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The effect of residents' personality, emotional solidarity, and community commitment on support for tourism development



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H I G H L I G H T S

- To test residents' personality, emotional solidarity, and support tourism development.
- Feelings toward tourists and tourism development are different among males and females.
- High agreeableness and extraversion personalities are supportive towards tourism development.

A R T I C L E I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

Residents' personality and their perspectives about community and those visiting can play an important role in forming overall support for tourism development. This study examined how residents' personality, emotional solidarity, and community commitment impact perceptions of tourism, which ultimately explain support for tourism development. To test the theoretical framework, survey data were collected from 340 residents living in two Malaysian tourism destinations. Structural equation modelling was utilized to assess the proposed model. Results revealed that sympathetic understanding and welcoming nature were the strongest factors influencing residents' attitudes towards tourism development while the effect was different among males and females with differing personality traits. Further analysis showed that the effect of welcoming nature and emotional closeness on residents' attitude towards tourism development was different among residents with personalities of high agreeableness and extraversion, while openness to experience, conscientiousness, and neuroticism did not have a significant effect on these relationships.

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1. Introduction

The tourism industry within Malaysia is growing at a rapid pace, contributing to increased foreign exchange and the availability of job opportunities especially within rural areas (Ibrahim, 2010). As announced by the federal government, the gross value added of tourism industries (GVATI) to the GDP increased 13.7% from 2013 to 2014 with 169.3 million visitors (domestic and international) in 2014 (<https://www.statistics.gov.my>). Realizing the value of

tourism to the country, the Malaysian government has proactively taken steps to promote the industry by forming the Malaysian Tourism Policy to increase GNP and enhance economic value. Such policy was initiated to formally promote ecotourism as well as other kinds of tourism within the country (Amran, Wahid, Siti-Nabiha, & Abustan, 2008; Moghavvemi et al., 2017). These efforts have contributed to growing interest in Malaysia (and its various rural communities) as a tourist destination. (see Fig. 1)

In proactive planning efforts, numerous studies have been undertaken in Malaysia to examine the effects (i.e., costs and benefits) of tourism development on local communities. Kayat (2002) found this on Langkawi Island where individuals acknowledged that tourism created opportunities to overcome economic hardships despite eroding traditional Muslim values and cultural lifestyles. The author conceded that such dependency influenced residents'

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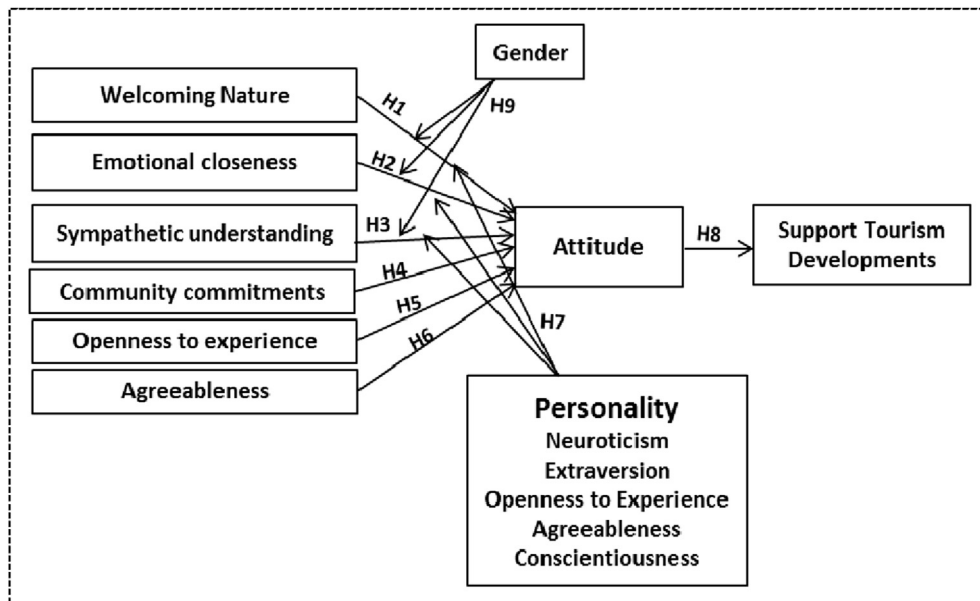


Fig. 1. Research model.

perceptions of tourism. [Ismail and Turner \(2008\)](#) argued that even though residents of Perhentian Island (another Malaysian destination) are aware of the positive contributions of tourism, they are mindful of those that are negative (i.e., rising costs of goods and services, increasing land and housing values, and degrading natural resources). Negative social consequences of tourism have also been highlighted by [Nejati, Mohamed, and Omar \(2014\)](#), indicating residents are abusing drugs and alcohol and engaging in illegal sexual activities as a result of tourism.

[Ismail and Turner \(2008\)](#) remind us that despite these negative consequences, the industry has been instrumental in providing incentives for natural resource conservation as well as preservation of historical buildings and heritage sites on the Malaysian islands. [Hazmah and Mohamed \(2015\)](#) point out that on Mabul Island, residents are aware of and thankful for the low-entry requirements for becoming boatmen, dive operators, front-desk and house-keeping staff not to mention opportunities for social interaction with visitors. [Hasani, Moghavvemi, and Hamzah \(2016\)](#) that demonstrated Malaysian residents can be quite welcoming of tourists not only for the economic benefits (i.e., increased employment opportunities and improved standards of living) but also opportunities for cross-cultural exchange ([Hasani et al., 2016](#)), whereby residents are afforded numerous opportunities to interact with visitors and engage in transformative learning.

In light of the extensive work focusing on residents' perceptions of tourism development in general and Malaysia, specifically, [Woosnam \(2011\)](#) highlighted the fact that many of such studies have considered how such individuals perceived the industry overall and not on their personal relationships with tourists. Furthermore, most variables used in such studies are based on demographic, residential, spatial, and economic measures ([Almeida-García, Pelaez-Fernandez, Balbuena-Vazquez, & Macias, 2016](#); [Vargas-Sánchez, De los Angeles Plaza-Mejía, & Porras-Bueno, 2009](#)). Few studies have considered how relational aspects between residents and tourists can serve to explain locals' perspectives of the industry overall ([Woosnam, Norman, & Ying, 2009](#)). It was the work of [Woosnam \(2012\)](#) that demonstrated how residents' emotional solidarity with destination visitors can explain attitudes regarding tourism development when he and colleagues developed the emotional solidarity model. Of course the

relationship between residents and tourists (coupled with interaction, shared beliefs, and shared behaviour) may be affected by other important factors such as individuals' personality. It is important to study residents' personality because individual differences may trigger different types of emotions and responses when a particular situation stimulates feelings ([Triandis & Suh, 2002](#)). Specifically, individuals' personality can precipitate human's sensitivity to positive and negative effects and this may influence their reactions and decisions in particular situations ([Park, Lee, Sohn, Eom, & Sohn, 2014](#)). For example, extroverts have been shown to exhibit lower physiological responses to pain and sadness and this connection is linked to parasympathetic reactivity ([Park et al., 2014](#)). Given this, it is presumed that residents' possessing diverse personality traits would respond differently when encountering tourists and evaluating tourism development. Even though numerous works exist with the tourism literature concerning personality, no studies have considered the construct's potential to explain emotional solidarity and ultimately attitudes about tourism and support for tourism development. The only study that is tangentially related focused on how personality helps to explain changes in emotions among individuals while on vacation ([Lin, Kerstetter, Nawijn, & Mitas, 2014](#)).

Gender also has the ability to explain residents' attitudes concerning tourism and its accompanying development (see [Huh & Vogt, 2008](#); [Mason & Cheyne, 2000](#); [Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012](#); and; [Nunkoo, Gursoy, & Juwaheer, 2010](#)). However, gender has never been considered a moderator between the constructs of emotional solidarity (i.e., welcoming nature, emotional closeness, and sympathetic understanding) and support for tourism development. [Mason and Cheyne \(2000\)](#) did purport however, that residents' gender may contribute to feelings toward tourists and overarching perceptions about tourism development.

Considering these gaps, the main purpose of this research is to examine how constructs of emotional solidarity, community commitment, and personality influence residents' attitudes toward supporting tourism development among rural Malaysian residents. Such work builds on the established model of emotional solidarity developed by [Woosnam \(2012\)](#). Furthermore, our aim is also to observe the moderating effect of residents' gender and personality on the relationship between emotional solidarity and attitudes

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