The Effect of Core Competencies as a Moderator between Perceived Value and Destination Image in Green Hotel: An Assessment using Structural Equation Modeling Technique with Partial Least Square (i.e. PLS-SEM).

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***Abstract*— This study was conducted to investigate the effect of moderating factor namely Core Competencies on the relationship between the Perceived Value and Destination Image among green hotel customers in Malaysia. This quantitative research was performed using a survey method through questionnaires. The total of 450 samples selection of data from guests who stayed in Malaysia certified green hotels were collected. The results of the Structural Equation Modeling technique with Partial Least Square (i.e. PLS-SEM) revealed that the Core Competencies was found to have significant and positive moderator effect on the relationship between the perceived Value and Destination Image. Moreover, the effect of Perceived Value toward Destination Image was stronger, when the impact of Core Competencies is strong, as compared to the situation when Core Competencies is low, which is the effect of Perceived Value toward Destination Image tends to reduce. This study leads to the integrated green hotel model for the development of core competencies in green segments which could be helpful and valuable to hotel industry for the enhancement of perceived value and destination image.**

Keywords*—Moderator effect; core Competencies; perceived value; destination image; partial least square (PLS-SEM)*

1. Introduction

As the number of green consumers' increases, hotels are making a lot of effort to create green images. Concern for the environmental problems has been escalated progressively and customers, as well as businesses, are recognizing the seriousness of the environmental degradation and its consequences [1,2]. This environmental concern brings a radical change in the customers' attitude and purchasing behavior towards environment-friendly business properties [3]. As a result, hotels are becoming more concerned towards maintaining the balance between environmental, resource consumption, ethical and societal concern, and profitability issues [4,5]. In particular, it is no longer possible for hotels to avoid their environmental and social responsibilities because they consume large amounts of fuel, energy, water and other non-renewable resources in various operations while providing product and services to customers. It is clear that many hotels are proactive now in the process of becoming 'green hotel' or 'eco-friendly hotel' to get a distinctive place in the growing competitive hotel market [6, 7].

The hotel industry plays a significant role, contributing to the overall economy of Malaysia. International brands, such as Marriot Hotels Malaysia, InterContinental Hotels Group and Holiday Inn group play a major role in attracting foreign investment. The hospitality industry is one of the top 10 sectors in Malaysia in attracting foreign direct investment. Revenue in the Hotels segment amounts to US$733m in 2019. Revenue is expected to show an annual growth rate (CAGR 2019-2023) of 10.6%, resulting in a market volume of US$1,095m by 2023. So, doubt, rapid growth of environmental awareness in hotel industry have become prevalence in developing country such as Malaysia. The Malaysian government has been promoting many environmental protection policies [8]. This trend has leads to adoption of higher level of green practices in the Malaysian hotel industry which enable the industry to become more competitive.

In order to keep up with the intense competition in the industry, green hotels should make sure they deliver superior quality of service [6, 7]. A good understanding of the service quality model in green hotel industry is crucial in ensuring high level of green involvement among customers thus promoting tourism sustainable development. Linkages between perceived value, core competencies and destination image in green hotels is important to help preserve the ecosystem, environment sustainability and other favourable quality of life effects. This study aims to examine the influence of this linkages towards green hotels in Malaysia and to examine the moderating role of core competencies within the linkages.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Perceived Value

Perceived value is defined as "the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product (or service) based on perceptions of what is received and what is given" [9]. Perceived value has gained increasing attention from both practitioners and academics. From a practitioner's perspective, perceived value relates to marketing strategies such as (cross-cultural) market segmentation, product differentiation, and resource allocation [10]. Meanwhile, academics have investigated the antecedents of perceived value (e.g., service/experience quality, image, involvement, trust, motivation, tourist experience) and its consequences (e.g., satisfaction, behavioral intention, purchase intention, loyalty, and willingness to recommend). They have also examined these relationships using a meansend model [11, 12, 13].

Perceived value also has been conceptualized as a dynamic and subjective construct that determines the volume of advantages and disadvantages earned or lost by a tourist or traveler in different situations [14]. In other words, perceived value is a multidimensional construct that indicates the overall traveler assessment towards tourism products and services before, during, and after the purchase or use. [15] clarified that perceived value is illustrated by two main elements, which include the benefits acquired, such as financial and social, and the losses incurred, such as price, quality, and health. Several scholars have applied perceived value and examined its validity on different contexts in the hospitality industry [16, 17, 18, 19].

Numerous studies of perceived value and destination image in green hotel industry and its consequences have been done since it is a way to build and create a competitive advantage for a company [20]. However, in-depth understanding of perceived value and destination image concepts is still in its fancy. Thus, this study tested five perceived value variables namely: quality, price, social, emotional and epistemic.

2.2 Core Competencies

There are still debates on the definition of competencies, whether competencies should be viewed as outcomes or performance standard, or whether it should be a person's abilities, attitudes and individual characteristics [21]. [22] for example, define competency as "a set of observable performance dimensions, including individual knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors, as well as collective team, process, and organizational capabilities, that are linked to high performance, and provide the organization with sustainable competitive advantage (p. 216)".

The OECD defines core competencies as "personal attributes or underlining characteristics, which combined with technical or professional skills, enable the delivery of a role/ job" (www.oecd.org). This study follows the latter definition of core competencies as a graduate's ability, attitudes or characteristics. Plenty of literature on competencies focuses on identifying important competencies for enhancing graduate employability [23] and the OECD and many other countries, including Korea, have devote a great deal of time finding out the role of competencies in hotel industry and labour markets.

Customer perceives the destination value added as a unique systemic offer [24]. The tourist is not interested in the ''organizational fragmentation'': and would rather enjoy any tourism resources without coordination inefficiencies. Therefore, the competitive advantage of the tourism destination as a whole often relies on the overall inter-firm network configuration, more than on a few individual firm competencies. Core-competence is more than a tourism resource [25].

If this strategic intent also encompasses network-specific resources, then, as mentioned above, the competitive advantage becomes relational or inter-organizational. [26] proposes a classification of core-competencies based on Porter's well known ''value chain''. In the case of tourist activities, we prefer to adopt the notion of value constellation [27]. This is the interpretation of the tourist destination as a local network that creates value ''with and for'' the tourist; the latter is at the centre of the value creation process and not at the end, as in the case of the traditional value chain perspective. Hospitality researchers have been interested in the study of competency models because human resource managers use competency models as a basis for various talent acquisition processes [28, 29]. Employing competent employees, in turn, can increase job satisfaction [30], improve guest service quality [31] and result in better financial performance [32].

Therefore, this study proposed a variable of "customer competencies and technology competencies". These factors are empirically distinguishable [33] and called these two leadership competencies factors as business-, self-, and people- savvy.

2.3 Destination Image

Tourism is one of the most prosperous and fastest growing economic branches in the world. Recent analyses show that the world tourism with 284 million employees (1 of 11 employees on average) forecasts a 3.5% growth for 2017, which is 1 percentage point higher than the world economic growth [34]. Tourism represents 9% of the world GDP, moreover, the forecasts for 2030 with an annual growth of 3.3% show that the number of world overnights might even reach 1.8 billion.

A tourist destination can be epitomized as a managed tourist system with balanced relations among its participants and with a political consensus on a geographically defined area with sufficient natural and constructed tourist attractions, developed infrastructure, ability to create added value for its visitors and the ability to ensure sustainable tourism development. A visitor perceives its final goal of travel and such tourist destination as a complete unit i.e. complete tourism product with an added value [35]. The term of the tourist destination has been interpreted in many different ways, but the majority acknowledge that this is a coherent geographical region with uniform identity and various tourism products. A tourist destination has the appearance of an independent and competitive product [36]. [37, 38]

delineates the tourist destination as a geographical region (city, area, and town) that a visitor or a tourist segment chooses for its travel goal.

Destination Image in green hotel and hospitality has been discussed from a competence-based perspective. However, there is a controversial issue of whether core competencies should be considered as a business factor in a particular business sector or generic skills required in overall tourism industry. Some researchers [39, 40, 41] examined the core competencies that are required in a specific business within the hospitality and tourism industry. They believe that the competencies required for destination image in a restaurant may differ from the competencies that are required for destination image at a hotel.

3. Theoretical Framework

Based on the theoretical backgrounds explained earlier, this study derives a theoretical model that shows the theoretical relationship between Perceived Value, Core Competencies, and Destination Image (see Figure 1). Therefore, the following hypothesis was anticipated:

H1: There is a significant effect of Perceived Value toward Destination Image

H2: There is a significant effect of Core Competencies toward Destination Image.

H3: Core Competencies give a moderate effect to the effect of Perceived Value toward Destination Image.

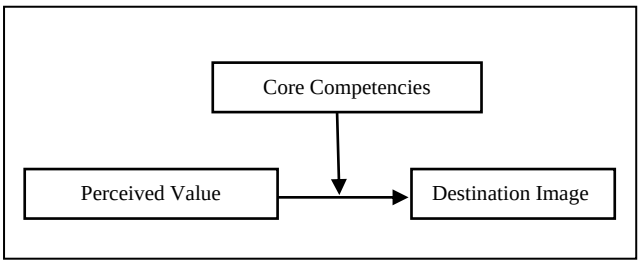

Figure1: Theoretical Model

4. Methodology

4.1 Sample

The data used in this study consists of questionnaire responses from participants who visited the certified green hotels in Malaysia. 450 questionnaires were distributed and 337 responses were received, yielding a response rate of 75%. In order to collect the data, a cover letter has been attached to each set of the questionnaire informing the purpose of the study to the participants. The questionnaire was personally distributed to the *person in charge* of the Rooms Division Department. Three weeks were given to the Rooms Division Department to distribute the questionnaires in the hotel rooms. After three weeks, a telephone call has been used to remind the person in charge that the questionnaire will be collected.

4.2 Analytical Method

Structural Equation Modeling technique with Partial Least Square (i.e. PLS-SEM) estimation method was employed to explore the relationship among the targeted constructs [42] with the 5000 bootstrapping replication to get reliable results [43]. This technique allows the researchers to testing the convergent and discriminant validities of the measurement model that being proposed [44, 45]. In addition, two-stage approach estimation technique was also employed in this analysis procedure since the targeted constructs involved higher order constructs (i.e. HOC) by using the Latent Variable Score (i.e. LVS) estimation score [46].

As for moderator variable analysis, [44] suggests that, there is exist a moderate effect if the interaction between independent and moderator variable was significant toward dependent variable. According to the [44], although two-stage approach can be used for handling the HOC issues, this technique can also be used to testing the moderator effect when dealing with continuous moderator variables, which is using LVS score. They also summarized that, at the first stage, the analysis would estimate the main effects model without the interaction term to obtain the latent variables score. After that, the score of the dependent latent variable and score of the moderator latent variable from the first stage are multiplied to create a single item measurement to measure the interaction term.

By using this two stage approach to testing a continuous moderator variable is best choice for the hypothesis testing, since [46] have shown that this approach can provide great accuracy of the parameters and also this approach performs favorably when they conducted a stimulation study in PLS-SEM. [44] also stated that, this approach is not restricted to the formative structural model, but also can be used to structural model that having all reflective indicators to the constructs.

On other hand, the effect size of the significant interaction was also computed for accessing the impact of moderator variable [44, 46]. In order to compute the effect of moderator variable, R^2 from the main effect model and interaction effect model were used for assessing the overall effect size f^2 for the interaction. The value of 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 has been recommended as small, moderate and large effect respectively [44]. The formula for accessing the impact of moderator variable is shown below:

$$f^2 = \frac{R^2_{\text{with interaction}} - R^2_{\text{without interaction}}}{1 - R^2_{\text{with interaction}}}$$

5. Findings

5.1 First Order Measurement Model

The quality of the first order measurement was tested first. Table 1 indicated that, all indicators meet the minimum requirement of the convergent validity such as indicator loading > .70, AVE > .50, and also both

reliability (i.e. Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha) were above .70 [43, 44]. Besides that, Table 2 indicated that, heterotrait-monotriat (i.e. HTMT) ratio values were less than .90, hence it confirms that, each latent variable was totally discriminant to each order [44, 47]. Therefore, the LVS from this model can be used since meet the requirement of convergent and discriminant validities as well as having a credible goodness of fit index.

Table 1**:** Convergent Validity for First-Order Measurement Model

LV	Indicator	Loading	AVE	γ	α
Quality Value	QualV1	.915*	.812	.928	.921
	QualV2	.911*			
	QualV3	.876*			
Price Value	PriveV1	.901*	.841	.941	.936
	PriceV2	.895*			
	PriceV3	.954*			
Social Value	SocialV1	.872*	.733	.891	.901
	SocialV2	.881*			
	SocialV3	.813*			
Emotional Value	EmoV1	.736*	.558	.791	.813
	EmoV2	.789*			
	EmoV3	.714*			
Epistemic Value	EpisV1	.895*	.709	.907	.893
	EpisV2	.816*			
	EpisV3	804*			
	EpisV4	.851*			
Customer Competencies	Cus1	.863*	.712	.881	.892
	Cus2	.842*			
	Cus3	.826*			
Tech. Competencies	Tech1	.796*	.583	.807	.796
	Tech2	.716*			
	Tech3	.776*			
Attractive Scenery	Sce1	.812*	.644	.845	.864
	Sce2	.803*			
	Sce3	.793			
Green Attraction	Green1	.896*	.833	.937	.893
	Green2	.913*			
	Green3	.929*			
Green Promotion	Promo1	.936*	.870	.953	.946
	Promo2	.915*			
	Promo3	.947*			
Revisit Intention	Rev1	.879*	.773	.911	.923
	Rev2	.883*			
	Rev3	.876*			

Note: LV = Latent Variable; AVE = Average Variance Explained; *p <.01.

Table 2: HTMT Discriminant Analysis for First-Order Measurement Model

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
(1)											
(2)	.795										
(3)	.401	.601									
(4)	.710	.520	.532								
(5)	.235	.445	.636	.698							
(6)	.189	.429	.423	.237	.715						
(7)	.436	.432	.873	.587	.825	.441					
(8)	.503	.241	.603	.699	.569	.523	.508				
(9)	.537	.357	.420	.381	.524	.178	.407	.403			
(10)	.433	.237	.571	.415	.147	.403	.496	.369	.369		
(11)	.210	.128	.523	1.190	.516	.595	.557	.690	.498	.516	

Note: (1) = Quality Value; (2) = Price Value; (3) = Social Value; (4) = Emotional Value; (5) = Epistemic Value; (6) = Customer Competencies; (7) = Technology Competencies; (8) = Attractive Scenery; (9) = Green Attraction; (10) = Green Promotion; (11) = Revisit Intention.

5.2 Second Order Measurement Model

All indicators for measuring the target latent variables in the second order measurement model (i.e. Table 3) also meet the minimum requirement of convergent validity (i.e. indicator loading > .70, AVE > .50, Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha were > .70) [43, 44]. However, there are some indicators having loading value > .50, but this indicator was maintained in the analysis if the AVE for the specific latent variable was above .50 for maintain the content validity [44]. In addition, the HTMT ratio values for this model (i.e. Table 4) were also less than 0.90. Therefore, latent variables used in this model were totally discriminant to each order [43, 44]. Therefore, this second order model fits the empirical data and the structural model test can be evaluated.

Table 3**:** Convergent Validity for Second-Order Measurement Model

LV	Indicator	Loading	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
Perceived Value	Quality Value	.774*	.657	.905	.869
	Price Value	.823*			
	Social Value	.826*			
	Emotional Value	.822*			
	Epistemic Value	.805*			
Core Competencies	Cust Compe	.859*	.784	.879	.728
	Techno Compe	.911*			
Destination Image	Attractive Scenary	.813*	.543	.825	.718
	Green Attraction	.705**			
	Green Promotion	.721*			
	Revisit Intention	.702*			

Note: LV = Latent Variable; AVE = Average Variance Explained; *p <.01.

Table 4: HTMT Discriminant Analysis for Second-Order Measurement Model

	Perceived Value	Core Competencies	Destination Image
Perceived Value	-		
Core Competencies	.513	-	
Destination Image	.674	.578	-

5.3 Structural Model and Moderator Testing

The structural analysis without interaction effect indicated that, Perceived Value (β = 0.440, t = 8.420, p <.01; 95% BCa CI: (0.323, 0.533)) and Core Competencies (β = 0.242, t = 4.154, p <.01; 95% BCa CI: (0.121, 0.350)) give a positive significant effect toward Destination Image. Hence, it is indicated that, if the average level of Perceived Value and Core Competencies were high simultaneously, then the level of Destination Image was also high. Besides that, this model also indicated that, both independent variables were able to explain about 34% of variance explained toward Destination Image.

Table 5: Strctural Model and Moderating Assessment

Model Without Interaction Effect

	β	t-statistic	95% BCa CI[a]	R^2
PV→CC	0.414	5.882**	(0.263, 0.540)	.340
CC→DI	0.239	3.586**	(0.106, 0.363)	
PV*CC→DI	-	-	-	

Model With Interaction Effect

	β	t-statistic	95% BCa CI[a]	R^2	$f^{2,b\ 2}$
PV→CC	0.469	8.764*	(0.263, 0.540)	.362	.034
CC→DI	0.306	4.543*	(0.106, 0.363)		
PV*CC→DI	0.097	3.015*	(0.038, 0.162)		

Note: PV = Perceived Values; CC = Core Competencies; DI = Destination Image; β = Standardized Beta Coefficient; BCa = Bias Corrected and Accelerated; f^2 = Effect Size; [a]The bootstrap samples was 5000 samples; [b]This effect size reflect the moderator effect; *p <.01.

As for assessing the moderator effect, second structural model was developed, which is structural model that contain the moderating effect. Referring to the Table 5, the structural analysis with interaction effect indicated that, the moderating effect (i.e. PV*CC) was positively significant effect toward Destination Image (β = 0.097, t = 3.015, p <.01; 95% BCa CI: (0.038, 0.162)), with the small effect size (f^2 = 0.034). Since Core Competencies give a positive moderate effect, it is indicated that, the effect of Perceived Value toward Destination Image were stronger, when the impact of Core Competencies is strong, as compare to the situation when Core Competencies is low, which is the effect of Perceived Value toward Destination Image tends to reduce. Figure 1.4 depicts the impact of Core Competencies as for the effect of Perceived Value toward Destination Image, whereas Figure 1.2 and Figure 1.3 show the analysis of PLS-SEM for without and with interaction variable model.

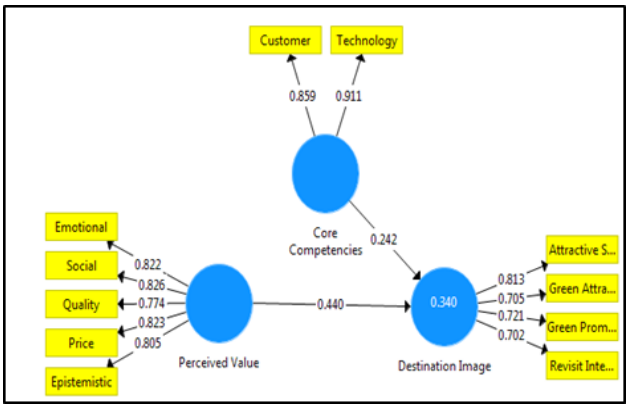

Figure 1.2: Structural Model Without Interaction Variable

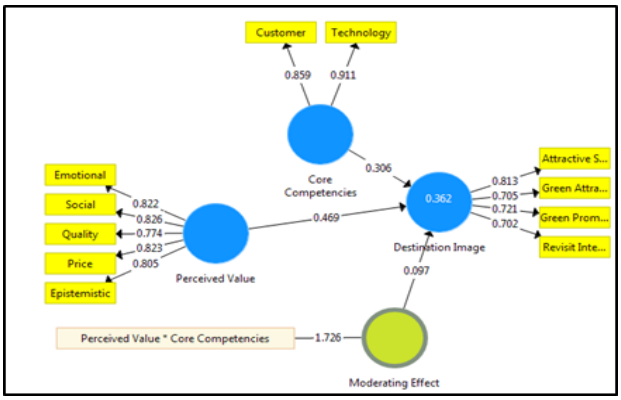

Figure 1.3: Structural Model With Interaction Variable

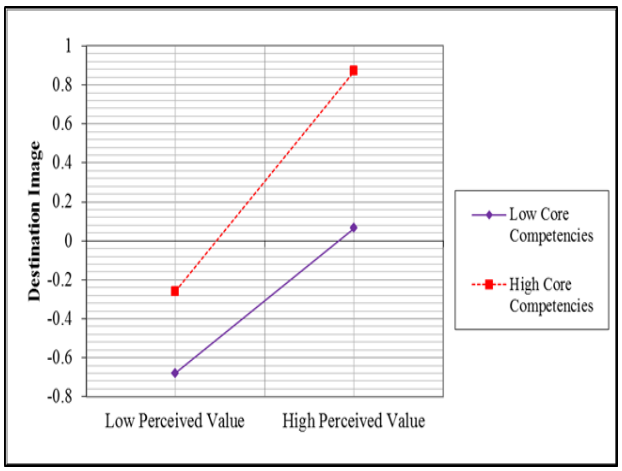

Figure 1.4: The Impact of Core Competencies on the effect of Perceived Value toward Destination Image

6. Discussions and Future Research

6.1 Discussions

The results indicated that core competencies, perceived value and destination image were important predictors of consumer choices toward an environmentally friendly or green hotel and desire to take an environmentally friendly hotel, both of which positively affect consumers' green destination image. Thus, this research suggests that green hotels should increase green destination image and consumers' perceived value to enhance the core competencies of the green hotel.

6.2 Future Directions

There are two major limitations worth noting in this study, which are relating to the sample size and the industry involved. Since this study is confined to green hotel guests in Klang Valley area, generalizability of the findings may be rather limited. Therefore, future research may need to focus on green hotel guests in other states, in order to gain more comprehensive perspective and stronger representativeness of the study in the local context. Future research also may extend in other service industries such as retail or public transportation industry as no such research has been conducted in those industries in Malaysia.

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