A STUDY ON ONLINE ACTIONS OF ECOTOURISTS VISITING NATURE BASED ATRACTIONS IN KUALA LUMPUR

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ABSTRACT

Ecotourism is considered as an important facet of sustainable tourism development discourse. Eco-tourists' are found to be driven by motivations of acquiring and exchanging knowledge in relation to ecological aspects as a part of their educational and learning elements of ecotourism. Another important motivation for eco-tourists is to engage in socializing activities while in an ecotourism experience that provides the main platform for knowledge exchange among them. Such knowledge exchange can often encompass dialogue on ecological protection, sustainable development issues and ethical consumption in ecotourism. Social media which is an online platform for social interactions and has the potential to provide socialization and knowledge sharing opportunities to eco-tourists beyond their ecotourism experiences. This chapter puts forward a case on the role of social media in providing a platform for dialogue on ecological stewardship through socialization and knowledge sharing opportunities it provides in the context of eco-tourists' visit to Kuala Lumpur.

KEYWORDS: ECO-TOURISM. SOCIALIZATION. KNOWLEDGE. SOCIAL EXCHANGE.

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INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism has been attributed to be the most imperative form of activity representing the discourse of sustainable tourism (Barkin, 1996; Oslo Statement on Ecotourism, 2007). Ecotourism, since 1990, has grown at a rate of 20-34% per year and as of 2010, ecotourism consisted of 5-10% of the global travel market and the global ecotourism market is estimated to grow at 5% annually (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2012). Tourists who participate in ecotourism activities are normally referred to as eco-tourists. They are tourists who travel to nature-based areas and engage in nature-based activities compatible to experience ecology and environment of such areas (Wearing & Neil, 2009). They tend to possess pro-environmental values which generate the interest in them to learn about the local ecology and experiencing nature in its original state, meet and interact with people of similar interests, and respect local cultures (Beaumont, 2011; Stein, Denny & Pennisi, 2003). Eco-tourists activities can involve risks and challenges, as well as fun and excitement, depending on the kinds of nature-based activities they participate in (Weaver & Lawton, 2007). Eco-tourists are found to have higher education levels and higher incomes compared to other forms of tourists (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2012). Higher income levels of eco-tourists enhance their learning interests and experiences, as well as a desire to interact with likeminded individuals. It is this need for learning experiences that makes eco-tourists demand for knowledge on the destinations they visit more predominant than other tourists (Galley & Clifton, 2004). Moreover, their needs to interact with likeminded individuals (peer- eco-tourists) enables them a desire to socialize.

Social media is based on Web 2.0 technologies which provide dyadic as well as many-to-many interactions online. The potential benefits use of social media in the context of eco-tourists is considerably less evident in previous literature given the fact that it has the ability to enable exchange of knowledge in the form of audio-visual,

pictorial and textual content through the intense social interactions it provides to its users. Eco-tourists consider it imperative to promote aspects in relation to sustainable development and ecological awareness through word-of-mouth exchanges among themselves. Social media which provides opportunities for e-WOM can enable interactions among eco-tourists on aspects of ecological sustainability and conservation beyond the ecotourism trips they undertake. Focus

This study hence, focuses firstly on the use of social media by eco-tourists for socialization and knowledge sharing purposes with respect to sustainable issues and awareness. The second focus of this study is on the ecological stewardship practiced by eco-tourists through online socialization and knowledge sharing that emanates from their leaning and socializing motivations. It will throw light on the ability of social media in ecological stewardship efforts of eco-tourists which have wide ranging implications for ecotourism operators and authorities of ecotourism attractions in Kuala Lumpur.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

1.1   NATURE-SEEKING

Seeking nature refers to eco-tourists' quest for nature-based experiences, viewing flora and fauna species, taking risks and challenges, as well as experiencing fun and enjoyment as a part of their efforts to participate in such nature-based activities (Beaumont, 2011). It is from eco-tourists' pro-environmental values, that their desire to seek nature emanates and turns out to be one of the main motivational aspects for eco-tourists to engage in ecotourism experiences. Development of pro-environmental values refers to the desire of eco-tourists to contribute to the sustainability of ecological aspects in ecotourism destinations (Wearing & Neil, p. 201) expressed in terms of awareness on environmental issues, conservation and eco-consciousness. The nature-seeking characteristics and pro-environmental attitudes of eco-tourists' drive their learning and educational needs (Hughes & Morrison-Saunders, 2005). Learning and

education through knowledge attained on ecological aspects and pro-environmental activities for eco-tourists drive their motivation to participate in ecotourism trips.

The motivations of eco-tourists in terms of learning, socialization, and nature seeking, make them distinct from the overall motivations of mass tourists (Beaumont, 2011; Wight, 2001). Mass tourists are purely motivated by recreational interests and relaxation needs in their experiences of nature trips (Hughes & Morrison-Saunders, 2005). Besides, they can be motivated by other factors like negative or positive moods and cultural distance factors in their desire to experience tourism activities, making them significantly different from eco-tourists (Bilei & Kim, 2009; Chen & McCain, 2011). Hence, the eco-tourists motivational aspects, especially learning and socialization, cause their knowledge seeking, as well as interaction activities to be significant.

1.2   LEARNING AND EDUCATION

Learning motivations on ecological and social aspects at ecotourism destinations as well as ecotourism activities available at the ecotourism destination are often drive eco-tourists to engage in eco-trips. Learning opportunities for eco-tourists come in the way of means of interpretation facilities for eco-tourists provided by managements of ecotourism attractions to provide them knowledge on ecology, conservation and sustainable issues in relation to biodiversity which in turn distinguishes them from other types of tourists (Beaumont, 2011; Hughes & Morrison-Saunders, 2005). A number of previous studies have highlighted the importance of knowledge on ecology that influences the cognitive process of eco-tourists which in turn, impacts their satisfaction levels of ecotourism experiences (Harlow & Pomfret, 2002; Hughes & Morrison-Saunders, 2005). Previous literatures have also emphasized on the necessity of eco-tourists to share such knowledge among each other in relation to ecotourism attractions and nature-based recreational experiences as well as for promotion of sustainability issues (Harlow & Pomfret, 2002; Lu & Stepchenkova, 201 Wearing & Neil, 2009). Therefore sharing of such knowledge among eco-tourists turns out to be a type of social influence that enriches their learning process. The process of sharing and

recommending is possible through word-of-mouth communication or the social interactions among eco-tourists (Meric and Hunt, 1998; Weaver, 2002).

1.3 ECO-TOURISTS AND ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

The process of knowledge sharing through socialization among eco-tourists, are the key facets of their ecotourism experiences. However, given the importance of knowledge sharing and socialization among eco-tourists, they face certain challenges. Firstly, poor interpretation facilities at the destination, inadequate knowledge of nature guides and static information at ecotourism attractions often result in inaccurate and insufficient knowledge available to eco-tourists affecting the learning component in their ecotourism experience (Hughes & Morrison-Saunders, 2002). Secondly, a lack of the environmental educational component in ecotourism promotion as well as lack of access to new technologies that can enable social interactions among eco-tourists to share knowledge on ecotourism and awareness on sustainability aspects lowers their satisfaction levels (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2012; Gibson, Dodds, Joppe & Jamieson, 2003; Weaver & Lawton, 2007; Wu, Wang & Ho, 2010).

Therefore given that eco-tourists have been found to have a strong tendency to use word-of-mouth (social interactions) as one of the most important mediums of sharing experiences with each other (Weaver, 2002), there is a need for eco-tourists to have such socialization among themselves beyond the trips they undertake. Social technologies likesocial media, which facilitates two-way dialogue between individuals in the form of online word-of-mouth exchange, can be highly instrumental in the socialisation process among eco-tourists. This goes beyond their face-to-face socialisation activities while in an ecotourism experience. However, given the potential of social media in enabling a dynamic socializing and knowledge sharing platform, for some reasons, the use of social media as a medium of a dyadic word-of-mouth exchange among eco-tourists is rather limited (Meris & Hunt, 1998). Social media that emanates from Web 2.0 have already been found to enable interactions for distribution of travel-based information among general tourists (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Lai & Shaffer, 2005).

Based on this premise, social media sites are believed to also have the potential to go beyond meeting the utilitarian needs of general tourists in addressing the socialization and knowledge sharing needs of eco-tourists (Charters, 2009).

Social media enables online communities to meet in digital environments where individuals with mutual interests can socialize and develop strong and persistent relationships among themselves. One of the virtues based on which these individuals socialize and maintain sustainable relationships among themselves is cooperation. Cooperation among these individuals comes in the form of voluntary engagement in social interactions and knowledge sharing that meets their collective as well as individual interests (Fuchs, Bichler & Rifler, 2009; Seraj, 2012). This cooperative process of socialization results in exchanging of expert knowledge often by individuals who have extensive experience and expertise in the respective area of interest of the online community (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002), which in turn renders them recognition and reputation in the said online community. The reputational aspect associated with the experienced individuals in these online communities creates a sense of trust among all members is vital in the sustenance of the online social relationships (Seraj, 2012). The sustenance and strength of online social relationships in online communities of social media are also driven by altruistic motives of each individual towards all individuals. These motives emanate from their common goals and affective feelings towards each other (Kozinets, 1999). These altruistic attitudes in turn lead to a sense of belonging among individuals in an online community, which helps them to identify themselves with the said online community (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002; Kozinets, 1999).

ECOTOURISTS' ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS AND SUSTAINABILITY

The cooperative, altruistic activities as well as the reputational and trust benefits evident in the intense interactions between users in social media have been found to initiate awareness and activism on ecological protection between ecologically conscious travelers (Roka & Mosainder, 2009). This online activism often leads to ecological citizenship. Ecological citizenship is a kind of ecological stewardship which involves
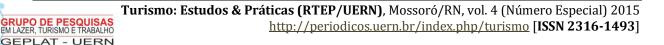
online dialogue on ecological conservation and activism between individuals with ecological consciousness and sensibilities in a collective manner that often leads to actions pertaining to ecologically ethical consumption (Roka & Moisander, 2009). Such online activism substantially contributes towards awareness on sustainable development issues. Since eco-tourists as consumers of ecologically responsible tourism has become an area of significant discourse (Budeanu, 2007), ecological citizenship through online dialogue between them in social media sites can significantly result in ethical consumption of ecotourism (Roka & Moisander, 2009). The online dialogue can engage eco-tourists in intense social interactions and knowledge sharing on ecological aspects pertaining to eco-tourism ultimately resulting in a collective form of ecological citizenship (Roka & Moisander, 2009).

METHODOLOGY

A field survey was conducted with the help of a structured questionnaire at 4 nature-based attraction spots in and around Kuala Lumpur. The spots were Bukit Nanas, Dark caves, Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) and the KL Bird Park. Bukit Nanas is believed to be a small patch remaining from the tropical rainforest that once existed where the city of Kuala Lumpur is now located (Tourism Malaysia, 2012). The dark caves located on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur and lying adjacent to the famous Hindu shrine of Batu caves is a well known site for caving activities in Malaysia. The FRIM lies on the northern fringe of Kuala Lumpur city and is known for educational facilities in relation to botanical and forestry aspects as well as to attract visitors for its nature-based recreational activities like waterfalls, canopy walk as well as jungle trekking and biking. Finally, the Kuala Lumpur Bird Park being a part of the Perdana Lake Gardens offers exclusive opportunities for avian viewing and recreational activities. The rationale for choosing Kuala Lumpur as the case for this study emanates from the fact that the nature-based attractions in and around it offers ample opportunities for ecotourism activities like bird watching, jungle trekking and hiking, canopy walks, caving as well as nature-viewing. Moreover, Kuala Lumpur has been

identified as a potential urban ecotourism as from the discussions in the World Ecotourism Conference in 2010. In addition to this, Kuala Lumpur is the capital of Malaysia which has been recognized as a fast growing ecotourism destination in the Asia Pacific region and the country also won the Best Ecotourism Destination Award at The Travel Weekly (Asia) Industry Award in 2008 (Bhuiyan, Siwar, Ismail & Islam, 2011; Tourism Malaysia, 2008). Besides, it is through Kuala Lumpur that a large number of international tourists travel to different parts of Malaysia. Given these favorable factors, Kuala Lumpur is considered imperative to look into the perspectives of online ecological stewardship with respect to eco-tourists.

The survey for the main study was conducted in the period between 5th September, 2013 and 5th January, 2014. The questionnaires included 3 initial questions on whether the respondents fall in the category of eco-tourists, hard or soft, or not, based on the explanations of hard eco-tourists and soft eco-tourists in the previous studies of McKercher (2001) as well as Larmen and Durst (1987) and Weaver and Lawton (2007). Hard eco-tourists indulge in challenging and risky experiences and have more inclination towards knowledge seeking, nature seeking and eco-centrism while soft eco-tourists tend to engage in more socialization among themselves and recreational activities in the nature with lesser risks (McKercher, 2001). The third question was to determine whether the respondents (eco-tourists) used social media for social interactions and knowledge sharing on ecotourism. This was followed by questions on aspects of gender, educational qualifications, age-group, and status of employment. The next section included questions on the respondents' number of visits to the ecotourism sites in Kuala Lumpur, the kind of ecotourism activities they took part in, their top sources of ecotourism-related knowledge as well as their use of social media sites. Final part of the questionnaire included questions in relation to the aspects of cooperation, reputation, trust, altruism and community identification as well as satisfaction in socialization and intention to share knowledge.

The respondents for the study are eco-tourists falling in the category of both hard eco-tourists and soft eco-tourists due to the fact that Kuala Lumpur being an urban ecotourism space, a wide range of eco-tourists can be expected to visit ecotourism

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attractions in the city. The target respondents were contacted in person where the ecotourism attractions in and around Kuala Lumpur were located. The questionnaire was distributed to the respondents at the entry/exit points to the nature-based attractions as well as within the attractions wherever possible. 600 questionnaires were distributed and 590 were returned. Out of the 590, 40 were removed as they were found incomplete.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS:

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

The data reveals that out of the total respondents (n= 543), 27 % (147) were hard eco-tourists and 73% (396) were soft eco-tourists. This is indicative of the fact that majority of the visitors to the ecotourism attraction sites in Kuala Lumpur preferred accessible and pleasurable nature-based recreational activities instead of challenging experiences of nature as also found by previous studies (Hughes & Morrison-Saunders, 2005; McKercher, 1993). All the respondents were found to be users of social media since majority of the respondents (67%) were younger individuals falling in the age range of 25-44 and 59% with a Bachelors degree, confirming the findings of the previous studies which observed that eco-tourists by virtue of their relatively younger age and higher educational qualifications find social media as a trustworthy source of information (Lu and Stepchenkova, 2012; Wight, 2001). However, in terms of age, these findings were in contrast with some older studies of Sharpley (2006) and Eagles and Casganette (1995) who found eco-tourists to be older in the Western context as they belonged to the baby boomer generation. This is imperative given the fact that the respondents in this study were primarily from the Western countries. These observations could be indicative of the fact that unlike in the past when baby boomers used to be primarily eco-tourists, the present trend is witnessing an emerging segment of young travelers who are reasonably affluent, educated and digitally literate seeking quality nature-based recreational experiences. Another interesting observation from the findings was that 59% of the respondents fell in the category of married and 55% were

females as against 45% of male respondents, which seems to indicate the fact that female and married eco-tourists have a greater interest to socialize and share knowledge online in terms of ecological stewardship and sustainable and ethical ecotourism consumption.

In terms of the respondent's ecotourism activity in Kuala Lumpur, the findings reveal firstly that 71.9% of the respondents visited Kuala Lumpur for ecotourism at least twice. Moreover, most were found to engage in nature-viewing and jungle trekking (57%) while a substantial portion of the respondents engaged in caving (56.3%) followed by bird watching (43.1%) and canopy walk (30.3%). These findings confirm the imperativeness of Kuala Lumpur as an ecotourism destination in an urban space as previous studies by Wight (2001) and Tao et al., (2004), Kim et al., (2008) and Cini et al., (2010) observed that nature-viewing, jungle trekking and hiking, caving and bird watching were also popular ecotourism activities among eco-tourists in traditional non-urban ecotourism settings.

Most respondents (74.7%) found online sources like websites of ecotourism attractions as the top source of ecotourism related knowledge while nearly 40% of the respondents found social media sites useful sources of knowledge on ecotourism. This is indicative of the effectiveness of online platforms like portals and social media sites as increasingly useful sources of knowledge for eco-tourists as compared to the findings of Wight (2001) and Wearing and Neil (2009) which found offline sources like published materials, associations and magazines as credible sources of ecotourism knowledge. In terms of the social media sites used, Facebook was found to be most popular with 93.4% of the respondents claiming to use it the most followed by Trip Advisor (69.4%). This reflects the fact that Facebook and Trip Advisor act as effective socializing and knowledge sharing platforms for ecotourists. Finally in terms of nationality, majority of the respondents were from UK (26.1%), USA (25%) and Australia (19.1%).

Table 1 Demographic Profile

Items	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
Soft Eco-tourists	396	73
Hard Eco-tourists	147	27
Social Media Users	543	100
Gender	**Frequencies**	**Percentage (%)**
Male	299	55
Female	244	45
Marital Status	**Frequencies**	**Percentage (%)**
Unmarried	214	39.4
Married	320	59
Others	9	1.6
Age	**Frequencies**	**Percentage (%)**
Less than 18	11	2.0
18-24	119	21.8
25-34	206	37.8
35-44	159	29.2
45-54	42	7.7
55 or Above	8	1.5
Education	**Frequencies**	**Percentage (%)**
Less than High School	2	.3
High School	38	7.0
Diploma/Higher Diploma	127	23.3
Bachelors Degree	321	58.9
Post Graduate/Masters Degree	57	10.5
Travel to the attraction in KL	**Frequencies**	**Percentage (%)**
Once(excluding current visit)	392	71.9
Twice	110	20.2
More than twice	43	7.9
Employment	**Frequencies**	**Percentage (%)**
Employed	474	87
Unemployed	69	13

Table 2 Other Aspects of Demographic Profile of Respondents

Items	Frequencies	Percentage (%)*
Bird watching	235	43.1
Nature-viewing	312	57.2
Jungle Trekking/Biking	310	56.9
Caving	307	56.3
Canopy Walk	165	30.3
Source of Ecotourism Knowledge in Kuala Lumpur	**Frequencies**	**Percentage (%)***
Word-of-mouth	41	7.5
Travel Books/brochures/guide	192	35.2
Website of eco-tourism attractions	407	74.7
Social Media sites	216	39.6
Social Media Sites Used	**Frequencies**	**Percentage (%)***
Facebook	509	93.4
Twitter	249	45.7
Trip Advisor	378	69.4
Virtual Tourist	259	47.5
YouTube	143	26.2
Flickr	43	7.9
Nationality	**Frequencies**	**Percentage (%)**
UK	142	26.1
USA	136	25.0
Australia	104	19.1
Spain	37	6.8
France	27	5.0
New Zealand	12	2.2
Canada	16	2.9
Italy	10	1.8
Singapore	9	1.7
Other Countries (Sweden, Switzerland, Vietnam, Greece, Albania, Croatia, Germany, Austria, Russia, Portugal, Holland, Ukraine, Norway, Sri Lanka, China, India, Japan, Fiji, Philippines, Kazakhstan)	50	9.4

* The frequency does not sum up to 100% because of multiple responses.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The scale used in this study ranged from 7- strongly agree to strongly disagree. The mean values of the variables under cooperation, reputation, altruism trust, community identification, eco-tourists satisfaction in socialization through social media

as well as intention to share knowledge were all indicative of the positive rating of the dimensions by the respondents. In other words, it revealed that the respondents were in agreement with the statements.

Table 3 Means and Standard Deviations of Measurement Items

Cooperation	Mean	Std. Deviation
OEVR	5.22	.817
VCKO	5.47	.912
VCMA	5.43	.873
OEUK	5.45	.922
OEII	5.50	1.020
OEIK	5.48	.973
Depend	5.49	.951
Reputation	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
PIER	5.38	.893
Rewards	5.22	.988
EKR	5.39	1.037
PAVR	5.51	1.047
Prestige	5.50	1.052
Credibility	5.33	.914
Authority	5.45	.949
Altruism	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
HOE	5.38	.746
HESP	5.55	.831
DPAV	5.45	.968
CESP	5.59	1.023
ETD	5.59	.985
Trust	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
ESMK	5.12	1.079
ESSMPI	5.26	1.213
Trustworthy	5.21	1.188
Promises	5.09	1.129
ESMCM	5.04	1.013
ESMT	5.30	.928
Community Identification	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
STOE	5.37	.841
SOB	5.33	.919
FTE	5.34	.805
SOP	5.49	.941
PSMEE	5.53	.977
SMSLI	5.44	1.002
Ecotourists Satisfaction in Socialisation through Social Media	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
HSIE	5.45	.806
SARE	5.46	.887
SEE	5.54	.954
SOSE	5.63	1.008
SSPAV	5.55	1.042
Intention to Share knowledge	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
IWSEK	5.59	.909
IWSPAV	5.38	1.013
MIEKH	5.50	1.002
IWRSM	5.48	.882
IIEK	5.66	.931
FIEE	5.68	.983

The most notable were the items measuring satisfaction which clearly indicated that eco-tourists derived the required levels of satisfaction in socialization with fellow eco-tourists through social media. The intense social interactions lead to cohesiveness among eco-tourists in social media that ultimately leads to satisfaction in socialization. This is also indicative of the fact that eco-tourists experience similar levels of satisfaction in socialization by social media as much as they experience satisfying socialization during an actual ecotourism experience. Satisfying online socialization experiences through social media also enables eco-tourists to have social interactions with a wider range of eco-tourists than just the tour group members they meet while in an actual eco-tour.

Another notable aspect is the positive rating of items related to intentions to share knowledge by eco-tourists. This is an interesting finding since previous studies of Holden and Sparrow hawk (2002) and Kim, Kim, Park& Guo (2008) suggested that soft eco-tourists tend to socialize more than share knowledge compared to hard eco-tourists due to their hedonic motivations. In contrary, in this study which involved a majority of soft eco-tourists, knowledge sharing was found to be equally imperative as socialization in the online context.

The satisfactory online socialization and knowledge sharing intentions of ecotourists also considerably indicates their ecological citizenship practices via social media. This is due to the fact that social Interactions and sharing of knowledge between eco-tourists via social media involve sharing of ecotourism-related interactions and knowledge sharing that significantly takes account of awareness on ecological aspects and sustainability issues. Moreover, since environmental sustainability is an imperative aspect for eco-tourists, intense socialization and knowledge sharing through social media ushers their intentions to engage environmental stewardship. The satisfying online social interactions that enables exchange of audio-visual, textual and pictorial content enhances their awareness and concerns about ethical consumption based on the global discourse on sustainable development. Satisfying socialization via social media hence turns out be a 'transformative dialogue' among eco-tourists.

This provides operational and management implications for ecotourism operators and authorities involved with management of ecotourism in nature-based areas. DMOs and eco-tour operators can enhance online socialization and knowledge sharing among eco-tourists by encouraging them into more satisfying electronic word-of-mouth exchange through social media sites like Facebook, Trip Advisor, You Tube as well as blogs. This in turn, can enhance awareness on ecotourism destinations they manage and products they offer. With regards to the authorities managing ecotourism attractions in Kuala Lumpur, the findings reveal that nature-viewing and jungle trekking/hiking should be their prime focus to attract eco-tourists. Moreover, their websites needs to provide more knowledge with respect to these activities and ecological aspects and also encourage eco-tourists to have enhanced dialogue and content exchange through their pages and profiles in social media sites. The findings of this study are also clearly indicative of the fact that authorities managing ecotourism attractions in Kuala Lumpur need to be mindful about the emergence of a new type of eco-tourists who do not belong the traditional baby boomer generation of ecotourists and who are more informed and connected electronically with other knowledgeable ecotourists. Therefore, their promotional activities and the recreational activities they provide have to be delivered with reasonable effectiveness and with appropriate understanding of the psychological, hedonic-affective needs and pro-environmental attitudes of the ecotourists.

CONCLUSION

Ecological stewardship practiced by eco-tourists through their online actions leaves implications for businesses in ecotourism in terms of the need for them to re-shape their operational strategies to comply with the ethical consumption demands of eco-tourists. The commendable awareness sustainable development issues in Western eco-tourists were clearly revealed since in this study majority of the eco-tourists identified originated from Western countries. Ecotourism businesses and ecotourism attraction management bodies in Asia especially in Malaysia need to position themselves

to effectively gauge the behavioral trends of ecotourists emanating from the online dialogue between them in social media. Their pro-activeness in terms of managing their strategies to continue providing both, opportunities of intense online interactions and satisfying levels of ecotourism experiences to ecotourists in accordance with the line of ecological sustainable and ethical consumption, will determine their operational effectiveness. The findings of this study also make it clearly evident that the use of digital technology by ecotourists is high due to age and education factors. So even though they seek considerable nature-based experiences they would still prefer to be connected to technology at pre and post trip situations for social and knowledge exchanges. Kuala Lumpur being an urban area makes it convenient for the ecotourists to have internet access for the purposed of social and knowledge exchanges with peer ecotourists. Therefore, ecotourism operators and ecotourism attraction management bodies need to emphasize on providing efficient and informative online services to ecotourists through the enhanced use of social media and websites with reliable and sufficient content and updates.

UN ESTUDIO VIRTUAL SOBRE LOS ECOTURISTAS EN ATRACTIVOS NATURALES DE KUALA LUMPUR

RESUMEN

El eco-turismo es considerado una fase importante en el desarrollo del discurso del Turismo sustentable. Los eco-turistas buscan conducir un intercambio de información y conocimiento respecto a su bagaje educativo. Entre otras de las motivaciones de este segmento, se encuentran actividades vinculadas a la socialización con otros, como así también al diálogo entre lo sustentable, la protección de la ecología y la ética del consumo. Los medios de comunicación tienen un rol importante en la creación de plataformas online que permitan intercambiar las propias experiencias. Este artículo pone en evidencia un caso donde los medios de comunicación proveen una plataforma de discusión respecto a los eco-turistas quienes han visitado Kuala Lumpur.

PALABRAS CLAVES: ECO-TURISMO. SOCIALIZACIÓN. CONOCIMIENTO. INTERCAMBIO.

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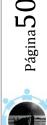
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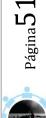
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