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Brand Awareness, Brand Association, Perceived Quality and Brand Loyalty among Tourists in Malaysian Budget Hotels

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the relationship between brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality and brand loyalty among tourist in Malaysian budget hotels. The objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty, to examine the relationship between brand association and brand loyalty and to analyse relationship between perceived quality and brand loyalty among tourist in Malaysian budget hotels. Quantitative research approach is used to achieve the research goals and 208 responses were analysed using a structured questionnaire that was used to target domestic tourists who encountered using budget hotel services in Malaysia. This study used descriptive analysis, reliability test and Spearman Correlation analysis as data analysis technique. The result from Spearman correlation coefficient analysis revealed that there is a positive relationship between awareness, brand association, perceived quality and brand loyalty among tourist in Malaysian budget hotels. The data collected is analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 25. This study will help the upcoming researchers and tourism players to focus more on budget hotel branding which serves as country's' economic indicators.

Keywords: Brand Awareness, Brand Association, Perceived Quality, Brand Loyalty, Budget Hotel.

INTRODUCTION

Data from Strategic Planning Division, Tourism Malaysia, Ministry of Tourism and Culture (MOTAC), Malaysian Association Hotel (MAH) and Malaysia Budget Hotel Association (MyBHA) and through the analysis of data from key performance indicator from Tourism Malaysia 2016 website, Malaysian hotel industry had a total of 4,961 hotels in the year 2016 which increased 3.4% as compared to year 2015, with 4,766 hotels. Budget hotel is the main focus of this study which have been scaled as orchid. The total number of budget hotels in Malaysia in the year 2016 was 793 hotels with 19,544 rooms. budget hotels serve as the key player to the tourism industry in the economic development of many Asian countries. According to Saaid, Malaysian Executive Director stressed that the hotel industry may be emergent due to the tourism industry's commitment (Jaafar, Toh & Sukarno, 2011).

Based on the level of service delivered by the hotel, hotels can be classified as economical or luxury hotels, whereas economical hotels are correspondingly known as budget hotels that meet the customers basic needs by providing clean and cleanrooms (Abhijeet, 2013). Budget hotel offers lower-cost rooms, meals and is considered to be the lowest in the hotel industry (Hotel Arco Palace, 2012). Malaysia's hotel industry has experienced a process of change that has brought the Malaysian economy a sensational economic development (Lahap, 2014). Significantly, the development of hospitality industry in Malaysia has gone to a specific degree that further upgrades the Malaysian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) encroaching on the Malaysian economy as a whole. In the year 2013 revenue from the tourism industry had rose from RM 60.6 billion to RM 65.4 billion (USD 19 billion) with an increase of 7.3 percent (Tourism Malaysia, 2015).

This study aims to investigate the relationship between brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality and brand loyalty among tourist in Malaysian budget hotels. The variable for this study is supported from the previous study but in the different perspective. There are three objectives in this research:

1. To examine the relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty among tourist in Malaysia budget hotel.
2. To investigate the relationship between brand association and brand loyalty among tourist in Malaysia budget hotel.
3. To investigate the relationship between perceived quality and brand loyalty among tourist in Malaysia budget hotel.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Researchers

The study will contribute to the advancement of literatures in tourism. among students because there are have variety of opportunity to ensure the researchers will be able to explore and find out new problems and solutions in the context of tourism and hospitality industry.

Hotel Industry

As for the hoteliers, they need to focus more on the technique to position their goods or services in the market to ensure the tourist will be attracted to purchase their services as compared to the other budget hotels.

Consumers

Consumer plays vital role in the tourism industry. without them purchasing the goods or services a particular business will not be able to perform. To prevent this situation, the business owners should provide the right services with affordable prices to ensure the consumer will be attracted to purchase budget hotel as their accommodation during their travel period.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is seen as three-dimensional which consist of psychological, attitudinal and composite concept based on former researchers. (Backman & Crompton, 1991; Bowen & Chen, 2001). Behavioral studies relate to brand loyalty has operationally defined loyalty as repeated buying intention, buying habits, and word-of-mouth feedback (Baloglu, 2002). Researchers also interpret attitudinal brand loyaltyas brand loyalty through measures such as confidence, personal connection and engagement (Baloglu, 2002; Bowen & Shoemaker, 2003; Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Consideration of the attitudinal aspects of loyalty helps the researcher to differentiate between brand loyalty with repeated purchases focusing on customer perception instead of just purchases, and is not an objective reflection of real life (Mellens et al., 1996; Odin et al., 2001). Brand loyalty model or contingency strategy which combines both behavioral and attitudinal factors as the integrated view provides a systematic thoughtful view of the concept of loyalty and has been explored and validated in a variety of brand loyalty studies (Harris & Goode, 2004; Li & Petrick, 2008) and thus it adopted here. Attitude was chosen to measure brand loyalty for this research because attitude measures the affection for brand to make the customer repeat purchases.

The overall relationship between brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand association and perceived quality has shown positive relationship. Based on the investigation by Xu, Li and Zhou (2015), their study has shown that brand awareness has positive impact on brand loyalty. While, research by Altigan, Askoy and Akinci (2005) showed that if customers had a gradual positive association with a product, consumers will be more loyal to a brand and the other way around. While a research by Khan, Zain-ul-Aabdean, Nadeem and Rizwan (2016) focusing on the impact of product and their findings shows that perceived quality is strongly associated with brand loyalty and has a very positive relationship. it can be uttered that previous studies have proven the association of the mentioned relationship and thusly this research is worth exploring.

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness plays an essential role in building the product image customers' mind to which it serves as a reason for purchasing based on their knowledge, experience and awareness and this directly will make the buyer to repurchase the product near future (Alkhawaldeh et al, 2017). Awareness consists of aspects such as quality, confidence, reliability, a good quality of price ratio, proximity to people, accessibility and traditional styling (Kapferer, 2012). Normally, consumer will not prefer to buy or purchase from unknown brand where they are not confident with the performance of goods or quality being provided by the brand especially an expensive product. Therefore, the organization which had strong brand name is in the winning track as customers choose their brand rather than unknown brand (Rantung. et al., 2014).

Brand awareness is also important in the sight of brand loyalty. To possess and build a strong brand image, brand awareness is one of the reasons for such strength (Buil, 2013). Brand awareness helps to compare our brand with the competitors' brand and help to do brand choices (Valavi, 2014). While, benefits that the brand loyalty brings are that it helps market order, make your fortune and a regular customer for a marketing effort of competitors (Thompson, 2014).

Brand Association

Aaker (1991) mentioned that the brand association create and build positive characters and feeling in the mind of consumers about the brand and directly enhances the brand image. The strength of associations can be seen at different level, whereby the stronger the association, the more capability of the brand to spreading the activation but if its weaker, the brand will not be able to achieve its goal. According to (Torkild Thellefsen, 2015) associations are the only force in the mind. There are three forms of associations namely resemblance, contiguity, and interest. It can all be recognized in individuals when in use of brands. The formation process encompasses brand as information, a given mind, collateral experience of the mind and brand association which also involves past, present, and future.

Brand associations consist of brand attributes which is characterized as product and services. It can be in a form of product related or non-product related. The product related context can be defined as a model and color of the product while non- related product is dealing with external aspect based on the use of the product such as price, creativity, imagination, brand personality, feeling and experiences, brand benefits and brand attitudes. Brand association is the base to get a decision to brand loyalty. It means that brand association is the basic of brand loyalty that influences what customers see about a particular brand. Benefits of having positive relationship between brand association and brand loyalty is that brand loyalty can imitate the consumers mind on consumption of brand performance (Aaker, 1991). Brand loyalty represents the customer with the brand and make it as an intangible asset that reflect the companies' price, product or service (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010).

Perceived Quality

Perceived quality is an essential part in deciding on the brand loyalty and as budget hotel suppliers; they need to ensure that the perceived quality of the budget hotel meets the standard of the consumer needs. If the perceived quality is higher than the perceived monetary sacrifice, it will show positive relationship by which price discounts frequently minimizes the perceived monetary sacrifice of the buyer and thus increase the perceived quality, perceived value, and buying intentions. Perceived quality is the combination of perception of past experience and result of each new consumer encounter and shifts their product perceptions (Boulding, 1999). Swinker and Hines (2006) divided perceived quality into four namely intrinsic, extrinsic, presentation and ready-to-wear efficiency categories. According to Monroe (2003), price can be the indicator of perceived quality or perceived monetary sacrifice. Pappu et al. (2006) mentioned that the perceived quality is one of the consumer-brand equity components. This element also has a major influence on the purchasing process and brand loyalty of the consumer. It is the fundamental reason for purchase (Saerang, 2014).

Relationship between Brand Awareness, Brand Association, Perceived Quality and Brand Loyalty

Brand awareness is recognized as a prerequisite for a brand loyalty. According to Mishra (2014) brand awareness will be stated as strength of a brand's presence in the customers mind. The relationship of brand awareness and brand loyalty can be clarified when the brand awareness increase, consumers tend to be familiar with the brand and it will directly enhance brand loyalty towards the product or services. Therefore, brand awareness positively influences brand loyalty.

Next, brand association is regarding all the things that stays in the memory of customers regarding a particular brand. It is the base for achieving decision to brand loyalty. The positive relationship between brand association and brand loyalty may reflect in the consumers mind set to stably purchase a brand (Aaker, 1991). Consequently, brand association is the basic factor of brand loyalty that encourage customers to see a particular brand.

Perceived quality is not the actual product but is regarding the experience or intuition from the customer during or after using the brand. Most of the consumer will seek the benefit from the brand that offers goods or services based on their requirement. Thus, the positive relationship between perceived quality and brand loyalty is generally stated in the marketing literature (Fornell & Olsen, 2002).

Research Hypothesis

The main purpose of developing hypothesis in the study is to ensure the researchers able to develop a specific direction and better understanding regarding the subject matter.

H_1: There is positive relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty.
H_2: There is positive relationship between brand association and brand loyalty.
H_3: There is positive relationship between perceived quality and brand loyalty.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework has been formed to investigate the relationship between the independent variable which consist of brand awareness, brand association and perceived quality with brand loyalty as the dependent variable.
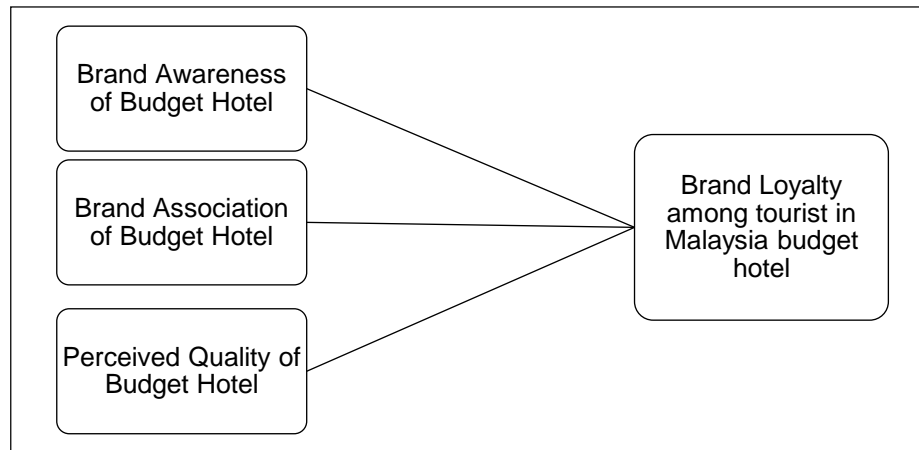
Figure 1: Conceptual framework

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

According to Burns and Bush (2009), research design is the procedure and technique used for data collection and analysis during the research. Quantitative approach is being using to collect data in this research. Quantitative research concentrates to gather and analyse numerical data by using the mathematical based methods (Aliaga & Gundersons, 2006). Meanwhile, quantitative method is regarding the collecting and analysing structured data that can be numerically denoted (Goertzen, 2017). In this research, descriptive research design will describe brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality and brand loyalty among tourist in Malaysian budget hotels.

Data collection

Foremost, the data collection method used in this study is online survey by using Google forms. It is one of the tools that can be used being it free and user friendly. Besides that, the researcher may save time and money by using this particular tool. Secondly, data collection was also done via ground survey. A set of questionnaires was distributed at budget hotels to the population to collect data among domestic tourist in Peninsular Malaysia who had an experience of using budget hotel services.

Population and Sample

Based on Figure 2 the number of tourist arrivals in Malaysia fluctuates from year 2014 to the year 2018. The total income receipts increase from RM 82.1 billion to RM 84.1 billion in the year 2018. Population can be defined as all the people or units of interest which are not have the data available in a population for nearly all individuals (Hanlond & Larget, 2011). In this study, our population is local tourist whom had an experience of using budget hotel services in Peninsular Malaysia and male and female tourist between the age of 18 to 50 years old are targeted.
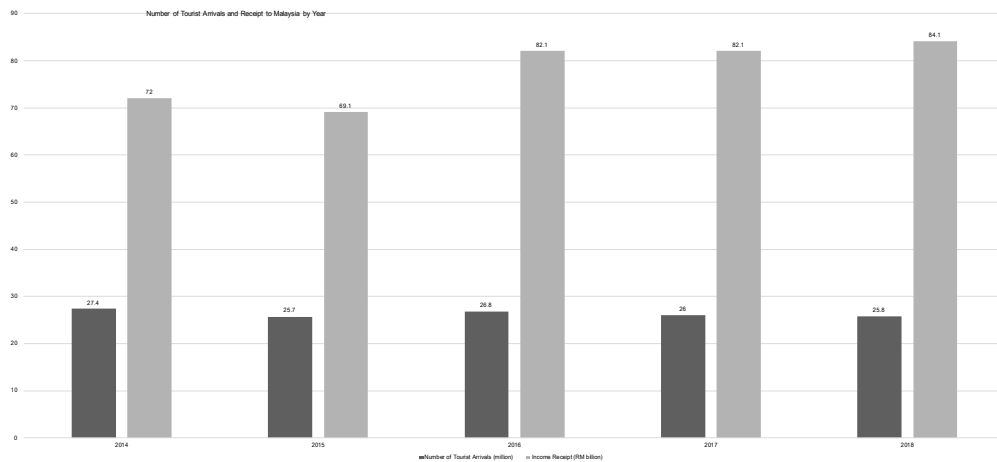
Figure 2: The number of tourist arrivals and receipt to Malaysia by year

According to Lavrakas (2008), sample size is the unit number that was chosen from which data information is gathered. In this study, budget hotel is the main unit aimed to be investigated. Yet there is an absence of data on the actual number of tourists who stays at the budget hotels around Malaysia and thusly the population is set to be unknown.

Data Analysis

There are four types of data analysis used in this study namely frequency analysis, descriptive analysis, reliability analysis and Spearman correlation coefficient analysis. The data obtained is then analysed by using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 25.

FINDINGS
Demographic Profile

Table 1: The respondents' profile based on the category, frequency and percentage

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	115	55.3
Female	93	44.7
Age		
Below 20 years old	3	1.4
21-30 years old	126	60.6
31-40 years old	47	22.6
41 years and above	32	15.4
Race		
Malay	171	82.2
Chinese	18	8.7
Indian	15	7.2
Others	4	1.9
Marital Status		
Single	107	51.4
Married	100	48.1
Others	1	0.5

Current Job

Public Sector	31	14.9
Private Sector	106	51.0
Self employed	25	12.0
Others	46	22.1

Income (RM)

Below RM1000	54	26.0
RM 1001 – RM 3000	71	34.1
RM 3001 – RM 5000	37	17.8
Above RM 5000	46	22.1

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of respondents based on gender, age, race, marital status, current job and range of income. The total numbers of respondents are 208 people. Based on table 1, it is depicting that the number of male respondents is 115 respondents while the number for female respondents are 93 respondents. Out of 208 respondents, 55.30% were male respondents while the remaining are female respondents.

Next, for the age category, the highest category of respondents is aged between 21 up to 30 years old with 126 respondents out of 208 The second highest respondents are aged between 31 up to 40 years old with 47 respondents (22.6 %) followed 32 respondents from the age category of 41 years old or 15.4 %. For the race category, 171 respondents are Malay (82.2%), followed by 18 Chinese respondents (8.7%), 15 Indian respondents (7.2%) and 4 indigenous people (1.9%) had responded to the questionnaire. Based on the table 107 respondents out of 208 (51.4 %) are single while 100 respondents (48.1 %) are married. For the others marital status which is merely 1 respondent (0.5 %).

The current job category shows that there are 31 respondents from public sector 106 respondents from private sectors 25 are self-employed and others (46 respondents) had responded to the questionnaire. The percentage shows the highest respondents are among the private sector employees (51.00%) followed by others which is consist of students and unemployment (22.10%) while the lowest percentage of respondents are self-employed which is (12.00%).

For the last category, the table shows the highest number of respondents are earning between RM1001 to RM3000 which is 71 out of 208 respondents (34.10%). Meanwhile, the lowest responses are received from among those earning between RM 3001 to RM 5000 consist of 37 respondents (17.80%). Respondents that have the income below RM1000 that responded to this study are quite high 54 out of 208 respondents (22.1%) followed by the third highest respondents with income above RM 5000 which consist of 46 respondents (22.1%).

Reliability Test

Reliability Analysis is used to measure the reliability of the questionnaires in measuring the variables. The pilot test has been done with 30 respondents before it is distributed to 208 respondents through fieldwork and online survey.

Table 2: Result of Reliability Coefficient Alpha for the independent variables and dependent variables.

Variable	Number of Item	Cronbach's Alpha	Strength of Association
Brand Loyalty	5	0.878	Very Good
Brand Awareness	5	0.879	Very Good
Brand Awareness	5	0.934	Excellent
Perceived Quality	5	0.956	Excellent

Table 2 sowed the value of Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient for dependent variables and independent variables in this study and Jorge (2016) mentioned that the minimum acceptable value for Cronbach's alpha is 0.70. Based on Table 2, all the variables received a result above the value of 0.7. As a result, the questionnaire had been accepted. The result for brand loyalty among tourist in Malaysian budget hotels is 0.878 which is very good.

Descriptive Analysis

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation result

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Brand Loyalty	208	7.3808	1.66650
Brand Awareness	208	7.0500	1.75961
Brand Awareness	208	7.5154	1.52206
Perceived Quality	208	8.5029	1.43739

Table 3 presents, the mean and standard deviation analysis result. Brand awareness, brand association and perceived quality are independent variable while dependent variable is brand loyalty. The highest mean value is recorded for perceived quality, which is 8.5029. Meanwhile the lowest mean value is recorded for brand awareness, with 7.0500, where in this study the respondents less agreed for this variable.

Spearman Correlation Analysis

Spearman's Correlation Analysis is one of the important analysis to measure the association between two variables. The objective of this analysis is to determine whether the correlations exist between the independent variables (Brand Awareness, Brand Association and Perceived Quality) and the dependent variable (Brand Loyalty). If the correlation exists, the researchers will have to decide the strength and direction of association between the variables.

Hypothesis 1: There is positive relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty

H_1: There is relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty among tourist in Malaysian budget hotels.

Table 4: Correlation Coefficient for Brand Awareness in Determine Brand Loyalty

		Brand Loyalty	**Brand Awareness**
Brand Loyalty	Spearman correlation	1	0.684**
	Sig (2- tailed)		0.000
	N	208	208
Brand Awareness	Spearman Correlation	0.684**	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	0.000	208
	N	208	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Data analysis that covered 208 respondents shows the Spearman Correlation Coefficient (r_s) is 0.684. The shows that there is a strong relationship and the probability Sig (2-tailed) is 0.0000.

Hypothesis 2: There is positive relationship between brand association and brand loyalty

H_2: There is relationship between brand association and brand loyalty among tourist in Malaysian budget hotel.

Table 5: Correlation Coefficient for Brand Association and Brand Loyalty

		Brand Loyalty	**Brand Association**
Brand Loyalty	Spearman correlation	1	0.750**
	Sig (2- tailed)		0.000
	N	208	208
Brand Association	Spearman Correlation	0.750**	1
	Sig (2-tailed)		
	N	0.000	208
		208	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The correlation coefficient for brand association in determining brand loyalty is displayed in Table 5. The results show that the Spearman coefficient (r_s) is 0.750. It indicates very strong relationship between brand loyalty and brand association. The test of relation significance shows that probability Sig. (2-tailed) is 0.000. This implies that the tourists believe that there is a significant positive relation in brand association in determining brand loyalty.

Hypothesis 3: There is positive relationship between perceived quality and brand loyalty

H_3: There is relationship between perceived quality and brand loyalty among tourist in Malaysian budget hotels.

Table 6: Correlation Coefficient for Perceived Quality in Determine Brand Loyalty

		Brand Loyalty	Perceived Quality
Brand Loyalty	Spearman correlation Sig (2- tailed)	1	0.442**
	N		0.000
		208	208
Perceived Quality	Spearman Correlation Sig (2-tailed)	0.442**	1
	N	0.000	208
		208	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation coefficient result for perceived quality in determining brand loyalty is presented in Table 6. The result indicates that the Spearman coefficient (r_s) is 0.442 for 208 respondents. This portrays that there is a positive correlation between the variables. The test of relation significance displays that probability Sig. (2- tailed) of 0.000. Comparable to the previous results, this implies that the tourists believe that there is a significant positive relation in perceived quality in determining brand loyalty

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study attempts to test the relationship between brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality and brand loyalty among tourist in Malaysian budget hotels. The findings from this study have validated the findings from the previous scholar (Tsang et al., 2011), that brand awareness has a positive relationship on brand loyalty, and it has been agreed in (Valentine & Barnett, 2003) which found similar result. Based on the correlation result, brand awareness and brand loyalty had strong relationship with the value of r=0.684. The second objective of the study which is to investigate the relationship between brand association and brand loyalty among tourist in Malaysian budget hotels. This bond obtains the value of 0.750 and it is supported by prior research, Atilgan, Aksoy and Akinci (2005) whom revealed that if customers have more positive association towards a brand, they would be more loyal towards that brand. Correlation between perceived quality and brand loyalty is 0.442 and it can be interpreted as strong relationship. It is supported by the previous study, which revealed similar association (Falahat et al., 2018).

In our research, brand loyalty was measured by brand awareness, brand association and perceived quality. The results attained from the data provides a valuable consequence in assisting budget hotel stakeholders to detect the brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality and brand loyalty among tourist toward budget hotels in Malaysia. In academia, this research offers a vital input to the extend the knowledge. There were numbers of researches done in exploring brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality and brand loyalty and the is valuable to those who have the intention to study the hospitality industry.

Furthermore, this research also can be used as reference by who? For government agencies, this research may deliver extra information's about tourist that uses budget hotels. Government also may take necessary actions to improve and promote the budget hotels to the local tourist and foreign tourist as compared to five-star hotels. If the tourism stakeholders focus on budget hotel branding and performance within the country, it will attract more people to travel because it is affordable and comfortable to stay. Eventually, the country's economy will rejuvenate and local business will be able to generate profit and improvise the buying power.

As part of the recommendation for future studies, the researcher should help and educate the target respondents by giving explanation to each question to ensure they are rating on the right scale. The qualitative method also may help researcher to get the real data regarding the current issue of their forthcoming study.

Next, future researchers should use variety of method to collect data instead of using manual and online survey through the Google form. The upcoming studies may use more secondary data's, for example find out more resources regarding the main focus of study in the library, company or official ministry website and may use door-to-door or telephone interviews to enhance the findings. Lastly, future researchers should include other variables such as brand superiority, brand affection and brand resonance.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the correlation value from the data analysis illustrates that the independent variable which are brand awareness, brand association and perceived quality have positive relationship with the brand loyalty. Researches on branding of budget hotels in Malaysia should be acknowledged by hoteliers especially budget hotel stakeholders in order to upgrade their business and standards. Future studies may use this research as reference addressing the change of the trend in budget hotel businesses. In addition, as part of the governments obligation a specific budget should be allocated for the tourism and hospitality industry because both of this industry are pillars that ensures the tourist satisfaction. This industry has a great potential to generate profit and directly rejuvenate the country's economy and the hospitality industry will further foster if the suggestions from this research is taken into consideration.

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