THE MODERATING IMPACT OF COMMUNITY SUPPORT ON TRI-DIMENSIONAL IMPACTS OF TOURISM (ECONOMIC, SOCIO-CULTURAL, & ENVIRONMENTAL) TOWARDS RURAL TOURISM COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

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ABSTRACT

Rural tourism being one of most influencing industries in Malaysia, in particular, the state of Sarawak. Competitiveness to a host destination especially in rural tourism has always be a concern to the stakeholders. As a result, increase competitive advantage to a host destination is somehow necessary if rural tourism is valued and to be invested for future development. Thus, the theory of resource based view underpins the proposed research framework and intends to investigate the influence of tri-dimensional impacts on rural tourism competitive advantage from local communities' perspectives. This is the first known study to adopt community support as the moderating variable to examine the proposed constructs. A total of 222 respondents were used for statistical analysis. To assess the developed model, SmartPLS (version 3.2.6) is applied based on path modeling and then bootstrapping. The results revealed that socio-cultural impacts and environmental impacts are significantly and positively correlated to rural tourism competitive advantage from the communities' perspectives. As per expectation, the findings also revealed that community support exists in moderating the relationship among environmental impacts and rural tourism destination competitive advantage.

Keywords: Economic Impacts; Socio-cultural Impacts; Environmental Impacts; Community Support; Tourism Competitive Advantage; Rural tourism.

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1.   INTRODUCTION

Tourism is always on limelight as a tool to the development of our nation to supplement other industries. It is the simplest and most effective way to promote our culture, environments and social elements in the domestic manner at the international level. It has been in a great growth for past 10 years and many tourists have been hunting for authentic and sustainable holiday experiences for rest and relaxation (Buffa, 2015). The state of Sarawak is naturally rich in nature resources. According to Ruiz-Molina, Gil-Saura, and Moliner-Velázquez (2010) and Moric (2013), tourism stakeholders have re-centered the focus on rural tourism in line with its potential as an alternative plan for creating source of income. It is said to be a tool to improve local welfare and its standards of living (Peptenatu, Pintilii, Drăghici, and Stoian, 2009; Probstl-Haider, Melzer, and Jiricka, 2014; Aliman, Hashim, Wahid, & Harudin, 2016). Hence, rural tourism development should work hand in hand with community and involved range of community resources (Cawley and Gillmor, 2008). The potential of tourism is indefinite in impacting a nation's economy (Kalaiya and Kumar, 2015), thus, it is beneficiary to the communities. There are researches proving that this industry has dynamic contribution of economic gains to the communities (Yu, Chancellor, and Cole, 2011).

Competitiveness to a host destination especially in rural tourism has always be a concern to the stakeholders as it is particularly the main factor to lead to its performance (Cimbaljevic and Bucic, 2015) specifically rural tourism is increasingly challenging in tourism market (Zainuddin, Radzi, and Zahari, 2013) as rural tourism is still viewed as very niche and unexposed in the local context. As a result, increase competitive advantage to a host destination is somehow necessary if rural tourism is valued and to be invested for future development. However, in the Malaysian context, according to Lo, Songan, Ramayah, Yeo, and Nair (2013), a growing competition is said to be fierce among rural tourism industries. As quoted by Chon, Uysal, Fesenmaier and O'Leary (2014), Ramseook-Munhurrun, Naidoo, Seebaluck, and Pillai (2016) rural tourism sector has also been stiff in competition for past decades. One of the reasons that has been identified for declining numbers of visitors to a tourism destination is dissatisfaction toward the quality of services and products provided in most general cases. (Arabatzis and Grigoroudis, 2009; Yusof and Rahman, 2011). Hence, the objective of this study is to examine the impact of introducing community support as a moderator to increase competitive advantage between its relationships with economic impact, socio-cultural impact and environmental impact respectively.

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.   *Tourism Competitive Advantage*

Competitive advantage in tourism is none the less than having the ideology of preserving the destination uniqueness (Căprărescu, Daniela, and Stancu, 2013), making use of the current resources and sustain it efficiently with strategic management and support aids from government and aligned vision from a pool of stakeholders (Oye, Okafor & Kinjir, 2013). Besides, attractive marketing structure from collaborated tourism providers is also important in market development sector (Gorman, 2005; Ritchie and Crouch, 1993). The ability to duplicate or imitate the competitive advantage of one destination to another destination will then be recognized losing the competitive advantage by the former. There are factors that contribute to one destination's competitive advantage.

2.2. Tri-dimensional Impacts

Frechtling (1994), suggests that economic impact is the result that is directly affected by travel industry and could also be explained as its secondary costs and benefits brought by travel industry. It is also viewed as the net economic change that is in line with expenditure from tourists in host destination for an event or facility (Turco and Kelsey, 1992). On the positive side of economic impacts, it creates job opportunity, entrepreneurship opportunities, investment attraction and contribution; all of these consequences have improve host destination's economy and resulted to a better living (Akis, Peristianis & Warner, 1996). Social impact is effect that may influent local community's quality life (Fredline et al., 2003). From the positive point, Ap and Crompton (1998) had come to a consensus that a positive socio-cultural impacts would enhance the standard of living, infrastructures or facilities of tourism development destination, general protection, improved relations and understanding of different culture, traditions, heritage, identity, values between the visitors and the host community. Kreag (2001) has defined perceived environmental impact as perceptions where the local community has towards the types of environmental aspects, it might be positive or negative to them as a result. In order to sustain the competitiveness, this impact is said to be critically important. Therefore, effort in preserving, conserving and maintaining the environmental resources are equally important when comes to destination competitiveness (Dwyer and Kim, 2010).

2.3. Community Support

In gaining economic growth, enhancing life quality and maintaining environmental quality, there is an element in which is known as community support that comes into picture. Community support plays a role in the service sector of tourism when tourists' needs and community's intentions are met, only by then the life span of the industry could be prolong and keep developing (Taylor, 1995; Eagles, McCool, and Haynes, 2002; Sebele, 2010). These are somewhat known to have community involvement (Gursoy and Rutherford, 2004) and community participation (Jamal and Getz, 1995; Okazaki, 2008) so sustainability of development in rural tourism could take place (Jones, 2005; Nicholas, Thapa, and Ko, 2009). At the meantime, with reference made to Jurowski and Gursoy (2004), community participation and community involvement are relatively significant in community support for tourism development in long run. Hence, community support has shown a very important role in this atmosphere.

2.4. Hypotheses Development

(a) Tri-dimensional Impact and Rural Tourism Competitive Advantage

According to Wood (1994), tourism industry could be a major factor for change in the social, political, and cultural system as well as the economy and environment. Indirectly three of the impacts quoted have create a direct tight relation to competitive advantage of a host destination. The result from local community in support to tourism development is obviously providing investment opportunities and creating a new source of incomes to the host residents (Gursoy and Rutherford, 2004). Past researches have revealed that perceived economic impact has positive and significant relationship with tourism development (Jurowski, Uysal & Williams, 1997), past study also acknowledge that destination competitiveness has significant and positive relationship with economic impact of tourism development (Yoon, 2002). In short, the relationship between economic impact and its host destination's competitive advantage is established. Socio-cultural

benefits could be enriched covering a wider scopes through tourism to the local community (Sirakaya, Teye, and Sonmez, 2002; Besculides, Lee and McCormick, 2002). Moreover, the environmental awareness is created through tourism in preserving and protecting the natures and facilities i.e. nature parks and wildlife sanctuary; it also inculcate the interests and gaining knowledge about the nature when interaction between the residents and the visitors took place (Wall and Mathieson, 2006). The relationship between environmental impact and destination competitiveness is reciprocal, the more positively environmental impacted the destination the more competitive the destination to be and vice versa. Hence, the proposed hypotheses are:

H1	:	Economic impact is positively related to rural tourism competitive advantage in rural tourism destinations.
H2	:	Socio-cultural impact is positively related to rural tourism competitive advantage in rural tourism destinations.
H3	:	Environmental impact is positively related to rural tourism competitive advantage in rural tourism destinations.

(b)   Community Support Moderates Tri-dimensional Impacts and Rural Tourism Competitive Advantage

The impact could differ when moderator is introduced to the environment, therefore a different sets of hypotheses are constructed. Local community of a rural tourism behave and responded differently when dealt with destination tourism development (George et al., 2009). The outcome from the tourism development could be positive or negative in their approach. Contrived tourism development model has explained that local community could be actively participate themselves in the development when situation like economic crisis comes and that allow them to develop destination economically. However, they could choose to venture into other sectors instead of rendering support though economy status might not be optimistic to them at that time. Chen and Gursoy (2001) have quoted that tendency for community to get involve to support tourism development is high when there are opportunities like cultural exchange and cultural identity or recognition that is beneficial to them. In order to achieve its destination competitiveness, especially in the rural tourism context; environmental conservation practices is vital in sustaining the competitiveness through community's effort and involvement (Mihalic, 2000; Diaz and Rodriguez, 2008). Muganda et al. (2013) and Chandralal (2010) quoted that it is relatively important to understand the importance of local community support towards the development of sustainable rural tourism destinations, as it leads to conservation practices and contributing to the development of tourism destination competitiveness (Sekhar, 2003; Manyara and Jones, 2007; Zhang and Lei, 2012). The higher the commitment from community in supporting the tourism development, the greater the impact on environment; this is eventually lead to stronger competitive advantage that possess by host destination. Thus, the hypotheses developed as follow:

H4	:	The positive relationship between economic impact and rural tourism destinations will be enhanced when community support is high.
H5	:	The positive relationship between socio-cultural impact and rural tourism destinations will be enhanced when community support is high.
H6	:	The positive relationship between socio- environmental impact and rural tourism destinations will be enhanced when community support is high.

3.   METHODOLOGY

Samunsan Wildlife Sanctuary is the selected destination in carrying out the survey and study. A quantitative approach is applied to study the site in a Confirmatory Factor Analysis manner with pre-set questionnaire being used as an instrument to measure the data collected from the domestic communities that resided along the coastline of Samunsan Wildlife Sanctuary. Three villages have been targeted by the researchers, namely Kampung Temaga Cina/Dayak, Kampung Tanah Hitam, and Kampung Pueh. The structure of the questionnaire is sub-divided into two sections. First section portrayed the demographic information of the respondents, second section comprises multiple questions to measure on economic impacts, socio-cultural impacts, environmental impacts, community support and tourism competitive advantage. The item in second section were adapted from Perdue, Long and Allen (1990), Dymond (1997), Choi and Sirakaya (2005), Boley, McGehee, Perdue and Long (2014), and Dwyer and Kim (2003), with slight modification to the questionnaire in order to fit in to the Malaysian context. Respondents were guided with a seven-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) to each of the question. Criteria to respondents must age at least 16 year-old and above and resided at the site as local communities; without favouritism, a simple random and purposive sampling technique was used in selection of respondents. Total of 238 sets of questionnaires were collected and then series of preliminary analysis were then be conducted by using Statistical Package for Social Science 23.0 (SPSS) to eliminate the issue of missing values and straight lining. After the first run, 16 sets were deleted from the pool of 238 sets due to missing values and straight lining issues. The balance of 222 sets were proceeded to PLS-SEM analysis by using SmartPLS (version 2.3.6, Ringle, Wende, and Becker, 2015). Algorithm was first used to assess the measurement model. Followed by Bootstrapping with 500 resamples to generate the standard errors of the estimation and t-values. At the final stage, Blindfolding was conducted to test the predictive relevance of the model.

4.   FINDINGS

4.1.   *Assessment of the Measurement Model*

Tests on item reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity of the measurement scales were conducted by using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).All the items loadings reflected in Table 1, have exceeded minimum cut off point of 0.50 (Bagozzi, Yi, and Philipps, 1991), hence, it shows that the internal consistency met. As suggested by Chin (2010), composite reliability (CR) values need to be greater than the minimum cut off point of 0.7 in order to meet convergent validity. Fornell and Larcker (1981) have suggested the average variance extracted (AVE) values should greater than the minimum criteria of 0.50. Both, CR's and AVE's values have met their minimum criteria respectively. For discriminant validity (refers Table 2), following the 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). Hence, the measurement model was satisfactory and provided sufficient evidences in terms of reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.393 for tourism competitive advantage, which explained more than 39.3% of the construct. The R^2 was above the moderate indication as suggested by Cohen (1998) which is slightly above the moderate model of $R2\_ 0.33$.

Table 1: Results of Measurement Model

Construct	Items	Loadings	CR	AVE
Community Support	Comm_Supp_01	0.914	0.945	0.774
	Comm_Supp_02	0.864		
	Comm_Supp_03	0.839		
	Comm_Supp_04	0.904		
	Comm_Supp_05	0.876		
Rural Tourism Competitive Advantage	Comp_Adv_01	0.543	0.889	0.503
	Comp_Adv_02	0.669		
	Comp_Adv_04	0.690		
	Comp_Adv_06	0.628		
	Comp_Adv_07	0.769		
	Comp_Adv_08	0.720		
	Comp_Adv_09	0.751		
	Comp_Adv_10	0.858		
Economic Impact	Eco_Imp_01	0.763	0.881	0.518
	Eco_Imp_02	0.810		
	Eco_Imp_04	0.731		
	Eco_Imp_06	0.752		
	Eco_Imp_08	0.562		
	Eco_Imp_09	0.653		
	Eco_Imp_10	0.738		
Environmental Impact	Env_Imp_01	0.966	0.755	0.623
	Env_Imp_04	0.559		
Socio-Cultural Impact	Social_Cul_01	0.825	0.875	0.638
	Social_Cul_02	0.761		
	Social_Cul_05	0.880		
	Social_Cul_06	0.719		

Note: [a] Composite Reliability (CR); [b] Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

Table 2: Discriminant Validity of Constructs

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Community Support	**0.880**				
2. Economic Impact	0.002	**0.720**			
3. Environmental Impact	0.024	0.483	**0.789**		
4. Rural Tourism Competitive Advantage	0.285	0.482	0.422	**0.709**	
5. Socio-Cultural Impact	0.074	0.714	0.455	0.522	**0.799**

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

4.2. Assessment of the Structural Model

Table 3 present the results of the hypotheses testing. The statistical results showed that two out of three direct hypotheses proposed and tested were supported. The results showed that socio-cultural impacts and environmental impacts were found positively significant in relation to rural tourism competitive advantage from the local communities' perspectives. Interestingly, one out of the three moderating hypotheses proposed was supported. The results indicated that community support positively moderated the relationship between environmental impacts and rural tourism competitive advantage. Thus, H2, H3, and H6 were supported, and H1, H4, and H5 were rejected.

Table 3: Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Standard Beta	Standard Error	t-value	Decision	VIF
H1	Economic Impact → Rural Tourism Competitive Advantage	0.100	0.089	1.121	Not Supported	2.282
H2	Socio-Cultural Impact → Rural Tourism Competitive Advantage	0.255	0.092	2.771**	**Supported**	2.147
H3	Environmental Impact → Rural Tourism Competitive Advantage	0.314	0.069	4.535**	**Supported**	1.468
H4	Community Support Moderate Economic Impact and Rural Tourism Competitive Advantage	-0.176	0.281	0.625	Not Supported	1.274
H5	Community Support Moderate Socio-Cultural Impact and Rural Tourism Competitive Advantage	-0.377	0.330	1.143	Not Supported	1.320
H6	Community Support Moderate Environmental Impact and Rural Tourism Competitive Advantage	0.171	0.070	2.459**	**Supported**	1.108

Note: *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$

5.   DISCUSSION

In referring to the findings from H2, socio-cultural impact was found positively related to tourism competitive advantage because of the interaction that creates the sense of belongings to the tourists though they are visiting a foreign country. Cultural elements has also contributed major impact to attract tourists from visiting the destination due to its rich and unique tribal element. As for H3, it is justifiable that the core of the attraction is environmental resources that impress and pull more tourists to the destination. Thus, community believes that the environmental resources has impacted their destination competitiveness. Interestingly, analysis from this paper has shown that the effect of community support as moderator in the relationship of environmental factor that leads to competitive advantage of the site is indeed supported. The findings turn up to be positive only for environmental factor to the community of Samunsan and the other two factors seem do not impact the community though there were supports rendered from them. It is posited that this is due to the nature of the site itself, as a result the community is willingly committing in enhancing the park. Mbaiwa & Stronza (2011), Deery, Jago & Fredline, (2012), and Mihalic (2000) have confirmed that local community's participation in deciding on issues, planning and managing the use of natural resources in the rural context has benefited the tourism development.

Moreover, a safer environment will also affect tourists' decision in visiting the destination. Keith (2007) has pointed out that climate change issue of a tourism destination has an influence over tourists' decision in selecting a destination. Hence, a poorly managed tourism development will expedite the exploitation on tourism resources and results in climate change (Naser, Abbas & Sayyed, 2011). Since Samunsan Wildlife Sanctuary is a nature and wildlife conservatory site; therefore, with community efforts in preserving the flora and fauna and park-keeping the site clean and unpolluted is worthwhile and impactful to create competitive advantages. In relation to H4 & H5, we found no support for the relationships between economic factor, socio-cultural factor and competitive advantage. The impact of economic factor is greatly affected by the visit of tourists; in other words, community support is passive towards the economic influence. It is an indirect results that will bring benefits to the local community, community involvement is highly dependent on the acceptance of tourists in term of visits from visitors.

Socio-cultural has the same destiny since the motive and objective of the tourists in visiting the park and while enjoy watching the untouched nature of flora and fauna, community does not make use on such opportunity in promoting their culture; therefore, this factor has not impacted greatly community in committing themselves in rendering support on this section. Regardless of how rich the socio-cultural elements are, the joy of the day is not focus on the appreciation to culture and social elements by the visitors. As explained by Aref, Redzuan & Gill (2010), communities are lacking of mobilizing resources and tourists have been too concentrated on the nature and thus neglected on culture and social elements. Resource mobilization is defined as a community's ability to identify resources for tourism development (Goodman et al., 1998). Failure in identifying resources such as culture and social resources will lead to negligence and ignorance. As such, it does not create any competitive advantage to a destination though is rich in it but do not make known to tourists.

6.   CONCLUSION, THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

In summary, the findings revealed that socio-cultural impact and environmental impact are positive and significantly related to rural tourism competitive advantage, thus H2 and H3 were supported. In addition to that, community support also found moderating the relationship between environmental impact and tourism competitive advantage, and hence H6 was supported. On the other hand, the hypotheses proposed for H1, H4 and H5 were rejected. Although the impact might not be global and applied in general, at least it is destination-specific and it impacted the local context since the main focus of research, management, and policy activities has been on local character and its consequences, in which is the scale of analysis adopted here. As a result, the practical implication is such the stakeholders could consider ultilize the findings of this study in helping, supporting, encouraging and promoting communities support to the domestic tourism development specifically when environmental is concerned. A thorough strategic management is required in incorporating the community support element in conserving or/ and enhancing the environment. In theoretical contribution, this study is known to be the first to adopt community support as moderator and introduced to examine the relationships between economic impact, socio-cultural impact, environmental impact and competitive advantages to a destination in one framework. Since, the key to the success of a tourism destination is its competitive advantage; thus, it is very important and influential for future researchers to identify other possible moderator(s) that could increase a destination competitiveness.

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