

INTERNET: THE BEST HOMESTAY PROMOTER

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Abstract: *The purpose of this study is to determine the best promotion tool in promoting homestay program in Malaysia. Homestay program in Malaysia becomes a potential sector to improve the development of economy, infrastructure, social, and the environment factors in tourism industry. 500 Homestay program visitors were randomly selected and the data collected was analyzed using IBM-SPSS version 24. Findings show that promotions via internet are the most powerful tool to attract visitors and the visitors via internet are more satisfied with the homestay facilities provided by the host. This positive perception embarked more than 80 percent of them to return to the same homestay in future and recommend their favourite homestay to others. In addition, results from binary logistic regression analysis also supported the findings with 97.23 percent of them will return to the same homestay in the future and 96.88 percent will recommend to the others. It caused of the highly satisfaction level with the facilities provided by the homestay host. It is recommended that all registered homestay in Malaysia will promote their homestay using the internet tools because it can advertise attractively and also will reduce the marketing cost.*

Keywords: *Homestay, Internet, Facility, Service*

Introduction

Internet is the most dominant medium in navigating, search of information and communication network connectors worldwide. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2009), the online social media technology allows tremendous number of people to have social interaction and communications. Internet is used along with smart gadgets such as personal computer (PC), laptop and mobile devices. Their study also stated the devices which are connected to internet

lead social networking sites to activate with interface in establishing social connections and relationship. Statistically, Asian region showed numerous internet usages with 1,622,084,293 users, followed by Europe with 604, 147,280 users and the number is expected to balloon every year. (Internet World Stat, n.d.).

Social media technologies began as social phenomena but now they have become ever-growing parts of any companies' promotional expenditure. Thus, internet becomes an effective advertising media even though it is necessary to fully understand the determinants of consumer response to online advertisements. One of the popular sectors advertised in internet is tourism. Business people who are involved in tourism sector such as owners of hotels, homestays, and travel agencies prefer advertising their services on the internet since it is accessible at anytime and anywhere using mobile devices. Their advertisements are normally displayed online through social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram since they have become platforms for people to chat, build new ties, viewing and navigating their list of connection and those made by others in the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Surprisingly, through these facilities the business people will do zero cost of marketing strategy but they are able to reach millions of people. To place bookings, visitors just need to view the room images, price offered, date and facilities provided. These features make the business people feel that internet is beneficial to marketing interaction and it suits visitors' needs by surveying the point of interest without having to be there. This is supported by Ana Maria (2014) and Soares, Pinho and Nobre (2012) who note that internet give a deep impact on advertising and it is vital to marketers.

Nowadays, local and international tourists prefer choosing homestay as their place to stay over hotels because of the attractions itself such as uniqueness and choices of food (Meimand, Khalifah & Hakimi, 2013). As one of the tourism products, homestay program plays a crucial role to the economy since it can be considered as the fast growing segments of tourism market (Wang, 2007). Foreign tourist visits the Malaysian homestay program to experience its uniqueness. This uniqueness may attract a lot of people to come and visit the homestay. Therefore, promotion plays a very important role to attract tourists to come and stay at the homestay.

Tourist, especially foreign tourist will make a visit to homestay program that registered under Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia compared to others because the program offers tourist with such a beautiful nature, art and crafts, music and cultural activities, habitat and vernacular architecture, historical significance, traditional food and beverage, agriculture projects or activities, and special phenomena (Ibrahim & Abdul Razzaq, 2010). With these reputations, homestay operators should have the best marketing strategy to promote their homestay so that it will make everything more effective (Miraz, Raml, Ku-Mahamud et al., 2015). Therefore, this study will identify the best promotion tool in promoting homestay program in Malaysia.

Literature review

Homestay program in Malaysia has become a potential sector to improve the development of economy, infrastructure, social, and the environment factors especially in tourism sector (Pusiran & Xiao, 2013). Wipada (2007) defined the homestay as one type of lodging that tourists share with the homeowner with the intention to learn culture and lifestyle from the homeowner, who prepared lodging and food. The growth in homestay program provides huge opportunities to the rural communities where it has significant contribution to the rural

socioeconomic development, social capital development, conservation effort and enhancement of rural areas, as stated by Ibrahim and Abdul Razzaq (2010). United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) barometer declared that homestay program in Malaysia is ranked at 9th position from 2009 to 2011, and 10th position in 2012. Malaysia was also awarded first prize for UNWTO Ulysses Award 2012 for innovative in public policy and governance for homestay experience programme (Othman, Wee & Hassan, 2014). Based on such achievements, it indicates the government efforts in developing and managing homestay as one of the tourism products has been proven to be successful and properly guided.

Since Malaysia is rich with multicultural value and resources, there are many attractions that could promote homestay program. There is also a program set by the Malaysian Ministry of Tourism called Plant A Tree (PAT) program which is part of the initiatives in promoting environmental awareness and conservation (Ismail, 2012). His study also stated that PAT may encourage tourists to repeat their visit when to see the development of the trees planted by themselves (Ismail, 2012). Meanwhile, Othman et al. (2014) asserted branding image also have significant role in promoting tourism. Their study mentioned that the tagline “Malaysia truly Asia” has created an identity where tourists can associate and add valuable experiences while having holiday in Malaysia.

Promotion is an important aspect that can influence visitor to visit homestay and has become an important factor for marketing process (Miraz et al., 2015). As outlined in the Ninth Malaysian Plan (2006-2010), one of the plans is to strengthen the importance of sustainable tourism development. One of the suggested themes regarding sustaining tourism effort in this plan is to develop domestic tourism through marketing and promotion activities (Marzuki, 2010). Realizing the potential growth and economic impact of homestay tourism, the government of Malaysia through its related agencies play important role in publicity and marketing promotions effort (Pusiran & Xiao, 2013). As such, one of the endeavours by the Malaysian Ministry of Tourism is by the endorsement of *go2homestay* website, <http://www.go2homestay.com/> as the official website for homestay directory in Malaysia and through social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. By embracing e-marketing promotion from the use of internet and technology, it provides a platform for tourists to make reservations or enquiries of their desired destination in simpler and easier way. Besides that, another initiative is by developing mobile application for smartphones which can amplify the segment of potential tourists from the global community connectivity. The application is highly accessible since there are vast smartphone users globally. In addition, Othman et al. (2014) stated that e-marketing is among the top marketing strategies used in promoting tourism products.

Research Methodology

500 visitors of Malaysia homestay programme, focusing in Pahang region served as respondents for this study. The criteria of choosing this region is because the homestay program started in 1980s in Pahang with a student exchange program (Tourism Pahang Malaysia, 2013). The students stayed with adopted family with different culture and background with the objective is to promote a greater understanding of Malaysia cultural and social.

The questionnaire was adopted by Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia (2014) and was distributed to selected visitors. The questionnaire comprised four sections; Section A, B, C and D. Section A focused on visitor background, Section B looked at the promotion tools used to promote homestay program, Section C was about the loyalty and recommendation of the homestay to others (Yes or No), and Section D consisted of used Likert scale statements ranging

from 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good) about the facilities and services provided by the homestay host. This study aims to determine the best promotion tool in promoting homestay program in Malaysia. Second analysis is based on t-test, to test whether there is a significance difference between group of visitors via internet and group of visitors via other promotion tools towards services and facilities provided by homestay hosts.

Final analysis is binary logistic regression approach to calculate the percentage of the visitor will return to the same homestay in the future if they use the internet for getting the information about the homestay. As information, binary logistic regression requires the observations to be independent and the independent variables are linearly related to the natural log of the odds ratio, but not require the assumption of normality, unlike multiple regression. This approach needs a minimum of 20 cases for each predictor with a minimum of 60 cases (Leech, Nancy, Barrett, et al., 2008). The first model is based on dependent variable which is whether the visitor will return to the same homestay in the future and independent variables are internet promotion, facilities and services provided by the homestay operators. The second model is based on dependent variable which is whether the visitor will recommend the homestay to others and independent variables are internet promotion, facilities and services provided by the homestay hosts. The facilities and services provided by the homestay hosts will be included in the model if the variables have a significance difference based on the t-test analysis.

Findings and Discussion

In total, 255 (51.00%) male and 245 (49.00%) female visitors took part in the study. 390 (70.00%) of them were less than 35 years old, 95 (19.00%) were between 35 and 45 years old, and the rest 55 (15.00%) were above 45 years old. Table 1 shows the homestay promotion tools used by the visitors to get the information about their selected homestay. According to Miraz et al. (2015), promotion is an important aspect that can influence visitor to visit homestay. This study reveals that internet (51%) is the most important tools to promote the homestay program followed by family and friends (20%), radio or television which shares the same number of response as brochure or billboard or newspaper, 65 visitors (13%), and from travel agency with only 3% (15 visitors). The visitors used website or social networks such as Facebook and Twitter to get information about the homestay program. The information gathered from the internet is about the location, facilities and services provided by the homestay hosts. All the information given can attract the visitors to visit the homestay.

Table 1: Homestay Promotion Tools

Promotion Tools	Frequency (%)	Rank
Internet (Website/ Social network)	255 (51%)	1
Family/ Friends	100 (20%)	2
Radio/ Television	65 (13%)	3.5
Brochure/ Billboard/ Newspaper	65 (13%)	3.5
Travel agency	15 (3%)	5

Visitors will have an intention to visit the same homestay again in future or will recommend it to others based on the facilities or services provided by the homestay hosts. Next analysis will examine whether there is a significant difference on facilities and services, between the means they obtained information about the selected homestay; via internet or other promotion tools. Normality test showed that the data was normally distributed because the *p*-value obtained was greater than 0.05. The independent t-test was conducted and the result indicates that there is a

significant difference between the groups for service factor since the p -value was less than 0.05, as shown in Table 2. The mean difference for this factor is .1718, which shows the group which used internet to get the information about the homestay is more satisfied about the facilities provided by the homestay host, as advertised on the internet. Furthermore, Table 2 also indicates that there is no significant difference between the groups for facility factor since the p -value was greater than 0.05. This finding reveals that there is no significant difference of satisfaction level towards the services provided by the homestay host between the group which used internet and without used the internet to get the information about the homestay. Therefore, the homestay hosts should be more concerned about the services provided so that the visitors will return to their homestay in future and will recommend the homestay to others.

Table 2: Results of Independent t-Test

Factors/ Group of Test	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
Facilities				
Internet ~ Other promotion tools	2.4902, 2.3184	.9764, .8188	2.135	.033*
Services				
Internet ~ Other promotion tools	2.6275, 2.7092	1.0110, 1.0063	-.906	.366

*Significance at 5% level of significance

The following Table 3 shows that the intention among the visitors to return in future to the same homestay based on different promotion tools used. The analysis found that the best homestay promotion tool; internet has the highest tendency of visitors to return in future, 220 (86.30%) out of 255 visitors. In addition, 215 (84.30%) of them will recommend their selected homestay to others, as stated in Table 4. These finding reveals that the visitors easily recommend the homestay to others by using the internet. It is also revealed that internet affects homestay advertising, as suggested by Ana Maria (2014) and Soares et al. (2012).

Table 3: Cross Tabulation Table of Return Visit in Future to the Homestay

Promotion Tools	Return in the Future		Total
	Yes	No	
Internet (Website/ Social network)	220 (86.30%)	35 (13.70%)	255
Family/ Friends	80 (80.00%)	20 (20.00%)	100
Radio/ Television	50 (76.90%)	15 (23.10%)	65
Brochure/ Billboard/ Newspaper	55 (76.90%)	10 (23.10%)	65
Travel agency	15 (100%)	0	15

Table 4: Cross Tabulation Table of Recommendation of Homestay to Others

Promotion Tools	Recommendation		Total
	Yes	No	
Internet (Website/ Social network)	215 (84.30%)	40 (15.70%)	255
Family/ Friends	80 (80.00%)	20 (20.00%)	100
Radio/ Television	50 (76.90%)	15 (23.10%)	65
Brochure/ Billboard/ Newspaper	55 (76.90%)	10 (23.10%)	65
Travel agency	15 (100%)	0	15

As stated earlier in Table 1, internet contributed more than 50% in attracted visitor to choose the best homestay. Next finding revealed the binary logistic regression results in calculating the percentage of visitor will return to the same homestay in the future and also will recommend the homestay to others given other two independent variables; internet promotion and facilities provided by the homestay hosts. The variable of services provided by the homestay hosts is not selected as independent variable in binary logistic regression analysis because based on the t-test analysis in Table 2 shows that the result of service factor is not significance. The binary logistic regression result obtained based on two different dependent variables; first result is return to the same homestay (Table 5) and second result is recommending the homestay to others (Table 6).

Result in Table 5 shows whether the visitor will return in the future to the same homestay as the dependent variable. The result indicates that two predictor variables; facilities provided and internet as promotion tool are significantly predicted whether or not the visitor will return to the same homestay in the future. The Omnibus tests of model coefficients revealed that the two predictor variables are significantly together with Chi-square = 177.339, df = 2 and $p < 0.000$ with 51.00% total variances. Based on the classification table obtained, the overall prediction success rate for the cases used in developing the model is 88.00 % with correct prediction rates of 95.20% for visitors who will return to same homestay in the future and compared to 50.00% for those who will not. Therefore, the predictor variables are better at predicting who will return to the same homestay in the future compared to who will not. Based on Hosmer and Lemeshow test, it shows that the model obtained adequately fits the data (Chi-square = 7.348, df = 5, $p = 0.196$, $p > 0.05$).

Table 5: Results of Binary Logistic Regression 1

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	p-value	Exp (B)	95% CI for Exp(B)
Constant	- 4.138	.590	49.276	.000	62.686	
Internet Promotion	-.913	.330	7.653	.006*	.401	(.210, .766)
Facilities	2.566	.280	83.880	.000*	.077	(.044, .133)

*Significance at 5% level of significance

Table 5 revealed that the best logistic regression model obtained for visitor will return to the same homestay in the future can be expressed as follows:

$$\ln \left[\frac{\text{Probability (Return)}}{\text{Probability (Not Return)}} \right] = - 4.138 - 0.913 (\text{Internet}) + 2.566 (\text{Facilities})$$

where visitor will return to the same homestay in the future

$$= \ln \left[\frac{\text{Probability (Return)}}{\text{Probability (Not Return)}} \right]$$

As an example, the likelihood of a visitor will return to the same homestay in the future if the visitor was promoted to stay at the selected homestay via internet with facilities provided rate of 3.0 would be calculated as follows:

$$\ln \left[\frac{\text{Probability (Return)}}{\text{Probability (Not Return)}} \right] = -4.138 - 0.913 (0) + 2.566 (3.0) = 3.56$$

The ‘odds ratio’ is approximated as $e^{3.56} = 35.163$

The probability that this homestay will be return to the same homestay in the future would be

$$\frac{35.163}{1 + 35.163} = 0.9723 = 97.23\%$$

For comparison, the likelihood of a visitor will return to the same homestay in the future if the visitor was promoted to stay at the selected homestay via other promotion tools with facilities provided rate of 3.0 would be calculated as follows:

$$\ln \left[\frac{\text{Probability (Return)}}{\text{Probability (Not Return)}} \right] = -4.138 - 0.913 (1) + 2.566 (3.0) = 2.647$$

The ‘odds ratio’ is approximated as $e^{2.647} = 14.112$

The probability that this homestay will be return to the same homestay in the future would be

$$\frac{14.112}{1 + 14.112} = 0.9338 = 93.38\%$$

Next Table 6 shows for the visitor will recommend the homestay to others as the dependent variable. The result indicates that two predictor variables; facilities provided and internet as promotion tool are significantly predicted whether or not the visitor will recommend the homestay to the others. The significant predictor variables contributed together to the significant model (Chi-square = 176.012, df = 2 and $p < 0.000$), accounted 49.60% of the total variance based on Nagelkerke-R². In addition, the classification table shows that the overall prediction success rate for the cases used in developing the model is 87.00 % with correct prediction rates of 95.20% for visitors who will recommend the homestay and compared to 47.10% for those who will not. Therefore, the predictor variables are better at predicting who will recommend compared to who will not.

Table 6: Results of Logistic Regression 2

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	p-value	Exp (B)	95% CI for Exp(B)
Constant	-3.900	.559	48.689	.000	49.389	
Internet Promotion	-.620	.312	3.956	.047*	.538	(.292, .991)
Facilities	2.445	.263	86.178	.000*	.087	(.052, .145)

*Significance at 5% level of significance

Based on Hosmer and Lemeshow test, it shows that the model obtained adequately fits the data (Chi-square = 10.135, df = 5, $p = 0.072$, $p > 0.05$). The best logistic regression model obtained for visitor to recommend the homestay to others can be expressed as follows:

$$\ln \left[\frac{\text{Probability (Recommending)}}{\text{Probability (Not Recommending)}} \right] = -3.900 - 0.620 (\text{Internet}) + 2.445 (\text{Facilities})$$

$$\text{where visitor will recommend the homestay} = \ln \left[\frac{\text{Probability (Recommending)}}{\text{Probability (Not Recommending)}} \right]$$

Second example is the likelihood of a visitor to recommend the homestay to the others if the visitor was promoted to stay at the selected homestay via internet with facilities provided rate of 3.0 would be calculated as follows:

$$\ln \left[\frac{\text{Probability (Recommending)}}{\text{Probability (Not Recommending)}} \right] = -3.900 - 0.620 (0) + 2.445 (3.0) = 3.435$$

The 'odds ratio' is approximated as $e^{3.435} = 31.031$

The probability that this homestay will be recommended would be

$$\frac{31.031}{1 + 31.031} = 0.9688 = 96.88\%$$

For comparison, the likelihood of a visitor will recommend the homestay to others if the visitor was promoted to stay at the selected homestay via other promotion tools with facilities provided rate of 3.0 would be calculated as follows:

$$\ln \left[\frac{\text{Probability (Recommending)}}{\text{Probability (Not Recommending)}} \right] = -3.900 - 0.620 (1) + 2.445 (3.0) = 2.815$$

The 'odds ratio' is approximated as $e^{2.815} = 16.693$

The probability that this homestay will be recommended would be

$$\frac{16.693}{1 + 16.693} = 0.9434 = 94.34\%$$

Based on the percentage obtained for the two binary logistic regression models shows that the groups of visitor via internet will have higher intention to return to the same homestay in the future with 3.85% compared to the other group of visitors. In addition, the binary logistics regression analysis also shows that group of visitors via internet will have higher intention to recommend the homestay to others with 2.54%. It shows that the homestay promotion via internet give better perception among to visitors compared other promotion tools.

Conclusion and Recommendation

It can be concluded that internet becomes the best homestay promoter compared to other promotion tools. More than 50 percent of the homestay visitors got the information about the homestay from the internet source. The result of comparison test revealed that the visitors used internet to get the information about the homestay feel more satisfied in term of facilities provided by homestay hosts compared to visitor that used other promotion tools. In addition, the visitors via internet have higher intention to return to the same homestay in the future and also having higher intention to recommend the homestay to their relative and friends. It shows that the effectiveness of the homestay promotion via internet is better compared to other promotion tools including radio, television, newspaper, family, friends and also travel agency.

Future study is highly recommended to examine the effectiveness of internet usage in promoting Malaysia homestay programme especially the used of official website for homestay directory in Malaysia; <http://www.go2homestay.com/> in wider region.

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