

## FACTORS INFLUENCING PURCHASE INTENTION AMONG MALAYSIANS IN SELECTING AIRBNB ACCOMMODATION

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this research is to examine the cause and effect relationship between price, electronic word-of-mouth, brand image, unique and local authenticity and purchase intention among Malaysians in selecting Airbnb accommodation. Questionnaire was developed and distributed to 205 Malaysians on perception and experience on Airbnb accommodation. Multiple regression analyses were used to analyse the relationship among variables of the conceptualised model. The findings confirmed the significant impact of price, electronic word-of-mouth and brand image except unique and local authenticity. The limitations and suggestions for future research development are also being discussed.*

**Keywords:** *Airbnb, accommodation, purchase intention and multiple regressions.*

### INTRODUCTION

Airbnb is a peer-to-peer online trusted marketplace for people to list, search and book short-term lodging and unique accommodation in residential properties around the world. Today, the platform hosts more than six million listings worldwide and it covers over 81,000 cities and more than 191 countries (Airbnb, 2019). According to Guttentag (2016), Airbnb allows people to rent out their places as accommodation via online for travellers and backpackers to book. According to Ting (2017), a report from Morgan Stanley Research stated that in 2015, only 12% of 4000 travellers booked accommodation via Airbnb in the last 12 months whereas it had increased to 19% in 2016. This shows Airbnb has become a bigger threat to hotels in the accommodation sector. Moreover, Airbnb is said to be forecasting EBITDA of \$450 million on \$2.5 billion in revenue for 2017 and its revenue is projected to be as much as \$8.5 billion by 2020, as mentioned by Gallagher (2017).

According to Izyanti, Salamiah and Mohd Salehuddin (2017), although sharing economy online platform like Airbnb started relatively late in Malaysia, Airbnb's growth has increased significantly in recent years as there were extensively marketing campaigns by Airbnb itself and knowledge of the brand name from other regions. Malaysia government began to promote Airbnb in Visit Malaysia 2014, where the government encouraged tourists to purchase accommodation from Airbnb to boost the tourism industry and local estate economy (Tourism Malaysia, 2016). As stated by Shah *et al.* (2012), purchase intention is a kind of decision-making that studies the reasons to buy a particular product or services by

the consumer. In other words, it means to plan to buy a product or attain a service. Studying the purchase intention is important because it helps marketers to understand consumer's behaviours (Ahasanul, 2015). As mentioned by Mirabi, Akbariyeh and Tahmasebifard (2015), the purchase intention of a customer involves a complex process as it is related to customer behaviour, perceptions and their attitudes.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Price**

Price is one of the main concerns in making the decision to purchase as an evaluating value. Pappas (2017) pointed out that consumers wanted to garner the best possible "value for money", hence price and overall expenditure factors became important in selecting accommodation, and this caused travellers to shift from traditional hotels to sharing economy accommodations. According to Mao and Lyu (2017), travellers enjoy value acquired from good service quality and relatively inexpensive prices. In a study conducted by Guttentag (2016), it discovered that most of the people agree that the biggest motivation to use Airbnb is its relatively low cost. Airbnb used the concept of 'low cost' to attract customers in many media stories on the company (Ennion, 2013). According to Nicolau (2012), a study showed that price sensitivity plays an important role in influencing tourists to choose accommodation.

However, Schmalbruch (2016) suggested that Airbnb might not always be the cheapest accommodation options as sometimes it depends on location. Airbnb in cities like Orlando, Chicago and New Orleans have higher rates (Flckenscher, 2016). In Malaysia, international travellers who book Airbnb accommodation on Airbnb will be paying RM10 tourism tax per night, said by Tourism and Culture Minister Mohamed Nazri to Dewan Rakyat (FMT Reporters 2017). If the price of Airbnb is more expensive than a traditional hotel, travellers would most likely switch back to the traditional hotel.

*H<sub>1</sub>: Price has an influence on purchase intention towards Malaysians in selecting Airbnb accommodation.*

### **Electronic Word-of-Mouth**

Electronic word-of-mouth or eWOM, is defined as the information and evaluation of the product by customers based on their own personal experience (Wei and Lu 2013). Melian-Gonzalez *et al.* (2013) suggested that eWOM has a significant impact on accommodation products in the tourism industry. Park and Lee (2009) stated that travellers would refer to eWOM of Airbnb from past visitors as it will crucially affect travellers' purchase intention. Studies conducted by Hung and Li (2007) and Schau *et al.* (2009) advised that one of the most useful ways to decrease consumer's perceived risk is through eWOM and seeks advice or reviews from the internet. Wu (2014) also proofed the relationship between eWOM and perceived risk in terms of hospitality and said that, when customers book accommodation via the internet, they will use eWOM to reduce the potential risk of the transaction.

When the volume of eWOM about a product or service is high on the internet, it means that more likely a customer will hear about it as the volume of eWOM boosts brand

awareness (Cheung and Thadani, 2012). Mohamed *et al.* (2015) stated that popular opinions posted by other reviewers will have impacts on customers, and these reviews would influence the consumers' positive changes in brand choice, as well as purchase intention and overall evaluation of brand. Besides, eWOM is a trustworthy information source for travellers to refer to in order to form a better picture of accommodation before they book online (Repup 2016). Finley (2013) and Lehr (2015) mentioned that the review system in Airbnb serves as the foundation of trust in transactions.

*H<sub>2</sub>: Electronic word-of-mouth has an influence on purchase intention towards Malaysians in selecting Airbnb accommodation.*

## **Brand Image**

According to Dhillon (2013), an image is a significant element of accommodation industry and brand acts as the most influential element in services because of its uniqueness like perishability, inseparability, tangibility and heterogeneity. In other words, brand image is the thought in consumers' mind when customers are exposed to a brand, or customers spontaneously imagine the characteristics of a brand when they evaluate a brand name (Johanudin *et al.*, 2015). According to Tsou, Liu and Hsu (2015), the better the brand reputation is, the greater the customers perceive the brand image. Also, a good brand reputation boosts the confidence of customers in the brand and their purchase decision. Nevertheless, prior research suggested that brand reputation helps customers to assess risk before they purchase, thus easing the intention to purchase (Zhu, Sun and Leung, 2014).

In addition, Ahmadinejad (2017) suggested that the familiarity to a brand results from a strong brand image, thus influencing customer's purchase decision towards the brand. Academic research has shown that brand familiarity plays an important role to brand in the industry. Customers have started to accept the Airbnb brand bit by bit and accept its business model for alternatives accommodation choices (Mao and Lyu, 2017). In an empirical study conducted by Mohammad Reza and Samiei (2012), it showed that eWOM also influences brand image and consequently affects purchase intention. One of the examples of eWOM is customer rating. According to Ogut and Tas (2012), if the customer rating is high on accommodation websites, it will lead to a higher online booking. Customer rating does not only provide info about the accommodations' service and facilities quality, but it also provides info about accommodations' physical surroundings (Cezar and Ogut, 2016).

*H<sub>3</sub>: Brand image has an influence on purchase intention towards Malaysians in selecting Airbnb accommodation.*

## **Unique and Local Authenticity**

Unique refers to new, different and versatile as against standard tourist products, which may be built upon authentic local culture and suppliers' individual taste (Guttentag, 2015). Nguyen (2016) mentioned that customer's unique experience expectation is dynamic, and it may have affected by many different factors. Therefore, unique experience represents travellers' own feeling derived from partaking in non-standardised and personally tailored tourist products and services (Mao and Lyu, 2017). More and more customers want to have

meaningful, personal, memorable and unique experiences when they travel so that they can feel fully engaged (Forno and Garibaldi, 2015). It is very important for customers to examine their experience expectation before they travel as it forms the right attitudes and consequent behavioural intentions as well as purchase intention (Sheng and Chen, 2012).

On the other hand, Airbnb allows travellers to make friends in real life. The participation of the sharing economy is based on social motivations, caused by interaction with locals that occurs during the accommodation sharing (Rimer, 2017). According to Garrett-Price (2014), Airbnb consumers relate Airbnb as 'real people with real home'. However, Poon and Huang (2017) stated that unique attributes of peer-to-peer accommodation may not be suitable for everyone because there are different factors affecting travellers' choices when purchasing accommodation. As Airbnb is growing too fast and has expanded its offering to include hotels and luxury properties, it is not just a home anymore, people who look for homely feel will not purchase from Airbnb (Solon, 2018).

*H<sub>4</sub>: Unique and local authenticity has an influence on purchase intention towards Malaysians in selecting Airbnb accommodation.*

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Sample and Data Collection**

There are prior studies conducted to examine factors influencing purchase intention towards accommodation selections. However, there are not many researches done specifically on Malaysians in selecting Airbnb accommodation. For instance in this research, the target population is Malaysians. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2013), choosing the right number of samples is important as it can avoid waste of resources especially when the sampling size is large. The number of sample must be more than 30 and less than 500 as it is suitable for most study. Samples can be divided into a few subcategories and each category must have at least 30 samples. Henceforth, the questionnaires were distributed over the states in Malaysia to those aged 18 years old and above with purchasing power. Besides, the questionnaires collected data from those respondents who have experience or wish to experience Airbnb only.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

The data was processed using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS). SPSS is a data management and analysis program to produce statistical data analysis such as descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). SPSS is user-friendly and flexible. Researcher can easily access SPSS with all skill levels and be able to help the research study to find new opportunities, improve efficiency and minimise risks (IBM, 2018).

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2013), reliability of measure specifies the level to which it has no error and without bias. Along with Tavakol and Dennick (2011), it is acceptable to have a value of more than 0.7, nevertheless, some researchers may recommend higher value of 0.9 to 0.95. This research also adopted normality test. It was to identify whether the data fits a bell curve shape or to ensure the samples are normally distributed. As

said by Griffin and Steinbrecher (2013), the acceptable range for skewness is between -3 and +3, whereas the acceptable range for kurtosis is -10 and +10. Regression analysis was also used to analyse the effects of two or more independent variables on a single, interval-scaled dependent variable (Zikmund et al., 2010).

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

### Reliability Analysis

According to researchers Sekaran and Bougie (2013) along with Tavakol and Dennick (2011), the result in Table 1 is based on the rule of thumb of Cronbach's Alpha shows that the test coefficients range from acceptable to good.

**Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Number of Questions</b>	<b>Cronbach Alpha</b>
Purchase Intention	4	0.705
Price	4	0.772
eWOM	4	0.834
Brand Image	4	0.814
Unique and Local Authenticity	4	0.780

### Normality Analysis

Normality analysis was used to calculate the probability of normal data distributions. The skewness and kurtosis test will show whether the variables used are normally distributed and whether we can accept or reject the null hypothesis. The results as in Table 2 show that the lowest and highest value for skewness are -0.939 and -0.423 respectively, whereas the lowest and the highest value for kurtosis are +0.953 and +2.780 respectively. All the values fall into the acceptable range, hence the data gathered is considered normally distributed.

**Table 2: Skewness and Kurtosis**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Skewness</b>	<b>Kurtosis</b>
Purchase Intention	-.791	2.780
Price	-.614	1.460
eWOM	-.784	1.938
Brand Image	-.939	2.365
Unique and Local Authenticity	-.423	-.953

### Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was a commonly used technique to verify between dependent variable and independent variable which are related to hypothesis for correlation shown in percentage or value. Simple regressions analysis was used to evaluate the research throughout the test in-value showing how strong the relationship and a significant value of less than 0.05 shows that there is a positive relationship between variables and the alternate

hypothesis is accepted. Table 3 shows the summarised results of multiple regression analysis for the independent variables, price ( $p = 0.000$ ), eWOM ( $p = 0.041$ ) and brand image ( $p = 0.000$ ) were accepted however only unique and local authenticity ( $p = 0.823$ ) was rejected.

**Table 3: Regression Analysis**

Variables	Unstandardize d Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	T	Significant
Price	.287	.301	4.174	.000
eWOM	.127	.137	2.062	.041
Brand Image	.291	.317	4.479	.000
Unique and Local Authenticity	.031	.015	.224	.823

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

H<sub>1</sub> indicates price has an influence on purchase intention towards Malaysians in selecting Airbnb accommodation. Based on the results from the regression test, it shows that there is a significant relationship between price and purchase intention, which expressed that H<sub>1</sub> is supported ( $p = 0.000$ ,  $\beta = 0.301$ ). Kim, Xu and Gupta (2012) added that products or services with a reasonable price would lead to higher purchase intention among customers. Research conducted by Hamari, Sjosklint and Ukkonen (2015) showed that the primary motivation to use sharing economy services was affordability and Airbnb accommodation is more affordable than traditional hotels, despite that there may be other affordable options like hostels. According to the supporting research done by past researchers, the price is significantly influencing purchase intention towards Malaysians in selecting Airbnb accommodation, thus H<sub>1</sub> is accepted.

H<sub>2</sub> indicates electronic word-of-mouth has an influence on purchase intention towards Malaysians in selecting Airbnb accommodation. Based on the results from the regression test, it shows that there is a significant relationship between eWOM and purchase intention, which expressed that H<sub>2</sub> is supported ( $p = 0.041$ ,  $\beta = 0.137$ ). Some of the past studies also support this hypothesis. Melian-Gonzalez *et al.* (2013) mentioned that eWOM has a significant impact on accommodation products in the tourism industry. Studies conducted by Schau *et al.* (2009) argued that one of the most useful ways to decrease consumer's perceived risk is through eWOM and seeks advice or reviews from the internet. Mohamed *et al* (2015) stated that popular opinions posted by other reviewers will have an impact on customers, and these reviews would influence the consumers' positive changes in brand choice, as well as purchase intention and overall evaluation of brand. Thus, eWOM is significantly influencing purchase intention towards Malaysians in selecting Airbnb accommodation, thus H<sub>2</sub> is accepted.

H<sub>3</sub> indicates brand image has an influence on purchase intention towards Malaysians in selecting Airbnb accommodation. Based on the results from regression test, it shows that there is a significant relationship between brand image and purchase intention, which expressed that H<sub>3</sub> is supported ( $p = 0.000$ ,  $\beta = 0.317$ ). This is consistent with the study done by Kim, Xu and Gupta (2012), in which a trust in the brand would gradually increase the purchase intention towards products or services. According to Tsou, Liu and Hsu (2015),

the better the brand reputation is, the greater the customers perceive the brand image. This boosts the confidence of customers in the brand and their purchase decision. Study conducted by Mauri and Minazzi (2013) stated that customer often refers to customer rating before they choose an accommodation to make sure that the accommodation is a good choice. According to the past research, brand image is significantly influencing purchase intention towards Malaysians in selecting Airbnb accommodation, thus  $H_3$  is accepted.

$H_4$  indicates unique and local authenticity has an influence on purchase intention towards Malaysians in selecting Airbnb accommodation. From the results of the regression test, there is no significant relationship between unique and local authenticity and purchase intention, which expressed that  $H_4$  is not supported ( $p = 0.823$ ,  $\beta = 0.015$ ). This result is inconsistent with the research done by Gluttentag (2015), which stated that the main driver for travellers to book Airbnb accommodation is seeking a unique experience. According to Poon and Huang (2017), unique attributes of peer-to-peer accommodation may not suitable for everyone, because there are different factors affecting travellers' choices when purchasing accommodation. Guttentag (2016) argued that some travellers use Airbnb not for its homely feeling or unique aspect, but for the sense of novelty. While Airbnb's unique selling point is its homely feeling, Airbnb was also found to be less preferred in terms of family aspect (Poon and Huang, 2017). Thus, unique and local authenticity is insignificantly influencing purchase intention towards Malaysians in selecting Airbnb accommodation, thus RH4 is rejected.

On a practical level, this research is able to gain a better understanding on why Malaysians choose Airbnb accommodation should prove valuable for a variety of stakeholders. Airbnb may utilise this study to provide useful marketing insights to compete with other direct competitors like HomeAway and Flipkey or the indirect competitor like hotels. Once Airbnb has understood the factors that lead to purchase intention among Malaysians, it can make strategized decision on how best it is able to market its products and establish a strong market position in Malaysia. Besides, this study also helped Airbnb hosts to understand the reasons why Malaysians purchase accommodation from Airbnb. As with Airbnb, hosts have full control of their availability, prices, house rules and how they interact with guests (Airbnb, n.d.). By reading this study, existing Airbnb hosts would know how to improve their listings to match customers' preferences. This would help them to attract new customers and retain existing customers. For those people who are interested in becoming an Airbnb host, this study can be used as a guideline for them to host on Airbnb.

Moreover, this study also provides significant information to hotel industry, especially for the traditional hospitality industry managers. Hotel managers are able to discover what causes Malaysians to switch their choice of accommodation from traditional hotels to sharing economy platform like Airbnb. It also allows managers to assess more accurately the threats that Airbnb possess and impacts from the rising of Airbnb in Malaysia, and consecutively the significance of responding to Airbnb's emergence. In addition, this study will contribute to the government body such as the Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia. The government has started to realise the emergence of sharing economy platform can bring opportunities to Malaysia's tourism industry (Izyanti, Salamiah and Mohd Salehuddin, 2017). The government could encourage travellers to book from Airbnb and promote travel destinations such as Penang, Ipoh and Malacca. This study will also help the government to make a proper decision regarding potential policy changes to regulate Airbnb (Guttentag, 2016).

On the other hand, this study provided significance in terms of theoretical level. In Malaysia, there was no study emphasises on purchase intention towards selecting Airbnb accommodation among Malaysians. Future researchers can use this research study as a reference to extend accommodation selection. In this study, there are four proposed factors which are price, electronic word-of-mouth, brand image and unique and local authenticity. The future researchers can explore other latest relevant factors from time to time. Furthermore, gaining the understanding on factors influencing purchase intention towards selecting Airbnb accommodation also provides the contribution to the education sector. Education sector such as universities can include the information of sharing economy concept into the syllabus. University lecturers can also teach about sharing economy in the lecture. For instance, lecturers can educate students on the new trends in accommodation and tourism industry as well as Airbnb's characteristics as a disruptive innovation.

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