

Self-Engagement in Avitourism: A Case of Taman Negara Bird Count (TNBC2017) Malaysia

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Abstract: *In most parts of the world, tourism is the sector that has been found to be the fastest-growing economically and avitourism, which is a part of ecotourism, is growing in trend. However, the local market potential of birding or avitourism in many developing countries, including Malaysia, is yet to be further explored despite its rapid growth globally. Many previous researchers agreed that avitourism has high potential in bringing significant social and economic benefits to local communities. Thus, the aim of this study is to investigate the aspect of youth engagement in birding activities and its implication for future avitourism.*

Index Terms: *Tourism, ecotourism , avitourism potential, young birders*

I. INTRODUCTION

Being recognized as the fastest growing sector economically, tourism keeps on growing. Malaysia is also experiencing the same trend with tourist arrivals and receipts in 2017 was 25.95 million and RM82.1 million respectively [1]. Tourism has some special areas such as medical tourism, education tourism, sport tourism, ecotourism and avitourism, to name a few. Recently, avitourism has been classified as a sub set of ecotourism as it promotes conservation and environmental sustainability [2] and has gained interests of many tourists. In fact, avitourism has been said as one of the faster growing subsectors of ecotourism, recognized for its economic values. Besides promoting conservation and environmental sustainability, it also brings significant economic benefits to local communities [3]. In Malaysia, birdwatching or avitourism activity has also increased in popularity and contributes to the economic growth of the nation [4] as well. Ranked 12th globally for its megabiodiversity [5], endowed with the amazing nature and biodiversity, Malaysia has a big potential in promoting avitourism.

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It is said so because Malaysia has recorded over 60 species of birds that can be considered to be endemic [5]. With this natural asset, Malaysia seems to have a high potential market in birding tourism or also known as avitourism which is yet to be ventured [6].

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Taman Negara which is located in Pahang, Malaysia is the world's oldest virgin rainforest and is very famous with its amazing flora and fauna as well as its nature beauty [7]. TNBC or its full name Taman Negara Bird Count was established in 2014. The main aim was to promote the conservation of natural resources. The event was successfully organized annually and interestingly, many of the TNBC participants eventually turn to be nature lovers after they joined TNBC.

Table 1: bird species and number of participants

TNBC	No. of bird species	No. of TNBC participants
TNBC2014	76	120
TNBC2015	125	150
TNBC2016	150	200
TNBC2017	180	271

Source : TNBC 2017

From the table above, Taman Negara Bird Count (TNBC) has brought tremendous positive impacts to local community despite the fact that it is still at infancy.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Ecotourism

In the situation that tourists prefer to enjoy their holiday in a more environmentally responsible way, ecotourism would definitely be a great choice for them since the activities support the conservation of the environment with a more effective tourism management. This can be said only because when properly and systematically managed, ecotourism can minimize waste, pollution, and other tourism by-products.

Ecotourism can therefore be one of the good ways to preserve the environment. In addition to preserving the environment, ecotourism can also sustain local community well - beings by generating economic opportunities within the area among local people.

The participating ecotourism spots can promote many other ecotourism activities. Examples of the activities include canopy tours, bird watching, river rafting, waterfall visits, surfing and snorkeling, and a lot more. Bird watching or so - called avitourism has recently become increasingly popular among tourists [3] and thus is one of the fastest growing types of ecotourism activities.

B. Avitourism

Avitourism is classified as a nature-based tourism subcategory[8] and has been defined as a journey beyond one's usual overnight situation, to see birds in their natural habitat using a binocular[8]. Tourism for bird watching or birding, also known as avitourism, means that specific nature-based tourism sector that is explicitly focused on bird species [9]. Indeed, bird watching reflects a lively observation, identification and photography of birds – for recreational and leisure purposes [9-11].

C. Self-engagement

[12] described self - engagement as a state in which a person is highly engaged and eager to fulfill his or her task and find it easy to remain focused and is willing to invite others to take part in such program or activity. Interestingly [13-15] claimed that engagement has a relationship with performance, and in this case it can be concluded that engagement relates to the program's final outcome. Say, if in the end of the program, the level of engagement of participants can be increased, or retained at least, one can also conclude that the program can have a better future or has the potential to be sustained.

D. Intention to Participate in the Future

One of the ways to predict whether the program has the potential to be joined and chosen again by the existing participants or not is by predicting the intention of the participants to participate in such program in the future. As suggested by [16], there were several factors that have been associated with intention to participate in any kind of programs and factors like organizing committee, motivation, types of activities, venue and time are some of the examples.

IV. METHOD

To obtain the data, this research applied quantitative method whereby questionnaires were delivered to respondents during the three-day TNBC event. The potential respondents were all the 271 participants who participated in this TNBC2017 event. Since during the TNBC event the participants were tight with the program schedules, thus questionnaires were distributed during lunch hour and dinner time to those who were willing to participate and be the respondents. The respondents had to answer 35 questions altogether covering three sections and it took about ten minutes for them to complete the survey.

All the questions used in this study were divided into three main sections; Section A requires respondents to provide their demographic information, Section B provides questions regarding Self-engagement and Section C requires the respondents to rate their perception on Intention to Participate in the Future. The questions in Section B and C used five-point Likert Scale whereby 5 =strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree and 1= strongly disagree.

Self-engagement of the participants in this study was measured by adopting and adapting the measures constructed by [14] and [17]. .

V. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned previously, the number of TNBC2017 participants was 271. However, only 218 participants participated in the survey and all responses were found to be usable for further data analysis.

A. Normality Test

The role of the normality test was to establish values of Kurtosis and Skewness. Kurtosis was established by [18] and established that if Kurtosis and skewness values are close to +1 or -1, the data distribution is normal.

B. Reliability Analysis

To determine the reliability of the data, the value of Cronbach alpha for each variable was checked. Table 2 shows the results of reliability analysis for self-engagement (total), absorption, vigorous, dedication, and intention to participate in the forthcoming event. In this study, the Cronbach alpha value for self-engagement is 0.904, intention to participate in the future is .732, absorption 0.861, vigorous .944, and dedication .815. All the values are found to be above 0.70, thus it can be concluded that the scales used in this study are all reliable and acceptable [19].

Table 2 : Analysis of Reliability

Constructs/ Variables	Number of questions	The value of Cron. Alpha
Self- engagement	10	0.904
Intention to participate in the future	3	0.732
- absorption	3	0.861
-vigorous	4	0.944
-dedication	3	0.815

C. Respondents' Demographic Profile

In terms of gender, the majority of the respondents were female (61.5) and 38.5% male. Thus, it can be said that this



event was female dominant. In general, participants from Pahang (46 %) were the majority and the lowest number of participants were from Malacca, Sarawak, and Indonesia (0.6 %). University, college and high school students made up the majority of the respondents (52.9%) and high school and primary school students representing 47.1% of the respondents. In detailed, 26.4% of the participants of TNBC2017 were from Taman Negara Young Birder that made them the majority of respondents. It was then followed by UPM Serdang 1 representing 19.5% of respondents, 9.8% from UiTM Pahang, 9.2% from UPM Serdang 2, 5.7% from SMK Inderapura, 5.2% from SMK Jerantut, 5.2% from SMK Pusat Penyelidikan Pertanian Tun Abdul Razak, 5.2% from KPTM Kota Baharu, and also 4.6% respectively from Kolej Komuniti Raub, KTPM Kuala Lumpur and SMK Saujana. In terms of age, the results indicated that most respondents ranged from 10-19 years of age (47.7 %) followed by 20-24 years of age (44.8 %) and 25-40 years of age (7.5 %). Most of the respondents who joined this TNBC were sponsored (44.8%), 28.7% were self-sponsored, and 26.4% were sponsored with either regular fees or discounted fees.

D. Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 below illustrates the the overall mean for items that measure the intention to participate in the future for birdwatching program, which stands at 3.740.

Table 3: Mean Value for Intention to Participate in the Future

Question/Item	Mean	Std. Dev.
will participate again	3.780	0.827
will spread the words to others	3.910	1.008
would invite more friends to join	3.530	1.007
Overall	3.740	0.943

As indicated in Table 4, the overall mean for four items that measure vigorous is 4.280 and the standard deviation is 0.623.

Table 4: Mean Value for Vigorous

Question/ Item	Mean	Std. Dev.
looking forward for bird watching	4.200	0.651
very energetic while doing activities	4.210	0.665
mentally ready for activities	4.210	0.665
Excited during activities	4.490	0.711
Overall	4.280	0.623

Table 5 shows that the overall mean value for the three items that measure Dedication variable is considerably high; the mean value is 4.190 and the standard deviation is 0.595. Specifically, the item ‘To me, the activities are challenging’ gives the mean value of 4.730, the item ‘The activities are

very inspiring’ gives the mean value of 3.890 and the item ‘I enjoyed the activities very much’ gives the mean value of 3.940.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics - Dedication

Question/ Item	Mean	Std. Dev.
challenging activities	4.730	0.506
Inspiring activities	3.890	0.789
I enjoyed the activities very much	3.940	0.758
Overall	4.190	0.595

Table 6 reveals that the overall mean for absorption variable is 3.730 and the standard deviation is 0.630. All the three individual items that measure the absorption variable have the mean values that are close to 4.00 which can be considered as high (3.63-3.95).

Table 6 Descriptive Statistics – Absorption

Question/ Item	Mean	Std. Dev.
when in activities, forgot anything else	3.630	0.814
really engrossed and did not think about other things	3.630	0.807
was really happy in these activities.	3.950	0.454
Overall	3.730	0.630

As shown in Table 7, the mean for each dimension of self-engagement (vigorous, dedication, absorption) are high with mean 4.280, 4.190 and 3.730 respectively. At the same time, the mean score for overall self-engagement is also high which is 4.070 and standard deviation 0.555.

Table 7: Mean Value for Self – Engagement

Question/Item	Mean	Std. Dev.
Absorption	3.730	0.630
Dedication	4.190	0.595
Vigorous	4.280	0.623
Overall	4.070	0.555

VI. THE POTENTIAL OF AVITOURISM IN MALAYSIA

There is a huge potential for avitourism or bird watching activity to be a popular activity in many existing and potential avitourism spots, whether in Peninsular Malaysia or in Sabah and Sarawak. It is said so because Malaysia has a high number of bird species.

In many parts of the world such as Africa and Australia, avitourism has mainly attracted middle-aged and

middle-class participants. As shown in the US FWS survey conducted in 2011, it



was reported that 53% of birders were 45 years of age or older and 30% were 55 years of age or older, as cited by [20]. This means most birders are among the elderly. Interestingly, the findings of this study reveal that avitourism also has gradually attracted young people.

The findings also reveal that the TNBC2017 youth participants scored high in the survey that asked about their intention to participate in such activities in the future as well as about their self-engagement. In other words, the results of self-engagement and intention to be involved in birding in the future have also revealed a positive attitude among youth participants towards avitourism. Since TNBC2017 participants came from many states in Malaysia, the results of this study can be regarded as representative and it shows that there is high potential to develop birdwatching activity as one of Malaysia's ecotourism activities.

This is a very positive sign and in fact, avitourism nowadays generally has enormous potential to attract birders from different age categories because more and more people around the globe are looking for activities to absorb themselves in nature, while at the same time enjoying exotic bird species at the places they visit and enhancing their knowledge in local cultures.

VII. CONCLUSION

Birding community, as stated by previous research, is diverse [21] when discussed in terms of age, education, sex, and income levels. In terms of age, birding is no longer dominated by middle-aged birders because young birders are increasing in number. Even though the literature stated that birding or avitourism is dominated by white males with good education status and high salaries [22], the number of birders from middle class group is also increasing. Apart from demographic factors, birding methods, commitment levels and motivation levels are also said to be the factors that can influence the future of avitourism [23],[21].

Based on the findings of the current study, avitourism was found not to be only attractive to the middle-aged birders but also is becoming attractive to the young birders. The findings of previous studies combined with the results of this study suggest that avitourism should therefore be promoted seriously because it can also contribute significantly to the overall growth of tourism sector in Malaysia, as almost all states in Malaysia have their own virgin forests that are rich with their local bird species. Apart from Pahang that has started with their avitourism activities and events, some other states like Kelantan, Terengganu and Kedah can also promote birding activities or avitourism in their virgin forests. TNBC2017 in Pahang can be a good model to apply to Kenyir Lake in Terengganu as one of the avitourism destinations to be enjoyed by local and international avitourists because Kenyir Lake has tremendous bird species including the very rare species. In fact, Kenyir Lake has 360 bird species and there are nine out of ten species of hornbills recorded in Malaysia [24] are available in Kenyir Lake..

To ensure that this avitourism activity is sustained, proper and systematic management of natural resources is very important. Having stated the above, the findings of this study could give clearer insights and could also provide some guidelines to the relevant parties to come up with more effective avitourism marketing, management, and planning.

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