



CRUCIAL HUMAN CAPITAL RESOURCES AND ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY: AN INSIGHT INTO COMMUNITY-BASED RURAL HOMESTAY PROGRAMME

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Abstract:

Sustaining economic aspect of a tourism initiative is highly related to the resource's optimization. Community-based rural homestay (CBRH) programme in Malaysia has been introduced by the government to develop rural communities through their engagement in tourism activities. The government agencies have provided various supports including financial, and trainings to enable the CBRH programme to attract more tourists and eventually to sustain in the tourism industry. However, recent statistics indicate more operators withdrawn from the programme as it does not generate additional income as intended. Several challenges in relation to the resources have been identified as obstacles to the economic growth of the CBRH programme. Hence, using the Resource-based View (RBV) theory this study identifies the crucial resources utilized in CBRH programme to ensure the economic sustainability of the programme. Quantitative research approach will be employed using a questionnaire survey to examine the relationship of crucial human capital resources towards the economic sustainability of the programme. The findings of this study will enhance the theoretical understanding on the economic sustainability of CBRH program and offer a suitable approach and recommendation guidelines to the stakeholders.

Keywords:

Community-Based Tourism, Economic Sustainability, Homestay, Human Capital, Resources, Resource-Based View

Introduction

Tourism industry in Malaysia is one of the largest contributors to the country's gross domestic product. With the considerations of reviving from the pandemic COVID-19, the tourism industry players in Malaysia have strived to regain the excellent performance that was experienced prior to COVID-19 as shown in Figure 1. Efforts have been made thus far whereby in 2023 there were 20.1 million of tourist arrivals, which generated RM71.3 billion in tourist receipts (Tourism Malaysia, 2023). Similarly, much effort has been promoted by the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC) to revive and sustain the community-based tourism (CBT) initiatives as these initiatives have also been affected by the COVID-19 issues.

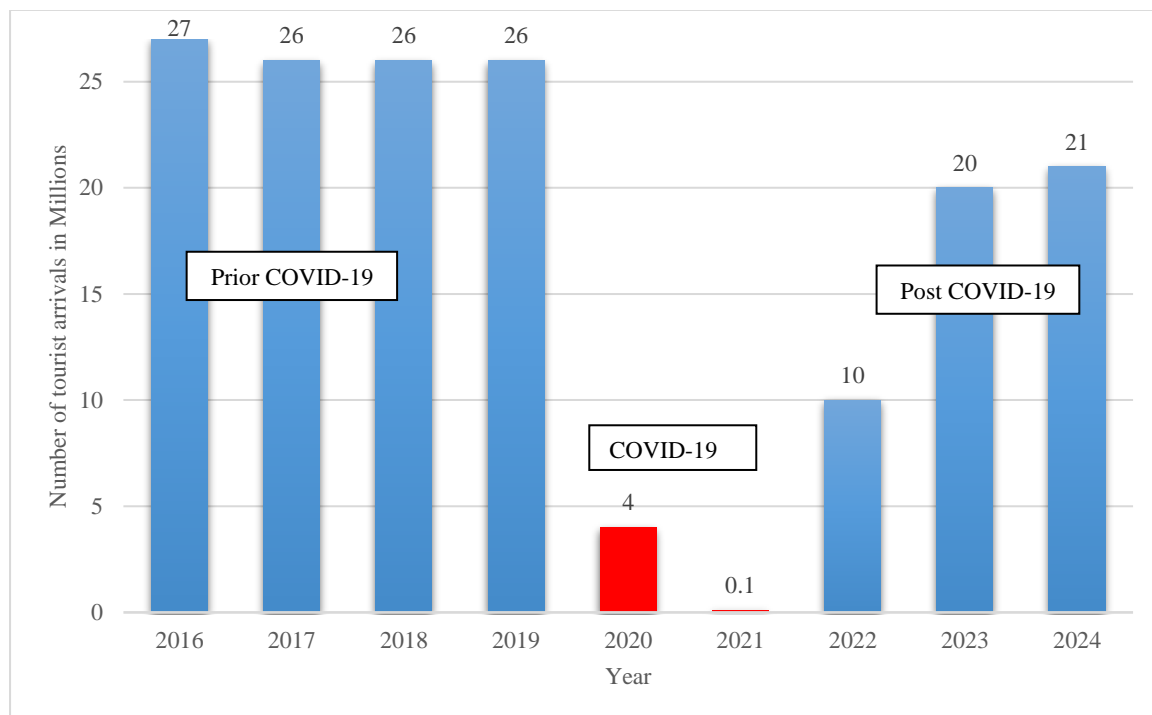


Figure 1: Tourist Arrivals to Malaysia

Source: Tourism Malaysia (2023)

An established CBT initiative in Malaysia is the community-based rural homestay (CBRH) programme, initiated in 1995 (Ramele & Yamazaki, 2020). A CBRH programme aims to reduce income imbalances between the rural and urban areas through the creation of the new economic activity, which takes the opportunity of tourism elements that are in the vicinity (Ibrahim & Razzaq, 2010). This programme involved a group of villagers registered with MOTAC and individually they are known as the homestay operators. CBRH programme offered a refreshing rural environment and local community lifestyle experience to the visitors (Kayat, Zainuddin, Ramli, & Mat Kassim, 2016).

Table 1: Comparison Number of CBRH Programmes and Operators in Malaysia in the Year 2019 And 2023

No.	State	CBRH		Operators	
		2019	2023	2019	2023
1.	Perlis	3	4	56	42
2.	Kedah	17	15	356	206
3.	Pulau Pinang	11	10	234	155

No.	State	CBRH		Operators	
4.	Perak	11	11	305	145
5.	Selangor	16	16	449	222
6.	Negeri Sembilan	13	8	288	130
7.	Melaka	9	9	137	157
8.	Johor	27	26	556	465
9.	Kelantan	8	8	152	122
10.	Terengganu	11	7	216	104
11.	Pahang	16	17	323	331
12.	Sarawak	44	49	653	706
13.	Sabah	30	34	406	441
14.	Labuan	3	3	79	80
	Total	219	217	4,210	3,306

Source: (MOTAC, 2019 and MOTAC, 2023)

The number of CBRH programmes and operators has been reported to be declining in recent years as shown in Table 1. It can be seen that in 2019, that is prior to the COVID-19 pandemic the number of CBRH programmes was 219, while in 2023 the number was 212. While the number of CBRH operators is dropping from 4210 in 2019 to 3306 in 2023. The uncertainty of demands and difficulties to maintain the supplementary income generation from the programme has led the operators to withdraw from the programme as highlighted in the past studies by Khan et al. (2024) and Yong et al. (2024). This situation is quite a concern to the operators of the CBRH programme as generating economic benefits are the main motivation for them to participate in the programme.

Subsequently, throughout the existence of the CBRH programme, there are several challenges in economic aspect. Firstly, it has been discovered that there are cases of incompetent leadership issues (Horssen, Fabel, & Mohiddin, 2024; Abas, Halim, & Hanafiah, 2022; Zulkefli, Che Aziz, & Mohd Radzol, 2021), which greatly affected the sustainability of the programme, specifically the economic benefits. Secondly, it has been identified that many operators are lacking in having the entrepreneurial mindset as suggested by Chandhasaa and Pattanapanithipongb (2024) and Yong et. al (2024) The entrepreneurial mindset is important since the CBRH programme is a tourism business initiative. Finally, the CBRH programmes especially in Malaysia are facing problems in marketing their homestay services and products due to poor promotion through technology usage and social media (Anuar & Qian, 2024; Khan et al., 2024; Kunjuraman, 2022). One of the main issues confronting the CBRH programme is the difficulty faced by visitors in obtaining information regarding homestays and availability (Gusti, Adriansyah, & Waluyo, 2024). These three challenges build a foundation for associating to three respective skills, which are leadership skills, entrepreneurial competencies and social media engagement. These elements are important since they can be recognized as contributing factors to evaluate the economic sustainability of the CBRH programme (Nurfadilah, Syah, Suci, Ginanjar, & Hamida, 2024; Suardana, Astuti, Jaya, & Taufik, 2024).

Economic sustainability in tourism business initiative is crucial to ensure a wide range of economic benefits to the local communities (Gantait, Matthew, Chatterjee, & Singh, 2024; Zamzuki et al., 2023), which eventually could improve the overall community development. This is so since the CBT related activities are the focal contributions to the local tourism business initiative, thus able to sustain the CBRH programme. Economic sustainability can be

referred to the creation of wealth at various levels of the community and focuses on the cost-effectiveness of economic activities (United Nations Environment Programme & World Tourism Organization, 2005). More importantly, the CBRH programmes' viability and their capability can be sustained over long term. Therefore, this paper attempts to highlight the CBT related business initiative by exploring the crucial elements as possible drivers to improve the economic sustainability of CBRH programmes in Malaysia.

Literature Review: Crucial Resources and Economic Sustainability

In this section, crucial resources and economic sustainability are discussed and elaborated as follows.

Resources

In general, resources are those assets that are cemented semi-permanently to an organization or entity (Alvarez & Torres-Barreto, 2018). The organisations then utilize those assets to develop, manufacture, and deliver products and services to its customers. In the case of CBRH, the tourism business initiative may utilize the assets surrounding the community to create products and services for visitors to experience. Barney (1991) emphasized that resources can be grouped into three categories, namely physical capital, human capital and organizational capital as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Categories of Resources

Categories of Resources	
1. Physical capital resources	Physical assets are such as building, and machineries used in the organisation.
2. Human capital resources	Human capital resources are such as the training, experience, judgement, intelligence, relationships, and insight of individual managers and workers in an organisation.
3. Organizational capital resources	Organizational capital resources are such as the organization's formal reporting structure, formal and informal planning, controlling, and coordinating systems, informal relations among groups within an organization and between an organization and those in its environment.

Source: (Barney, 1991)

Physical capital resources in tourism refer to the tangible assets that contribute to the tourism industry. Those assets include buildings, infrastructure, and attractions that enable communities to engage in tourism while enhancing the visitor experience (Kry et al., 2020). While organization capital resources can be regarded as the combination of tangible and intangible assets used by the tourism initiatives to organize their business activities. These resources include the organizational structure and social capital of a tourism business initiative (Aminudin & Jamal, 2024; Auliah et al., 2024).

In relation to service type of business initiative, the human capital resources are the essence of the business operation (Li & Qamruzzaman, 2022). Among the important human capital resources are leadership skills, entrepreneurial competencies and social media engagement skills (Khan et al., 2024; Kunjuran, 2024; Aljazeera & Hamdan, 2023; Costa et al., 2023;

Manuti, Impedovo, & de Palma, 2016). Basically, these resources are the basic units of analysis for Resource-based View (RBV) theory as discussed in the following section.

Resource-based Theory

RBV theory emphasized on the relevant resources that could be used to create competitive advantage. Competition becomes a crucial issue that need to be addressed properly as suggested by Simarmata, Kusumastuti, and Wijaya (2024) in order to be successful in any business initiative. Similarly, in a CBRH programme, the resources are crucial in this tourism-based initiative, where there are variation of products and services from natural resources that make the CBRH programme unique. For example, there are many communities in villages that run the CBRH programmes throughout the country and the most important thing is the difference that each of these CBRH programmes provide. The difference is the key strategy to attract visitors to choose the particular CBRH programme. Subsequently, all these important resources contribute to the economic sustainability of an organization including the CBRH programmes.

Economic Sustainability in Tourism Initiatives

Indeed, ensuring the economic sustainability of a CBRH programme is a success indicator for the programme (Khan et al., 2024). In general, the economic impact can be seen when the tourism activities are continued to benefit the local community through job opportunities and side incomes (Zamzuki et al., 2023). The tourism small business initiatives are expected to make a sustained profit through products and services offered to the tourists (Nurfadilah, Syah, Suci, Ginanjar, & Hamida, 2024; Yong et al., 2024). In order to realize the objectives of the programme, a CBRH programme need to fully utilize the resources in their community (Simarmata, Kusumastuti, & Wijaya, 2024). The resources mentioned in the past studies as illustrated in Table 3 below are such as incorporating the usage of social media in their marketing and promotional efforts, enhancing entrepreneurial skills and improving human resource capacity (Meneses, Costa, Ferreira, & Eusebio, 2024; Nurfadilah, Syah, Suci, Ginanjar, & Hamida, 2024; Janjua, Krishnapillai, & Rahman, 2021).

Table 3: Past Studies related to Economic Sustainability in Tourism

No	Title	Author(s)	Journal	Methodology / theory	Findings
1.	Use and Adoption of Website and Social Media Marketing: Insights from Homestay Business Owners	Anuar & Qian (2024)	Information Management and Business Review	Qualitative	Adoption of social media to increase visibility and improve interaction with prospect visitors.
2.	Achieving sustainable competitiveness of tourism dynamics with	Simarmata, Kusumastuti, & Wijaya (2024)	European Journal of Innovation Management	Qualitative RBV Theory	Tourism destination must utilize valuable, rare and inimitable (VRI) resources and

No	Title	Author(s)	Journal	Methodology / theory	Findings
3.	resource-based view The Issues and Challenges of Homestay Business Sustainability in Selangor and Perlis: In the Lens of Social, Economic and Environmental Factors.	Khan et al. (2024)	Educational Administration : Theory and Practice	Qualitative	capabilities to sustain. By recognising the unique value of homestays and allocating resources accordingly are crucial for sustainable homestay programme.
4.	Community Homestay Management Assistance	Nurfadilah, Syah, Suci, Ginanjar, & Hamida (2024)	Advances in Community Services Research	Qualitative	Enhancing service quality and management in community-based homestays fosters economic sustainability by improving human resource capacity and attracting tourism. Challenges in Economic sustainability are reliance on government funding, poor marketing strategies, and financial mismanagement, leading to in adequate income generation for operators.
5.	Sustainability of community-based tourism through the lens of homestays operators in rural area of Penang, Malaysia	Nor (2024)	Geografia-Malaysian Journal of Society and Space	Qualitative	The major research themes considered are sustainable tourism, tourism policy, economic
6.	A bibliometric overview of economic sustainability in tourism	Meneses, Costa, Ferreira, & Eusebio (2024)	European Journal of Tourism, Hospitality and Recreation	Qualitative	

No	Title	Author(s)	Journal	Methodology / theory	Findings
7.	The Effects of Homestay Capabilities on Homestay Performance in Sabah	Dawayan, Jr, Tanakinjal, Boniface, & Nasip (2021)	Journal of Responsible Tourism Management	Quantitative RBV Theory	indicators, tourism sustainability, and entrepreneurship. The findings suggest that homestays need to emphasize on all the capabilities to be able to improve their performance, and be competitive in the tourism industry.
8.	A systematic literature review of rural homestays and sustainability in tourism	Janjua, Krishnapillai, & Rahman (2021)	Sage Open	Qualitative	Important topics like homestay branding, homestay and entrepreneurship, homestays and information and communication technology (ICT) competency, homestay operator's training and development about sustainability—are rarely addressed in the existing literature.
9.	Sustainable Tourism Development and Economic Growth: Bibliometric	León-Gómez, Ruiz-Palomo, Fernández-Gámez, &	Sustainability	Quatitative Sustainable tourism development,	Results found that research on the impact of sustainable tourism on economic

No	Title	Author(s)	Journal	Methodology / theory	Findings
	Review and Analysis	García-Revilla, (2021)		economic growth	growth has mainly focused on the areas of hospitality, green and sustainable technology, and environmental sciences. Therefore, it would be interesting to address new areas of study that extend the results obtained.

Source: (Author's Compilation)

Therefore, the sustainability in terms of economic of a tourism initiative can be regarded as how the local community use their local resources efficiently, with the fair distribution of the benefits in achieving the long-term profitability (Meneses, Costa, Ferreira, & Eusebio, 2024; Choi & Sirakaya, 2006). It is suggested that a framework related to economic sustainability can be adapted based on Barney (1991) as illustrated in Figure 1. In relation to economic sustainability of any tourism business initiative including that of CBT such as CBRH programmes, the important resources are the human capital resources as suggested in Figure 1. These resources could improve the capacity CBRH programmes and the ability of attracting visitors.

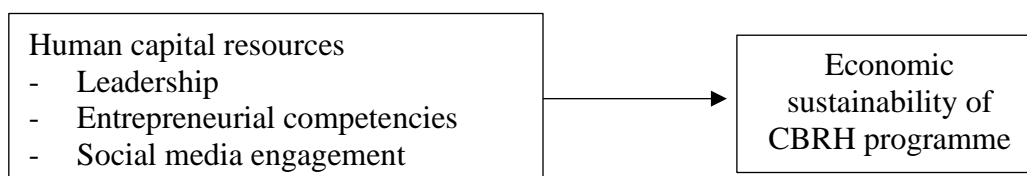


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Economic Sustainability

Source: (Conceptual Framework proposed by Author)

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research approach involving a questionnaire survey. The target respondents are the homestay operators registered with MOTAC. The population in this study encompasses 520 CBRHP operators in the northern region of Malaysia. Accordingly, a minimum sample size of 138 was determined using G*Power 3.1 software to proceed with the data collection. Subsequently, the items measurement used in the questionnaire were adapted from the past studies. This study considered a cross-sectional sample survey whereby the questionnaire will be distributed using personal visits to collect the data from respondents. Next, descriptive analysis and hypothesis testing will be carried out using IBM SPSS and SmartPLS software respectively.

Conclusion

Tourism industry of Malaysia is recovering intensively after the COVID-19 situation with significant increase in international tourist arrivals. Efforts to promote CBT and cultural experiences are attracting diverse visitors, domestically and internationally. Challenges remain in community-based tourism initiatives, especially from the aspect of human capital resources such as incompetent leadership, lack of entrepreneurial mindset, and poor promotion and technology usage. Lacking these resources would jeopardize the sustainability of economic aspects in a CBT initiative.

Hence, it is crucial to study the human capital resources, specifically the leadership skills, entrepreneurial competencies and social media engagement skills towards the economic sustainability of the CBRH programmes. It is important to study on the economic sustainability as it is an essential measure to evaluate the success of community-based tourism initiatives, such as the CBRH programmes towards improving community development.

Future studies could focus on establishing an appropriate framework that illustrate the role of these resources in relation to the economic sustainability of the CBRH programmes. This framework may be used as a guide for tourism strategies in enhancing the development of rural communities in the country. In addition, this framework could raise the level of understanding at the grassroot level that CBT business initiative is able to contribute to the nation's economy through the innovative and unique ideas of CBRH programme.

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