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Exploring the Impact of Perceived Benefits of Tourism on and Psychological Well-being of Host Communities: Evidence from Heritage Areas

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Abstract

This study aims to examine how the perceived benefits of tourism influence the psychological well-being of host communities, as seen by local residents at UNESCO heritage sites in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. It also seeks to explore the mediating role of community involvement between these two primary variables. Using a quantitative research approach, self-administered surveys were distributed to a sample of local citizens at UNESCO heritage sites in both countries. A total of 396 completed surveys were collected and analyzed statistically using PLS-SEM. The results revealed significant positive direct relationships between all perceived benefits of tourism and the psychological well-being of host communities. Additionally, the study found that community involvement in tourism serves as a mediator in all of these direct relationships. These findings offer practical advice to tourism decision-makers, enabling them to create environments where both tourists and host communities thrive, leading to positive social, cultural, and economic outcomes.

Keywords: Perceived benefits of tourism, community involvement, psychological well-being, host communities, UNESCO heritage sites

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Introduction

As international travel continues to grow and rebound, it is increasingly important to reconsider tourism policies and management. All stakeholders in the sector must adapt and improve these policies to ensure that local communities and the environment are prioritized in tourism development (World Tourism Organization, 2024), and to ensure the long-term success of the tourism industry, it is crucial to understand and evaluate the attitudes of residents toward the effects of tourism development. Moreover, examining the host community's perceptions of tourism and its benefits is vital as it shapes their behavior toward it (Ramseook-Munhurrun & Naidoo, 2011). The perceived benefits of tourism refer to the positive impacts that stakeholders—such as local residents, business owners, and policymakers believe result from tourism activities. These perceptions are essential in shaping attitudes toward tourism and influencing its long-term success and sustainability (Kodaş et al., 2022; Adongo et al., 2017; Besculides et al., 2002). The benefits associated with tourism development include various aspects, such as community benefits, destination profile, economic benefits, and amenities and facilities development benefits. Understanding these dimensions is key to fully grasping the benefits of tourism development for local communities (Garrido & Recuero, 2024). Community involvement is a process that allows local residents to participate in decisions that impact their lives (Aref, 2011). In tourism settings, it refers to the active engagement of a group of individuals in activities such as decision-making, planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and problem-solving, with the belief that tourism will provide benefits to those who are involved (Ami et al., 2020). This approach views communities as essential stakeholders, rather than passive observers, emphasising their role in shaping tourism to align with local needs and values (Timothy, 1999). The importance of such involvement lies in its potential to promote sustainable development, preserve cultural heritage, ensure fair economic benefits among community members, and contribute to the conservation of the local environment (Scheyvens, 2002; Aref et al., 2010). Psychological well-being is a complex concept that encompasses an individual's mental health and their subjective assessment of their current quality of life, as determined by subjective evaluation criteria (Diener et al., 1999). From the viewpoint of residents in tourism destinations, psychological well-being is characterised by the absence of major mental health issues, a high level of satisfaction with one's living environment, participation in positive spiritual activities, and the ability to adapt effectively and solve problems in the community (Wang et al., 2022).

Despite the growing body of literature examining the effects of tourism on host communities, there remains a significant gap in understanding how the perceived benefits of tourism specifically influence the psychological well-being of host communities. To the best of our knowledge, no one has investigated how perceived tourism benefits impact the psychological well-being of host communities at UNESCO World Heritage sites, nor has anyone addressed the mediating role of community involvement in this relationship. While numerous studies focus on the economic, environmental, social and cultural impacts of tourism (e.g., Türker, 2013; Nayomi & Gnanapala, 2015; Amalu et al., 2021; Alamineh et al., 2023; Jehan et al., 2023), few explore the subtle ways in which the local community realises these benefits and how these perceptions translate into well-being outcomes (e.g., Carneiro & Eusébio, 2015; Giampiccoli et al., 2022; Brooks et al., 2023). Based on social exchange theory (Ap, 1992) and stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), this study aims at exploring how the perceived benefits of tourism affect the psychological well-being of host communities as perceived by local citizens at UNESCO heritage sites in Saudi Arabia and in Egypt. Additionally, understanding the mediating role of community involvement between the study's two main variables.

Literature review & hypotheses development

The perceived benefits of tourism on and psychological well-being of host communities

Tourism has a significant potential to impact the lives of community residents (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011). Several studies have shown a positive connection between the perceived benefits of tourism and overall well-being. Ramkissoon (2023) suggested that the social impacts of tourism perceived by host communities influence residents' sense of attachment to their place and their support for tourism development, which directly affects the overall quality of life in these communities. Furthermore, Yu et al. (2018) demonstrated that both sociocultural and environmental benefits enhance the living experience of rural communities in Orange County, Indiana, USA, and Bimonte & Faralla (2016) found that residents perceiving greater economic and social benefits reported enhanced life satisfaction. Similarly, Nawijn & Mitas (2012) observed a positive correlation between perceived tourism impacts and subjective well-being in Palma de Mallorca. However, this relationship can be influenced by factors such as the stage of tourism development and demographic variables (Kim et al., 2013). For instance, in mature destinations, tourism fatigue or power imbalances may weaken the positive effects of perceived benefits (Diedrich & García-Buades, 2009). While this research implicitly includes the principle that tourism influences the quality and well-being of the host community, few studies have directly examined residents' perceptions of the impact of tourism on their well-being and on their psychological well-being, specifically on host communities in World Heritage areas. Therefore, we have formulated the following hypotheses:

H-1: "CB" positively and significantly impacts "PWB".
H-2: "DPEB" positively and significantly impacts "PWB".
H-3: "AFDB" positively and significantly impacts "PWB".

The perceived benefits of tourism and host community involvement

The participation of the host community acts as a key factor in safeguarding both the tourism environment and the cultural heritage of the community, which are integral parts of the tourism product (Wilopo et al., 2020). Many studies have examined and analysed the relationship between the perceived benefits of tourism and host community involvement. Gnanapala & Karunathilaka (2016) found that the community in Sri Lanka has mixed perceptions regarding ongoing tourism development. Those who benefit from tourism have positive views and attitudes, while those who have not experienced any direct benefits tend to have negative opinions. They recommended implementing a well-planned awareness program to encourage community involvement in ongoing tourism development efforts. In addition, Soares et al. (2021) stated that residents of host communities generally have a positive view of tourism and highlighted the importance of involving these communities in tourism development decisions at the Route of Santiago de Compostela World Heritage site in Spain. Rasoolimanesh et al. (2017a) highlighted that community involvement is a key factor influencing residents' perceptions of the tourism development of the Malaysian George Town World Heritage Site. Furthermore, Rasoolimanesh et al. (2017b) discovered significant distinctions between the ways in which locals' opinions and community involvement impact support for the growth of tourism in urban and rural world heritage sites. Conversely, Dragouni & Fouseki (2018) proposed that perceptions of tourism have little impact on influencing the community's intentions to engage in tourism development in Kastoria, Greece. Based on the above literature review, the following hypotheses have been constructed:

H-4: "CB" positively and significantly impacts "CI".
H-5: "DPEB" positively and significantly impacts "CI".
H-6: "AFDB" positively and significantly impacts "CI".

The role of community involvement and the relation between perceived benefits of tourism and psychological well-being

The connection between community involvement, perceived benefits, and psychological well-being can be interpreted through the framework of social exchange theory (Ap, 1992), which suggests that individuals are more inclined to support tourism when the perceived benefits surpass the costs, as well as stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), which stresses the importance of involving all relevant parties, including host communities, in tourism decision-making. It argues that acknowledging and addressing community interests, especially through perceived benefits, boosts their willingness to engage. These frameworks collectively underscore the relationship between perception and action in tourism development. Community involvement is increasingly considered a mediator between perceived tourism benefits and psychological well-being. According to Social Exchange Theory (Ap, 1992), residents engaged in tourism are more likely to perceive benefits and experience enhanced well-being. Lee & Jamal (2018) found that community involvement partially mediated the effect of perceived benefits on quality of life in rural tourism contexts. Similarly, Woo et al. (2015) showed that the association between perceived tourism impacts and life happiness was mediated by community attachment, which was reinforced by involvement. However, the mediation effect varies depending on the context. In highly developed tourism destinations, involvement may have a diminished impact due to existing power dynamics or disengagement from residents (Diedrich & García-Buades, 2009). The quality of involvement is also crucial—superficial participation may lead to frustration rather than empowerment (Tosun, 2006). These findings suggest that while community involvement generally strengthens the link between perceived benefits and well-being, its effectiveness is influenced by implementation and local conditions. It remains uncertain whether the same outcomes will specifically apply to psychological well-being. Accordingly, the following hypotheses have been constructed:

H-7: "CI" positively and significantly impacts "PWB".
H-8: "CI" mediates the relationship between "CB" and "PWB".
H-9: "CI" mediates the relationship between "DPEB" and "PWB".
H-10: "CI" mediates the relationship between "AFDB" and "PWB".

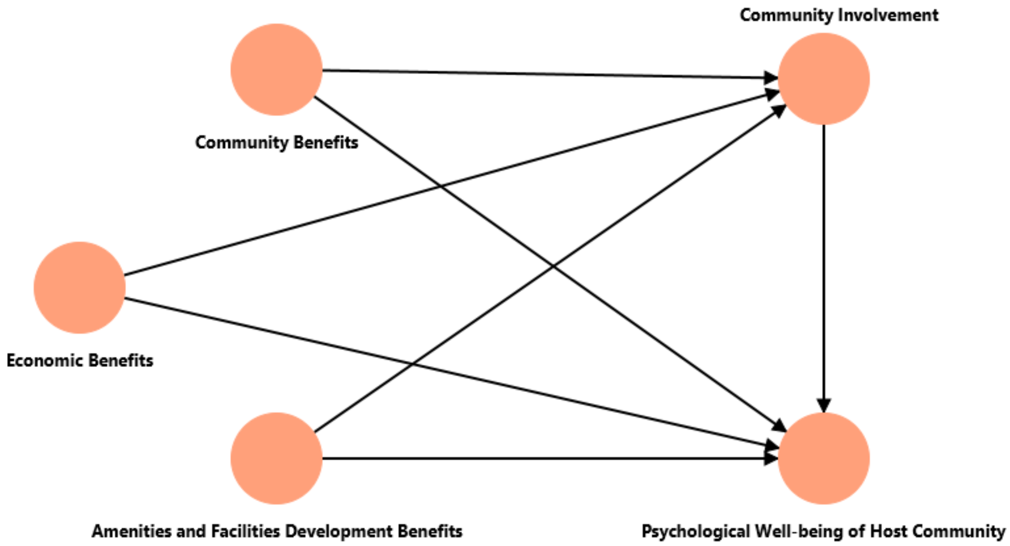

Figure 1. Study conceptual framework

Study area:
To evaluate the association between the study variables, the study was carried out at two UNESCO World Heritage Sites: the Nubian Monuments from Abu Simbel to Philae in Egypt and Al-Ahsa Oasis in Saudi Arabia. Al-Ahsa Oasis, which spans 8,544 hectares on the eastern Arabian Peninsula, was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2018. In addition to historical buildings, cities, and archeological sites, it has a mix of gardens, canals, springs, wells, and a drainage lake. These components, which include noteworthy features like historic fortifications, mosques, wells, and sophisticated water management systems, demonstrate the ongoing human presence in the Gulf region from the Neolithic period to the present. Al-Ahsa is known for its remarkable human-environment interaction and is home to 2.5 million date palms, making it the largest oasis in the world (UNESCO, 2024a). Covering 374.48 hectares, the Nubian Monuments from Abu Simbel to Philae in the Aswan Governorate were included as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979. This location is renowned for its remarkable archeological constructions, such as the Sanctuary of Isis at Philae and the Temples of Ramses II at Abu Simbel. Between 1960 and 1980, UNESCO coordinated an international campaign to conserve these sites from the rising waters of the Nile (UNESCO, 2024b).

Materials and methods
The scale used in this study to evaluate the factors was developed based on the literature review. Three factors—community benefits (measured by eight items), destination profile and economic benefits (measured by six items), and amenities and facilities development benefits (measured by four items)—were used to gauge the perceived benefits of tourism. These factors were taken from Garrido & Recuero (2024). The eight-item scale used to measure community involvement was taken from Moghavvemi et al. (2021). A four-item scale taken from Wang et al. (2022) was used to measure psychological well-being. This study targets the local populations of two UNESCO World Heritage sites: Al-Ahsa Oasis in Saudi Arabia and the Nubian Monuments from Abu Simbel to Philae in Egypt. In line with Veal's guidelines for large or undefined populations, the sample size was determined based on an estimated population of 20,000 individuals (Veal, 2006). To calculate the sample size, Stephen Sampson's formula was used (Ayad et al., 2024; Ayad, 2022), resulting in 372 completed responses.

$$n = \frac{Nxp(1-p)}{[[N-1\,x(d^2 \div z^2)] + p(1-p)]}$$

In this context, "n" represents the sample size of the study, "p" indicates the probability distribution, "z" denotes the confidence level (95%), and "N" corresponds to the population size. The study employed self-administered questionnaires as part of a quantitative research design to collect primary data. The questionnaire was reviewed and refined by a panel of experts, including academic scholars and professionals from the tourism industry. Data collection occurred between February and June 2024, with 421 local residents from host communities in Al-Ahsa Oasis, Abu Simbel, and Aswan participating. A total of 396 completed surveys were returned, resulting in a response rate of 93.8%. These responses were subsequently analyzed using statistical methods. The questionnaire was organized into four distinct sections, each aligned with the research's objectives. The first section gathered demographic information, while the other remaining sections addressed all study variables: perceived tourism benefits, which were further categorised into community benefits (CB), destination profile and economic benefits (DPEB), and amenities and facilities development benefits (AFDB); community involvement; and psychological well-being. Participants evaluated the items within each section using a 5-point Likert scale.In order to glean valuable insights from the collected data, which enabling informed decision-making, the Excel v.15-2013 and SPSS v.29-2022 were used to analyse descriptive data and to explore the sample's demographic characteristics. Additionally, the study hypotheses were tested and the relationships between all variables were examined using the partial least squares structural equation modeling PLS-SEM v.4.1.0.9.2024.

Results

Measurement model (outer model):

Convergent validity:

Construct validity was assessed to ensure that the measurement items accurately reflected their intended constructs. This validation confirms that items designed to measure the same construct are indeed related. In this study, reliability scores for all items surpassed the recommended threshold of Hair et al. 0.7 (Sarstedt et al., 2021), demonstrating strong consistency among the measurement items. Additionally, a composite reliability (CR) test was conducted to assess internal consistency across the scale items. CR values, represented by "rho_a," for all variables exceeded the established threshold of 0.7, as outlined by Bryman & Cramer (2012) and Sarstedt et al. (2021). This value indicates a high level of reliability in capturing the underlying constructs of the study. To further assess how much variance in each construct was explained by its items relative to error variance, the average variance extracted (AVE) test was employed. The results signified AVE values greater than the 0.5 cut-off for all constructs, meeting the criterion offered by Fornell & Larcker (1981). This finding indicates that items effectively captured variance of their respective constructs with minimal measurement error. According to Fornell & Larcker's guidelines, an AVE value of at least 0.50 confirms that items contribute more to the construct than to errors, thereby enhancing the validity of the outer model. Further details are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Convergent validity

Variables	Item	Λ	AVE	α	rho_a
Community Benefits "CB" (Garrido & Recuero, 2024)	CB-1	0.941	0.683	0.931	0.949
	CB-2	0.827			
	CB-3	0.932			
	CB-4	0.719			
	CB-5	0.719			
	CB-6	0.819			
	CB-7	0.810			
	CB-8	0.940			
Destination Profile and Economic Benefits "DPEB" (Garrido & Recuero, 2024)	DPEB-1	0.712	0.624	0.880	0.920
	DPEB-2	0.879			
	DPEB-3	0.916			
	DPEB-4	0.920			
	DPEB-5	0.719			
	DPEB-6	0.702			
Amenities and Facilities Development Benefits "AFDB" (Garrido & Recuero, 2024)	AFDB1	0.719	0.760	0.888	0.979
	AFDB2	0.920			
	AFDB3	0.931			
	AFDB4	0.952			
Community Involvement "CI" (Moghavvemi et al., 2021)	CI1	0.877	0.699	0.932	0.953
	CI2	0.933			
	CI3	0.894			
	CI4	0.931			
	CI5	0.892			
	CI6	0.922			
	CI7	0.719			
	CI8	0.719			
Psychological Well-being "PWB" (Wang et al., 2022)	PWB1	0.748	0.753	0.888	0.897
	PWB2	0.907			
	PWB3	0.897			
	PWB4	0.909			

Discriminant validity

To ensure that the constructs in the suggested model are conceptually separate and do not overlap, discriminant validity is a crucial metric. As it ensures that each construct represents a distinct facet of the theoretical framework without being unduly connected with other constructs, this indicator is essential for confirming the measurement model's resilience and demonstrating the discriminant validity of Kock's model (Kock, 2020). Using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which looks at the ratio of correlations, discriminant validity was evaluated in this study. Refer to Figure 2 and Table 2.

Table 2. Fornell-Larcker criterion

Variables	CB	DPEB	AFDB	CI	PWB
CB	**0.826**				
DPEB	0.542	**0.790**			
AFDB	0.452	0.642	**0.871**		
CI	0.622	0.555	0.568	**0.836**	
PWB	0.452	0.612	0.472	0.612	**0.868**

The Fornell-Larcker criterion states that the square root of the AVE for each construct should be higher than its correlations with all other constructs. This procedure ensures that a construct accounts for more variance in its own indicators than it does with other constructs. As shown in Table 2 and Figure 2, the square roots of the AVEs for all constructs in this study were consistently higher than their respective correlations with other constructs. This adherence to Fornell & Larcker (1981) and Hair et al. (2017) guidelines confirms the discriminant validity of the measurement model, as the AVE for CB is 0.826, which is higher than its correlations with DPEB (0.542), AFDB (0.452), CI (0.622), and PWB (0.452). Similarly, all other constructs—DPEB (0.790), AFDB (0.871), CI (0.836), and PWB (0.868)—also exhibit higher diagonal values than their corresponding inter-construct correlations. These findings confirm that discriminant validity is established for all latent variables in the measurement model. Additionally, a cross-loading analysis was conducted to ensure that each item within the model loads more strongly on its intended construct than on any other constructs. The results demonstrated that all items had higher loadings on their respective constructs than on unrelated constructs, providing further evidence of the model's discriminant validity. These findings are consistent with Chin's (1998) recommendations for evaluating construct distinctiveness, reinforcing the reliability of the measurement model.

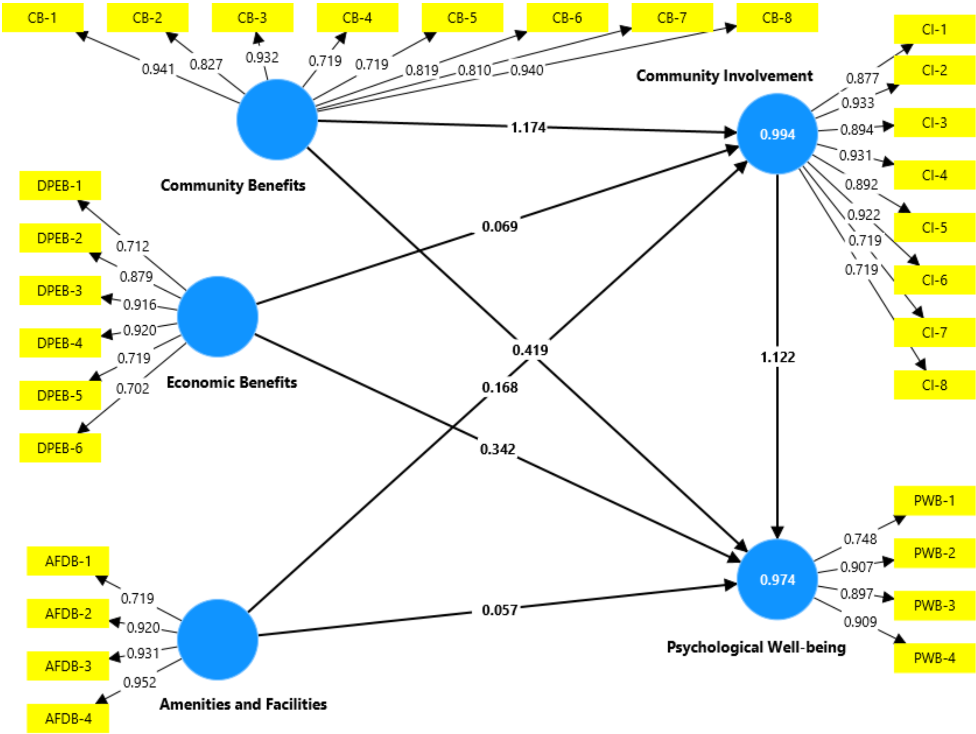

Figure 2. Measurement model

Structural Model (inner model)

Coefficient of determination (R^2):

To evaluate the predictive accuracy of the model, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was calculated. R^2 values show the percentage of the DV's variance that can be accounted for by the IVs. In this study, the R^2 values for the DVs were within moderate to high ranges, indicating that the IVs had a considerable explanatory effect. According to Chin's (1998) evaluation thresholds, the results presented in Table 3 show that the model's predictive power is statistically significant.

Table 3. R^2 Test results

Variable	R^2	Level
CI	0.994	High
PWB	0.974	High

CI (R^2 = 0.994): The model using CI accounts for 99.4% of the variance in the dependent variable. This is a rather robust association. PWB (R^2 = 0.974) accounts for 97.4% of the variation. Additionally, it demonstrates significant explanatory power. Both values are designated as High, indicating that the model's predictive accuracy for both variables is excellent.

Effect size (f^2)

To evaluate the relative influence of each IV on the DVs, effect size (f^2) calculations were conducted. According to Cohen's (1988) guidelines, effect sizes are categorised as small (0.02), medium (0.15), or large (0.35). The results shown in Table 4 reveal that the effect sizes of the IVs on the DVs ranged from medium to large, indicating substantial and significant effects within the proposed model.

Table 4. effect Size (f^2)

Variables	PWB	CI
CB	0.330 (Medium)	0.765 (Large)
DPEB	0.244 (Medium)	0.153 (Medium)
AFDB	0.115 (Small)	0.224 (Medium)
CI	0.358 (Large)	

CB demonstrated a large effect on Career Identity CI ($f^2 = 0.765$) and a medium effect on PWB ($f^2 = 0.330$), indicating its substantial role in shaping career-related perceptions and moderate influence on psychological outcomes. DPEB exhibited medium effects on both PWB ($f^2 = 0.244$) and CI ($f^2 = 0.153$), suggesting that emotional development contributes moderately to both domains. AFDB showed a small effect on PWB ($f^2 = 0.115$), but a medium effect on CI ($f^2 = 0.224$), indicating a more pronounced impact on career identity formation than on psychological well-being. Additionally, CI had a large effect on PWB ($f^2 = 0.358$), highlighting a strong predictive relationship between variables.

Examination of "GoF":

The overall fit of the structural equation model was assessed using the Goodness of Fit (GoF) index, which offers a comprehensive measure of the model's adequacy. The GoF value was determined as follows:

$$GoF = \sqrt{R^2 x\ AVE}$$

$$GoF = 0.832$$

The calculated GoF value for the model was 0.832, surpassing the benchmark set by Wetzels et al. (2009). This outcome indicates that the proposed model provides an adequate fit, making it a dependable representation of the relationships among the constructs in this study.

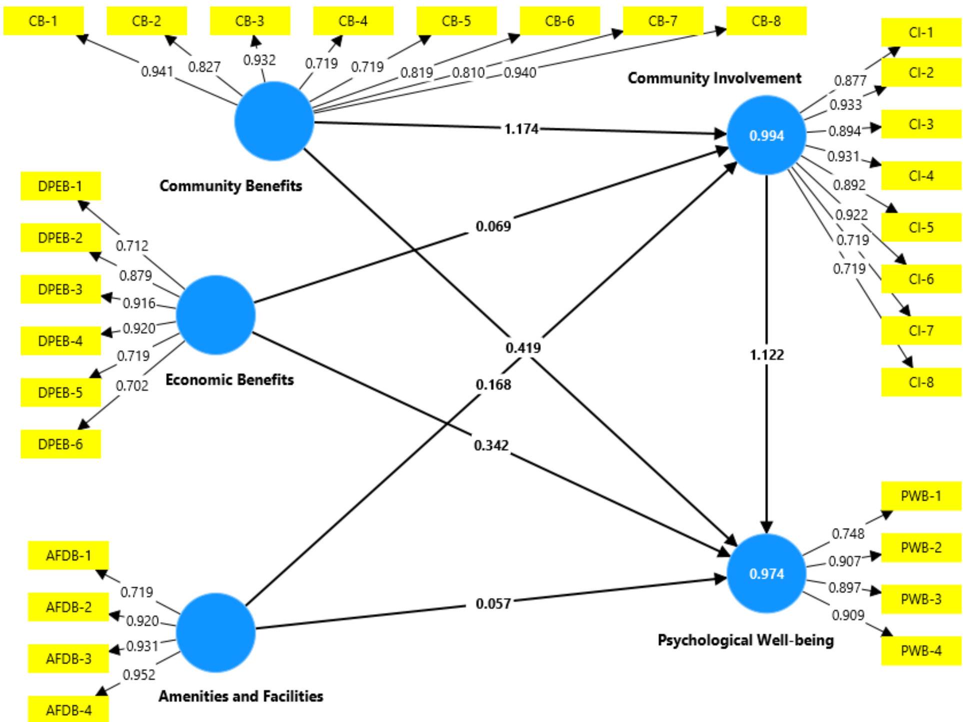

Figure 3. The final model

Examination of the Hypotheses:

To evaluate the compatibility of the proposed theoretical model with the primary data, a test of path coefficient significance was conducted. A summary of the results for each hypothesis test is provided below. For further details, refer to Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5. **Direct Path Coefficient**

Hypothesis	S.Beta	STDEV	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P Value	Findings
H-1: CB -> PWB	0.419	0.040	10.475	0.000	Supported**
H-2: DPEB ->PWB	0.342	0.126	2.709	0.007	Supported
H-3: AFDB -> PWB	0.057	0.003	19	0.000	Supported**
H-4: CB ->CI	1.174	0.023	50.662	0.000	Supported**
H-5: DPEB ->CI	0.069	0.031	2.205	0.027	Supported
H-6: AFDB ->CI	0.168	0.011	14.863	0.000	Supported**
H-7: CI -> PWB	1.122	0.529	2.122	0.034	Supported

Significant at P** = 0.000

SEM was used to analyze all direct relationships between the study constructs, allowing for an assessment of the proposed connections. The results highlighted that CB showed a strong positive impact on PWB, with an effect size of 0.330, a standardized beta (Std.-Beta) coefficient of 0.419, and a P-value of 0.000. This suggests that community benefits significantly improve the psychological well-being of host communities at world heritage sites, supporting Hypothesis H1. DPEB had a significant positive effect on PWB, with an effect size of 0.244, a standardized beta (Std.-Beta) coefficient of 0.342, and a P-value of 0.007. This suggests that the destination profile and economic benefits considerably enhance the psychological well-being of host communities at world heritage sites, supporting Hypothesis H2. AFDB demonstrated a significant positive influence on PWB, with an effect size of 0.115, a standardized beta (Std.-Beta) coefficient of 0.057, and a P-value of 0.000. This suggests that the development of amenities and facilities benefits improves the psychological well-being of host communities at world heritage sites, supporting Hypothesis H3. CB demonstrated a significant positive effect on CI, with an effect size of 0.765, a standardized beta (Std.-Beta) coefficient of 1.174, and a P-value of 0.000. This indicates that community benefits notably enhance host community involvement in tourism at world heritage sites, confirming Hypothesis H4. DPEB also showed a notable positive impact on CI, with an effect size of 0.153, a standardized beta (Std.-Beta) coefficient of 0.069, and a P-value of 0.027. This indicates that destination profile and economic benefits significantly boost host community involvement in tourism at world heritage sites, validating Hypothesis H5. AFDB also demonstrated a substantial positive effect on CI, with an effect size of 0.224, a standardized beta (Std.-Beta) coefficient of 0.168, and a P-value of 0.000. This indicates that the development of amenities and facilities benefits significantly enhances host community involvement in tourism at world heritage sites, confirming Hypothesis H6. CI exhibited a positive impact on PWB, with an effect size of 0.358, a standardized beta (Std.-Beta) coefficient of 1.122, and a P-value of 0.034. This result emphasizes the important role of host community involvement in tourism in promoting the psychological well-being of host communities at world heritage sites, validating Hypothesis H7.

Table 6. Indirect path coefficient

Hypothesis	S.Beta	STDEV	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P Value	Findings
H-8: CB ->CI ->PWB	1.318	0.628	2.099	0.036	Supported
H-9: DPEB ->CI -> PWB	0.178	0.061	2.918	0.007	Supported
H-10: AFDB ->CI -> PWB	0.188	0.085	2.214	0.027	Supported

Significant at P** = 0.000

To investigate the mediating role of "CI" in the relationship between the IVs and Dvs, the indirect effects were assessed using SEM. The analysis revealed that with an indirect effect size of 1.318, a standardized beta (Std.-Beta) coefficient of 1.318, and a P-value of 0.036, the analysis shows that "CI" significantly mediates the relationship between "CB" and "PWB," offering strong support for Hypothesis H8. The mediating role of "CI" between "DPEB" and "PWB" was also confirmed, with an indirect effect size of 0.178, a standardized beta (Std.-Beta) coefficient of 0.178, and a P-value of 0.007. This indicates that "CI" significantly mediates the relationship between "DPEB" and "PWB," providing strong support for Hypothesis H9. Similarly, the mediating role of "CI" between "AFDB" and "PWB" was confirmed, with an indirect effect size of 0.188, a standardized beta (Std.-Beta) coefficient of 0.188, and a P-value of 0.027. This suggests that "CI" significantly mediates the relationship between "AFDB" and "PWB," providing strong support for Hypothesis H9.

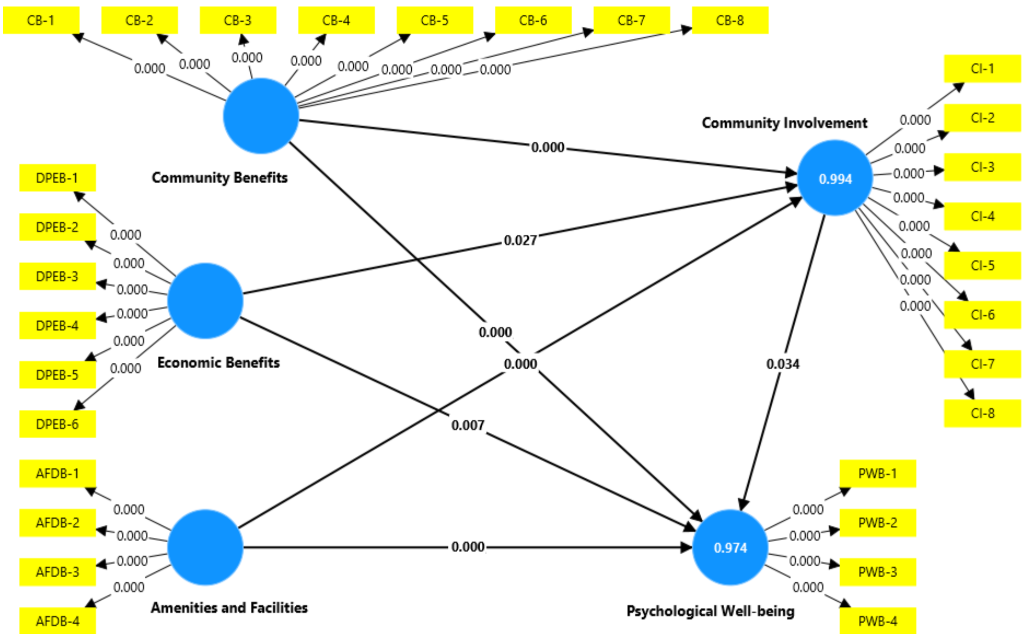

Figure 4. Significance of path coefficients

Discussion and implications

This study seeks to investigate the influence of perceived tourism benefits, encompassing community benefits (CB), destination profile and economic benefits (DPEB), and amenities and facilities development benefits (AFDB), on community involvement in tourism (CI) and psychological well-being (PWB) among host communities. The perceptions of local residents from two UNESCO World Heritage sites —Al-Ahsa Oasis in Saudi Arabia and the Nubian Monuments from Abu Simbel to Philae in Egypt—are central to this inquiry. Moreover, the study examines the mediating role of CI in the relationship between CB, DPEB, AFDB, and PWB. To achieve these objectives, the interrelationships among the variables were systematically analyzed. The findings indicate that the dimensions of perceived tourism benefits—namely, community benefits (CB), destination profile and economic benefits (DPEB), and amenities and facilities development benefits (AFDB)—exert a positive and statistically significant impact on the psychological well-being (PWB) of local residents at heritage sites in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The present study represents a novel contribution to the literature, as prior research has not explicitly examined these particular relationships. Most existing studies have concentrated on broader or related constructs such as the impact of tourism benefits on residents' quality of life (Ramkissoon, 2023), the lived experiences of rural host communities (Yu et al., 2018), general life satisfaction (Bimonte & Faralla, 2016), and subjective well-being (Nawijn & Mitas, 2012). Additionally, research by Andereck & Nyaupane (2011) emphasizes the value of residents' perceptions in shaping overall life satisfaction through tourism involvement. The current study extends these findings by highlighting how specific perceived benefit dimensions influence psychological well-being directly. Moreover, the results demonstrate that CB, DPEB, and AFDB also positively and significantly affect community identity (CI) among local residents at heritage tourism sites in both countries. This finding aligns with previous research, such as Soares et al. (2021), who observed that residents along the Santiago de Compostela World Heritage route in Spain often held positive attitudes toward tourism and emphasized community involvement in tourism planning. Similarly, Stylidis et al. (2014) found that community identity is closely linked to residents' support for tourism development, particularly when tourism is perceived to enhance local culture and image. Conversely, Dragouni & Fouseki (2018) reported a more limited influence of tourism perceptions on community participation intentions in the context of Kastoria, Greece, suggesting that contextual and cultural factors may moderate these relationships.

Furthermore, the study reveals an indirect effect of CB, DPEB, and AFDB on PWB mediated through CI, thereby confirming the significant mediating role of community identity in this model. This mediating relationship has not been previously established in the extant literature and contributes to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which tourism benefits influence residents' well-being. It supports the conceptual framework that links identity formation and psychological outcomes, consistent with broader tourism and social psychology literature (Zenker & Rütter, 2014; Ramkissoon et al., 2013). These findings demonstrate the value of fostering strong community identity as a pathway to enhancing residents' well-being through tourism development. Theoretically, the results support and extend existing tourism development models by incorporating psychological and identity-based variables into frameworks traditionally dominated by economic and sociocultural metrics (e.g., Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011; Stylidis et al., 2014). The role of CI as a mediator aligns with social exchange theory (SET), which posits that individuals' support for tourism is influenced by their evaluations of costs and benefits (Ap, 1992). However, this study deepens SET applications by demonstrating that beyond rational evaluations, psychological factors—such as residents' sense of belonging and identification with their community—play a pivotal role in shaping how perceived benefits affect well-being outcomes. From a practical standpoint, the findings offer several actionable insights for policymakers, tourism planners, and destination managers. Specifically, the evidence highlights the necessity for tourism strategies that go beyond mere economic development to consider residents' psychological and social dimensions. Understanding the psychological impact of tourism is essential for achieving sustainable tourism development, as resident support is critical to the long-term success of tourism initiatives (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Wang & Pfister, 2008). By actively fostering community involvement, tourism stakeholders can create inclusive development processes that promote local empowerment, enhance social cohesion, and improve the overall quality of life for host populations. Furthermore, the integration of these findings into policy and planning efforts can contribute to a more balanced and equitable distribution of tourism benefits. When residents perceive tangible and intangible benefits—such as improved infrastructure, enhanced cultural identity, and meaningful participation in decision-making—they are more likely to support tourism and engage constructively with tourists (Ramkissoon et al., 2013; Zenker & Rütter, 2014). This, in turn, fosters a virtuous cycle of mutual benefit and shared responsibility, whereby both host communities and visitors can thrive. In this sense, tourism development that prioritizes psychological well-being and community identity not only strengthens the social fabric of destination areas but also contributes to the resilience and sustainability of the tourism sector as a whole.

Conclusion

This study aims to examine the direct impact of the perceived benefits of tourism, including its three factors (CB, DPEB, and AFDB), on community involvement in tourism and the psychological well-being of host communities as perceived by local citizens at UNESCO heritage sites in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. It also explores the indirect effect of CB, DPEB, and AFDB on psychological well-being (PWB) through community involvement (CI). Data was collected from 396 local residents of host communities. Descriptive data were analyzed using SPSS version 24 and Excel Sheet 2010 to assess the demographic characteristics of participants. Additionally, PLS-SEM version 4.1.0.6 was used to analyze the direct and indirect relationships between the variables and to test the research hypotheses. The SEM results indicated that the perceived benefits of tourism (CB, DPEB, and AFDB) have a positive and significant impact on community involvement in tourism and the psychological well-being of host communities, as perceived by local citizens at UNESCO heritage sites in both Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that community involvement plays a mediating role in the relationship between the perceived benefits of tourism and the psychological well-being of host communities. Understanding and utilizing these reciprocal dynamics can help tourism decision-makers create environments where both tourists and host communities can thrive, leading to beneficial social, cultural, and economic outcomes. By addressing psychological impacts, policymakers can develop strategies to strengthen community resilience and ensure long-term benefits for both hosts and visitors.

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