Tourist Expectation on UNESCO World Heritage Sites Brand Signals in Malaysian Historical Cities

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Abstract: The UNESCO World Heritage (WH) brand signal uses a recognisable WH symbol which communicates with the public. However, there are limitations which most visitors tend to be unnoticed of the existence of the symbol. The emblem of UNESCO WH is known as the symbol that represents the World Heritage sites under the 1972 World Heritage Convention. Even though one of the primary functions of the symbol is an identifier of properties inscribed in the UNESCO WH list, there is still lack of awareness among visitors to the WH sites especially in Malaysian WH cities. In this article, the authors explore the participatory research method through interviews with the visitors around two WH inscribed historical cities in Malaysia; Melaka city and George Town city. The authors not only draw through the transcripts of interviews among visitors/tourists but also take note of participants' observations through visual method at the WH cities. The empirical data from the on-site participatory research methods uncover the experiences through the lenses of researchers as well as the tourists. The findings of this research show that the WH brand signal are unnoticeable by the tourists due to the visibility of the WH signal and lack of awareness. This research can be used as a guideline in establishing the 'UNESCO' brand in Malaysia.

Index Terms: Brand signal, Tourist expectation, UNESCO World Heritage Sites

I. INTRODUCTION

The brand identity which includes the 'visual appearance and communication' is reflected through the brand owner. It is illustrated by statement of [1] that;

"The UNESCO designation of World Heritage Sites is used for national aggrandizement and commercial advantage within the international competition for tourists, more often than it is a celebration of an international identity."

In 2006, the UNESCO Creative Cities Network which was convened in Santa Fe, New Mexico highlighted that term 'creative tourism' as "travel directed toward an engaged and authentic experience, with participative learning in the arts, heritage, or special character of a place, and it provides a connection with those who reside in this place and create this living culture"[9]. However, in a field observation conducted by [7], the authors discovered that none of their study locations in Australia applied the WH mark (symbol) throughout the site or external road signage. WH logos or emblem are not being used fully by authorities due to restrictions of law and regulations [5].Since the inscription on Melaka and George Town Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca in 2008, there have been development of conservation and management plans and structure to maintain the World Heritage Sites in the UNESCO list. The George Town World Heritage Incorporated is an organization that was set up by the Penang State Government to manage the site by working closely with all relevant stakeholders [4]. Thus, in their plan of maintaining and preserving the George Town as the historical city in Malaysian, the organization has also included 'wayfinding system' as part of their programme to "improve and unify the signage of sites of importance within the World Heritage Site" [6].This shows how important the WH brand as to encourage and attract more tourists to Malaysia. In order to further investigate experiences of tourists who visited the Malaysian historical sites as inscribed by UNESCO, the following research question is used as a guide for this study: What are the factors that determine the reliability of the signages?

II. METERIALS AND METHODS

The researchers have adopted the case study approach [12] and the sites for data collection are selected according to the frequencies of visitors at the locations in Melaka and George Town cities. There are two main zones which are outlined by UNESCO as to maintain the sustainable use of resource through collaborative management as illustrated in Figure 1. The zones are divided into Core and Buffer Zones [11];

i. **Core area(s):** securely protected sites for conserving biological diversity, monitoring minimally disturbed ecosystems, and undertaking non-destructive research and other low-impact uses (such as education);

ii. **Buffer zone(s):** Buffer zones are an important tool for conservation of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List. All along the history of implementation of the World Heritage Convention, the protection of the "surroundings" of the inscribed properties was considered an essential component of the conservation strategy, for cultural and natural sites alike. The World Heritage Committee valued the concept and included it into the Operational Guidelines as one of the elements to be considered in the preparation of a nomination proposal.
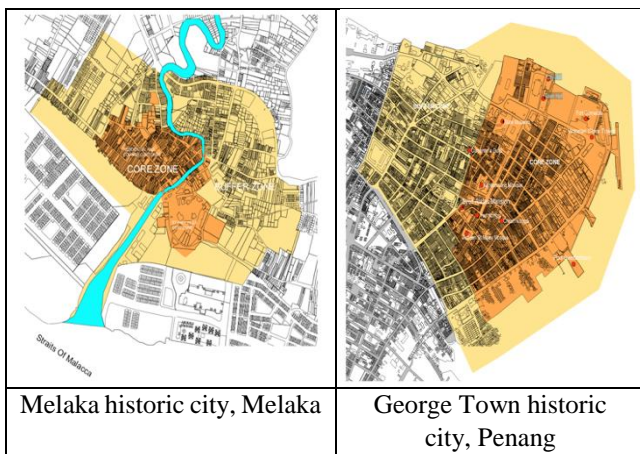
| Melaka historic city, Melaka | George Town historic city, Penang |

Figure 1: UNESCO designated zone of Melaka and George Town, Penang (source:
http://www.gtwhi.com.my/images/stories/files/dossier.pdf)

In this study, the researchers randomly interview the tourists around the core zones at both locations as more activities and signages are found there. Figure 1 shows the UNESCO designated zones in Melaka and George Town [10]. The interviews are conducted within five days in September 2017 at both locations. The journey of walking around both cities give us very memorable and fascinating experiences. During our intriguing conversations with the participants, most of them did not even noticed the WH signages until we explained our intention of interviewing them. Thus, the on-site photo documentation of the places we visited are also recorded as to strengthen our research objective for this study. The interviews are transcribed, and themes are identified according to tourist expectation model which will be discussed further in the results section. Recognizable signages or wayfinding systems around the core zones are also identified and documented. The images are then analyzed according to the locations and types of sign design.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In a research conducted by [2], there are four main factors that determine the Tourist Expectation when traveling. For the purpose of this study, the participants are interviewed at the UNESCO designated zones in Melaka and George Town within five days of data collection. Based on the model, the characteristics are illustrated through conversation between the researchers and the participants interviewed. There are 17 random local and foreign participants participated in the process of data collection. The foreign participants include tourists from Hungary, England, Germany, Indonesia and also United States of America. The local participants for this interview are from Kuala Lumpur, Sarawak, Penang, Pahang and also Melaka. Among the questions asked during the interviews are: Describe your experience when visiting the UNESCO sites especially branding of UNESCO World Heritage Sites such as the signs and symbols at the sites? Have you visited other UNESCO World Heritage Sites? How can you compare the experience between Penang/Melaka and others?

Figure 2 shows the characteristics of tourist behavior that are analyzed based on the on-site interviews conducted. The findings show the experiences of tourists who visited the WHs

either in Malaysia or other countries. The model adapted shows the common and unique experiences of tourists. The transcribed interviews were coded into four different themes that were illustrated from destination image, past experience, word of mouth and external communication. One of the on-site interviewees described her experiences as;"Visiting UNESCO gazetted places bring expectations as to get a UNESCO brand, the site must go through certain criteria and evaluation. However, I did not pay much attention on the signs or symbols other than the signages of building, remnant, or sites that am visiting. I have not noticed any sign UNESCO on those places I have visited. Yes, it is necessary to label those gazetted sites with UNESCO sign or logo so we as the public would aware and appreciate more of those places"(Anonymous, personal communication, September 5, 2017).
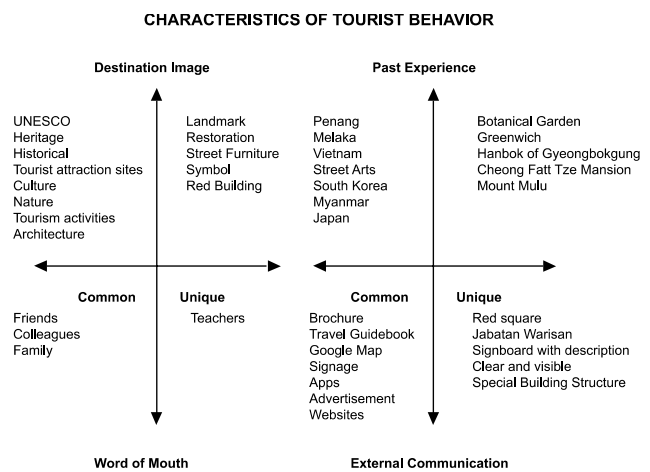
Fig 2: Characteristics of Tourist Expectation (Adapted from Tourist Expectation Model by Rodríguez del Bosque, San Martín, Collado, & del Mar García de los Salmones (2009).

Table 1: Visual representation analysis in George Town, Penang

Type of Sign Design/ Attractions	Criteria
	Directional sign pole with specific colour coded that shows places of interest nearby the placement of the sign.
	Directional sign that shows specific places with additional information such as the distance from specific location of the sign. The directional sign is also combined with regulatory sign which forbids the high loads vehicles.

Information sign, which shows the point of interest with specific color used. This sign complies with the specification required by UNESCO that added the "City of George Town" at the bottom of the word World Heritage and the WH emblem.

Map sign can be found around the A Famosa area which uses the similar colour code of the 'red brick' without the WH symbol.

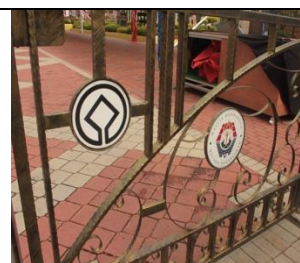An information sign on Jejak Warisan Penang Heritage Trail which emphasized on the current under construction restoration building.

Located at Jalan Hang Jebat which seems to be a very useful location due to confusing streetscapes.

One of the most visited Street Arts.

The information displayed on the wayfinding varies according to the locality of the wayfinding. There are also two maps displayed which emphasized on the tourists' places of interest and the nearest tourist attractions.

Steel rod sculpture that can be found around George Town.

The WH symbol is placed at the bottom of each wayfinding and not clearly visible to the audience due to the size of the logos.

Directional wayfinding with city map.

WH symbol also being placed at the gate near the City Council building.

Table 2: Visual representation analysis in Melaka city

Type of Sign Design/ Attractions	Criteria
	This is where the 'Red Square' which was identified as the starting point of the UNESCO designated zone.

The city map which looks "alienated" due to the choice of font used as well as colour codes used.

Table 1 and Table 2 show George Town and Melaka cities have implemented the constructive used of UNESCO brand in their wayfinding and signages. The emblem used also shows consistent branding strategies for promoting George Town and Melaka as UNESCO WH Sites. These that can be found not only on the road signs but also on the information signs on the walls with descriptions of specific locations. The findings have described the visual representations of the UNESCO brand that are found in the historical cities in Malaysia and how importance to have consistent and well-planned branding of UNESCO WH to give awareness to the visitors in the future. In a research finding conducted by [8], their findings illustrated that only moderate awareness of the logo affect the behaviour of the visitors. Their study also highlighted the importance of management of heritage sites in order for the visitors to revisit the places of interest. Thus, it is very significant to ensure that the Malaysian city councils take active actions in managing the sites more effectively. The principles [3] will be used as a guide for future collaboration with the city councils in ensuring the reliability of the signs and signals of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Malaysia. The five principles on enhancing the visibility to increase the awareness of the UNESCO World Heritage sites 'brand' are as follow:

1. Consistency of typeface, colours, and design style for natural areas of Malaysian World Heritage sites.
2. Consistency of typeface, colours, and design style for heritage areas of Malaysian World Heritage sites.
3. Provide orientation cues and memorable locations using landmarks.
4. Do not give too many choices of navigations to the visitors.
5. The signages should be placed at decision points to help navigation decisions.

IV. CONCLUSION

Although our study is an exploratory research approach, it has successfully uncovered the experiences of tourists who visited other UNESCO WHs in other countries and compared with Malaysian historical cities inscribed by the UNESCO. The management of both cities; George Town and Melaka should have collaborated and implemented a more constructive planning to ensure that reliability and consistency of the WH branding image of both cities. The UNESCO World Heritage site is well known to travellers or tourists who are aware of the 'brand' either being portrayed as a signal on the signages, websites, brochures and other promotional media. However, the management of UNESCO World Heritage sites organizations should take active actions in developing a more effective standardization at the WH sites in Malaysia. Thus, this research is intended to be a guideline for a more effective UNESCO WH branding in Malaysian sites. Future research should be conducted at other WH sites in Malaysia which focus on natural and cultural sites that will help to enhance the visibility of the UNESCO brand in Malaysia.

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