

Booster of Rural Tourism's Competitiveness: Stakeholders' Involvement as A Moderator

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Abstract

Tourism competitiveness of a destination has been greatly influenced by several factors, two of the factors selected under this study is community support and community knowledge. However, the limelight shines on the moderating role of stakeholders' involvement on the relationships between the destination competitive advantage and its factors. This is the first study that has adopted the stakeholders' involvement as a moderating variable to test on the moderating impact on the relationships. The lacking of development has indeed decreased the competitive level to host destination. Past studies have researched on the relationships of community support and community knowledge with destination competitiveness; this study has introduced the stakeholders' involvement into the framework as moderator, in which it has been modified according to the resource-based view (RBV) theory to test the moderating impact on the former variables. A total of 223 sets of questionnaires were successfully collected for analysis. Both Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23.0 and SmartPLS (version 3.2.7) were used for analysis. Interestingly, the findings revealed that both community support and knowledge impact were statistically proven to be significantly related to rural tourism destination competitive advantage. The implications of the study were further discussed.

Keywords: Community support Impacts; Community knowledge Impacts; Stakeholder's involvement; Tourism competitive advantage; Rural tourism.



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1. Introduction

Sarawak, is the largest state and the richest in natural resources in Malaysia. However, the state is very much left behind in term of urban development compared to other states. Despite all these, there is a golden opportunity for tourism development specifically in rural areas. The community is now in the picture of ensuring all tourism activities to be successful. Since, community is the only factor that could self-assist themselves in rural tourism development with the limited resources available to them (Cawley and Gillmor, 2008). Hence, two impacts are identified under this framework, namely community support and community knowledge. These two factors have direct impact to rural tourism destination competitiveness. Community from rural destination has said to be motivated differently in tourism destination development (George *et al.*, 2009). With the knowledge power they possess and the willingness to participate, it is going to fruit and harvested handsomely. Competitiveness is yet very much rely on the visitations of tourists. However, due to the lack of development and performance, it has indeed weakened the competitive level to host destination. In ruling out the reasons for a drop of visitors to tourism destination, it is due to the satisfaction level on service quality and products offered (Arabatzis and Grigoroudis, 2009; Yusof and Rahman, 2011). Hence, it could be foreseen that the participation from community and the involvement from stakeholders could be very much influential.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to test the impact of introducing stakeholders' involvement as a moderator to increase competitive advantage in its relationships with community support impact. Community knowledge is not tested, as the power of knowledge actually supplement the support that community rendered. In short, it is an abstract influence towards the former impact that mentioned.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Tourism Competitive Advantage

Tourism competitiveness is the ultimate goal for the development and prosperity of a nation's tourism industry. Studies have shown that in a model of destination competitiveness, there are attributes that linked to stakeholders and local community (Crouch, 2007). These attributes have played a very important part in shaping the competitiveness; for instance, special events that held by community has impacted touristic significance, attitudes of the community have the direct impact to level of hospitality to tourists, entrepreneurial talent creates room for development and improvement in tourism. Wilson *et al.* (2001) even added a very strong point on creation of destination competitiveness that knowledge in tourism possessed by local community will eventually lead to tendering their support in their domestic tourism industry to succeed. This is a significant factor to gain competitiveness to outshine and outstand other destinations.

2.2. Community Knowledge and Community Support Impacts

Information and knowledge is power and it is also a key to success in rural tourism. Lepp (2008) and López-guzmán and Sánchez-cañizares (2011) mentioned that communities often underestimated themselves and that lead them to be passive in tourism activities at their own respective tourist destinations. As a result, knowledge is a turning point, therefore it is vital to enhance the community capacity (Aref *et al.*, 2010) through individual level, community level and organizational level (Kieffer and Reischmann, 2004; Raik, 2002). Instant result from community knowledge being provided and improved, is a boost in confidence level; the support tends to follow to give community an all-rounder participation once knowledge is there. The knowledge has given the sense of participation of community in rural tourism development when they prove their ability in contributing to local tourism.

Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2011), and Lee (2013) mentioned that studies have stated that support from community is also influenced by attitudes, perceived benefits (effects), and community attachment (satisfaction). This cause-effect seems to be in line with the statement made by Hanafiah *et al.* (2013) that tourism industry bounces to expand and grow whenever the local community support is incorporated. In an indirect manner, community support has effect over tourists, it has the ability to influence the tourists' level of satisfaction during their visits. This satisfaction level will affect their intention to re-visit and through words of mouth recommendations (Gursoy and Rutherford, 2004). Besides, the support from community could even enhance the service quality and authentic experiences which supplement the value of a lifetime experience to the tourists as something precious and priceless (Heath, 2002). This an extraordinary and unique value that hand over to tourists spiritually.

2.3. Stakeholders' Involvement

Stakeholders is defined as any group or individual who has influential ability over or being influenced by tourism development at a destined area (Freeman, 1984). According to Waligo *et al.* (2013), it is said that stakeholders has possessed great influence in tourism sustainability. Therefore, the concept of stakeholders has clearly portrayed the parties like government, tourists, local community, entrepreneurs and other sectors (Gunn, 1994; Swarbrooke, 2001). However, in this study, in order to avoid confusion or entering the grey area of definition; tourists and local community are the two elements that being excluded from this grouping. This is to give a clear picture to the respondents that there should not be duplication of status in this study to avoid bias and prejudice in giving their hearty feedbacks. This variable is being introduced as moderator in this framework due to certain reasons. The scenario is backed with reason that stakeholder group is indeed an essential factor to tourism destination, the initiatives and thoughts which are external to the strategic planning and management process are very much affecting tourism sustainability (Dill, 1975). Beierle and Konisky (2000), and Healey (1998) have stressed that stakeholder's participation in tourism development is utmost important especially in dealing with conflicts and competing with interests, their involvement affect the progress of tourism. In Adeyinka-Ojo *et al.* (2014)'s findings have mentioned that stakeholders' involvement is very much affecting rural tourism destination's management and marketing activities. Another solid quoting from Moric (2013), stakeholder may compete among each other but it may also create synergy and maximization of value in tourism businesses. Hence, this element is definitely impactful to competitive advantage. Thus, it is used to test whether this component is influential towards the other two variables.

2.4. Hypotheses Development

2.4.1. Community Support and Community Knowledge Impact son Rural Tourism Competitive Advantage

In the context of rural tourism competitive advantage, local community contributions have been one of the back bone. As quoted by Reid *et al.* (2003), by exposing the current living context, educating and improved the local community knowledge in tourism will eventually strengthen their future efforts in tourism development and the life quality of themselves then leads to higher competitiveness. This clearly shown the inter-dependability between the two variables. Attitude of the community towards tourism-related activities could be improved or totally been changed by creating awareness and implementing proper and progressive learning programme to the community (Stylidis *et al.*, 2014). With that effort, it helps community to formulate and scrutinize their policies made and also the progress of the development over times. This chain reaction is also cited by Chandralal (2010) that community support is indeed an important role in developing a sustainable rural tourism. Another typical citation on impact of

community knowledge is the participation of community in natural resources preservation, waste management, and infrastructure and facilities development, nonetheless some tourism programmes and tour packages are fundamentals to tourism development (Vitasurya, 2016).

The relations between the community support and community knowledge to the destination competitiveness is reciprocal, the more positively community support impacted the destination the more competitive the destination to be and vice versa. Same effect applies to community knowledge. Hence, the proposed hypotheses are:

H1: Community support impact is positively related to rural tourism competitive advantage in rural tourism destination of Sarawak.

H2: Community knowledge impact is positively related to rural tourism competitive advantage in rural tourism destination of Sarawak.

2.4.2. Stakeholders' Involvement Moderates Community Support Impact On Rural Tourism Competitive Advantage

This study having the framework that stakeholders' involvement does moderate the impact of community support towards the tourism competitive advantage of a destination, hence the third set of hypothesis is constructed. Study in the past has adopted stakeholder involvement as a moderator in the context of organizational performance (Clark *et al.*, 2014). Stakeholders as mentioned under the literature review it is another group of contributors to rural tourism competitiveness, they are having a tight relationship to destination competitiveness and it has been very much supported by literature. Dill (1975) has quoted that each stakeholder group could be an important component of a tourism destination depending on their initiatives and thoughts in management process and its strategic planning. It is also said to have influence over sustainable tourism development (Robson and Robson, 1996). Now, it is used to test the effect if it was an influential moderator to community support impact. With a more dedicated and devoted actions from stakeholders to be involved in local tourism activities, it is predicted that community tend to gain more support in term of accommodations, transportations, telecommunications, human resources and other sorts of aids to give a domestic tourism a boost. Rule in general, the relationship of community support and destination competitiveness should be boosted with extra credits and benefits added from stakeholders. This could be backed by (Ramayah *et al.*, 2011) that when there is a collaborations among stakeholders and it mediates relationship between trust, commitment, communication and tourism business network performance. This has given the community the upper hand in their support towards destination competitiveness. Thus, the propose hypothesis is:

H3: Stakeholder involvement is positively moderating the relationship between community support impact and rural tourism destination competitive advantage; such that when stakeholder involvement is high the relationship between community support impact and rural tourism destination competitive advantage will be stronger.

3. Methodology

The destined location carried out for the purpose of this study is at Samunsan Wildlife Sanctuary. The targeted respondents are the local community members residing at or near to Samunsam Wildlife Sanctuary. Sets of pre-set questionnaires are used to measure the data collected from the respondents with face-to-face interview being conducted. Since quantitative approach is the mode adopted to assess the site in a Confirmatory Factor Analysis. The same set of questionnaires is applied across the board to three villages near-by, namely Kampung Temaga Cina/Dayak, Kampung Tanah Hitam, and Kampung Pueh. The design of the questionnaire is separated into two parts. The earlier section emphasises on demographic information of the respondents, the latter focuses on multiple questions in which asking on community support impacts and community knowledge impacts, stakeholders' involvement and rural tourism competitive advantage. On the multiple questions section, questions are adapted from Perdue *et al.* (1990), Dymond (1997), Choi and Sirakaya (2006), Boley *et al.* (2014), and Dwyer and Kim (2003), questions are lightly modified to suit the use in a domestic context. A seven-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) to the question is used to lead the respondents to best describe their degree of agreement.

Minority below age 16-year-old would not be approached, this is to ensure that the analysis has reach a standard of maturity. In order to avoid favouritism or bias, a simple random and purposive technique was adopted in approaching respondents. G*Power software was employed to obtain the minimum sample size needed to reach explanatory level for the model. A priori power analysis using medium effect size, thus the minimum sample size suggested is 119. In sum, a total of 223 sets of questionnaires were successfully collected proceeded with preliminary analysis by using Statistical Package for Social Science 23.0 (SPSS). The analysis is meant for handling issues like missing values and straight lining. All these sets were then proceeded to PLS-SEM analysis by using SmartPLS (version 3.2.7). A two-steps approach was adopted to test the research model (see Figure 1), at the beginning stage, algorithm was used to run through the measurement model. Then, bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples to generate the standard errors of the estimation and t-values.

4. Findings

4.1. Assessment of The Measurement Model

Based on confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) approach, measurement scales' reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity were tested. Loadings with minimum cut point of 0.5 and above (Bagozzi *et al.*, 1991) were

refrained on Table 1, to meet internal consistency. Chin (2010) suggests that, composite reliability (CR) values is greater than the minimum cut off point of 0.7 should be refrained in order to be declared valid. As for the average variance extracted (AVE) values should not be smaller than the minimum criteria of 0.50 as referred to suggestion made to Fornell and Larcker (1981). Both, CR's and AVE's values have met minimum criteria respectively. Moreover, Cronbach's alpha values were also adopted to test the reliability and internal consistency of the instrument (Cronbach, 1951), and the results indicated that the Cronbach's alpha values are considered at good level. As suggested by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) that the value of 0.60, 0.61 – 0.79, and above 0.80 is considered poor, acceptable, and good respectively.

For the discriminant validity shown in Table 2, reference made to Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion, the value of AVE was square rooted and testified against the inter-correlation of the construct with other constructs in the research model and all the values noted as greater than each of the constructs' correlation (Chin, 2010). In addition, this study also assessed the discriminant validity with Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ration (see Table 3). The rules of thumb are all the ratio should not exceed HTMT_{0.85} value of 0.85 (Kline, 2011) or HTMT_{0.90} value of 0.90 (Gold et al., 2001). Hence, the measurement model was satisfactory and provided sufficient evidences in terms of reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The coefficient of determination (R²) was 0.547 for tourism competitive advantage, which explained more than 54.7% of the construct. The R² was above the moderate indication as suggested by Cohen (1998) which is slightly above the moderate model of R² 0.33.

Figure-1. Research model

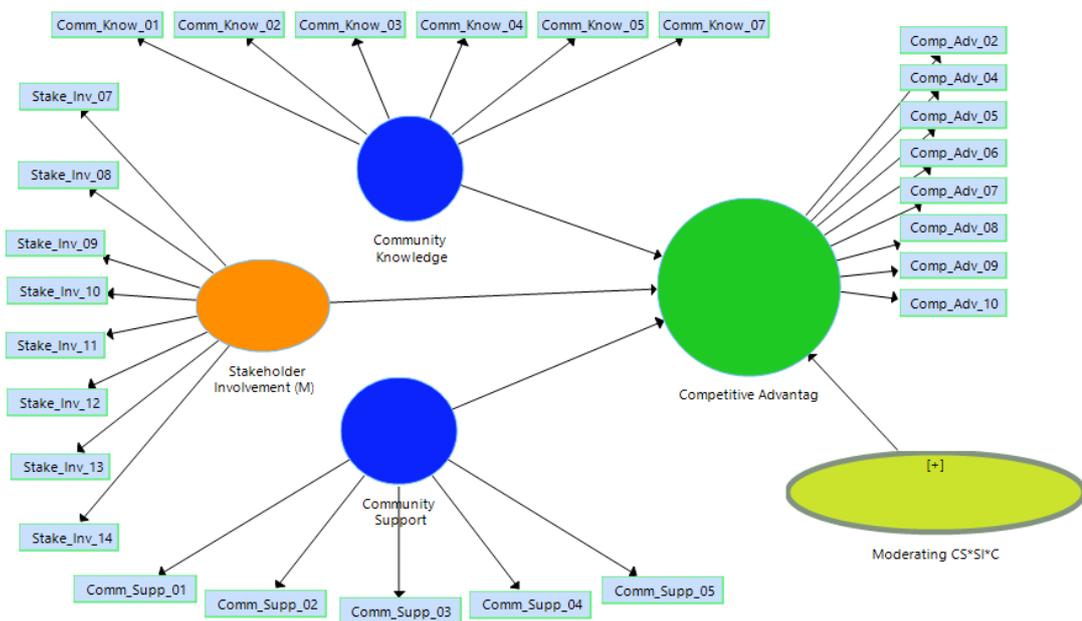


Table-1. Results of measurement model

Construct	Items	Loadings	CR	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE
Community Knowledge	Comm_Know_01	0.859	0.871	0.825	0.534
	Comm_Know_02	0.736			
	Comm_Know_03	0.786			
	Comm_Know_04	0.678			
	Comm_Know_05	0.506			
	Comm_Know_07	0.770			
Community Support	Comm_Supp_01	0.914	0.945	0.927	0.775
	Comm_Supp_02	0.880			
	Comm_Supp_03	0.819			
	Comm_Supp_04	0.906			
	Comm_Supp_05	0.879			
Competitive Advantage	Comp_Adv_02	0.521	0.888	0.855	0.503
	Comp_Adv_04	0.652			
	Comp_Adv_05	0.592			
	Comp_Adv_06	0.790			
	Comp_Adv_07	0.815			

	Comp_Adv_08	0.674			
	Comp_Adv_09	0.715			
	Comp_Adv_10	0.852			
Stakeholders' Involvement	Stake_Inv_07	0.666	0.926	0.908	0.613
	Stake_Inv_08	0.668			
	Stake_Inv_09	0.813			
	Stake_Inv_10	0.835			
	Stake_Inv_11	0.908			
	Stake_Inv_12	0.817			
	Stake_Inv_13	0.783			
	Stake_Inv_14	0.741			

Note:
^a Composite Reliability (CR)
^b Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Table-2. Discriminant validity of constructs (Fornell&Larckercriterions)

	1	2	3	4
1. Community Knowledge	0.731			
2. Community Support	-0.065	0.880		
3. Rural Tourism Competitive Advantage	0.630	0.214	0.710	
4. Stakeholders' Involvement	0.584	0.153	0.597	0.783

Note: Diagonals represent the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) while the other entries represent the correlations.

Table-3. Discriminant validity of constructs (HTMT)

	1	2	3	4
1. Community Knowledge				
2. Community Support	0.196			
3. Rural Tourism Competitive Advantage	0.677	0.286		
4. Stakeholders' Involvement	0.645	0.176	0.621	

4.2. Assessment of the Structural Model

Next, Table 4 presents the results from hypotheses testing. The rule of thumb for one-tailed hypotheses testing is t value should exceed 1.645 or 2.33. Interestingly, the statistical results indicated that two of the direct relationship hypotheses tested were found supported. Community support impact and community knowledge impact were said to have positive relation to rural tourism competitive advantage from domestic community. Surprisingly, H3 which is the hypothesis proposed with stakeholders' involvement as a moderator was not supported, result shown that it was not significant. On top of that, the variation inflation factor (VIF) values were also obtained to test the multicollinearity issue among the constructs. The results indicated that all the VIF values were below 10, thus it is confirmed that no multicollinearity issue exists among the constructs (Bock *et al.*, 2005). To explain the predictive relevance of the model, Blindfolding procedures was performed to obtain the Q² value. Hair *et al.* (2016) propounded that the Q² value of more than zero value is relevant, thus the Q² value of rural tourism competitive advantage is 0.242 (see Table 5).

Table-4. Path coefficients and hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Standard Beta	Standard Error	t-value	Decision	VIF	f ²
H1	Community Support Impact → Rural Tourism Competitive Advantage	0.183	0.047	3.884**	Supported	1.064	0.069
H2	Community Knowledge Impact → Rural Tourism Competitive Advantage	0.427	0.073	5.842**	Supported	1.631	0.247
H3	Stakeholders' involvement Moderates Community support Impact and Rural Tourism Competitive Advantage	0.249	0.280	0.887	Not Supported	1.037	0.139

Note: p<0.05*; p<0.01**

Table-5. The results of the prediction values

	SSO	SSE	Q ² (=1-SSE/SSO)
Community Knowledge	1,338.0 0	1,338.0 0	
Community Support	1,115.0 0	1,115.0 0	
Competitive Advantage	1,784.0 0	1,353.0 0	0.242
Moderating CS*SI*CA	8,920.0 0	8,920.0 0	
Stakeholder Involvement (M)	1,784.0 0	1,784.0 0	

5. Discussion

Reference made to H1, community support impact had a positive relationship to tourism competitive advantage. The scenario has portrayed that the more supports rendered by the local community to the tourism development the more competitive the destination is going to increase, because the sense of belongings has directly generated and passing on to the community. Hospitality towards tourists it is heartily offered from the locals serves as non-remuneration for its destination competitiveness. It is absolutely through personal touch that created a different mood of experience. As quoted by [Mbaiwa and Stronza \(2011\)](#), [Deery et al. \(2012\)](#) and [Mihalic \(2000\)](#), with participation from local community in deciding on issues, planning and managing the use of natural resources in the rural context has brought benefits to tourism development.

Community knowledge impact from H2 has also shown that it is positively related to rural tourism competitive advantage and it is significant. The influence of knowledge from community has massive impact on the destination competitiveness, as [Keith \(2007\)](#) has touched on climate change issue in tourism destination is indeed a factor for tourists in choosing their destination visited. As a result, if community is lacking of knowledge in preserving natural resources, or lacking skills in managing the local tourism development, then resources would be exploited, that leads to climate change ([Naser et al., 2011](#)). Poor acceptance from tourists would be very damaging to the local development. Hence, knowledge is critical and regarded as an important factor to tourism competitiveness.

However, with additional element that been introduced to the framework in a bigger picture, it does not seem to improve the relationship between community support and rural tourism competitive advantage. The introduction of stakeholders into the context in order to enhance the relationship did not work out as projected. H3 turned out to be not supported though the result shown significance. As tested and analyzed under this framework, stakeholders involvement could be a great help in increasing and improving the competitive advantage of a destination. But, it definitely did not enhance the community support impact against destination competitiveness. Reasons could be that stakeholders is an independent body where its existence could be read by community as a threat to them when comes to tourism development. A profit-oriented community would not treat stakeholders to be an aid in booming tourism development but rather they will treat it as a threat of entry in this scenario. As mentioned by [Cheuk et al. \(2015\)](#), economic gains from tourism development are one of the major source of incomes of the village community especially for villages nearby Samunsan Wildlife Sanctuary where all these villages are very remote and under-developed. Stakeholders only come in for business opportunity and it is not rewarding to community in the entire development process. Psychological empowerment is an important influence on the perceptions of the residents on impact of tourism and their support towards tourism. Thus, psychological thinking affect greater the response on community support. If they perceived their incomes were at threat, the relationship with stakeholders would definitely be ceased.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Theoretical and Practical Implications

In conclusion, looking at the results from the findings, both community knowledge and community support are positively impacted and significantly related to rural tourism competitive advantage, as H1 and H2 were both shown supported. However, stakeholders' involvement does not seem to be moderating the relationship between community support and rural tourism competitive advantage, therefore H3 is not significant. Although, stakeholders' involvement does not seem to help in enhancing the relationship between community support and rural tourism competitive advantage; it is still treated as an important factor to destination competitiveness, as stakeholders' participation undeniably increases the destination competitiveness. Reasons for it not being able help to moderate, could be possibly due to community's profit-oriented attitude since they not benefited monetarily like the stakeholders' do from tourism activities; or it could be because of the nature of the destination, from the economical point of view, the benefits that brought by the tourists to the local community are not lucrative since Samunsan is a National Park, the tourists do not bring any economy impact to them at all. The main objective for tourists to visit is to enjoy the nature rather than indulge themselves with luxury entertainments.

In making use of the findings from this research, though stakeholders' involvement does not seem to moderate the community support impact; it is still worth for future research on how to blend it stakeholders' involvement into community support in the rural tourism competitive advantage particularly to national park where source of income for community is limited, variety of business opportunity to target tourists is also very limited. In the theoretical

aspect, this study could trigger the stakeholders that it is very much alarming the threat to stakeholders if they intend to develop and expand their investment in rural tourism in the long run. It is somehow very deteriorating if development was to focus on rural tourism sector without community support from the domestic residents. It is very influential if stakeholders could introduce, invite and include community to be part of the group in venturing into rural tourism business development in the long run. Thus, it is propounded that stakeholder involvement could be the potential contributor for the development of rural tourism competitive advantage. It is suggested to investigate the research framework in other rural destinations, the results could be varied according to different context.

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