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THE IMPORTANCE AND PERFORMANCE OF A DESTINATION'S ATTRIBUTES ON SENIOR TOURISTS' SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to study the senior travellers' perception on the importance and performance of Penang's tourism attributes. To do so, the effect of the importance and performance of such attributes on senior tourists' overall satisfaction was also investigated. The perception was assessed by applying importance-performance analysis, whereas its effects were evaluated using partial least squares - structural equation modelling. A total of 12 attributes were chosen in order to evaluate the travellers' satisfaction level towards Penang as a tourist destination. The analysis shows that the senior travellers rated 'accessibility to the destination', and 'local transport services' as the most important attributes, requiring further concentration and improvement. These features ranked as important but achieving a satisfactory level of performance was also discovered. The result of the partial least squares analysis confirmed the effects of both importance and performance of the selected attributes on senior tourists' overall satisfaction.

Keywords: Destination attributes, Senior traveller, Satisfaction, Importance-performance analysis, Partial least squares - structural equation modelling, Penang, Malaysia.

Contribution/ Originality

This study is one of very few studies, which investigated the travel characteristics of senior travellers in Malaysian urban destinations. This study is a primary research conducted in Penang that examined the perceptions of senior travellers on the importance and performance of Penang's attributes and evaluated the effects of these attributes on their overall travel satisfaction.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Tourist satisfaction is one of the crucial factors contributing to the success of a destination. It plays a vital role in marketing strategies, tourist spending patterns, revisit intention and the overall image of the destination (Yoon and Uysal, 2005). High concentration on the issue of satisfaction derives from a broadly accepted notion that the basic managerial benchmark for success should be set up in terms of level of satisfaction. On this account, it is logical to assume a causal connection between the performance of tourism attributes and the level of tourist satisfaction (Baker and Crompton, 2000). The interrelation between performance quality and satisfaction spurs a dynamic debate. Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) argue that the lack of agreement on conceptualizing it creates confusion to the point where these two are frequently used interchangeably. As an example, Manning (1986), after reviewing the literature, concluded that the principal measure of quality in outdoor recreation has long been defined by visitor satisfaction. Baker and Crompton (2000) accredited (Crompton and Love, 1995) discussion explaining that, "performance quality is conceptualized as a measure of a provider's output, whereas the level of satisfaction is concerned with measuring a tourist's outcome". Costa *et al.* (2004) noted that delivering a high quality service and performance is a strategy to meet customer satisfaction. However, the perception of the quality and performance of services can affect the level of satisfaction as an indirect attribute (Otto and Ritchie, 1995; Ritchie and Crouch, 2010). Furthermore, it seems that there is an indirect relationship between the importance of attributes and their performance (Ryan and Huyton, 2002; Griffin and Edwards, 2013). The importance of an attribute or feature of the destination's tourism market is the result of the attribute's performance (Matzler *et al.*, 2004) and the performance may, in turn, affect the overall level of satisfaction. The success of a destination critically depends on the overall satisfaction of tourists. Despite this, research on differences in markets with regards to satisfaction is limited (Eusébio and Vieira, 2013).

One important niche market for any destination is the senior travellers segment due to its potential for growth and share of the market. Early retirement scheme have increased seniors' free time for leisure as the nature of retirement is garnished by flexibility of time, excess fund, and active lifestyles. As a result, the senior bracket is an attractive market for the tourism industry worldwide (Fleischer and Pizam, 2002). The golden aged travellers have been regarded as an important segment for developed economies like Japan and Korea. Considering that, tourism researchers have long been aware of senior travellers' growing importance to the travel and tourism industry (Reece, 2004). However, this segment is still regarded as new and there is not much literature discusses their issues, hence need more concentration (Alén *et al.*, 2012). According to the World Tourism Organisation (2001), some of the 2020 future market trends see an increase in the number of elderly or senior tourists changing from active vacations to experience-based holidays and an ever increasingly complex segmentation of the demand to comply with the different objectives or purposes of traditional travel. Since senior travellers account for a considerable share of travellers, therefore, identifying key factors that contribute to senior travellers' satisfaction can provide invaluable insights for tourism policy makers and service providers. On this account, using Penang, Malaysia as the case study, this paper aims to examine the importance and performance of Penang's destination attributes from the international senior

traveller's perspective using importance-performance analysis. Furthermore, this paper will analyse the direct effect of the importance of selected attributes on their performance and its indirect effect on satisfaction, structure equation modelling (SEM) was used. SEM is a dominant multivariate technique (Hershberger, 2003) which simultaneously investigates the components' indirect relationship. In the following sections, a brief review of relevant literature studying senior travellers is first presented. Then, the theoretical foundation and understanding of this study is explained resulting in developing research questions and proposing a research background. The third part of this paper focuses on the methodology used in the study followed by the results and the discussion. Finally, a conclusion is presented in the final section which looks at new avenues for further research.

2. THE SENIOR TRAVELLER

The definition of a 'senior' was diverse in previous studies with those of 50 years of age and above (Lehto *et al.*, 2002; Sellick, 2004), 55 years of age and above (Hsu *et al.*, 2007a; Sangpikul, 2008; Boksberger and Laesser, 2009; Musa and Sim, 2010), 60 years and above (Capella and Greco, 1987; Souce *et al.*, 1989), or 65 years and above (Zimmer *et al.*, 1995). Research pinpointing tourists of older ages covers different areas of interests such as on their characteristics and behaviour (Hossain *et al.*, 2007), the connection between various socio demographics and the senior's tourism market (Peterson, 2007), the psychological aspects and influential factors in their decision making (Shoemaker, 2000; Hossain *et al.*, 2007) and many others. Based on these studies, it can be concluded that there is growing importance of the segment of tourists over 55 years of age, increasing demand for quality and sophistication, additional segmented markets, a deficiency of time and plethora of money, emergent attentions towards environmental and sustainability issues, and more individually managed trips with longer itineraries, as well as participatory and active holidays.

While some reported that senior tourists are less likely to travel, and when they do travel they often seek both security and personalized service. Alén *et al.* (2012) pointed out that older consumers or senior tourists spend more of their income on travel and less on other things. They also defined the age of senior travellers as the age at which the consumer begins to sense different needs and forecast and plan for aging. In terms of opportunities in the market, the senior tourist market is shifting away from peak seasonality as most of these travellers do not perform paid work and they receive social benefits which allow them to travel throughout the year. Furthermore, as senior travellers have greater purchasing power and their group is predicted to become a major force in the 21st century as population's age, this marks them as an important potential market for the industry.

3. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Earlier approaches towards conceptualizing satisfactions were established based on post-consumption evaluations (Kozak, 2001). However, researchers such as Bosque and Martín (2008) define satisfaction as a cognitive-affective position consequent from a tourist's experience in a destination. Baker and Crompton (2000) noted that "satisfaction is purely experiential. It is a

psychological state that can only be derived from interaction with the destination". Recent research has mostly focused on attribute-level conceptualization of satisfaction. In this approach, satisfaction is the function of attribute-level evaluation (Eusébio and Vieira, 2013). Tse and Wilton (1988) introduced the model of perceived performance which evaluates tourists' satisfaction towards a travel destination regardless of their prior perception. Based on this model, tourists' satisfaction is an assessment of their actual experience (Yoon and Uysal, 2005). Lück (2011) empirically evaluated satisfaction based on the function of two components: the importance of products or services and their performance. Since satisfaction involves meeting the expectation of customers, perception of the quality and performance of service attributes can therefore affect the level of satisfaction (Otto and Ritchie, 1995). Furthermore, an indirect relationship between the importance of attributes and their performance was proposed by Ryan and Huyton (2002), and Griffin and Edwards (2013). Though an attribute's importance is the result of its performance (Matzler *et al.*, 2004), at the same time consumers may perceive better performance for those features which they feel are more important. Thus, it is expected that satisfaction can be affected directly by a product or service's performance and indirectly by its importance. Hence, the three hypotheses of this research are [1] the level of importance has a direct effect on an attribute's performance, [2] senior travellers' overall satisfaction is positively affected by an attribute's performance; and [3] An attribute's importance influences senior tourists' overall satisfaction as a result of its performance.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. The Study Site

Penang Island is one of Malaysia's leading tourist destinations, located in north-western of Peninsular Malaysia that lies at the coordinates of 5°24′00″N and 100°14′20″E longitude (Figure 1). With a total land area of 293 km2, the island is currently connected to the mainland by two bridges. It is also the most populated island in the country with an estimated population of 738,500 in 2012 and the islanders are predominantly Chinese (41.5%), followed by Malay (40.9%), Indian (9.9%) and others (7.3%).

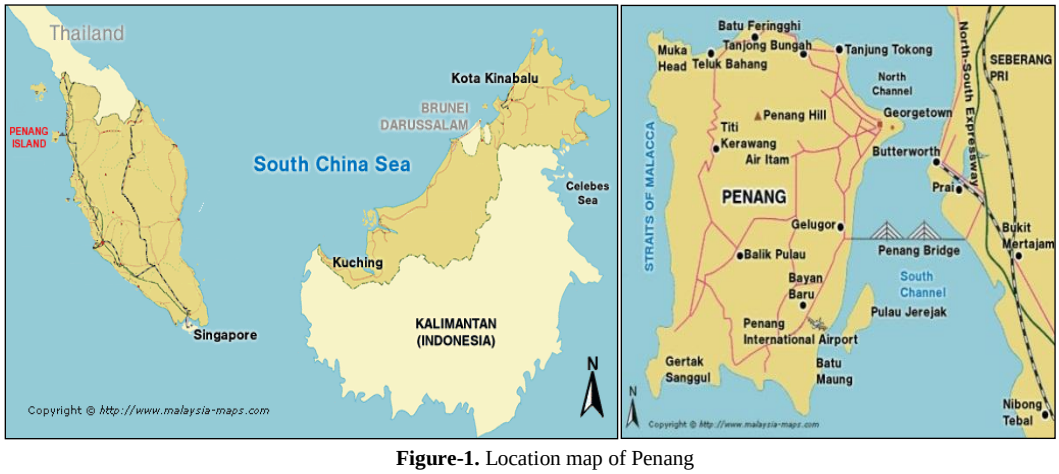

Figure-1. Location map of Penang

Source: http://www.malaysia-map.com

Tourism in Penang has started as early as 1834, when the initial reference of tourist in the island was published in a travelogue (Begbie as cited in Din (1986)). At the same time, a few hotels (e.g. Hotel de L'Europe, E & O, Runnymede and the Crag Hotel on Penang Hill) were established as the response to foreign expatriates demands (Snodgrass, 1980). Between 1940s and 1990s, Penang was intensively promoted as the 3S (sun, sea and sand) holiday destination, where Ferringhi beaches and tropical weather were the key selling points. The island was given the title of 'Pearl of the Orient' by the Western tourists in the 1960s and 1980s. In early 2000s, Penang began to promote its cultural heritage attributes as an alternative tourism product. In 2008, George Town, the capital city of Penang was inscribed as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) World Heritage Site, which further boost the island's profile on the world tourism map. Since then, the island welcomes a steady flow of tourists and in 2013 it attracted about 6 million visitors, both international and domestic.

4.2. Sample Description and Data Collection

The study sample was international tourists, aged 50 and above, who have stayed at least one night in Penang during the third and fourth quarter of the year 2012. Transient tourists and day-trippers were excluded from the study. The determination of the respondent's age group was in line with previous studies by Lehto *et al.* (2002) and Sellick (2004). The survey was conducted face-to-face using self-administrated questionnaires. The respondents were approached at selected tourist spots throughout the island as well as at main to the island namely the airport, bus terminal, ferry jetty and cruise pier. A total of 72 senior international travellers answered the survey. The demographic profile of respondents is summarized in Table 1.

The survey instrument went through content validity by a panel consisting of tourism stakeholders such as hotel managers, travel agents, airline officials, airport staff and tourist attraction managers. The instrument was then prepared in several languages included English, Mandarin, Arabic and Japanese, reflecting major tourist markets for Penang. The respondents were asked to provide information on their travel background such as purpose of trip taken, duration of stay, the mode of travel, source of information and etc. In addition, the respondents were required to rate 12 attributes of destination importance and 12 attributes of destination performance, based on a 5-point Likert scale.

4.3. Data Analysis

Simple frequencies and cross tabulation frequencies analysis were computed according to respondents' demographic, travelling profiles, and expenditure patterns. Furthermore, importance-performance analysis was done to rate the participants' perception of the importance and overall performance of Penang destination attributes. The importance-performance analysis which first introduced by Martilla and James (1977) is accepted as a well-documented and competent tool to provide service providers and managers with reliable information related to the efficiency of resource allocation (Wade and Eagles, 2003). At last, and as the main statistical method for this study, partial least squares - structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), which is a variance-based structural equation modelling system, was used to evaluate research hypotheses. Additionally, PLS

is a non-parametric approach and is not limited by assumptions of the multivariate normality of data, skewness, multicollinearity, and specification error (Henseler *et al.*, 2009). For PLS-SEM, the statistical software application 'Smart PLS 2.0' was used to analyse the framework (Ringle *et al.*, 2005). To examine the significance of the research paths, a bootstrapping process with 1000 samples was employed as suggested by Hair *et al.* (2010). The common method bias was checked to insure that a single latent factor did not account for the majority of the explained variance (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986). The results of un-rotated factor analysis indicated that the first factor accounted for only 34.0% of the total 60.68% variance, indicating that the common method bias was not a serious problem in the study.

5. RESULTS

5.1. Senior Travellers Demographic and Travel Characteristics

The results of the survey show that, 58.3% of those questioned were male travellers and 41.7% female. The majority, 74.6%, were married. Approximately more than 50% of respondents reported a monthly income of more than MYR 5,000. In terms of educational level, 49.3% had received tertiary education and 33.8% hold a higher degree. Most of them stayed in Penang for 3-7 days (60.9%) while the average duration of their overall stay was 15 days. Furthermore, they mainly visited Penang with the propose of leisure/recreation/holidays (68.1%) (Table 1).

Table-1. Demographic and travel characteristics

Gender	**%**	**Marital status**	**%**
Male	58.3	Single	11.3
Female	41.7	Married	74.6
		Divorcee/Widower	14.1
Monthly income (in MYR)	**%**	**Education level**	**%**
< 5,000	18.4	Higher degree	33.8
5,001 – 10,000	31.6	Tertiary education	49.3
10,001 – 50,000	39.5	Secondary education	15.5
50,001 – 100,000	5.3	No formal education	1.4
> 100,001	5.3		
Average	MYR 27,398.53		
Minimum	MYR 817.00		
Maximum	MYR 306,250.00		
Purpose of visit	**%**	Length of Stay	**%**
Leisure/recreation/holidays	68.1	1- 2 days	14.5
Visit friends/relatives (VFR)	11.1	3 -7 days	60.9
Business/professional	9.7	8 – 14 days	18.8
Health treatment	4.2	15 – 30 days	2.9
Convention/conference/trade show	2.8	31 – 60 days	0.0
Education/study/teaching	1.4	> 60 days	2.9
Incentive travel	1.4	Average	8 days
Government affairs/official mission	1.4	Maximum	90 days

5.2. Importance-Performance Analysis

The first step of performing important-performance analysis was to calculate the mean score for both the importance and performance of attributes. Then, the mean values for each value of

importance and performance were presented in a two-dimensional grid with the Importance values (Y-axis) plotted against Performance values (X-axis). Table 2 presents the mean score of the 12 destination attributes of Penang perceived by international senior travellers in relation to their importance and performance. The data plotted onto the IPA grid is presented in Figure 2. In this figure, the X-axis depicts the perception of the performance scores and the Y-axis represents the related scores of importance for the same item. The mean importance for the plotted data was 3.86 and the mean performance rating was 3.65.

Table-2. The mean score of twelve features of the importance-performance analysis

No	Attribute	Mean Importance	Mean Performance	Difference
1	Image of destination	3.92	3.85	-0.07
2	Variety of tourism attractions	3.83	3.72	-0.11
3	Cultural/historical uniqueness	3.68	3.59	-0.09
4	Value for money	3.79	3.74	-0.05
5	Safety and security	4.10	3.82	-0.28
6	Accessibility to the destination	3.97	3.64	-0.33
7	Friendliness of the people	3.89	3.96	0.07
8	Availability of information	3.81	3.60	-0.21
9	Ease of communication	3.58	3.58	0.00
10	Cleanliness of destination	3.78	3.22	-0.56
11	Accommodation services	3.99	3.67	-0.32
12	Local transport services	4.01	3.36	-0.65
Total		46.35	43.75	43.75
Central line		3.86	3.65	3.65

Figure 2 illustrates the results of the importance-performance analysis grid for cultural tourists. As presented in following figure, ‘accessibility to the destination’ and ‘local transport services’ were identified in the ‘Concentrate Here’ quadrant. The ‘image of destination’, ‘safety and security’, ‘friendliness of the people’ and ‘accommodation services’ were plotted in the ‘Keep Up the Good Work’ quadrant. The ‘cultural/historical uniqueness’, ‘availability of information’, ‘ease of communication’, and ‘cleanliness of destination’ fall into the ‘Low Priority’ quadrant. Furthermore, ‘variety of tourism attractions’ and ‘value for money’ were both plotted in the ‘Possible Overkill’ quadrant.

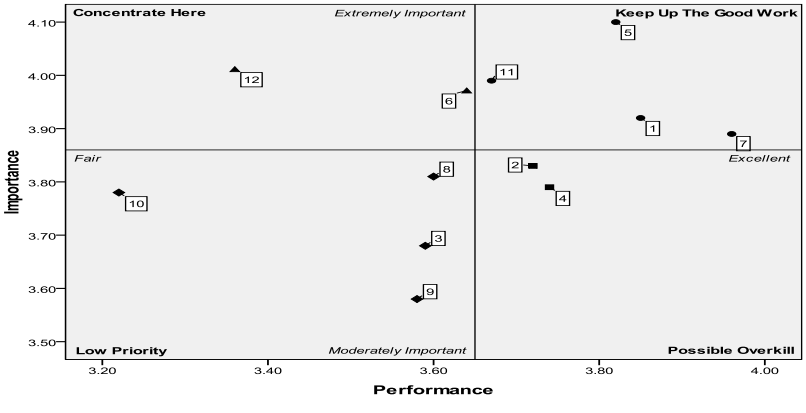

Figure-2. Importance-performance analysis of Penang perceived by international senior travellers

5.3. Measurement Model Results

The research model embraces a reflective measurement model as well as a structural model. The prior encompasses the relationships between the indicators and their respective constructs, while the second comprises the causal relationships between the latent constructs. Measurement model analysis was used to evaluate internal consistency reliability and construct validity. Construct validity consists of convergent and discriminant validity. However, as overall satisfaction is a single item construct, the validity and reliability measures of this construct could not be reported. Additionally, the structural model and hypotheses were assessed by testing path coefficients (β) and their significant levels using PLS path modelling with a non-parametric bootstrapping procedure.

5.3.1. Construct Validity

Construct validity embraces convergent and discriminant validity. As shown in Table 3, convergent validity comprises three steps: factor loading, composite reliabilities and average variance extracted (AVE). To examine discriminant validity, the most common method was used, a comparison between the square-root of AVEs for any two constructs and the estimated correlation between the same constructs, where the former must be greater than the latter (Hair *et al.*, 2010).

The result of convergent validity shows the extent to which a number of items measuring the same concept are in agreement. We used a cut-off value for loadings at 0.5 as suggested by Hsu *et al.* (2007b). Hence, if any item which has a loading of higher than 0.6 on more than one factor, then they will be deemed to have significant cross-loading. The results showed that no item had multiple cross-loading, indicating the preliminary discriminant validity. As shown in Table 3, three items of performance construct (cultural/historical uniqueness, cleanliness of destination, and local transport services) have been omitted from the analysis due to low factor loadings. Subsequently, the analysis was rerun with the exclusion of these three items. The standardised loadings estimations for the remaining items exceeded the cut-off value of 0.5.

Composite reliability estimates the degree to which the respective indicators indicate the latent construct. A cut-off value of 0.7 and above is suggested for composite reliability, demonstrating good reliability (Hair *et al.*, 2010). The result indicating adequate composite reliability for importance (0.93) and performance (0.90) constructs. The cut-off value for AVE is suggested to be a value of 0.5 and above (Hair *et al.*, 2011). In this study, the AVE values ranged from 0.71 to 0.72, which were above the suggested value of 0.5. In general, the measurement model demonstrated satisfactory reliability and convergent validity, indicating that all items are valid measures of their respective constructs. Cronbach's alpha scores for each factor were more than the recommended cut-off value of 0.6 (Hair *et al.*, 2010) and indicated good scale reliability.

Table-3. Results of the measurement model for first-order constructs

Construct	Items	Loadings	AVE	CR	R^2	Alpha
Importance (Reflective)	Image of destination	0.82	0.72	0.93		0.91
	Variety of tourism attractions	0.68				
	Cultural/historical uniqueness	0.64				
	Value for money	0.66				
	Safety and security	0.67				
	Accessibility to the destination	0.70				
	Friendliness of the people	0.81				
	Availability of information	0.82				
	Ease of communication	0.55				
	Cleanliness of destination	0.72				
	Accommodation services	0.86				
	Local transport services	0.68				
Performance (Reflective)	Image of destination	0.73	0.71	0.90	0.21	0.88
	Variety of tourism attractions	0.72				
	Value for money	0.73				
	Safety and security	0.69				
	Accessibility to the destination	0.75				
	Friendliness of the people	0.72				
	Availability of information	0.65				
	Ease of communication	0.66				
	Accommodation services	0.68				
satisfaction	SIM	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.33	1.00

Note: CR = Composite Reliability, AVE= Average Variance Extracted, SIM= Single Item Measure

In addition, the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each of the reflective constructs of importance and performance were much larger than its correlation with the other construct (Table 4)suggested that the measure has adequate discriminant validity (Chin, 2010).

Table-4. Discriminant Validity

Constructs	Importance	Performance	Satisfaction
Importance	**0.721**		
Performance	0.461	**0.705**	
satisfaction	0.261	0.577	**SIM**

Diagonals (in bold) represent square root of the AVE, SIM= single item measure.

5.3.2. Assessment of the Structural Model

5.3.2.1. Direct Effect

As depicted in Table 5, the study proceeded with the path analysis to evaluate the direct effects between the variables. The two direct paths were significant at $p<0.01$. The results indicated that the effect of Importance on Performance ($\beta=0.461$, $p<0.01$) and Performance on Satisfaction ($\beta=0.577$, $p<0.01$) is positive and significant. Consequently, the result provided support for H1 and H2.

Table-5. Path coefficient and hypothesis testing (direct effects)

Hypothesis	Relationship	*β*	*t* value	Decision
H1	Importance→ Performance	0.461	5.255***	Supported
H2	Performance →Satisfaction	0.577	6.785***	Supported

Beta = regression weight, *t* values are computed through bootstrapping procedure with 72 cases and 1000 samples; *** $p<0.01$

5.3.2.2. Indirect Effect

In this research, one indirect effect was evaluated as depicted in Figure 3. Using the bootstrapping procedure suggested by Hayes (2009) and Sattler *et al.* (2010), the indirect effect of the research model was assessed. The $R^2=0.21$value for indirect effect was obtained by dividing the indirect effect (*ab*) by the standard error (SE) of the indirect effect. The SE is the standard deviation of the repeated bootstrap estimates of the indirect effect. As shown in Figure 3, the *t* value of the indirect effect was greater than 1.96 and significant (*t* =4.490) at the level of 0.01. Therefore, the results support H3.

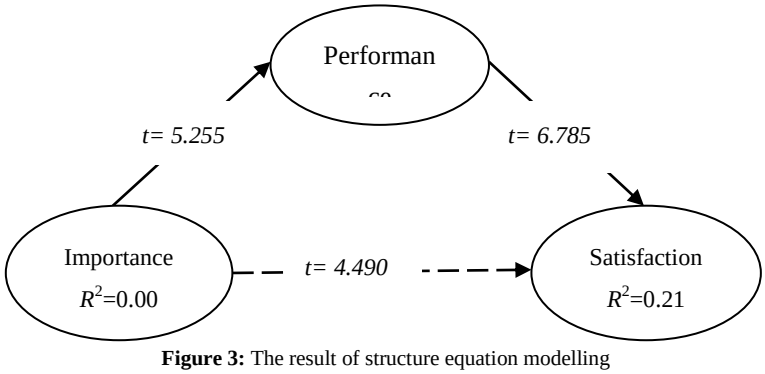

Figure 3: The result of structure equation modelling

6. DISCUSSION

Approximately more than 50% of those questioned reported a monthly income of more than MYR 5,000 and most of them were well educated. Most of them stayed in Penang for 3-7 days with an average duration of 15 days stay. This result is in line with previous studies such as those performed by the World Tourism Organisation (2001) and Bai *et al.* (2001) which considered this demographic as a profitable market. Members of this market proved to be sensitive towards sustainability issues and having more time and financial resources to travel, hence, stay longer at the destination. The result of the importance-performance analysis indicates that 'accessibility to the destination' and 'local transport services' are the attributes that are considered to be of high importance and also needing more concentration. Former studies related to senior tourists also mentioned that for senior travellers, accessibility and local transport are important services that must be taken into account by destination planners (Patterson, 2006). Furthermore, Alén *et al.* (2012) demonstrated that this specific segment requires accessibility. The 'image of destination', 'safety and security', 'friendliness of the people' and 'accommodation services' were recorded as important factors with satisfactory performance. This is where Penang marketers have to maintain the standard of quality to appeal to this profitable part of the market. The 'cultural/historical uniqueness', 'availability of information', 'ease of communication', and 'cleanliness of destination'

were considered to be less important attributes of the destination. However, improving the quality of these factors should not be neglected by tourism marketers.

The results of PLS-SEM analysis indicated the significance of the three hypotheses investigated in this paper. As depicted in Figure 2, this study revealed that perceived importance and performance of destination attributes influence the overall satisfaction of senior travellers. This is supported by some other tourism industry studies that confirmed a positive link between the quality of performance and tourists' satisfaction (Chen *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, it was found that the importance of destination attributes had a positive direct effect on their performance. Our results are consistence with other research (Griffin and Edwards, 2013) which suggested an indirect relationship between importance and performance of products and services. Additionally, this research proved a significant dependency of performance in relation to importance and overall satisfaction. Based on the findings of this study, both the importance and performance of destination attributes could affect tourists' overall satisfaction. In regard to Penang, the senior travellers market is attractive enough to motivate both the public and private tourism sectors to work on improving and sustaining different components and attributes of the tourism sector. In terms of market opportunities, senior travellers could help shift tourism away from seasonality. As the results of the study revealed, both importance and performance influence tourists' overall satisfaction. Consequently, enhancing the level of services offered, especially those that are important in the eyes of tourists can result in greater satisfaction and a more favourable image of the destination. Eventually, this can lead a particular destination's tourism market to higher revenues. The scope of this study was limited to Penang as a destination and senior tourists as a niche in the market. Studies conducted in other contexts and focusing on other sectors can validate the results of this particular study.

7. CONCLUSION

This study used important-performance analysis to pin point the most important attributes perceived by senior travellers to Penang. Furthermore, using PLS-SEM, the effect of perceived importance and performance of Penang attributes on senior travellers' overall satisfaction was assessed. The results revealed that senior travellers rated 'accessibility to the destination' and 'local transport services' as the most important attributes that need more concentration. Furthermore, the results of PLS-SEM confirmed that importance has an effect on the performance of given attributes. In addition, performance of attributes was proved to mediate the relation between importance and satisfaction. The insights provided by this study can lead tourism marketers to plan accordingly with the needs of this specific market in mind. The same study might be done on other segments of Penang domestic and international tourists with consideration to new variables such as the intention of the trip.

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