

Online Travel Agents (OTAs) and Malaysian's Repurchase Intention based on "The Three Musketeers" – Brand Image, Perceived Value, and Trust

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Abstract: The hospitality and tourism industry greatly benefits from the pivotal role online travel agencies (OTAs) play. It is well known that online travel agencies' products and services often offered people many conveniences before the pandemic outbreak. Therefore, this study is mainly concerned with Malaysians' intention to purchase tourism products and services through online travel agencies again. This study is mainly for online travel agencies to satisfy Malaysians better, eliminate shortcomings and provide them with the best services. This study uses a quantitative method, namely a questionnaire survey, to collect data. One hundred questionnaires were distributed to Malaysians above 18 years old through the social media platform. In addition, the study provides reference data for online travel agency owners, the tourism industry, and future researchers. According to the findings, there is a significant relationship between brand image, perceived value, trust, and the intention to repurchase among OTAs.

Keywords: Online travel agencies, Malaysian's repurchase intention, Brand image, Perceived value, trust

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Introduction

With the advancement of technology, many offline activities have entered the online or virtual world, including the transformation of traditional offline physical travel agencies into online travel agencies (OTAs) (Dwikesumasari & Ervianty, 2017). The development of OTAs refers to establishing a website and an online application that allows consumers to easily browse and purchase tourism products on the website or download the application. With the development of technology, the market has gradually discovered significant benefits of OTAs. Therefore, OTAs brands have increasingly appeared in the market in recent years. The marketing tool of OTAs is an online website that operates 24 hours a day and provides online services to consumers (Choi *et al.*, 2018). The target OTA market of OTAs has been covered worldwide.

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OTAs from other countries gradually established themselves in Malaysia. Research shows that in 2020, the most popular OTAs in Malaysia are shown in Figure 1, and Agoda-based OTAs accounted for 81 percent. According to a publication by Hirschmann (2021a), 73 percent of Malaysians used an OTA in 2020 (Figure 2). These statistics show that OTAs generate significant revenue for the hotel and tourism industries.

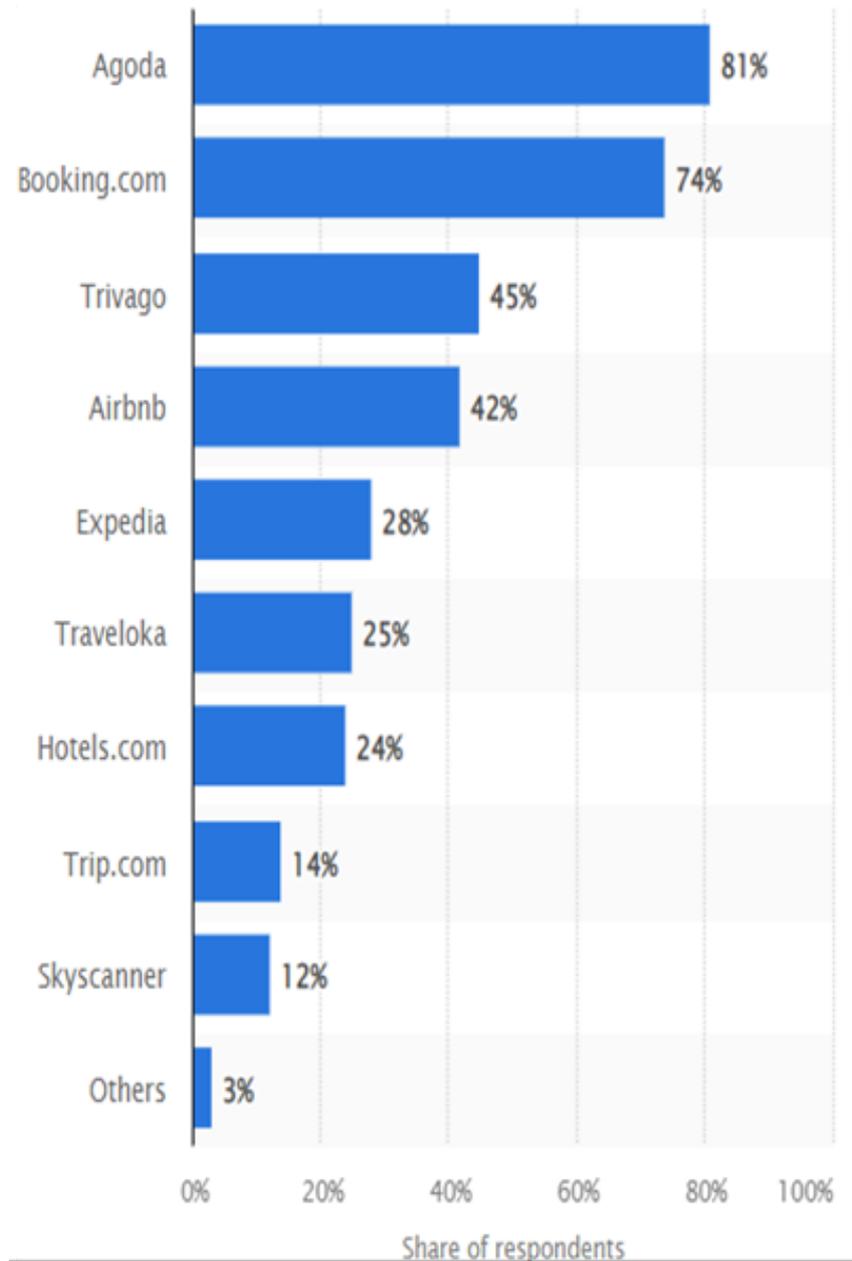
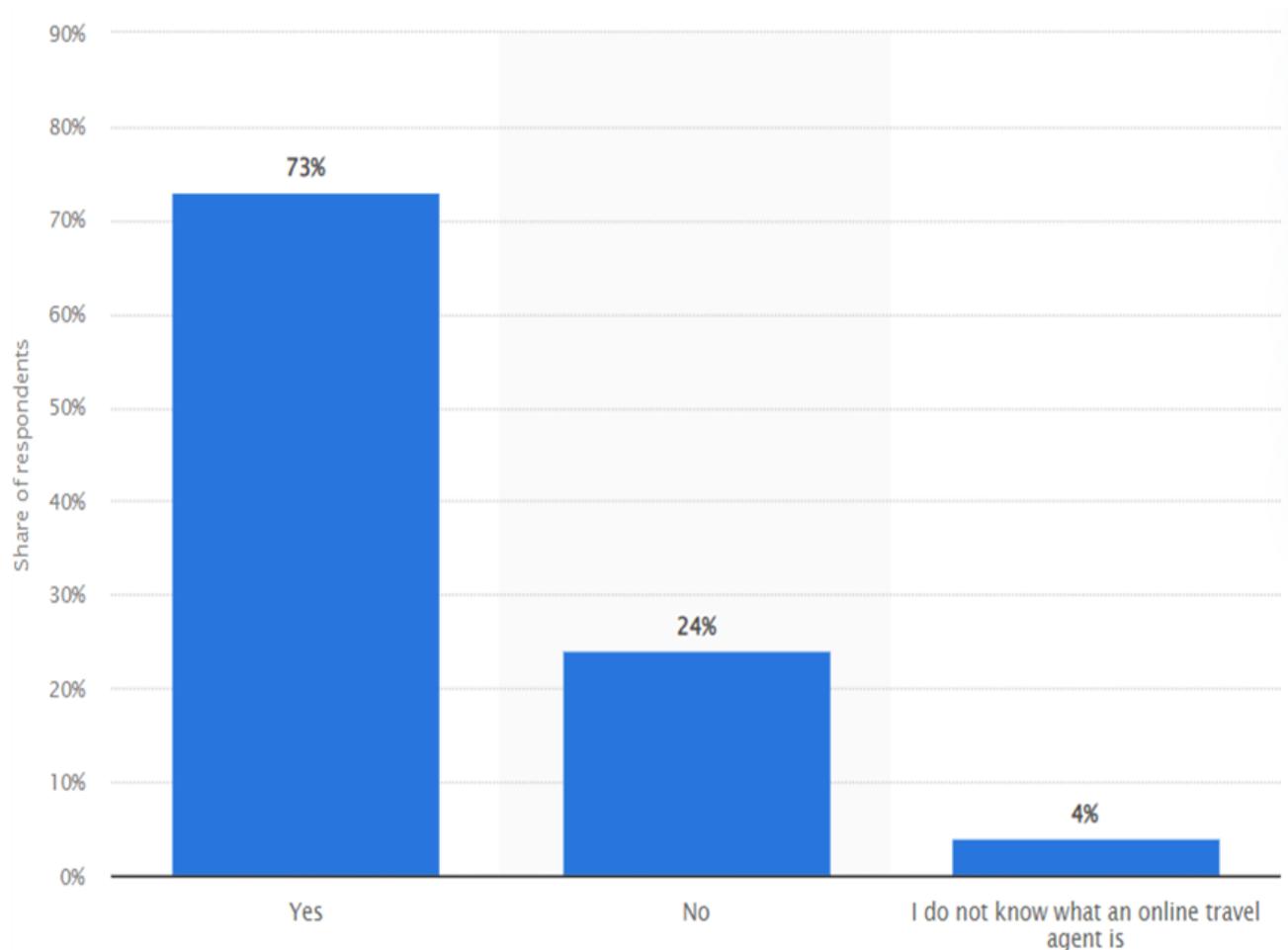


Figure 1: Most Popular Online Travel Agencies Among Consumers in Malaysia as of November 2020
Source: Hirschmann (2021a)



The travel industry of OTAs in Malaysia is stagnant due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The OTAs have charged commissions to hotel operators during the pandemic period. Therefore, the Malaysian hotel industry has expressed to the government that they want the government to regulate OTAs (Bedi, 2021). If they are not regulated, the hotel industry will not be able to operate for long. However, the government's discussions have indicated that regulating OTAs would be counterproductive for Malaysia. Since some OTAs are foreign companies, Uzaidi Udanis, a member of Tourism Malaysia, stated that Malaysia has no right to regulate them (Mohsen, 2021). He proposed to address this loophole and amend the outdated provisions of the 1992 Tourism Act.

The Malaysian tourism industry has gradually reopened, as the government has lifted travel restrictions despite the continued increase in COVID-19 cases. While a broad-spectrum prohibition policy was considered, the government required infected hotels to suspend operations for disinfection. This has impacted the operation of OTA's hotel lists, which were halted again. Besides these factors, OTAs also have three independent variables that affect consumer consumption in Malaysia: brand image, perceived value, and trust. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has substantially impacted the hotel and tourism industry, especially OTAs, as Malaysian borders remain closed, and leisure travel is prohibited. OTAs cannot sell tourist-related goods, causing their business to stand at a standstill. Prior to the pandemic, OTAs served as a platform for hotels and tourist attractions to generate additional revenue. The research objective is to identify factors influencing Malaysians' intention to purchase tourism products and services through online travel agencies.

Literature Review

Online Travel Agencies in Malaysia

There are various brands of OTAs in the market, including companies from Malaysia and overseas. As per STAAH (2017), Booking.com's OTA was ranked first among Malaysia's top 10 online channels in 2017, as illustrated in Figure 3. Booking.com is a foreign company based in Amsterdam. Although Booking.com is a foreign company, it is also preferred and used by Malaysians. Ctrip is ranked 6th in Figure 3 and is the largest OTA in Malaysia (PaylessMy, 2015). Ctrip offers 400,000 hotels and over 9,000 air routes covering 199 countries.



Figure 3. Top 10 Booking Sites in Malaysia in 2017
Source: STAAH (2017)

The emergence of OTAs has garnered significant attention in the tourism industry, with researchers studying various aspects of these platforms. Brand image, perceived value, and trust have been found to impact repurchase intention, as reported by Pham and Nguyen (2019). Moreover, trust was shown by Razak *et al.* (2014) to have a direct positive effect on repurchase intention. OTAs are vital to the hospitality and tourism industry, as they offer a global promotional and sales platform for hotels and tourist attractions. Thanks to platform marketing channels, consumers now prefer online consumption, and OTAs provide a comprehensive one-stop service that includes hotel selection, star ratings, reviews, pricing, and payment processing.

Repurchase Intention

Abrar *et al.* (2017) define repurchase intention as an individual's readiness to purchase the products or services of a particular company again, predicated on their previous experiences. The consumer's willingness to repurchase is the message they recall, making it a continuous behavior (Liu *et al.*, 2015). According to Razak *et al.* (2016), previous research has identified the connection between consumer satisfaction and trust as the

primary factor influencing repurchase intention. The brand image and perceived value of OTAs can contribute to consumer satisfaction.

OTAs have also made efforts to increase Malaysians' repurchase intentions, such as Agoda's new strategy. In 2019, Agoda launched a strategy for the AgodaVIP program, which targets the hospitality industry. The Agoda VIP program allows hotels participating in online sales to offer a discount of at least 15 percent to Agoda VIP customers (TTR Weekly, 2019). Such a discount enticed consumers to spend money to upgrade to a VIP membership constantly. Hotels that offer discounts receive special VIP badges issued by Agoda and displayed on the Agoda website or app. The badges make the hotel more noticeable to Agoda's exclusive VIP customers (TTR Weekly, 2019).

Brand Image

Brand image is a perception in the consumer's memory. Brand image is the symbol and quality indicator of the product and may be simple to understand, but it is abstract (Prabowo *et al.*, 2020). From the consumer's standpoint, brand image can be either positive or negative. The success of a brand can be inferred from consumers' continuous repurchases. For OTAs, brand image focused on the website and the company's image.

Humans are often visual creatures, as consumers have always been attracted to beautiful and attractive things (Nichols, 2018). The various brands of OTAs in the market are not all deeply embedded in consumers' memory. Consumers are often more willing to repurchase from brands they are familiar with. For example, consumers have purchased a product from the same brand before. Therefore, competition between OTAs in the market is very fierce. Coupled with brand image differentiation, each competitor is at a different level.

According to Arif's (2019) research, the key objective of a brand is to instill trust, confidence, strength, longevity, security, and exclusivity in the minds of consumers, thereby reducing their uncertainty while making repurchase decisions. Thus, research shows that the importance of brand image is synonymous with marketing tools. Arif's (2019) study indicates a positive relationship between Citilink's brand image and consumers' intention to repurchase.

Therefore, the brand image must be constantly renewed and improved. In this way, consumers' visual and emotional fatigue can be avoided, and the probability of repeat purchases can continuously increase.

Perceived Value

The value perceived by consumers is defined as a sacrifice. According to Zeithaml (1988), consumers' assessments of the value they receive from a product or service are primarily based on their perceptions of its worth. Value is a vast vocabulary that depends on the circumstances and understanding of each individual. Perceived value is divided into positive and negative, representing both a benefit and a detriment (Pham and Nguyen, 2019). The benefit of perceived value is the economy, society, and relationships, while the sacrifice is related to consumers. The sacrifice of consumers may consist of the price, time, OTA's effort, and OTA's risk (Lee & Chen-Yu, 2018).

The perceived value may motivate consumers to participate more actively in consumption. For example, OTAs' services and discounts can save consumers time and money. This way, consumers will be more willing to always pay for OTAs. According to Pham *et al.* (2018), the convenience of OTAs brings monetary and economic value to consumers. The benefit is that tourists can compare prices on different OTAs and choose websites with lower prices for travel products.

Perceived value encompasses much more than just economic value. Some examples of additional components of perceived value are convenience value, emotional value, social value, and freedom of choice. The convenience value is the complete information provided by OTAs, which saves consumers time and effort in searching for information. Wu *et al.* (2014) showed that consumers use online services more frequently, the higher the perceived value they receive from the website. From this research, perceived value has a direct positive influence on the repurchase.

Trust

Trust means believing someone or something is reliable (Lee & Min, 2021). From the consumer's perspective, trust is the belief that one person has confidence in another (Morrow, n.d.). Everyone has a different view of trust, but its influence on repurchase is undeniable (Razak *et al.*, 2014). In OTA, trust is commonly used in the transactional domain. In the transactional area, consumers must enter their personal information and card number (Wu & Yong, 2006). The transaction between consumers and OTA can only be conducted with a certain level of trust.

Mosavi and Ghaedi (2012) found that trust strongly influences consumers' positive or negative repurchase intention. In order to permanently attract consumers' repurchase intention, OTAs need to improve online conditions continuously. In this way, consumer trust is achieved, and consumer uncertainty is reduced. For example, OTAs can improve their website's quality of information, security, responsiveness, and interactivity. The higher the level of trust, the more likely consumers are to shop on the website again (Jia *et al.*, 2014).

Trust also affects the number of visits to OTAs and consumers' willingness to repurchase (Sullivan & Kim, 2018). Thus, trust enables consumers to build long-term buying relationships with OTAs. This can also succinctly show that trust has some incentive and directly affects consumers' repurchase intention.

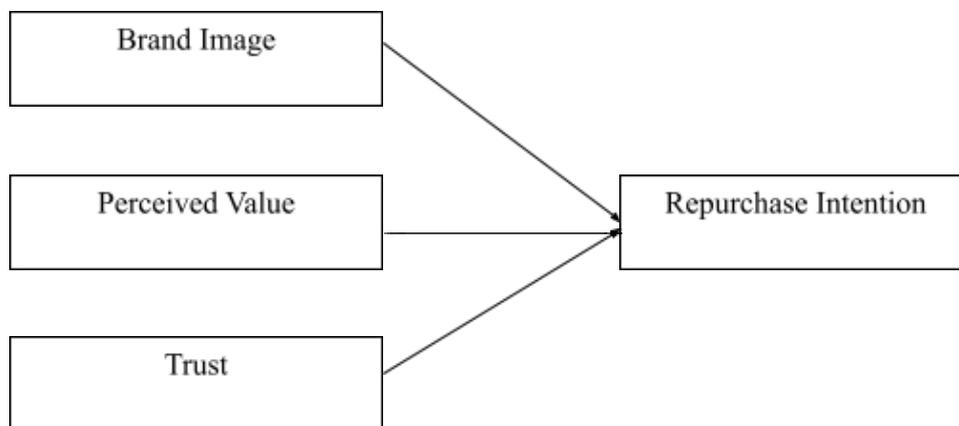


Figure 4. Research Framework

Source: Pham and Nguyen (2019)

Methodology

This study uses an explanatory research design and a quantitative method through a cross-sectional study and an online questionnaire survey to collect data from a sample of 100 adults aged 18 years and older in Malaysia. According to Burmeister and Aitken (2012), the sample size calculation for multiple regression is $N > 50 + 8p$, and this rule of thumb is simple and easy to use. N represents the sample size, and p represents the number of

predictors. The number 50 in the calculation can be changed. The initial number 50 is a general rule of thumb that requires at least 50 respondents for regression, and this number increases as the number of independent variables increases (VanVoorhis & Morgan, 2007).

Predictors (P) = Brand Image + Perceived Value + Trust

$N > 50 + 8 \times 3 = 74$ respondents

The sample size for this study was set at 100 because statisticians recognize this number and provide meaningful results (Bullen, n.d.). Convenient Sampling was used in this study because of the random selection of respondents (Lavrakas, 2008). The respondents were selected because they fit the scope of the researcher. Only Malaysians above 18 years old can complete the questionnaire in this study. Therefore, the sources of respondents can be from different areas, such as schools, workplaces, friends, and relatives. The method of data collection in this study was done by questionnaire survey. The questionnaire was created online to survey the respondents, and the platform for creating the questionnaire was Google Forms. Different online social platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and the Little Red Book, were used to send the questionnaires to the respondents. The questionnaire was distributed from January 14, 2022, to February 24, 2022. Before conducting a large-scale survey, the researchers conducted a pilot test to comprehensively assess the feasibility of the proposed primary study (Workplace Testing, 2018).

The pilot test for this study was conducted from January 7, 2022, to January 13, 2022. Respondent data were also collected online as part of the pilot test. The six components of the questionnaire used in this study are as follows: Section A: General Questions; Section B: Brand Image; Section C: Perceived Value; Section D: Trust; Section E: Repurchase Intention; and Section F: Demographic Profile. These questions were asked on a five-point Likert scale, with respondents able to choose a scale of 1 to 5, with '1' representing strongly disagree and '5' representing strongly agree. There are six sections: Section A through Section F. Section A contains general questions, and sections B through D are IVs. The other two sections, E and F, are DPs and demographics. The multiple regression method was used for data analysis.

Findings & Discussions

The summary of the demographic profile of the respondents in the actual questionnaire is shown in Table 1. However, the data on the general problems are presented in Table 2. The respondents in the study were predominantly female and accounted for 80 percent of the total number. Most respondents (75%) were between 21 and 30 years old. Of the three major ethnic groups in Malaysia, Chinese made up the most significant proportion at 77 percent, followed by Malays at 11 percent and Indians at 10 percent. Single respondents comprised the largest group at 86 percent, followed by professionals at 71 percent and students at 21 percent. There were no divorced or unemployed respondents in the survey. The range of respondents' monthly salaries varied, with 20 percent reporting no income, 12% earning less than RM2,000, 57 percent earning between RM2,001 and RM4,000, 6 percent between RM4,001 and RM6,000, 8 percent between RM6,001 and RM8,000, and 2 percent earning more than RM8,001.

In this questionnaire, 84 percent of respondents favored online travel agencies (OTAs), while 16 percent did not. In the second question, Agoda.com was the most popular OTA brand among respondents, chosen by 44 percent. Twenty-nine percent of respondents chose Booking.com, 8 percent chose Trivago, 15 percent chose Airbnb, 3 percent chose Traveloka, and 1 percent chose Trip.com. When asked about repurchase behavior, 38 percent of respondents said they sometimes repurchase tourism products and services through OTAs during the year, 35 percent rarely repurchase, and 17 percent always repurchase. However, 10 percent of respondents never purchased through OTAs.

Table 1: Summary of General Questions

General Questions		Frequency	Mode Class
1. Do you like to use OTAs to purchase tourism products and services?	Yes	84	Yes
	No	16	
2. What is the OTA brand you often use?	Agoda.com	44	Agoda.com
	Booking.com	29	Booking.com
	Trivago	8	
	Airbnb	15	
	Expedia	0	
	Traveloka	3	
	Hotels.com	0	
	Trip.com	1	
	Skyscanner	0	
	Other	0	
3. How often do you repurchase tourism products and services through OTAs per year?	Always	17	Sometimes
	Sometimes	38	
	Seldom	35	
	Never	10	

The model summary is used to determine the strength of the correlation between the independent variables (IVs) and the dependent variable (DV) (IBM, 2021). As shown in Table 3, the model was used to predict repurchase intention. The R-value represents the correlation between the predicted and observed repurchase intention. Kassambara (2018) explains that the R-value is always positive and ranges from zero to one. The R-value in the present model is 0.838, while the R² value is 0.702. This means that 70.2% of the change in repurchase intention is explained by brand image, perceived value, and trust. Since the R-value is greater than 0.7 and close to 1 (Frost, n.d.), the model can accurately predict Malaysians’ repurchase intention, indicating a powerful correlation between IVs and DV.

ANOVA was used to analyze whether the variance of the means significantly differed between the IVs and DV (Laerd Statistics, n.d.). The F-value is the ratio of the sample variances, and the F-value in ANOVA is 75.552. The significant value (Sig.) is 0.000. Scribbr (n.d.) explains that the Sig. in ANOVA, also known as the *p*-value, is used to determine if there is a significant relationship between the IVs and DV. A sig. of less than 0.05 indicates a significant relationship. In this case, the Sig. is less than 0.05, indicating a significant relationship between brand image, perceived value, and Trust and Malaysians’ repurchase intention for tourism products and services through online travel agencies (OTAs). Table 3 shows the coefficient used to measure whether the hypotheses are supported. For the IV “brand image,” the values are ($\beta = 0.396, t = 3.980, p = 0.000 < 0.05$). The *p*-value is less than 0.05, which means a relationship exists between brand image and Malaysians’ repurchase intention for tourism products and services through OTAs. Therefore, H₁ is supported.

H₁: There is a relationship between brand image and Malaysian’s repurchase intention of products and services from tourism through online travel agencies.

The second hypothesis analyzes the relationship between perceived value and Malaysian repurchase intention for tourism products and services through OTAs. The values for perceived value are ($\beta = 0.456, t = 4.516, p = 0.000 < 0.05$). The *p*-value below 0.05 indicates a relationship between perceived value and Malaysian repurchase intention. Therefore, H₂ is supported. The second hypothesis analyzes the relationship between perceived value and Malaysians’ repurchase intention for tourism products and services via OTAs. The values for perceived

value are ($\beta = 0.396, t = 3.980, p = 0.000 < 0.05$). The p -value is less than 0.05, indicating a relationship between perceived value and Malaysians' repurchase intention. Therefore, H_2 is supported.

H_2 : There is a relationship between perceived value and Malaysian's repurchase intention of products and services from tourism through online travel agencies.

Finally, the relationship between Trust and Malaysians' repurchase intention for tourism products and services through OTAs is analyzed. The values for trust are $\beta = 0.280, t = 3.873, p = 0.000 < 0.05$. The p -value remains 0.000, indicating a relationship between Trust and Malaysians' repurchase intention. Therefore, H_3 is supported.

H_3 : There is a relationship between Trust and Malaysian's repurchase intention to products and services from tourism through online travel agencies.

Table 2: Multiple Linear Regression Model for Brand Image, Perceived Value and Trust

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.838a	0.702	0.693	0.371

Model Summary						
	Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	31.328	3	10.443	75.552	0.000b
	Residual	13.269	96	0.138		
	Total	44.596	99	10.443		

a. Dependent Variable: Repurchase Intention

b. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Image, Perceived Value, Trust

Coefficients ^a						
	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
1	(Constant)	- 0.477	0.294		- 1.623	0.108
	Brand Image	0.396	0.099	0.339	3.980	0.000
	Perceived Value	0.456	0.101	0.385	4.516	0.000
	Trust	0.280	0.072	0.254	3.873	0.000

a. Dependent Variables: Repurchase Intention

The result of this research shows that brand image has a significant impact on Malaysians' repurchase intention. Malaysians attach great importance to brand image, which Thoo *et al.* (2018) confirmed. Malaysians recommend brands with a long history to their friends, colleagues, and family. Therefore, the OTA brand image has a significant impact on repurchase intention. It also shows that Malaysians prefer to repurchase tourism products and services from OTA companies with good reputations and images. Several OTA brands were listed in the survey, and most respondents chose Agoda.com as their first choice regarding OTA repurchase intention. From the results, Agoda.com has become the respondents' first choice due to its well-known brand image. Since its inception in 2005, 17 years have passed, and the brand image is deeply embedded in the memory of many people, which confirms this result (Yie, 2020).

According to Ruata *et al.* (2021), the brand image has gained popularity by maintaining the value and quality of its services. From the theory of other researchers, a good brand image has a better product quality in

the eyes of consumers and thus influences the likelihood of repurchase intention (Grewal *et al.*, 1998). This is due to the company's size or the brand image itself. The level of a company's brand image has a significant impact on purchase intention (Dontigney, n.d.). Therefore, many OTAs are not conducive to encouraging consumers to purchase again because a good and well-known OTA brand image often attracts consumer attention and increases the incentive for repeat purchase intention.

In this study, the result on perceived value showed a significant influence on repurchase intention. The evidence of Lee and Chen-Yu (2018) shows that Malaysians consider perceived value important in terms of price, time, effort of OTA, and risk of OTA. As Pham and Nguyen (2019) found, price in perceived value influences consumers' repurchase intention. Therefore, this study suggested that OTAs can set up a statistical analysis of price comparison or search engine optimization (SEO) on the website to increase consumers' repurchase rate.

Referring to other research and the findings of the author of this study (Ponte *et al.*, 2014), it is indicated that perceived value is the most important precondition for online repurchase intention of tourism products and services. From the research, OTAs can create a system that strives for the higher perceived value of their customers (Silva & Goncalves, 2016). It can be seen that perceived value has a strong relationship and influence on repurchase intention in the study. Therefore, OTA should pay more attention to the importance of perceived value and make some adjustments to maximize perceived value.

There is a significant relationship between trust and repurchase intention, supporting H3. Trust is critical for OTA, and whether consumers intend to repurchase depends on the security and privacy guaranteed on the site. Trust in OTA websites is based on the information on the website, the transaction, and consumer data security. As Morrow (n.d.) demonstrated, trust occurs when one person trusts another. Another study supported by Sullivan and Kim (2018) and Wu and Chang (2006) shows that consumers' willingness to purchase OTA again depends on the valuable experience they have with excellent service and high security during the transaction, as payments can only be made within a certain level of trust. The results of this study show that there is a significant relationship between trust and repurchase intention. Therefore, the majority of respondents agree with the statement that trust in the OTA website influenced their repurchase intention.

In a study by Rahayu and Saodin (2021), trust influences consumers' repurchase intention. This research shows that trust is related to the information and reliability of the OTA website. Once the OTA website increases its reputation value, consumers' repurchase intention will increase. Previous studies have shown that trust as an intermediary variable can influence consumers' repurchase intention, and the result was confirmed (Jeon *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, trust is part of an OTA's efforts to encourage consumers to repurchase a product.

This is consistent with the research conducted by Zhu *et al.* (2019), which found that the level of trust positively influences consumers' repurchase intention of online websites. The trust comes from the appearance and security of the website. Through the content of this study, it was found that the sources of repurchase intention influenced by respondents' trust are security features, privacy protection, transaction system, and payment system. The lower the risk guaranteed by the online website, the higher the consumer's trust value and the higher the repurchase intention. So trust is an important factor for OTA. This will increase the repurchase rate of consumers.

Conclusion

Due to the sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, many sectors and industries are affected, especially the hospitality and tourism industries. This study aims to help OTAs improve their business in the future. It will identify factors influencing Malaysians' intention to repurchase tourism products and services through OTAs. In this study, the focus is on whether there is a relationship between IVs and DV. According to the survey results,

the IVs influencing repurchase intention are brand image, perceived value, and trust. Through this research, the management of OTAs can understand the perceptions and decisions of OTAs among Malaysians. OTAs can make some changes during this period. Moreover, the study could help offline travel agencies change their business models. Even though it is affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the development of technology, online will always be the most effective marketing tool (Optimizely, n.d.).

The research results were obtained because OTA helps the hotel and tourism industry to be more progressive and enables offline travel agencies to change their operating models. This study aims to promote Malaysians' intention to purchase tourism products and services through OTAs, especially given the current situation of the pandemic COVID -19. As mentioned earlier, IVs significantly impact Malaysians' repurchase intention through OTAs. To better target OTAs, some suggestions have been made below. The recommendations will be based on the independent variables after all IVs are confirmed in the data.

Since brand image influences Malaysians' repurchase intention, OTA management can create a SWOT analysis to improve their company's image. OTAs use this SWOT analysis to analyze and understand their company's strengths and weaknesses and improve and reduce weaknesses (Mind Tools, n.d.). Finally, there are many OTAs in the market, and OTAs need to understand their business and take the right actions. Through this analysis, OTAs can gain insight into the organization and external factors such as operating models and competitors. An old Chinese proverb says, "Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles, you will never be in danger." This will strengthen the brand image of the company.

The perceived value of OTAs may rise, encouraging Malaysians to make additional purchases. The perceived value of OTAs can be achieved by formulating marketing efforts that capture the attention and emotions of customers. For example, develop a virtual carnival specifically related to tourism. Within this carnival, you can offer some activities, such as sweepstakes for hotel or airline tickets, coupons, and rewards for the highest consumer numbers. Finally, the most important and fundamental recommendations for building Trust in OTAs were to ensure that the information on the website is secured regarding money transactions, customer information and travel data. Consumer trust, which influences repurchase intent, often comes from the security displayed on the website (Hall, 2015).

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