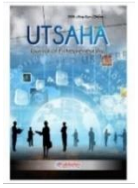

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Factors Influencing the Community-Based Ecotourism Development in Cambodia: Structural Equation Model Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Community-based ecotourism (CBET) aims to empower local communities through engagement and participation in Cambodia. This study investigates the relationship among tourism destination love, community engagement, socio-cultural attributes, support for CBET, perceived impact likelihood, community economic benefits, and CBET development in ecotourism sites and biodiversity conservation by drawing on a case study of the main eight ecotourism areas in Cambodia. The study used a quantitative research approach to investigate and parameterize the dynamic ecotourism components, and to explore key factors influencing the CBET using a self-administered survey by intercepted 406 visitors and structured questionnaire items were asked local communities who provide tourism services to visitors in eco-tourism destination sites in November 2022 and March 2023. The results of SEM indicated that all relationships among research variables (as proposed in the conceptual model) were significantly impacted and confirmed by this study. This means that CBET requires additional essential support from the resources listed above in order to grow in local communities in Cambodia.

Keywords: *Community-Based Ecotourism (CBET), Structural Equation Model (SEM), CFA, Tourism Destination Love, Community Engagement*

INTRODUCTION

The number of foreign visitors visiting Cambodia has increased dramatically during the last 20 years. Over 5 million tourists had visited Cambodia in 2016, demonstrating how rapidly tourism has grown in the country. While cultural tourist places such as Angkor Wat continue to draw large numbers of visitors, more and more travelers are also making their way to ecotourism locations (Walter & Sen, 2018). In 2020, there was a 96.5% decline in revenue from international tourism. While the gross domestic product (GDP) benefited from the tourism services sector in the same year. About 3 percent, compared to roughly 12.1 percent in 2019 (Sharma & Nayak, 2020). Most of the tourists that come to Cambodia see its cultural and historical attractions, which include more than a thousand ancient temples. However, the Phnom Penh city and Angkor Wat temple attracted the most attention (Mao et al., 2014; Walter & Sen, 2018). Ecotourism focuses on three primary characteristics: (1) Natural or ecological sustainability; (2) economic benefits; and (3) psychologically acceptable in social life (Purbaningrum, 2018). Thus, Cambodian government policy objectives for ecotourism development focus on reducing poverty, rural community development, education, and conservation of biodiversity (Ngamsangchaikit, 2017). Community-based ecotourism (CBET) goal is to bridge the ecotourism gap by involving local communities in its development and activities (Pookhao, 2014).

The tourism sector has been significantly impacting the social and economic growth of local people around the world (Amerta et al., 2018; Handayani et al., 2022). Tourism scholars agree that social entrepreneurship is important in adopting financially sustainable strategies to achieve social aims and the responsible development of ecotourism (Dahles et al., 2020). Ecotourism can be defined as an alternative form of tourism and is usually confused with natural and cultural tourism (Noh et al., 2020). CBET development that actively encourages community participation is well-positioned to achieve developmental objectives. Additionally, the tourism sector is one of the main pillars of economic growth in Cambodia besides from garment sector, construction, and agriculture sectors (Xinhua, 2023).

As a result, Cambodia has some of the greatest revenue leakage rates in Asia, with estimates of 40% in 2017 going to foreign agents and investors (Document, 2019). Community-based ecotourism (CBET) is a new style of tourism that aims to reduce the environmental impact of tourism activities while also harmonizing local people and the natural environment. Community-based ecotourism (CBET) is steadily increasing in popularity as a tourist strategy in addressing the problems between ecotourism protection and community development to ensure CBET's sustainability (Zheng et al., 2021). As a result, more efforts must be promoted to new projects that encourage local community participation in Cambodia's tourism industry. For the most part, ecotourism in

Cambodia is still small-scale and community-based and holds a limited share of total tourism visits, at around 10% in 2016 (Walter & Sen, 2018). Carter et al. (2015) identify the growing importance of ecotourism as a development tool, yet also the paradox of increasing numbers of eco-tourists putting pressure on the natural resources by which snatural attractions are sustained. Carter et al. (2015) further notes several challenges for ecotourism development in Cambodia, including poor investment returns, lack of human capital, and a need for strong research evidence for benefits to local ecotourism communities and the preservation of the natural environment. Even though ecotourism benefits and costs have not yet been properly and systematically measured, Local Cambodian communities, the government, and various national and international firms continue to express strong support for community-based ecotourism (CBET), as well as its potential environmental, cultural, and livelihood benefits in Cambodia (Pawson et al., 2017; Toko, 2015; Ven, 2016). Some findings on sustainable, responsible, rural, ecotourism, pro-poor, and community-based tourism are becoming more limited. These alternative tourism destinations, if properly built and maintained, can contribute to tourism's long-term community development while also providing visitors with unique experiences. Some scholars have qualitatively studied the expansion of community-based tourism in Southeast Asia (Pawson et al., 2017).

Most importantly, this study assumes that previous research researchers should have focused more on destination brand consumption, infrastructure and transportation, destination promotion, accountability, communication, tourism, education and training, safety and security, destination facility and service, and tourism conservation. As a result, this study aims to examine the significant factors associated with tourist destination love, community engagement, sociocultural features that enable CBET, and its perceived impacts on people's livelihoods, all of which impact community economic benefits.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The questionnaire was self-administered to respondents using a purposive sample technique (Cooper & Schindler, 2014) which collected data from local community residents running their family businesses for seven eco-tourism destinations in Cambodia, such as Chambok, Thmatboey, Prek Thnout, Osvay, Ang Trapeang Thmor, Preah Rumkel, Prek Toal, and Bantey Chhmar. This study's Cochran (1977) sample size formula is used to gather data from an unknown population, with an error level of 5% and a scale standard deviation of 0.5. Furthermore, Cochran's sample size formula explains how these decisions were made. Hence, the sample size (n) is determined as follows:

$$n = \frac{Z^2\,(p * q)}{e^2} = \frac{(1.96)^2(0.5 * 0.5)}{(0.05)^2} = 384$$

The sample size is denoted by n, and the standard error (Z = 1.96) has a 95% confidence level. The variance estimate is represented by (p ∗ q) = 0.25, with q=1-p=0.5. Furthermore, the selected error level (e) of 5% is chosen in this study. To collect this data, a sample size (n) of 406 respondents was used.

This study reviews literature related to research variables and integrates the existing literature to develop the research variables which consist of Tourism Destination Love and Community Economic Benefits. This study uses two techniques for analysis such as quantitative and qualitative analysis. The self-administered survey was used to collect the data by intercepting 398 visitors and the structured questionnaire items were asked to visitors from November 2022 and February 2023. The case study design uses purposive sampling to investigate the complexities of CBET development in Cambodia's eight eco-tourism areas, including Chambok, Thmatboey, Prek Thnout, Osvay, Ang Trapeang Thmor, Preah Rumkel, Prek Toal, and Bantey Chumar, as well as statistical analysis and hypothesis testing with programs such as SPSS 25, AMOS 23, and STATA 14.

This study was collected from a questionnaire survey whose design was based on the c. Respondents were then asked to rate how well they considered their service performance in eco-tourism destination sites in Cambodia; a 5-point Likert scale was adopted to rate the questionnaire items with 1= strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4= agree; and 5 = strongly agree. Considering the "sociocultural attribute" measures, "six items were selected from Kummitha et al. (2021). Tourism destination consists of six items that were adopted from Morando & Platania (2022). CBET Development consists of six items that were adopted from Dey et al. (2020). Community engagement consists of three items that were adapted from Liu et al. (2014). Community economic benefits consist of eight items were adopted from Kummitha et al., (2021) and Liu et al. (2014). Supporting for CBET consists of five items and its impacts on livelihood consist of six items adopted from Ven (2016).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Tourism destination love is a love relationship with a certain location (Sharma & Nayak, 2020). Hence, heritage destination love originates more with destination love, often mentioned as place love. Despite this fact, destination/place love refers to a particular place (Sharma & Nayak, 2018), and heritage destination love refers to loving and being attached to a heritage destination (Andriotis et al., 2021). The literature review of tourism destinations showed that love is a dominant variable regarding tourist behavior in specific destinations, which makes tourists committed to particular destinations. Tourism research scholars have focused less on investigating the relationship between tourism destination love and community economic benefits. Then, this study applies marketing brand management literature to the tourism destination context; for instance, brand love improves economic benefits, which leads to tourists in exchange for their loyalty (Hsu & Chen, 2018). By drawing the concept of branding community, brand love may directly influence the economic benefits

(Jayasingh, 2019). Tourism destinations not only extend the service hours of tourism destination sites, but they also improve the community's economic benefits, ensuring that the tourism sites are effective over time (Chen et al., 2020). Mobile phone brand equity in retail fashion brands also economically benefits from brand love (Ferreira et al., 2022). Thus, this study borrows the market brand concepts of brand love as "tourism destination love" contributes to improving the community economic benefits in eco-tourism destination sites, which leads to tourists in exchange for their loyalty to destinations.

The following hypothesis is proposed:

$H_{1:}$ Tourism destination love positively impacts the community's economic benefits.
H_2: Community engagement positively impacts the community's economic benefits.
H_3: Socio-cultural attributes positively impact the community's economic benefits.
H_4: Support for CBET positively impacts the community's economic benefits.
H_5: Perceived impacts on the livelihoods of people positively impact the community's economic benefits.
H_6: Community economic benefits positively impact the community's economic benefits.

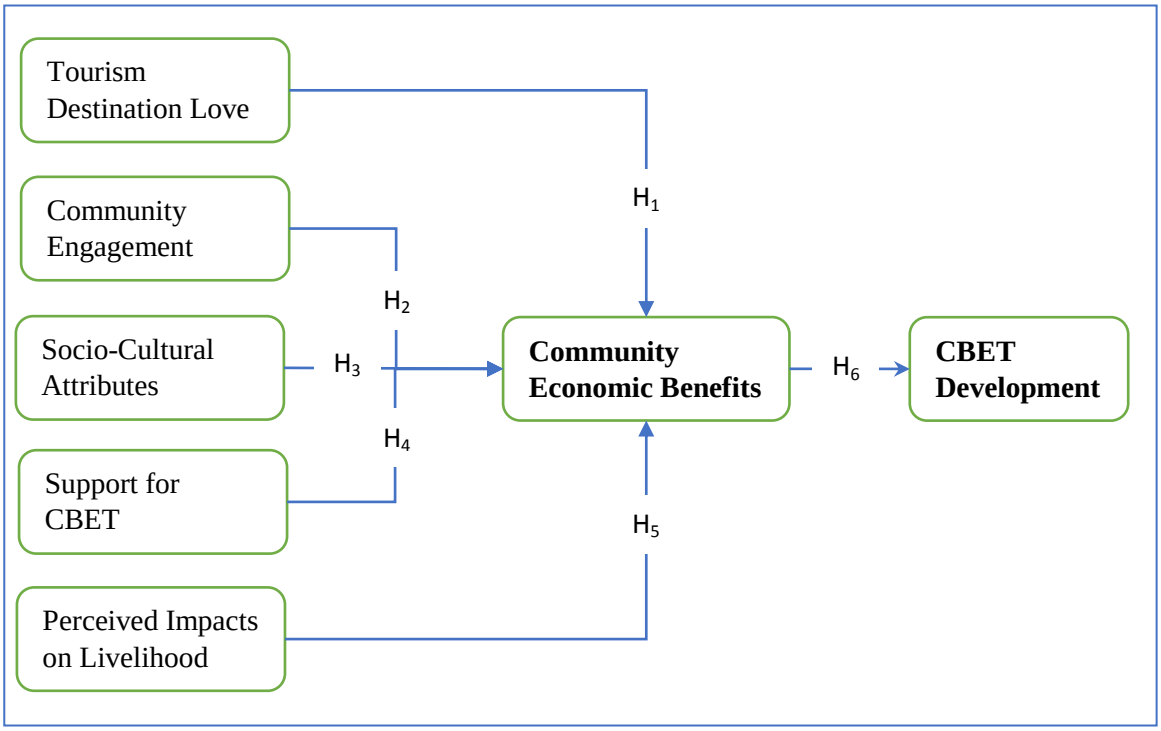

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for CBET
Source: Authors' Illustration

Factor Analysis

The studies well mentioned the factor analysis, hence, this study used exploratory factor analysis with VARIMAX model to verify the dimensionality and reliability of research variables, as shown in Figure 1. Data analysis processes such as factor analysis and reliability tests (Cronbach's Alpha: α) were tested. Factor analysis is first utilized to identify the dimensionality of each test. This section specifies that the thresholds for each item's factor loading scores must be greater than 0.60. Each item-to-total correlation and coefficient Alpha (α) are accessed to examine the internal consistency and reliability of questionnaire items in research constructs. Based on the research by Hair et al. (2014), the factor loading of each research item must be greater than 0.60, the Eigenvalue is greater than 1, the Cumulative percentage must be higher than 0.60, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) must be higher than 0.50, Item-total-correlation is greater than 0.50, and coefficient Alpha (α) must be higher than 0.60 or 0.70, respectively as shown in Table 1. As demonstrated in Table 1, the rules of thumb were used to assess the factor analysis and reliability test findings presented in Table 2. Most importantly, the rest of the research items have met (Table 2) the rule of thumb of the formal reliability test and were adopted to double-confirm with Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and test the research hypotheses with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) by performing AMOS 23 software.

Table 1. Rule of Thumbs for Factor Analysis and Reliability Tests

Indicators	**Factor Analysis**				**Reliability Test**	
	Factor loading	KMO	Eigenvalue	Cumulative %	Item-total-correlation	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Threshold values	≥0.60	≥0.50	>1	≥60%	≥0.50	≥0.60

Source: Authors' Calculations

Table 2. The Results of Factor Analysis and Reliability Test

Code*	**Factor Analysis**				**Reliability Test**	
	Factor Loading	KMO	Eigenvalue	Cumulative %	Item-total correlation	Cronbach Alpha
Socio-Cultural Attribute						
SCA4	0.850	0.833	3.146	62.913	0.742	**0.852**
SCA6	0.790				0.662	
SCA5	0.789				0.660	
SCA3	0.769				0.633	
SCA1	0.765				0.627	
SCA2	0.673	Deleted to increase the cumulative %				
Perceived Impacts on Livelihood						

PIL6	0.868	0.899	4.001	66.679	0.793	**0.900**
PIL5	0.839				0.756	
PIL3	0.818				0.728	
PIL4	0.814				0.723	
PIL1	0.790				0.695	
PIL2	0.766				0.667	
Community Economic Benefits						
CEBE7	0.858	0.923	5.442	68.019	0.807	**0.933**
CEBE6	0.848				0.793	
CEBE3	0.836				0.780	
CEBE4	0.836				0.780	
CEBE1	0.822				0.762	
CEBE8	0.815				0.751	
CEBE5	0.803				0.740	
CEBE2	0.778				0.711	
Tourism Destination Love						
TDL2	0.887	0.919	4.467	74.447	0.830	**0.931**
TDL6	0.878				0.818	
TDL3	0.871				0.810	
TDL5	0.867				0.804	
TDL1	0.865				0.801	
TDL4	0.808				0.728	
Support for CBET						
SCBET2	0.879	0.844	3.519	70.374	0.800	**0.894**
SCBET3	0.857				0.766	
SCBET4	0.842				0.743	
SCBET5	0.821				0.715	
SCBET1	0.792				0.679	
Community Engagement						
COME2	0.936	0.748	2.554	85.137	0.852	**0.913**

COME3	0.930				0.839	
COME1	0.902				0.786	
Community-Based Ecotourism Development						
CBETD4	0.905	0.920	4.440	73.996	0.853	**0.930**
CBETD5	0.865				0.801	
CBETD1	0.858				0.789	
CBETD3	0.858				0.789	
CBETD6	0.845				0.775	
CBETD2	0.828				0.753	

Note: Code can refer to the full description of questionnaire items as shown in the Appendix.*

Source: Authors' Calculations from SPSS-AMOS

Correlation Matrix

The correlation matrix was also utilized in this current study to calculate the mean value of each research construct and determine the dependence among various variables simultaneously. In other words, the correlation matrix was used to evaluate the correlation between the variables (Wagavkar, 2023). The results contain a table having correlation coefficients among every variable and the rest of them. When calculating the degree of correlation between study variables, many correlation coefficients exist, which are commonly indicated by r or p. The significance level for all correlation coefficients was set at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Pearson's Correlation is the common one that several research scholars have always used to measure the strength of the correlation between the two variables.

Table 3 indicated that the correlation matrix, which showed the relationship among research variables, has a high correlation coefficient among research variables, as proposed by this study.

Table 3. Correlation Matrix

Variable	Mean	Std.D	COME	SCBET	TDL	PIL	SCA	CEBE	CBETD
COME	3.43	1.32	1.00	0.61**	0.67**	0.61**	0.44**	0.66**	0.66**
SCBET	3.26	0.97		1.00	0.67**	0.60**	0.63**	0.66**	0.64**
TDL	3.52	1.04			1.00	0.73**	0.61**	0.77**	0.83**
PIL	3.46	0.92				1.00	0.56**	0.81**	0.70**
SCA	3.65	0.83					1.00	0.62**	0.59**

CEBE	3.43	0.95						1.00	0.74**
CBETD	3.53	1.05							1.00

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Note: COME = Community Engagement; SCBET= Support for CBET; TDL = Tourism Destination Love; PIL = Perceived Impacts on Livelihood; SCA = Socio-Cultural Attribute; CEBE = Community Economic Benefits; CBETD = Community-Based Ecotourism Development.

Source: Authors' Calculations

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

First, the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for all the items resulted in factor solutions, as expected theoretically and interpretation as follows. The Cronbach Alpha coefficients for each factor were greater than 0.60. Second, we used confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) to assess the convergent validity of the measures. Confirmatory factor analysis consists of main parts for this manuscript, firstly related to the "First Order-Factor Model" and secondly related to the "Second Order-Factor Model". This study used the first-order factor model (i.e., this study does not report the Figures of the first-order factor model) to examine the research construct individually, as shown in the results in Table 5 and second-ordered as shown in Figure 3, respectively. Some indicators were eliminated if needed due to low factor loading or a possibility of high correlation with other indicator variables. The second order's results satisfied the threshold suggested by Hair et al. (2014). So, table 4 shows the threshold values for CFA and SEM, which were used to analyze the results. All loadings exceed 0.60, and each indicator t-value exceeds 1.96 ($p < 0.05$), thus satisfying the CFA criteria. Table 5 and Figure 3 show that the overall goodness-of-fit assessment showed that $\chi 2/df = 1.144$, GFI=0.931, AGFI = 0.902, NFI = 0.958, CFI = 0.994, RMSEA=0.019. This means that these findings were a good match with adequate convergent validity. Since all the numbers are above the set cutoff conditions, this investigation will proceed with hypothesis testing by using structural equation modeling (SEM). Indeed, the CFA and SEM Thresholds were utilized to assess the study's findings, as indicated in Table 6.

Table 4. The Threshold of CFA and SEM Model

Model Fitness	Rule of Thumbs
χ^2/D. F	< 2.50
GFI	≥ 0.90
AGFI	≥ 0.90
NFI	≥ 0.90
CFI	≥ 0.90
RMSEA	< 0.05

Source: Authors' Calculation

Note: Chi-square= $\chi 2$
D.F. = Degree of Freedom
GFI = Goodness of Fit

AGFI = Adjusted Goodness of Fit
NFI = Normed Fit Index
CFI = Comparative Fit Index
RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation

The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability coefficients (CR) were applied to relate the quality of a measure. To avoid misconceptions, it is needed to appropriately understand the equations of the AVE and CR, as well as their association to the definition of validity and reliability. In this manuscript, we explain, using simulated one-factor models, how the number of items and the homogeneity of factor loadings might influence the AVE and CR results.

$$\text{AVE} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} \lambda_i^2}{n} \quad (1)$$

$$\text{CR} = \frac{(\sum_{i=1}^{n} \lambda_i)^2}{(\sum_{i=1}^{n} \lambda_i)^2 + (\sum_{i=1}^{n} \delta_i)} \quad (2)$$

Where: λ: the standardized factor loading and i is the number of items (1) and δ: error variance terms (2) while δ = 1-λ_i^2. Based on the result in table 5, AVE must exceed 0.50, and CR must exceed 0.6 or 0.70, respectively. By Hair et al. (2014) recommend that the t_{value} is greater than 1.96 and the p value < 0.05. All other criteria shown in Table 5, results of CFA and CR met the threshold, which indicated that these research variables have high reliability and validity. Thus, this study contributes to exploring the significant coefficient among hypothesis relationships.

Table 5. Results of Overall CFA Model

Indicators		*Research Constructs*	*Standardized Loading*	*t-value*	*p-value*	*AVE*	*C.R*
CBETD2	←	Community-Based Ecotourism Development (CBETD)	0.800	20.664	***	0.706	0.935
CBETD3	←		0.820	21.586	***		
CBETD4	←		0.872	A	***		
CBETD5	←		0.847	23.014	***		
CBETD6	←		0.902	21.224	***		
CBETD1	←		0.794	24.379	***		
CEBE8	←	Community Economic Benefits (CEBE)	0.812	A	***	0.658	0.920
CEBE7	←		0.841	22.361	***		
CEBE6	←		0.813	18.926	***		
CEBE4	←		0.796	18.515	***		

CEBE3	←		0.799	18.405	***		
CEBE1	←		0.805	18.625	***		
SCA3	←	Socio-Cultural Attributes (SCA)	0.588	12.771	***	0.513	0.837
SCA4	←		0.883	A	***		
SCA5	←		0.725	16.865	***		
SCA6	←		0.753	17.789	***		
SCA1	←		0.587	12.735	***		
PIL2	←	Perceived Impacts on Livelihood (PIL)	0.693	16.025	***	0.622	0.908
PIL3	←		0.792	19.157	***		
PIL4	←		0.820	19.659	***		
PIL5	←		0.835	20.358	***		
PIL6	←		0.839	A	***		
PIL1	←		0.742	17.361	***		
TDL6	←	Tourism Destination Love (TDL)	0.848	A	***	0.692	0.931
TDL5	←		0.866	22.855	***		
TDL4	←		0.757	18.398	***		
TDL3	←		0.822	23.412	***		
TDL2	←		0.858	22.909	***		
TDL1	←		0.836	21.869	***		
COME1	←	Community Engagement (COME)	0.826	22.725	***	0.770	0.910
COME2	←		0.904	A	***		
COME3	←		0.901	27.125	***		
SCBET5	←	Support for CBET (SCBET)	0.763	17.478	***	0.632	0.882
SCBET4	←		0.836	A	***		

SCBET3	←		0.780	17.876	***		
SCBET2	←		0.828	19.484	***		
SCBET1	←		0.658	14.239	***		

Goodness-of-fit index assessment	**Threshold values**	**Results**
χ^2/D.F	<2.50	1.144
GFI	≥0.90	0.931
AGI	≥0.90	0.902
NFI	≥0.90	0.958
CFI	≥0.90	0.994
RMSEA	<0.08	0.019

Note: A = regression weight fixed at 1.000, and p-value significance level of <0.05 and 0.001.

Source: Authors' Calculation

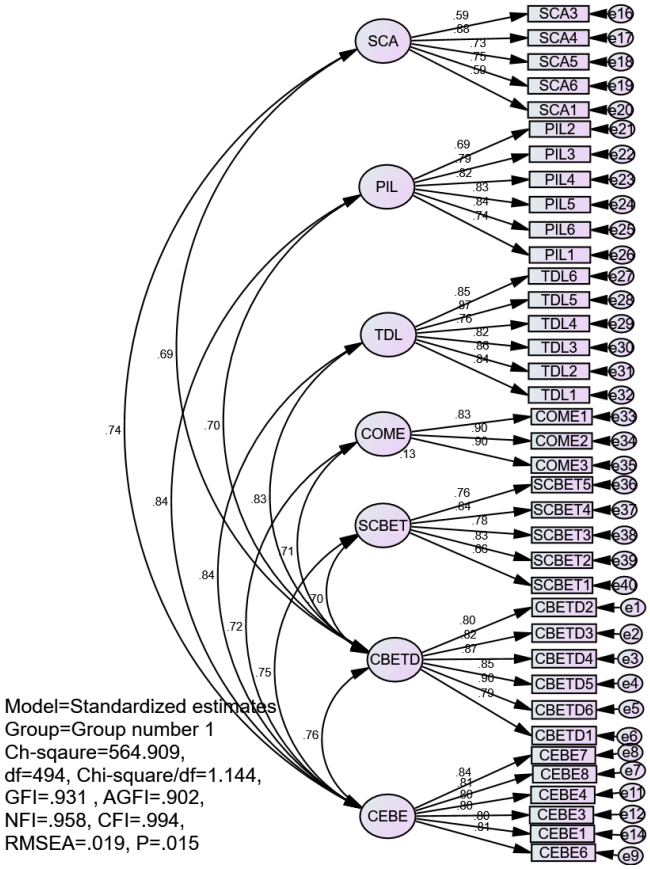

Figure 2. The Results of CFA Model
Source: Authors' Calculations from SPSS-AMOS

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Analysis

The SEM model was used to test a hypothesis using the likelihood estimation approach using the CFA model, as shown in Table 5. The results show goodness-of-fit were satisfactorily receivable (GFI = 0.931, AGFI = 0.902, NFI = 0.958, CFI = 0.994, RMSEA = 0.019) as in Table 5 and Figure 3 and the proposed model also performed well in terms of goodness-of-fit. Table 6 demonstrates that the CFA was performed well before SEM to evaluate the probability estimate method. Table 7 and Figure 3 reveal that the goodness-of-fit metrics were adequate (GFI = 0.931, AGFI = 0.902, NFI = 0.958, CFI = 0.995, and RMSEA = 0.019). This finding suggests that this model is appropriate, with an acceptable goodness-of-fit.

The SEM model discloses that the relationship between "tourism destination love" and "community economic benefits" has a significant positive impact with a coefficient β=0.318, and p-value = 0.000. So, hypothesis 1 is accepted. The relationship between "community engagement" and "community economic benefits" has a significant positive impact with coefficient β=0.084, and p-value = 0.026 ($p<0.05$). hypothesis 2 is accepted. The relationship between "socio-cultural attributes" and "community economic benefits" has a significant positive impact with coefficient β=0.115and p-value = 0.002 (<0.05). Hence, hypothesis 3 is

accepted. The relationship between "support for CBET" and "community economic benefits" has a significant positive impact with coefficient β=0.096 and p-value = 0.021 (>0.05). hypothesis 4 is rejected. The relationship between "perceived impacts on livelihood" and "community economic benefits" has a significant positive impact with coefficient β=0.395, and p-value = 0.000. hypothesis 5 is accepted. The relationship between "community economic benefits" and "CBET development" has a significant positive impact with coefficient β=0.961, and p-value = 0.000. Thus, hypothesis 6 is accepted.

Firstly, the research finding also indicated that "community economic benefits" and "CBET development" have the strongest coefficient with β = 0.961, and p value = 0.000. Thus, "Community economic benefits" are critical for promoting CBET development in the eco-tourism location. Second, this result discovered that "perceived impacts on livelihood" considerably boost "community economic benefits" in seven eco-tourism destinations in Cambodia. Finally, using the structural equation model to analysis, our study considerably supports all of the offered theories.

Table 7. The Regression Results of SEM Model

Indicators		**Research Constructs**	**Standardized Loading**	**t-value**	**p-value**
CBETD2	←	Community-Based Ecotourism Development (CBETD)	0.835	19.634	***
CBETD3	←		0.824	21.744	***
CBETD4	←		0.876	A	***
CBETD5	←		0.844	23.04	***
CBETD6	←		0.911	21.489	***
CBETD1	←		0.795	24.44	***
CEBE8	←	Community Economic Benefits (CEBE)	0.812	A	***
CEBE7	←		0.84	22.389	***
CEBE6	←		0.813	18.915	***
CEBE4	←		0.793	18.46	***
CEBE3	←		0.799	18.4	***
CEBE1	←		0.814	18.904	***
SCA3	←	Socio-Cultural Attributes (SCA)	0.588	12.732	***
SCA4	←		0.883	A	***
SCA5	←		0.726	16.845	***
SCA6	←		0.751	17.715	***

SCA1	←		0.589	12.771	***
PIL2	←	Perceived Impacts on Livelihood (PIL)	0.694	16.04	***
PIL3	←		0.793	19.184	***
PIL4	←		0.814	19.524	***
PIL5	←		0.829	20.23	***
PIL6	←		0.842	A	***
PIL1	←		0.738	17.275	***
TDL6	←	Tourism Destination Love (TDL)	0.847	A	***
TDL5	←		0.867	22.862	***
TDL4	←		0.759	18.453	***
TDL3	←		0.821	23.3	***
TDL2	←		0.86	22.944	***
TDL1	←		0.836	21.821	***
COME1	←	Community Engagement (COME)	0.823	22.577	***
COME2	←		0.906	A	***
COME3	←		0.905	27.372	***
SCBET5	←	Support for CBET (SCBET)	0.763	17.558	***
SCBET4	←		0.837	A	***
SCBET3	←		0.778	17.897	***
SCBET2	←		0.829	19.54	***
SCBET1	←		0.657	14.214	***
Path Relationship—Hypothesis testing					
H_1: TDL	→	CEBE (Accepted)	0.318***	5.960	0.000
H_2: COME	→	CEBE (Accepted)	0.084**	2.225	0.026
H_3: SCA	→	CEBE (Accepted)	0.115**	3.108	0.002
H_4: SCBET	→	CEBE (Accepted)	0.096**	2.310	0.021

H_5: PIL	→	CEBE (Accepted)	0.395***	7.662	0.000
H_6: CEBE	→	CBETD (Accepted)	0.961***	16.547	0.000
Goodness-of-fit index assessment			**Threshold values**		**Findings**
χ^2/D.F			<2.50		1.138
GFI			≥0.90		0.931
AGI			≥0.90		0.902
NFI			≥0.90		0.958
CFI			≥0.90		0.995
RMSEA			<0.08		0.019

Note: A = regression weight scaled at 1.00, with a p-value significance threshold of <0.05 and < 0.001.

Source: Authors' Calculations from SPSS-AMOS

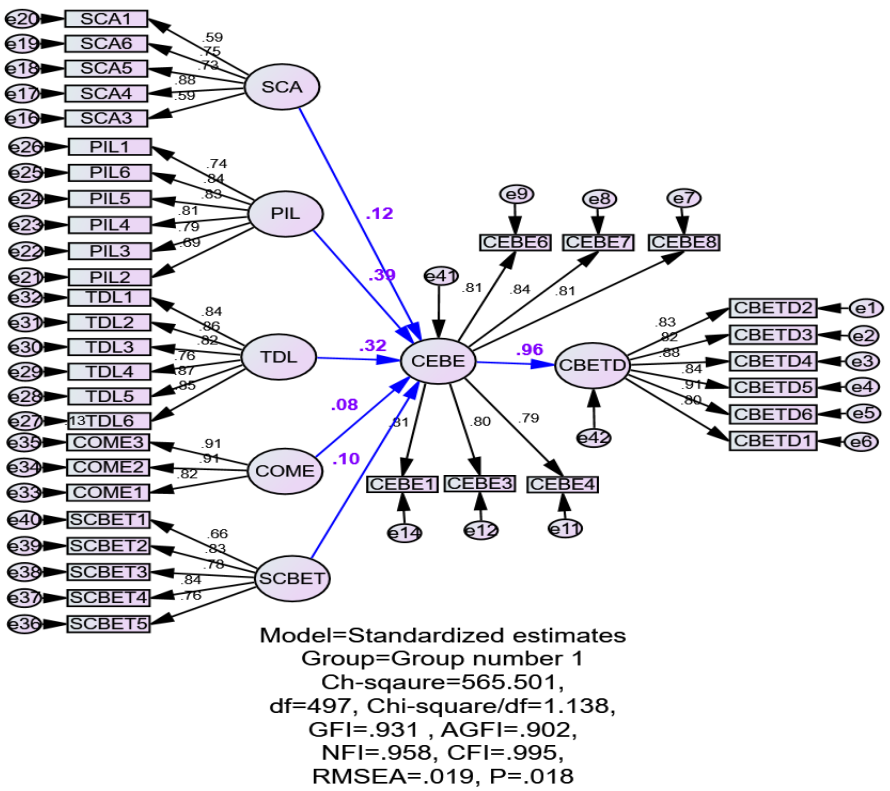

Figure 3. The results of SEM Model
Source: Authors Calculation from SPSS_AMOS

This study has conceptualized a research framework by integrating and applying key concepts from marketing brand management to destination aspects in ecotourism contexts. Table 7 and Figure 3 of SEM reveal show that this study's findings in seven ecotourism destination areas in Cambodia strongly support all

research hypotheses. These findings indicated that "community economic benefits" are most important in enhancing "CBET development" for local tourism service providers in seven ecotourism sites. Then, "perceived impacts on livelihood" are also one of the key impacts among other research variables on community economic benefits in ecotourism destination sites. Therefore, this study assumes that "socio-cultural attribute," "tourism destination love," "support for CBET," and "community engagement" play a critical role in enhancing "community economic benefits" for local ecotourism people, which leads to strengthening the sustainability for "CBET development," respectively. Much of contemporary research on ecotourism pays more attention to planning and business models to understand ecotourism management, focusing on such factors as visitor experience, tourism product and program development, government policy, institutions, marketing, ecotourism destination involves travel to natural destinations, minimizes environmental and cultural impact, builds ecological awareness, provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people, and respects local culture. In Cambodia's tourist destination, the Chambok CBET initiative has drastically reduced deforestation, hunting, and other ecologically detrimental behaviors, protecting around 1200 hectares of communal forestland (Lonn et al., 2018; Walter & Sen, 2018). Most CBET initiatives in Cambodia, including local knowledge, guides, and homestays, are value-added ecotourism goods contributing significantly to ecotourist attractiveness (Walter & Sen, 2018). This means that locals can benefit from CBET programs and tourists, potentially increasing their daily income.

CONCLUSION

Active participation and involvement of local communities is crucial for the success of community-based ecotourism (CBET). Engaging communities in decision-making processes, planning, and development ensures their ownership of the projects, leading to long-term commitment and sustainability. One of the primary objectives of CBET is to promote conservation and environmental protection. The presence of unique and biodiverse ecosystems in Cambodia makes it an attractive destination for ecotourism. Effective management and preservation of these natural resources are essential for the development of CBET.

Cambodia is known for its rich cultural heritage, including traditional customs, arts, and crafts. CBET initiatives should prioritize the preservation and promotion of local culture to offer tourists an authentic experience. This can include showcasing traditional dances, local cuisine, handicrafts, and supporting community-led cultural activities. To attract tourists, CBET destinations must have adequate infrastructure and accessibility. Well-connected roads, reliable transportation options, and the availability of basic amenities like accommodations and healthcare facilities are crucial for the success of CBET projects.

Building the capacity of local communities and ensuring they have the necessary skills and knowledge is vital for the development of CBET. Training

programs should focus on hospitality, guiding, environmental conservation, marketing, and financial management. This empowers communities to actively participate in CBET activities and enhance their livelihoods. The support of the government through favorable policies, regulations, and financial incentives is crucial for the growth of CBET in Cambodia. Governments should provide a conducive environment for CBET initiatives, including streamlined procedures for permits, licenses, and access to funding.

Effective marketing and promotion strategies are necessary to attract tourists to CBET destinations in Cambodia. So, social media, collaborating with travel companies and internet platforms, has potentially boosted the awareness of CBET's unique experiences and increase the number of tourists. Collaboration between different stakeholders, including local communities, NGOs, government agencies, and private sector entities, is crucial for the success of CBET. Networking and sharing of the best practices, unique experiences, and other resources could contribute and encourage the sustainable growth and development.

To summarize, the success of Community-Based Ecotourism or CBET in Cambodia relies on various factors, as community engagement, conservation initiatives, cultural preservation, infrastructure, capacity building, government assistance, marketing, and collaboration. By addressing these potential factors, Cambodia can harness the potential of CBET to create sustainable livelihoods for local communities while preserving its natural and cultural heritage. CBET has emerged as a significant contributor to Cambodia's sustainable development and conservation efforts. Several key factors influence strongly the success and growth of CBET in the country.

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