Harmonizing Rural Tourism and Rural Communities in Malaysia

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Abstract: The purpose of this research is to investigate the tourism impact on social, economics, environment and cultural from local communities perspectives. 184 respondents comprising of local communities from 34 rural tourism sites in Malaysia took part in this study. SmartPLS 2.0 (M3) was applied based on path modelling and bootstrapping with 200 re-samples to analyse the data. The findings suggested cultural, social, repositioning of the destination and environment were most concerned by local communities. Implications of the findings, limitations of the study, and directions for future research were discussed further.
[Lo, MC, Songan, P. Abang Azlan Mohamad, Yeo, A.W. **Harmonizing Rural Tourism and Rural Communities in Malaysia.** *World Rural Observ* 2018;10(4):48-57]. ISSN: 1944-6543 (Print); ISSN: 1944-6551 (Online). http://www.sciencepub.net/rural. 8. doi:10.7537/marswro100418.08.

Keywords: Rural tourism, Local Communities, Economics, Environment, Social, Cultural

1. Introduction

Rural tourism is becoming increasingly important to the Malaysian economy and tourism product offering. The importance of tourism to local economies varies across Malaysia. Some places, like major cities, have an enormous investment in the tourism industry, while rural areas may lag behind. In fact, rural tourism can provide a unique opportunity to fulfil visitors' desires in searching out for new destinations and experiences. In addition, rural areas are a rich and often untapped source of cultural and heritage tourism. Past studies on tourism research have repeatedly evidenced that tourists tend to participate in cultural and heritage tourism on their trips to rural tourism destination. Malaysia is a heterogeneous society where the local communities are from various demographic and social economics background. Hence, ***promoting tourism in rural destination in Malaysia*** covers major issues in rural tourism including agro-tourism, cultural/heritage tourism, ecotourism, planning, marketing, economic impact and many others. Malaysia rural tourism is composed of a large number of rural communities, each with distinct and varied assets. The uniqueness of rural destination for visitors is its peaceful relaxation, inspiration, recreation, education and entertainment. Within Malaysia, it is noticeably that tourism demand drivers that play an important part in generating trips to rural tourism areas. As shown in Appendix 1, the number of tourists visited Malaysia and the income generated from tourism has been increasing from year to year. For the past 10 years, tourists' arrivals have more than doubled from 10.2 million in 2000 to 24.6 million in 2010. In the corresponding time frame, tourists' receipts increased from RM17.3 billion to RM56.5 billion.

According to past researchers (e.g., Wang, Pfister, & Morais, 2006), rural tourism have resulted in different needs, aspiration and attitude toward tourism among the local communities. It is crucial to involve local communities in decision making to ensure effective performance and the sustainability of the required output. As stated by Bhattacharya and Kumari, (2004), the local communities are more aware of their natural resources wealth and more concern in creating and managing eco-friendly atmosphere which will benefit both tourists and the local communities. Local communities play an important role in tourism development by building up familiarity with the tourists and impressed the visitors with their local cultural activities (Thongma, Leelapattana, & Hung, 2012). Past studies have evidenced that to secure loyal customers, it is crucial to ensure that customers must be satisfied and have a wonderful experience during their visits (Schmitt, 1999; Lin, 2012). Hence, it is important to gain support from local communities when developing rural tourism destination for long-term success in tourism development (Chandralal, 2010).

Past researchers have highlighted that there is a direct relationship between tourism development and communities' negative attitudes towards tourism development (Smith & Kranninch, 1998; Bestard & Nadal, 2007). It was posited that local communities with stronger ties among the communities are very concern about the impact of tourism could have on

them than other communities with weaker ties (Besculides, Lee, & McCormick, 2002). Having support from local communities is important to the future successful marketing effort as the local communities will help in the development of rural tourism industry if they are convinced that tourism will benefit them and their communities. As stated by past researchers (e.g., Gursoy, Jurowski, & Uysal, 2002), local communities will be inclined to get involved in exchanges of ideas and endorse future tourism development if they perceive positive impacts are greater than the negative impacts. Past studies have also indicated that local communities living in tourism destination that had low tourists arrivals and low economic activities or high tourists arrivals and high economic activities, will be supportive of tourism development than communities living in low tourism with high economic activity or high tourism with low economic activities (Allen, Hafer, Long, & Perdue, 1993; McGehee & Andereck, 2004).

Despite the enormous breadth of literature on the relevance of tourism research in general, and to an understanding of stakeholders' influence in tourism in particular, research studies of tourism that involves communities in tourism development are not well integrated. It is important to note that, the ability to influence decision makers within rural tourism destinations has become a requisite competency and may be more critical to the success of rural tourism development for many rural tourism sites. As tourism business becomes more competitive than ever before, the issue of gaining cooperation and compliance from local communities becomes a critical issue. Hence, to achieve the objectives, the study is designed as follows. Based on previous research, the section on hypotheses proposes a series of hypotheses on the 4 main tourism impacts namely, economics, social, cultural, and environment on positioning, destination environment and values as perceived by rural communities. Wang, Bickle, and Harrill, (2010) found that social, cultural and economic dimensions are positively related to tourism development but impacted negatively on environmental context.

The methodology section presents the data and the method used to analyze empirically the hypotheses that are developed, obtained from 34 rural tourism sites in Malaysia and followed by the results section, where the findings will be discussed. The paper ends with conclusions and limitations of this study. It is not known whether there existed any concrete relationships between the tourism impact and positioning, values, and destination environment of the rural destination. If certain connections are discovered, it would be desirable to pursue the study in the future.

2. Literature Review

2.1.1 Development of Rural Tourism

Rural destinations are normally less visited by tourists compared to well-known cities or reputable holiday resorts. Nonetheless, rural destinations have more to offer as compared to urban destinations as they spacious, less crowded, and have greener areas for tourists' to relax and to find a place for tranquillity. This is more so at the present moment as many people are suffering from pressures at work due to stress and urbanization (Ju, 2011). Hence, these have resulted in the progressive development of rural tourism sites. In addition to that, rural tourism sites are known to be friendlier, and have the ability to provide tourists natural attractions (e.g., jungle, forest, flora and fauna) and on top of that, tourists are exposed to local inhabitants and the friendly local communities. The community, as hosts to tourists, is vital for visitors' experience and it is impossible to sustain tourism in a destination that is not supported by the local people (Ahn, Lee, & Shafer 2002; Twinning-Ward & Butler 2002; McCool, Moisey, & Nickerson 2001).

In most of countries, rural tourism has been actively promoted by stakeholders such as governments and the tourism industry players, without an overall effective strategy, such as, a successful protected area management plans and without consultation or inclusion of local communities (Wearing & Neil, 1999). This is not surprising as the problem with rural tourism is that the local residents are unskilled and their education levels are normally lower than their urban counterparts. Hence, this has resulted in a slow development pace at rural tourism sites and the possibility of the uninformed local communities could have destroyed parts of their cultural or heritage and give up their traditional lifestyle to pursue modern global trends.

In general, satisfaction is an essential determinant of business success and that customers' satisfaction is paramount in the quality management of organizations, and tourism industry is no exception. Hence, a major challenge for rural destination is to understand the perceptions of their customers and their expectations from tourism industry, and thus, the involvement of local communities is crucial in providing input that can assist in decision making for the development of rural tourism. It is important to note that, local communities are becoming increasingly aware and are able to recognize and contribute ideas, such as, products offered by various tourism destinations. Thus, it is crucial for rural tourism industry players to understand and to be aware of what their local counterparts require from the development of their site to remain competitive in the marketplace.

Various studies have in fact provided evidence that the development of tourism impact can be further categorized into four main groups, namely, economics, social, cultural, and environment. Discussions in the following section begin with the tourism impacts and followed by positioning, destination environment and communities' perceived values.

2.1.2 Economics

It is well understood that tourism was encouraged because of the economic impact that it can bring about to the local communities, such as, generating a new range of income opportunities and creating jobs for the local residents. Past studies have indicated that tourism has helped to increase the standard of living, and, hence local communities have also turn to tourism as a mean to increase their pay, employment opportunities as well as living standard (Akis, Peristianis, & Warner, 1996), and subsequently contributed towards the gross domestic product (GDP) growth of the countries. Tourism industry is also seen as playing an essential role for community development and poverty reduction (Ashe, 2005), and, hence tourism was generally viewed positively and has impacted on the local economies (Tatoglu *et al*., 2000).

2.1.3 Environment

Environment, whether it is natural or manmade, is the most fundamental ingredient of tourism product (Pereda, 2012) particularly in rural areas. The mushrooming of outdoor activities in tourism destinations have been held responsible for the deterioration and erosion on the landscape, deforestation, inappropriate and uncontrolled development of outdoor activities, loss of habitats and disturbance of endangered species, high level of pollution due to exhaustion from motor vehicles (Brida *et al*., 2011), and the arrival of tourists are damaging the natural environment (Tsaur, Lin, & Lin, 2006). Some residents are likely to be resistant toward tourism and these negative perceptions are the barrier to sustainability. As a result, it is vital for the local communities to consent before any progress can be made towards a more sustainable position (Miller, 2001), and an understanding of local communities' attitudes and perceptions and how these perceptions are formed with regards to tourism development would provide valuable knowledge for the tourism industry, particularly for regional tourism development projects. Hence, any study should focus on the negative impact of tourism, such as, the impact of pollution that is caused by tourism, how the construction of accommodation and other tourists' facilities may jeopardise the delicate natural environment, and the overcrowding of rural sites during influx of tourists during certain periods of the year, such as, school holidays. This study also examine, from the cultural standpoint, whether the lifestyles of the local communities and their culture would be impacted as a result of tourism activities.

2.1.4 Cultural

Past researchers (e.g., Riganti, 2006) have indicated that one of the attractions for tourists to visit rural tourism destination is due to its cultural built heritage at the location. They have noted that heritage plays an important role to develop local identity, draw more tourists especially those with special interest in cultural and arts (Abdul Halim & Che Mat, 2010). It was indicated that ethnic groups who have different upbringing and cultural backgrounds is highly disingenuous and seen as part of the valuable assets to rural tourism (Bhattacharya & Kumari, 2004).

2.1.5 Destination Repositioning, Environment, and Communities' Values

Products offered by rural destination sites are naturally and culturally rich and these products are distinctive to each particular rural destination site. It is vital that the rural communities preserve and practice this valuable tradition as their existence are the "unique selling proposition" that pull visitors to the destination sites (Lo, Mohamad, Songan & Yeo, 2012a). In certain tourism locations in Malaysia, tourism stems as a result of various initiatives that were set up by governments and non-governmental bodies. An example of this is the tourism site of Bario in the state of Sarawak; whereby an initiative to bridge the digital divide had spawn tourism activities there. This initiative, the e-Bario Project sought to highlight the various ways that information and communication technology is able to assist rural communities to be socially, culturally and economically developed and from this project, it was found that input from the community was vital to its implementation (Songan, Hamid, Yeo, Gnaniah & Zen, 2004).

As more people are visiting these tourism destination sites, it is important that tourism industry at these locations provide the necessary products and services that meet the needs and expectation of these visitors. Hence, the local destination sites would need to be opened to determine whether their current state of their destination is in line with the needs and expectations of the tourists. With that in mind, it is imperative that the development of the tourism sites has what to offer and may have to improve and develop the existing products and services to meet these needs. As stated by past researchers, branding and positioning is important as it will affect the choices of the customers (Lopes, 2011). In addition, the purpose of positioning is to differentiate the different sites according to their uniqueness, and positioning is being viewed seriously by the

governments of these countries and had channel fundings to these tourism places to enhance the destination image and attractiveness in the eyes of tourists (Sumaco & Richardson, 2011).

Nonetheless, it is also crucial for development of tourism sites to take into account the views of the local residents in its efforts to learn the perceptions, values and attitudes that compensate the economic benefits of tourism as potential negative social and cultural outcomes of tourism would have caused. Though the industry of tourism is viewed as one of the core industries that could provide income for the local community (Lo, Mohamad, Songan & Yeo, 2012b) and as well as economic benefits, it also provides other benefits, such as, environmental, values, and socio-cultural to the local communities (Kuvan & Akan, 2005) as it enables the local residents to enjoy and improved their well being (Andereck & Vogt, 2000).

Despite the advantages of tourism, the industry has the possibility to bring about negative impacts on the local communities in rural destinations, and on that vein, it is necessary for the government and developers of tourism, to include local communities' participation in deciding and planning for future development; and in doing so, to consider tourism industry as a "community industry" (Murphy, 1985). Therefore, it is crucial that special attention be given on these concerns and the likely impact of tourism on the local communities by involving them as part of the team in developmental programme.

On the other hand, environmental wonders, outdoor recreation, scenery and festival and events are considered as tourism drivers that are responsible in generating demand for rural tourism and these drivers help to fulfil the needs of visitors at rural tourism sites (Greaves & Skinner, 2010; Ibrahim & Gill, 2005). Otto and Ritchie (1996) noted that tourism industry, being a subset of service industry and its management practices are paying close attention to issues of quality and efficiency. It is important to note that the tourism at rural destination sites rely heavily on environment atmosphere, such as, nature of environment, service environment, and attitudes' of local communities.

3.1 Methodology

The population of the present study consists of members of local communities currently residing in rural tourism destinations in Malaysia. The target respondents comprised of members of local communities who are making a living at the rural destinations for at least 1 year. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed and explained to the local communities in 34 sites of rural tourism destinations in Malaysia, nonetheless only 184 sets were usable. Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the respondents.

The first section was designed to measure respondents' perceptions of the impact of tourism from four perspectives, namely, economics, social, cultural and environment. Section 2 required local communities to rate items on how they prefer tourism to be with regards to the repositioning of the areas, and how have tourism affected their values and environment of their residence. Lastly, Section 3 was used to collect the personal profile and demographic data of the respondents. In Sections 1 and 2, the items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale.

Table 1. Demography Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Respondent (N=190) Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	97	51.1
	Male	89	46.8
Educational Level	High school or below	65	34.2
	Diploma	54	28.4
	Degree or professional qualification	51	26.8
	Postgraduate	8	4.2
	Others	8	4.2
Monthly Income (in RM)	Less than RM 500	43	22.6
	Between RM 501 and RM 1,000	49	25.8
	Between RM 1,001 and RM 1,500	25	13.2
	Between RM 1,501 and RM 2,000	22	11.6
	Between RM 2,001 and RM 2,500	17	8.9
	Between RM 2,501 and RM 3,000	16	8.4
	RM 3,001 and above	10	5.3

Respondent's profile (N=190)	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Age (in years)	32.7	11.0	15	72

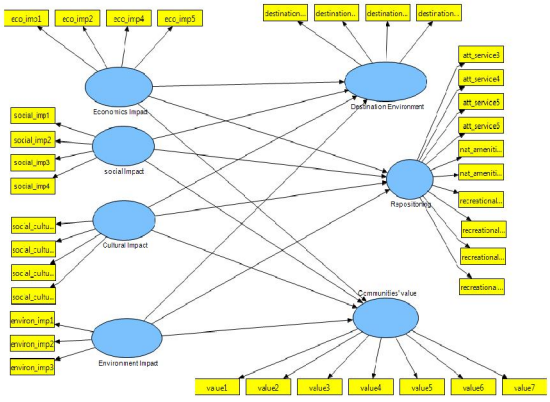

Figure 1: Research Model

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; Tenenhau *et al*, 2005; and Wetzels *et al*., 2009). A total of 200 re-samples were used to generate the standard error of the estimate and t-values.

4.1.1 *Assessment of the Measurement Model*

Table 2. Loading and Cross Loading

	Economics Impact	Social Impact	Cultural Impact	Environment Impact	Destination Environment	Repositioning	Communit value
Eco_imp1	**0.734**	-0.151	0.144	-0.156	0.121	0.158	0.095
Eco_imp2	**0.766**	-0.194	0.340	-0.249	0.096	0.209	0.106
Eco_imp4	**0.634**	-0.238	0.124	-0.315	0.141	0.036	-0.010
Eco_imp5	**0.678**	-0.120	-0.024	-0.305	0.188	0.108	-0.003
Social_imp1	-0.158	**0.657**	0.040	0.269	-0.154	0.065	0.195
Social_imp2	-0.092	**0.701**	0.017	0.337	-0.229	0.125	0.159
Social_imp3	-0.259	**0.707**	-0.008	0.349	-0.243	0.129	0.184
Social_imp4	-0.130	**0.684**	-0.137	0.268	-0.234	0.065	0.078
Social_cultural1	0.181	-0.052	**0.799**	-0.068	0.131	0.542	0.506
Social_cultural2	0.175	-0.107	**0.717**	-0.059	0.199	0.454	0.377
Social_cultural3	0.163	-0.053	**0.753**	-0.133	0.195	0.390	0.356
Social_cultural4	0.173	0.073	**0.828**	-0.069	0.145	0.622	0.559
Environ_imp1	-0.293	0.348	-0.102	**0.787**	-0.282	-0.091	-0.071
Environ_imp2	-0.140	0.255	-0.007	**0.728**	-0.259	0.054	0.044
Environ_imp3	-0.332	0.388	-0.103	**0.628**	-0.186	-0.046	-0.008
Destination_environ1	0.138	-0.222	0.118	-0.213	**0.652**	0.272	0.127
Destination_environ2	0.123	-0.229	0.214	-0.249	**0.824**	0.211	0.243
Destination_environ3	0.136	-0.204	0.216	-0.260	**0.818**	0.168	0.212
Destination_environ4	0.162	-0.290	0.080	-0.268	**0.682**	0.032	-0.038
Att_service3	0.057	0.110	0.415	0.063	0.155	**0.617**	0.595
Att_service4	0.050	0.269	0.319	0.012	0.175	**0.690**	0.606
Att_service5	0.105	0.078	0.477	0.029	0.120	**0.567**	0.385
Att_service6	0.105	-0.015	0.452	-0.017	0.126	**0.634**	0.488
Nat_amenities1	0.264	0.194	0.539	-0.052	0.091	**0.756**	0.659
Nat_amenities2	0.143	0.245	0.316	-0.033	0.062	**0.672**	0.602
Recreational_entertain3	0.169	0.019	0.480	-0.136	0.251	**0.670**	0.519
Recreational_entertain4	0.111	0.064	0.359	0.017	0.175	**0.670**	0.447
Recreational_entertain5	0.184	-0.027	0.481	-0.112	0.170	**0.710**	0.502
Recreational_entertain6	0.115	0.078	0.559	-0.062	0.215	**0.787**	0.581
Value1	0.009	0.210	0.300	0.014	0.192	0.502	**0.815**
Value2	0.037	0.185	0.549	-0.031	0.087	0.631	**0.817**
Value3	0.043	0.156	0.523	0.030	0.022	0.559	**0.819**
Value4	0.138	0.213	0.475	-0.049	0.245	0.661	**0.839**
Value5	0.118	0.153	0.346	0.015	0.151	0.374	**0.707**
Value6	-0.022	0.061	0.313	-0.071	0.149	0.378	**0.670**
Value7	0.117	0.193	0.361	-0.031	0.160	0.522	**0.606**

Table 3. Results of Measurement Model

Model Construct	Measurement Item	Loading	CR[a]	AVE[b]
Economics Impact	Eco_imp1	0.734	0.797	0.497
	Eco_imp2	0.766		
	Eco_imp4	0.634		
	Eco_imp5	0.678		
Social Impact	Social_imp1	0.657	0.782	0.473
	Social_imp2	0.701		
	Social_imp3	0.707		
	Social_imp4	0.684		
Cultural Impact	Social_cultural1	0.799	0.857	0.601
	Social_cultural2	0.717		
	Social_cultural3	0.753		
	Social_cultural4	0.828		
Environment Impact	Environ_imp1	0.787	0.759	0.514
	Environ_imp2	0.728		
	Environ_imp3	0.628		
Destination Environment	Destination_environ1	0.652	0.834	0.560
	Destination_environ2	0.824		
	Destination_environ3	0.818		
	Destination_environ4	0.682		
Repositioning	Att_service3	0.617	0.895	0.463
	Att_service4	0.690		
	Att_service5	0.567		
	Att_service6	0.634		
	Nat_amenities1	0.756		
	Nat_amenities2	0.672		
	Recreational_entertain3	0.670		
	Recreational_entertain4	0.670		
	Recreational_entertain5	0.710		
	Recreational_entertain6	0.787		
Communities Value	Value1	0.815	0.903	0.574
	Value2	0.817		
	Value3	0.819		
	Value4	0.839		
	Value5	0.707		
	Value6	0.670		
	Value7	0.606		

Note: [a] 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)}

[b] 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)}

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 larger than 0.5 (significant at $p < 0.01$). As shown in Table 2, all Average Variance Extracted (AVEs) were either closed to or 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, 1998b, 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, 2010, 1998b; 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.

Table4. Summary Results of the Model Constructs

Model Construct	Measurement Item	Standardized estimate	t-value
Economics Impacts	Eco_imp1	0.734	2.969
	Eco_imp2	0.766	2.958
	Eco_imp4	0.634	2.095
	Eco_imp5	0.678	2.314
Social Impact	Social_imp1	0.657	5.180
	Social_imp2	0.701	7.066
	Social_imp3	0.707	5.702
	Social_imp4	0.684	4.429
Cultural Impact	Social_cultural1	0.799	14.525
	Social_cultural2	0.717	7.562
	Social_cultural3	0.753	10.274
	Social_cultural4	0.828	14.269
Environment Impact	Environ_imp1	0.787	3.717
	Environ_imp2	0.728	3.553
	Environ_imp3	0.628	2.434
Destination Environment	Destination_environ1	0.652	4.122
	Destination_environ2	0.824	7.550
	Destination_environ3	0.818	8.536
	Destination_environ4	0.682	5.406
Repositioning	Att_service3	0.617	5.149
	Att_service4	0.690	10.193
	Att_service5	0.567	5.214
	Att_service6	0.634	6.778
	Nat_amenities1	0.756	10.225
	Nat_amenities2	0.672	8.439
	Recreational_entertain3	0.670	7.764
	Recreational_entertain4	0.670	7.352
	Recreational_entertain5	0.710	13.333
	Recreational_entertain6	0.787	18.574
Communities Value	Value1	0.815	19.716
	Value2	0.817	17.268
	Value3	0.819	14.659
	Value4	0.839	18.236
	Value5	0.707	8.512
	Value6	0.670	7.797
	Value7	0.606	6.569

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

4.1.2 *Assessment of the Structural Model*

Secondly, Table 6 and Figure 2 present the results of the hypotheses testing. It was revealed that four hypotheses were found to be significantly related

to the repositioning and communities value. The results have revealed that four hypotheses, namely, H5, H6, H8 and H9 were supported whereas, H1, H2, H3, H4, H7, H10, H11, and H12 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 *et al*. (2011). Following the guidelines of Wetzels *et al*. (2009), we estimated the GoF values (see formula), which may serve as cut-off values for global validation of PLS models. The GoF value of 0.43 (average R^2 was 0.358, average AVE was 0.526) 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*., 2005).

$$GoF = \sqrt{\overline{AVE} \times \overline{R^2}}$$

Table 6. Result of Reliability Test

Model Construct	Measurement Item	Cronbach's α	Loading range	Number of items
Economics Impact		0.671	0.634 - 0.766	5(4)
	Eco_imp1			
	Eco_imp2			
	Eco_imp4			
	Eco_imp5			
Social Impact		0.632	0.657 - 0.707	4(4)
	Social_imp1			
	Social_imp2			
	Social_imp3			
	Social_imp4			
Cultural Impact		0.780	0.717 - 0.828	7(4)
	Social_cultural1			
	Social_cultural2			
	Social_cultural3			
	Social_cultural4			
Environment Impact		0.530	0.628 - 0.787	3(3)
	Environ_imp1			
	Environ_imp2			
	Environ_imp3			
Destination Environment		0.732	0.652 - 0.824	4(4)
	Destination_environ1			
	Destination_environ2			
	Destination_environ3			
	Destination_environ4			
Repositioning		0.870	0.567 - 0.787	16(10)
	Att_service3			
	Att_service4			
	Att_service5			
	Att_service6			
	Nat_amenities1			
	Nat_amenities2			
	Recreational_entertain3			
	Recreational_entertain4			
	Recreational_entertain5			
	Recreational_entertain6			
Communities Value		0.875	0.606 - 0.839	7 (7)
	Value1			
	Value2			
	Value3			
	Value4			
	Value5			
	Value6			
	Value7			

Initial items numbers (final numbers)

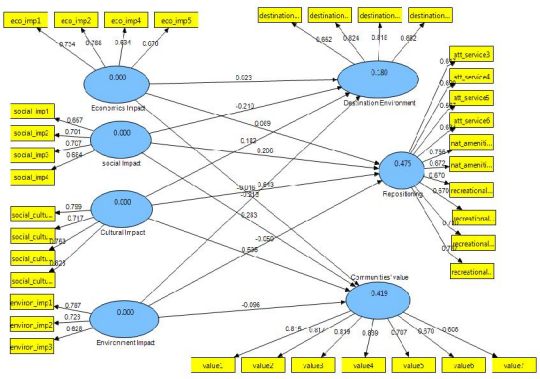

Figure 2. Results of the path analysis

Table 7. Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Coefficient	t-value	Supported
H1	Economics Impact → Destination Environment	0.023	0.137	NO
H2	Economics Impact → Repositioning	0.089	1.018	NO
H3	Economics Impact → Communities Value	-0.016	0.166	NO
H4	Social Impact → Destination Environment	-0.210	1.642	NO
H5	Social Impact → Repositioning	0.206	2.077	YES
H6	Social Impact → Communities Value	0.283	2.787	YES
H7	Cultural Impact → Destination Environment	0.182	1.375	NO
H8	Cultural Impact → Repositioning	0.643	8.656	YES
H9	Cultural Impact → Communities Value	0.596	7.986	YES
H10	Environment Impact → Destination Environment	-0.213	1.508	NO
H11	Environment Impact → Repositioning	-0.050	0.425	NO
H12	Environment Impact → Communities Value	-0.096	0.779	NO

*p<0.05, **p<0.01

Table 5. Discriminant Validity of Constructs

	Economics Impact	Social Impact	Cultural Impact	Environment Impact	Destination Environment	Repositioning	Communities Value
Economics Impact	**0.705**						
Social Impact	-0.237	**0.688**					
Cultural Impact	0.222	-0.027	**0.775**				
Environment Impact	-0.345	0.451	-0.096	**0.717**			
Destination Environment	0.186	-0.316	0.213	-0.332	**0.748**		
Repositioning	0.200	0.145	0.662	-0.049	0.224	**0.680**	
Communities Value	0.082	0.227	0.594	-0.020	0.184	0.794	**0.758**

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

5. Discussions

Past studies have revealed that rural tourism has significant contribution to various stakeholders, such as, enabling tourists to enjoy and admire nature and the culture of the destinations, and also contributes to the economic and social recovery of the rural sites. This study endeavours to investigate the impact of social, economic, cultural and environment dimensions of tourism on communities' attitudes in the Malaysian context as compared to past studies (e.g. Girard & Gartner, 1993; McCool & Martin, 1994; Harrill & Potts, 2003), which focused mainly on communities' attitudes in the Western perspective. In the study of rural tourism, the influence of economics, environmental, social and cultural factors on local

communities are considered as the main pillars. Local communities in rural destination ought to be given the chance to take part in tourism as this provides a platform for the local communities to better their economic and financial standings. Moreover, by getting involved in tourism activities, this could open the doors to many opportunities, such as, employment in homestay accommodation, embark on jungle trekking businesses, opening up handicrafts and retailing businesses (Sanggin, 2009).

The results of this study have indicated that social and cultural components are significantly related to repositioning and communities values. In investigating communities' perceptions and attitudes from the social aspect, they are considered as key indicators in rural tourism development as tourism may result in higher delinquency rates in the communities, and could lead to traffic congestion in the destination. Destination image comprises of a few dimensions and is a multi-stage process which includes the affability of the local communities as an important role in the positioning of the rural destination (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Hanlan, & Kelly, 2005). The findings have indicated that communities' wish to underline on the importance of stressing on social and cultural impact when it comes to repositioning and enhancing communities' value. This is supported by past researches on tourism that attentions have been placed more on the physical aspects of tourism to the local communities and disregard the human elements (Hall & McArthur, 1998; Goh, 2010). The findings of the present study support the works from previous studies (Wang *et al*, 2009; Lo, Mohamad, Songan & Yeo, 2012c), whereby it was found that cultural aspect is significant in rural tourism development. In the same breath, Lo, *et al.*, (2012b) found that sustainable rural tourism would be a failure without the vital participations of the local communities in rural destination.

Therefore, the time is ripe to get the local communities in the strategic planning of rural tourism so that wrong brand stigmatization and wrong decision can be avoided (Tasci & Kozak, 2006). Researchers in the past, such as Ries and Trout, (1981) and Kotler, (2000) have defined positioning as being connected to a firm, service person or place and is parallel with the concept of a product, which can be defined as tangible products, intangible products (services), place, person or idea. Hence, the results have shown that when it comes to repositioning and shaping the communities' value, destination image should also relate to the cultural and social aspects of the local communities as a symbol of their rural tourism destinations. It is very important for the destination to set itself apart from other destinations by focusing on its unique selling proposition (Leisen, 2001), and perhaps one of the ways is to focus on the unique cultural value of the rural tourism sites as indicated in this study. As stated by Mirbabayev and Shagazatova, (2012), if emphasis were to be placed on local culture for attracting tourists to the region, it will be able to play a role to preserve the local traditions and handicrafts which are on the verge of extinction. It is undoubtedly, communities are one of the main reasons for tourists to visit a destination and that, tourists are drawn from different countries with different social contexts, which in them will help shape the context of the tourists' experience of the local culture in the host community (Richards & Hall, 2000).

Interestingly, the findings have revealed that economics and environment impact are not the main concern of the local communities when it comes to repositioning of the environment and values. This could be due to past tourism projects having possibly involved local communities in the tourism business and that some of the revenue have been accrued to them. Sadly, most of the communities' based tourism projects performed badly (Mbaiwa, 2003). The findings were further supported by past researchers (e.g., Brida, Osti, & Faccioli, 2011) who found that local communities tend to weigh the cost and benefit that tourism can bring upon them, and they were mostly of the opinion that tourism is likely to bring more advantages than disadvantages to their communities. In fact, the local communities' attitudes towards tourism are likely to be influenced by communities' perceptions of its benefits and are likely to vary among residents within host communities in accordance to the amount and type of interaction that residents have with tourists (Devine, Gabe, & Bell, 2009).

One of the main reasons for local communities to oppose the development of tourism is due to the intense pressure these developments place on the environment. Nonetheless, the results shown that environmental impact is not the main concern of the local communities of the rural tourism sites in Malaysia. This could be due to reasons, such as, the tourism has not resulted in excessive depletion of resources and the current damages that occurred on these places are not worrying to the local communities. In addition to that, the concentrations of tourists at rural tourism sites in Malaysia are not intense (Pizam, 1978) and hence environmental issues are still not the concern of the local communities. In fact, currently, local communities have positive attitudes towards the arrival of tourists.

6. Conclusion

Beerli and Martin, (2004) elucidated any changes in tourists behaviour such as expectations,

preferences and tastes would have an impact in positioning strategy. It should be noted that positioning of a destination would not be successful without the views of the local communities as their input is crucial as part of the strategic planning. If the level of residents' loyalty to tourism development is high, the potential conflicts between residents and tourism establishments could be avoided (Chen, 2000). The local community could work together with industry players and the tourists in identifying an effective strategy that needs to be put in place at a rural destination site. This collaboration between the three stakeholders of rural tourism (i.e. communities, industry players and tourists) is able to further identify the component that would help in attracting more tourists to visit the rural tourism site, and to pay close attention in developing the component that could improve and provide satisfaction to tourists visiting the rural site (Mohamad, Lo, Songan, & Yeo, 2010). In conclusion, an understanding of the impact of tourism from local communities' perspectives and how these perceptions are formed with regards to tourism development would provide valuable knowledge for the tourism industry, particularly for regional tourism development projects.

Acknowledgement

The funding of this research is obtained through research grants from the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak.

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12/25/2018