# Tourist Destination Brand Loyalty and Experiential Marketing:  A Case of Langkawi Island, Malaysia

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**Abstract:**

Experienctial marketing is a marketing strategy used to deeply engage the customers loyality in the product or the industry. The present study  assess the  impact of experiential marketing via social media platforms to enhance the brand loyalty of clients and tourists. The study was conducted in Langkawi Island of Malaysia. The target population was the tourism industry. Conventient sampling method was applied for the data collection. Additionally, crossectional quantative data was collected from the respondents to assess the impact of the experiential marketing strategies on the custormer brand loyalty. A total of 51 tourism agenets were selected for the study. Brand loyality, image perception, place attachment, service quality, and experiential marketing were the major construct of the study. The results indicates that customers show deep respects and loyality to the products and processes they have been using for long. However, change is the major element, which customers and consumers prefers, therefore, the study recommends that customers should be always given new orientations to keep them engaged and attracted.

*Keywords:* Tourism industry;  service quality; Experitail Marketing ;  brand loyalty

## I. Introduction

Social media plays a crucial role in marketing commodities and services in the present era of digitization and online presence (Zainuddin, Radzi, & Zahari, 2016). According to the Google report, there are 4.62 billion social media users in the world. From Malaysia, 86% of the population has access to the social media. Among these users, 2.8 billion use facebook (2.7), almost 2 billion youtube, almost 2. WhatsApp, 1.16 billion instagram, and other social media platforms billion (LizhiXu, Tang, Wang, & Li, 2018; Lia & Law, 2020; Dann, Nash, & Pearce, 1988) as indicated in figure 1.
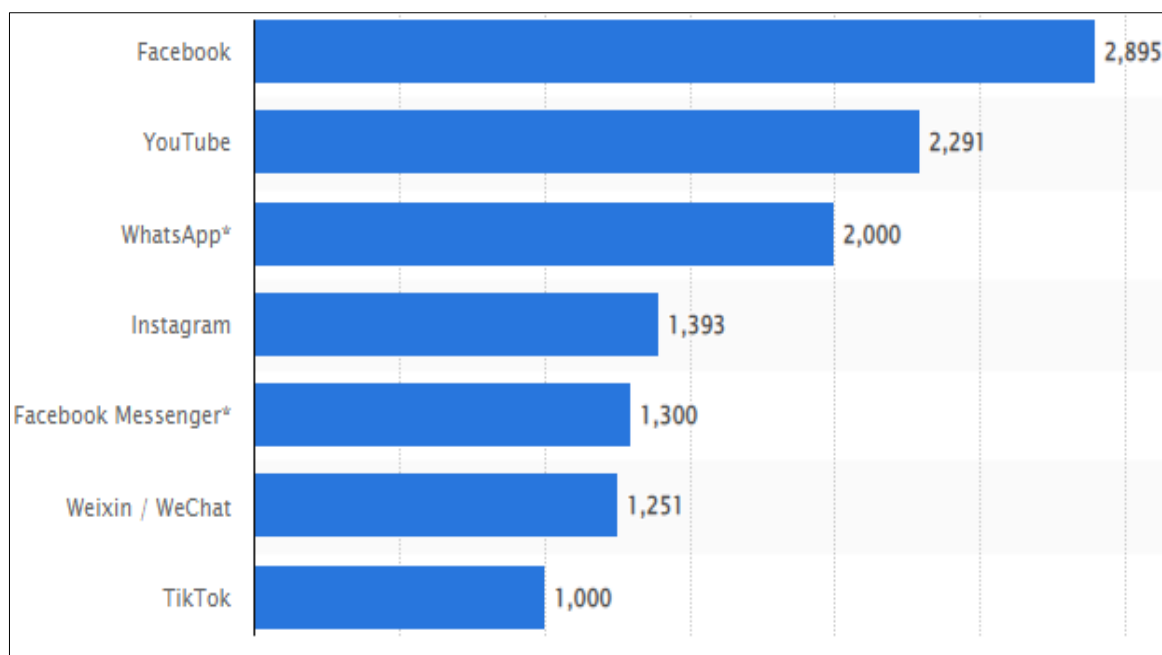
Figure 1: Social Media usage around the globe (LizhiXu, Tang, Wang & Li, 2018)

Additionally, major shidt can be seen in the digital marketing, According to a survey in 2018, 1.45 billion active digital marketing agents were in the market, in which 13% increase was seen in 2019. The pandemic of COVID-19 boomed and even forced digital marketing and e-shopping (Sharma, Dhiman, & Jha, 2021; Khan & Nawaz, 2021). Like other fields, the tourism industry recorded a sudden shift in their customers, processes, mechanism, models, and branding. Before and after COVID-19, tourism had become one of the most important sectors in the world economy, accounting for 10 percent of global GDP, and more than 320 million jobs worldwide are associated with the tourism industry (Luis, Ruiz-Real, Uribe-Toril, & Gázquez-Abad, 2020). This number is the symbol of loyalty and attraction of the agents and customers. In Malaysia, the total revenue from the tourism department was 47199.45 MYR Million from 1998 until 2020. Due to technology infusion in society and the processes, tourists are preferring more social medias' plateform for travelling, booking and other liasuire activities (Khan & Nawaz, 2021; Luis, Ruiz-Real, Uribe-Toril, & Gázquez-Abad, 2020; Sharma, Dhiman, & Jha, 2021).

Tourism organizations have taken advantage of this amazing technology by increasing their promotions of destinations and products on Social Media with the sole aim of reaching out to the masses (LizhiXu, Tang, Wang, & Li, 2018). Certain tourism organizations such as Yelp, TripAdvisor, Trip Hobo, Travel Triangle, and many more provide extensive information starting from small boutiques, restaurants, and shops to major sightseeing attractions for all totourism destinations through various Social Media tools (Lund, Cohen, & Scarles, 2018). With more than 200 million reviews and opinions posted on TripAdvisor till date, and more than 800 million active users on Facebook posting updates and sharing images of their travel destinations, Social Mediacan be seen as dominating the tourism marketing scenario (Hanna, Rowley, & Keegan, 2021; Benedek, 2018). However, very less ground work, facilities and subroutines have been developed for the tourism development and destination management in Malaysia, although the presenence of thetoruism department, travel and tours agend in Lankavi.

Therefore, this study investigated the impact of social media marketing on the loyalty of consumers in the tourism sector of Malaysia. To get an overview of the engagement of customers, the report focuses on different factors that impact the tourism business, including image perception, place attachment, quality of service, experiential marketing, consumer engagement, and brand loyalty. Hence, the current report aims at providing a detailed perception of the Malaysian tourism sector and its relation to brand loyalty via social media.

## 2. Literature Review

Tourist destination can be a city, town or sight, which havely depend on the revenue from the visitors and tourism and has been marked a tourism market (Dann, Nash, & Pearce, 1988; Benedek, 2018). Toruism destination is a multi-dimentional construct, which involve attitudental elements and repeated purchases, social, psychological and emotional attachement with certain place, brange and image. In the same way, brand loyalty is the tourists' emotional attachment to the tourists place. It represent the strength of relation between relative attitude and pattonage behaiours (Youssef, Leicht, & Marongiu, 2019; Khan & Nawaz, 2021). It also encourages others to adapt to the brand, recommends developing psychological and emotional attachment with the tourism brand. This process starts when a customer uses the certain brand, products, and services, get familaerity, and attachement with the goods, services, place and other allied things (Dann, Nash, & Pearce, 1988; LizhiXu, Tang, Wang, & Li, 2018).

In tourism industry, brand loyalty is one of the major construct of the experital marketing and toruism destination (Rather, Najar, & Jaziri, 2020). It is possitve association of the custumers with the product and services. It is a repeated purchases despite competitors' efforts to lure them away. Accrodign to research brand loyalty is developed through matching of the customers values and the brand, compatability of the brand with the life style, stories and memories connected with brands, features of products and sense of togatheredness (Sotiriadis, 2020; Hanna, Rowley, & Keegan, 2021).

### 2.1. Place Attachment and Tourism Destinations

Place attachment is one of the fundamental element in developing tourism in certain locality. It is the one of the fundamental element in tourism development, maintainability and sustainability (Trinchini, Kolodii, Goncharova, & Baggio, 2019). It the emotional attachment of the visitors with the place. Attachment means higher level of satisfaction, which will lead to higher revisits, therefore, place attachment belives in hoslistic attachment of the people and place (Wassler, Wang, & Hung, 2019).It relate to personal prefences, essences, experiences, and connection which tourists develop regarding certain places. Even tourist develop their feeling of the possession for certain places (Christou, Chatzigeorgiou, & Simeli, 2018). According to human geographies, it is based on two factors, i.e. place identity and place dependence (Farah et al., 2018). Place identity is the emotional connectedness people and sights and place dependence is the degree of the same experiences vistor get from the places (Dann, Nash, & Pearce, 1988; LizhiXu, Tang, Wang, & Li, 2018). They help in understanding visitors's relationship with a destination. According to research findings, direct experiences are necessary to fuel place attachment (Saura, Reyes-Menendez, & Palos-Sanchez, 2019). Additionally, in environmental psychology, the attachment of tourists to a place is broadly dependent on demography, sense of the place, environmental installation, and the sentiment

that arises from the environment (LizhiXu, Tang, Wang, & Li, 2018). The engagement of tourists and visitors can be enhanced by improving the major areas of service including hotels and hospitality facilities. However, the ongoing developments cannot be promoted to tourists unless marketed via social media (Catheryn, Khoo-Lattimore, & Wang, 2018; Hanna, Rowley, & Keegan, 2021).

## 2.2 Image Perception and Tourism Destinations

Image perception refers to the impact, feeling and perception created tourists's mindes. In tourism context, human interaction plays a key role in shaping the experience of tourists within a specific destination. It is the tourist perception based on their use, perceived usefulness and interaction with the product (Sharma, Sharma, & Chaudhary, 2020). Customers loves product and service, if it look and feal is good. Human psyche proclaims that user want to reuse the products and services again and a time, and develop their sensational and emotional attachment when they finds them easy to use and usefull. Therefore, after a centuries, customers are attracted to the Japanees products due to their perceived usefulness and easy human computer interaction (Catheryn, Khoo-Lattimore, & Wang, 2018; Khan & Nawaz, 2021).

In contrast, negative perception of images can largely affect the tourism business since visitors are less interested in paying visits to a place that does not seem attractive enough in the images. Hence, the tourism agencies need to make the optimal usage of social media platforms to market high-quality images that can attract more tourists to Malaysia (Liu, Hultman, Eisingerich, & Wei, 2020). The pictures can be captured by authorities of development or tourists that have previously visited the area (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020). These images, both still and live can attract more tourists to this island and enhance the tourism business of Malaysia. Since images can create a major reflection on the minds of potential visitors, this factor is crucial for the Malaysian tourism business (Alghizzawi, 2019; Filieri, A.Yen, & Yu, 2021).

## 2.3 Experiential Marketing and Tourism Destinations

Experiential marketing, also named engagement marketing, includes marketing strategies that immerse customers within a product or deeply engage them (Séraphin, Zaman, Olver, Bourliataux-Lajoinie, & Dosquet, 2019). It enables consumers to not just buy products or services from a brand, but to actually experience the brand. One major factor in experiential marketing is the emotional and sensational attachment of the customer with the product or services being used (Mkwizu, 2020). Human develop social, emotional, psychological, and moral attachment and engagement with products and services, then they put the head and heart, burn their sweat and blood for sustainment, development, and promotion (Bashir, Khwaja, Rashid, Turi, & Waheed, 2020; Turi, Adresi, Darun, & Mahmud, 2020).

In the present scenario of global competition, the tourism sector of Malaysia needs to enhance its engagement practices with potential tourists and visitors to attract them to different regions. Through experiential marketing via social media, visitors from all parts of the globe are attracted and engaged in a series of memorable and original traveling activities (bashir, Khwaja, Turi, & Toheed, 2020). Besides, experiential tourism engages all senses of the customer through inherent physical and spiritual connections via tourism services. Through this

marketing strategy, tourists are made to feel special and validated and a sentimental connection can be created with the tourist agency for unique services. Hence, experiential marketing is a significant factor regarding brand engagement and customer retention (Khurram, Sultan, & Turi, 2018).

## 2.4 Service Qaulity and Tourism Destinations

Service Quality refers to the services of the organization which an organization provides to the tourists as compared to the wishes, desires and expectations. It is evaluated based on overall provision and performance of services to tourists. It include, but not limited to transpotation, food and beverages, resorts, hotel accommodation and social packages (Bashir, Khwaja, Mahmood, Turi, & Latif, 2021; Turi, Adresi, Darun, & Mahmud, 2020).

Malaysia is facing certain inconsistencies due to social, cultural and religocity perspectives. Similarly, tt faced many expensions, industrilzation, internationalization in the last decade due to market expensions, immaturity and unexperiences of the travale and tours agents (Catheryn, Khoo-Lattimore, & Wang, 2018). Even on the government side, flights and other transporation, proper management, visa services and guides need to be develop because the global tourists are demanding and an extended sense of client satisfaction has made the maximum usage of modern service qualities through proper management (Bashir, Khwaja, Rashid, Turi, & Waheed, 2020; Dann, Nash, & Pearce, 1988).

## 2.5 Relationship between brand loyalty and consumer engagement in the tourism industry

There is an interconnection between brand loyalty and consumer engagement within the tourism industry of a country. It can be stated that customer loyalty deals with the customer's trust towards the specific industry (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020). Moreover, it can be seen that customer loyalty helps enhance the image of the brand and in turn accommodating for accelerating the productivity of an organization or industry. In the past few years, the competition within the tourism industry has been increasing as an obvious factor (Lia & Law, 2020). In these circumstances it has become essential to enhance customer loyalty and relation with the customers to hold a strong position in the market. These factors are directly related to the economic growth of the same (Saura, Reyes-Menendez, & Palos-Sanchez, 2019). Customer loyalty and customer engagement is in turn helpful for the industry for value creation and maintaining long-term relationships with the clients. In terms of tourism, brand loyalty plays a crucial role especially in the present pandemic situation since the financial growth of the companies is dependent on customer loyalty (Bashir, Khwaja, Mahmood, Turi, & Latif, 2021; Khurram, Sultan, & Turi, 2018).

## 3. Contextual Analysi of the Malaysian tourism industry

The tourism industry is making significant usage of several social media platforms to promote services and offers and gather feedback from tourists. Especially in the scenario of Malaysia, tourism has a major contribution to the national economy and is a key driver of the country's GDP. Although the recent upsurge of the global Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the tourism sector, Malaysia is still one of the major holiday destinations. Malaysia provides a *"smart tourism"* experience with an excessive focus on digitization and smart

infrastructure to build a sustainable and resilient tourist base (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020). Since the tourism sector has gotten affected in the current pandemic scenario, the Malaysian tourism agencies are retaining their consumers by marketing their services via social media. Besides, *"social media marketing"* helps agencies to monitor and facilitate communications and regular interactions, keeping the consumers connected to different brands. In addition, since most tourist destinations are starting to reopen, social media platforms have a major role to play in making tourists share their traveling experiences (Alghizzawi, 2019; Liu, Hultman, Eisingerich, & Wei, 2020).

The Langkawi Islands is one such area in Malaysia that has grown to be a major holiday destination that is attracting tourists from all parts of the world. Being a combination of 99 islands on the West coast of Malaysia, Langkawi is known for its mystical beaches, forests, and exquisite legends. However, many tourists are still not very aware of the surprises this region beholds, and that is where social media comes into play. The tourism agencies have a huge potential of attracting more tourists through social media by promoting the region through photos, videos, and exclusive offers. Hence, social media marketing is considered one of the most effective tools in the tourism industry for the brands of Malaysia (Sharma, Dhiman, & Jha, 2021; Turi, Adresi, Darun, & Mahmud, 2020).
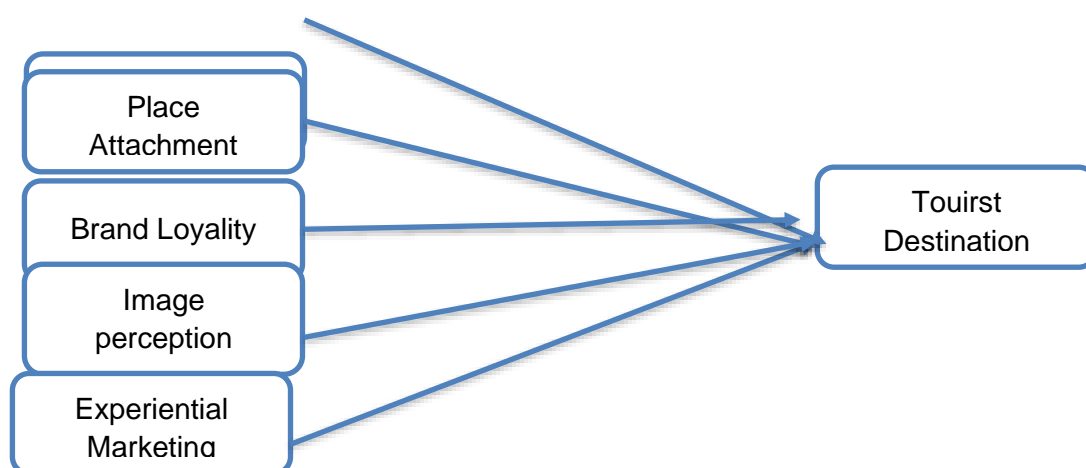


**Figure 2: Conceptual Model**

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Research Design

The study was based on the quantative survey. Primary data was collected through self-adminstered questionnaire. The instrument was adopted from the previous studies. 5-likert scale was used for getting the consenses of the respondents. Instrument was consisted of two parts. First part dealt with the demographics of the respondents and the second part was used to collect data regarding the main constructs of the study. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed among the target population and the 153 questionnaires were gotten back from the respondents. Initial screening for data missing, outliers, duplications and other anomalies was conduted. After screening process 17 questionnaire were excluded due to the above-mentioned anomalies and the study left with 136 questionnaire the analysis and results generalization. The

target population was the tour and travel agents in Langkawi Island, Malaysia. Random sampling technique was adopted for the study. Data was analysied using SPSS software.

## 5. Results and Analysis

### 5.1 Sample Demographics

In our respondents, majority were male respondents(65.4 %) and remaining (34.6) were females. As far as their professional experience was concerned, most of them have had more than 6 years of experience. As the research is conducted in Islamabad, (44.1 %) are living in linkawi from last 10 years. Their age frequencies mentioned in Table 1 indicates that more tourist agents were mature enough to answer and the respondents queries, as their frequencies remaind higher for (40-50) age brekets. The results shows there are three age groups in which 77 personals (56.6%) 40-50 years and over 50 personals(33.1%) having age above 30 and remaining participants 14 (10.3%) are between 30-40 years.

### Table 1 **Demographics of the Study**

| Valid values | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Female | 47 | 34.6 | 34.6 | 34.6 |
| | Male | 89 | 65.4 | 65.4 | 100.0 |
| Experience | 0-5 Years | 37 | 27.2 | 27.2 | 27.2 |
| | 6-10 Years | 60 | 44.1 | 44.1 | 71.3 |
| | Over 10 Years | 39 | 28.7 | 28.7 | 100.0 |
| Age | 30-40 | 14 | 10.3 | 10.3 | 10.3 |
| | 40-50 | 77 | 56.6 | 56.6 | 66.9 |
| | Over 50 | 45 | 33.1 | 33.1 | 100.0 |
| Total | | 136 | 100.0 | | |

### Descriptive statistics of the study

### Table 2 Descriptive Statistics

| | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|
| SQ | 136 | 3.5574 | .60143 |
| PA | 136 | 3.4485 | .61623 |
| BL | 136 | 2.9794 | .95631 |
| EM | 136 | 3.2886 | .75699 |
| IP | 136 | 3.1706 | .74457 |
| TD | 136 | 3.5000 | .64406 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 136 | | |

*(SQ= Service; Quality, PA= Place attachment, BL= Brand loyality, EM= Experienctial Marketing, IP=Image Perception, TD= Tourist Destination)*

The results shown in above table are based on descriptive statistics of different variables. According to the statistics, means of all construts are higher tha their standard daviations, which indicates that tourist approach travel and tours agents for the guidance to the tourist destination. In the same way tourist values and attach theirselves to the place where they visit. They also show empathy items they purchase and to the place, as the brand loaylity and image perception values are higher as compared to the standard devaiton. Similarly,

## 5.3 Reliability Statistics

### Table 3: Reliability Statistics

| Cronbach's Alpha | Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items | N of Items |
|---|---|---|
| .824 | .836 | 10 |

The results expressed in the above table reflect reliability of all elements. According to Sekaran (2003), value above 0.80 is considered good while 0.70 falls in acceptable range and value 0.60 is poor reliability. The test is done by Cronbach's Alpha technique. Reliability is measure to indicate that a reliable instrument is used.

## 5.4 Correlations

### Table 4: Correlational Analysis

| | | SQ | PA | BL | EM | IP | TD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SQ | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .407** | .242** | .397** | .137 | .283** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 | .005 | .000 | .111 | .001 |
| | N | 136 | 136 | 136 | 136 | 136 | 136 |
| PA | Pearson Correlation | .407** | 1 | .539** | .431** | .325** | .342** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 |
| | N | 136 | 136 | 136 | 136 | 136 | 136 |
| BL | Pearson Correlation | .242** | .539** | 1 | .522** | .445** | .285** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .005 | .000 | | .000 | .000 | .001 |
| | N | 136 | 136 | 136 | 136 | 136 | 136 |
| EM | Pearson Correlation | .397** | .431** | .522** | 1 | .345** | .333** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | .000 | | .000 | .000 |
| | N | 136 | 136 | 136 | 136 | 136 | 136 |
| IP | Pearson Correlation | .137 | .325** | .445** | .345** | 1 | .380** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .111 | .000 | .000 | .000 | | .000 |
| | N | 136 | 136 | 136 | 136 | 136 | 136 |
| TD | Pearson Correlation | .283** | .342** | .285** | .333** | .380** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .001 | .000 | .001 | .000 | .000 | |
| | N | 136 | 136 | 136 | 136 | 136 | 136 |

*(SQ= Service Quality, PA= Place attachment, BL= Brand loyality, EM= Experienctial Marketing, IP=Image Perception, TD= Tourist Destination)*

Results shown in the above table are about correlation analysis. This test provides whether strength of relationship exists among variables and shows presence of linear relationship among variables. Service quality has positive and significant(0.407) correlation with place attachment . Similarly all other variables carry positive and correlate with each other, which indicates that tourists values place attachement, develop their empathy and sympathy with the places they visits, develop attachment with the things (brand) they purchase. In the same experienctial marketing plays vital role in tourist destinations and their satisfaction.

## 5.5 Regression Analysis

Regression analysis is a statistical technique for investigating the relationship among the variables. There are three types of regression, first is Simple Linear Regression (SLR), stepwise regression, and the third Hierarchical Regression. In this study, I have used simple Regression to find out the model summary of regression analysis as mentioned below.

**Table 5. Regression Analysis**

**Model Summary**

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | .841[a] | .707 | .701 | .60874 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), SQ, IP, BL, TD, IP,EM

*(SQ= Service Quality, PA= Place attachment, BL= Brand loyality, EM= Experienctial Marketing, IP=Image Perception, TD= Tourist Destination)*

The result in table 4 explains several things. First, it explains how much variance in tourist destination is aligned with its allied constructs. This is denoted by "$R^2$" i.e. 0.707. Here the results explain that 70.7 % variance in toruists destination is due to SQ,IP, EM, TD  factors.

**Table 6: ANOVA**

| Model | | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Regression | 344.972 | 8 | 43.121 | 116.367 | .000[b] |
| | Residual | 142.667 | 385 | .371 | | |
| | Total | 487.639 | 393 | | | |

a. Dependent Variable: *TD= Tourist Destination*

b. *(SQ= Service Quality, PA= Place attachment, BL= Brand loyality, EM= Experienctial Marketing, IP=Image Perception)*

The goodness of fit or model fitness is investigated by F statistics. In the above table F value (F-value =116.367 and p =  0.000 < 0.05) is found significant so it is assumed that model is a best fit. So the output of above table explains that the model allows to predict tourist Destination.

## 5. Discussion

According to the findings of the study, servives quality, place attamenet, brand loyality, experiential marketing and image perception has significant effect on tourism destination. According to the previous research findings, Tourists pay more, if they considered that they are being provided with the best of services. According to them, they can pay more, if better services are provided. Many research findings support this phenomenon, that tourists spands lavishly if they get good services (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020). In the same way, toruists develops attachment, feeling and sensation, care and value the place, recommends it to their friends, fellows and family members (Rather, Najar, & Jaziri, 2020). According to Sharma, Sharma, & Chaudhary (2020) and Filieri, A.Yen, & Yu (2021) have also acknowledge in their findigs that touris shows empathy and sympathy with the places, where they visit. Additionally, brand loyality is one of the major influencer and contributors among the tourists destination selection. Peoples with brand loyality, remains with the brands till last. For the development of the image perception and brand loyality, experiential marketing plays important role. Therefore, adequate and necessary branding and marketing strategies need to be developed to attract, maintain and develop tourism in the Lankawi Malaysia.

## 6. Conclusion

It can be deduced from the discussions and analyses so far that marketing via social media plays a major role in maintaining a loyal consumer base. In the tourism sector of Malaysia, service quality is regarded as a vital strategy to manage the tourism process in a fundamental way to enhance tourist loyalty and meet their demands. Moreover, experiential marketing through social media portals acts as a beneficial instrument in generating greater revenues for a travel enterprise and also retaining clients to enhance business transactions. The notion of developing a tourism industry to new peaks requires broadening the number of yearly entries to gain greater revenues. In addition, social media platforms can be used to keep the sentiments alive in the minds of tourists for a long time after they have left the place. Hence, the essence of traveling can be kept alive among tourists through experiential social media marketing in Malaysia.

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