Original Research

Gastronomy, Tourism, and the Soft Power of Malaysia

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Abstract

This review article examines the link between tourism and soft power in view of five (four proposed by Ooi) interlinked ways (approaches). It also looks whether Malaysia (as a case study) by using the soft power approaches has achieved the desired outcomes or not. The article found that Ooi's approach is adequate to analyze a country's tourism policy, strategies, tourists' perceptions, and the outcomes of tourism. However, it has ignored the independent role of gastronomy, the business-enabling environment, recognition of the cultural and natural sites as world heritage, and methodological approach to address negative stereotypes against other nationalities. The article also maintains that Malaysia has efficiently used the soft power approach and maximally received benefits from it without the use of coercive powers. This research offers insight into different power tools applied in a variety of contexts which shape the image of the country.

Keywords

soft power, tourism, Malaysia, food, gastronomy

Introduction

Power has two faces: soft and hard. Nye (2009) defined power as "Power is [ones] ability to affect the behavior of others to get what one wants" (p. 160). Soft power is a country, institution, or person's ability to achieve the desired results through attraction, whereas the hard power tool is about the application of coercion and payment. In international geopolitics, coercive powers have often been used to control the politics and economics of other countries or bring balance in power and take more economical and political advantages. However, in changing world politics, the use of hard powers (coercion and payment) has little winning position; thus, the powerful countries have also opted for soft power approach to bring economic prosperity and development in their countries (ElMassah, 2015; Nye, 1990). Without soft power, winning the heart and minds and becoming successful in world politics has not been possible. Bringing benefits through soft power are extremely difficult because the governments did not have control over the important resources and also soft powers' acceptance greatly depends on the audience's choices in the targeted countries.

In the soft power approach, resources do not work directly to create an environment for the diplomacy; therefore, the impact of these resources took a longtime for getting the desired results (Nye, 2004). In soft power approach, transmission of foreign policies, political values, cultural values, beliefs, and agendas are more important which primarily focus on impressing minds and hearts of the audiences in one particular country or across the world. When the global audiences empathize and feel sympathetic toward a country's policies, programs, and values, it means, that country has a strong soft power (Ooi, 2016). There is another approach to power: smart power. Nye (2009) claimed that he had developed the term of smart power in 2003 to counter the misunderstanding that one power approach could produce the desired policy outcomes. Nye claimed that soft and hard power tools could not replace each other but have to go together smartly to use the relevant tools. With the concept of smart power, Nye proposed the use of contextual intelligence meaning conversion of the resources and tools of soft and hard powers into smart power strategies (Nye, 2008).

After the emergence of soft, hard, and smart power approaches, the researchers have focused on tourism and its associated areas such as food, culture, diversity, and economic growth. It is because researchers and policy makers have been looking into the country's image building, destination marketing, and global perceptions of the destination country (Saberi, Paris, & Marochi, 2018). Through tourism, in geopolitics, countries build mutual understanding and

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empathy. From the soft power perspective, the tourists become a geopolitical object and subject (Ooi, 2016). Some key resources perform the pivotal role to promote and transmitting values or influencing the global audiences (tourists). These resources include national institutions for the promotion, developmental aid, international media, and global pop cultures. Tourism works the best way through all these resources because with it or through it, soft power works internally and unknowingly (Ooi, 2016).

Ooi (2016) has proposed four interlinked ways to look at the relationship between soft power and tourism. (a) Tourists develop greater and more profound understanding, and empathy of the destination country and tourists get more familiar and become fond of the place. (b) It becomes a prime mandate of the tourist authorities to portray a very attractive image of the country and its places to the global audiences. Such representation entails strong glorifying images of the destination to counter the negative images; among the soft power tactics, destination branding becomes more effective. (c) Big events such as world symposiums, expositions, and games are arranged to garner geopolitical support. The events play an important role to attract tourists and show the capacity and capabilities of the country. (d) The outsider tourists bring the message of their countries and this way they change the stereotypes established against the other countries (Ooi, 2014, 2016). The inclusive investigation of the relationship between soft power and tourism from these four interlinked areas is lacking. Therefore, in this article, the first objective is to investigate whether the four interlinked ways (areas) are adequate to assess and understand the relationship between soft power and tourism.

Within tourism, and also on its own, food has a significant (a tactic) role in soft power approach; it is known as a form of soft power (Reynolds, 2012) and also called a tactic in diplomacy. In the diplomacy, food heritage is used in relation to other countries to promote and improve the ideas and perception of a destination country; but besides this soft power use of food heritage, the policy makers intend to enhance the export sector (Quinale, 2017). Research on food as soft power has often been glossed over because it has less political visibility. However, food and tourism go together. These are deeply linked to each other (Henderson, 2009; Tikkanen, 2007). However, food is utilized "as a vehicle for soft power" (Reynolds, 2012, p. 47). The political actors use food and letting the food to affect the audiences in both manners: "a source and a means of implementing coercion at different political levels" (Reynolds, 2012, p. 47). It is an essential soft power tool, and its correct application could result in both coercion and control in political and social circles. Food is an item of consumption and has cultural and historical symbolism. It is culturally symbolized and carries a symbolic meaning with it, which the actors of soft power know and understand. It is the symbolic value of the food (not the food itself) that enables the soft powers to be successful. Wherever food travels, it carries cultural or symbolic values

and norms with it and conveys or communicates soft power messages to other actors. Food cultures are societal or communities' (rather states) symbolic properties (in authoritative terms) and states did not have control of food cultures (Montanari, 2006; Reynolds, 2012). It becomes extremely difficult to retain cultural and symbolic purity and authenticity of food when it becomes the export material (Nash, 2009). To keep its purity, authenticity, and symbolic cultural value, the soft food power has to protect itself from the actors that attempt to mix with it and change its core value and message (Reynolds, 2012).

Food (gastronomy) is believed to be the primary sources of attraction for all kinds of tourists whether local or international (Bessiere, 1998; Omar, Karim, Bakar, & Omar, 2015). Food also helps tourists to learn the difference between the culture they were visiting and their own (Hegarty & O'Mahoney, 2001). The relation between tourism and food is labeled in different ways: It is labeled as food tourism (Hall, Sharples, Mitchell, Macionis, & Cambourne, 2003), culinary tourism (Wolf, 2002), tasting tourism (Boniface, 2003), and gastronomy tourism (Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Hjalager & Corigliano, 2000). Without a doubt, food has a vital role in the development of a destination, which can benefit the macroeconomy if appropriately harnessed (Henderson, 2009). There are various economic benefits of food tourism. For governments, it is a vital tool for rural development, and creating employment opportunities and ensuring the survival of the industry (Boyne, Hall, & Williams, 2003) and also crucial for urban development (Etzold, 2013). It is also believed that in the public diplomacy domain, the nation-states brand their food or gastronomy as a warfare tool to gain economic benefits (Wang, Weaver, & Kwek, 2016).

Given the above narrative, the second interlinked objective of this article is to examine how Malaysia's use of food within the tourism, traditions, and cultures (as a soft power tool) has influenced the audiences at local and international levels. Under this focus, the article would assess whether Malaysia has been able to succeed in achieving its targets by using the given soft power tools *alone* or not. It picks Malaysia as a case study because in the Southeast Asia much literature is looking into the China and Japan's soft power role (Otmazgin, 2008; Shambaugh, 2015), and Malaysia has not been examined within the framework of soft power from tourism and food perspectives. Noticeably, it has also attained a little attention from an educational perspective as a soft power tool (Lee, 2015).

Method and Approach

The article follows a case study approach and drives data from the secondary sources. The article articulates five main areas including four areas framed by Ooi's (2016), which show links between soft power and tourism. The fifth area is gastronomy as soft power resource—an area that has been glossed over by Ooi. However, some scholars

have acknowledged the role of gastronomy within tourism (Nirwandy & Awang, 2014). I have framed the five concepts as the following. (a) The tourists have developed greater and more in-depth understanding and empathy of Malaysia and the tourists were more familiar and fond of the destination. (b) The tourism authorities have made it mandatory for them to portray a very attractive image of the country and its places to the global audiences in which they are strongly glorifying images of Malaysia to counter the negative images. (c) Malaysia has been organizing or investing into big events like world symposiums, expositions, and arranged games to garner geopolitical support, through which it was able to show its capacity and capability to hold such kinds of events. (d) The outsider tourists have brought the message of their countries so that the stereotypes established against the other countries have been changed or addressed. (e) The food (gastronomy) played an important role in image building of Malaysia. In light of these areas or frame of references, this article will thoroughly review the literature and understand whether Malaysia was able to materialize its only soft power tourism resources to maximize the economic and other benefits.

Tourists' Understanding and Empathy

Alkahsawneh and Alfandi (2015) interviewed 405 respondents in Saudi Arabia (in Jeddah city) and United Arab Emirates (in Dubai city) and attempted to investigate the perceived image of Malaysia as a tourist country. They picked respondents who had already been to Malaysia as tourists. The respondents offered a variety of reasons for picking up Malaysia as a destination country, and they were willing to revisit it. They believed that Malaysia was a multipurpose destination place and along with various attractions and facilities to Muslim tourists it included halal food and worship places. However, the Western respondents (Jalis, Zahari, Izzat, & Othman, 2009) did not mention that they had any problems with halal food and Islamic culture. However, Muslims respondents in Dubai and Jeddah showed concerns about the lack of investment in marketing communication activities to provide information to tourists about safety, security, the value of money, and intermingling with the local communities (Alkahsawneh and Alfandi, 2015). Sudipta and Sarat (2010) took note of the cultural perspective (such as cultural and historical attractions) within tourism and took views of Indian tourists from India. They surveyed 144 tourists and found that Malaysia did not have enough cultural tourism resources, and also due to lack of promotional and informational material, the international Indian tourists were unaware of the various cultural tourist places in the country.

Safety and security are the prime areas, in which the destination countries have to take indispensable steps so that tourists feel safe and secure in every respect. Studies on tourists' perceptions of risks, threats, and risk management in Malaysia are lacking. However, a few studies have attempted to bring in some of the aspects of risks and threats the tourists come across during their stay in the country; but most often studies are conducted by the local researchers. Yang, Sharif, and Khoo-Lattimore (2015) investigated European tourists' risk perception in the eastern Sabah. They picked the location because of its high-risk status which it earned because of numerous abductions and political issues. They established that the tourists perceived Sabah's eastern coast as highly risky; however, such negative perception did not influence their opinion of various other coastal places in Malaysia.

Weifeng (2005) studied the risk perceptions of Chinese tourists and concluded that among the Southeast Asian countries, Malaysia was viewed as the safest place for visiting after Singapore. Amir, Ismail, and See (2015) surveyed 156 international women tourists' perception of risk in Kuala Lumpur and learned that women respondents were "more fearful of crime either as a result of perceived vulnerability compounded by a sexual risk or by differences in acknowledging fear." They found that 99% women tourists perceived that it was safe for them to walk around Kuala Lumpur city in the daylight, and in the nighttime such perception decreased to 15%, it means 85% women did not feel secure in the nighttime. The most insecure conditions that scared women were road traffic and also snatching and pickpocketing. Similarly, Rahman (2014) conducted an empirical study with 198 tourists from the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Europe, and America in Kuala Lumpur to learn what factors influenced Muslim tourists to be loyal to the destination. Rahman found that quality of services and Islamic attributes (such as easy availability of Masjids) had a significant connection to Muslim tourists' satisfaction and destination loyalty, but the destination attributes had less impact on Muslim tourists motivations. Battour, Ismail, Battor, and Awais (2017) also found that religion had a significant impact on tourists' motivation and satisfaction. They had interviewed 508 Muslims respondents in international hotels and tourists sites in Johor Baru, Kuala Terengganu, Penang, and Kuala Lumpur.

Malaysia's Tioman Island once to be ranked the most beautiful island in the world has lost the ranking because of the lack of developmental activities and poor environment management perceived by the tourists and other stakeholders. The tourists faced problems due to the limited Internet and phone access, limited road access, neglect by the local communities, and dirty beaches (Ho, Chia, Ng, & Ramachandran, 2017). Mohamad, Abdullah, and Mokhlis (2012) interviewed 1,007 tourists at Kuala Lumpur International Airport and the Low-Cost Carrier Terminal. They found that foreign tourists were willing to come back to Malaysia for various positive reasons that include low-cost travel and living packages, cultural heritage, and natural scenes. However, they did not mention if any of the departing tourists had refused to come back for specific reasons. Paul's Travel Blog (2008) offered one's unkind encounter with various individuals in the country; that encounter in all

ways suggests weaknesses at the infrastructural and institutional level, but Paul encountered problems in 2008 when a country was preparing its nation to be a tourist's friendly country. Malaysia took a longtime to reach that destination and it is still not on the track to satisfy many tourists perspectives for various reasons, which this article attempted to discuss in the following section.

Tourism Authorities and Malaysian Tourism Policy

In 2013, Malaysian Ministry of Tourism turned into the Ministry of Tourism and Culture with prime purpose to bring use culture and heritage as a strategy to promote and attract the global tourist audience; and the slogan "Malaysia Truly Asia" was created (Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia, n.d.). The Malaysian government had various initiatives to bring more tourists to the country because, in 2013, it had received 25.72 million tourists, which brought 65.44 billion to the Malaysian economy. In 2017, Malaysia received around 26 million international tourists along with 82.2 billion contributions to the revenue (Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia, 2018). By 2020, under the Malaysia Tourism Transformation Plan (MTTP), the government aimed to bring in 36 million tourists in the country (Omar et al., 2015). The Ministry's vision is to develop "Malaysia as a world-class tourist and cultural destination by the year 2020, as well as building the national identity based on arts, culture, and heritage" (Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia, n.d.). The government had intended to allocate RM2 billions in 2018 budget to support tourism by encouraging and sponsoring the small and medium scale enterprises or operators (NST Team, 2017). Under the tourism policy, the government had declared 2020 as Visit Malaysia Year and would host the major international events including World Congress Information Technology, APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) Summit and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (Basyir, 2017) as strategies within the soft power approach (Ooi, 2016). Malaysia's neighboring country, Indonesia, had immense and better potential of soft power as compared with Malaysia; however, Malaysia used soft power tool more effectively and efficiently in managing its resources (tourism, art, food, traditions, cultures, and diversity) (Luhong, 2017).

The list of issues highlighted in researches (Alkahsawneh & Alfandi, 2015; Sudipta & Sarat, 2010; Yang et al., 2015 and others) reveal that Malaysian authorities have made it mandatory for them to present a very attractive image of the country to counter the negative perceptions against the country. Generally, a country's image building goes successfully even when they pass through constant political conflicts (Campo & Alvarez, 2014). In Malaysia's case, the increase in tourists and exponential increase in tourism revenue (Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia, 2018) are

apparent signs that the country's machinery has been able to influence the image of destination country even though the tourists have indicated various issues, but these issues could not deter tourists' flux to Malaysia.

The most critical dimensions Ooi (2016) missed to highlight are the role of International Agencies such as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and enabling international economic/business environment. Both influence international audiences and give a positive image of the country. UNESCO has declared natural and cultural sites in Malaysia as world heritage sites; cultural sites include George Town (Penang) and Melaka and historic cities of the straits of Malacca and archeological heritage sites of the Lenggong Valley, and natural locations include the national parks of Kinabalu and Gunung Mulu (in Borneo). UNESCO's sites have a significant contribution to national image building and international profiling (King, 2015). At the same time, the enabling economic environment also supports the growth of the tourism sector (Ridderstaat, Croes, & Nijkamp, 2016; Wu, Liu, Hsiao, & Huang, 2016).

Investing in Big Events

For the last three decades, Malaysia has been organizing mega and small events for the local and international community, and the popularity and diversity of special events and festivals across the country have increased and so has its importance. The business events and activities have risen rapidly in Malaysia (Bouchon, Hussain, & Konar, 2017). Under the Ministry of Tourism, Malaysia has set up the Malaysian Convention and Exhibition Bureau responsible for organizing business events, conferences, meetings, games, and other activities. It also supports various agencies in and outside of Malaysia in organizing events (Malaysian Convention and Exhibition Bureau, n.d.-a). The government of Malaysia expects that MyCEB should contribute 16,700 jobs to the nation and 3.9 billion ringgits to the Gross National Income (GNI) by 2020. For achieving these targets, the government had allocated 50 million ringgits for the promotion of business tourism that includes supporting bids for specific international business events. Malaysia's popularity in the world and the Asia-Pacific has increased. In 2013, Malaysia was placed 35th in the worldwide topic choices for the meeting, incentives, conference, and exhibition-related events, and in 2016, Malaysian city Kuala Lumpur was the third best business city in Southeast Asia (see Table 1 for more details; Malaysian Convention and Exhibition Bureau, n.d.-b).

In 2017 (until August), Malaysia has organized 73 events related to the industry by bringing in 60,665 delegates and 555.53 million ringgits to national income. By 2020, Malaysia aims to make 3.9 billion ringgits to the national economy and also targets receiving 2.9 million delegates (The Star Online, 2017). In 2013 and 2014, Kuala Lumpur organized 32 and 47 mega events, respectively, and secured the attendance of 97,211 and 110,754 international attendees

Table 1. Awards and Accolades Given to Malaysia in the Asia-Pacific and the World Under Different Categories in 2016 and 2017.

Year	Category of award/accolade	Position in the Asia-Pacific or Southeast Asia	Position in the world
2016	2nd in the Asia-Pacific—Education First English Proficiency Index	2nd	NA
2016	World Bank's Ease of Doing Business	6th	18th
2016	Best Business City in Southeast Asia—Business Traveler Asia-Pacific Travel Awards (Kuala Lumpur)	3rd	NA
2017	World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index	2nd	NA
2017	World's Best Airport Immigration Service—Skytrax Awards (Kuala Lumpur International Airport)	NA	1st
2016	CVENT Top 25 Meeting Destinations in the Asia-Pacific (Kuala Lumpur)	3rd	
2016	Global Top Destination Cities by Mastercard Index (Kuala Lumpur)	NA	17th
2017	World Economic Forum's Price Competitiveness	NA	3rd
2017	Global Retirement Index and Health care Quality Worldwide	1st	6th
2017	Euromonitor International's Top City Destinations Ranking (Kuala Lumpur)	5th	NA

Source. Malaysian Convention and Exhibition Bureau (n.d. -b).

each year, respectively (Peng, 2017). In 2017, Malaysia hosted the Southeast Asian Games in Kuala Lumpur city, which was considered to be an important source of economic growth. It was claimed that the economic growth impact on the result of hosting the games went beyond the tourism and hotel sectors (Goyder, 2017). To the extent that Malaysia is organizing mega events, we have enough claims from the side of government and show that there is a strong connection between soft power and events (that includes social, cultural, business conferences, sports, and symposiums). In this context, Malaysia can show its capacity and capabilities as a country to facilitate large-scale and diverse events. However, what is left to be answered is the quality of events and its management, which Ooi (2016) has glossed over. On these aspects, the literature is scarce (Bouchon et al., 2017; Voon, Lee, & Murray, 2014).

Change of Stereotypes Against the Other Countries

Malaysian tourism policy shows that it is open to all countries irrespective of the origin, race, ethnicity, and culture. As it is more welcoming to the Western nations, it has also opened its arms for Indians, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and other countries in Asia. Malaysia as a Muslim country has welcomed more tourist from China, which is a non-Muslim country. In 2000, Malaysia received 501,590 tourists, which doubled to 1.5 in 2012 (Lean & Smyth, 2016). In 2017, Malaysia had issued around 327,000 entry passes to Chinese (Malay Mail, 2018). The tourism sector was the third largest contributor (with 73.3 billion ringgits) to the Malaysian economy in 2016 (The Star Online, 2017). However, it is extremely tricky and onerous tasks to assess that tourists from other countries had brought the message of their countries so that the stereotypes established against the other countries have been changed. It requires multidimensional

and longitudinal research covering various aspects some of those may include finding stereotypes among Malaysians about certain nations, then assessing how these stereotypes were changed and whether the tourists had brought any positive messages along with them or not. A country, like Malaysia, eyeing more tourists to support its tourism sector and overall economy, could not afford to live with negative stereotypes against other nations and ethnic groups. Generally, studies have focused on tourists' perceptions of Malaysia (destination) (Yang et al., 2015) and also covered the issue of perception and attitude of locals toward tourism management (Korça, 1998; Teye, Sirakaya, & Sönmez, 2002). However, studies are lacking to address the other angle of the research; that is, how Malaysians perceive tourists and their countries and what messages tourists conveyed to the locals in Malaysia. From this angle, assessing soft power's relationship to Malaysian measures to address certain stereotype against other countries or nationalities is beyond the frame when a country is entirely focused on receiving tourists from across the world irrespective of their origins. Another example of Malaysia's soft approach toward other nations is Indonesia and Malaysia had fought a war, but currently, the Indonesian labor force constitutes the largest human power in Malaysia. In 2017, the total registered workers in Malaysia were 1,781,598, of which around 41% were Indonesians (Nasa, 2017).

Food as Soft Power

As indicated above, within tourism, food has a great place (Etzold, 2013; Henderson, 2009) and the food is a valuable tool and source of soft power approach (Quinale, 2017; Reynolds, 2012). The government of Malaysia claims and promotes that Malaysia is a "food paradise" where tourist could find a diversity of tastes of food at low prices (Tourism Malaysia, n.d.). Malaysia's traditional food is considered a

fusion food; in other sense, a unifying cultural code. Chinese, Indian, and Malay ethnic communities' culture greatly influence the characteristic, details, and the forms of foods prepared in Malaysia. In result of fusion, Malay traditional foods' tastes and characteristics are found in traditional Chinese and Indian foods and vice versa (Jalis, Che, & Markwell, 2014). Tourists love traditional food and show great support to the local economy. Jalis et al. (2009) interviewed 311 Western (45.7%) female respondents at Kuala Lumpur International Airport to learn their perceptions of the Malaysian foods. They found that the majority of Westerners believed Malaysia had various choices to pick tasty and freshly cooked foods. They also viewed that Malaysia had a unique food culture.

The Malaysian Tourism Promotion Board (MTPB) had developed a promotion plan to include traditional food. The MTPB had also joined the Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE), initiated a large-scale campaign, and started organizing events for promoting Malaysian food as an attraction to tourists; those events also include ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Heritage Food Trail with Chef Wan. Besides, the Department of Heritage Malaysia (DHM) has released the list of 100 Malaysian Heritage Foods in 2009. In 2013, the list was expanded to 151 (Department of Heritage Malaysia, 2013). It shows that traditional foods have become an important element of the Malaysian tourism industry. Thus, the government and its institutions have invested mainly in the food sector to influence the large audiences across the globe.

In the Muslim world or communities, the Islamic way of life is followed by basic Islamic principles, and interaction with and consumption of food is also based on the Islamic principle of halalness and purity. Food and nonfood companies, banks, and corporations whether owned by Muslims or not, for maximizing profits they have been using the concept of halalness as a soft power to win the hearts and minds of Muslim consumers (Van der Spiegel et al., 2012). The halal market has expanded across the world, and various standardization and certification institutions have been set up, which conduct audits and laboratory tests to ensure effective labeling of halal products. The concept of halalness has widely been applied to academia with different aspects of the consumer market, but from the soft power approach, halal food has not gained attention. In the Malaysian context, the literature overwhelmingly discusses the importance of halal food, its certification, consumers choices, halal tourism (or religious tourism), and halal regulatory mechanisms (El-Gohary, 2016; Henderson, 2016). Malaysia promotes its tourism through assurance and reassurance of availability of halal food and provision of hall food brings more competitive advantage and develops Muslim friendly image among Muslim countries especially the middle eastern countries (Henderson, 2016). To Muslim audiences, Malaysia has shown an image that it is Muslim friendly country and claimed that it is the top destination for Muslim travelers

from across the world with other facilities it has halal food (Islamic Tourism Center, n.d.).

Analysis

Before delving into the analysis of Ooi (2016) interlinked areas of soft power, the article delineates Malaysian history of dealing with hostile elements and application of hard power approach. Over the last five decades, Malaysia has taken part in various military excursions inside and outside of the country. Outside of the country, Malaysian excursions were primarily along with alliances such as NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization; in the Gulf of Aden) and American (battle of Mogadishu). However, it has taken various measures which have hurt the territorial integrality of the country such as it along with neighboring countries has dealt with Moro Pirates and the group of Abu Sayyaf, which are still somehow active in Northern Borneo (Boquet, 2017; Hastings, 2011). Malaysia may have still threat from neighboring countries (Romaniuk, 2013). However, Malaysia does not need to venture like America which has various long wars with many nations and still heavily immersed in a cold war with China and Russia and ongoing physical wars in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Niger, and Somalia and elsewhere (Cordesman, 2017). In early 2018, around 200,000 active U.S. troops were deployed across the world, and at the same time, United States's foreign policy was rapidly moving toward militarization in which diplomacy has shrunken (Malley, 2018). Nye (2009) believed that America could win wars if it continues to apply contextual intelligence effectively and smartly by utilizing soft and hard resources (tools), America could retain its hegemony and draw benefits. However, Gelb (2009) believed that such tactics have brought America to the verge of collapse and loser of wars on all fronts, and only the common sense policy could rescue America from the disaster. That policy is based on appreciating the diversity of the world in which the world's leaders examine the situation in its context and merits, and connect it to reasons and evidence.

These ethnocentric solutions for a country (like America) have enough meat for understanding the notion of hard power, but nations like Malaysia could not rely on muscles and policy but on branding its nation through soft power approach, which I earlier said is the subtle way to solve country's social, economic and developmental problems. The problems are solved not by venturing into other countries' boundaries as America has always been doing for more than one century—the case of Philippines and Cuba (Jackson, 2014)—but inviting them as tourists to witness the diverse cultures, traditions, ethnic groups, foods, and tastes. They are attracted through branding of a nation, which is attained through soft power and public diplomacy, which reshapes international communities' opinion of a nation (Fan, 2008), to which Anholt (2008) calls the reputation management. Malaysia had branded itself by reshaping the world's views about Malaysia as a diverse and unique country in the Southeast Asia region.

Malaysia has the long-running tourism campaign (Anholt, 2008). In it, the slogan of "Malaysia Truly Asia" is one of the main strategies to give image to the outsiders that the country is unique and distinctive because of cultural, social, and ethnic diversity. With this slogan, the country has been attempting to show that Malaysia is an exceptional tourism destination where all kinds "colors, flavors, sounds and sights of Asia come together" (Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia, n.d.). Under this slogan, the government has tried to show to the world audience that no other country but only Malaysia has Asia's three major races, that is, Indian, Chinese, and Malays, and many other groups. The government goes on to claim and convince the audience that no other country had a diversity of cultures, traditions, customs, and festivals but only in Malaysia. On its website, the government also asserted that it has cultural touches of English, Arabic, Persians, Indonesians, and Thais (Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia, n.d.). Malaysia not only has branded its tourism and diverse foods and cultures but also has successfully branded itself as a nation with diversity and acceptance and accommodation of other cultures. It also translates its tradition into new contexts for tourism promotions with the creation of new styles and traditions (Hussin, 2013). "Malaysia Truly Asia" campaign and slogan has helped to develop a more advantageous and lasting image among the global audiences, which has pushed Malaysia to heavily depend on and enhance this kind of country's soft power instead venturing into other countries borders. However, slogans and image building are not enough to promote tourism, but it becomes indispensable to heavily invest in infrastructure especially related to tourism (Kadir & Karim, 2012; Shahbaz, Kumar, Ivanov, & Loganathan, 2015) for gaining economic growth (Tugcu, 2014).

The branding of the nation and its image as the diverse and peace-loving country also does not come without trickle down impacts on the national and local economy. Malaysia's extensive investment in tourism has resulted in the higher development of infrastructure and tourism industry. Since the early 1990s, Malaysia has heavily invested in expansion and improvement of infrastructure for tourism (Chon, Elgin, & Oppermann, 1997). In 2005, 1,300 population had one doctor (Ministry of Finance Malaysia, n.d.-a), which decreased to 632 in 2017 (Ministry of Finance Malaysia, n.d.-b). The incidents of poverty have significantly reduced from 8.5% of households in 1999 (Ministry of Finance Malaysia, n.d.-a) to 0.4% in 2016 (Ministry of Finance Malaysia, n.d.-b). In 2000, the GNI per capita was US$3,460, which increased to US$9,860 in 2016 (World Bank Group, n.d.). These and many other indicators categorically show Malaysia's soft power approach is a far better strategy to materialize more effectively and efficiently its resources (Luhong, 2017; Ooi, 2016).

Also, the examination of five interlinked areas (four suggested by Ooi, 2016—interconnected tools of soft power) shows that soft power approach especially tourism and food-related strategies are adequate to succeed in achieving targets, but these areas are not enough factors to see the total soft power paradigm and also in some instances, the assessment of such cases requires longitudinal investigation. It is not easier to satisfy every single tourist because they come up with different needs and perceptions and higher expectations but most tourists are satisfied, and they intend to come back to destinations (Kwanisai & Vengesayi, 2016; Supitchayangkool, 2012). Some tourists face different issues that indicate toward weaknesses at the infrastructural and institutional level, which in Malaysia's case should be taken aside because Malaysia is still in the process of branding itself as a tourist country and also because the tourists were determined to ignore such issues (Alkahsawneh & Alfandi, 2015; Ho et al., 2017; Weifeng, 2005; Yang et al., 2015). Malaysia is on track to satisfy the majority of tourists for various reasons. Its evidence is found in the increasing flux of tourists. The number of tourists is increasing. It is obviously because the state machinery is enabling a tourist-friendly environment and creating a positive image of the destination.

As for as negative stereotypes against other nationalities is concerned, Malaysian tourism and business policy is open for all irrespective of the origin. It has welcomed all races and nationalities. As a Muslim country, it is open to all non-Muslims. Malaysian cannot afford to live with negative stereotypes and cannot shut the border to any friendly nation because tourism is the third largest contributing sector to the economy. However, as there is a lack of research, it is difficult to assess that tourists from other countries had brought the message of their countries so that the stereotypes established against the other countries have been changed. Multidimensional and longitudinal research is needed to find out (a) stereotypes among Malaysians about certain nations; and (b) whether the tourists had brought any positive messages along with them or not, and then need to assess how the stereotypes among Malaysians were altered. Malaysia could not live with negative stereotypes against other nations and ethnic groups when it is eying more tourists by 2020 and beyond. There are many under-addressed areas within the tourism as soft power approach that includes how Malaysians perceive tourists and their countries and what messages tourists conveyed to the locals in Malaysia and what were the means of conveying the messages. From this angle (stereotypes against other nationalities), assessing the soft power's relationship to Malaysia' measures to address certain stereotype against other countries or nationalities is beyond understanding (proposed by Ooi) when a country is entirely focused on receiving tourists from across the world irrespective of their origins.

Malaysia is organizing mega events (that includes social, cultural, business conferences, sports, and symposiums), and it shows Malaysia's strong emphasis on using its soft power approach (as Ooi believed). In this context, Malaysia can

demonstrate its capacity and capabilities as a country to facilitate the large-scale and diverse events. However, the mostly unanswered questions are linked with the quality and management of the mega events which Ooi (2016) has glossed over. On these aspects, the literature is scarce (Bouchon et al., 2017; Voon et al., 2014). Ooi has also overlooked the contribution of UNESCO and the government's efforts to create an enabling international economic/business environment for business tourism. These both have a more significant impact on the international audiences and give a strong positive image of the country. UNESCO recognized Malaysia's two natural and two cultural sites as world heritage, which has played a significant role in image building and created Malaysia's international profile (King, 2015; Su & Lin, 2014). At the same time, the enabling economic environment also supports to the growth of the tourism sector (Ridderstaat et al., 2016; Swarbrooke & Horner, 2012; Wu et al., 2016).

Last but not the least, the important dimension to the soft power approach in this article is food whether traditional or halal. The analysis reveals that the soft power approach without food/gastronomy is extremely weak. For Ooi, the gastronomy is the last important interlinked areas within the soft power approach. However, for Malaysian, the tourism industry could not survive and flourish without gastronomy. Therefore, Malaysia has extensively invested in the food sector to influence the large audiences across the globe and also in Muslim communities with the concept of halal and pure food. Also in Muslim countries, Malaysia has been promoting its tourism through assurance and reassurance of availability and provision of halal food, which has resulted in more competitive advantages and developed Muslim friendly image among Muslim countries especially the Middle Eastern countries (Henderson, 2016). Malaysia is the top destination for Muslim travelers. They consider Malaysia as a Muslim friendly country with halal food and Islamic way of life (Islamic Tourism Center, n.d.).

Conclusion

This article has attempted to address two main objectives. First, it investigated the adequacy of four interlinked ways (areas) proposed by Ooi (2016) in assessing and understanding the relationship between the soft power and tourism. Second, in light of Ooi's areas, it examined the effectiveness and influence of Malaysia's use of gastronomy approach within the tourism and traditions and cultures as soft powers tools in influencing the audiences at local and international level. In this regard, this review article skimmed through the literature to analyze five (four proposed by Ooi) interlinked ways to look at the relationship between soft power and tourism. All interlinked areas are relevant to study the links between the two. However, the review indicates toward a vast area of other concerns ignored by Ooi that include the independent role of gastronomy (especially traditional and Muslim food), the business enabling environment, recognition of the

cultural and natural sites as the world heritage, and methodological approach to address negative stereotypes against other nationalities. The additional challenge in this article was to examine the role of soft power especially in the context of tourism as an independent tool in achieving the desired economic outcomes. The article found that Malaysia has efficiently used soft power approach and maximally received benefits from it. Malaysia used its resources to promote tourism, culture, food heritage, and halal food and has used slogans to attract and influence the global audiences not only in the western part of the world but also Muslim population around the globe (Henderson, 2016; The Star Online, 2017; Van der Spiegel et al., 2012). Malaysia has applied great slogans like "Malaysia Truly Asia" and uniquely presented its image and won hearts of millions of tourists and investors, which kept the flux of tourist higher and higher; and each year, the number of tourists increased. As mentioned earlier, in 2016, the tourism sector was the third largest contributor to the Malaysian economy (The Star Online, 2017). The article also found that with good and genuine presentation and application of soft power tools such as diverse cultures, unique traditions, multiethnic, multireligious, and tolerant society, a country could bring maximum benefits, but the country has to invest in it. Malaysia is aiming to invest more and hoping to receive 36 million tourists by 2020 (Omar et al., 2015).

The article maintains that for attaining the desired outcomes, the effective (or smart) use of only soft power tools is adequate, and Malaysia has relatively achieved the outcomes of development and tourism boom through the effective application of its only soft power tools. Over the last three decades, Malaysia has not applied coercive or hard powers against its neighbors as the United States has done across the world. Rather Malaysia has applied the soft power approach smartly without combining the hard power approach for the preferred outcomes. The article agrees to Smith-Windsor (2000) that the application of hard power on other countries and landscapes is vague and inapplicable, and better to be left behind. Smith-Windsor claimed that hard and soft powers have originated from America did not fit into the other countries' political settings. However, this article argues that the soft power concept could be applied in any of the political and cultural setting in the world including in Malaysia. The article concludes that Ooi's four ways and also gastronomy are adequate (ways) to examine and analyze the relationship between the country's soft power and tourism. In other words, Ooi's approach is the best way to maximally explore tourism policy, approaches, strategies, tourists' perceptions, the impact of tourism on communities, and other interlinked areas which support international tourism.

This exploratory research offered insight into different power resources and tools applied in a variety of matters and contexts which shape the image of countries. It also emphasized that all possible areas of power should be assessed to provide a clear picture of the image building through soft power gastronomy and tourism approach.

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