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THE CONTRIBUTION OF VACATION TO MALAYSIAN FAMILY WELLBEING: DESIGNING AND ANALYSING INSTRUMENT

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Abstract:

Nowadays, family vacation is becoming one of the most essential sectors of the tourism industry. It is a fact that family tourism and vacation provide benefits to family relationships, lifetime memories, communications, marriage, family happiness and also family wellbeing. A preliminary study involving 30 respondents was conducted to further design and analyse the instrument used to explore the contribution of vacation to the Malaysian family wellbeing. Several questions were proposed to fulfil the study; (1) Does vacation strengthen family bonding? (2) Does vacation contribute to the lifetime memories among family members? And (3) Does vacation create good communication among family members? The findings contributed to further study by using the tested instrument to fulfil the goal of the National Family Policy Malaysia (NFP) which aims to develop prosperous, healthy and resilient families to ensure social stability families. It significantly will support the Principle 4 of NFP which is to produce strong family relationships, a culture of sharing resources and mutual responsibilities to ensure family wellbeing. Further, the study is also significant to invigorating domestic tourism and ensuring business continuity by the Tourism, Arts and Culture Ministry.

DOI: 10.35631/JTHEM.831001.This work is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)**Keywords:**

Vacation, Family Wellbeing, Family Bonding, Family Lifetime Memories, Family Communication, Instrument, Malaysian

Introduction

It is undoubtedly that family tourism is one of the most important sectors of the tourism industry around the world and accounting for about 30 per cent of the leisure travel market (Scha' nzel & Yeoman, 2015). Several common and similar terms have been tremendously used in researches to describe family tourism for instance, family vacation, family holiday and family travel. A study undertaken by AGODA on Family Travel Trends in 2017 noted that family travel has become popular around the world with 71% of Australian travellers reported having travelled with their core family (i.e. parents & children), 81% from Indonesian travellers and 86% from Thailand (AGODA, 2018). Further, Japan's 2018 National Tourism Survey showed that family tourism is one of the most popular types of travel, comprising 19.64% of domestic tourism and 36.06% of overseas tourism among Japanese residents (Japan Tourism Agency, 2020). A current survey by AGODA for the year 2021 further showed that people rated spending more quality time with their loves one as prior thing they wanted to do in the next coming year (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: AGODA Survey (2021)**

Source: AGODA Survey (2021)

Problem Statement

The National Population and Family Development Board (NPFDB) or normally known as Lembaga Penduduk dan Pembangunan Keluarga Negara (LPPKN) defines family into few categories of household namely nuclear family household, extended family household, single

member household, unrelated member household and other related member household (NPFDB, 2016). The NPFDB has few studies conducted to understand the various and complex profiles of family in Malaysia, even has produced few reports to understand the issues and challenges faced by family in Malaysia. The Malaysian Population and Family Survey Report for instance has been produced every 10 years since 1974 by the NPFDB which significantly acknowledge the aspects of marriage, fertility, the family structure as well as family challenges. The report also provides continuous efforts to formulate new initiatives in facing the realities of change within society which need to be implemented.

Focusing on strengthening the declining family institutions particularly following the Covid-19 outbreak, LPPKN had conducted an event on Malaysian Family Month celebration launched by the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob at Taman Botani Perdana on Sunday, November 7. According to the LPPKN deputy chairman, Mastura Mohamad Darby, the wellbeing of Malaysian families was at a moderate level during the pandemic period, hence urged members of the community to continue to enliven the family spirit by carrying out leisure activities at home (The SUNDAILY, 11 May 2021). However there has been no study or survey undertaken to understand the contributions of vacation to family relationship, family happiness, marriage and family wellbeing which may enhance the social stability of the family structure. Since the vacation mainly tourism industry, contributes to the country GDP and employment, it is high time to study its contributions to the family wellbeing particularly in terms of family bonding, family lifetime memories and family communication.

Objective and Research Questions

The study investigates the contribution of vacation to the Malaysian family wellbeing by designing and analysing the instrument to measure several aspects namely;

- 1) Does vacation strengthen the family bonding?
- 2) Does vacation contribute to the lifetime memories among family members?
- 3) Does vacation create good communication among family members?
- 4) Does vacation contribute to the Malaysian family wellbeing?

Literature Review

Family Vacation

Family vacation derives in various meanings which also known as family tourism, family leisure and family holidays. According to Fridgen (1984), family vacation is much more than just getting to a particular destination but it involves a complex phenomenon such as planning, anticipation, trip experiences and post trip recollection. Vacations actually can provide more benefits to family. Leisure travel for families in many ways has become a necessity rather than a luxury. Similarly, family holidays is described as travel away from home for more than one day undertaken by a family group which consist of at least one child and one adult (Carr 2011; Schänzel et al. 2015). Family holidays is further seen as an effective means of bonding, during which family members can spend quality time and create collective memories (Carr, 2011; Lehto et al., 2009). It is a fact that family tourism and vacation provide benefits to family relationship, life time memories, communications, marriages, family happiness and also family wellbeing. According to Wu et al., (2019), family tourism research has focused on three major streams: family travel decision making, the benefits of travel, and family travel experiences. Mimi Li et al. (2017) stressed that research on family travel nowadays have received growing attention from both the travel industry and academia. They found that family travel motivates

the family members in terms of spending quality time with children, creating pleasant memories learning and development, compensation for children, and self-compensation.

Additionally, Durko and Petrick (2016) examined existent research on the benefits of travel applicable to working adults, couples, families, and extended family members and found that travel has several deeper benefits for families, relationships, and the individual. Their extensive literature review emphasized that travel provides positive benefits for adults, children, and couples for instance time allotted for family bonding is decreasing, likely attributed to increased career demands and changing family structures. The study further showed travel as a means to utilize limited family time to help improve communications within a relationship, reduce the possibility of divorce, strengthen lifelong family bonds, and increase a sense of wellbeing in adults and children. Despite changing family structures and demographics, family life continues to be important to Americans and family travel is perceived as an important builder of family wellbeing (Chesworth, 2003).

Lehto et al. (2009) conducted a study regarding the unique interplay of family vacation travel, family cohesion, and family communication through a sample of 265 family travelers. Their findings revealed that family vacation contributes positively to family bonding, communication and solidarity. In another study, Lehto et al. (2012) considered family as an important unit of individuals seeking experiences together during vacation which deserves explicit attention because of ramifications of family vacation on family functioning. The study further explored the interplay of vacation activity patterns and family cohesion and revealed four types of family travelers namely bonded and nature seeking; attached and enthusiastic; self-directed and recreation oriented; and sociable but static family travelers. The study provided greater impacts to the development of quality family vacation programs and enhancement of family life satisfaction.

Vacation and Family Bonding

Family vacation also has intensifying family bonds by providing an escape from the routine life, strengthening family cohesion, creating lasting memories and providing future life decisions (Shaw et al, 2008). Smith and Diekmann (2017) cited that the shared activities among family members during vacations can create experiences which lead to an increase in bonding and attachment, moreover creating loyalty within the family. Additionally, Gilbert and Abdullah (2004) emphasized that the anticipation of a family vacation is also believed can increase positive feelings about life, family and health. Overall, Lehto et al. (2009) believed that travel vacations also contribute to the increase of family bonding, increase positive communications, strengthen family ties and strengthen the connectedness of family members.

Vacation and Family Lifetime Memories

A study by Morgan and Xu (2009) found that memories of holidays have contributed to individuals' happiness through reminiscent memories. In fact, memories of holidays are found to affect different life domains such as family and social lives (Sirgy et al., 2011). As noted by Neumann (1999), memory of a trip is critical since it holds a certain attraction and intrinsic reward that materialize in the moments of storytelling. The life time memories are considered vital in the tourism studies. Oh et al. (2007) emphasized that the significance of memorable experiences, as memory is the single most important information source for an individual when making a revisit decision and spreading word-of-mouth. Further, Larsen (2007) verified that tourist experiences to be either past, personal, or travel-related events as something that strong

enough to have entered long-term memory. Previously, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) highlighted that memorable experiences may contribute to a sense of exhilaration, a deep sense of enjoyment that is long cherished and that becomes a landmark in memory for what life should be like.

Vacation and Family Communication

Vacation is also significantly contributing to enhance the communication among family members. Hence, family communication is another construct commonly considered in family leisure research. Several studies have reported improvements in family communication after joint involvement in various outdoor recreation programs among small samples of families (Huff et al., 2003; Kugath, 1997; Bandoroff & Scherer, 1994). Additionally, a study by Orthner and Mancini (1991) found that family leisure experiences were essential in providing opportunities for, as well as being a facilitating mechanism for communication between family members. Further, it was explained by Shaw and Dawson (2001) that parents in their study consciously and deliberately planned and facilitated family leisure in an effort to enhance family communication.

Vacation and Family Wellbeing

There have been an increasing number of studies in tourism pertaining to family wellbeing (Pyke et al., 2016; Hartwell et al., 2012; McCabe et al., 2013). The concept of wellbeing is defined by Crisp (2016) in the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy as being used to describe what is non-instrumentally good for a person. Meanwhile, wellbeing is seen by Carlisle et al (2009) as a collateral causality of many social, cultural and economic changes associated with the period roughly recognized as high, late or liquid modernity connecting it to the moral value system of modern society. Generally, the idea of wellbeing is categorized into two approaches; hedonic and eudaimanic. Ryan and Deci (2002) describe hedonic approach of wellbeing as a subjective happiness and the experience of pleasures. The eudaimonic approach on the other hands is connected to personal growth, self-fulfilment and self-development, full engagement and optimal performance of meaningful behaviour (Cloninger, 2004). In the context of tourism, several studies have focus on wellbeing through a broad range of terms partially inspired by philosophy as well as psychology, such as 'quality of life' and 'life satisfaction' (Dolnicar et al., 2012; Uysal et al., 2012; Sirgy et al., 2011; de Bloom et al., 2010; Sirgy, 2010) and 'happiness' (Nawijn, 2011; Filep & Deery, 2010; Nawijn et al., 2010).

Further studies also cited that vacation contributing to the reduction of work stress and increases family life satisfaction and physical health, hence leading to the total happiness and quality of life (Sirgy at al., 2011; de Bloom et al, 2010; Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004; Strauss-Blaehtosche et al, 2002; Neal et al., 1999). In fact, there are studies that suggested family vacation as a way to foster and maintain family wellbeing (Brynes, 2001; Newman, 1996). Other studies also noted that leisure activities are a major component of family travel which revealed positive effects on the family structure (Hornberger et al., 2010; Poff, 2010; Holman & Jacquart, 1988). A current study by Totsune et al. (2021) on the Japanese in their 60s found that tourism is considered as an important aspect that motivate their wellbeing. One way to promote broader subjective wellbeing may be financial assistance for travelling, such as social tourism initiatives to provide opportunities to travel for those otherwise unable to participate due to financial disadvantages. They concluded that tourism contributes to the subjective wellbeing among older adults.

There are also studies regarding family vacation which focus on the influence to family wellbeing and quality of life (QOL). For instance, a recent study on family tourism and vacation has been undertaken in China by Gao et al. (2018). The study aimed to explore the influence of family holiday travel on the subjective wellbeing (SWB) of Chinese adolescents. Interestingly, the findings of the study suggested that family holiday travel influences the global life satisfaction; contentment with school, self and leisure life; positive and negative effects of adolescents. The study also concluded on the influence of family travel on the SWB of adolescents. Even though previous study by de Bloom et al. (2010) was undertaken among employees, they found that most vacations have strong, but rather short-lived effects on health and wellbeing (H&W). They investigated on the development of health and wellbeing during and after a long summer vacation, and also the changes related to vacation activities and experiences. The findings indicated that health and wellbeing increased quickly during vacation and there were relationships between vacation duration and most vacation activities.

Research Methodology

As a preliminary study to design and analyse the instrument used to explore the contribution of vacation to the Malaysian family wellbeing, the study involved a distribution of survey questionnaire to the respondents. A preliminary study is also seen as a preparation stage to increase the content validity of the questionnaire measurement before conducting the actual or the large-scale study. Oppenheim et al. (2003) emphasized that questionnaire even is adapted from previous studies needs to be constructed, revised and refined before the actual data collection can be implemented. Part 1 of the questionnaire asked the respondents to provide their background profiles such as gender, age, marital status, role in the family, number of family member, occupation, monthly household income, number of time traveling in the past two years and reason for traveling. The second part requested the respondents to indicate their perceptions on 44 items regarding the contributions of family vacation to the family bonding, family life time memories, family communication and family wellbeing. There are various suggestions regarding the size number of respondents selected for the preliminary study. A number between 10 to 30 respondents is also considered suitable by Isaac and Michael (1995) and Hill (1998). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the questionnaire was distributed to 30 respondents consisted of the Universiti Utara Malaysia staffs through online using the Google form link.

Taking into consideration the COVID-19 pandemic that continues to unfold, an online survey or web-based survey was employed in the study through email. Online survey is considered an efficient tool and has been tremendously applied in many studies (Kumar & Naik, 2016; Raju & Harinarayana, 2016; Webb, 2017). In fact, online survey through email is acknowledged as an appropriate qualitative research amid social distancing nowadays (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021). The Google link was closed once the number of the returned questionnaire reached 30. The responses were presented in an Excel format and then were transferred to Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-PC) version 25 for Windows for further analysis. Cronbach's coefficient alpha test was used for the purpose of determining the reliability of the items on the instrument.

Findings

Respondents' Background

Table 1 describes the findings regarding the background of the respondents. Briefly, the respondents consisted of male (50.0%) and female (50.0%). Most of the respondents were between 46 – 55 years old (36.7%) and married (63.3%). The findings also indicated that the majority of the respondents representing father (50.0%) and interestingly followed by daughter (36.7%). The findings also revealed that the majority of the respondents consisted of 6 – 10 people in their family (43.3%), followed by 3 – 5 people (40%) and only one indicating a less than 3 people in the family (3.3%). As for the respondents' occupation, the findings showed that the majority of the respondents serviced as government servant (56.7%) and had a monthly household income of RM5000 – RM10000 (63.3%). Additionally, question regarding the number of travel the respondents had in the less 2 years revealed that most of them had their vacations less than 5 times (56.7%) and interestingly the purpose was for relaxation (73.3%).

Table 1: Profiles of Respondents (N = 30)

Items	Frequency	Percentage %
Gender:		
Male	15	50
Female	15	50
Age:		
Below 18 years old	0	0.0
18 – 25 years old	10	33.3
26 – 35 years old	1	3.3
36 – 45 years old	1	3.3
46 – 55 years old	11	36.7
56 – 65 years old	6	20.0
Above 65 years old	1	3.3
Marital status:		
Single	11	36.7
Married	19	63.3
Divorced	0	0.0
Separated	0	0.0
Role in family:		
Father	15	50.0
Mother	4	13.3
Son	0	0.0
Daughter	11	36.7
Grandfather	0	0.0
Grandmother	0	0.0
Father in law	0	0.0
Mother in law	0	0.0
Other	0	0.0
Number of family member:		
Less than 3 people	1	3.3
3 – 5 people	12	40.0
6 – 10 people	13	43.3

More than 10 people	4	13.3
Occupation:		
Student	5	16.7
Government servant	17	56.7
Private	4	13.3
Own business	0	0.0
Housewives	0	0.0
No occupation	4	13.3
Monthly household income:		
RM5000 – RM10000	19	63.3
More than RM10000	11	36.7
Number of time travelling together in the family for the past 2 years:		
Less than 5 times	17	56.7
5 – 10 times	10	33.3
More than 10 times	3	10.0
Reasons for travelling together with family:		
Relaxation	22	73.3
Education	0	0.0
Sports and events	0	0.0
Visiting families and relatives	7	23.3
Other	1	3.3

Source: Current Study

Reliability Test

The reliability test was further conducted to ensure that the items in the questionnaire consistently manifests the same construct that it is measuring. Reliability tests for each item were carried out and determined using Cronbach's Coefficient alpha (α) test. Table 2 depicts the findings of reliability test for nine items pertaining the family bonding with coefficient alpha value of .886. All the nine items indicating item-total correlation value ranged between .686 - .341. The findings also noted that one item derived with a value of less than 0.40. The items 'Family members do things together during vacations' showed a value of .341 which should be eliminated from the questionnaire. Taking into account that the value is nearly reached 0.40, the item has been maintain in the questionnaire for future distribution.

Table 2: Reliability Test for Family Bonding

Statement	Item-total correlation	Total items	Coefficient Alpha
FAMILY BONDING		9	.886
1 Family members do things together during vacations.	.341		
2 Family members feel very close to each other during vacations.	.686		
3 During vacations, family members go along with what the family decides to do.	.606		

4	Family members feel close to each other while traveling together.	.661
5	Traveling together makes the family ties stronger.	.664
6	Family members are supportive of each other during leisure trips.	.638
7	While traveling together, family members respect each other's personal time and space.	.779
8	Travelling together creates strong relationships/bonding among family members.	.756
9	Vacations increase the quality of family relationships.	.689

Source: Current Study

Table 3 depicts the findings regarding the family lifetime memories which consisted of six items and also revealed high coefficient alpha value of .821. All the six items indicating item-total correlation values ranged between .754 - .448, hence were maintain in the questionnaire for further action.

Table 3: Reliability Test for Family Lifetime Memories

Statement	Item-total correlation	Total items	Coefficient Alpha
FAMILY LIFETIME MEMORIES		6	.821
1 While traveling together, family members share interests and experiences with each other.	.739		
2 While traveling together, family members enjoy participating in the same activities.	.610		
3 I remembered most the people I travelled with during vacations.	.453		
4 I enjoyed the special activities I did with my family while on vacations.	.754		
5 I will always remember the special places I visited with my family during vacations.	.448		
6 Vacations create strong family life time memories.	.576		

Source: Current Study

The reliability test results for family communication is presented in Table 4. Items for family communication which consisted of 11 items revealed a high coefficient alpha value of .934. Additionally, all the items are maintain in the questionnaire since they indicated item-total correlation values ranged between .786 - .580.

Table 4: Reliability Test for Family Communication

Statement	Item-total correlation	Total items	Coefficient Alpha
FAMILY COMMUNICATION		11	.934
1 Spending time together during vacation makes family members satisfy with how they communicate with each other.	.783		
2 Spending time together during vacation makes family members become very good listeners.	.753		
3 Spending time together during vacation makes family members express affection to each other.	.761		
4 Spending time together during vacation makes family members able to ask each other for what they want.	.580		
5 Spending time together during vacation makes family members calmly discuss problems with each other.	.772		
6 Spending time together during vacation makes family members discuss their ideas and beliefs with each other.	.782		
7 Spending time together during vacation makes family members provide honest answers when family members ask questions of each other.	.786		
8 Spending time together during vacation makes family members understand each other's feelings.	.687		
9 Spending time together during vacation makes family members seldom say negative things about each other when angry.	.754		
10 Spending time together during vacation makes family members express their true feelings to each other.	.629		
11 Spending time together during vacation increases communications among family members.	.698		

Source: Current Study

The reliability test results for family wellbeing is presented in Table 5. Items for family wellbeing which consisted of 11 items revealed a high coefficient alpha value of .921.

Additionally, all the items are maintained in the questionnaire since they indicated item-total correlation values ranged between .789 - .627.

Table 5: Reliability Test for Family Wellbeing

Statement	Item-total correlation	Total items	Coefficient Alpha
FAMILY WELLBEING		11	.921
1 Our family travels together well.	.627		
2 Traveling with family members is quality time well spent.	.723		
3 Tension within my family is more relaxed while traveling together.	.640		
4 In my family, everyone shares responsibilities when planning a trip.	.634		
5 While traveling together, family members discuss problems and feel good about the solutions.	.634		
6 Vacations increase the happiness of family.	.713		
7 Family vacations stabilize my mental health and emotion.	.789		
8 I am more productive with my work when I came back from vacations with my family.	.725		
9 Family vacations bring meaningful life and has value to my family.	.740		
10 Vacations create total family happiness for me.	.774		
11 Vacations increase my family wellbeing.	.746		

Source: Current Study

Conclusion

Based from the findings of the preliminary study, it is suggested that further study should be conducted using the pretested instrument as it revealed reliable items. All the 44 items of the instrument adopted from previous literature representing the family bonding, family lifetime memories, family communication and family wellbeing specifically in the context of Malaysian families. The items can further reveal the contribution of vacation and the impacts of family facation to the family wellbeing.

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