THE INFLUENCE OF MUSLIMS' INVOLVEMENT WITH TRAVELING TO ISLAMIC DESTINATIONS ON MALAYSIA'S ISLAMIC BRAND EQUITY

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By

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

MICE	Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
PLS	Partial Least Squares
OIC	Organization of Islamic Countries
CIP	Consumer Involvement Profile
PII	Personal Involvement Inventory
RPII	Revised Personal Involvement Inventory
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
MCPV	Muslim Customers' Perceived Value
TDCM	Tourism Development Corporation Malaysia
MOCAT	Ministry of Arts, Culture and Tourism
MOTOUR	Ministry of Tourism Malaysia
VMY	Visit Malaysia Year
MWW	Malaysia Welcome the World
PERMIM	Malaysian Indian Muslim Associations
MACMA	Malaysian Chinese Muslim Association
JAKIM	Malaysia Department of Islamic Development
MATTA	Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agent
ITC	Islamic Tourism Centre
ATM	Arabian Travel Market
ART	Arab Radio and Television
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CR	Construct Reliability

TTN	Travel & Tourism News
TTG	Travel Trade Gazette
MENA	Middle East & North Africa
MELTS	Middle East Luxury Travel Show
AWTTE	Arab World Travel and Tourism Exchange

PENGARUH PENGLIBATAN PELANCONG MUSLIM SELAMA MELANCONG KE DESTINASI ISLAM TERHADAP EKUITI JENAMA ISLAMIK MALAYSIA

ABSTRAK

Pertambahan bilangan pelancong Muslim di dunia menjadikan pasaran ini antara salah satu topik yang menarik di dalam kajian pelancongan. Hal ini menarik destinasi-destinasi pelancongan untuk lebih menerima konsep pelancongan berasaskan Islam dan halal. Malaysia sebagai sebuah negara Islam sememangnya serius dalam penubuhan halal hub dalam produk pelancongan. Walaupun Malaysia merupakan satu destinasi pelancongan yang menarik untuk pelancong Muslim memandangkan terdapatnya unsur-unsur Islamik dalam aspek-aspek budaya, warisan dan makanan; kelebihan ini diperlekehkan oleh aktiviti-aktiviti penghidangan alkohol, tatacara pemakaian yang kurang sopan, berjemur dibawah matahari tanpa berpakaian serta penyajian daging babi di restoran-restoran. Dua situasi berbeza yang berlaku di Malaysia telah menjadi isu dalam pelancongan berasaskan Islam. Oleh itu, adalah perlu untuk menilai ekuiti jenama Islam Malaysia dari perspektif Islam untuk memberi pengertian kepada strategi-strategi pemasaran yang betul. Peningkatan jumlah pelancong Arab Timur Tengah di Malaysia telah dipilih sebagai sampel kajian ini. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menyiasat ciri-ciri demografi dan corak perjalanan pelancong dari Timur Tengah di Malaysia, telah dijalankan untuk menilai ekuiti jenama Islam Malaysia, mengukur tahap penglibatan umat Islam dengan perjalanan ke destinasi Islam, dan meneroka hubungan antara penglibatan yang merangkumi lima dimensi ekuiti jenama yang melibatkan lima hipotesis telah dipertimbangkan. Analisis kesahihan dan kebolehpercayaan berdasarkan kajian awal melibatkan 40 responden telah dilakukan menggunakan perisian SPSS. Analisis

Cronbach Alpha telah dilakukan untuk menilai kebolehpercayaan bagi setiap pengukuran. Hasil analisis data menunjukkan bahawa semua item pengukuran dimuatkan pada konstruk yang tepat. Dalam peringkat kedua kajian, borang soal selidik yang telah diperbaiki digunakan untuk pengumpulan data akhir yang melibatkan 384 responden di tiga bandar utama; Kuala Lumpur, Langkawi dan Pulau Pinang. Dengan menggunakan SPSS, taburan kekerapan dan peratusan daripada ciri-ciri demografi responden dan corak perjalanan telah dianalisis. Statistik deskriptif telah digunakan untuk menentukan skor min pada dimensi penglibatan dan ekuiti jenama. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa tarikan mempunyai nilai min tertinggi, diikuti oleh ungkapan diri dan keutamaan dalam membina penglibatan. Seterusnya dalam menilai membina ekuiti jenama, kesetiaan menunjukkan nilai min yang paling tinggi, diikuti dengan kesedaran, nilai, kualiti dan imej. Kesimpulannya, nilai keseluruhan min bagi kedua-dua konstruk menunjukkan bahawa responden yang terlibat dengan perjalanan ke destinasi Islam bersetuju bahawa Malaysia adalah destinasi Islamik. Dalam menguji hipotesis, Model Persamaan Struktur (Structural Equation Modelling) dari perisian Partial Least Square (PLS) telah digunakan. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa kesemua lima hipotesis cadangan kajian boleh diterima. Hubungan yang paling kuat dikenalpasti adalah hubungan di antara penglibatan dan kesedaran jenama, diikuti dengan penglibatan dan kualiti jenama, penglibatan dengan imej jenama, penglibatan dengan nilai jenama dan penglibatan dengan kesetian jenama. Berdasarkan penemuan kajian, kekuatan dan kelemahan Malaysia sebagai destinasi pelancongan Islamik telah dibincangkan serta implikasi teori dan praktikal daripada kajian ini turut dibahaskan, diikuti dengan cadangan dan kajian masa depan untuk pertimbangan.

THE INFLUENCE OF MUSLIMS' INVOLVEMENT WITH TRAVELING TO ISLAMIC DESTINATIONS ON MALAYSIA'S ISLAMIC BRAND EQUITY

ABSTRACT

The growing number of Muslim tourists in the world made this market as one of the most interesting topics in tourism studies. It has urged many destinations to step forward to embrace the concepts such as Islamic tourism and halal tourism. Malaysia as an Islamic country has been serious on establishing a Halal hub for tourism products. It is credible to be a good destination for Muslim tourists according to the existence of Islamic attributes, culture, heritage, and food, however, some activities such as drinking alcohol, wearing scanty clothing, sun bathing naked, and serving pork in restaurants are found in this country. This twofold situation in Malaysia may obscure the issue of Islamic tourism in the country. Therefore, it is necessary to assess the Islamic brand equity of Malaysia from Muslims' perspective in order to give insight to the right marketing strategies. The growing number of Middle Eastern Arab tourists in Malaysia emerged choosing them as the samples of the present study. The study aimed at investigating on demographic characteristics and travel patterns of Middle Eastern Arabs in Malaysia, evaluation of Islamic brand equity of Malaysia, measuring the level of Muslims' involvement with travelling to Islamic destinations, and exploring on the relationships between involvement and the five dimensions of brand equity. Therefore, a total number of five hypotheses were considered. A preliminary validity and reliability analyses of the pilot study with 40 respondents were performed using SPSS software. The Cronbach's alpha was calculated to examine the measurement reliability. An exploratory factor analysis was used to test the validity of all the measurements. The results showed that all measurement items were loaded on the appropriate construct. In the second stage, the revised

questionnaire was used for the final data collection with 384 respondents in three cities namely, Kuala Lumpur, Langkawi, and Penang. Using SPSS, frequency distribution and percentages of respondents' demographic characteristics and travel patterns were analyzed. Descriptive statistics has also determined mean scores on dimensions of involvement and brand equity. Results demonstrated that attraction showed the highest mean value, followed by self-expression and centrality in involvement construct and loyalty showed the highest mean value, followed by awareness, value, quality, and image in brand equity construct. The overall mean value for both constructs demonstrates that respondents are involved with travelling to Islamic destination and agreed that Malaysia is a well-branded Islamic destination. For testing the hypotheses, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was applied as the tool and Partial Least Square (PLS) was used as the software. Results showed that all the five proposed hypotheses of the study were accepted. The strongest relationship was found between involvement and awareness, followed by involvement and quality, involvement and image, involvement and value, and involvement and loyalty. Based on the findings of the study, the strengths and weaknesses of Malaysia in terms of Islamic tourism destination have been discussed and the theoretical and practical implications of the study were provided followed by recommendations and future researches to be considered.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

Tourism has been identified as an economic growth factor in recent years. The international tourist industry is becoming an increasingly competitive marketplace and destination marketing studies have addressed the marketing strategies and activities required to attract visitors by individual country destinations (Mestre, Rey & Stanishevski, 2008; Henderson, 2009). Therefore, tourism marketers should act in a way as they are preparing for a tournament in order to stay ahead of other markets in the new world of competition. As the tourism market becomes increasingly competitive, not only marketers should allure new visitors to the destinations, but also they should investigate on customer retention. Understanding the needs, preferences, interests, and behaviors of different markets play a critical role in drawing them into destination while attracting and retaining certain markets or visitor segments will help destination marketers to develop marketing strategies. The growing number of Muslim tourists in the world made this market as one of the most interesting topics in tourism studies. Eid (2013) highlighted that a better understanding of Muslim customers allows tourism companies to interact, respond and communicate more effectively to significantly improve retention rates. According to Muslim Population Worldwide Data (2014), the increasing number of Muslim population estimated at 1.84%. The Muslim population was estimated around 2.04 billion in 2013 and recently it has reached 2.08 billion in 2014. This increase in the number of Muslim population has led to the rise of Halal concept in

many fields especially in Islamic countries. For example, Japan has concentrated on the availability of halal food and embracing of 'Halal Japan' brand to a higher level compared to previous time when their firms and outlets did not show much interest on the production of halal foods until 2010 (Yusof & Shutto, 2014). In Korea, as well, a growing number of food companies try to secure the certification of halal food to attract Muslim customers. The notions of halal food, halal manufacturers, halal pharmaceuticals, halal cosmetics, halal packaging and halal logistics products as well as halal services show the world's concern for Muslim market. Tourism is not excluded from this practice and now Muslim tourists have become a large niche market for tourism industry. Therefore, the knowledge about Muslim tourists' behaviors and needs are highly needed for tourism business sectors to develop, promote and sell tourism products that suit to the unique needs of this new market (Sripraset, Chainin, & Rahman, 2014). It is very interesting that some tourism industry practitioners in non-Muslim countries have also taken steps to consider the special needs of Muslim visitors. It can be illustrated by the provision of halal food and hotel signage pointing to Mecca for prayer as well as information about mosques (Zamani-Farahani & Henderson, 2010).

Malaysia as an Islamic country has been also serious on establishing a halal hub for the products as well as services in finance and tourism (Samori & Rahman, 2013). It stepped forward to embrace the concepts such as Islamic tourism and halal tourism. It seems that the tourism marketers of Malaysia have been successful to promote the country as a well-known tourist destination in the world for its Islamic environment. It registered an estimated 5.44 million Muslim tourists in 2012 (equivalent to 21.75% of Malaysia's total tourist arrivals for the same year) compared to 5.22 million in 2011 (Islamic Tourism Center, 2014). In 2013, it

received more than five million Muslim tourists out of the total 25.03 million tourists. Malaysia has the potential development of Islamic tourism and hospitality industry for its arts, heritage and unique culture of the Malay Muslims. However, most of the studies explored only on Malaysia's physical Islamic attributes while the evaluation of such a strategic branding as an Islamic hub has been rarely investigated. Measuring the effectiveness of brands is a crucial aspect of successful long-term destination management (Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005). It has been suggested that the effectiveness of destination brands can be measured from a customer perspective (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). The measurement of brand from customer perspective has been called customer based brand equity which typically involves brand awareness, brand image, brand quality, brand value, and brand loyalty. So when consumer based brand equity is argued in the context of tourism destination, the perspectives of tourists are minded in order to evaluate the destinations' brand equity. In terms of destination branding, brand awareness means the brand's presence in the mind of the target tourists, brand image represents the perceptions attached to the destination, brand quality is concerned with perceptions of the quality of a destination's attributes, brand value is the tourists' holistic evaluation of the benefit of a product in destinations, and finally, brand loyalty represents the level of attachment to the destination, visit/revisit intention, positive word of mouth, and recommendation to others.

The growing number of Muslim tourists in Malaysia emerges the evaluation of Islamic brand of the country from this market's perspective in order to give insight to the right marketing strategies of the country as an Islamic hub. On the other hand, psychological elements such as involvement have been found to be significantly related to tourists' behavior and act as its predictor. This has been highlighted

particularly in leisure and recreation context. Involvement is defined as an "unobservable state of motivation, arousal or interest toward a recreational activity or associated product" (Havitz & Dimanche, 1997). Several researchers supported that the construct is conceptualized based on the concepts such as attraction, self-expression, and centrality to lifestyle (Kyle, Absher, & Graefe, 2003a; Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2004d). So if a tourism product or a travel experience can enhance the tourists' interests and enjoy, fulfil their self-expression needs, and reveal their lifestyle activities, their pleasure and involvement with that product or experience will be heightened. According to Ryan (1994), tourism is essentially about tourists' experience within a place and with the attributes of that place and the people found there. Marking Malaysia as the place to be investigated in this study, Islamic features are significantly considered as the country's tourist attributes especially for Muslim tourists. Therefore, Muslim visitors may come across with Islamic attributes purposely or accidentally in a country like Malaysia in which Islam is the main religion but the more they are involved with traveling to Islamic destinations, the more they may concern about those attributes.

Hence, after investigating on respondents' demographic profile and travel patterns as the first objective of the study, the second aim of this research allocates to assess the brand equity of Malaysia as an Islamic hub by investigating on its accepted dimensions including awareness, image, quality, value, and loyalty. As the third aim of the study, measuring Muslim tourists' involvement with travelling to Islamic destinations is considered. Finally, the last objective of the study is to examine whether their level of involvement would affect their level of evaluation of Islamic brand equity of Malaysia. The model suggests that Muslim tourists' involvement with travelling to Islamic destinations will lead to the increase of all dimensions of

Islamic brand equity of Malaysia, namely awareness, image, quality, value, and loyalty.

1.2 Malaysia as a Tourist Destination

Being located in Southeast Asia (Figure 1.1), Malaysia consists of two distinct territories: West Malaysia (Peninsular Malaysia) and East Malaysia. Peninsular Malaysia is located in south of Thailand, north of Singapore and east of Indonesian island of Sumatra. East Malaysia lies on the island of Borneo and shares borders with Brunei and Indonesia.

Figure 1.1: Location of Malaysia in Southeast Asia
Source: http://www.malaysia-maps.com

Malaysia is a country blessed with many natural beauties like beaches and islands, flora and fauna, mountains, caves, lakes, and rainforests. It is also enriched with traditional and heritage sites which exist along with new and modern buildings. The country's most important sources of income are industry, agriculture, mining, and tourism. In fact, tourism is one of the key contributors to Malaysia's economy. Besides all these features, Malaysia is a multicultural country consisting of three major cultures namely Malay, Chinese, and Indian. This characteristic added to cultural attractiveness of the country. Today, Malaysia has a total population of

29,566,417 people (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2012) comprising of diverse ethnic groups (almost 58% Malay and Bumiputras, 24% Chinese, 8% Indians, and 10% others).

In fact, this diversity has been highlighted after Malaysia occupied by British in the late 18th when many Chinese and Indian workers were brought to the country. Due to its particular situation and blessed with rich variety of culture it has the potential to be one of the best tourist destinations in Asia. In fact, Malaysian hybrid culture can be truly regarded as a source of unique and authentic identity. It means the harmonious mixture of Indian, Malay, and Chinese cultures, in spite of their differences, have reconciled during the time. This multicultural environment led the country to have colorful festivals such as Thaipusam, Chinese New Year, Deepavali, Hungry Ghost Festival, Hari Raya Festival and so on as well as heritage sited associated with these ethnic groups. It also made Malaysia as a gastronomic paradise provided by variety of foods (including Chinese, Indian, Western and a range of Halal food). These characteristics besides nightlife, well-equipped and cost-effective medical and healthcare-related services, homestay programs, Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE), variety of shopping malls and many other tourist attractions made Malaysia as a well-known destination for tourists.

Malaysia has been voted as the top destination for Muslim tourists in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014 by Crescent Rating of Singapore. It is also interesting to note that Malaysia ranked ninth behind France, the United States, Spain, Turkey and Germany in which Malaysia is the only Muslim country which is in group 10 high ranking world tourist destinations of which 23% is made up of Muslim tourists which is 4.48 million (Samori & Rahman, 2013). Malaysia developed Halal tourism as a promising approach to attract more Muslim tourists to the country and with the

variety of Islamic attributes; it seems a good country for the tourists who care about Islamic values while travelling. It has a rich Islamic heritage as well as Halal food, Muslim people and wide Islamic environment which provide Muslim tourists with a good Islamic experience. However, there are some issues in terms of Islamic tourism in Malaysia which made this topic indispensable as the subject of the study. These issues are explained in the following section.

1.3   Statement of the Problem

According to Battour, Ismaeil and Battor (2011), even though marketing and destination attributes were explored widely, still there is lack of study in the relationship between tourism and Islam, Islamic attributes and their impact on tourist needs in tourism marketing. In the existing age where countries attempt in branding themselves by their particular attributes, studies regarding the interrelation of Islam and tourism seem inevitable especially in Muslim countries where they adopt the strategy of branding themselves as Islamic hubs. Boo, Busser and Balogl (2009) affirmed that there is lack of research regarding destination brand measurement and conceptualizing how tourists evaluate a destination brand. Konecnik and Gartner (2007) also confirmed that the examination of a destination's brand is challenging because the literature lacks a commonly accepted framework. Ooi (2004) indicated that most destination brand studies focus on the brand images and how the messages of the brands are expressed and presented while other dimensions of brand have not been explored well. Therefore, it is necessary to assess the true value of a destination brand when tourism marketers attempt to send the message of the brand to the world.

Malaysia tried to labeled itself as an Islamic and Halal hub and has formed tourist rules in a way to limit the tourists' behaviors which are forbidden by Islam

(Henderson, 2003a) but yet some activities such as drinking alcohol, wearing scanty clothing, sun bathing naked, and serving pork in restaurants are found in this country, especially in touristic places. This is due to the fact that Islamic law is relaxed in Malaysia and thus, it might affect Muslim tourists' perceptions or attitudes towards the country. On the other hand, Din (1989) mentioned that Malaysia provided a double standard (two sets of laws for Muslims and non-Muslims) in which prohibits and restricted sensitive actions only for Muslims while non-Muslims are not restricted to follow the same Islamic laws. Even though Din (1989) claimed that this strategy seemed to work well and illustrates balancing tourist needs with religious values, it might be problematic in the case of Muslim tourists who are really serious about Islamic rules when travelling to a Muslim country. Salman and Hasim (2012) studied Arab tourists in Malaysia and found that only a very small number of the respondents have the image of Malaysia as an Islamic country. This confirms that the Middle East tourists are very hard to be satisfied. This is while Malaysia is called the wealthiest Muslim country in Southeast Asia and is said to be the opinion leader among the region's Muslim population (Kim, Im & King, 2014). Up to now, no study has investigated Malaysia as an Islamic branded destination to realize how Muslim tourists really evaluate the brand equity of the country as an Islamic hub. The focuses of previous studies were more on Halal food and hospitality (e.g., Samori & Rahman, 2013; Sripraset et al., 2014) rather than a holistic evaluation of Islamic brand value. Thus an investigation on Malaysia under the umbrella of Islamic branding is needed.

On the other hand, it has been mentioned that despite of numerous studies on the influence of involvement on product choice and evaluation in the marketing literature, the concept is still under research in the tourism literature (Gursoy & Gavcar, 2003; Josiam, Kinley, & Kim, 2005). Furthermore, even though studies of

travel tendencies have been previously analyzed regarding tourists' involvement, little work has focused on evaluating brand in connection with involvement (Kim, Han, Holland & Byon, 2009). Therefore, it is necessary to fill this gap by more investigation on this construct in tourism context. These notions show that the relationship between the two constructs of this study, namely involvement and brand equity, still need to be explored more precisely.

As one of the most visited Islamic destinations in the world, Malaysia should be investigated in terms of recognizing the factors which help to retain the existing tourists as well as bringing in the new ones. Therefore, it calls for more exploration on Malaysia's Muslim visitors, especially those rising markets such as Arabs. Studies on Muslim tourism still seem insufficient. Since Muslim market has been an important part of marketing within recent years, a number of researchers explored on the characteristics of Muslim tourists travelling to different destinations but compared to the Muslim population which has emerged as a global market in recent years, research into Muslim travelers has not received the same level of attention given to identifying secular travelers (Battour, Battor, & Bhatti, 2013). Due to the importance of this market, it is crucial to understand and evaluate their motivations, images, perceived value, perceived quality, and behaviors in order to have a better marketing strategy for a destination. Since Malaysia is probable to be a good destination for Muslim tourists according to the existence of Islamic attributes, culture, heritage, food and so on, it comes into question how much these features might impulse Muslim tourists to evaluate Malaysia as an Islamic country. Since Muslim tourists may search for authenticity and novelty in Malaysia, the overexposure to Islamic attributes might be considered as an undesirable feature while it might carry the sense of confidence for many of them. However, it depends

on the individuals whether they are involved with travelling to Islamic destination or not because if they are not involved, the unplanned exposure would less happen. So far, a few researches have explored Malaysia from the point of view that whether Muslim tourists adopt positive or negative attitudes toward the Islamic branding in Malaysia. In fact, Malaysia with its multicultural setting is a worthy destination regarding the studies on culture, cuisine, heritage, and other related tourism products but it can be demonstrated that some of Muslim visitors in Malaysia may be really interested and satisfied with the Islamic features in this country while some of them may not have the feeling of interconnection with those features. The reason might be that they want to experience a different environment or they want to be free of Islamic rules when they travel. Therefore, based on their different level of involvement, their attitudes would also vary from being fascinated to Malaysia to not considering it as a worthful Islamic destination. These initial remarks made the researcher to practically and scholastically investigate on the level of Muslim tourists' involvement with travelling to Islamic destinations and its influence on evaluation of Islamic brand equity of Malaysia. Consequently, it can contribute to tourism industry in Malaysia to take advantage of these circumstances.

1.4   Aims of the Study

Firstly, this study investigates on demographic profile and travel patterns of Middle Eastern Arab tourists in Malaysia in order to have a better understanding of their characteristics and travel arrangements. Then, it aimed at conducting an evaluation of how much Middle Eastern Arab tourists recognize Malaysia as a highly valued and competitive Islamic destination, based on brand equity factors (awareness, image, quality, value, and loyalty). Malaysia has become an important consumer market for

the Muslim tourism industry and it would be useful to investigate this country as an Islamic tourist destination. There is no commonly agreed brand equity model in the literature and furthermore, most of the studies investigated the hierarchical relationships between the dimensions of the construct such as salience (awareness), image (associations), quality, value, and loyalty (Bianchi & Pike, 2010; Boo et al., 2009; Lin, 2011; Pike, Bianchi, Kerr & Patti, 2010). However, this study concerns the evaluation of brand equity disregarding the relationships between the dimensions and it only focuses on the dimensions as the building blocks of brand equity and as tools of evaluation. Furthermore, the psychological factors which influence Muslim tourists to travel to Islamic destinations i.e., respondents' involvement profile have been investigated. Finally, the influence of Muslims' involvement and concern with travelling to Islamic destination on the evaluation of the Islamic brand of Malaysia has been explored in the current research. Therefore, there are four main objectives for this study. Firstly, investigation on demographic characteristics and travel patterns of Muslim tourists in Malaysia is minded. Secondly, the evaluation of brand equity of Malaysia as an Islamic hub will be explored from the perspective of Middle Eastern Arab tourists visited this country. Thirdly, respondents' involvement with travelling to Islamic destinations has been explored with regards to its three dimensions. Finally, the last purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of Muslim tourists' involvement with travelling to Islamic destinations on their evaluation of brand equity of the country as an Islamic hub. Therefore, involvement is explored as the exogenous or independent variable which will be examined in terms of its influence on brand equity as the endogenous or dependent variable. Dimensions of brand equity will be examined because it is considered as a multi-dimensional construct. The objectives of the study are outlined as follows:

Objective 1: To investigate on demographic profile and travel patterns of Middle Eastern Arab tourists in Malaysia.

Objective 2: To assess the Islamic brand equity of Malaysia from Middle Eastern Arab tourists' perspective.

Objective 3: To assess the psychological factors influencing Muslim tourists travelling to Islamic destinations (respondents' involvement profile).

Objective 4: To test the relationship between Muslim tourists' involvement with travelling to Islamic destinations and the dimensions of Islamic brand equity of Malaysia. For this purpose, the sub-objectives of the study are to explore the influence of Muslim tourists' involvement with travelling to Islamic destination on:

- Awareness about Malaysia as an Islamic destination.

- Image about Malaysia as an Islamic destination.

- Perceived quality of Malaysia as an Islamic destination.

- Perceived value of Malaysia as an Islamic destination.

- Loyalty toward Malaysia as an Islamic destination.

1.5   Research Hypotheses

This research assumes that the psychological factors lay behind Muslims' involvement with travelling to Islamic destinations and it hypothesized that their involvement with travelling to Islamic destinations will exert a positive influence on their evaluation of Malaysia's brand equity as an Islamic hub. This is considered as the main hypothesis of the present study while the relationships between five dimensions of brand equity with involvement have been investigated in order to reach the aims of the study. Therefore, the hypotheses of the study are as follows:

H1: Muslim tourists' involvement with travelling to Islamic destinations will exert a positive influence on their evaluation of brand equity of Malaysia as an Islamic hub. In order to test this relationship, five sub-hypotheses were considered:

H1a: Muslims' involvement with travelling to Islamic destinations exerts a positive influence on their awareness of the Islamic brand of Malaysia.

H1b: Muslims' involvement with travelling to Islamic destinations exerts a positive influence on their image about the Islamic brand of Malaysia.

H1c: Muslims' involvement with travelling to Islamic destinations exerts a positive influence on their perceived quality of the Islamic offerings in Malaysia.

H1d: Muslims' involvement with travelling to Islamic destinations exerts a positive influence on their perceived Islamic value about the Islamic attributes of Malaysia.

H1e: Muslims' involvement with travelling to Islamic destinations exerts a positive influence on their loyalty toward Malaysia.

1.6   Research Questions

A well-chosen research question can explain the focus of the research and help the readers to understand the subject matter addressed within the topic of the study. In order to reach the aims of this study, the total number of two main questions is addressed.

Research Question 1: What are the demographic characteristics and travel patterns of Middle Eastern Arab tourists in Malaysia?

Research Question 2: What are the components of Malaysia's Islamic brand equity?

Research Question 3: What are the psychological factors lay behind Muslims' involvement with travelling to Islamic destinations?

Research Question 4: Does Muslim tourists' involvement with travelling to Islamic destinations affect the level of their evaluation about dimensions of Malaysia's Islamic brand equity? In order to answer this question, the following sub-questions are minded:

- Does involvement with travelling to Islamic destinations influence Muslim tourists' awareness about Malaysia as an Islamic hub?

- Does involvement with travelling to Islamic destinations influence Muslim tourists' image about Malaysia as an Islamic hub?

- Does involvement with travelling to Islamic destinations influence Muslim tourists' perceived quality about Malaysia as an Islamic hub?

- Does involvement with travelling to Islamic destinations influence Muslim tourists' perceived Islamic values about Malaysia?

- Does involvement with travelling to Islamic destinations influence Muslim tourists' loyalty to Malaysia as an Islamic hub?

1.7   Research Method

This research is based on survey method using a questionnaire comprised of four parts. Part one is about tourists' demographic characteristics. Part two includes the questions regarding travel pattern of respondents. Part three of the questionnaire is assigned to questions regarding tourists' involvement with travelling to Islamic destination, and part four provides tourists with items of brand equity. For parts three and four, a 5-point Likert scale (Likert, 1932) was administered (5 strongly agree, 4 agree, 3 neutral, 2 agree, and 1 strongly agree). In order to have a more precise questionnaire and to test the reliability and validity of the items, a pilot test was considered with 40 Muslim tourists from Middle East countries. The pilot test was

conducted in Batu Feringhi area in Penang Island. Based on the results, the final questionnaire was delivered to be used for the final data collection. The final questionnaire was translated to Arabic language through a back translation in order to facilitate the data collection procedure.

After collecting the data, appropriate tools and software were used for analysis. For achieving the first (demographic profile and travel pattern), the second and the objectives of the study (assessing the Islamic brand equity of Malaysia and involvement), a descriptive analysis has been applied in SPSS version 19. Therefore, the frequency and percentage of respondents' demographic characteristics and travel patterns were assessed followed by measurement of each dimension of brand equity (awareness, image, quality, value, and loyalty) and involvement (attraction, centrality to lifestyle, and self-expression). The mean value for each item has been revealed as well as the mean value for each construct. In order to test the multidimensionality of involvement profile and to test the relationships between involvement and dimensions of brand equity, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) has been used as the tool and Partial Least Squares (PLS) as the appropriate software for this study. Involvement has been considered as a second-order construct consisting three first-order constructs, namely, attraction, self-expression, and centrality to lifestyle. This way, the involvement construct has been ultimately applied as one construct influencing five dimensions of brand equity.

Measurement model and structural model have been provided as the two essential steps of SEM. The measurement model revealed the construct validity and reliability while structural model examined the research hypotheses through t-value, beta coefficient (β) and coefficient of determination (R^2) for latent constructs. The research process is displayed in Figure 1.2.
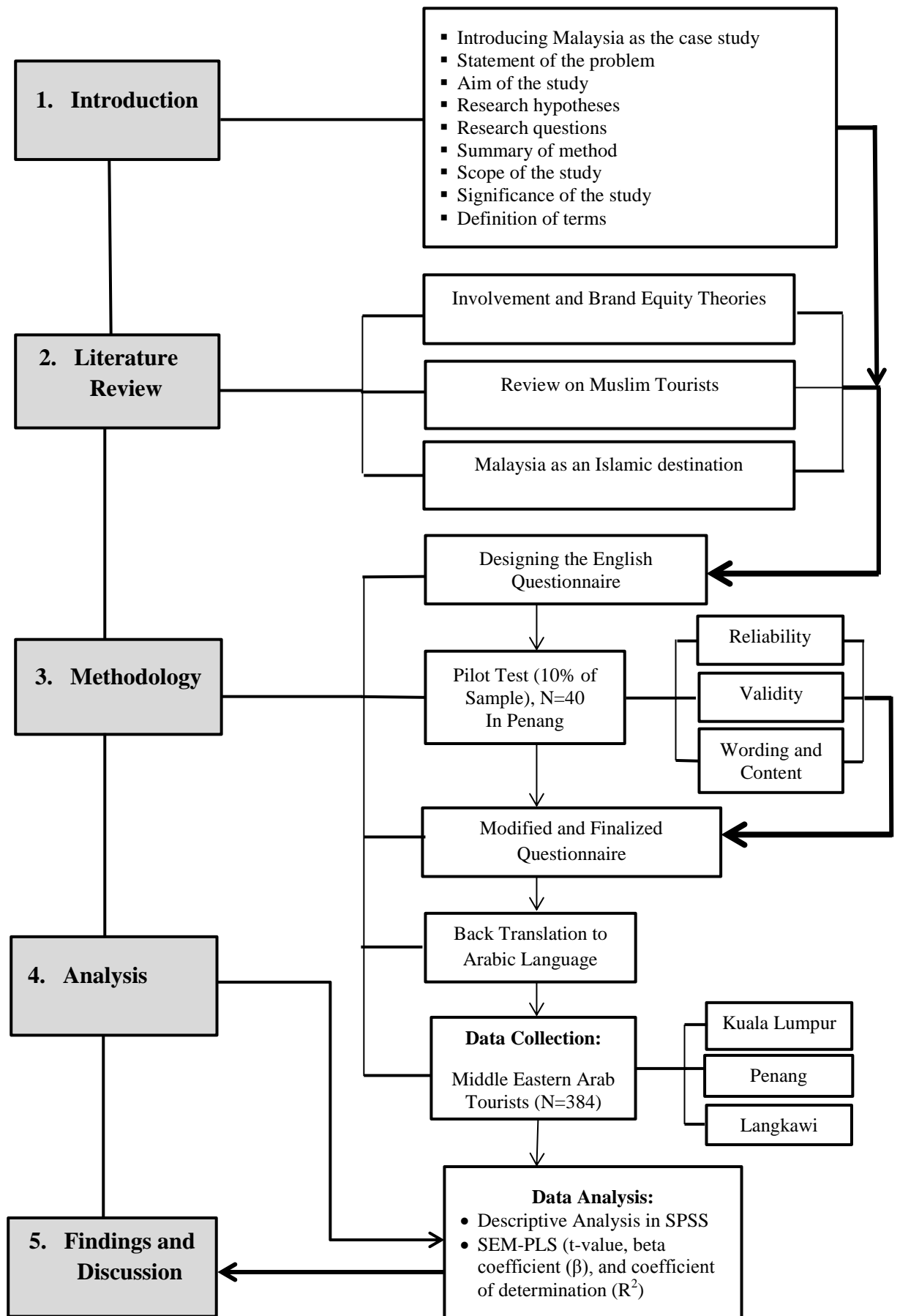
Figure 1.2: Research Process

1.8   Scope of the Study

According to Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life (2011), 62% of the Muslim population resides within the Asia-Pacific region. On the other hand, Malaysia has been known as the wealthiest Muslim country in Southeast Asia and as the opinion leader among the region's Muslim population (Kim et al., 2014). Therefore, its strategic situation calls for more exploration as the scope of Islamic destination studies, especially in South-East Asia. The geographical scope of this study is limited to the three most visited cities by Muslims in Malaysia namely, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, and Langkawi because they were found to be the most visited cities in Malaysia (Ariffin & Hasim, 2009; Salman & Hasim, 2012).

The areas selected for data collection in Kuala Lumpur limited to Suria KLCC shopping center, Pavilion shopping Mall, and Bukit Bintang Area. For the part of Penang data collection, the questionnaires were distributed in Gurney Plaza, Gurney Paragon shopping Mall, and Batu Feringhi area covering Golden Sand Resort, Holiday Inn Hotel, and Park Royal Hotel. The rest of the questionnaires were distributed in three locations in Langkawi Island, namely, Langkawi Jetty Point, Langkawi International Airport, and Pantai Cenang Beach as the most familiar and accommodating Beach in Langkawi for tourists.

Arab Muslims from Middle East countries have been targeted as the samples of the study. A total number of 384 Middle Eastern Arab tourists were sampled. The sampling method was based on ratio calculated from the number of Arab tourist arrival in 2013. The data was collected in May and June 2014. The period is considered the Arab season since most of Middle Eastern Arabs travel before Ramadan which is considered the fasting month for Muslim people. Therefore, there is an influx of Arab tourists in the country from Middle East.

1.9   Significance of the Study

According to Sripraset et al. (2014), among the top 20 countries that have had the greatest growth in international tourism expenditure 2005-2010, 25% of that growth in expenditure is from OIC (Organization of Islamic Countries) member countries. Therefore, Muslim tourists are one of the most important tourist generating markets worldwide which has the potential to have a great influence on the marketing of tourism and destination development in future. It explains why Muslim market has attracted the interest and attention of world marketers. The increase in number of Muslim tourists may happen due to its large population size and being the fastest growing economy in the world. According to new population projections by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life (2011), the world's Muslim population is expected to increase by about 35%, rising from 1.6 billion in 2010 to 2.2 billion by 2030. Therefore, all destinations need to put more efforts on improving their image in the mind of Muslim tourists and to capture a significant share of this new business opportunity in the face of intense international competition from other destinations. Specially, the Islamic countries should take the opportunity of their Islamic attributes to attract Muslim tourists because Muslims are quite demanding for their basic Islamic features based on the rules of Shari'ah. Since this study will evaluate the brand equity of Malaysia as an Islamic hub, it can help the country to maximize the benefits of its held Islamic attributes in the eye of Muslim tourists.

On the other hand, the dimensions of brand equity are of great importance per se. For example, Yuksel, Yuksel and Bilim (2010) noted that tourist loyalty is a key area of examination as it has implications to the economic development of a country. Malaysia has been among the top destinations for Muslim travelers within the recent years. So it is important to target Muslim tourists in Malaysia in order to find out

how they evaluate Malaysia as an Islamic country. Especially, with increasing competition with other Islamic countries, Malaysia should find the factors which contribute to retain its customers.

Rather than the significance of exploring brand equity of Malaysia as an Islamic tourist destination from marketing perspective, the psychographic factor of Involvement provides an insight to tourism industry because it has an important implication in tourism studies. Moreover, the concept of involvement has not been so far investigated in the context of Islamic destination. In fact, identification the visitors who are psychologically involved with and/or committed to the Islamic destinations can be a practical means for ensuring a consistent number of Muslim visitors to the country. Since the relationships between the dimensions of involvement and brand equity has not been yet explored adequately in details, this study can add to the previous studies in which the casual link among personal involvement to a specific destination, destination brand equity and behavioral intentions (Kim et al., 2009) was explored.

The results of this study will help tourism marketers in Malaysia to portrait the friendly Islamic environment of the country for potential Muslim travelers all around the world. Investigating on Middle Eastern Arab tourists as the samples of this study, it will clue Malaysia's tourism industry in integrating marketing and promotional campaigns to build a more powerful Malaysia Islamic brand in Muslim markets. Furthermore, it will help to highlight the country's advantages which make Malaysia a sustainable destination for Muslims as well as non-Muslims who are also interested in religious tourism. At the same time, destinations with similar circumstances like Malaysia with Islamic theme would practice the same strategies proposed by this study.

In general, due to the lack of research in destination brand equity, involvement, and Muslim markets in Malaysia, this study can make a significant contribution to tourism practice in the country and at the same time it can contribute to extant academic knowledge. Involvement was explored extensively in recreation studies while it has been less considered in tourism context. Also, brand equity of a destination is quite a new area of study in tourism research. Therefore, it was attempted to fill the gap by investigating on these two important variables (involvement and brand equity) and the relationship between them. This frame can be the initial step toward the future studies on Muslim tourists in Malaysia, e.g., to investigate on the effect of their involvement with travelling to Islamic destinations on brand equity in depth, or to explore on other factors which may lead to their high level of brand equity evaluation. Furthermore, some tourism polices and strategies to effectively capture the Middle Eastern Arab tourist market can be provided by this research.

Malaysia has done great attempts to position itself as an Islamic country within recent years. Measuring and establishing brand value in a systematic manner in which it is considered as a dimension of brand equity is quite new in academic researches. In summary, this investigation can further define the nature of an Islamic destination brand and will lead to development of a theory of the brand constructs.

1.10   Definitions of Terms

The key terms used in the present study are defined as follows in order to clarify the concepts and constructs of the research.

Involvement: Involvement is a general level of interest in or concern about an issue without reference to a specific position (Hupfer & Gartner, 1971) or a person's

perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests (Zaichkowsky, 1985).

Brand Equity: Brand equity is the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand (Keller, 1998; Keller, 2008).

Brand Awareness: Brand awareness represents the strength of the brand's presence in the mind of the target customers (Aaker, 1996).

Brand Image: Brand image is the reasoned or emotional perceptions which consumers attach to specific brands (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990; Keller, 2003).

Brand Quality: Brand quality is a customer's perceptions of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service with respects to its intent purpose (Aaker, 1991).

Brand Value: Islamic brand value is based on development of Islamic-oriented tourism standards and identified Islamic attributes of destination that may attract Muslim tourists. It involves the inclusion of prayer or worship facilities, halal food, Islamic entertainment, Islamic dress codes, general Islamic morality and alcohol and gambling free (Battour et al., 2011; Zulkharnain & Jamal, 2012; Battour et al., 2013).

Brand Loyalty: Brand loyalty is the attachment of a customer to a brand (Aaker, 1991) and is conceptualized with the repeat purchase, positive words of mouth, and recommendation to others.

1.11   Organization of the Research

Chapter one is a summary of the research introducing the background of the study, research problems, aims of the study, research questions, summary of research procedure, scope of the study, significance of the study, the limitations of the study,

and finally the definitions of the key terms. *Chapter two* will present an overview of Islamic and Halal tourism, Islamic attributes of destinations, Malaysia's tourism marketing efforts, its Islamic attributes, Muslim tourists' scenario, and finally an overview of Middle Eastern tourists' demography and travel patterns. The research will look the literature surrounding involvement, brand equity, and their relationships in *chapter three*. It will be followed by the research methodology in *chapter four* including research design and all the procedures from the first step of preparing the questionnaire and data collection to the last step of data analysis. The results will be provided in *chapter five*, where after the discussion and implications of the study as well as recommendations for future researches are discussed in further details in *chapter six*.

1.12   Conclusion

This chapter was designed to outline the structure of the thesis, including the concepts and variables of the study**,** presenting the problem statement, objectives of the study, research hypotheses and relevant research questions. The study will investigate the phenomenon of Middle Eastern Arab tourists' evaluation of Islamic brand equity of Malaysia while the influence of their involvement with travelling to Islamic destinations on this evaluation will also be explored. The purpose of this study is to reach an understanding of the involvement drivers on their evaluation and at the same time to explore on brand equity of Malaysia as an Islamic destination for Middle Eastern Arab tourists in order to increase the professional marketing understanding of the country. The summary of research method and scope of the study have been presented followed by significance of the research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1　Introduction

This chapter will be assigned to the overview of previous works on study's variables and their relationships in order to develop research hypothesis based on previous studies. It includes the definition and conceptualization of the study constructs, namely involvement and brand equity, their measurements, followed by the relationships between them. The research's hypotheses and the hypothetical framework of the study will be further provided.

2.2　The Concept of Involvement

Several researchers highlighted the role of involvement in providing marketers with an insightful perspective on understanding consumer's purchase behaviors (Gursoy & Gavcar, 2003; Hwang, Lee, & Chen, 2005; Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; Lehto, O'Leary, & Morrison, 2004).

Sherif and his associates (Sherif & Cantril, 1947; Sherif & Hovland, 1961; Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall, 1965; Sherif & Sargent, 1945; Sherif & Sherif, 1967) are the pioneers in conceptualizing involvement. First, the concept was investigated in social psychology when ego-involvement was considered as the centrality and importance of a social issue in individual's life (Sherif & Sargent, 1945; Sherif et al., 1965; Sherif & Sherif, 1967). In this case, a person is said to be ego-involved when his/her position on an issue is very central to his/her self-identity or when a person is strongly committed to a position (Sheirf et al., 1965). Further, Sherif and his

colleagues examined the strength or extent of the cognitive linkage between the self and a leisure activity. Overall, they conceptualized the ego as a central concept surrounded by values, goals, standards, or norms which are shaped by the social world. Ego-attitudes are a manifestation of this value set and vary in priority and importance (Sherif & Cantril, 1947). They are activated when a cognitive connection is made between stimuli (i.e., the attitude object) and elements of the ego or self-system (Kyle & Mowen, 2005). Ostrom and Brock (1968) later explained that ego attitudes are aroused in three situations. First, situations that would cause important values to be engaged; second, situations that are highly related to one's values; and third, situations where a large number of values are engaged. Later on, Selin and Howard (1988) also mentioned that individuals identify themselves by developing psychological attachment towards a recreational activity 'ego' involvement which was an approval of Sherif's works. Further, Hupfer and Gartner (1971) described involvement as "a general level of interest in or concern about an issue without reference to a specific position" (p. 263). Zaichkowsky's (1985) identified involvement as a person's perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests. It was also defined as the degree to which a person devotes him or herself to an activity or associated product (Engel & Blackwell, 1982; Zaichkowsky, 1985) and as an unobservable state of motivation, arousal or interest toward a recreational activity or associated product (Rothschild, 1984; Havitz & Dimanche, 1997). The latter definition has been widely used in leisure and recreation fields of study. The construct is operationalized as a salient concept for understanding leisure, recreation, and tourism behaviors (Havitz & Dimanche, 1999).

The idea behind involvement is that a single activity or product might be significant for an individual to be involved but it may not be high valued or important