



Enlightening Tourism.

A Pathmaking Journal



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THE CONNECTION BETWEEN COMPETITIVENESS AND SUSTAINABILITY IN TOURISM DESTINATIONS: EXAMINING THE HARD, SOFT, AND MODERATING EFFECTS OF KNOWLEDGE SHARING

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to assess the impact of hard and soft measures on the competitiveness of tourism destinations. Additionally, this article examines the impact of tourism destination competitiveness on rural tourism sustainability management. Following that, knowledge sharing is used as a moderator variable to demonstrate its moderating effect on the relationship between tourism destination competitiveness and rural tourism sustainability. A total of 390 respondents, including both domestic and international tourists, who visited the six rural tourism destinations in Sarawak, Malaysia, voluntarily participated in this study. A PLS-SEM approach was used to evaluate the developed model, and WarpPLS software was used to perform the PLS estimate and hypotheses testing. The empirical findings indicated that destination appeal, tourism infrastructure, and service quality all have a significant and positive effect

on the competitiveness of tourism destinations. Additionally, it was discovered that tourism destination competitiveness has a positive and significant effect on the sustainable management of rural tourism destinations.

KEYWORDS

Tourism; Destination competitiveness; Sustainable management; Knowledge sharing; PLS-SEM; Malaysia.

ECONLIT KEYS

L83; Z32; Q01.

1. INTRODUCTION

Widely regarded as one of the world's largest and fastest-growing industries, the tourism sector is often attributed as a significant driver of a nation's economy. Its contributions towards the country's economic growth include increased earnings of local communities through the creation of additional jobs and business opportunities for both community members and tourism stakeholders (Long & Nguyen, 2018; Scott, Hall & Gössling, 2019; Nicolaidis, 2020). This phenomenon has also been observed in the rural settings of Malaysia, as rural communities are turning towards rural tourism as a means of alternative income generation (Sapari, Shuib, Ramachandra & Kunasekaran, 2019). In a 2020 report, it was projected by the World Travel & Tourism Council that the global Travel & Tourism sector would see growth by up to 3.5 percent in 2019, totalling \$8.9 trillion in contributions. However, due to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic which resulted in a 72 percent drop in international tourist arrivals from January to October 2020, costing the tourism industry US\$1 trillion (UNWTO, 2020b), it is clear that the travel and hospitality industry were among those hardest hit by the pandemic. Consequently, in an effort to revive and redevelop the tourism industry as the world looks towards living with COVID-19, many countries are resuming some tourism activities, in accordance with Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). This includes putting the 3Cs – Confined spaces, Close contact, and Crowded spaces – into practice.

Changes in the travel practices have positively affected rural tourism, as rural destinations are strategic due to the lack of crowds and the further distances from the city centre. Rural tourism began gaining popularity even before the pandemic, owing to the attractive natural and cultural components that allow visitors to unwind and escape from their hectic daily routines (Zhu & Deng, 2020). It is expected that this