



Impact of responsible tourism on destination sustainability and quality of life of community in tourism destinations



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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of the study is to examine the impact of perceived responsible tourism on perceived quality of life of communities in tourist destinations and to analyze the mediating role of perceived destination sustainability. A questionnaire-based survey conducted to collect responses from a sample of 432 residents from 3 different tourism destinations in India. From the data analysis, it was found that as the residents of the local community, perceived responsible tourism plays a pivotal role in the formulation of perceived destination sustainability, which in turn impacts their perceived quality of life. Thus, the study findings offer implications for the successful management of tourism businesses as well as the community sustainability and their well-being.

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1. Introduction

The concept of responsible tourism has received considerable attention from scholars in tourism domain (Mihalic, 2016). Spenceley et al. (2002) stated that responsible tourism is a tourism initiative to achieve good tourism business opportunities through enhanced holiday experiences, quality of life of local residents, socio-economic benefits, and protection of natural resources in the tourism destinations. After identifying its importance to enhance business opportunities in tourism sector, the concept has come to the mainstream of tourism literature (Mohd Hafiz Hanafiah, Azman, Jamaluddin, & Aminuddin, 2016). However, majority of the studies were conducted taking the perspectives of tourist or the service provider (e.g., Tearfund, 2002; Spenceley et al., 2002; Van der Merwe and Wocke, 2007). For example, Spenceley et al. (2002) conducted a study to capture different benefits associated with responsible tourism initiatives. The study results revealed that 66% of tour operators claimed that the responsible tourism initiatives positively impacts local communities. Further, Frey and George (2010) studied responsible tourism management in terms of tourism business owners' perspective. The findings of the study

suggest that despite general positive attitude towards responsible tourism initiatives, businesses are not investing time and money to follow responsible tourism initiatives. The study further states that the factors, such as the cost associated with responsible tourism practices, competitive environment and lack of government support are the hindrances which curb active propagation of responsible tourism programs in emerging economies. Even though different studies were conducted to understand the role of responsible tourism and its impact on different outcomes, to the authors' knowledge no studies till date examined how responsible tourism influences local communities' sustainability perception and in turn their perception of quality of life. This understanding is important, because the real benefits of responsible tourism will be fulfilled only if the local communities in these tourist destinations perceives that the activities concerning responsible tourism initiatives creates favourable destination sustainability and improved quality of life (Hanafiah et al., 2016).

Thus, the current study tries to fill this gap through an investigation which offers insights into how host communities perception of responsible tourism contributes to the development of their perception of quality of life. In particular, this research focuses on the mechanism, such as perceived sustainability dimension, which has been absent in the tourism literature. Thus, this research hypothesized that host communities' perception of responsible tourism positively influences their quality of life through the development of favourably perceived sustainability. If the

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hypothesized relationships are supported, this study adds to the current tourism literature that host community perception concerning responsible tourism is important to develop their quality of life through favourably perceived sustainability. Therefore, it is important to consider host community perception, so as to bring positive benefits of responsible tourism, specifically host communities' quality of life.

The organization of the paper is as follows. First, theoretical development and hypotheses formulation of the study are presented. Then, the study provided a detailed elaboration of the methodology adopted. Data analysis and results are presented next. Finally, the study concludes with discussion, implications, limitations and directions for future research.

2. Theoretical development and hypotheses formulation

2.1. The impact of responsible tourism on destination sustainability

The concept of responsible tourism has been defined as all forms of tourism which respect the host's natural, built, and cultural environments and the interests of all parties concerned (Smith, 1992; Stanford, 2000). Responsible tourism initiatives of Kerala consider it as a "tourism management strategy embracing planning, product development, management, and marketing to bring about positive economic, social, cultural, and environmental impacts (Kerala Tourism, 2012). DEAT (1996) defined responsible tourism as enabling local communities to enjoy a better quality of life through increased socio-economic benefits and improved natural resource management (Spenceley et al., 2002).

Leslie (2012) defined responsible tourism as "a behavioral trait ... based on the basic principles of respect for others and their environment", and further stated that responsible tourism assumes "acting responsibly in terms of one's own actions, and moreover, in the management and operation of business" (p. 20). Considering the above said definition, in this paper we define perceived responsible tourism as an evaluation of local communities who are residing in the tourism destinations that what extent they perceive that the parties involved in tourism initiatives involved in environmental and ethical responsibilities during their management and operation of tourism business. In short, the idea of responsible tourism has its core domain understanding of associated individuals' involvement in taking responsibility to take action, in that different parties are involved, such as consumers, suppliers, tourism service providers, governments, etc.

Goodwin (2011) clearly links responsible tourism to action in favor of making tourism more sustainable. It explains that when taking responsibility results in clear cut actions, then it is called as sustainable actions. However, responsible tourism is not a synonym for sustainable tourism (Mihalic, 2016). Responsible tourism addresses the aforementioned sustainable tourism discourse in implementation and is more of an expression to describe tourism that is sustainable because it acts sustainably. Thus, it can be inferred that when the local communities perceives that responsible tourism initiatives builds on appropriate sustainability-based strategies and policies, then it will result in appropriate actions or behaviours, called as sustainable actions or behaviours.

The relationship between perceived responsible tourism and destination sustainability can be corroborated from the stated objectives of responsible tourism as a tool to minimize negative social, economic and environmental impacts whilst maximizing the positive effects of tourism development (Frey & George, 2010). Destination Sustainability envisages a quadruple or triple bottom line approach consists of economic, social, and environmental sector that proposes an ideal situation where exists a balance among all the three dimensions (Dredge, 2008). A study on the impacts of

responsible tourism in Kerala invariably stated that responsible tourism has played a significant role in the sustainability of destination (Paul & Rupesh, 2013). Considering the positive socio-economic impacts of responsible tourism; Michot (2010) called this initiative 'pro-poor tourism'. Wight (2008) opined that responsible tourism initiatives in and adjacent to National Parks in Ottawa produced sustainable outcomes in destinations. Spenceley et al. (2002) reported that community based tourism enterprises (CBTE) initiative under responsible tourism contributed to destination sustainability. Similarly, various other studies implied that responsible tourism significantly contributes for the attainment of economic, social, cultural and environmental sustainability of destinations (e.g., Bah, 2008; Greiner, 2010; Howse, 2008; Maelge, 2008; Saji and Narayanasamy, 2010). Cape Town (2009) stated that responsible tourism approach is aimed at bringing positive economic, social, cultural, and environmental impacts. Thus, we state the hypothesis that:

Hypothesis 1. Host communities' perceived responsible tourism has a positive impact on their perceived destination sustainability.

2.2. The impact of sustainability on perceived quality of life

Quality of life is the degree of wellbeing felt by an individual or group of people (Delibasic, Karlsson, Lorusso, & Rodrigue, 2008). World Health Organization (WHO) stated quality of life as individuals' perceptions of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns. It composed of four dimensions, such as, material wellbeing, community well-being, emotional well-being and health and safety wellbeing (Hughes, Addington-Hall, Aspinall, & Dunckl, 2004; Skevington, Lotfy, & O'Connell, 2004).

Destination sustainability induced by responsible tourism can have a multitude impact on the quality of life of people. A study conducted among the residents in Virginia revealed that the perception of residents about the impacts of tourism has a significant relation with their satisfaction with particular life domains (Kim, Uysal, & Joseph Sir, 2013). Further in tourism literature, studies stated that the impacts of tourism focused on four important domains, such as economic, social, environmental, and cultural, the influence tourism in these domains have significant influence on quality of life of local residents (Ap, 1992; Aspinall, 2006; Jurowski & Gursoy, 2004; Kim, 2002).

Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC-D, 2013) observed that destination sustainability is frequently used in connection with local community (Aspinall, 2006; Baros & David, 2007; Choi & Sirakaya, 2006). Specifically, it revealed that sustainability has a significant impact on lives of people (Godfrey, 1998; Hall & Vredenburg, 2004; Kennedy, 1992; Krippendorf, 1982; Mowforth & Munt, 1998; Romeril, 1985; Simpson, 2001). Constanta (2009) opined that tourism enhances quality of life. Further, Faulkner and Tideswell (1997) revealed that there exists a very strong relationship between quality of life of residents and standard of recreational, shopping and service facilities. Crofts and Holland (1993) established that tourism development is a positive function of the rural residents' quality of life.

When residents perceive that the tourism development happened at the cost of their resources and it outweighs the benefits, they may feel resentment and irritation towards tourists that in turn reduce community satisfaction (Faulkner & Tideswell, 1997; Doxey, 1975; Ko & Stewart, 2002). According to Cavus and Tanrisevdi (2003), monopolistic control of tourism development is the primary factor in residents' negative attitudes towards tourism. Lessons from responsible tourism initiatives inferred that

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