

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK FOR A SUSTAINABLE SEA TURTLE CONSERVATION MARKETING: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

The engagement of local community in environmental and marine life conservation is crucial for the development of a successful conservation promotion and other related initiatives. This would possibly lead to a sustainable conservation and marine-based tourism and community-based strategies for environmental planning and management. Given the attention of sea turtle conservation in the islands on the east coast of Peninsula Malaysia, the symbiotic relationship between local communities and the environment could become the most effective common marketing strategy in promoting sea turtle conservation, which has not been explored extensively now. Considering the above, this paper aims at developing a community engagement framework for a sustainable sea turtle conservation and other related tourism activities. The methodology of this conceptual paper is based on the development of community engagement factor as it was developed in previous studies. Besides that, the conceptual framework was also based on community perceptions over current scenario of sea turtle egg trade and local tourism authority matters. Apart from developing a novel community engagement framework for sea turtle conservation, the study will also raise the issue of understanding of marine life conservation from the eyes of the local community at the targeted settings. Since sea turtle conservation has a huge potential for Malaysia's marine-based tourism to explore and for the local communities to benefit from, it is hoped that the findings of this study will guide local government, Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia and related NGOs to understand the role of community in sea turtle conservation related issues.

Keywords : Community Engagement ; Conservation Marketing ; Sea Turtle Conservation;

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The local community is an essential element of the system to mobilize the redevelopment of tourism destination sites. At World Heritage Sites (WHS), for instance, local community is proven to be part and parcel to promote the sustainability of the sites and simultaneously to make use of the opportunities for subsistence and/or income generating purposes. As stated in the National Policy of Biological Diversity 2016-2025, the agenda of public education and awareness regarding conservation have been emphasized as the first plan of action. This shows the commitment of the government in empowering the community for the conservation efforts. Involvement of the community in conservation initiatives can be in many forms, from the highest level participatory in the decision-making processes to the lowest level voluntary promotional activities of the heritage sites. By definition, community engagement encompasses all collaborative actions of the members of the community in achieving common goals and making the community a better place to live (McCloskey & Cook, 2013). Like in any other marine tourism destinations, islands on the east coast of peninsula Malaysia as well as in

Borneo have their local communities that benefit directly and indirectly from the marine-based economy. To the communities, their involvement in the tourism development is of paramount importance, i.e., it is parallel to their socio-economic needs and their pursuit of a better quality of life. Most importantly, the participation of the community has tremendous impact on their spirit of fellowship amongst the residents, sense of attachment to the community shared values and appreciation towards the local area and sustainable conservation programs (Jaafar, Noor & Rasoolimanesh, 2015). Despite the importance of local community engagement to the cause of environmental conservation, their engagement in the promotion of marine life and heritage conservation have rarely been discussed of late. A century-long history of sea turtle egg trade and the problem of political authority in conservation-related matters have also exacerbated hindrance to community engagement from moving forward.

Number of studies have acknowledged active participation of local community in destination promotional initiatives as recommendable; in which the residents are seen to play an increasingly significant role in disseminating information about the place through their understanding of the destination's shared values and culture as well as local content and tacit knowledge (Vollero, Conte, Bottoni & Siano, 2018). Despite generation long human-marine species damaging interactions history, residents also need to be educated about the economic benefit of marine conservation efforts, which, in turn, will result in local buy in for conservation activities (Teh, Teh & Jolis, 2018). Local community is regarded as destination brand ambassador for tourism and conservation through a strong bond of relationship, i.e., the kind of community-conservation relationship is one of emulation that provides motivation for the investment of recognition and appreciation of the nature leading towards attaining a certain standard of marketing communication of the conservation effort.

The subject raised in this research will specifically spark the interest of the local and federal government as well as NGOs related to sea turtle conservation in Malaysia such as Perhentian Turtle Project and Borneo Tourism Research Centre. The issues related to the political power of authority and the rights of the community and NGOs are common and pressing now. Dr Muhammad Abdul Latiff Abu Bakar in his article published in *Astro Awani* argued that various parties must work together to combat the issues that disaggregating important views of NGOs and the community in matters pertaining to wildlife conservation (Abu Bakar, 2021). The government of Malaysia through its responsible body of authority, has allocated millions of Malaysia Ringgit on promotional and advertising campaigns. But the presence of local community as destination brand ambassadors might have an amplified impact if their level of attachment, commitment and participation and support for turtle conservation cause are deliberately examined and further enriched for better results in promotional initiative. This is the reason why the development of such research framework is important to understand the factors that may have impact on community engagement in the marketing of conservation-related matters. In this instance, the conservation of sea turtle in Malaysia. Therefore, this paper will propose a study that focuses on the level of local community engagement in sea turtle conservation and understanding the impact of community factors on the turtle conservation marketing. This study investigates that community attachment, community commitment, community participation, community support for conservation positively affects their engagement in turtle conservation promotion.

To develop a community engagement framework and assessing the impact it has on conservation tourism, initiatives or promotional activities, a detailed framework and term of reference to which local communities are referring to at any point in time are essential to substantiate a more stringent and predictive structure. In this study, it is opined that the formation of agreement towards engagement in turtle conservation promotional activities depends on the community' macro perspective on community factors (i.e., community attachment, community commitment, community participation and community support for tourism development) and community responsible wildlife conservation perceptions. Indeed, the local communities' qualitative insights on experiences and perceptions with issues revolving local community could also have a significant impact on the overall agreement of engagement in conservation promotion interactions. This is due to local communities' varied perceptions of various roles and functions in their community.

At this point, some questions need to be answered:

- i. How does local community degree of attachment affect their engagement in sea turtle conservation marketing?
- ii. How does local community degree of commitment affect their engagement in sea turtle conservation marketing?
- iii. How does local community degree of participation affect their engagement in sea turtle conservation marketing?
- iv. How does local community degree of support for conservation affect their engagement in sea turtle conservation marketing?
- v. How does local community perceptions of turtle egg trade affect their engagement in turtle conservation marketing?
- vi. How does local community perceptions in ecotourism development affect their engagement in turtle conservation marketing?
- vii. How does local community perceptions of power to influence tourism has a positive effect on their engagement in sea turtle conservation marketing?

All in all, the study will focus on:

- i. The level of local community degree of attachment in relation to sea turtle conservation marketing.
- ii. The level of local community degree of commitment in relation to sea turtle conservation marketing.
- iii. The level of local community degree of participation in relation to sea turtle conservation marketing.
- iv. The level local community degree of support for conservation in relation to sea turtle conservation marketing.
- v. The level of local community perceptions of turtle egg trade in relation to sea turtle conservation marketing.
- vi. The level of local community perceptions in ecotourism development in relation to sea turtle conservation marketing.
- vii. The level of local community perceptions of power to influence tourism in relation to sea turtle conservation marketing.

In a nutshell, a successful and sustainable sea turtle conservation marketing will require collaborative effort from various parties including the local community. One of the steps will involve creating awareness among the community perceptions and their engagement towards tourism development or marine life. Given the highest interest in sea turtle research, monitoring and management, it is timely to seek opinion from the community about the most important research questions in order to assist sea turtle conservation marketing. This study will be, by any means, the first attempt to collate and something relevant research questions

to assist sea turtle conservation marketing to involve at a smaller community setting, as similar efforts at other local, regional and international scales have occurred.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Community Degree of Attachment

In conservation context, the word of community attachment is being referred to which residents of a place possess cognitive or affective ties to each other and to that place. Community attachment or many researchers refers to as placement attachment refers to the bonding that occurs between individuals and their meaningful environments. It is also referring to a group of people that feeling about that situation especially place, national, regional and personality of place. It is simply put as the connection among the residents towards a community at an emotional or affective level based on how they understand and embrace the common customs and shared values into community life. Eusébio, Vieira and Lima (2018) stated that community attachment is an indicator to community's attitudes towards tourism development. It is not the commitment one has over its community, but it implies an individualistic perspective, concerned with an individual's social participation and integration into community life, and an emotional link to a specific community. From a local community's perspective, the attachment can be measured through the importance assigned to the authenticity of the locality. As a result of community attachment, support for tourism development can be expressed in a variety of ways, such as voting, contributions and willingness to participate in community meetings as well as in promoting conservation activities. A local resident who has high level of community attachment is normally seen to have full support of tourism and high tendency to promote the place to others (Stylidis, 2018). Therefore, it is fair to hypothesize that community attachment and the spirit of motivation to the degree of attachment will lead community toward sea turtle conservation activities.

2.2 Community Degree of Commitment

Commitment refers to the desire to maintain a valued relationship. In the context of community, community commitment refers to the spirit one has that enable him/her to willingly give a hand and to volunteer to commit any works related to the community he/she is residing. Community commitment built on the model of emotional solidarity developed by an individual. Community commitment is defined by the propensity of local community to develop and maintain strong bond between community member and the collective values shared among them. It is said to exist when local individuals feel a sense of belonging in their community, psychological attachment to other community members, comfortable exchanging opinions with other community members, and love to get involved and participate in community activities. Vollero, Conte, Bottoni and Siano (2018) found that the local community who share collective values of their community play an active role in place service activities and tend to be more engaged in promotional activities of the community they live in. Their participation and commitment greatly enhance the success of the tourism industry. As a matter of fact, many government authorities rely on local communities to commit to their communities to achieve sustainable tourism development and benefit from industry. Thus, it is assumed that when the level of commitment is high among the community, they will internalize the needs and wants of others in the community to reap potential benefits from the tourism industry, hence giving way to positive perception toward conservation activities (Moghavvemi, Woosnam, Paramanathan, Musa & Hamzah, 2017).

2.3 Community Degree of Participation

One of most reported factors to local residents' community engagement in tourism development is their level of participation in the community. Community participation is a relationship established by residents of the community themselves through their cooperation in striving to achieve common goals and make their community a better place to live. Although many researchers have acknowledged abundance of study were conducted on community participation in development and related benefit distribution projects, few have studied the practical relationship between community involvement and the actual impact on conservation targets. Cheng, Wu, Wang and Wu (2019) suggested participation could be enhanced by applying a few mechanisms such as cohesion and insight for consciousness events. Community participation was also apparent as a recurrent practice which in most cases influenced by multiple factor within local environment. It is, therefore, important to understand the interaction of community participation in tourism-led community development strategies and if a realistic approach is taken, community participation is a worthwhile endeavor (Mayaka, Croy & Cox, 2018).

2.4 Community Degree of Support for Tourism Development

Community support for tourism development may direct individual's favourable behaviour towards a particular touristic object and offer voluntary influential action in their circle of social group. In a social group, individuals are expected to obey to what has been acknowledged. In this context, community support needs a validation from the local community and tourism development contributes towards improving the cause the upholding i.e. tourism and sea turtle conservation as equally important as towards improving their quality of life. It is common to gain community support to tourism-related activities, if and only if, the benefits are well-communicated to related parties involved. A good community-tourism development relationship is influenced by factors attributed by the host, among others, lack of tourism-related benefits (Matseketsa, Mukamuri, Muboko & Gandiwa, 2019). Adongo, Choe and Han (2017) opined that community support is important in a heritage tourism setting largely contributed by community perception of economic and sociocultural impacts tourism development have on their wellbeing.

2.5 Community Perception of Sea Turtle Egg Trade

Although the trade of sea turtle eggs is regulated and enforced by the law in Malaysia and the restriction is made under the state government, for instance, Terengganu state government has long established its sea turtle protection initiative. However, the consumption of the eggs is still noticeable. Today sea turtle egg traders are still free to sell the eggs because of the high demand from the consumers. Meenakshi, Khaulah, Jean, Jarina, Uzair & Farid (2018) argued that raising awareness among the community, the young ones, is the key to address exploitation against wildlife and a strategy to reduce the consumption of sea turtle eggs in the market. They opined that local community's full comprehension of economic benefit of tourism could potentially increase the conservation values of sea turtles.

2.6 Community Perceptions in Ecotourism Development

Most studies on ecotourism development suggesting that local residents have strong believe toward the positive impacts ecotourism could bring to the community. Sayektiningsih, Nugroho, Yassir, Sari, Ma'ruf, Mukhlisi and Suryanto (2019) stated that tourism practitioners have to accommodate the aspirations and expectation of the community in optimizing benefits of ecotourism, which in turn would lead to responsible tourism behaviour among the community.

2.7 Community Perception of Power to Influence Tourism

It was projected that one's perception of power and authority is an important indicator to his/her overall engagement in the development of a community (Grzeskowiak, Sirgy & Widgery, 2003). It is indeed congruent to the psychological concept of locus of control. Researchers argue that people who perceive themselves as having more control over aspects which affect their lives are most satisfied with their lives. However, in a study by Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2011), this dimension was not evident. In Malaysian context, where comparative power distance index is high, community who perceive their level of power could potentially influence tourism development could be a major indicator to their overall engagement to tourism promotional activities.

3. METHODOLOGY

Surveys are born out of the needs of modern state bureaucracies, as the term statistics implies. Like other research that requires a statistical approach in analyzing the data, this research used a quantitative research method, specifically a survey design. The rationale for using a survey design in this research is as follows:

First, the purpose of employing a survey design is to develop the measurement. To do that, a series of focus group sessions will be conducted to develop the measurement of the constructs. Second, a survey design will be developed, and this entails relatively low costs for research that requires a large sample. Third, the use of standardized questions in a survey design makes it easier for the researcher to administer the interview sessions. It is also less labour-intensive as compared to other qualitative methods such as focus groups and experiments. Fourth, a survey design is appropriate for computer-based statistical analysis where closed-ended items can be easily coded, transferred onto a computer file, administered, and manipulated. And fifth, as for the respondents, a survey design is ideal for recording their responses at their own pace. Furthermore, the instruments used in a survey are specially designed to maintain the respondents' interest during the interview and, most importantly, they are designed to make it easy for respondents to understand.

Before proceeding to the sample design, the first step is to define the research population. The population of the research is the local community in islands projected for marine life conservation programs on the east coast of Malaysia. Since access to any specific and complete sampling frames for residents in these places is rather unfeasible, this led the researcher to opt for a non-probability sampling design. One of the non-probability sampling designs used to reduce selection biases is quota sampling where a uniform percentage from the population is used to select a similar allocation for the sample (a known proportion from every target community setting).

A thorough assessment of conceptual and metric equivalence of the measures is important as the current research is investigating a group of samples whose first language is non-English. Firstly, to materialize the conceptual equivalence of the measures, two sets of questionnaires will be produced in English and in Malaysia's national language through a careful process of back-translations. The questionnaire will be developed in English from a series of focus group session. Additional items will also be taken from other previous literature in order to develop a distinctive scale best suited to the current setting. The questionnaire will then be translated into the Malaysian language and back-translated into English by a third party to ensure consistency. To ensure that the data will be collected in an organized manner within the stipulated period, a standard procedure will be designed. The procedure is deemed necessary to minimize bias and to ensure randomness in the selection of respondents, despite

the non-probability sampling design. The procedure of data collection will involve the identification of the location, time, and method to approach potential respondents. First, the study will identify suitable outreach programs and locations; the strategy will be to organize outreach programs in communal areas where residents can easily be gathered. Secondly, following the identification of the locations, the study must allocate a suitable time to approach the potential respondents. Since the interview will take a considerable time to complete (approximately 10 minutes), the next strategy is to employ several enumerators to approach potential respondents.

4. CONCLUSION

Malaysia has signed seven biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) to provide protection for its biodiversity. Malaysian government has demonstrated the commitment towards protection of biodiversity as stated in the National Policy of Biological Diversity 2016-2025. In spite of the commitment and effort, human damaging interaction to some endangered species is still common and continues to happen. This study would be a reference for policy maker to make amendment for instance, Enakmen Penyu Terengganu 1951 (Pindaan 1987). It is hoped that it will provide a framework of community factors for a sustainable sea turtle conservation and a focus on marine tourism with marine conservation as the main focal point. In addition, the new developed framework may suggest a new assessment of sea turtle conservation promotion database of Malaysia. This information could be used to formulate a better management and marketing strategies for turtle tourism and image enhancement program in Malaysia. This study is also useful as a guideline in creating and introducing programs to enhance community's education in sea turtle conservation and knowledge in values and appreciation of community engagement towards tourism development and conservation program.

Understanding the importance of community in this conservation programme, the community engagement framework is highly likely to have a huge impact on quality of life of the community as well as on the ecosystems of the endangered species. With the framework. conservation programmes could be organized to highlights the cost and benefits trade-offs to the community, to facilitate stakeholder buy-in and to potentially contribute to more effective marine management and planning. This study is, therefore, deemed important not only to the conservation of sea turtles but to the targeted community.

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