Analysing Visual and Textual Content of Tourism Brochures: A Case of Malaysian Destination Image

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The purpose of the study is to reveal the meaning of destination images that is projected in tourism brochures. Semiotic analysis approach is used to achieve this objective. This paper adapts the 4-phase research process of design principle, data elicitation, data analysis and knowledge interest. The work of Saussurre, Peirce and Barthes is reviewed in understanding the structure of meaning from both visual and textual angles prior to applying the semiotic analysis approach within the destination image context. The findings of this paper discuss the underlying structure of meaning of Malaysian destination images from a British perspective.

Key words: semiotic analysis, destination image, Malaysia

Introduction

This paper strives to understand the meaning of tourism destination image from a media angle. Ideally, an assessment of various modes of media inclusive the print (brochures, newspapers, magazines) and electronic (television, the world wide web, radio) would have been comprehensive and preferred. Pragmatic consideration such as the time and resources available and the most accessible and favoured media by the tourist was thought through before deciding on concentrating the study on the tourism promotional brochures. Both textual and visual images are scrutinised in this paper using semiotics (semiology); which is a means to study the systems of signs. Within the semiotic analysis, the study also incorporates a basic element of content analysis in order to develop and compare the various themes that have emerged from the assessment of the brochures. Drawing from themes emerging from the content analysis, a completion of the semiotic analysis of both textual and visual content of the brochures is possible. Hence there are two components in this paper; firstly a brief background of the theoretical underpinnings of semiotics and how content analysis comes in as a supportive tool and secondly the application of semiotics to uncover the meaning behind the images projected in the brochure.

Design Principles

The design principle revolves around the case study approach. The purpose of the study is to reveal the meaning of images that is projected in tourism brochures. And in the context of

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this study interest, the assessment will be on the Malaysian destination images that are projected in the tourism brochures in the UK.

Why semiotics? To answer this, the underpinning philosophy will have to be discussed and understood first. Semiotics is a tool in addressing sign systems systematically. Signs in the context of this paper include both visual and textual images of the brochures. A Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and an American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) are the two prominent contributors, also to be considered as the founders to the study of signs (semiotics). Hence the ontology and epistemology of semiotics will draw mainly from linguistics and philosophy.

Before progressing further, here, the ‘way of research’ applied for this paper is Synergistic Holism (Ramachandran & Liu, 2002). This paper belief, to address the holistic nature of destination image, rules should not govern the process of search to resolve an issue. The term semiology that originates from the Greek word σημείον, which means sign; has been in use since ancient time (Noth, 1990) as means of communication and representation. Nevertheless, it is the works of Saussure (1916/1966) and Peirce (1934), considered as modern semiology that will be looked at for the purpose of this paper. Firstly, Saussure’s views are reviewed, who defines semiotics as a science that studies signs within society. Being a linguist, naturally, Saussure’s primary focus in developing a semiotics framework revolved around the use of language. Sausurre’s dyadic semiotic model (Figure 1) discusses three components in a sign system:

- **Sign,**
- **Signifier,** and
- **Signified**

Sign, according to Saussure, is the relationship between a signifier and the signified. Signifier means the form the sign takes. For the context of this paper, this form is the image (whether textual or visual). And the signified is the concept that this form (image) represents.

![Figure 1 Sausurean Dyadic Model](image-url)

The Peirce (1934) model which fits better to address this paper, upholds the fact that ‘a sign ... is something that stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity’. Peirce in his structuralism worldview added that every thought is a sign. And this is explicated in Peirce’s triadic model as in figure 2.

Representamen is the form, which the sign takes. Interpretant is the sense made of the sign though not necessarily the interpreter and an object is to which the sign refers. For instance the siren of an ambulance can be viewed as the representamen. The message that the sound of siren indicates that the vehicles, give way, slows down or stop for the ambulance to get pass the traffic is the interpretant. And the act of the vehicles stopping or giving way in itself is the object. The similarities between Saussure and Peirce are that representamen is
similar in meaning with *signifier* and *interpretant* is similar in meaning with *signified*. The variation though stems from how *representamen* is explained: something that stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. The difference here as compared to Saussure’s model is that the *representamen* can be either material or immaterial. This is where Peirce’s model fits better into the tourism context due to its’ recognition of the material/physical component. And what clearly appears directly in Peirce’s model as compared to Saussure’s model is the *object* component, which adds on to the validity to use Peirce’s model for the context of tourism.

![Pierce's Sign System](image)

**Figure 2** Pierce’s Sign System

Hence, Peirce’s model as suggested by (Echtner, 1999) is adapted as the design principle for this paper. For the purpose of this paper, *representamen* is the destination, which is Malaysia; that is the form of image that is represented. *Object* will be the visual and textual images that are represented in the brochures. For instance, a textual line like ‘long sandy beaches’, ‘oldest rainforest’ or visual images like the Petronas twin towers or the F1 circuit. *Interpretant* is considered as both the consumer (i.e. tourist) as well as the interpretation (sense made of the sign [i.e. image of Malaysia]).

In connection with the design principal, an additional element in semiotics is worthwhile to be considered to what has been discussed earlier. Building upon Saussures’s model, Barthes introduces the primary and secondary systems in the levels of signification. In this level of signification, Barthes, speaks of denotation, connotation and myth. Denotation according to Barthes, only requires linguistic and anthropological knowledge for readers to make sense of the subject. For instance, when an image (visual or textual) of a rainforest is shown, with denotation, a reader will be able to tell (conceptualise) there are trees, wild animals, it is green and has tropical climate. This interpretation is from an anthropological and linguistic angle. And denotation is the primary system in Barthes’s spatial metaphor between the primary and secondary sign systems (Figure 3).

Solely from a denotation point, the marketers and advertisers of a destination may not gain much advantage, except maybe for the fact of creating awareness. But what is more interesting in the secondary level of signification is the probing into the deeper structure of meaning. Referring back to the above figure, what appeared to be a holistic sign system in the primary level of signification becomes empty in the secondary level. The rainforest being the initial sign (for primary level – denotation stage) now becomes a vehicle for signification (for secondary level – connotation stage). According to Barthes, the connotation level requires conventional and further cultural knowledge, which he calls lexicons. Barthes explains that lexicon knowledge may be practical, national, cultural or aesthetic. And most importantly highlights the point that this knowledge has the interpretational freedom, where the meaning of image relies upon the knowledge available through experience and contextual salience. From a tourism imagery context, the secondary probing of Barthes to understand the deeper
structure of meaning becomes an advertising tool for tourism marketers to create the myth that the consumer want to achieve as a dream or a fantasy.

Figure 3 Barthes's primary and secondary level of signification adapted in a tourism context

To achieve advertising success as mentioned above, promoters play with the use of language in two different ways, as Saussure identifies them as syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships. To understand and explain this relationship better, let's take the following (Figure 4) examples in a text describing the images of Malaysia:

Figure 4 Syntagmatic-Paradigmatic Relationships

Referring to Figure 4, a paradigmatic relationship reflects both similarities and differences in a text. For instance, the paradigmatic has a vertical relationship. The similarities in this vertical axis are the categories of destination and image. Though categorically (destination) similar; Malaysia, Borneo and Kuala Lumpur, does not have a horizontal relationship, which makes the meaning. Hence the function of the horizontal axis (syntagmatic) is to combine words to make meaning. This linear combination is the one that creates and gives meaning for the image of a particular destination. And this linear combination is the one that normally promoters capitalise to fulfil the fantasy of a tourist. Hence a combination of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationship will pave way to probe the deeper structure of meaning in a more holistic manner.
Data Elicitation

The collection of these brochures was carried out systematically. A list of UK based tour operators/travel agents who promoted Malaysia actively was obtained from the Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board in London. Contacts to request for brochures were made to the 45 organisations through phone calls and Internet request (where available). Out of the 45, 3 organisations were web based therefore did not produce brochures and another two organisations though promoting Malaysia did not have brochures relevant to Malaysia, bringing down the population size of the organisation to 40. The response rate of the population is 47.5% whereby 19 of the 40 organisations responded by sending their brochures on Malaysia. The data from these 19 brochures are the ones used to conduct the semiotic analysis in the next section.

Data Analysis

Drawing from the design principles and utilising the data obtained from the previous sections, the semiotic process as suggested by (Echtner, 1999) is applied in this analysis section. The semiotic process suggested by Echtner consists of the following components:

• Selection of a synchronic closed corpus data.
• Specification, segmentation and inventory of relevant elements of analysis
• Syntagmatic-Paradigmatic examination of the elements
• Creating taxonomy of elements to understand the system of ‘rules’ by which these elements are combined.
• Penetrate surface meaning (denotative) and extract underlying meanings (connotative)

Selection of synchronic closed corpus data

The data obtained from the elicitation process comprised of brochures, which included not only Malaysia, but also depending on the theme the tour operator or travel agent wished to position and promote their business as. For the scope of this study, data has to be specifically selected and isolated to meet the underlying purpose of this study. Therefore, the defined data set for this study will be of those brochures that consisted of Malaysia, both textually and visually, as the subject. Having drawn the boundary, a synchronic perspective (Saussure, 1966) to operationalise the study was required. Saussure’s meaning of synchronised data set is that the data set is viewed as static, distinct and a self-sufficient system that focuses on the current structure and not historical context. Thus, for synchronising purpose, the data set of the Malaysian (self-sufficient system) subject that will be used for the analysis is from the brochure of the 2003/2004 (current structure) seasons.

Specification, segmentation and inventory of relevant elements of analysis

Drawing from the theoretical goal of this research, to understand the deeper structure of meaning of Malaysian image from a British perspective, specific element (units of analysis) is to be derived from the closed corpus of data. This process of segmentation is to break the whole into parts for the purpose of analysis and better understanding. The segmentation of this section is in two folds. The first division is to have one segment for visual image and another for textual image. Next is to identify the elements (sub-segments) within each of these umbrella segments.
Image as a whole is both the textual and visual image of Malaysia as projected in the brochures. The following division; visual and textual image, will then go through a series of further segmentation which will be the task of this section.

Prior to moving into the detailed segmentation it is worthwhile to have a look at the broader picture; type of heading these brochures carry in promoting Malaysia. For instance, is the entire brochure dedicated in promoting Malaysia or does Malaysia fall under the geographical cluster (i.e. worldwide, Far East)? The theme that Malaysia was promoted is shown in the illustration below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brochure numbers</th>
<th>Themes representing Malaysia</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D1, D9</td>
<td>Orient</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D2, D12, D13, D15</td>
<td>Name of Company</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D3, D6, D8, D16, D18, D19</td>
<td>Worldwide</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D4, D10</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D5, D14</td>
<td>Far East</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D7, D11</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D17</td>
<td>Tropical</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The themes assessed in the above table are the textual messages that appeared on the front cover of the brochures. Though the front cover may not be in the context of the closed corpus of the semiotic analysis, but it was felt essential to include it at least from a textual context to get a feel of where or which category does Malaysia fall into. The visual images were omitted from this particular exercise due to the complex and multiple images that were presented that did not represent Malaysia, maybe with the exception of the brochures (D4 & D10), which only promoted Malaysia. D1 till D19 are the labels for the 19 brochures that are being assessed. Bearing in mind that the above list is actually the list recommended by the Malaysian Tourism Promotion Board in London, it was surprising that only two (D4 & D10) out of the 19 brochures actually had the word Malaysia on the front cover of the brochure.

Observing from a broader angle, the two main categories these brochures fall into include: I) geographical category – worldwide, orient, Asia, tropical, Far East and Malaysia, and II) the name of the company (organisation) promoting Malaysia. Assuming the argument of other countries falling into similar geographical cluster is true, and from a brief examination it appears that even Malaysia’s regional competitors (i.e. Thailand and Singapore) are in the same brochures; then comes the question of direct competition. Malaysia with its rather ambivalent image will have to compete with the might of Thailand’s cultural and heritage image. Then there is Singapore, due to its small size, stronger economy and its airline that does the promotional work of the nation, appears to be more attractive, even though it may just be a stopover destination. Hence, these are issue that has to be tackled if Malaysia were to position herself better amongst the British tourists.

Let’s also briefly look into the other category: company’s name on front cover. This, I would say is purely due to a business angle. The 4 brochures (D2, D12, D13, D15) that had their respective company name instead are tour operator based and not travel agents. Therefore, we are talking about business units that are not only promoting and positioning a destination, but are organisations that are competing to create a positive image/identity for themselves to be a leader in their business. I must say, that these tour operators are very creative and innovative in projecting their image. Simply because the name chosen for the company, also represents the image (i.e. exotic, activity based, adventure based) of the destinations they are selling. When the company’s name has a strong image, the products offered sells easily and D2 is a good example of it. It is well established and well known. The
MTPB having an affiliation with D2 helps promote the Malaysian image. One issue that requires careful consideration on the front page of these company-based brochures is that beside the names of their company (in big print) there was also a tendency of putting the name of the destinations in small print. For instance, the name of Borneo and not Malaysia appeared on one of the brochures and even worst is when the competitors name appeared and nothing of Malaysia was mentioned. What we can learn here is that, probably awareness creation is not only required by the potential tourist, but also it should be targeted to those who are selling Malaysia as a destination.

Knowing this deficiency, or on a positive note, the opportunity, this is an area which can be tapped into to create better awareness amongst British tourists, tour operators and travel agents to project a strong image of Malaysia. Coming back to the segmentation of the closed corpus data for semiotic analysis, table 2 below illustrates the elements that emerged both visually and textually between brochures 1 and 19.

Table 2 Segmentation of Visual and Textual Elements of the Brochures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMAGE AS WHOLE</th>
<th>VISUAL IMAGE</th>
<th>TEXTUAL IMAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V1 Accommodation {16}</td>
<td>T1 Island, Beach, Sea, Sand {16}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V2 Beach, Sea, Sand {15}</td>
<td>T2 Rainforest {15}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V3 Golf Course {7}</td>
<td>T3 Tropical, Weather, Climate {17}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V4 Forest {16}</td>
<td>T4 Accommodation (hotel, resort) {17}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V5 Skyscrapers (Twin tower) {14}</td>
<td>T5 Facilities {15}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V6 Swimming pool/swimming {13}</td>
<td>T6 Village {9}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V7 Wildlife (fauna/flora) {15}</td>
<td>T7 Classic/elegance {2}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V8 Activity (rock climbing) {12}</td>
<td>T8 Family, Children {6}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V9 Gastronomy (spices, food) {6}</td>
<td>T9 Natural beauty {13}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V10 Palm tree (coconut) {14}</td>
<td>T10 Wildlife (animals and plants) {14}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V11 Children/family {6}</td>
<td>T11 Destination (Penang, Langkawi) {19}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V12 Couple {8}</td>
<td>T12 Accessibility (Flight, motorway) {4}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V13 Village house (on stilts) {8}</td>
<td>T13 Activities (snorkelling) {9}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V14 Map {16}</td>
<td>T14 Tour type (multi-centre) {11}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V15 Historic/cultural {11}</td>
<td>T15 Culture &amp; multi-ethnicity {12}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V16 Sunset {7}</td>
<td>T16 Colonial/Heritage {11}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V17 Local people {11}</td>
<td>T17 Liveliness (vibrant, charming) {11}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V18 Agro tourism (paddy) {6}</td>
<td>T18 Shopping {9}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*{} is the frequency of occurrence of the image in the brochures.*

For textual image segmentation, the elements are derived from words and phrases that described the image and for the visual image it was the object or action portrayed in the brochures. V1 to V18 are the elements that occurred as visual image in the brochures whereas T1 to T20 are elements that occurred as textual image in the brochures. Similar to the earlier observation of the front cover, a basic content analysis (Bauer, 2000) was carried out to find out the frequency of occurrence of these elements. This part of the semiotic analysis is quantitative in nature.

Taking a step further, these elements can be combined to create themes that the elements could possibly fall under. The creation of themes is a step taken in bringing together the elements to look at it from a holistic angle. The earlier part gives an account of the
number and frequency of elements occurred. The numerical section though essential, does not provide a holistic theme, which is the aim of the semiotic analysis. At this point, the data occurs as in parts of textual image and visual image. And the structure of data is also viewed from a singular perspective. For instance, the image of sunset seen just as a picture of sun but without taking into account that it may mean romantic environment. Hence the challenge now is to bring these segmented parts as a whole. And for that, the understanding of the ‘syntagmatic-paradigmatic’ concept as discussed earlier is required. With the application of this concept the understanding of the structural relationship both horizontally and vertically is possible. Drawing and combining from V1 to V18 and T1 to T20, the outcome of the application of this concept is the six emergent themes, namely:

- Modernisation
- Wilderness/Eco-friendly
- Preservation/Heritage
- Destination for all walks of life
- Richness/diversity
- Rustic/Exotic

For instance, accommodation (V1, T4), skyscrapers (V5), facilities (T5), elegance, comfort, luxury (T7), accessibility (T12), liveliness (T17) and shopping (T18) project Malaysia as a modernised and civilised nation and society. The highlights of modern Malaysia include the Petronas Twin Towers; shopping malls with products of international leading brands; vibrant, charming and environment; infrastructures like the international airport and highways (motorways) and high standard hotels and resort facilities that project the feel of comfort, luxury and elegance.

On the other hand, the images of pitcher plant, orang utan and forest (V4, V7, T2, T10) emphasise the natural beauty (T9), projecting a wilderness/eco-friendly image of Malaysia that shows that the conservation of nature has not been neglected by the impacts of modernisation. Heritage/Preservation of Malaysia is reflected by the colonial architecture (T16, V15) that is well preserved in the midst of the skyscrapers backdrop. The heritage and cultural element also shows multi-ethnicity (T6, T15, V13, V17) and the cultural harmony that exist amongst the three major ethnic groups, namely Malays, Chinese and Indians. Multi-ethnicity is not the only image to project Malaysia’s richness/diversity. The richness/diversity is also portrayed Malaysia’ geographical image (V2, T1, T2, V4, T3, T9). Malaysia divided into east and west by the South China Sea has a wide range of natural resources from under the sea right to the highest peak in South East Asia. The images highlighted are; the long sandy beaches (i.e. Penang, Langkawi, Tioman); the deep-sea world (i.e. sipadan); the highlands (i.e. Mount Kinabalu); the valleys (i.e. Klang Valley) where most inhabitants (V17) and land-use (V18) activities can be seen. Malaysia’s physical geography coupled with the weather conditions provide the perfect climatic environment – The Tropical Rainforest – that is amongst the richest bio-diversity on earth.

Having the blend of modernisation, cultural heritage, and richness/diversity, the Malaysian image is projected as a destination that suits all walks of life. This is projected in a wide range of ways. If it is activity (T13, V8) based, then images of snorkelling, scuba diving, mountain climbing, rock climbing and spelunking (caving) for the more adventurous heart are projected. Images with children’s face painted, hotel rooms with cartoon characters, wading pool and swimming pool with parents and children having fun are projected to show the suitability of Malaysia as a holiday destination for families. Images of a couple walking on a long sandy beach; sitting by the pool facing the sea during sunset (V12, V16); fine dining (V9); sitting in a dim lit room and honeymoon package (T14) provides the image of privacy and space (uncrowdedness) that suit couples (adult) tourists. And for the more sophisticated tourists (i.e. businessman, luxury), images of golf course (V3, T19), spas (T20),
shopping (T18), liveliness (T17), IT facilities (T5) are projected. On a different note, it is also important to take notice that tourists are provided with information that will facilitate them in terms of accessibility (T12, T14). The fly-drive packages promoted emphasise the convenience of left hand drive in Malaysia that is compatible to the UK system. Similarly, there are also multi-centre packages that show that accessibility and connectivity is not an issue when travelling to or in Malaysia. Though Malaysia’s natural resources are plenty, the destinations projected are namely Kuala Lumpur that gives the idea of modernisation & heritage; Borneo the image of wilderness, Penang projecting an image of richness/diversity and heritage; while Langkawi, Tioman, Redang and Pangkor Laut filling in the gap of providing something for tourists of all walks of life. Till now, the images projected have been more physical the psychological. The brochures also attempted to project the rustic/exotic feeling about Malaysia. Especially in the gastronomy (V9) and scenic section (V13, V16, V10, T9, T17, T1, T2). The images of village house on stilts, crystal clear sea water, sandy beaches, spices, variety of food, palm trees, sun sets, pristine forest and lively nightlife bring out the psychological components of image by creating an exotic/rustic aura about the destination.

**Taxonomy of Combined Elements to Extract the Underlying Meaning**

As the title of this section sums up, the purpose of it is first to build up taxonomy derived from the element and themes that are derived from the inventory. Once taxonomy is established, the next step is to probe the underlying structure of the meaning. That means going a step further from just understanding the denotative meaning and prod into its connotative meaning. This is where the myth, fantasy and dreams projected by the images in the brochures are discussed. But firstly, is the creation of taxonomy (Figure 9) of possible elements to understand the system of ‘rules’ by which they are combined.

![Figure 5 A Semiotic Taxonomy of Malaysian Destination Image](image)

The above taxonomy has three layers. The lowest layers divided into two sections; the visual elements (i.e. V1) and textual elements (i.e. T1) are the basic individualistic images projected. For instance, a textual phrase describing the ‘natural beauty’ or a visual; image illustrating ‘local people’. With the conceptual use of ‘syntagmatic-paradigmatic’ application,
the second layers of themes (modern, heritage, wilderness, diversity, everyone, exotic) from the outcome of the combination of elements are made possible. The interaction and relationship of these 6 emergent themes is what create the holistic meaning of tourism destination image. Hence, understanding the top most layer of the taxonomy – the tourism destination image of Malaysia. In short, the direct meaning or denotation of the destination image of Malaysia is that: Malaysia has a harmonious blend of modernisation, at the same time preserving the cultural and heritage component of the nation. It also gives the message that the modernisation has not been the cause for the nation to neglect her natural beauty by giving strong emphasis to wilderness. The Malaysian image also projects as a potpourri from both cultural and geographical diversity; from ethnic and cultural richness to the diversity of the natural resources. These strengths are converted into activities and tourism packages to everyone (people of all walks of life) in terms of facilities, amenities, activities and infrastructures. Last but not least, the psychological element of being rustic and exotic too is portrayed to create a tingling feeling amongst the potential tourists.

Until this point, the discussion of the data set has been rather straightforward or descriptive (denotative) in nature. The next attempt is to extract and interpret the underlying structure of the meaning of the images projected. Though the earlier part was highly denotative, there was an element of connotation towards the end, which is the psychological element of creating the aura of a destination to be unique, rustic and exotic. And this will be a good departure point to embark on the connotative meaning. At the saturation point of product offering and competition amongst one destination to the other, this will be a worthwhile point for promoters and marketers to dwell into. Though there may be ethical queries of manipulating the actual image to the image projected, it cannot be denied that a travel experience for most tourists is a dream or a fantasy come true. So, treading the connotative path with a right balance of creating the dream but at the same time not deviating from the actual truth of the destination, will be the challenge marketers of destination are facing and will face in the future.

Back to the connotative images of Malaysia as portrayed in the brochures, it is the type of mind game; both subtle and hidden messages that require probing. For instance, the images of spa resorts and golf courses are projected as luxury and elegance. This lifestyle is not possible for many people on a day-to-day living. This is a dream or a fantasy that a tourist will experience just from the brochures or if materialises on a short period of time during their vacation. As Thurot & Thurot (1983) explain from a Marxist framework, it is just not a commercial competition any longer, but it is the differences in social class that is seen here. It brings forth the fact that it is the aristocrats’ lifestyle that the lower classes experience on a short period during their holidays.

Uzzel (1984) whose work touched on the myth and fantasies highlighted that the lives lived by the tourist portrayed the image of good life, for instance an image of a masseuse massaging in a spa, and the waiter serving some exotic delicacies. All these are marketing tools a promoter can use to show that the tourist will be treated like a ‘king’. The notion of exotic as explained earlier is supported by the work of Cohen (1989) with regards to authenticity of villages. But Cohen (1989), brought forward the issue that the image portrayed may be false identity. This may also be true in the case of Malaysian image; For instance, the houses on the wooden stilts with a sunset backdrop portraying the exoticism of the destination. The issue here would be that, the service providers create these village looking villas. Hence, loosing the originality of an actual environment. But the question again is do tourist really want to go through mosquito bites, face a cobra in front of them, in short have a rough and tough time? This question really depends on the maturity of the tourist and the level of difficulty they are willing to face. This scenario is well explained by Cooper (1994), by saying that the tourist wants to feel the adventure, nature, challenge and exoticism
but with the certainty that there is comfort, convenience and safety in undertaking such activities. Therefore, in summary, there is no harm in creating dreams through the brochure image but with the increasing knowledge and maturity of tourists; there is an essential issue that must be addressed. That is a promoter should be truthful in delivering the message. Probably by stating the difficulty level, or even by saying that the experience can be felt either with luxury and comfort or in the true wilderness environment as desired by the tourist. The challenge here for the tourism industry is to have available the range of experience levels and the image projected that matches what is actual.

Knowledge interest

In view of the main aim of this paper to understand the meaning of destination image, this paper on semiotic analysis with its philosophical underpinnings has aided in uncovering the underlying structures and deeper meaning of image from the assessment of brochures. As Echtner (1999) puts it, the collective contribution of this semiotic analysis has resulted in exposing the structure of the tourism experience as communicated by the language of tourism marketing. And to be specific the exposition of Malaysian image portrayed from a British perspective.

Thus, it is not the aim of this paper on questioning of the statistical significance and numerical validity or reliability, but it is an attempt to understand the deeper meaning of destination image and explicating this understanding to achieve content validity. It is my hope that through this understanding of the content, better strategic decision making sense can be achieved.

Reference

