding based on the strengths and size of the destination. Hence, most destination marketers either brand their destination based on the name of the city, state, region, or country. For example, Hankinson (2001) highlights successful destination brands including country brands such as 'Scotland', 'Spain', and 'New Zealand'; city brands such as 'New York', 'London', 'Manchester', and 'Glasgow'; and region brands such as 'Shakespeare's County (Warwickshire), and 'Herriot Country (the Yorkshire Dales)'.

Notably, these examples conceptualize the effectiveness of destination branding. There are also other examples of destinations that succeeded through destination branding. According to Gilmore (2002), Spain was a developing country which once suffered from its negative history. The country's tourism industry blossomed after an active repositioning effort to redefine its identity and image was carried out through destination branding. Spain is now a successful case of destination branding involving the identity of Joan Miro's sun which represents change and its modernization. Similarly, New Zealand experienced brand positioning failure as a result of geographical disadvantage (Morgan *et al.*, 2003). According to Morgan *et al.* (2003), New Zealand failed in the first attempt to position itself as 'The Orchard of the Pacific'. But the situation changed when the country used destination branding to reposition its brand. As a result, New Zealand continues to enjoy a successful destination branding with its positioning of "100% Pure New Zealand" until this day through positioning itself as a destination shaped by the locals who 'live the brand' which offer tourism experiences of "The New Zealand Way" (Morgan *et al.*, 2002).

While most destination marketers focus on branding the destination name based on its geographical area, it is important to note that in order to attract tourists, destination marketers aim to enhance location awareness. Here, 'location' is an important aspect of destination branding. However, there is inadequate