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## Article

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# **Effects of Destination Appeal and Tourism Infrastructure on Rural Tourism Destination Competitiveness and Revisit Intention: A Study in Bario Kelabit Highland**

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## **Abstract**

An extensive literature demonstrates that hard dimensions contribute to the growth of tourism destinations. To remain competitive, these resources are significantly important for selecting a tourism location and they also serve as a key attraction for travelers. Therefore, this study is an attempt to explore the effects of hard dimensions (i.e., destination resources, cultural uniqueness, accessibility quality, and accommodation quality) on the competitiveness of rural tourism destination, particularly on highland-based tourism destination. Additionally, this study examines the effect of tourism destination competitiveness on tourists' intention to revisit. Competitiveness theory and theory of planned behavior are used as the theoretical base to explain rural tourism destination competitiveness and tourists' revisit intention. This study surveys 166 respondents comprising of domestic and international tourists. PLS-SEM approach is used to evaluate the developed model, with WarpPLS software performing the PLS estimation and testing of hypotheses. The empirical findings indicate that destination resources, cultural uniqueness, and accessibility quality provided significant contribution to rural tourism destination's competitiveness. Interestingly, it was discovered that the competitiveness of rural tourism destinations has a positive and significant relationship with tourists' intention to revisit. Unexpectedly, a significantly negative relation between accommodation quality and rural tourism destination competitiveness. Ultimately, the study results in development

of future guidelines for scholars and practitioners interested in competitive rural tourism destinations.

**Keywords:** rural tourism destination competitiveness, destination resources, cultural uniqueness, accessibility quality, accommodation quality, revisit intention.

## 1. Introduction

Tourism is widely regarded as one of the world's largest and fastest expanding industries, making major contributions to the economic development of a country (Nicolaides, 2020), and playing an essential part in increasing the economic growth of a country over the long term. According to Scott et al. (2019), tourism could specifically enhance the profits of local communities through the provision of job opportunities. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of international tourists that visited a country fell by 72% from January to October 2020, which resulted in a loss of one trillion dollars for the tourism business (UNWTO, 2020). As a consequence of increasing competition among tourism destinations and recognition of rural tourism's potential for growth and contribution to the country's and specifically community's income during the post-COVID-19 tourism development phase, a need to investigate factors influencing or enhancing rural tourism has emerged (Nooripoor et al., 2021; Zhu & Deng, 2020).

Numerous studies have established that the importance of tourism destination to identify significant factors that lead to the destination's competitiveness development (Mihalič, 2000; Crouch, 2010; Rahmiati et al., 2020) in light of the current state of the tourism market (Guo et al., 2020). Indeed, it is critical to recognise that a tourism destination's comparative and competitive advantage must be significantly enhanced in order to outperform other tourism destinations (Nadalipour & Khoshkhoo, 2019). It was argued that these resources are not only necessary for a tourism destination to maintain its competitiveness, but also act as a significant pull for tourists to visit (Nunes et al., 2018). As a result, it is critical to conduct an in-depth examination of the concept of tourism destination competitiveness (Mustafa et al., 2020).

Tourism products are predominantly made up of tangible or intangible products in nature (UNWTO, 2019). Tangible assets are comprised of the natural resources and man-made attractions (such as tourism infrastructure), whereas intangible assets content destination's image and reputation (Apostolopous & Gayle, 2002). In this study, services are enacted as critical role in attracting tourists in the tourism industry. This is further supported by the study of Qu et al. (2011) and Schaar (2013) that both tangible and intangible assets contribute significantly to the tourism destination development. Additionally, previous research has identified cultural and natural attractiveness as components of hard measures (Ancincova, 2014). Both destination appeal and tourism infrastructure are considered tangible products or hard services, as they both provide visitors with physical satisfaction. Some argued that tangible elements had a greater impact on tourism than intangible elements (Albayrak et al., 2010).

As noted, that the dimensions of destination appeal and tourism infrastructure had led to the development of rural tourism destination competitiveness (Manrai et al., 2018; Owiya et al., 2019). Without a doubt, the concept of "destination competitiveness" is critical in the tourism industry especially in rural tourism. While previous research has recognized the importance of destination competitiveness, the existing literature has not examined the relationship between destination competitiveness and revisit intention. Thus, it is worthwhile to conduct an in-depth examination of the predictors of tourism destination competitiveness, particularly the tangible measures, and to further examine the impact of tourism destination competitiveness on tourists' intention to revisit in the case of rural tourism destinations.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 Competitiveness Theory and Theory of Planned Behavior*

Both the Competitiveness Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) were applied in order to provide a framework for the research that was conducted for this study. To begin, the competitiveness theory was selected as the fundamental theory to support the research framework and to shed light on the competitiveness development of rural tourism destinations (Chin, 2021; Porter, 1985). According to Bordas (1994), comparative advantages are evaluated based on the resources that are already present in the destination, whereas competitive advantages are evaluated based on the resources that are created specifically for the destination. As a consequence of this, natural (such as destination resources and cultural distinctiveness) and man-made (such as accessibility and accommodation quality) resources are considered as essential elements for improving the competitiveness of rural tourism destinations.

Following that, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is used to argue the competitiveness of tourism destinations has an effect on tourists' intention to revisit rural tourism destinations. TPB is a psychological theory that serves as the foundation for the study of human behavioral intention (Ajzen, 1991). It is a development of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). The TPB has been extensively used to explain consumer behavior across a variety of disciplines (Kan & Fabrigar, 2017; Ajzen, 2020), including the tourism context (Hasan et al., 2020). To summarize, this study applied TPB as one of the underlying theories for the research framework, examining the effect of rural tourism destination competitiveness on tourists' intention to revisit rural tourism destinations. Additionally, according to Bianchi et al. (2017), mostly the researchers are preferred to use other theory to explain the study on the selection of travel destination (Soliman, 2021).

### *2.2 Rural Tourism Destination Competitiveness*

The term "competitiveness" was first proposed by Porter (1980) to describe the environment in which a business operates. Competitiveness is an essential element of both management and marketing strategy (Fornell, 1992). The term "destination competitiveness" refers to a location's ability to compete successfully in the tourism industry while also maintaining its commitment to the responsible use and preservation of its natural resources (Lestari et al., 2021). One of the definitions of destination competitiveness that is widely mentioned comes from Hassan (2000). He defines it as "a

destination's ability to maintain its market position relative to competitors through the manufacture of value-added products and resource sustainability." Ritchie and Crouch (2003) investigated the idea of competition in the hospitality sector through their research. It is interesting to note that academics are eager to apply the idea of destination competitiveness to a number of different tourist locations (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Law & Lo, 2016). When analysing the competitiveness of a location, comparative advantages and competitive advantages are both considered to be important factors to consider (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Mustafa et al., 2020). According to Bobirca and Cristureanu (2008), the comparative advantage of a tourism destination is defined as the availability of natural and cultural resources. On the other hand, the competitive advantage of a tourism destination is defined as the availability of man-made resources such as tourism infrastructure and tourist facilities (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999). All of these potentially lucrative resources have, as a result, led to a more optimistic visit intention.

### *2.3 Revisit Intention*

The topic of revisit intention has been extensively researched over decades (Li et al., 2018; Cakici et al., 2019; Abbasi et al., 2021). The term "revisit intention" refers to a customer's willingness to return to a location or engage in a repeat activity in the context of tourism destinations (Yong et al., 2013). It is evident that an individual intention could drive individual to perform specific behaviour (Ajzen, 1985). Indeed, numerous studies have hypothesized a variety of revisit intention antecedents, including experiential quality (Bintarti & Kurniawan, 2017), trust, satisfaction, and loyalty (Mannan et al., 2019). Earlier research has confirmed that retaining existing customers are less costly comparing to acquiring new customers (Jansri et al., 2020). It is believed that a destination that is competitive in terms of resources and infrastructure tends to encourage repeat visits in rural tourism. Given the significance of revisit intention, it was included as a dependent variable in this study.

### *2.4 Hard Dimensions of Rural Tourism*

The findings of previous studies have demonstrated that hard measures have a key role in the growth of tourist destinations (Qu et al., 2011; Schaar, 2013). This research categorised destination appeals and tourism infrastructure as tangible products or hard services since they both give visitors with a sense of physical gratification. Previous research that has been published has highlighted how important it is for a destination to preserve and improve its natural and cultural tourism resources in order to get the most out of the one-of-a-kind collection of assets that the destination possesses (Potashova & Girijchuk, 2019; Suryawardani et al., 2020). Because of this, vacationers' choices regarding their travel itineraries to rural tourist locations will be impacted as a direct result (Sugiyama, 2019). In the context of rural tourism, the presence of natural resources or other facilities has evolved into an essential component of tourist offerings (Nooripoor et al., 2021). These are the most important resources that need to be protected, as their state has a direct bearing on the services and goods offered by the tourism industry (Reimer & Walter, 2013). The findings are consistent with the situation in the Sungai Sedim Nature Forest (SSNF), which is located in Malaysia (Aziz et al., 2018).

Besides, previous research has demonstrated that rural areas' distinct culture, history, and ethnic elements contribute to the destination's unique appeal (Djekic & Vucic, 2007). Several previous studies have attempted to explain cultural heritage in a variety of ways. According to Lertcharnrit (2008), cultural heritage is founded on tangible products such as cultural artefacts, antiquities, monuments, heritage buildings, and historic urban areas. Cultural uniqueness attractions have become a critical component of rural tourism development because they are critical not only for identity cultivation but are also recognized as a pillar of community economic development (Park, 2014).

Transportation infrastructure is affirmed as a critical pre-requisite for attracting tourists, particularly to remote rural tourism destinations with a limited supply of transportation infrastructure (Kanwal et al., 2020). The availability of efficient transportation facilities tends to improve accessibility by lowering tourist travel costs (Quach, 2013) and making tourist attractions more accessible to tourists (Herawati et al., 2014). Additionally, accommodations are listed as a critical component of tourism infrastructure (Wilde & Cox, 2008). Accommodation is defined in the context of rural tourism in Greece as lodging in traditionally furnished rooms served with a traditional local breakfast (Darău et al., 2010). In rural tourism, one of the revenue streams for local communities involved in tourism is through the provision of accommodation, more commonly referred to as homestay services. Recent studies have found that providing suitable accommodation and tourist facilities in rural areas has developed into a significant source of revenue for local communities (Maksimović et al., 2015).

## *2.5 Hypotheses Development:*

### *2.5.1 Hard Measures on Rural Tourism Destination Competitiveness*

The destination's appeal as a tourism destination is recognised as a critical factor in the development of the destination's competitiveness (Abolfazl, 2012). Buhalis (2000) points out that strategic and sustainable management strategies can boost a tourism destination's competitiveness. Additionally, previous research has indicated that it is necessary to prioritise cultural and heritage elements for rural tourism development, as these elements are considered to be primary tourism attractions, as well as contributing to the development of a tourism destination's competitiveness (Ritchie & Crouch, 2010). According to a recent study by Zhang et al. (2019), it is also critical to preserve traditional culture in order to attract tourists and develop destination competitive advantages. The presence of cultural heritage resources at a tourism destination is important to enhance the destination's unique selling point in turn to success the development of rural tourism destination (Potashova & Girijchuk, 2019). It serves to both satisfy tourist interests and to shape rural tourism destinations' competitiveness (Chakraborty, 2020).

Moreover, past researchers have found that comprehensive tourism infrastructure (e.g., transportation infrastructure, lodging amenities, and tourist facilities) is necessary for tourism destinations to support tourism activities and serve as a prerequisite for competing with other tourism destinations (Abdullah et al., 2015; Jovanovi & Ili, 2016). This is therefore to improve accessibility by providing an efficient tourist transportation network, as this is a critical factor in the development of tourist flows and, consequently, in the

overall competitiveness of tourism destinations (Massidda & Etzo, 2012; Almstedt et al., 2016). It was argued that accommodation quality is one of the essential facility because it provides all necessary comforts and allows tourists to connect with nature (Setokoe et al., 2019). Subsequently, the following hypotheses have been outlined:

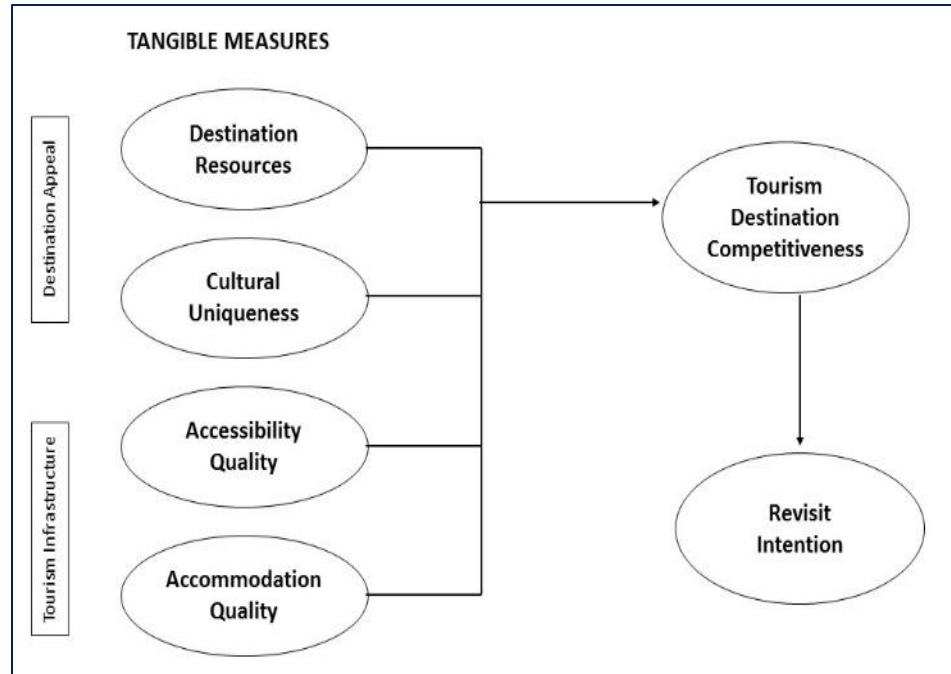
- **H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a positive and significant relationship between destination resources and the competitiveness of rural tourism destinations.
- **H<sub>2</sub>:** There is a positive and significant relationship between cultural uniqueness and the competitiveness of rural tourism destinations.
- **H<sub>3</sub>:** There is a positive and significant relationship between accessibility quality and the competitiveness of rural tourism destinations.
- **H<sub>4</sub>:** There is a positive and significant relationship between accommodation quality and the competitiveness of rural tourism destinations.

#### 2.5.2 Rural Tourism Destination Competitiveness on Revisit Intention

In today's competitive market, tourists' intention to return has been regarded as a critical factor in a destination's ability to remain relevant and competitive (Singh & Singh, 2019). Pai et al. (2021) discovered that the level of tourism destination's competitiveness will be increased and this is therefore will improve an individual travel experience and revisit intention by implementing smart tourism technology (STT). Therefore, to increase tourist revisit intention, it is critical to strengthen the tourism destination's competitive advantage through a variety of strategies (Abbasi et al., 2021). The following hypotheses were developed in light of the preceding discussion of existing research:

- **H<sub>5</sub>:** There is a positive and significant relationship between tourism destination competitiveness and revisit intention.

Based on the literature reviewing, researchers proposed the following research model of rural tourism destination competitiveness and tourists' revisit intention, as shown in Figure 1. The focus of this research model is to explore the effects of destination appeal and tourism infrastructure on tourism destination competitiveness. Moreover, this study attempts to examine the positive relationship between tourism destination competitiveness and revisit intention.



**Figure 1: The Research Model**

### 3. Methodology

In terms of the design of the study, a quantitative research approach was chosen for the data collection, which was accomplished through the administration of questionnaires. In this study, a non-probability sampling method, more precisely an approach known as purposive sampling, was utilised for the selection of respondents. Respondents aged 18 years and older (i.e., both domestic and international visitors) who were visiting Bario Kelabit Highlands, and who agreed to be interviewed, were included in the samples for this study. Rural tourism has emerged as the most intriguing tourist destination in the region as a direct result of its singularity in terms of natural, cultural, and adventure tourism. In addition, taking into consideration the fact that activities connected to rural tourism have the potential to offer a valuable alternative source of income for the communities that are located there. Therefore, it is essential to carry out the proposed study framework in the rural tourism destination of Sarawak in order to further discover the most relevant elements that contribute to the destination's competitiveness. In addition, if the research is successful in Sarawak, it may have implications for other rural tourism sites throughout Malaysia as a whole.

A total number of 24 items were adapted from past studies and amended to the Malaysian's context. All the measurement items details are listed in Appendix A. On a seven-point Likert scale, respondents to the questionnaire were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the assertions (ranging from 1 for strongly disagree to 7 for strongly agree). G\*Power was used to determine the minimum sample size required for a significance level of 0.05. An a priori power



analysis with a medium effect size, a significance level of 0.05, and a power of 0.95 suggests a minimal sample size of 138 for evaluating the developed research model. Out of 200 distributed questionnaires, a number of 178 questionnaires were returned, which is equivalent to a response rate of 89 per cent. It means that there were no response errors, as it exceeds the recommended response rate of 70 per cent (Nulty, 2008).

Prior to executing the measurement and structural analysis, a series of preliminary analyses were performed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software to exclude missing data and straight lining, followed by the PLS-SEM method. During the process of analysis, twelve sets of questionnaires were eliminated from the study, while the remaining 166 sets were utilised to assess the validity of the measurement model and to test hypotheses. Using the Partial Least Squares - Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) estimate technique, the WarpPLS software was used to perform the PLS-SEM analyses on the proposed research model (see Figure 1). PLS-SEM is used to predict and identify the key driver (Ramayah et al., 2018) and improve the validity of a study (Tenenhaus et al., 2005). Besides, due to the small sample size and non-normal distribution of the data, the PLS-SEM analysis was applied in this research study. According to Hair et al. (2017), a pattern of responses is considered to be non-normal if its skewness and kurtosis values are either larger than or equal to  $\pm 1$ . (see Table 1). Due to the fact that it takes into account both real composites and standard error of the mean (SEM) variables, it was decided that WarpPLS is the programme that is most suited for conducting an analysis of the developed research model. Additionally, in this research study, formative constructs were used as all the arrows of selected independence variables (destination resources, cultural uniqueness, accessibility quality, and accommodation quality) go to the latent variable (tourism destination competitiveness), as presented in Figure 2.

**Table 1: The Skewness and Excess Kurtosis**

	<b>DesRes</b>	<b>CulUniq</b>	<b>AccQual</b>	<b>Accom</b>	<b>TDC</b>	<b>RVI</b>
<b>Skewness</b>	-0.547	-0.722	-0.196	-0.728	-0.538	-0.900
<b>Exc.Kurtosis</b>	0.159	0.359	-0.685	0.987	-0.428	0.438

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Assessment of the Measurement Model

Confirmatory factor analysis, also known as CFA, was utilised to determine the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the measurement scales. This was done so that the construct's validity could be measured. All item loadings are greater than 0.50 (Bagozzi et al., 1991), and the composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) of all constructs are greater than 0.70 (Chin, 2010) and 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), respectively. Additionally, all item loadings are greater than 0.70 (Chin, 2010). In a nutshell, we were successful in maintaining internal consistency. In the discriminant validity analysis that is presented in Table 3, the value of AVE was square-rooted before being compared to the construct's correlation with other constructs in the research model. The results showed that all of the values were higher than the correlation of each individual

construct (Chin, 2010). This indicated that these underlined constructs were of adequate discriminant validity. Overall, the measurement model was completely satisfactory with the evident results of reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. For rural tourism destination competitiveness, the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) stood at 0.439, indicating a moderate model that explained more than 43.9 per cent of the construct (Cohen, 1998). However,  $R^2$  value for revisit intention recorded 0.374, indicating a moderate model that explained more than 37.4 per cent of the construct.

**Table 2: Results of Measurement Model**

<b>Model Construct</b>	<b>Measurement Item(s)</b>	<b>Loading</b>	<b>Composite Reliability (CR)</b>	<b>Average Variance Extracted (AVE)</b>
Destination Resources	DestRes_01	0.839	0.900	0.693
	DestRes_02	0.890		
	DestRes_03	0.877		
	DestRes_04	0.713		
Cultural Uniqueness	CulUniq_01	0.808	0.911	0.719
	CulUniq_02	0.881		
	CulUniq_03	0.862		
	CulUniq_04	0.838		
Accessibility Quality	AccessQ_01	0.725	0.833	0.560
	AccessQ_02	0.586		
	AccessQ_03	0.839		
	AccessQ_04	0.817		
Accommodation Quality	AccomQ_01	0.763	0.912	0.723
	AccomQ_02	0.896		
	AccomQ_03	0.883		
	AccomQ_04	0.851		
Tourism Destination Competitiveness	TDC_01	0.818	0.909	0.713
	TDC_02	0.865		
	TDC_03	0.883		
	TDC_04	0.810		
Revisit Intention	RVI_01	0.889	0.934	0.779
	RVI_02	0.874		
	RVI_03	0.874		
	RVI_04	0.894		

**Table 3: Discriminant Validity of Constructs**

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Destination Resources	<b>0.832</b>					
2. Cultural Uniqueness	0.639	<b>0.848</b>				
3. Accessibility Quality	0.405	0.435	<b>0.748</b>			
4. Accommodation Quality	0.496	0.480	0.580	<b>0.850</b>		
5. Tourism Destination Competitiveness	0.528	0.593	0.474	0.389	<b>0.845</b>	
6. Revisit Intention	0.493	0.574	0.448	0.455	0.609	<b>0.883</b>

Note: The diagonals reflect the square root of the extracted average variance (AVE), whereas the remaining entries represent correlations.

#### 4.2 Assessment of the Structural Model

The structural model was then going to be tested to see if the underlying hypotheses were supported. In the current investigation, the method of bootstrapping was applied to obtain t values for each of the hypothesised relationships. The outcomes of testing the hypotheses are summarised in Table 4, and Figure 2. For the testing of hypotheses with only one tail, the t value needs to be more than 1.645 ( $p < 0.05$ ) or 2.33 ( $p < 0.01$ ). In total, this research study examined five hypotheses of direct relationship (see Table 4). From a tourist perspective, the study discovered that destination resources ( $\beta = 0.207$ ;  $t = 2.758$ ), cultural uniqueness ( $\beta = 0.388$ ;  $t = 5.378$ ), and accessibility quality ( $\beta = 0.202$ ;  $t = 2.699$ ) all have a positive significant relationship with the competitiveness of rural tourism destinations. On the other hand, it was discovered that tourism destination competitiveness ( $\beta = 0.615$ ;  $t = 8.852$ ) has a significant positive relationship with revisit intention. Unfortunately, the research uncovered that accommodation quality ( $\beta = -0.015$ ;  $t = -0.187$ ) was not supported. In summary,  $H_1$ ,  $H_2$ ,  $H_3$ , and  $H_5$  were all supported by the statistical analysis, whereas  $H_4$  was not.

Another assessment of structural model was predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ). In this research study, the  $Q^2$  values for tourism destination competitiveness and revisit intention were set to 0.462 and 0.380, respectively, in line with Hair et al. (2017)'s suggestion that a  $Q^2$  value greater than zero is significant. This study obtained a highly predictive model.

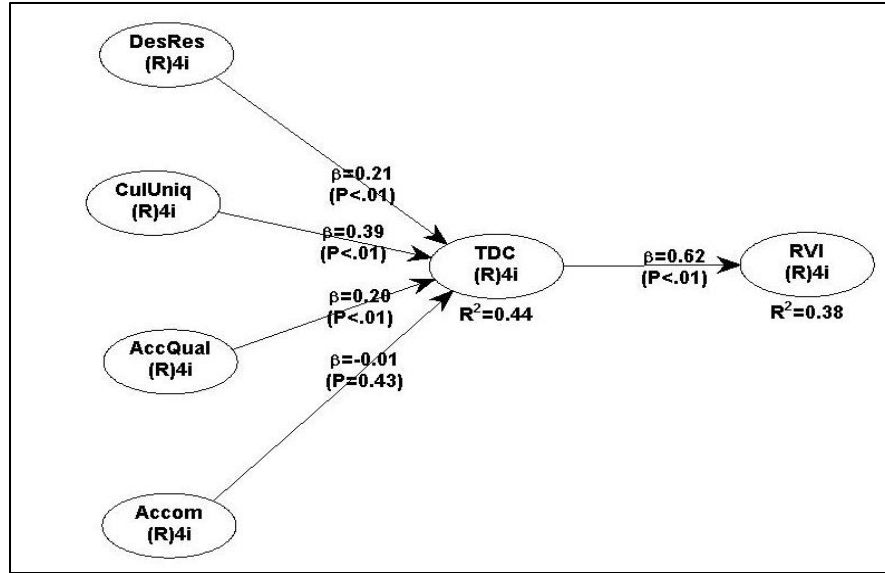


Figure 2: Assessment of the Structural Model

Table 4: Path Coefficient and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Standard Beta	P-value	t-value	Decision
H <sub>1</sub>	Destination Resources → Tourism Destination Competitiveness	0.207	<0.001	2.758**	Supported
H <sub>2</sub>	Cultural Uniqueness → Tourism Destination Competitiveness	0.388	<0.001	5.378**	Supported
H <sub>3</sub>	Accessibility Quality → Tourism Destination Competitiveness	0.202	<0.001	2.699**	Supported
H <sub>4</sub>	Accommodation Quality → Tourism Destination Competitiveness	-0.015	0.426	-0.187	Not Supported
H <sub>5</sub>	Tourism Destination Competitiveness → Revisit Intention	0.615	<0.001	8.852**	Supported

Note:  $p < 0.01$  \*\* =  $t > 2.33$ ;  $p < 0.05$  =  $t > 1.645$ \*

## 5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to analyse the effects of hard dimensions on the competitiveness of rural tourism destinations in rural Sarawak. Additionally, the research framework was developed to investigate the effect of tourism destination competitiveness on tourists' intention to revisit. The results indicated that  $H_1$ ,  $H_2$ ,  $H_3$ , and  $H_5$  were statistically supported. Surprisingly, it was discovered that  $H_4$  is not supported; there is no positive significant relationship between accommodation quality and tourism destination competitiveness.

For hypothesis 1, it was discovered that destination resources are positively associated with the competitiveness of rural tourism destinations from a tourist perspective ( $\beta = 0.207$ ;  $t = 2.758$ ). Previous research (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Abolfazl, 2012) established that a tourism destination's resource component is a critical factor in enhancing its competitiveness. Tourists are believed to be drawn to rural tourism destinations primarily because of their natural resources, which contribute to the destination's comparative advantage (Dugulan et al., 2010). According to statistical findings, tourists visiting Bario Highlands are enticed by the region's natural resources and tranquil environment. This is one of Bario Highlands' primary strengths.

Besides that, the statistical results for hypothesis 2 indicated a positive relationship between cultural uniqueness and rural tourism destination competitiveness ( $\beta = 0.388$ ;  $t = 5.378$ ). The statistical findings corroborate the study of Potashova and Girijchuk (2019). They discovered that cultural uniqueness is a critical component of a tourism destination's competitiveness. The Kelabit are an ethnic group in Sarawak's Bario Highlands. It is well-known for its one-of-a-kind culture and traditional dances. As a result, tourists are therefore believed that this cultural uniqueness was critical in enhancing the competitiveness of rural tourism destinations.

Furthermore, the statistical findings for hypothesis 3 ( $\beta = 0.202$ ;  $t = 2.699$ ) substantiated that accessibility quality has a significant contribution to the competitiveness of rural tourism destinations from a tourist perspective. It is understandable that tourists visiting Bario Highlands had a positive experience with accessibility. There are two primary routes to the Bario Highlands. One way is via a one-hour plus twin-otter flight from Miri City, or via an eight-hour four-wheel drive. However, almost all tourists who arrive in Bario do so via aeroplane. Thus, it is understandable that tourists find Bario Highlands' accessibility pleasant, as it contributes to the area's competitiveness.

Following that, the statistical results for hypothesis 5 shown a positive significant relationship between tourism destination competitiveness and tourists' intention to revisit ( $\beta = 0.615$ ;  $t = 8.852$ ). It is justifiable that tourists prefer to return to a competitive rural tourism destination. To be competitive as a tourism destination, it must possess several critical characteristics, including destination resources, cultural uniqueness, and high-quality supporting infrastructure. Indeed, a plethora of prior research has established that satisfaction and service quality are significant predictors of revisit intention. Interestingly,

this research discovered a significant relationship between the competitiveness of tourism destinations and tourists' intention to revisit rural tourism destinations.

## **6. Conclusions and Implications of the Study**

The outcome of the study is that the hard aspects of rural tourism destination competitiveness are substantial and strongly correlated with rural tourism destinations in Sarawak, Malaysia. In addition, it was demonstrated that the presence of a competing rural tourism site increases the possibility that visitors will return to the destination under examination. In conclusion, the findings of the path analysis contribute to the fundamental concept of destination competitiveness, with destination resources and cultural uniqueness serving as endowment resources (comparative advantage) and infrastructure (i.e., accessibility and accommodation quality) serving as created resources (competitive advantage) for the development of rural tourism destination competitiveness.

The current study makes a significant contribution to the advancement of both theory and management practises. To begin, the purpose of this study is to unavoidably and successfully build and improve the strategic guidelines for academics and practitioners who are interested in participating in the competitiveness of rural tourism destinations. This is the first study of its kind that investigates the influence of rural destination's hard dimensions on the competitiveness of rural tourism destinations in Sarawak, Malaysia. For example, In addition, this study demonstrated a relationship between destination competitiveness and revisit intention, which is noticeably absent from the previous research in this area. As a result, this study adds to the body of knowledge by contributing to it from the point of view of the geography of an Asian nation.

In terms of applicability, this study's findings are beneficial to local tourism stakeholders such as local communities, industry players, and tourism-related government departments about tourists' concerns when selecting rural tourism destinations. Tourism stakeholders can place a greater emphasis on these factors to help the destination maintain its competitiveness and long-term growth. With this in mind, tourism planners should consider the importance of tourism destination competitiveness and its potential to influence tourists' revisit intention to rural tourism destinations. A subsequent study could have examined the current research framework by including a moderator variable and conducting the study in a different location.

## **7. Limitation and Future Research**

Similar to other studies, research limitations need to be considered. Methodically, this study concentrated on the area of Bario Kelabit Highlands. The sample of study in this study is focused on domestic and international tourists who ever visited the Bario Kelabit Highlands, in Sarawak. Next, this study only focused on those who have experience (domestic and international tourists) in visiting Bario Kelabit Highlands, and did not consider the travellers. Other constraints were the nature of the study. The current study explained 44 per cent (56% remain unexplained) of the variance in tourism destination competitiveness and 38 per cent (56% remain unexplained) of variance in Tourists' revisit intention, respectively. Therefore, researcher should further improve the prediction power by selecting more relevant constructs in future. Due to the limitations of this research, the scholars can use this as foundation

information to ascertain more accurate predictors for tourism destination competitiveness and tourists' revisit intention. Nevertheless, the future researchers should conduct the on-going test and compare the similar dimensions on different rural tourism destinations.

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#### Appendix A – Measurement Items

Construct(s)	Item(s)	Sources
<b>Destination Resources</b>	i. The destination is clean and attractive. ii. The destination is harmony and relaxing. iii. The surrounding provides enough refreshment. iv. The destination provides sense of safety and security.	Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Canny & Hidayat, 2012; Yusof & Rahman, 2011
<b>Cultural Uniqueness</b>	i. Restoration on spiritual attractions is well-maintained. ii. Tourist attractions are much diversified. iii. There are preserved cultural and natural resources. iv. The destination is unique and to its best authentication.	Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Gutierrez, Lamoureux, Matus, & Sebunya, 2005;
<b>Accessibility Quality</b>	i. Accessibility to destination is nothing complex. ii. Car parks facility is available and sufficient. iii. Mode of transportations to destination are satisfactory. iv. The accommodation is strategic and convenient.	Canny & Hidayat, 2012; Chi & Qu, 2008; Yusof & Rahman, 2011

<b>Accommodation Quality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. My hotel/ motel is very cosy.</li> <li>ii. Hotel staffs are very attentive in offering hospitality.</li> <li>iii. Hotel staffs are very tactful and friendly.</li> <li>iv. Food and accommodation are charged reasonably.</li> </ul>	Canny & Hidayat, 2012; Chi & Qu, 2008; Yusof & Rahman, 2011
<b>Tourism Destination Competitiveness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. This place has high commitment in providing safe and secure environment.</li> <li>ii. There is a good variety of tourism activities offered to visitors.</li> <li>iii. There are high quality infrastructures in this place.</li> <li>iv. There are unique tourism resources which attract visitors to this place.</li> </ul>	Crouch & Ritchie, 1999; Hassan, 2000; Dwyer & Kim, 2003
<b>Revisit Intention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. I will revisit the destination in future.</li> <li>ii. I never regret visiting this destination.</li> <li>iii. I anticipated the sense of joy that made me to come.</li> <li>iv. There are high chances that I will return to destination for holiday.</li> </ul>	Artuğer 2015; Aziz et al., 2011;