

# Tanjung Datu National Park, Sarawak: Communities' Perceptions towards Its Rural Competitive Advantage

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## Abstract

Rural tourism is a rapidly growing tourism segment and has been given increasing importance, in view of its potential to contribute economic growth to the rural areas. However, any rural tourism destination development should be implemented in a way that maximizes destination competitive advantage. This study examines the relationship between stakeholder involvement, community knowledge about tourism, and the economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts on tourism with rural competitive advantage, as perceived by the local community. This study obtained, as voluntary respondents, 87 residents of a rural tourism destination in Sarawak, Malaysia. To assess the developed model, *SmartPLS 2.0 (M3)* was applied based on path modelling and then bootstrapping with 200 re-samples was applied to generate the standard error of the estimate and t-values. The findings suggested that stakeholder involvement in tourism, community knowledge about tourism and the environmental impact of tourism have had a significant positive impact on rural competitive advantage, whereas economic and socio-cultural impacts of tourism, as well as community support for tourism, had little impact on the same. Lastly, such study would benefit the tourism implementers and decision-makers in tourism industry, in the sense that tourism activity can be proactively detected and curbed once critical mass is reached.

**Keywords:** community knowledge about tourism, destination competitive advantage, rural tourism, stakeholder involvement

## 1. Introduction

Tanjung Datu National Park is one of the rural tourism attractions situated at the South-Western tip of Sarawak and near to the border with the Indonesian state of West Kalimantan (Sarawak Tourism, 2003). The park consists of various natural attractions such as white sandy beach, clear ocean, turtles' nesting spot, and as one of the most attractive rainforest for jungle trekking or wildlife observation. Both Telok Melano and Telok Serabang are the nearest villages to the national park which offered *homestay* services. The villages are accessible through either by trekking from Tanjung Datu National Park to Telok Melano village (approximately 4 hours) or by boat (20 minutes). Based on the potential of Tanjung Datu in the rural tourism industry, it is important to examine the local community perceptions towards the competitive advantages of the destination.

Rural tourism has been noted to have generated advantages and perceived benefits to the local communities such as the maintenance of infrastructure, employment/income opportunities, revitalization of local economies, growing awareness of the local cultural heritage (Liu, 2006; Sharpley, 2002). However, problems associated with it include lack of support/training, lack of local facilities/amenities, high development costs with low returns, low demand, lack of essential skills, lack of human capital supply, ineffective marketing, the dominance of mass tourism operators, lack of integration of tourism into rural development strategies, failure to address the strengths and constraints in the rurality, lack of involvement of the local population and a too-aggressive development pace without considering local capacity and cultural adaptability (Liu, 2006; Sharpley, 2002; Su, 2011).

In view of the above mentioned problems, it is imperative that the development of any rural tourism destination should be implemented in line with a multi-dimensional and tested model/framework which maximizes the competitive advantage of the said destination. A stakeholder group is the local community who live within or around the destination; and their perspective pertaining to rural competitive advantage is important due to two reasons. Firstly, the local community could be directly involved with the rural destination as a tourism supplier, with a vested interest in it, and would be aware of what works and what does not for the said destination. Secondly, a local community representative with no direct vested interest would still have insider knowledge

about a destination that an external party would not be privy to.

Therefore, the research questions for this study are formulated as follows. Based on the community's perspective:

- 1) Are stakeholders' involvements in tourism positively related to rural competitive advantage?
- 2) Are community's knowledge about tourism positively related to rural competitive advantage?
- 3) Are community's support for tourism positively related to rural competitive advantage?
- 4) Are the environmental impact of tourism is positively related to rural competitive advantage?
- 5) Are the socio-cultural impact of tourism is positively related to rural competitive advantage?
- 6) Are the economic impact of tourism is positively related to rural competitive advantage?

## 2. Literature Review

The competitive advantage of a tourism destination for rural tourism is the ability of the tourism destination to effectively utilize resources in the long-run; an efficient destination is one that devises a suitable strategy in marketing and is supported by the government, while sharing a common vision with its stakeholders (Oye, Okafor, & Kinjir, 2013). Gorman (2005) recognised a co-operative marketing structure as a competitive advantage in rural tourism, whereby marketing competencies can be achieved if groups of tourist providers collaborate and work closely to jointly develop the market. According to the Calgary Model of Competitiveness by Ritchie and Crouch (1993), five key constructs that determine a destination's competitiveness are such as destination's appeal, management, organisation, information and efficiency. The model also clarified that marketing efforts and managerial resourcefulness can assist in the destination's positioning and image, and organisational competences and strategic alliances are crucial in ensuring the enhancement of a destination's competitiveness. Wilson, Fesenmaier, Fesenmaier and Van Es (2001) who examined rural destination competitiveness indicated that a successful rural tourism development require stakeholders' involvement in tourism, and local community's knowledge and support for tourism.

This paper examines the factors highlighted by the various destination competitiveness models as discussed in the foregoing, to the extent that they relate directly to the local community. The study will also look into the benefits brought about by tourism from the environmental, socio-cultural and environmental perspective, as it is posited that such benefits would largely accrue to the local community in a tourism destination, and therefore should be included in a destination competitiveness model. After all, a destination cannot be recognised as competitive if it has no *raison d'être*.

The role of stakeholders' involvement in tourism is crucial in achieving sustainable tourism. As stakeholders are influential in achieving sustainability objectives, their views are vital for setting effective stakeholder involvement strategies (Waligo, Clarke, & Hawkins, 2013). The key factors are identified as leadership quality, information quality and accessibility, stakeholder mindset, stakeholder involvement capacity of sustainable tourism, contextual circumstances and the diversity of stakeholders. Carlisle, Kunc, Jones and Tiffin (2013) highlighted that in order to promote a multi-stakeholder partnership, institutional support for innovation is deemed important as it can improve niche tourism development by professionally-managed small scale native enterprises. Furthermore, the said institutions possess power and legitimacy to assist communities in entrepreneurship and innovation, which can then enable small medium enterprises to have access to a greater tourist market.

The community's information and knowledge about tourism are also crucial in determining rural tourism success. Despite benefiting in terms of economic and financial gains, a community's support for tourism is deemed low as a result of having no knowledge pertaining to the project (Lepp, 2008). In addition, Lepp elaborated that the success of a tourism development project also relies on the community's management and execution of tourism operations. López-guzmán and Sánchez-cañizares' (2011) study noted the vital connection between community-based tourism and knowledge attainment to improve standard of living.

Community's support for tourism. Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2011) noted that, based on the social exchange theory, community support is given based on the perceived benefits, perceived costs and community satisfaction. Lee (2013) also noted that factors affecting the community's support towards sustainable tourism include attitudes, perceived effects, community attachment and perceived benefits. Andereck, Valentine, Knopf and Vogt (2005) stated that the community that recognises the importance of tourism towards economic growth may gain benefits and are well informed with its positive impacts; education and awareness could assist the community in understanding the tourism industry.

Environmental benefits of tourism. Past research has emphasized the importance of the link between environment and tourism. For instance, policy intervention is necessary as it is related to the incorporation of stakeholders in the process of planning and decision making, particularly in conserving and sustaining the protected areas (Imran, Alam, & Beaumont, 2014). Furthermore, better environmental coordination can be achieved by involving the government structure and inclusive commitment by the stakeholders in tourism planning that will generate more profit, jobs and cater for rules favorable towards the environment. It is believed that awareness about preservation could assist in drawing more environmentally-based infrastructure investments to the host destination. However, negative impacts on the environment can also arise from tourism, such as destruction of natural resources, degradation of vegetation and wildlife depletion (Kim, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2013). It is necessary to maintain and enhance a tourism destination as the development of tourism is highly reliant on the natural as well as socio-cultural environment. Tourism activities, if not properly planned and developed, could lead to negative effects on the biophysical environment such as water pollution, air pollution and ecosystem degradation (Zhong, Deng, Song, & Ding, 2011).

Socio-cultural benefits of tourism includes maintaining the traditional culture, improving communication and understanding between different cultures, enhancing the social welfare and standard of living as well as refining the shopping and recreational opportunities (Tsundoda & Mendlinger, 2009). According to Sandeep and Vinod (2014), tourism can develop a distinguished set of socio-cultural costs towards its host destination in the physical and social interaction between the host and guest; indirectly, socio-cultural impacts are gained by operating via greater changes in the economy and culture within a community. Brunt and Courtney (1999) highlighted that the impact of culture includes gradual changes in the values, beliefs and cultural practices of a society, and further suggested that the tourism industry often contribute in the socio-cultural aspects instead of being the cause of change itself. The collaboration between the local community and the management of community-based tourism can be enhanced by the power of social capital. In this sense, coordination can be achieved by local-level collective management of common resources (Liu, Qu, Huang, Chen, Yue, Zhao, & Liang, 2014).

Economic benefits of tourism from ecotourism activities can be derived in the form of income, employment, diversification of various economic activities and increased business opportunities (Tisdell, 2003; Yacob, Shuib, Mamat, & Radam, 2007). Although ecotourism activities are perceived to be economically beneficial, it is debatable that the benefits are gained nationally and often costs exist, which are borne by the local communities. However, if the areas are protected, the benefits obtained by the local communities are in terms of employment opportunities, infrastructure development (for instance, better water supply and road network) and eco-tourism related businesses (Ezebilo, Mattsson & Afolami, 2010; Okech, 2001).

### **3. Method**

The population of the present study consists of local communities currently residing at or around Tanjung Datu National Park, Sarawak, Malaysia. A total of 87 questionnaires were distributed to the local communities and all were used for analysis. The respondents were interviewed face to face and was briefed on the research. This study is a non-probability sampling as the number of communities residing in that area is unknown. As some respondents at the destination were more proficient in the Malay language compared to English, the questionnaire included a Malay translation.

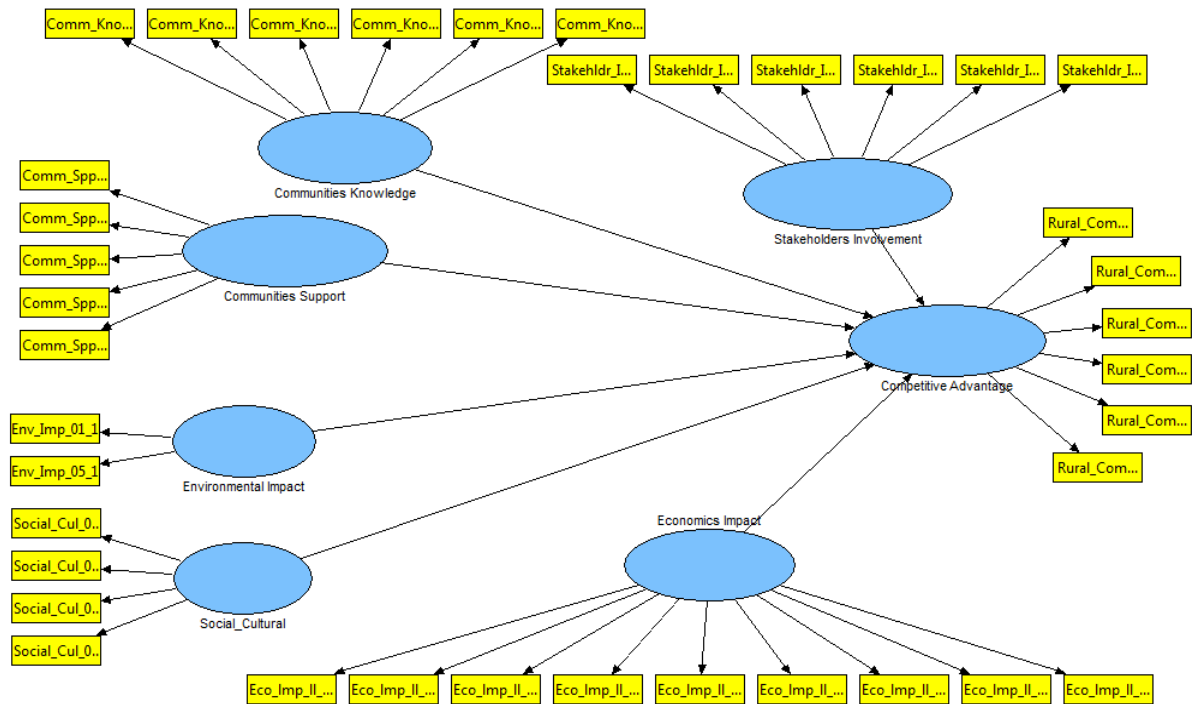


Figure 1. Research model

#### 4. Findings

This section presents the main research results. To assess the model developed as shown in Figure 1, SmartPLS 2.0 (M3) was applied based on path modelling and then the bootstrapping (Chin, 1998; Tenenhaus, Vinzi, Chatelin, & Lauro, 2005; Wetzels, Schroder, & Oppen, 2009). In addition, SmartPLS 2.0 (M3) was used to analyze the data obtained from the 87 residents of a rural tourism destination in Sarawak, Malaysia as the number of constructs are small. 200 re-samples were used to generate the standard error of the estimate and t-values.

##### 4.1 Assessment of the Measurement Model

Firstly, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to test the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the scales. As indicated in the Table 1 and 2, most item loadings were close to or larger than 0.5 (significant at  $p < 0.01$ ). As shown in Table 2, all Average Variance Extracted (AVEs) exceeded 0.5 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). The composite Reliability (CRs) for all the variables exceeded 0.7 (Gefen, Straub, & Boudreau, 2000) while the Cronbach alpha values were either close to or exceeded 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978). It was noted that all the indicators loaded much higher on their hypothesized factor than on other factors (own loading are higher than cross loadings (Chin, 1998; Chin, 2010), hence convergent validity is confirmed. In addition, as indicated in Table 4, the square root of the AVE was tested against the intercorrelations of the construct with the other constructs in the model to ensure discriminant validity (Chin, 1998; Chin, 2010; Fornell & Larcker, 1981) and all the square root of the AVE exceeded the correlations with other variables. Thus, the measurement model was considered satisfactory with the evidence of adequate reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

Table 1. Loading and cross loading

	Stakeholders Involvement	Communities Knowledge	Communities Support	Environmental Impact	Social Cultural	Economics Impact	Competitive Advantage
Stakehldr_Invlvmt_08	<b>0.512</b>	0.263	0.301	0.020	0.195	0.059	0.207
Stakehldr_Invlvmt_09	<b>0.823</b>	0.459	0.336	0.224	0.284	0.241	0.338
Stakehldr_Invlvmt_10	<b>0.766</b>	0.488	0.370	0.214	0.345	0.307	0.353
Stakehldr_Invlvmt_11	<b>0.810</b>	0.349	0.390	0.256	0.215	0.276	0.354
Stakehldr_Invlvmt_12	<b>0.827</b>	0.411	0.312	0.310	0.255	0.234	0.344
Stakehldr_Invlvmt_14	<b>0.793</b>	0.564	0.327	0.288	0.380	0.300	0.488
Comm_Knowlge_02	0.524	<b>0.832</b>	0.182	0.088	0.223	0.447	0.564
Comm_Knowlge_03	0.325	<b>0.702</b>	0.145	0.115	0.297	0.175	0.359
Comm_Knowlge_04	0.287	<b>0.617</b>	0.317	0.205	0.378	0.257	0.347
Comm_Knowlge_05	0.356	<b>0.680</b>	0.244	0.364	0.602	0.340	0.318
Comm_Knowlge_06	0.435	<b>0.641</b>	0.217	0.052	0.173	0.430	0.469
Comm_Spprt_01	0.349	0.228	<b>0.835</b>	0.223	0.247	0.226	0.244
Comm_Spprt_02	0.396	0.358	<b>0.889</b>	0.221	0.228	0.201	0.265
Comm_Spprt_03	0.269	0.193	<b>0.837</b>	0.275	0.257	0.098	0.093
Comm_Spprt_04	0.443	0.312	<b>0.898</b>	0.245	0.246	0.152	0.185
Comm_Spprt_05	0.395	0.212	<b>0.844</b>	0.197	0.231	0.169	0.197
Env_Imp_01	0.252	0.233	0.213	<b>0.780</b>	0.391	0.508	0.208
Env_Imp_05	0.276	0.159	0.238	<b>0.929</b>	0.590	0.374	0.351
Social_Cul_01	0.105	0.103	0.323	0.614	<b>0.613</b>	0.349	0.117
Social_Cul_02	0.386	0.435	0.279	0.410	<b>0.736</b>	0.504	0.314
Social_Cul_06	0.239	0.358	0.176	0.312	<b>0.782</b>	0.230	0.333
Social_Cul_08	0.273	0.252	0.098	0.536	<b>0.730</b>	0.168	0.268
Eco_Imp_01	0.143	0.264	0.205	0.545	0.450	<b>0.707</b>	0.208
Eco_Imp_02	0.226	0.318	0.241	0.470	0.428	<b>0.788</b>	0.237
Eco_Imp_03	0.314	0.544	0.106	0.243	0.225	<b>0.790</b>	0.388
Eco_Imp_04	0.163	0.191	0.099	0.448	0.280	<b>0.778</b>	0.180
Eco_Imp_05	0.318	0.469	-0.028	0.235	0.211	<b>0.693</b>	0.366
Eco_Imp_06	0.276	0.369	0.259	0.409	0.444	<b>0.851</b>	0.346
Eco_Imp_07	0.257	0.344	0.198	0.395	0.310	<b>0.841</b>	0.303
Eco_Imp_08	0.274	0.412	0.205	0.392	0.310	<b>0.788</b>	0.303
Eco_Imp_10	0.158	0.241	0.217	0.370	0.329	<b>0.617</b>	0.269
Rural_Comp_Advg_03	0.400	0.539	0.237	0.432	0.432	0.437	<b>0.878</b>
Rural_Comp_Advg_04	0.363	0.329	0.194	0.177	0.172	0.178	<b>0.640</b>
Rural_Comp_Advg_05	0.458	0.593	0.179	0.300	0.308	0.494	<b>0.850</b>
Rural_Comp_Advg_06	0.380	0.463	0.302	0.222	0.374	0.239	<b>0.861</b>
Rural_Comp_Advg_07	0.394	0.499	0.190	0.211	0.314	0.262	<b>0.865</b>
Rural_Comp_Advg_09	0.299	0.479	0.117	0.263	0.244	0.234	<b>0.742</b>

Table 2. Results of measurement model

Model Construct	Measurement Item	Loading	CR <sup>a</sup>	AVE <sup>b</sup>
Stakeholders Involvement	Stakehldr_Invlvmt_08	0.512	0.891	0.582
	Stakehldr_Invlvmt_09	0.823		
	Stakehldr_Invlvmt_10	0.766		
	Stakehldr_Invlvmt_11	0.810		
	Stakehldr_Invlvmt_12	0.827		
	Stakehldr_Invlvmt_14	0.793		
Communities Knowledge	Comm_Knowlge_02	0.832	0.797	0.416
	Comm_Knowlge_03	0.702		
	Comm_Knowlge_04	0.617		
	Comm_Knowlge_05	0.680		
	Comm_Knowlge_06	0.641		
Communities Support	Comm_Spprt_01	0.835	0.935	0.742
	Comm_Spprt_02	0.889		
	Comm_Spprt_03	0.837		
	Comm_Spprt_04	0.898		
	Comm_Spprt_05	0.844		
Environmental Impact	Env_Imp_01	0.780	0.846	0.735
	Env_Imp_05	0.929		
Social Cultural	Social_Cul_01	0.613	0.809	0.515
	Social_Cul_02	0.736		
	Social_Cul_06	0.782		
	Social_Cul_08	0.730		
Economics Impact	Eco_Imp_01	0.707	0.926	0.585
	Eco_Imp_02	0.788		
	Eco_Imp_03	0.790		
	Eco_Imp_04	0.778		
	Eco_Imp_05	0.693		
	Eco_Imp_06	0.851		
	Eco_Imp_07	0.841		
	Eco_Imp_08	0.788		
	Eco_Imp_10	0.617		
	Competitive Advantage	Rural_Comp_Advg_03		
Rural_Comp_Advg_04		0.640		
Rural_Comp_Advg_05		0.850		
Rural_Comp_Advg_06		0.861		
Rural_Comp_Advg_07		0.865		
Rural_Comp_Advg_09		0.742		

Note. <sup>a</sup> Composite Reliability (CR) = (square of the summation of the factor loadings) / {(square of the summation of the factor loadings) + (square of the summation of the error variances)}

<sup>b</sup> Average Variance Extracted (AVE) = (summation of the square of the factor loadings) / {(summation of the square of the factor loadings) + (summation of the error variances)}

Table 3. Summary results of the model constructs

Model Construct	Measurement Item	Standardized estimate	t-value
Stakeholders Involvement	Stakehldr_Invlvmt_08	0.512	6.481
	Stakehldr_Invlvmt_09	0.823	27.667
	Stakehldr_Invlvmt_10	0.766	19.947
	Stakehldr_Invlvmt_11	0.810	19.730
	Stakehldr_Invlvmt_12	0.827	22.322
	Stakehldr_Invlvmt_14	0.793	29.061
Communities Knowledge	Comm_Knowlge_02	0.832	34.694
	Comm_Knowlge_03	0.702	15.330
	Comm_Knowlge_04	0.617	9.244
	Comm_Knowlge_05	0.680	14.870
	Comm_Knowlge_06	0.641	8.577
Communities Support	Comm_Spprt_01	0.835	26.962
	Comm_Spprt_02	0.889	54.656
	Comm_Spprt_03	0.837	17.551
	Comm_Spprt_04	0.898	23.674
	Comm_Spprt_05	0.844	17.853
Environmental Impact	Env_Imp_01	0.780	9.454
	Env_Imp_05	0.929	36.810
Social Cultural	Social_Cul_01	0.613	6.689
	Social_Cul_02	0.736	14.688
	Social_Cul_06	0.782	14.664
	Social_Cul_08	0.730	12.566
Economics Impact	Eco_Imp_01	0.707	12.743
	Eco_Imp_02	0.788	17.459
	Eco_Imp_03	0.790	32.653
	Eco_Imp_04	0.778	19.412
	Eco_Imp_05	0.693	16.344
	Eco_Imp_06	0.851	42.465
	Eco_Imp_07	0.841	37.375
	Eco_Imp_08	0.788	21.077
	Eco_Imp_10	0.617	10.858
	Competitive Advantage	Rural_Comp_Advg_03	0.878
Rural_Comp_Advg_04		0.640	8.063
Rural_Comp_Advg_05		0.850	52.909
Rural_Comp_Advg_06		0.861	46.300
Rural_Comp_Advg_07		0.865	47.706
Rural_Comp_Advg_09		0.742	25.122

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$

Table 4. Discriminant validity of constructs

	Stakeholders Involvement	Communities Knowledge	Communities Support	Environmental Impact	Social Cultural	Economics Impact	Competitive Advantage
Stakeholders Involvement	<b>0.763</b>						
Communities Knowledge	0.572	<b>0.645</b>					
Communities Support	0.441	0.315	<b>0.861</b>				
Environmental Impact	0.306	0.213	0.262	<b>0.857</b>			
Social Cultural	0.377	0.442	0.277	0.591	<b>0.718</b>		
Economics Impact	0.327	0.487	0.210	0.486	0.422	<b>0.765</b>	
Competitive Advantage	0.474	0.608	0.249	0.341	0.389	0.398	<b>0.811</b>

*Note.* Diagonals represent the square root of the average variance extracted while the other entries represent the correlations.

#### 4.2 Assessment of the Structural Model

Secondly, Table 6 and Figure 2 present the results of the hypotheses testing. It was revealed that three hypotheses were found to be significantly related to the attitudes. The results have revealed that three hypotheses, namely, H1, H2, and H4 were supported whereas, H3, H5, and H6 were not supported.

We also conducted a global fit measure (GoF) assessment for PLS path modelling, which is defined as geometric mean of the average communality and average  $R^2$  (for endogenous constructs; Tenenhaus et al. (2005) following the procedure used by Akter, D'Ambra and Ray (2011). Following the guidelines of Wetzels et al. (2009), we estimated the GoF values (see formula 1), which may serve as cut-off values for global validation of PLS models. The GoF value of 0.51 (average  $R^2$  was 0.429, average AVE was 0.605) for the (main effects) model, which exceeds the cut-off value of 0.36 for large effect sizes of  $R^2$ . As such, it allows us to conclude that our model has better explaining power in comparison with the baseline values ( $GoF_{small}=0.1$ ,  $GoF_{medium}=0.25$ ,  $GoF_{large}=0.36$ ) (Akter et al., 2011). It also provides adequate support to validate the PLS model globally (Wetzels et al., 2009).

$$GoF = \sqrt{AVE \times \overline{R^2}} \quad (1)$$



Table 5. Result of reliability test

Model Construct	Measurement Item	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Loading Range	Number of Items
Stakeholders Involvement		0.853	0.512 – 0.827	(6)
	Stakehldr_Invlvmt_08			
	Stakehldr_Invlvmt_09			
	Stakehldr_Invlvmt_10			
	Stakehldr_Invlvmt_11			
	Stakehldr_Invlvmt_12			
	Stakehldr_Invlvmt_14			
Communities Knowledge		0.709	0.241 – 0.832	(5)
	Comm_Knowlge_01			
	Comm_Knowlge_02			
	Comm_Knowlge_03			
	Comm_Knowlge_04			
	Comm_Knowlge_05			
	Comm_Knowlge_06			
Communities Support		0.915	0.835 – 0.898	(5)
	Comm_Spprt_01			
	Comm_Spprt_02			
	Comm_Spprt_03			
	Comm_Spprt_04			
	Comm_Spprt_05			
Environmental Impact		0.659	0.780 – 0.929	(2)
	Env_Imp_01			
	Env_Imp_05			
Social Cultural		0.702	0.613 – 0.782	(4)
	Social_Cul_01			
	Social_Cul_02			
	Social_Cul_06			
	Social_Cul_08			
Economics Impact		0.911	0.617 – 0.851	(9)
	Eco_Imp_01			
	Eco_Imp_02			
	Eco_Imp_03			
	Eco_Imp_04			
	Eco_Imp_05			
	Eco_Imp_06			
	Eco_Imp_07			
	Eco_Imp_08			
	Eco_Imp_10			
	Competitive Advantage			
Rural_Comp_Advg_03				
Rural_Comp_Advg_04				
Rural_Comp_Advg_05				
Rural_Comp_Advg_06				
Rural_Comp_Advg_07				
Rural_Comp_Advg_09				

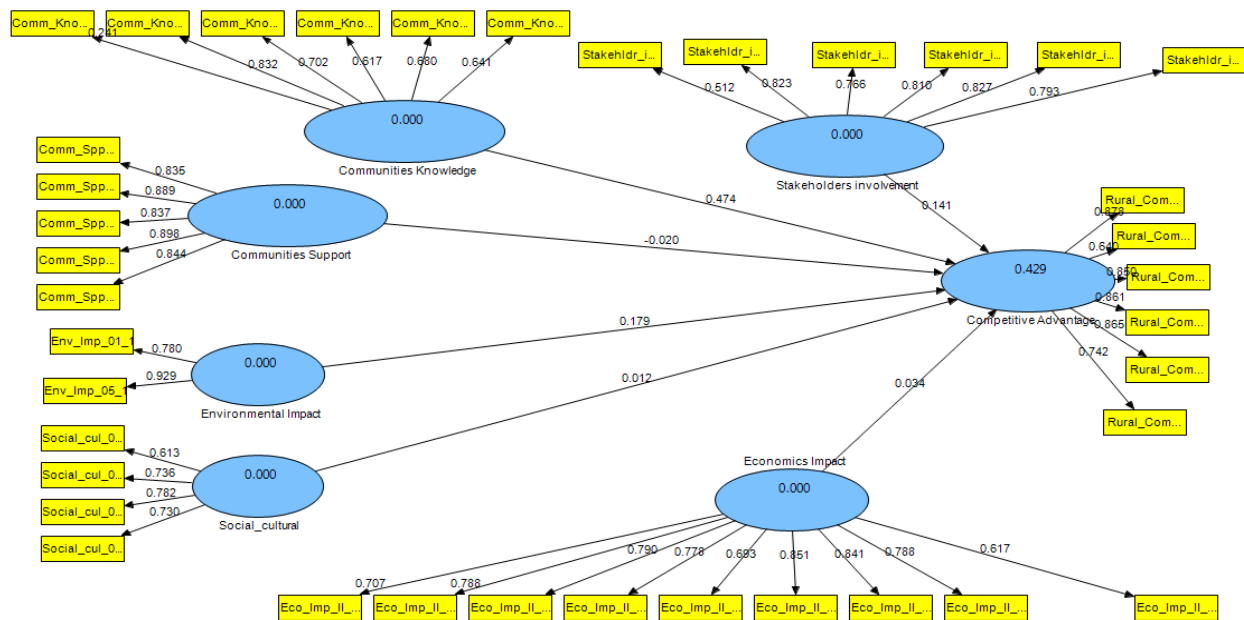


Figure 2. Results of the path analysis

Table 6. Path coefficients and hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Coefficient	t-value	Supported
H1	Stakeholders' Involvement in Tourism → Competitive Advantage	0.141	2.014	YES
H2	Communities' Knowledge of Tourism → Competitive Advantage	0.474	6.665	YES
H3	Communities' Support for Tourism → Competitive Advantage	-0.020	0.389	NO
H4	Environmental Impact of Tourism → Competitive Advantage	0.179	2.837	YES
H5	Socio-cultural Impact of Tourism → Competitive Advantage	0.012	0.168	NO
H6	Economic Impact of Tourism → Competitive Advantage	0.034	0.493	NO

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$

### 5. Discussion

From the findings, we see that stakeholder involvement has had a significant positive impact on rural competitive advantage at the Tanjung Datu National Park. In general, stakeholders included not only the local community themselves, but also tourists, tourism institutions, the local government and tourism players such as tour operators and businesses. Local community appeared to understand that a destination could only be competitive if all stakeholders are involved; at the same time, they wanted to be consulted when tourism policies are formed. The local community generally wanted to have a voice in the decision making process of local tourism development, even if the final decision was subsequently made by formal institutions. The community also was of the opinion that those who wanted to play a more active role in tourism should be financially supported to invest in its development. It is also supported from the baseline study of the Tanjung Datu community that they are interested in getting a job related in tourism industry. It is believed that communities of Tanjung Datu agreed tourists are willing to spend more money during their visit to the village. This indirectly will have a positive financial impact towards the community who involve in the tourism sector at the village and

also the National Park.

Tourists form another stakeholder group; their contributions were perceived to be limited to having a continuing interest in the area/destination in question and the maintenance of a connection with the said area after the initial visit. The local government, tourism institutions and tour operators/businesses are also stakeholders, and their role was seen to be promoters of tourism in the area. Tourism institutions and local government were also seen to play the role of involving tourism businesses such as hotels, restaurants and travel entrepreneurs, and the said tourism businesses' role are in turn to interact with other tourism businesses accordingly.

Community knowledge about tourism is also highly correlated with rural competitive advantage. This knowledge is represented by the following: (a) the tourism industry in the study area is an economic booster, (b) tourism does not only involve foreign tourists, but also local, (c) eco-tourism refers to tourism which is practiced in harmony with the environment, and (d) the local community's knowledge about local tourist attractions. Such correct understanding of tourism at the local level appears to be the main driving cause behind rural competitive advantage. Knowledge about tourism among community also lead to an active participation in the tourism business as community sees the opportunity to increase their income; as from the baseline study conducted shows that 55.8 percent of communities planned to have a job in tourism industry considering the tourism resources that they have in their village. Income can be generated through various ways such as becoming a tour guides, operating homestays, selling handicraft and other.

The positive impact of tourism on the environment is the third factor which is significantly and positively correlated with rural competitive advantage. In particular, at the study area, tourism provides an incentive for the natural environment to be protected. Also, the current level of tourism, in terms of crowding, pollution and the over-construction of tourism structures (such as hotels, lodges and other tourist facilities) were not found to spoil or destroy the natural environment at the study area. Respondents generally agreed that tourism brings more positive than negative effects to the environment at the study area. These positive effects can be directly linked to rural competitive advantage, possibly because tourism in the study area is largely nature-based. Hence, preservation of the environment and nature will have a direct benefit towards tourism in the area. Apart from that, majority of the communities' agreed and believed that this is part of their responsibilities to conserve the environment. The communities of Tanjung Datu also are willing to contribute their annual income for the conservations of their natural parks. Even though the reason for conserving the environment may vary, but majority of the community wanted to contribute for the conservation due to the fact that they want the future generation to be able to experience the natural resources in Tanjung Datu.

Community support for tourism, however, does not correlate to rural competitive advantage. Community support is reflected in the participation in tourism-related activities, involvement in the planning and management of tourism within the community, participation in cultural exchanges with visitors as well as in the promotion of environmental education and conservation, and co-operation with tourism planning and development initiatives. A disconnect between community support and rural competitive advantage in tourism is noted from the findings, which could be attributed to the absence of the community's influence on the decision making and policy setting process with respect to tourism. This would be consistent in the finding noted for stakeholder involvement earlier, whereby the community perceived that it would like to be consulted and be directly involved, while understanding that other stakeholders had, concurrently, different roles to play.

There is also no significant correlation between the positive impacts of tourism on the socio-cultural aspect of the community on rural competitive advantage. Tourism has socio-cultural impacts which involve the exposure of foreign culture and customs to the local community and vice versa; it also involves the increase in the availability of recreational facilities. The negative socio-cultural impacts have not yet been noted for the study area, based on the findings; for example, the degradation of traditions and culture, lower quality of life as a result of tourist presence, and security and crime problems. It is interesting to note yet another disconnect between the socio-cultural impact of tourism and rural competitive advantage, which implies that tourism development in the study area did not take into consideration of the former. Another implication is that the socio-cultural benefits have not been leveraged on in the tourism development efforts for the area.

Lastly, the findings reveal that there is no significant correlation between the positive economic impacts of tourism and rural competitive advantage. The economic benefits of tourism include employment opportunities, increase in investment and spending in the study area, improvement in public facilities and infrastructure and a general increase in standard of living. Such economic benefits are usually primarily sought for by the local community and they can arise from any industry, not just tourism. However, the disconnection between the said

benefits and rural competitive advantage would seem to imply that tourism development was not implemented in line with economic considerations at the study area.

In summary, stakeholder involvement, community knowledge about tourism and the environmental impact of tourism is closely and positively related to rural competitive advantage, while community support for tourism, and the socio-cultural and economic impacts of tourism on the community, have little or no correlation. The following section discusses the implications of the findings.

## 6. Conclusions and Implications

The findings suggest that factors directly related to the community do not have a significant relationship with competitive advantage. These factors are community support, and socio-cultural and economic benefits of tourism on the community. Without such factors, it would appear that the study area would not lose any of its competitive advantage.

On the other hand, factors that are not wholly linked to the community, such as stakeholder involvement, community knowledge about tourism and the environmental benefit from tourism do have a bearing on competitive advantage. Stakeholder involvement refers to the involvement of other parties and the findings suggest that the local community appear to have little influence on tourism development efforts initiated. In fact, the community appears to be just a cog in the wheel, perceived to be a minor player to fit in with an overall tourism programme that is designed from the top-down, and directly implemented for the area.

This appears to be borne out by the next discovered contributing factors, which are community knowledge of tourism and environmental benefit from tourism. The former is focused on the contribution of local community as a knowledge resource for the benefit of tourists, while the latter appears to be important only due to the fact that the environment is preserved and maintained as an attraction for visiting tourists.

To summarise the foregoing, the local community appear to be playing a supporting role in the tourism development process. They should be given a larger platform to air their views and concerns, be given more influence amongst the various stakeholder parties, and subsequently be accordingly empowered to be part of the implementation process. As tourism is an industry that has direct impacts on the study area and on the local community from the economic, socio-cultural and environmental aspects, it is only fair that the people who live in the said area be consulted on tourism policies and planning.

In the previous section, the findings revealed that an implication is that socio-cultural benefits have not been leveraged on in tourism development efforts. A recommendation to consider is to promote tourism programmes which piggyback on the availability of cultural resources owned by the local community. Tourism planners can research into the different resources available, such as local music, customs, handicraft, festivals unique to the study area, as well as interesting aspects of the community's way of life, in order to better position them as tourism products.

Despite efforts by the researchers to ensure a rigorous investigative approach and data collection techniques for the purpose of a sound research, the findings of the present research, like those of any empirical investigation, are subject to limitations. Generalizability can be further improved with a larger sample, and sampling at more similar rural destinations. The use of cross-sectional data methodology focused only on the periods of primary investigation and provided a 'snapshot' of one particular group at one moment in time. Thus, this study is limited in a temporal context. Suggestions for future research would, therefore, include a longitudinal study investigating the same areas of tourism development and its effects on the community/destination, to capture the changing attitudes and effects over time. It is envisaged that such a study would have practical benefit for tourism implementers and decision-makers, in the sense that tourism activity can be proactively detected and curbed once critical mass is reached.

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