

Blogger's Perceptions on Georgetown Heritage Site

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, blogs have gaining popularity. The characteristics of blog which offers an easy and inexpensive means of self-publications of content had made it a preferred choice for many people to express, shared their knowledge and experiences. Blogs is indeed a remunerative new opportunity for tourism enhancement. Blog has become a powerful weapon in marketing Georgetown as one of the famous tourist destination in Malaysia. Listed in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) heritage list, Georgetown heritage sites have gaining tremendous highlights, advertisements and entry posts from bloggers. As people's perceptions are unique, the bloggers sharing their posts thus researchers would like to explore the content of each blog towards Georgetown heritage site. It is interesting to discover the similarities and differences of blog contents between those bloggers posting blog entries on Georgetown heritage site. Qualitative approach mainly content analysis and observation has been deployed as part of the method for the study. This study concludes that tour operators need to understand the nature of tourist's needs and wants if quality accessible tourism products are to be available. Future research may focus on the bigger scale of respondents. Generally, this study provides the needs analysis of maintaining Georgetown heritage site thus will assist tourism operators and government agency to upgrade and refine the heritage facilities, so that public can enjoy and fully utilize the tourist destination. This will indirectly boost tourism economy and industry through satisfied tourists.

KEYWORDS: Blogs, Bloggers, Blog Entries, Georgetown Heritage Site.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, blogs have gaining popularity. The characteristics of blog which offers an easy and inexpensive means of self-publications of content had made it a preferred choice for many people to express and shared their knowledge and experiences. Blogs offered a potential vast of audiences on the web as that are more compliant and interactive than previous publication formats, print or digital [1]. In addition, blogs serve as places for exchanging information between bloggers and their audience [2]. Blogs provide freedom to express true and sincere opinions, thus they mostly viewed as telling real stories. Furthermore, blogs encouraged interchange between authors and readers in a way that few other media allow. The reader therefore becomes connected with the author, and this contributes to a sense of attachment. Blog users can be divided into 2 categories: blog readers and blog owners (bloggers). Usually, bloggers will post the topic that arose their interests together with some related images and links to other websites. Blogs influences are powerful in convincing readers about certain places that have been visited by bloggers. It is noted that over 346 million people worldwide read blogs. Furthermore, it is reported that 53.5% of internet users read blogs [4] and 30% of internet users had created or worked on their own blogs [3] in year 2011. Moreover, in [5] claimed that averages of 900,000 new articles per day are posted on blogs. Blogger also play a role as citizen journalists, as publisher, creator of online content and distributor of that content [6]. Blogs is indeed a remunerative new opportunity for tourism enhancement. It acts as a new form of communication that shifts the information to the audience.

In line with tourism destinations, the heritage value of a place is known for its cultural significance which indicates its historic, scientific, spiritual value for past, present or future generations. The heritage value of a place included buildings and structures, physically created places representing the ways of life, customs and other places that has historic significant. The heritage sites listed on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) world heritage list can be a mechanism for tourism. In Malaysia, Georgetown Penang is one of the heritage sites that being listed in the UNESCO heritage list. The brand of WHL (world heritage list) has automatically advertised and made Georgetown as a popular tourist destination. This site should be well protected due to the powerful impact that they have on tourism industry. In relation to blogs, it has been found that there are a lot of bloggers who have posted entries on their blogs which regarding on Georgetown heritage site with different styles, perceptions and acceptances towards this one particular heritage site. As people's perceptions are unique, the bloggers sharing their posts thus researchers would like to explore the content of each blog towards Georgetown heritage site. It is interesting to discover the similarities and differences of blog contents between those bloggers posting blog entries on Georgetown heritage site.

Several researchers have investigated issues on blogs in the context of travel-decision making process, experiences and satisfaction [1-2]. Travelers are most likely to visit the blog in order to obtain information of the place that they are intending to visit. In order to exchange the information of destinations that bloggers have visited, travel blogs have become an important tool or mechanism among readers. However, most studies focused on overseas tourist destinations [4-5, 7], while there is limited

number of local study that emphasized on local tourist destinations [8-9]. Most of the study explored on the blogs posting famous dishes as well as culinary experiences at various destinations. Hence, by exploring the perceptions of bloggers either positive or negatives on this natural heritage site specifically Georgetown heritage site, it is sought to fill the gap as literatures have heavily focused on the importance of blogs. Hopefully, such knowledge will assist tourism operators and government agency to upgrade and refine the heritage facilities, so that public can enjoy and fully utilize the tourist destination. This will indirectly boost tourism economy and industry through satisfied tourists. Hence, the finding of the study is worth in assisting tour operators to upgrade and enhance their services for public. The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. Section II discusses the literature review, followed by methodology used in the study in section III, while section IV reports the empirical results followed by conclusion in the last section.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Perception of Bloggers

Perception is crucial in understanding the principles upon which a sensory approach to ethnography must depend would not be doubtful [10]. Researchers proposed that perception has a deep relationship with the environment and personality of physical bodily presence and perceptual engagement to implicate an emplacement [11-12]. It is crucial for bloggers to spend time and effort to maintain a high quality blog since readers are more likely to visit blogs that exhibit high quality attributes. Blog quality is a vital component in influencing both user perceptions and subsequent blogging behaviour. Maintaining active blogs required bloggers to provide high quality features such as appearance, content, and technical adequacy. Blog quality could act as a stimulus affecting cognitive and emotional states. Providing an attractive and well-designed blog may enhance the perception of its usefulness and playfulness lead to a positive cognitive appraisal. The higher the quality of blog, the more positive the users' affect should be as highlighted in the studies investigating the relationships between blog quality, perceived usefulness and playfulness [13-14].

Historical Buildings

Preservation and enhancement of the historic surroundings is normally considered as an attractive responsibility [15]. Historic surrounding can be classified as i) building, areas such as parks, garden, other designated landscapes or public spaces with historic association complexes and ii) sites such as ancient monuments and places with historical associations. In this study, protection of heritage building comprised of the entire buildings gazette under the UNESCO award in Penang, which includes temples, houses, shops and etc. Among the significant heritage characteristics of Georgetown were the main pre-war buildings, particularly the 2 storey shop houses that can be found in the central city of Georgetown. It is noted that there were about 10,000 pre-war buildings in Georgetown. The history of these heritage buildings dates back to between late 18th and early 19th century. The communities nowadays have much more concerns about cultural preservation and they seek to prolong their own heritage. Residents' awareness on historical building has been growing. Government support cultural project to convert historical building into different tourism attractions as part of their efforts to endorse tourism. Adaptive use or reuse of historical building instead of demolishing it has been gaining popularity. Heritage is not only about the existing generation who persist to be grateful for and to get used to the magnificent history, culture and past culture, but it is also about the past. Besides that, heritage is also about the cultural traditions, places and values that people proudly protect for the future generations. It comprises family patterns, religious practices, myths traditions and community traditions, as well as museums, monuments, battlefields, artifacts, historic buildings and landmarks [16].

Heritage Buildings in Malaysia

Heritage buildings can be defined as places that invite curiosity among public to explore more about the people and culture it represents [17]. Additionally, heritage building can be classified as a building that being developed in the past which has high historical and architecture values [10]. Heritage buildings require continuous care and protection to save their historical, architectural, aesthetic, archaeological, spiritual, social, political and economic values to the next generations. In other words, heritage buildings should be conserved for as long as possible as it have an indefinite life span. Heritage buildings were expected to last forever [18]. In addition, heritage buildings can also be classified as buildings that being used by society for various reasons. In Malaysia, 4 major examples of heritage buildings had on architectural styles were Moorish (Old general post office built in 1894), Tudor (Royal Selangor club built in 1884), Neo-classical (Municipal council building in Georgetown built in 1879) and Neo-gothic (Carcosa mansion built in (1897) [19]. The existence of the exclusive colonial architectural styles that these heritage buildings are the proof by colonial powers of Portuguese, Dutch and British once conquered Malaysia. Georgetown Penang on the other hand can be seen as one of the unique heritage buildings that have been built during the colonial era, between year 1511 to 1957 with different architectural styles and influences. It has turn into one of the urban characteristics to this city due to the unique value that these buildings have.

Georgetown Heritage Site

Penang Island is located on the opposite of Malaysia's mainland. The accessible location has forced East India Company to divert Penang Island as an esteem port for the company to perform the business and therefore, the island was produced to the company in year 1786 [20]. In year 1789, Penang has turned into a visitor center soon after its foundation, as more ships cross the region. Georgetown has attracted many tourists and served as a central point for Penang tourism. Georgetown heritage site represents the mixture of religious pluralism, historic townscape and living heritage. The uniqueness had been indicated through house of worship and peaceful co-existence of different religious, a combination of Asian and colonial architectures and multicultural heritage which peeps out from the daily lives, rituals, trades and cuisine of the inner city community with these three unique items [21]. Heritage buildings are regarded as assets to the tourism industry [22]. It is a great chance to expand cultural

tourism in Georgetown. Suitable with their cultural uniqueness combined with high historical and architectural values, many foreign tourists are fascinated to these heritage buildings. They created significant tourism income for the Malaysian government, thus making the tourism industry as one of the essential main sectors of the Malaysian economy. Georgetown heritage site also provide modern shopping centers and local bazaars as well as night markets, beautiful beaches, presenting variety of culture, customs, foods, lifestyle and signs of different religion, such as Hindus and Buddhist temples, and mosque.

METHODOLOGY

Researchers adopted qualitative approach mainly content analysis and observation as part of the method for the study. For content analysis, several studies on bloggers perceptions as well as Georgetown heritage site were summarized and compared to get a better insights and overview. Moreover, reliable data were gathered from several sources such as online journals, newspapers, books and articles. The summary of each study were essential information to provide in-depth views on the topic. Grouping the journals and research papers according to the theme will assist in providing better views and more coordination during the explaining and analysing process. Additionally, for observation researchers reviewed 8 blogs that shared their opinions and experiences on Georgetown heritage site. The bloggers were selected which based on criterions of regular visited blogs among online readers [23]. Out of the 8 blogs, 3 were international bloggers/tourists while 5 consist of domestic bloggers/tourists. However, the identity of the blogger will not be revealing to respect the anonymity policy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings indicated that blog has becoming a powerful weapon in marketing Georgetown as one of the famous tourist destination in Malaysia. All 8 bloggers that researchers reviewed agreed that they have a great impression on Georgetown in terms of offering uniqueness and historic nature based tourism attraction. All bloggers expressed their appreciation and admirations with the building and culture that Georgetown heritage site has. The first blogger highlighted on the strategic location of Georgetown as well as the place is so rich with history. It is further agreed by second blogger that highlighted Georgetown as best for view, best for culture, best place for walking and the best place to escape from busy town. Additionally, third blogger mentioned that Georgetown is unique and 'staying there feels like you are living in a totally different world'. The blogger was so surprised to view the house inside when they have access into one of the heritage houses in Georgetown. To them, everything looks the same on the outsides and clueless on what is behind the door. Moreover, fourth blogger claimed that Georgetown infrastructure has been systematically managed. This is due to the influenced by British, which make it easy place to leisurely and wander around. Besides, the suburban area has been developed to ensure that all places in Georgetown are more attractive to attract tourists to visit the area. For example, hotels and resorts have been built to accommodate the number of international and domestic tourists that visited Georgetown. It will indirectly create a job opportunity to the residences in that area. The fifth blogger is a native people from Georgetown. The blogger shared many wonderful things about Georgetown. It can be seen that the blogger had fully utilized his/her blog to promote Georgetown. The sixth blogger was so in love with Georgetown and imposed that it is a must visit place for any tourists that come to Penang Malaysia. Interestingly, the seventh blogger gave negative comments. The blogger highlighted on the rudeness of Penangites especially on road. The blogger also warned readers to drive carefully whenever you are in Penang as the people are not so considerate. Though it does not represent all Georgetown drivers but it did tarnish the reputation of Georgetown drivers. The last blogger also expressed similar views with the seventh blogger. The blogger highlighted to receive double standards of treatments between local and international tourists. The food cost served to foreigners were much more expensive compared the one paid by locals. The blogger also encountered taxi drivers that did not turned on their meters while providing the shuttle service.

Additionally, all bloggers shared their dining experiences, facts on Georgetown as well as overall experiences during their stay in Georgetown. It is interesting to read various opinions and ideas of bloggers on one particular area. Apparently, majority of the expressions from the bloggers were positive though there were 2 blogs that highlighted the negativity of Georgetown. It is good to discover the negative experiences bloggers had as local authorities can act on the issue. A problem can be transformed into opportunity if it is entertained correctly. Probably, comments on the expensive food should be taken into consideration as there is no double standard treatment between local and foreigners. It is not surprised if readers will be influenced by the blog that they have read. It can be imposed that blogs act as the 'online word-of-mouth' where blog sites influenced reader's attitudes and approaches to life, purchase decisions, political viewpoints, and others whether in good or bad way. When readers read on heritage or tourism blog, it will influence their eagerness to go to that place and to experience the same thing as what the bloggers have. Nowadays, blog have becoming one of the convenient medium for people to state their opinion and communicate their thoughts. Blog posts can be referred as entries and it might be updated daily or weekly to suit those who are interested in opinions towards any topic that being discussed by the bloggers. Suitable with the technological advances, web users have convenience and easy access to the blog sites. It is indirectly makes web users a provider, as in this case bloggers, rather than being a consumer of information.

In conjunction with the implication of blogs and Georgetown heritage site, literatures have heavily emphasized the maintenance strategies to preserve the heritage tourist destination [18-23]. Maintenance is considered to be the most realistic and philosophically suitable protection strategy [24]. It is crucial to the survival of these buildings. This acknowledgement was made as early as 1877 by William Morris, which is the founder of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), an organization entrusted with caring and preserving United Kingdom's heritage buildings. He regarded frequent maintenance as the most realistic and economic form of protecting heritage buildings. Moreover, maintenance is the single most important process of all the processes of conserving heritage buildings [25]. The most sustainable way of preserving heritage buildings is

regular maintenance to ensure value of the buildings is sustained as maintenance is a continuous process. In order to ensure that the site is in condition at an accepted permits pleasure of the cultural resource without damage, it needs all practical and technical measures. It can be strongly stated that the country's heritage building deserve the best practice in the maintenance management from being demolished in order to continuously care and protect as well as to prolong their life span and functions. Georgetown heritage site did contribute in generating revenue to the country.

CONCLUSION

This study is essential for industry practitioners who are adhering to promote and maintain Georgetown heritage site as one of the best and popular tourist destination in Malaysia. The negative opinions and experiences expressed by some of the bloggers such as the one provided here may serve as a starting point. Actions can be taken by local authorities to refine their services to cope with the current tourist's needs and wants. Additionally, this data set does not support the full-scale evaluation of bloggers perceptions on Georgetown heritage site. This is due to a small number of participants in the study. Nevertheless, future studies may look into broader samples of respondents. Future research also could focus more on the different nationalities of the bloggers. It is interesting to discover outsiders or international tourist's opinions towards Malaysia tourism products. These heritage buildings offer a sense of identity and stability for the next generations. Therefore, heritage buildings in Malaysia should never be demolished but need to be conserved, as demolishing them is tantamount to erase the country's historical memories.

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