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SUSTAINING THE MALAYSIAN MONARCHY'S HERITAGE: HOW SHOULD IT BE POSITIONED TO INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS?

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ABSTRACT

Tourism industry relies heavily on good marketing strategy, which becomes imperative for destination marketers to focus on when building long-term consumer engagement, loyalty, and relationships by adopting a sustainable marketing strategy and ultimately safeguard heritage sustainability. This study selects the Malaysian monarchy's heritage as the research subject and positions strategy as a method to segment and profile international tourists to the said heritage. Respondents were surveyed in July and August 2022, at a museum in Malaysia. Using the Ward method, the clustering analysis identified three clusters, i.e., 'the royal enthusiast', 'the apathetic tourists', and 'the inclined royalist'. The main benefits sought by respondents were 'accessibility', 'quality of facilities', and 'an increase of knowledge'. Respondents viewed that there should be a focus on 'representation of the monarchy's heritage to the Malaysian people and identity', highlighting that it is 'a country with nine royal states', and is therefore unique. Since positioning is about the intention to highlight strengths and distinctiveness in the marketplace, the Malaysian monarchy's heritage should therefore be positioned in the minds of international tourists as 'a rich heritage destination with nine royal states', which is uniquely Malaysia. The clustering of tourists may enhance the consumption intention and achieve continuous sustainable strategic orientation in preserving the Malaysian monarchy's heritage.

Keywords: Heritage tourism, Malaysian monarchy, Monarchy's heritage, Positioning, Sustainability, Tourist awareness.

INTRODUCTION

Themes relating to heritage tourism and sustainable development are an ongoing research topic. To date, limitless research has been carried out by scholars and practitioners which has been used in various disciplines or professional specialisation. The concept of sustainable development first emerged in the late 1980s, as found in the Brundtland Report (United Nations, 1987), which specified that any development that is carried through should not only meet the present needs but also does not compromise the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. Since then, the definition has been the guiding principle for all sectors across different industries, including the tourism industry. In fact, the importance of sustainable tourism was highlighted by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) in 1988- the concept was defined in brief as, “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environment impacts, addressing the needs of the visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities” (UNWTO, n. d). Post 2015, in the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda, otherwise known as ‘Global Goals’, the committee stressed on sustainable development and called to all countries to focus on the sustainability of the environmental, societal, and economical impact (UNDP, 2023).

Heritage and culture are known to be an enabler of sustainable development, with aims on the sustainability of heritage and culture. In one of the 17 current SDG areas, i.e., SDG number 11, the goal pledges to establish sustainable cities and communities, and within this goal, cultural heritage has been explicitly mentioned in target 11.4 which aims to “strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage” (UNESCO, 2023). Since heritage and culture are societal values that make each society or community distinct and unique, the feature intrinsically pulls people to visit other countries with differing cultures, and therefore the SDG approach could lead to promoting the safeguarding of cultural heritage and nurturing creativity (UNESCO, 2019). Furthermore, the use of cultural heritage resources has the potential to assist sustainable development more effectively and expedite the implementation of the UN 2030 agenda (Yildirim, 2017).

However, cultural heritage is an under-recognised resource for sustainable development, where it must be fully leveraged to achieve the SDG (ICOMOS, n.d.). Most of the existing studies that examine the sustainability of tourism revolve around eco-tourism, and therefore express the need to address the importance of cultural heritage related studies at destinations within the context of sustainability (Roblek, Drpic, Mesko, & Milojica 2021). Heritage tourism brings sustainable development opportunities for destinations especially when the original cultural ecology is preserved, protected, and managed effectively while protecting the needs of future generations (Zhang et al., 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Attractiveness of Destinations

The attractiveness of destinations among tourists relies heavily on tourism marketing and promotional activities. The study of destination attractiveness, which is also specified as ‘destination image’ and ‘perceptions of destinations’ has been rigorously conducted and added to the literature in destination marketing since the 1970s (Wang et al., 2022). To gain a certain level of destination attractiveness, it is important to study a destination’s strengths and weaknesses, determine what the target market requires and communicate the product uniqueness effectively (Kasim & Dzakiria, 2001). These aspects are called positioning; a concept described as “...not about what marketers do with the product, but it is

about what marketers do in the mind of the prospect..." (Ries & Trout, 2001, p. 3). Ultimately positioning consists of three steps: 1) identifying a set of possible competitive advantages on which to build a position; 2) correctly selecting the competitive advantages, and 3) effectively communicating the chosen position to the selected target market (Kotler et al., 2010).

A part of Tourism Malaysia's five-year marketing action plan (2022-2026) is to efficiently portray that Malaysia is a unique holiday destination (Tourism Malaysia, 2022, p. 48). Tourism Malaysia, a government promotional agency, incorporates the Segmenting-Targeting-Positioning (STP) strategy in the Malaysia Truly Asia advertising. Positioning is the final step after the segmentation and targeting process (Palmer, 2005). The unique concept of positioning is a sequence of two facets (DiMingo, 1988) which begins with market positioning; a process that recognises the probable market segments, locating competitors' disadvantages and deciding on the optimum positioning strategy, followed by perceptual positioning which involves a distinctive corporate or product identity that was first determined by the earlier market positioning exercise. In this stage, the product identity is created using communication and promotional tools such as advertising, public relations, the internet, and social media.

Positioning is also a communication strategy that informs prospective customers in a clear, distinctive, and desirable position in the minds of the targeted user (Kotler et al., 2017, p. 92). Tourists are also more likely to be engaged, for instance, with a heritage destination when the positioning is compatible with their self-image, in common with the purpose of the conveyed message, and generating emotional attachment with a destination (Deb, 2020). In other words, tourists' satisfaction (positive or negative) is determined through their evaluation of the positioning exercise. Thus, with the right positioning strategy and statement, incorporating the tangible elements with intangible elements (Chacko, 1996) and with a clear demonstration of planning and communication (Kasim & Dzakiria, 2001) the positioning strategy could boost a destination effectively and achieve continuous sustainable strategic orientation surrounding the Malaysian heritage. Among the many heritage tourism products that are available in Malaysia, one that was less researched is the Malaysian monarchy's heritage. In support of its preservation and cultural value, this article selects the monarchy's heritage as a subject to study positioning strategy and contribute to the existing literature.

Monarchy and Tourism

The book by Long and Palmer in 2008 focused on tourism activities related to monarchies. It included articles from 16 authors who primarily researched the monarchies in the United Kingdom and various parts of Europe (Long & Palmer, 2008). They argued that the interpretation of the monarchy to an extent, was forged as a communicable identity for the international tourists visiting the United Kingdom, generating financial benefits to the country's economy, drawing a significant financial gain of over £550 million, making it the largest contributor to the tourism industry (Brand Finance Monarchy, 2017). More recently between April 2021 and March 2022, 426,000 paying visitors were recorded in Windsor castle and Frogmore House (Statista Research Department, 2022).

To date, globally there are around 30 countries with monarchies (Buchholz, 2022) and Malaysia is one of them. Distinctively, in West Malaysia, there are nine states with existing ruling monarchy or sovereign independent state, called sultan or raja (king), where every five years the sultans rotate among themselves through the royal council (majlis raja-raja) to serve as the Yang Dipertuan Agong (The Supreme Head of the Federation, Paramount King). Malaysia practices parliamentary democracy with constitutional monarchy where His Majesty, the Paramount King is the head of state of Malaysia. The

Monarchy of Malaysia, which began from the Sultanate of Malacca is the representative of a very ancient form of institution and heritage, existing for over 600 years (Department of Information, 2016).

Although it is not on the same scale as the British monarchy, the Malaysian monarchy's heritage also plays a considerable part in tourism. The attractions of royal heritage in Malaysia were developed through the concept of Bandar Diraja (Royal city), across the nine sovereign states (Selamat & Othman, 2016). The consumption of the royal heritage is an activity where tourists gain memorable experiences, a contrast to their everyday normal life situation (Palmer & Long, 2018). Based on internet searches from state tourism websites in Malaysia, there are approximately 58 royal heritages across the nine sovereign states that are accessible by tourists, though these attractions are managed individually by different stakeholders with no consolidated tourism effort.

It was proposed that the concept around the monarchy in tourism should be reinvestigated again as a specific popular cultural tourism by examining the relationship between royal and tourism economic gain and commercialisation of the concept (Palmer & Long, 2018). The Malaysian government has put great emphasis on highlighting the Malaysian national heritage in the national plan since the 1990's, and more recent, one of the Malaysia 2020-2030 tourism strategic directions (Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia, n.d., p. 30) is to strengthen Malaysia's tangible and intangible cultural heritage as valuable assets, showcasing the identity of the country. This proposes that it may be worthwhile to investigate the relationship between the monarchy, tourism, and the commodification of the concept (Porananond & King, 2016) and to highlight the need by investigating the existing Malaysian royal heritage products, and to possibly package as 'royal or monarchy tourism'. Nevertheless, though Malaysia has numerous royal attractions, the research on monarchy tourism in Asia, including Malaysia is scarce. It has been identified that there is a scarcity in the research of the monarchy in tourism and there is a need to shift the focus of the literature on monarchy outside of Europe (Porananond & King, 2016).

Scholarly attention on the Malaysian monarchy is mostly centred on the Monarchy's symbolism in the country (Rahman, 2010; Wahsalfelah & Norkhalbi, 2006; Burhanudeen, 1998; Muhamad, 2009; Smith, 2006; Loo, 2009; Ramlah & Noormaizatul, 2014). Relating to tourism, however, domestic travellers who visit a royal city would engage themselves in visiting main royal attractions and built heritages that are related to royal heritage (Saidi, Ahmad & Jusoh, 2020); the representation of the monarchy identity that is presented at the royal galleries creates a sense of pride among the local visitors, and detailed information from travel guides delivers a memorable experience (Selamat & Othman, 2016). However, a case study on the first royal city in Kuala Kangsar, Perak (Leh et al., 2013) concluded that the royal city status concept seemed to be insufficient as it lacked desirability from international and local tourists and another study only looked at the aspect of representation of the royal city (Saidi et al., 2022).

In a multiple response survey conducted by Tourism Malaysia (2018, p. 21), among the main activities that were engaged by visitors to Malaysia, three of the activities considered relevant to culture and heritage activities in 2018, were historical sites visits (36.8%), museums visit (30.6%) as well as cultural events and festivals (16.1%). These activities had shown significant growth compared to the previous year in 2017. The positive increase indicates that there is a significant interest among the visitors for heritage types of activities. Consequently, in the following year, 2019, the rate of visitors' interest for the said activities dropped (Tourism Malaysia, 2019, p. 46), proving the need to further promote and engage the visitors with creative and more unique product offers. "Positioning goes well beyond slogans and image making" (DiMingo, 1988, p. 4).

Additionally, visitors who have an awareness of a destination would create a positive image, which will then attract potential tourists to visit the destination (Milman & Pizam, 1995), and this could potentially result in a repeat visit if the destination meets their satisfaction level. Typically, respondents will give a rating from the listed attributes, and their ratings are then used to measure the positioning success. However, this is not often the case if a product is 'new' or just 'newly launched' in the market. In this instance, consumers may not be knowledgeable of the products attributes, and thus, may not be able to rate or even interpret those attributes (Fuchs & Diamantopoulos, 2010). The above authors' view somehow resonates with the Malaysian monarchy's heritage in tourism. Although the Malaysian monarchy's heritage attractions can be found on various tourism-related websites, little is known about their marketing strategy, and whether positioning exercise is used to position the monarchy heritage in tourism.

METHODOLOGY

This paper investigates whether the Malaysian monarchy's heritage can be leveraged to establish the monarchy's heritage in the minds of tourists by employing the STP strategy. The level of awareness among the tourists is also included in the study to further examine how tourists view the Malaysian monarchy's heritage. The National Museum of Malaysia has been chosen as one of the main attractions in Kuala Lumpur as a study site for this current study. The Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur received the most international arrivals (NST, 2018) with 13.79 million total international visitors in 2019 (Mastercard, 2019); Visiting the museum is one of the most popular tourist activities in Malaysia, accounting for 30.6% (Tourism Malaysia, 2018 p.21).

The instrumentation adapted attributes which were developed and used previously by others (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Poria, Butler & Airey, 2003; Poria et al., 2004; Kasim & Dzakiria, 2001; DiMingo, 1988).

The attributes are classified into a list, such as quality and features, which customers use to identify the attribute that brings them the most satisfaction. Target respondents were international tourists. The National Museum was used as the 'place' to select 'tourists' for two reasons. First, surveying tourists away from the heritage sites that are linked to the monarchy would provide an unbiased view about this type of heritage. Second, the result obtained would be diverse, and therefore considered as a valid reason (Weaver, Kaufmann, & Yoon, 2002). Malaysia re-opens their borders on April 1st to international tourists as the country enters the transitional phase into endemicity (Daim, 2022). From 1st August 2022, all travellers are allowed to enter Malaysia regardless of their vaccination status (Mysafe Travel, 2022). Thus, the questionnaire was distributed at National Museum in Kuala Lumpur from end of July to end of August 2022.

Stratified simple random sampling was chosen to collect data as there is no previous data that could provide a systematic approach to be used as a guide. This method is used since the exploration of this topic is based on two main population samples which are domestic and international visitor. This article however, only tabularised the international tourist subgroup and the international respondents were chosen based on their nationality, purpose of visit and their experience on the Malaysian monarchy's heritage. Building from Krejcie and Morgan's table (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970) based on the visitors' statistics to the national museum in 2021, around 315 respondents were required but only 204 had responded, thus, generating a total of 65 per cent response rate.

Potential respondents were approached, and those who were willing were asked if they had visited any sites in Malaysia that have a historical connection to the monarchy, such as royal museums, palaces, or royal galleries. This question served as a filter before they proceeded to answer the survey. The filter question is to gauge whether they are aware or unaware of the monarchy's heritage in Malaysia. Additionally, this research is exploratory research, and therefore appropriate response rates are not clearly defined. Given the absence of a universally accepted standard for the optimal response rate, as noted by Carley-Baxter et al., (2009), it can be inferred that a response rate exceeding 75% would be considered highly favourable. Therefore, a response rate of 65% would be considered good or above average. Participation rates in the 21st century is also falling because of the increased likelihood that participants are not willing to take part (Morton et al., 2012).

After collecting the profile, the next step is to identify the characteristics of the respondents, i.e., to segmentise the profile. To identify the profile, benefit segmentation which is a type of marketing segmentation using cluster analysis, was conducted. Market segmentation in essence, groups people in four ways namely demographic, psychographic, geographic, and behavioural, where the explanation of the groups is simple and descriptive. On the other hand, the benefit segmentation approach is a good method in identifying what people are seeking in a particular product, and a real identifier of a market segment (Dolnicar, Grun, & Leisch, 2018; Haley, 1968). The benefit segmentation process involves segmenting the perceived value that a customer believes, which he or she intends to receive when experiencing a product. The product is classified according to a set of characteristics (such as quality, features, etc.) that customers personally identify with, specifically the attribute that brings them the most satisfaction. The pioneer of benefit segmentation concept has suggested that this concept is a better way to identify what value each group segment desires (Haley, 1968). In addition, identification of using cluster analysis has been used by many past researchers to identify segmentation (Weaver et al., 2002; Mazanec, 1984; Punj & Stewart, 1983). More recent papers have used this approach on diverse types of tourism products such as summer destinations (Perera et al., 2020) including Sharia tourism (Sumadi & Sari, 2022).

Ward's method is used to identify the clusters since this method would provide a compact, even sized groups of clusters, which share similar characteristics. Ward's hierarchical clustering method has been widely used by many researchers (Murtagh & Legendre, 2014) and widely used for segmentation (Kasim & Dzakiria, 2001). The cluster analysis using Ward's hierarchical clustering method had identified three tangible segments based on the benefits that were sought by international tourists at a monarchy's heritage site in Malaysia. Then, the segments were described and compared using frequency statistics from the clustering variable, and cross tabulations between clusters based on the clustering variables were also carried out. Chi-Square tests are used to determine if there are significant differences in other variables. These tests specifically focus on categorical variables. The alpha significance level is set at 0.05.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Identified Segments from Cluster Analysis

The segmentation procedure generated three main clusters (Tables 1 and 2). The clusters were then cross-tabulated with the respondent's socio-demographic profiles for the categorisation process (Table 3). The descriptions of each cluster were analysed based on the respondents' differences in their needs and socio-demographic background across the clusters. The findings indicated Cluster 3 as the biggest cluster group with n= 110 members and followed by Cluster 2 with n= 74 members. Cluster 1 is the smallest cluster with n= 22 members only. Benefits segmentations were then identified by looking at the mean score of each attribute from each cluster, including the mean scores of the same benefit attributes between the three clusters. The respondents were asked the importance of each benefit sought items with '7' corresponding to 'absolutely important' to '1' corresponding to 'absolutely not important' (Likert scale from 1 to 7).

Overall, the low score in Cluster 1 may indicate that the n=22 members in this cluster do not see many benefits that they specifically seek from the monarchy's heritage when visiting Malaysia. Contrary to Cluster 2, this cluster appears to have a clear opinion of what they want when they are visiting monarchy heritage attractions in Malaysia. Whereas the highest number of members in Cluster 3, seemed to have a middling opinion on the benefits that they sought. Clusters 2 and 3 also have several similar benefits that they deemed important when visiting the monarchy's heritage sites. Cluster 1 instead, found that most of the attributes that were listed above were unimportant to them.

Cluster 2 was seemingly determined by what they wanted from a monarchy's heritage site, since most of the sought benefits they rated were rather high, sitting between 'slightly important' to 'absolutely important' (between 5 to nearly 7 Likert scale).

Cluster 3 seems to rank affordability and accessibility as 'mostly important'. The average mean score was between 5.47 to 5.89, in which the value closer to '6' was equivalent to 'mostly important'. However, quite a few listed attributes showed mean values between 4.13 to 4.86, under the Likert scale 'undecided.' Cluster 1 is distinctively different where they view visiting the monarchy heritage sites as unimportant, the Likert scale is mostly between 1 to 4 only (1= absolutely unimportant to 4= undecided) with a particular interest in the quality of facilities at the monarchy's heritage sites (mean=5.18).

Table 1

Monarchy Heritage Benefits Sought by International Tourists.

	Cluster 1 N=22	Cluster 2 N=74	Cluster 3 N=110	Sig.
Accessibility	4.59	6.16	6.02	0.000
Entrance fee	4.68	5.89	6.05	0.000
Value	4.86	5.58	5.74	0.013
Quality & facilities	5.18	6.07	5.89	0.004
Historical significance	4.18	5.91	5.47	0.000
Narration & signages	4.77	6.04	5.79	0.000
Audio guide	3.86	5.68	4.82	0.000
Activities on Malaysian monarchy	2.91	5.65	4.49	0.000
Activities at places of monarchy	3.14	5.55	4.55	0.000
Identity representation	4.00	6.07	5.65	0.000
Representation of Malaysian people	3.77	6.12	5.72	0.000
Information	4.18	6.04	5.51	0.000
One official website	3.14	5.95	4.86	0.000
Website from each state	3.41	5.77	4.77	0.000
Heritage trail	3.68	5.80	4.85	0.000
Brochure	3.41	5.65	4.31	0.000
Audio guide in tourism website	3.09	5.59	4.21	0.000
E-book in tourism website	2.45	5.53	3.85	0.000
Regality at site	2.86	5.46	4.35	0.000
Increase knowledge	4.55	6.32	5.87	0.000
More interesting than other monarchy	2.05	4.85	3.45	0.000
Malaysia is majestic with monarchy	2.05	5.36	3.53	0.000
Unique	2.91	5.78	4.36	0.000
Great	2.59	5.36	4.24	0.000
Nine royal states	3.86	5.19	4.17	0.000
Niche product	2.64	5.08	4.13	0.000
Main focus by tourism authorities	1.91	5.23	2.87	0.000
Main focus by marketers	2.00	5.34	2.80	0.000
Alluring	2.91	5.73	4.48	0.000
Enchanting	2.73	5.53	4.47	0.000
Corporate identity	1.91	5.22	3.92	0.000
Symbol	2.36	5.85	4.55	0.000
Defining nation	2.23	5.27	3.42	0.000
Relevant in tourism	2.73	5.97	4.59	0.000
Enhance Malaysian image	2.50	5.91	4.26	0.000

Note: 1 = absolutely not important and 7 = absolutely important.

Table 2

Ranked Monarchy Heritage Benefits Sought by International Tourists

Attributes	Cluster 1	Attributes	Cluster 2	Attributes	Cluster 3
Quality & facilities	5.18	Increase knowledge	6.32	Entrance fee	6.05
Value	4.86	Accessibility	6.16	Accessibility	6.02
Narration & signages	4.77	Representation of Malaysian people	6.12	Quality & facilities	5.89
Entrance fee	4.68	Identity representation	6.07	Increase knowledge	5.87
Accessibility	4.59	Quality & facilities	6.07	Narration & signages	5.79
Increase knowledge	4.55	Information	6.04	Value	5.74
Historical significance	4.18	Narration & signages	6.04	Representation of Malaysian people	5.72
Information	4.18	Relevant in tourism	5.97	Identity representation	5.65
Identity representation	4.00	One official website	5.95	Information	5.51
Audio guide	3.86	Enhance Malaysian image	5.91	Historical significance	5.47
Nine royal states	3.86	Historical significance	5.91	One official website	4.86
Representation of Malaysian people	3.77	Entrance fee	5.89	Heritage trail	4.85
Heritage trail	3.68	Symbol	5.85	Audio guide	4.82
Website from each state	3.41	Heritage trail	5.80	Website from each state	4.77
Brochure	3.41	Unique	5.78	Relevant in tourism	4.59
Activities at places of monarchy	3.14	Website from each state	5.77	Symbol	4.55
One official website	3.14	Alluring	5.73	Activities at places of monarchy	4.55
Audio guide in tourism website	3.09	Audio guide	5.68	Activities on Malaysian monarchy	4.49
Activities on Malaysian monarchy	2.91	Activities on Malaysian monarchy	5.65	Alluring	4.48
Unique	2.91	Brochure	5.65	Enchanting	4.47
Alluring	2.91	Audio guide in tourism website	5.59	Unique	4.36
Regality at site	2.86	Value	5.58	Regality at site	4.35
Enchanting	2.73	Activities at places of monarchy	5.55	Brochure	4.31
Relevant in tourism	2.73	E-book in tourism website	5.53	Enhance Malaysian image	4.26
Niche product	2.64	Enchanting	5.53	Great	4.24
Great	2.59	Regality at site	5.46	Audio guide in tourism website	4.21
Enhance Malaysian image	2.50	Malaysia is majestic with monarchy	5.36	Nine royal states	4.17
E-book in tourism website	2.45	Great	5.36	Niche product	4.13
Symbol	2.36	Main focus by marketers	5.34	Corporate identity	3.92
Defining nation	2.23	Defining nation	5.27	E-book in tourism website	3.85
More interesting than other monarchy	2.05	Main focus by tourism authorities	5.23	Malaysia is majestic with monarchy	3.53
Malaysia is majestic with monarchy	2.05	Corporate identity	5.22	More interesting than other monarchy	3.45

Note: 1 = absolutely not important and 7 = absolutely important

Clusters Socio-demographic Profile

The study is analysed further through the labelling of clusters based on the socio-demographic profile and the respondents' trip characteristics (Tables 3 and 4). The cross-tabulation analysis profiled the demographic differences between the clusters, and the chi-square tests have also shown a significant statistical difference.

Clusters awareness of monarchy heritage when travelling

As Fuchs and Diamantopoulos (2010) have mentioned, consumers are not able to interpret or rate the attributes and their level of satisfaction adequately if they do not have sufficient knowledge of a certain product. In Table 5, the clusters are analysed based on their level of awareness to the different segments.

Clusters comparative evaluation on awareness in relation to neighbouring countries with a monarchy heritage

In order to build a profitable relationship with the target customers, it is important to understand their needs and deliver better value compared to other competitors (Armstrong, Kotler, & Opresnik, 2020, p. 217). For the purpose of this study, to determine their level of awareness of other countries with a monarchy, the tourists were surveyed on their level of awareness of Thailand. A popular destination and a neighbouring country to Malaysia, Thailand is also a country with a constitutional monarchy. In Table 6, the comparison between clusters was examined.

Clusters intention to visit attractions with monarchy heritage in Malaysia

Tracking tourists' intention to visit is an important factor in measuring the success of a marketing strategy (Hennessey, Yun, & MacDonald, 2016). To gain a more profound understanding of each cluster, Table 7 provides a cross-tabulation of each cluster's intention to visit.

The respondents were also asked to elaborate their answers on the marketing concentration in promoting the monarchy heritage and only 49 respondents had answered. For those who had answered yes, the common themes were: "part of history", "unique feature", "historical and cultural interest", "interesting", and "valuable heritage". As for the respondents who had answered no, the respondents showed a negative emotional response. The common reasons were: "it is outdated", "I don't agree with monarchies", "culture is rich enough on its own", and "the monarchy is insignificant".

The above analysis has shown that Cluster 1 is not enthusiastic about visiting sites with monarchy heritage. Cluster 2, however, has shown the highest interest in monarchy heritage. Cluster 3 seems to be betwixt and between. According to Haley (1968), the benefit that people seek when consuming a certain product is the true essence of market segmentation. Therefore, the labelling of the clusters is as follows: Cluster 1- the 'apathetic tourists', Cluster 2- the 'royal enthusiast', and Cluster 3- the 'inclined royalist'.

Categorising market segments

To determine the Malaysian monarchy heritage speciality as perceived by the tourists from each cluster, the respondents were asked the importance of each of these items with '1' as 'absolutely not important' to '7' as 'absolutely important', as indicated in Table 8.

Table 3

Socio-demographic Profile of International Tourists by Monarchy Heritage Benefit Sought Segments

		Cluster 1 N=22	Cluster 2 N=74	Cluster 3 N=110	Total N=206	Chi- Sq. Prob
Gender	Male	59.1	40.5	60.0	52.9	.029
	Female	40.9	59.5	40.0	47.1	
Age	16-25	22.7	33.8	30.9	31.1	.522
	26-35	31.8	37.8	49.1	43.2	
	36-45	27.3	16.2	11.8	15.0	
	46-55	9.1	5.4	4.5	5.3	
	56-65	4.5	5.4	1.8	3.4	
	66-75	4.5	1.4	1.8	1.9	
Region	Africa	4.5	5.4	2.7	3.9	.000
	Asia	9.1	47.3	17.3	27.2	
	Europe	72.7	32.4	52.7	47.6	
	Middle East	0.0	2.7	0.9	1.5	
	North America	9.1	5.4	14.5	10.7	
	Oceania	4.5	4.1	9.1	6.8	
	South America	0.0	0.0	2.7	1.5	
	Unspecified	0.0	2.7	0.0	1.0	
Education	High School	0.0	6.8	5.5	5.3	.477
	College	18.2	12.2	8.2	10.7	
	Technical Institute	0.0	5.4	1.8	2.9	
	Bachelor/Degree	45.5	35.1	46.4	42.2	
	Master and above	36.4	40.5	38.2	38.8	
Occupation	Unspecified	0.0	1.4	0.0	0.5	.213
	Student	13.6	25.7	29.1	26.2	
	Administrative	0.0	4.1	1.8	2.4	
	Creative Arts	0.0	2.7	3.6	2.9	
	Education	9.1	12.2	13.6	12.6	
	Engineer	9.1	10.8	18.2	14.6	
	Finance	4.5	6.8	2.7	4.4	
	Management	22.7	6.8	8.2	9.2	
	Healthcare	4.5	4.1	5.5	4.9	
	Info System	0.0	5.4	1.8	2.9	
	Hospitality	0.0	1.4	0.0	0.5	
	Legal	13.6	4.1	3.6	4.9	
	Marketing	13.6	4.1	0.9	3.4	
	Business	0.0	4.1	6.4	4.9	
	Operation	0.0	2.7	0.9	1.5	
	Service	0.0	1.4	0.9	1.0	
	Homemaker/Housewife	9.1	2.7	2.7	3.4	
Income	<\$20,000	22.7	39.2	29.1	32.0	.543
	\$20,000.01 - \$40,000.00	36.4	31.1	30.9	31.6	
	\$40,000.01 - \$60,000.00	13.6	9.5	13.6	12.1	
	\$60,000.01 - \$80,000.00	9.1	6.8	9.1	8.3	
	\$80,000.01 - \$100,000.00	4.5	9.5	4.5	6.3	
	>\$100,000.00	13.6	4.1	12.7	9.7	

Table 4

Trip Characteristics of International Tourists by Monarchy Heritage Benefit Sought Segments

		Cluster 1 N=22 %	Cluster 2 N=74 %	Cluster 3 N=110 %	Total N=206 %	Chi- Sq. Prob
No. of Visit to Malaysia	Unspecified	0.0	2.7	0.0	1.0	.053
	1st Visit	59.1	70.3	75.5	71.8	
	2nd Visit	18.2	10.8	14.5	13.6	
	3rd Visit	13.6	2.7	3.6	4.4	
	4th Visit	0.0	4.1	0.0	1.5	
	5th Visit	0.0	1.4	0.9	1.0	
	6th Visit	4.5	0.0	0.0	0.5	
	8th Visit	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	
	10th Visit	0.0	2.7	0.0	1.0	
	>10 visits	4.5	5.4	4.5	4.9	
Purpose of Visit	Business	9.1	9.5	7.3	8.3	.252
	Visit Friends/Relatives	4.5	13.5	3.6	7.3	
	Attend Convention/Conference	0.0	5.4	1.8	2.9	
	Vacation/Holiday	77.3	64.9	78.2	73.3	
	Study/Formal/Schooling	4.5	5.4	3.6	4.4	
	Others	4.5	1.4	5.5	3.9	
Travelling with	Alone	27.3	23.0	31.8	28.2	.028
	With Spouse	45.5	21.6	30.0	28.6	
	With Friends/Relatives	13.6	41.9	33.6	34.5	
	In a tour group	0.0	4.1	0.0	1.5	
	With business associates	0.0	4.1	1.8	2.4	
	Others	13.6	5.4	2.7	4.9	

Table 5

Level of Awareness of International Tourists by Monarchy Heritage Benefit Sought Segments

		Cluster 1 N=22 %	Cluster 2 N=74 %	Cluster 3 N=110 %	Total N=206 %	Chi- Sq. Prob
Awareness of Malaysian Monarchy	Yes	36.4	71.6	61.8	62.6	.011
	No	63.6	28.4	38.2	37.4	
Awareness of 9 Monarchy States	Yes	27.3	31.1	19.1	24.3	.167
	No	72.7	68.9	80.9	75.7	
Have visited Malaysian Monarchy	Yes	0.0	6.8	1.8	3.4	.125
	No	100.0	93.2	98.2	96.6	
Source of Information	Travel Agency	4.5	2.7	2.7	2.9	.413
	Friends/Family	18.2	28.4	14.5	19.9	
	Publications	18.2	18.9	21.8	20.4	
	Social Media	0.0	10.8	5.5	6.8	
	Search Engine	4.5	20.3	26.4	21.8	
	Radio/Tv	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.5	
	Newspaper	0.0	6.8	7.3	6.3	
	Tourism Bodies	0.0	2.7	0.0	1.0	
	Others	4.5	5.4	10.0	7.8	

Table 6

Competitor Awareness of International Tourists by Monarchy Heritage Benefit Sought Segments

		Cluster 1 N=22 %	Cluster 2 N=74 %	Cluster 3 N=110 %	Total N=206 %	Chi-Sq. Prob
Awareness of Malaysian Monarchy	Yes	36.4	71.6	61.8	62.6	.011
	No	63.6	28.4	38.2	37.4	
Awareness of Thailand Monarchy	Yes	22.7	42.5	50.0	44.4	.058
	No	77.3	57.5	50.0	55.6	
Have visited Thailand's Grand Palace	Yes	40.9	28.4	29.1	30.1	.502
	No	59.1	71.6	70.9	69.9	
Awareness of Grand Palace's official	Yes	18.2	18.9	12.7	15.5	.491
	No	81.8	81.1	87.3	84.5	
Awareness of other tourism products in Malaysia	Ecotourism	45.5	52.7	56.4	53.9	.624
	Shopping	72.7	70.3	71.8	71.4	.963
	Golf	27.3	16.2	21.8	20.4	.455
	Bird	36.4	24.3	42.7	35.4	.038
	Homestay	22.7	23.0	18.2	20.4	.702
	Cultural and Heritage	86.4	81.1	76.4	79.1	.502
	Sports	22.7	17.6	22.7	20.9	.682
	Adventure	36.4	37.8	53.6	46.1	.068
	Marine	45.5	32.4	43.6	39.8	.266
	Cruise	22.7	14.9	14.5	15.5	.614
	Diving	40.9	29.7	42.7	37.9	.195
	Angling	13.6	4.1	6.4	6.3	.268
	Yachting	13.6	4.1	7.3	6.8	.280
	Biking	22.7	8.1	15.5	13.6	.151
	Wedding/Honeymoon	36.4	31.1	36.4	34.5	.746
	Others	9.1	6.8	5.5	6.3	.799

Table 7

International Tourists' Intention to Visit by Monarchy Heritage Benefit Sought Segments

		Cluster 1 %	Cluster 2 %	Cluster 3 %	Total %	Chi-Sq. Prob
Region	Africa	4.5	5.4	2.7	3.9	.000
	Asia	9.1	47.3	17.3	27.2	
	Europe	72.7	32.4	52.7	47.6	
	Middle East	0.0	2.7	0.9	1.5	
	North America	9.1	5.4	14.5	10.7	
	Oceania	4.5	4.1	9.1	6.8	
	South America	0.0	0.0	2.7	1.5	
	Unspecified	0.0	2.7	0.0	1.0	
Awareness of Malaysian Monarchy	Yes	36.4	71.6	61.8	62.6	.011
	No	63.6	28.4	38.2	37.4	
High Focus on Monarchy Tourism	Yes	22.7	85.1	51.8	60.7	.000
	No	77.3	13.5	48.2	38.8	
	Unspecified	0.0	1.4	0.0	0.5	
		Cluster 1 (Mean)	Cluster 2 (Mean)	Cluster 3 (Mean)	Total (Mean)	Chi-Sq. Prob
Intention to visit/revisit Malaysia Monarchy sites		3.73	6.18	5.15	5.37	.000
Intention to visit/revisit other Malaysia royal states		3.68	6.04	5.05	5.26	.000

Table 8

Monarchy Heritage Benefits Sought Ranked

	Mean	SD.	Rank
Accessibility	5.92	1.18	1
Entrance fee	5.85	1.34	4
Value	5.59	1.28	8
Quality & facilities	5.88	1.12	3
Historical significance	5.49	1.36	10
Narration & signages	5.77	1.25	5
Audio guide	5.02	1.57	13
Activities on Malaysian monarchy	4.74	1.52	19
Activities at places of monarchy	4.76	1.46	18
Identity representation	5.62	1.30	7
Representation of Malaysian people	5.66	1.38	6
Information	5.56	1.28	9
One official website	5.07	1.58	11
Website from each state	4.99	1.56	14
Heritage trail	5.06	1.37	12
Brochure	4.69	1.65	21
Audio guide in tourism website	4.59	1.62	25
E-book in tourism website	4.31	1.65	29
Regality at site	4.59	1.48	24
Increase knowledge	5.89	1.17	2
More interesting than other monarchy	3.81	1.48	33
Malaysia is majestic with monarchy	4.03	1.54	31
Unique	4.72	1.50	20
Great	4.47	1.32	27
Nine royal states	4.50	1.25	26
Niche product	4.31	1.40	28
Main focus by tourism authorities	3.62	1.76	35
Main focus by marketers	3.63	1.78	34
Alluring	4.76	1.44	17
Enchanting	4.67	1.38	22
Corporate identity	4.17	1.52	30
Symbol	4.79	1.66	16
Defining nation	3.96	1.69	32
Relevant in tourism	4.89	1.59	15
Enhance Malaysian image	4.67	1.60	23

Note. 1 = absolutely not important and 7 = absolutely important

Positioning creates an image of a product in the minds of the targeted consumer (Ries & Trout, 2001). The list of attributes in Tables 9 and 10 provides a holistic perceived view by cluster. The tourists' perceived idea of attributes should be examined from two viewpoints: functionality and psychological (Echtnner & Ritchie, 2003) as indicated in Table 9 and Table 10.

Table 9

Functionality Attributes of Monarchy Heritage Benefit Sought Ranked

	Cluster 1		Cluster 2		Cluster 3		Sig.
	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	
Accessibility	4.59	5	6.16	1	6.02	2	0.000
Entrance fee	4.68	4	5.89	9	6.05	1	0.000
Value	4.86	2	5.58	16	5.74	5	0.013
Quality & facilities	5.18	1	6.07	4	5.89	3	0.004
Historical significance	4.18	6	5.91	8	5.47	9	0.000
Narration & signages	4.77	3	6.04	6	5.79	4	0.000
Audio guide	3.86	9	5.68	12	4.82	12	0.000
Activities on the Malaysian monarchy	2.91	17	5.65	13	4.49	15	0.000
Activities at places of monarchy	3.14	14	5.55	17	4.55	14	0.000
Identity representation	4.00	8	6.07	3	5.65	7	0.000
Representation of Malaysian people	3.77	10	6.12	2	5.72	6	0.000
Information	4.18	7	6.04	5	5.51	8	0.000
One official website	3.14	15	5.95	7	4.86	10	0.000
Website from each state	3.41	12	5.77	11	4.77	13	0.000
Heritage trail	3.68	11	5.80	10	4.85	11	0.000
Brochure	3.41	13	5.65	14	4.31	17	0.000
Audio guide on tourism website	3.09	16	5.59	15	4.21	18	0.000
E-book on tourism website	2.45	19	5.53	18	3.85	19	0.000
Regality at site	2.86	18	5.46	19	4.35	16	0.000

Table 10

Psychological Attributes of Monarchy Heritage Benefit Sought Ranked

	Cluster 1		Cluster 2		Cluster 3		Sig.
	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	
Increase knowledge	4.55	1	6.32	1	5.87	1	0.000
More interesting than other monarchy	2.05	12	4.85	16	3.45	13	0.000
Malaysia is majestic with monarchy	2.05	13	5.36	8	3.53	12	0.000
Unique	2.91	3	5.78	5	4.36	6	0.000
Great	2.59	8	5.36	9	4.24	8	0.000
Nine royal states	3.86	2	5.19	14	4.17	9	0.000
Niche product	2.64	7	5.08	15	4.13	10	0.000
Main focus by tourism authorities	1.91	15	5.23	12	2.87	15	0.000
Main focus by marketers	2.00	14	5.34	10	2.80	16	0.000
Alluring	2.91	4	5.73	6	4.48	4	0.000
Enchanting	2.73	5	5.53	7	4.47	5	0.000
Corporate identity	1.91	16	5.22	13	3.92	11	0.000
Symbol	2.36	10	5.85	4	4.55	3	0.000
Defining nation	2.23	11	5.27	11	3.42	14	0.000
Relevant in tourism	2.73	6	5.97	2	4.59	2	0.000
Enhance Malaysian image	2.50	9	5.91	3	4.26	7	0.000

Only the top three attributes from each cluster will be discussed in detail. Based on the functional needs that are indicated in Table 9, Cluster 1 has ranked ‘quality of facilities’ as the highest, followed by ‘value for money’, and ‘narration and signages at the site’. As for Cluster 2, the top three were: ‘accessibility to the monarchy sites’, ‘representation of the Malaysian people at monarchy’, and ‘representation of the Malaysian identity at monarchy sites’. As for Cluster 3, this group’s first three ranks were: ‘affordability of entrance fees’, ‘accessibility to monarchy sites’, and ‘quality of facilities’.

When asked about how they desire to feel when visiting monarchy heritage attractions (psychological needs) as listed in Table 10, Cluster 1 would want to feel “the visit increase knowledge”, “Malaysia is the only country with nine states”, and “the Malaysian monarchy is unique”. As for Cluster 2, the three highest ranks were: “the visit increases knowledge”, “relevant”, and “enhances Malaysian tourism reputation”. Meanwhile, for Cluster 3, psychologically this group would want to feel: “the visit increase knowledge”, “relevant”, and “symbol of the country”.

In addition to rating the attributes, the respondents were also given an open-ended question to write their view of the Malaysian monarchy. Despite the low response rate (only 24 respondents had answered) it was useful in understanding their impression of this heritage. Words that they had used to describe (in verbatim), showing the position of their views on a scale of between two extreme points were from “interesting”, “unique”, “part of Malaysian heritage”, “rich history”, to “unknown”, “not advertised enough”, “I don’t know much”, “made of nine states? (question mark)”, and “I had no idea”. Their response illustrates that some of them were unaware that there is a monarchy heritage in Malaysia despite Malaysia having nine royal states with a long and rich history, and many places with royal palaces, royal museums, royal galleries, and royal mosques. This poses a question on the current Malaysian monarchy image emphasis in tourism.

Positioning suggestion

Marketers must consider the customers' complete experience with the company's product or service in order to identify areas of uniqueness (Armstrong et al., 2020, p. 217-221). Therefore, each time tourism marketers interact with tourists, they need to identify ways to stand out from the competition. Creating a strong and distinctive image requires communicating it through advertising that reflects the Malaysian monarchy heritage distinctiveness. Notably, a positioning statement could capture this uniqueness.

Based on the item rank in Table 9 and Table 10, the items that were repeated and could be used for positioning: 1) that it increases knowledge, 2) accessibility to the sites, 3) the monarchy heritage is relevant, and 4) quality of facilities. Other competitive advantages that could be considered are: 5) representation of Malaysian people and identity, 6) uniqueness, and 7) the only country that has nine royal states. Since there are many attributes to choose from, the main point is to determine which one to highlight? “More for more will draw one target market, less for much less will draw another, and so on.” (Armstrong et al., 2020, p. 221).

One way of ensuring the success of a product is by getting the message into the mind, and in this world of overcommunication, a clear and simplified message would be the best approach (Ries & Trout, 2001, p. 21, 31). Comparing the attributes- ‘accessibility to the sites’ and ‘quality of facilities’, although these are excellent points to highlight, they are not distinct enough to establish the competitive advantage of the monarchy heritage. Therefore, it is recommended that to communicate the uniqueness of the heritage, the obvious difference(s) should be highlighted. Furthermore, it is also suggested that the Malaysian monarchy heritage should be positioned as “A RICH HERITAGE DESTINATION WITH NINE ROYAL STATES – UNIQUELY MALAYSIA”. This suggested slogan is just an impression of how the monarchy's heritage could be positioned. If the authorities of the monarchy heritage are interested in utilising the findings from this research, they could explore alternative strategies for formulating slogans.

CONCLUSION

Heritage is known to be an enabler of sustainable development. The contribution of heritage and the sustainability of the heritage require explicit care by heritage professionals in ensuring that the heritage significance transcends national boundaries, and at the same time is commonly known for its importance among the present and future generations as well as contributing to sustainable development (Labadi, Giliberto, Rosetti, Shetabi, & Yildirim, 2021). With the right positioning strategy, the preservation of the Malaysian monarchy's heritage which has already existed for more than five centuries can be continued without the need to create a new product that could result in unsustainable use of natural resources. The purpose of the positioning exercise is to create an appealing image that leverages a destination's unique strength. The Malaysian monarchy is a unique feature of Malaysia, consisting of nine royal states and it practices a rotating monarchy system. This unique feature cannot be found in other parts of the world other than in Malaysia. This is also in line with Malaysia Tourism Marketing Strategy 2022-2026 which aims to boost international arrivals and position Malaysia as a unique holiday destination, with experiential, more flexible, individualistic trips, and special interest holidays.

Based on the findings, Cluster 2 is found to be the most suitable target market. The results have shown that Cluster 2 is more enthusiastic about the beneficial importance of visiting a monarchy heritage site, and was therefore named as 'the royal enthusiast'. The positioning strategy can be developed by identifying the particular category of experiential tourism that focuses on various themes (Garcia-Madurga, Esteban-Navarro, Delgado-de Miguel, & Menchero, 2019) that allow the tourists to engage more fully with the destination such as heritage tourism. Heritage tourism brings sustainable development opportunities for destinations, particularly after Covid-19 (Zhang et al., 2020), since the Malaysian monarchy heritage is a part of heritage tourism that can be experienced by tourists visiting this country. When travelling, tourists who have a particular interest in heritage, such as the respondents in Cluster 2, typically include visits to heritage destinations and seek attributes that will satisfy their curiosity and understanding of the heritage. In contrast to recreational tourists, heritage tourists are influenced by factors that affect their satisfaction with a heritage destination. Correspondingly, there are several factors that would affect tourists' satisfaction towards a heritage destination: 1) the image of the heritage destination...; 2) the visitors' experience...; 3) ..emotional attachment with a destination (Deb, 2020; Su et al., 2020). Therefore, the goal of a positioning strategy is to influence tourists' perception through effective communication.

This study has also suggested that Cluster 3 should be considered when developing targeted marketing campaigns since this cluster has shown enthusiasm for the attribute. However, Cluster 3 would require a different approach from Cluster 2 to lure them to visiting the Malaysian monarchy heritage sites, and therefore they are named as the 'inclined royalist'. Cluster 3 exclusively seeks the advantages of heritage site functionality, as demonstrated in Tables 9 and 10. Consequently, if the monarchy heritage site destination's quality of facilities is satisfactory and the destination presents a blend of art, culture, and history, Cluster 3 may be persuaded to visit. The participants in Cluster 2 and Cluster 3 when asked in one of the survey's open-ended questions, "Should there be a high focus on marketing the monarchy heritage in tourism?", some of their answers (taken verbatim) were: "It should be preserved, echoed to the next generation"; "It's part of the nation's history"; "It's a unique feature that can add value to tourism"; "Monarchies provide historical and cultural interest, example given, British monarchy". Their answers showed enthusiasm for the heritage as well as the element of sustainability, i.e., the preservation of the monarchy heritage for the next generations were mentioned. Specifically, Cluster 2 demonstrated a strong desire to visit places with an existing monarchy (Table 7). Accordingly, tourism advertising or marketing-related authorities should direct their communicating and advertising initiatives mainly on

Cluster 2, and potentially on Cluster 3. The communication efforts could be directed to countries from Europe (the United Kingdom- focusing on England, Austria, and the Netherlands), and the biggest international market profile from Asia (Japan, Singapore, China, Philippines, India including Sri Lanka, and South Korea) including Nigeria from the Africa region. The tourists who are interested in monarchy heritage may be influenced by these factors and largely are from countries with- 1) a monarchy such as the United Kingdom (mainly England, as the surveyed tourists from Ireland [*only North Ireland is a part of Great Britain] dislikes the idea of a monarchy), as well as Japan, and 2) countries that used to have monarchies as traditional leaders such as Austria and Nigeria.

In contrast, tourists who did not see the benefits of visiting heritage places with Malaysian monarchy heritage, as identified in Cluster 1, were named as the ‘apathetic tourists’, with the lowest number of members in the group. The tourists’ indifference towards the monarchy may be viewed from three standpoints: 1) tourists from members of commonwealth countries such as Australia and New Zealand; 2) tourists from the republic countries or who view themselves as republicans (not governed by a monarch), for example, those coming from Germany, Slovakia, United States of America, and France did not see the importance of concentrating marketing efforts and visiting sites with a monarchy heritage, and intriguingly, 3) there were few tourists from countries with a monarchy, for example, Spain that did not see the benefit of experiencing monarchy heritage in Malaysia. When their opinions were elicited as to whether there should be a marketing focus on the monarchy heritage, their answers (taken verbatim) are as indicated below differed from Cluster 2 and 3: “It’s not relevant at this time and century”; “It is outdated”; “I don’t agree with monarchies”, and “Royals are just symbolic, just be happy with that”. The disparity in views were similar (Palmer & Long, 2018) whereby some of the biggest issues surrounding the monarchy (in Britain) continued to be formed around the republican versus the unionist and even the anarchist’s belief and viewpoints. However, the focus of this paper is solely on the potential of a positioning strategy to raise awareness among international tourists. Consequently, the scope of this research does not include social perspectives, power dynamics, or similar concerns.

Regarding the tourist’s level of awareness, most of the respondents who were surveyed were first-time visitors to Malaysia and most of the respondents in Cluster 2 and Cluster 3 were aware that Malaysia is a country with a monarchy, however, they were unaware that this country has nine royal states (Table 5). On the other hand, Cluster 1 members were unaware of the monarchy heritage and all of them did not know that Malaysia has nine royal states. Tourists who were aware of the monarchy heritage had gained information mainly from their friends or family, through search engines and publication materials (Table 5). Perhaps the communication of the positioning statement could focus on these three media.

Interestingly though, tourists from all clusters perceived themselves as curious and wanted to learn more about this heritage (Table 10). For the heritage managers, this implies that the exhibitions at the monarchy sites should be interesting with contents that capture tourists’ attention and shape the cultural experience. Other top perceived importance were ‘quality of facilities’, ‘accessibility to the site’, ‘relevance of the monarchy’, and the representation of the Malaysian people and identity, which also imply both marketers and managers that these factors were all central when communicating the heritage aspect of the monarchy. Knowing the benefits that are sought by tourists is important and can be viewed in two ways (Kotler et al., 2017, p. 232). First, by knowing what the tourists want, managers can develop products with features that the customers (tourists) are seeking. Second, managers of the product could communicate more effectively to their intended customers.

The combined components of functionality and psychological experience would form an overall image of the monarchy heritage in Malaysia and the identified clusters could assist destination marketers and managers to discover distinct market groups as their customer base. The positioning should be communicated to the right target audience and the slogan should be persuasive. The suggested positioning statement- ‘A RICH HERITAGE DESTINATION WITH NINE ROYAL STATES – UNIQUELY MALAYSIA’, conveys a value proposition to the ideal tourists, who perceive functional and emotional benefits from visiting the Malaysian monarchy heritage sites. Besides, the more heritage that is promoted, which is subsequently backed by funding, legislation, and public awareness, the more sustainable it will become. Optimal cultural heritage management and innovative marketing strategies would lead to improved sustainable development.

In a recent finding on a royal tourism study in Indonesia, there was evidence of potential revisiting intention even though Indonesia is a republic country (Mamoon et al., 2022). Therefore, it juxtaposes that a monarchy country such as Malaysia could do better in marketing Malaysia as a country that is laden with rich heritage, that is unified by the symbol of the monarchy institution, despite its diversity. Consequently, this would contribute to the sustainability of the monarchy heritage.

Practical implications

These findings suggest that marketers and or managers of royal cities, royal galleries, museums- whether it is a district, state or royal museums, state government and state tourism with royal towns (Bandar DiRaja) including the providers of traditional crafts such as royal tenun (weaving) centre could leverage positioning and become the experts in the services of the Malaysian Monarchy’s heritage, communicating and implanting its heritage uniqueness to international visitors. Besides, parallel to the Sustainable Development Goal 17 and Malaysia Tourism Marketing Agenda 2022-2026, it is imperative now more than ever to conserve and preserve intangible heritage and the built heritage that complements and resonates with the existing institution and identity of Malaysians.

Limitations and recommendations for further study

Since this research is exploratory, there are some limitations in this study. International respondents were affected due to the pandemic (Covid-19); in fact, at the time of collection the border for international arrivals into Malaysia had just opened. Moreover, the number of respondents from certain regions is just too small to analyse and shape a profile, for example, the tourists from Africa and the Middle East. Language barrier was also noticeable among respondents from Japan and Korea who were mostly accompanied by hired museum docents. Therefore, it is suggested that the survey questionnaires should be in the respondent’s native language.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

This research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

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