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ENVIRONMENTAL SATISFACTION AS A MODERATOR IN THE HARNESSING OF COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

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Abstract: Community-based tourism (CBT) has come up as a viable solution towards development of sustainable tourism. Against the conventional tourism models, CBT focuses on the active participation and empowerment of the local communities in the planning, management, and decision-making processes in tourism. Through prioritization of local ownership, cultural preservation and environmental conservation, the CBT seeks to achieve more equitable distribution of tourism benefits and minimizing negative impacts. This is more so applicable in developing areas where tourism can be used as a trigger in bringing about socio-economic development provided it is done in a responsible manner This study aims to investigate how community-based tourism (CBT), with its three dimensions (economic, social, and environmental), affects long-term tourism growth and explores the moderating role of environmental satisfaction in the relationship between (CBT) factors and sustainable growth (SG). An online survey was conducted, involving 402 participants from the local community, representatives of the tourism sector, and visitors to the Dhofar tourism destination. A two-step quantitative approach was employed, utilizing structural equation modelling (SEM) using WarpPLS software. The findings demonstrated that the economic factor had a positive influence on sustainable growth, whereas the social factor exerted a negative influence, and the environmental factor exhibited no effect. Environmental satisfaction serves as a crucial moderator, amplifying the positive effects of social and environmental factors on tourism sustainability. CBT is a model of tourism that places local communities at the center of tourism management, development, and operation. This approach not only prioritizes environmental and cultural conservation but also enhances local livelihoods, making it a powerful tool for fostering sustainable tourism development. This study represents one of the limited investigations within the Sultanate of Oman in this context. The findings may assist the tourism industry in comprehending the potential advantages and challenges of (CBT) as well as how to employ it in their specific fields.

Keywords: environmental Satisfaction (ES), community-based tourism (CBT), sustainable growth (SG), Oman

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INTRODUCTION

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is a type of tourism where the local community owns and operates the tourism so that economic gains remain in the community and the traveler receives an opportunity to explore the culture firsthand (Jackson, 2025). Hence, the main foci of this approach include the engagement of local residents in planning and management processes, empowering locals and sustainable development through the conservation of cultural heritage as well as environmental conservation (Suriyankietkaew et al., 2025). According to Lo & Janta (2020), local residents play a key role in the decision-making of tourism and actively participate in the planning and distribution of benefits. CBT provides local communities with full authority to manage tourism activities to help them establish their desired social progress alongside financial development.

CBT has become increasingly significant in recent years, and it is one of the key drivers of the sustainable tourism development (Durrah et al., 2026; Zamzami et al., 2025). CBT enhances the policy in sustainable use and conservation of

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natural resources, in addition, it produces unity, pride, and involvement in the community decision-making process (Ghosh et al., 2025; Okpa et al., 2025; Rashwan et al., 2024). It is assumed that the communities with good attitudes towards tourism and having emotional attachment to the environment will endorse sustainable interventions like conservation, waste management, and resource conservation (Sukran et al., 2025; Sholeha & Sumarmi, 2025; Seidualin et al., 2025; Ziari & Mosleh, 2025).

The core virtue of CBT is its commitment to sustainable development and ethical economic practices, which enable local communities participating in CBT tourism programmes to use their power to determine tour activities while receiving a larger proportion of the generated wealth, as stated by Amoako et al. (2022).

Despite its recognised importance in empowering the local community and ensuring a sustainable environment, there are still uncertainties regarding how CBT can promote sustainable development in heterogeneous regional settings.

Despite the acknowledged theoretical merit of CBT, its practical application and effectiveness remain faced with unresolved issues; case studies have reported both positive and negative results, including financial losses, staffing shortages, poor leadership, and resource mismanagement (Giampiccoli et al., 2020). There is a lack of quantitative evaluations on the contribution of CBT to sustainable development, and practically no literature has investigated the discrete and interactive impact of the economic, social and environmental aspects of CBT (Alsaloum et al., 2024).

Previous studies have extensively highlighted individual aspects of CBT, ignoring the synergetic economic, social, and environmental aspects of the same, thus limiting the empirical understanding of their collective effects on sustainable results. Therefore, the analysis of the role of CBT in sustainable development is not yet complete, and a more detailed study of data is needed to go beyond the enumeration of its advantages and difficulties (Moscardo, 2008).

There is limited empirical research in CBT studies in Middle Eastern settings. The literature on community involvement or sustainable dimensions in local destinations is not very well studied (e.g., Abou-Shouk et al., 2021; Alsaloum et al., 2024), but these sources mostly focus on heritage tourism or cultural tourism and not on multidimensional approaches to the CBT. The gap is especially prominent in the Middle East; Oman is one of those examples where tourism is one of the economic priorities, but CBT remains insufficiently studied (Sharpley, 2020).

Overall, the current study aims to evaluate CBT initiatives by examining their sensitivity in economic, social, and environmental aspects. One of the main focuses of this research is environmental satisfaction, which is considered a moderating factor affecting perceptions of CBT and its role in sustainable development. Though previous studies of the CBT framework have been conducted on the economic, social and environmental dimensions, relatively less attention has been drawn to the moderation of environmental satisfaction on tourist involvement, decision-making and distribution of economic gains. By examining the role environmental satisfaction has in the economic, social, and environmental aspects of CBT, this study provides subtle clues to community tourism policy, empowerment programmes, and inclusive tourism. Dhofar is an appropriate research area due to its cultural diversity and growing tourism industry that combines both natural attractions and cultural attractions. Sustainable tourism is one of the aspects of the national strategy of Oman to reduce reliance on oil (Oman Vision 2040, 2021). Through the Dhofar case, the study offers new empirical data on the moderating role of environmental satisfaction in the interaction of the economic, social, and environmental dimensions in the context of CBT, which has not been extensively studied in the Middle East. The results will inform community empowerment initiatives and the Vision 2040 strategy of Oman toward diversifying its tourism sector. This vision requires information that is accessible to policymakers, tourism practitioners, and local communities to have a proper understanding of the contribution of CBT to the same.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Relationship between CBT and Sustainable Growth

Since both CBT and (SG) aim to minimise the negative effects of tourism while optimising its positive effects on the environment and local communities, they are inextricably intertwined (Hutnaleontina et al., 2022). CBT focuses on initiatives that are owned, controlled or have a significant impact on the local communities. This strategy puts emphasis on cultural conservation, community engagement, and equal distribution of benefits. In ensuring the community retains control over resources and cultural identity, the goal is to enable local people to use tourism as a tool of social and economic development (Sapkota et al., 2024). By balancing the economic, environmental, and social aspects of tourism, SG aims at making the sector sustainable and reducing negative impacts on the future generation. According to the definition offered by the United Nations World Tourism Organization, sustainable tourism is a combination of all three aspects: the needs of travellers, the tourism industry, and host communities, as well as the protection of ecosystems and cultural heritage (UNWTO, 2019).

CBT enables active inclusion of the local community in tourism planning and decision-making processes, thus forming a critical component of sustainable governance (SG). Goodwin & Santilli (2009) argue that CBT and SG provide local authorities with control over tourism-related resources and decision-making mechanisms, which, in their turn, create a stronger sense of local pride and make sure that the tourism development is based on local priorities and values. One clear way in which CBT has an impact on local livelihoods is the encouragement of a fair sharing of the proceeds of tourism. This process is consistent with the SG principle of reducing inequality and gaining equitable distribution of economic benefits as stated by Scheyvens (1999). Sustainable activities, which include ecotourism, are actively incorporated within CBT programmes by involving communities in the conservation and preservation of the environment. Weaver (2006) holds that in such integration, the SG environmental goals are achieved in full, and they are aimed at limiting resource production and alleviation of environmental disasters. Maintaining regional traditions, dialects, and heritage is an essential part of SG, and it is actively encouraged by CBT. The primary goal of sustainable tourism is to prevent commodification and protect and, at the same time, promote cultural diversity (Mowforth & Munt, 2003).

To guarantee long-term advantages and sustainable practices, both CBT and SG place a strong emphasis on cooperation among stakeholders, including local communities, governments, and commercial sector players (Bramwell & Lane, 2000). Long-term community and environmental advantages from tourism growth are guaranteed by CBT. For future generations, this strengthens SG's will to strike a balance between development and conservation (Saarinen, 2006). Although CBT advances the objectives of SG, issues including excessive tourism, a lack of knowledge about tourism management, and reliance on outside finance might make both strategies less effective. Aligning CBT with the larger objectives of SG requires strong governance, capacity-building, and community education (Afenyo-Agbe & Mensah, 2022).

The previous empirical studies have repeatedly highlighted a latent economic empowerment of CBT, reporting the results of better income diversification and a consequent reduction of rural poverty (Yang & Wall, 2023). However, there are also other signs of significant differences between translating these benefits to long-term sustainability, particularly within frames of financial leakage or unequal benefit-sharing models (Giampiccoli et al., 2020). In this regard, the current study is expected to determine whether the economic variables that result from CBT have a statistically significant and long-term effect on developmental outcomes. As a result, we have the following hypothesis:

H1. Economic factor positively affects sustainable growth.

Regarding the social aspects of CBT, e.g., improved social cohesion, empowerment, and involvement, they have been widely discussed in scholarly circles (Rop et al., 2023); however, there are limited empirical studies on their role in (SG). Many studies are operationalized social benefits as intermediaries but not as key drivers of sustainability. To this end, the present study will attempt to find out the relevance of social factors as independent predictors of (SG) outcomes. Thus, we propose the following:

H2. Social factor positively affects sustainable growth.

Even though CBT is conceptually consistent with environmental stewardship, there are still mixed empirical results. Some reports report minor or even negative impacts on the environment, which can be caused by over-tourism, poor waste disposal, or lack of conservation (Khater et al., 2025). Considering these inconsistencies, this question aims to determine whether the environmental aspect of CBT can be a substantive predictor of (SG) in the current contextual framework. Based on this argument, we hypothesis that:

H3. Environmental factor positively affects sustainable growth.

The Moderating Role of Environmental Satisfaction

Environmental satisfaction is a pivotal element in the success of sustainable tourism, reflecting the extent to which residents and visitors perceive improved environmental conditions as a result of tourism practices. High levels of environmental satisfaction enhance local communities' support for tourism, increase visitor satisfaction, and increase their intention to repeat visits, making it a strategic tool for stimulating (SG) (Sharpley, 2009; Trišić et al., 2023).

Previous studies illustrate that the correlation between CBT and environmental satisfaction is mutual. CBT also helps in enhancing the local environment in case it is managed in a sustainable manner, hence making residents more satisfied with their immediate environment. Environmental satisfaction, in its turn, is associated with the motivation to support and actively engage in such tourism programmers' in residents and increases their probability of success and sustainability (Krittayaruangroj et al., 2023). Environmental satisfaction is a significant measure of the quality of environmental policies and practices, especially those associated with (CBT). According to the literature, the greater the levels of resident satisfaction with the local environment, the greater will be the levels of support of development activities and awareness of the environment, which directly leads to the achievement of (SG) objectives. In turn, this means that environmental satisfaction is an indirect but significant contributor to sustainable economic, social, and environmental growth (Khan et al., 2022).

According to recent empirical research, it is possible to state that environmental satisfaction is a moderately impactful variable in sustainability models. As an example, Abou-Shouk et al. (2021) expressed the connection between tourism development and community support through the mediation of satisfaction of the residents with the quality of the environment. Similarly, Wang & Han (2022) also find similar results, and they find out that the relationship between resident empowerment and pro-environmental behaviors is enhanced by a high level of perceived environmental satisfaction. Nguyen et al. (2024) supported the fact that satisfaction with the local environmental enhancements increases residential interest in community tourism initiatives, which strengthens sustainability results.

All of these results support the argument that environmental satisfaction not only indicates the impacts of (CBT) but also determines how economic and social benefits are converted into sustainable development.

The perception of the community members of the improvement of the environment due to the development of community tourism is, according to the model of community support of sustainable tourism development by Lee (2013), a central element that forms the basis of the sustainability of these activities. Accordingly, the hypothesis is that the relationship between community tourism and (SG) is moderated by environmental satisfaction. An important point to note here is that environmental satisfaction might not have an equal impact on every aspect of CBT. Often, the profitability of economies and communities depends on how humans perceive the quality of the environment since the quality of the ecological environment lowers tourist attraction and, subsequently, lowers the socioeconomic income and unity of the community (Abou-Shouk et al., 2021). The environmental dimension, however, may be less sensitive due to the fact that it is a direct measure of the ecological effects of CBT and is not mediated by satisfaction. This asymmetry is responsible for the occasional occurrence of a statistically nonsignificant environmental variable in empirical models, as in the results of the present study. Previous research indicates that the satisfaction of residents regarding environmental conditions increases

their willingness to support tourism development (Abou-Shouk et al., 2021), and this in turn strengthens the connection between perceived economic benefits and sustainable development (Chien, 2022). Therefore, we propose the following:

H4. Environmental satisfaction moderates the relationship between CBT-based economic benefits and sustainable growth.

According to Jackson (2025) the social advantages of CBT, which include the supply of cohesiveness and empowerment, are also improved when inhabitants in the community perceive improvements in environmental quality. Based on these arguments, we propose the following:

H5. Environmental satisfaction moderates the relationship between CBT-based social benefits and sustainable growth.

Nevertheless, the most recent empirical studies on the moderating role of environmental satisfaction on environmental benefits have produced inconsistent findings, which suggests the potential asymmetry of the effect of satisfaction on different aspects of sustainability (Trišić et al., 2023; Wang & Han, 2022). Where some studies have found that a high level of environmental satisfaction enhances community involvement in environmental conservation, other studies have found that environmental satisfaction may bring about complacency whereby residents feel that the current state of the environment is satisfactory, thus reducing the level of active involvement (Elbaz, 2013). Such complexity of methods serves to make it imperative to thoroughly research the nature of conditions and processes where the level of environmental satisfaction is converted into evident environmental benefits. Hence:

H6. Environmental satisfaction moderates the relationship between CBT-based environmental benefits and sustainable growth.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sampling Procedure and Data Collection

This research embraced a quantitative survey design. The online survey was used to collect data for 4 months "July-October 2025". Trained research assistants were used to help in the administration of the instrument and also clarify respondents whenever necessary to streamline the data collection process. A convenience sampling strategy has been employed, which is generally applicable in exploration studies in tourism and sustainability (Elbaz & Abou-Shouk, 2016). The survey tool was subject to the deliberation of a group of expert scholars and industry players who were specialists in the area of tourism. Their task involved a systematic review of the design, relevance, and applicability of the questionnaire to the objectives of the research. Additionally, a pilot study was conducted with 25 individuals from tourism industry in the Dhofar region before the main data collection began. The survey tool was made to collect information on important parts of CBT, such as economic factors (ECF), social factors (SOF), and environmental factors (ENF), as well as environmental satisfaction (ES) and (SG). The survey was structured to gather quantitative data using closed-ended Likert-scale enquiries.

"Ethical approval for this study was secured from the University Research Ethics and Biosafety Committee at Dhofar University (Code: DU/AY/2024/25/QUES-050, dated November 25, 2024). This approval ensured that all procedures complied with institutional and international ethical standards for research involving human participants. Before administering the questionnaire, informed consent was obtained from all study participants, ensuring that they were fully aware of the study's purpose and procedures. Participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Moreover, they were assured of the confidentiality of their responses, with data being anonymized and used solely for research purposes.

The informed consent process involved providing participants with a detailed explanation of the study's objectives, the nature of their involvement, and the expected duration of their participation". The sample frame included the pertinent stakeholders including the local community, representatives from the tourism sector, and tourists visiting the Dhofar region in Oman. Eligible participants were adults (18 years and older) who were either residents of Dhofar for at least four months, tourists visiting the region, or industry representatives engaged in the tourism sector.

A total of 402 valid responses were obtained after excluding incomplete surveys.

Nevertheless, the final sample size was adequate for structural equation modeling (SEM), as it exceeds both the minimum threshold of 200 cases and the recommended ratio of 10–20 participants per estimated parameter (Hair et al., 2019), thereby ensuring sufficient statistical power and reliability. The sample included 50.7% men and 49.3% women. 48.8% of the sample consisted of individuals under the age of 30. 45.5% possessed a bachelor's degree. Additionally, 56.7% of respondents reported being unmarried as shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2).

GENDER	AGE	EDUCATION	MARITAL STATUS
50.7%	**48.8%**	**45.5%**	**56.7%**
Men	Under 30 years	Bachelor's degree	Unmarried
Men 50.7%	Under 30 .... 48.8%	Bachelor's ... 45.5%	Unmarried ... 56.7%
Women 49.3%	30 and over. 51.2%	Other 54.5%	Married/Other 43.3%

Figure 1. Sample profile (n = 402). (Source: Survey data July–October 2025)

Measures

The assessment of (CBT) factors utilized a 10-item scale based on the framework established by Ko & Stewart (2002). The economic factor is assessed through three items, the social factor is evaluated using three items, and the environmental factor is measured by four items. Although sustainable growth is a multidimensional construct, this study employed a

concise three-item scale to measure it adapted from (Abou-Shouk et al., 2021). The decision was based on two key considerations. First, brevity in survey design helps to minimize respondent fatigue, particularly when the instrument already includes multiple constructs (economic, social, environmental factors, and environmental satisfaction).

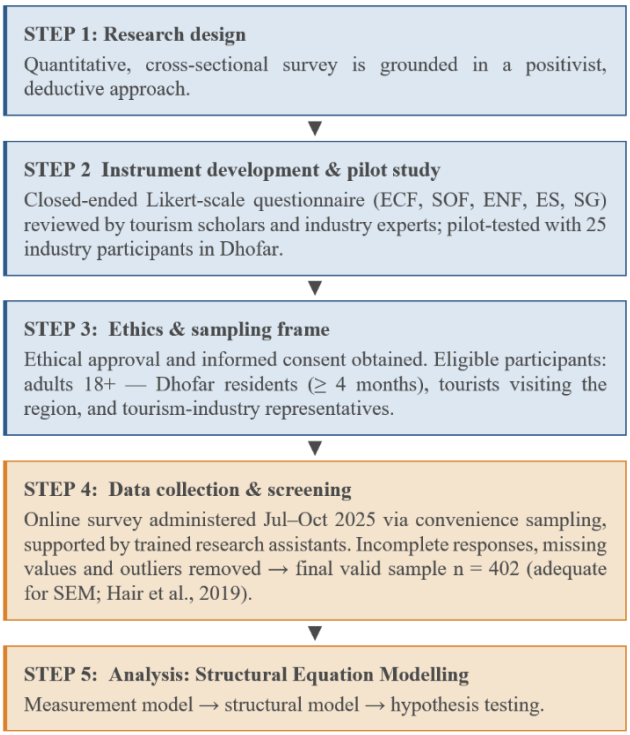


Figure 2. Methodology flow chart (Source: Authors' elaboration based on the study's methodology)

Prior research has shown that short scales can still provide reliable and valid measurement, especially when the items are carefully selected to capture the core essence of the construct (Hair et al., 2019). Second, the three items used in this study have been validated in previous empirical research as effective indicators of sustainable growth in similar contexts (Abou-Shouk et al., 2021), demonstrating satisfactory levels of reliability and construct validity.

The scale created by Pelletier et al. (1996) was employed to evaluate environmental satisfaction through three items. Therefore, adapting this scale provides a theoretically sound and empirically supported measure that captures stakeholders' evaluation of environmental quality in tourism destinations. Its integration into a CBT–sustainability framework is both conceptually appropriate and consistent with contemporary applications in related tourism and sustainability studies. Prior studies that have demonstrated reliability and validity of these measures in comparable contexts (i.e. Goodwin, & Santilli, 2009; Sharpley, 2020). We assessed the responses using a five-point Likert scale, which ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In order to increase the understanding of the Arabic-speaking respondents, all instruments were translated out of English to Arabic through a computerised process of back-translation, hence preserving the reliability and validity of the translated versions.

RESULTS

Research Model and Techniques

In this research, a dependent variable, (SG), is operationalized using three discrete items and an independent variable (CBT), which is defined on three orthogonal scales: economic (three items), social (three items), and environment (five items). Moreover, environmental satisfaction is used as a moderating variable, which has three items. The empirical data were analyzed with the help of WarpPLS software through the partial least square's structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). This method of analysis is comprised of two major forms: an internal structural model, which examines the strength of the postulated interrelations among latent constructs, and an external measurement model, which examines the validity and reliability of the measurement instruments.

Normality Test and Descriptive Statistics

While PLS-SEM demonstrates resilience to non-normal data, we present skewness and kurtosis for the sake of transparency. The normality of data was determined based on the skewness and kurtosis analysis of the distribution curve. An agreement among scholars in science suggests that skewness and kurtosis values are successful measures of normality (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Hair et al. (2010) explain that the skew and kurtosis are supposed to be within the range of ±2.58, meaning a normal distribution. Table 1 displayed the results of the data set's normality test. The results indicated that all variables have a normal distribution, with skewness and kurtosis values were within the allowed limits.

On the other hand, Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for all constructs. The assessment employed indicators ranging from 1 to 5 on a 5-point Likert scale. The findings indicated that the average (SG) was high (4.193), whereas the averages for social and environmental factors were relatively low (2.828 and 2.738, respectively), with the economic factor being notably high (4.164). The mean score for environmental satisfaction was recorded at 2.806, indicating a low level of satisfaction. The standard deviation values for all constructs were low.

Table 1. Normality test and descriptive statistics of constructs

Construct	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
ECF	4.164	0.787	-0.768	0.127
SOF	2.828	1.432	-0.131	-1.590
ENF	2.738	1.399	-0.023	-1.481
ES	2.806	1.473	-0.069	-1.609
SG	4.193	0.858	-1.007	0.360

Assessing the Measurement Model

Hair et al. (2019) stated that reflective outer models can be shown to be correct in three steps: by checking for indicator loading, convergent validity and the reliability of the internal consistency, and evaluating the discriminant validity. The outer model undergoes evaluation by initially examining the indicator loading, which indicates the extent to which the indicators effectively represent the construct. The suggested and recognized threshold for the loading exceeded 0.7, according to Hair et al. (2021). The outer loading of each indicator in Table 2 was higher than the acceptable level of 0.7. Although the loadings are high, item content overlap was carefully examined.

All items were retained to preserve full domain coverage and ensure conceptual completeness of the constructs. This finding showed how the indicators of the study are reliable and effective in determining the basic components. The large outer loadings demonstrated the fact that the indicators have a close relationship with the constructs they were measured by, which confirms the validity of the measurement model. The test was performed to measure the construct validity in the outer model by measuring the convergent and discriminant validity and internal consistency reliability of the scale items.

There is an indicator in each construct that calculates the average variance extracted (AVE), which is a representation of the construct. According to Hair et al. (2013), an AVE value of 0.50 is acceptable. As can be seen, Table 2 indicated that all the items pass the acceptable loading threshold, which showed that the constructs were well-defined and reliable.

The values of each of the constructs under AVE indicate that each of them explained a considerable percentage of the variation in the indicators. This fact is in favour of the construct validity of the model. All the indicators in each construct were retained due to their high contribution to the corresponding variables (Durrah et al., 2025a).

Table 2. Assessment of Measurement Model

Construct	Item	Loading	VIF	α	CR	AVE
Economic Factor (ECF)	ECF_1	0.803	1.803	0.758	0.861	0.675
	ECF_2	0.865				
	ECF_3	0.793				
Social Factor (SOF)	SOF_1	0.975	9.298	0.975	0.984	0.952
	SOF_2	0.978				
	SOF_3	0.975				
Environmental Factor (ENF)	ENF_1	0.954	8.136	0.967	0.976	0.911
	ENF_2	0.944				
	ENF_3	0.962				
	ENF_4	0.958				
Environmental Satisfaction (ES)	ES_1	0.979	6.204	0.977	0.985	0.955
	ES_2	0.976				
	ES_3	0.977				
Sustainable Growth (SG)	SG_1	0.868	1.468	0.863	0.916	0.785
	SG_2	0.903				
	SG_3	0.887				

Moreover, internal consistency reliability measures the extent of stability of the results of a measurement. Satisfactory internal consistency reliability is the property of an instrument where all of its construct indicators are consistent (Jain & Chetty, 2021). When in quantitative research, the composite reliability (CR) is reported, it is often equal to or larger than 0.7 (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015). Table 2 shows that none of the (CR) values were below the set threshold. Although SOF, ENF, and ES items exhibited very high loadings (0.984, 0.976, and 0.985), content overlap was carefully examined, and all statements were retained to ensure comprehensive coverage of the respective latent variables. The suggested value of Cronbach's Alpha aligns closely with the recommended values of the CR, as noted by Hair et al. (2006). The values of Cronbach's alpha presented in Table 2 exceeded the established cut-off value of 0.70 (Durrah et al., 2025b).

Additionally, the internal variance inflation factor (VIF) values for each set of predictors (exogenous constructs) in the structural model were examined to ensure the absence of multicollinearity among the constructs. Table 2 demonstrates that the structural model's collinearity issue is relatively minor, as the VIF values for the exogenous constructs remain below the

threshold of 10 (O'brien, 2007). The last phase of assessing the outer model involves establishing discriminant validity. Discriminant validity refers to the extent to which a specific construct empirically differs from other constructs within the inner model (Hair et al., 2021). Two methods exist that can be used to assess discriminant validity: the criterion suggested by Fornell & Larcker (1981) and the HTMT (heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations) criterion suggested by Hair et al. (2021). The Fornell & Larcker (1981) method is applied to test the discriminant validity of a given construct. It comprises comparing the square of inter-construct correlation to the AVE value of such a construct and the rest of the reflective constructs in the structural model (Alkhalaf et al., 2026). To have discriminant validity, the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) should be more than the sum of the correlations between the latent variables.

All constructs in the measurement model displayed adequate discriminant validity, as illustrated in Table 3. Also, Henseler et al. (2015) came up with the idea of the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations, which is being used more and more in empirical research. The conceptual similarity among the framework's constructs influences the proposed and recognized value of HTMT. To ensure the constructs are distinct, the HTMT value must be 0.90 or lower (Römer et al., 2021). All constructs' HTMT values in Table 4 fall within the recognized range except three values (0.934, 0.921, 0.908) violate this criterion. However, in the light of the conceptual similarity of the model constructs, the use of a more liberal criterion for specificity seems warranted, when constructs are theoretically very similar (as the social, and environmental factors of CBT in our study), higher values of 0.90 might be acceptable (George & Sarstedt, 2019).

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and HTMT. All diagonal entries in Table 3 exceed the corresponding inter-construct correlations. HTMT values (Table 4) meet conventional cutoffs (stringent < .85; lenient < .90). We also applied HTMT inference with 5,000 bootstrap samples; for every pair, the upper 95% CI was < 1.00, confirming discriminant validity. The PLS-SEM model is composed of two primary components: the outer model, also known as the measurement model, and the inner model, referred to as the structural model.

The outer model focuses on defining latent constructs, whereas the inner model examines the relationships among the various constructs within the framework (Bollen & Diamantopoulos, 2017).

Table 3. Correlations among latent variables with the square root of AVEs

	ECF	SOF	ENF	ES	SG
ECF	**(0.821)**				
SOF	-0.119	**(0.976)**			
ENF	-0.145	0.923	**(0.955)**		
ES	-0.093	0.907	0.883	**(0.977)**	
SG	0.342	-0.156	-0.184	-0.135	**(0.886)**

Table 4. Discriminant validity (HTMT)

	ECF	SOF	ENF	ES	SG
ECF					
SOF	0.138				
ENF	0.168	0.934			
ES	0.107	0.921	0.908		
SG	0.422	0.170	0.201	0.147	

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

As shown in Figure 3, we conducted SEM analysis using WarpPLS software. Table 5 presents the results of hypothesis testing and describes the direct and indirect effects of the variables regarding the direct effects, the findings revealed that the ECF had a positive effect on SG (β = 0.100, p = 0.022). Furthermore, SOF had a negative effect on SG (β = -0.136, p = 0.003). Thus, H1 and H2 were supported ENF had no significant effect on SG (β = -0.034, p = 0.248).

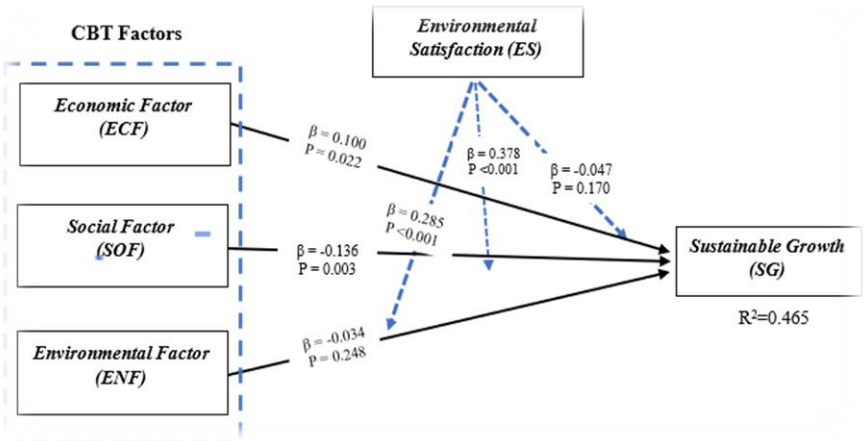


Figure 3. Measurement Model

Therefore, the results did not support H3. With respect to the moderating effects, the results showed that ES had a significant moderating effect on the SOF→SG and ENF→SG and relations (β = 0.378, p <0.001; β = 0.285, p <0.001), respectively. Thus, H5 and H6 were supported. Furthermore, the moderation results indicated that ES did not moderate the ECF→SG relation (β = -0.047, p = 0.170). Thus, H4 is not supported. The research employed f^2 values derived from WarpPLS to calculate the effect size associated with each path coefficient. A path coefficient may indicate a small effect (≥0.02), medium effect (≥0.15), or large effect (≥0.35) based on established effect size criteria.

Effects below 0.02 are typically considered negligible (Cohen, 1992). The exogenous factors shown in Table 5 demonstrate f^2 values ranging from small to medium size. Using the Stone-Geisser Q-squared coefficient, Table 5 shows how well the endogenous variables in the study model were able to predict what would happen. According to Fornell & Cha (1994), a study model is considered predictive if its Q-squared coefficient exceeds zero.

The study model satisfies this criterion, as its coefficient surpassed zero (0.354). In addition, the research model's overall fit was estimated through the Tenenhaus Goodness-of-Fit (GoF) index, which exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.36, achieving a value of 0.650. This recommends that the model indicates a satisfactory level of overall feasibility (Almohammad et al., 2025). Furthermore, the R-squared coefficient (R^2 = 0.465) indicates a satisfactory level of explanatory power for the dependent constructs.

Table 5. Hypothesis testing (direct and moderated paths)

H	Structural Paths	Path Coefficient (β)	P-values	Effect Size (f^2)	Result
Direct Effect					
H1	ECF → SG	0.100	0.022	0.035	Supported
H2	SOF → SG	-0.136	0.003	0.060	Supported
H3	ENF → SG	-0.034	0.248	0.016	Not supported
Indirect Effect (Moderating Effect)					
H4	ECF * ES→ SG	-0.047	0.170	0.017	Not supported
H5	SOF * ES→ SG	0.378	<0.001	0.211	Supported
H6	ENF * ES→ SG	0.285	<0.001	0.157	Supported
Q-squared coefficients (0.354)		R-squared coefficients (0.465)		Tenenhaus GoF (0.650)	

DISCUSSION

This study aims to identify the impact of (CBT) factors on sustainable growth, with a focus on exploring the moderating role of environmental satisfaction. The study findings indicated that the economic factor has a positive influence on sustainable growth, whereas the social factor exerts a negative influence. Additionally, findings have not supported any significant effect of the environmental factor on sustainable growth. Furthermore, the results showed that environmental satisfaction acted as a moderator in the relationship between two community tourism factors (social and environmental) and sustainable growth. However, environmental satisfaction did not act as a moderator in the relationship between the economic factor and sustainable growth. The following is a discussion of these factors and their effects on sustainable growth.

Hypothesis 1 suggested that economic factors significantly contribute to the promotion of sustainable growth. Investment in tourism frequently results in job creation and income generation for local communities, which is crucial for sustainable growth. Economic benefits to communities enhance their motivation to safeguard and preserve natural resources and cultural heritage. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2019) indicates that tourism may account for as much as 10% of global GDP and has a substantial effect on local economies through the generation of employment in sectors directly associated with tourism services, such as hotels, restaurants, and tour operations. Economic factors play a crucial role in sustainable growth by generating funds for reinvestment in conservation efforts (Eagles & McCool, 2002).

Regarding the second hypothesis, despite the importance of the social factors of (CBT) in achieving sustainable growth, the results of our study revealed a negative impact that hinders such growth. This can be explained by the fact that with the increasing influx of tourists, the local community may be pressured to adapt its culture and traditions to suit the tastes of tourists rather than preserving their authenticity. These conditions may lead to the transformation of customs and traditions into mere tourist offerings without preserving their intrinsic value (Smith, 2015).

Sharpley (2018) critically examines how tourism—particularly when marketed as a catalyst for community development—can ironically threaten social sustainability. He contends that although tourism is frequently portrayed as a driver of empowerment and local involvement, in reality it can undermine community unity, cultural authenticity, and social fairness, especially when advantages are inequitably shared or managed externally.

According to Goodwin (2011), he recognizes "overtourism" as a significant social danger to sustainable tourism. In his working paper "The Challenge of Overtourism," he describes overtourism as circumstances in which locals or tourists perceive that the number of visitors has increased to a level that the quality of life (for residents) or the quality of the experience for visitors has declined "unacceptably."

Goodwin emphasizes that platforms like Airbnb and peer-to-peer short-term rental services have social impacts: they can increase housing costs, decrease available housing for locals, and displace low-income residents. Regarding the third hypothesis, in traditional tourism, environmental factors such as pollution, overconsumption of resources, and land degradation impact sustainable growth. Nevertheless, the environmental impact can be minimal or even absent in the context of CBT because of the nature of this type of tourism and sustainable approaches to its management. However, the relevance of environmental factors to sustainable growth is not conclusive in this instance, implying that their effects are

not relevant in certain situations (Buckley, 2009). Under sustainable (CBT), the environmental factors do not actually influence sustainable growth because the environmental degradation is minimalized. This is attributed to the lack of high tourism density, the embracing of environmentally friendly practices, and the raising of awareness of the local communities on the need to take care of the natural resources. In this instance, environmental factors will be negligently influential on sustainability, and this is the reason why they do not impact sustainable growth (Stronza & Durham, 2008).

The findings also indicated that environmental satisfaction does not moderate the relationship between economic factors of (CBT) and sustainable growth. Environmental satisfaction is a significant aspect of evaluating tourism sustainability, though in certain instances, it might fail to influence the association between the economic components of community tourism and sustainable development. That is, environmental satisfaction does not affect how community tourism's economic impact influences sustainable growth. This is connected to the emphasis of economic returns, the low impact of environmental factors on economic performance, the availability of a compromise between economic development and environmental protection, and the use of purely economic parameters to shape tourism policies (Sharpley, 2020). Thus, sustainable economic growth is possible in community tourism despite the different levels of environmental satisfaction (Buckley, 2009). Moreover, the findings of this paper affirmed the moderating position of environmental satisfaction in the correlation between the social aspects of CBT and sustainable growth. In their research, Weaver (2006) also emphasizes that the environment is the basis of the resource base of tourism development, particularly in those regions that rely on natural landscape and ecological resources.

Weaver argues in his book Sustainable tourist: Theory and Practice that environmental quality is more than just a background; it is a key driver of tourist sustainability and competitiveness. He emphasizes that the deterioration of environmental conditions—such as pollution, habitat destruction, or aesthetic decline—can directly affect visitor satisfaction, destination perception, and long-term economic viability. In sustainable tourism frameworks.

Weaver emphasizes environmental management as a fundamental aspect of the Triple Bottom Line, indicating that ecological sustainability not only boosts ecological resilience but also brings social and economic advantages by enhancing quality of life, visitor satisfaction, and community welfare.

In other studies, made by Choi & Sirakaya (2006) discovered that the environmental sustainability aspect had little impact on residents' support for tourism, primarily because economic advantages surpassed environmental worries, and due to residents' limited awareness and perceived urgency regarding environmental matters.

Residents in areas reliant on tourism or under development often place greater importance on economic gains — such as employment, earnings, and infrastructure — than on environmental conservation. Numerous participants considered environmental impacts as less important, particularly when tourism offered sources of income. Consequently, their backing for tourism was motivated by economic reasons rather than environmental factors. In other words, "Residents frequently find the economic advantages of tourism more prominent than environmental issues." — (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006). The more satisfied residents and tourists are with the environment, the stronger and more influential the relationship between social factors and sustainable growth. Weak environmental satisfaction, however, weakens this relationship, even when social factors are strong (Lee, 2013).

The findings of this study add to the growing theoretical knowledge on (CBT) in the Sultanate of Oman by highlighting the interconnected nature of economic, social, and environmental factors and their impact on sustainable growth, highlighting the importance of a strong sense of environmental satisfaction in this context. (CBT) is a catalyst for sustainable growth not only across economic dimensions, but also across social and environmental dimensions. This reinforces theoretical models that view tourism as a multidimensional tool for achieving sustainability (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006). Nevertheless, the current research moves forward on the current CBT theory by establishing that social influences could have a pernicious impact on long-run development and dispelling the idea that all the social relations have an inherent tightening of the community outcome. This subtlety is an expansion of the Community Support Framework (Lee, 2013), which demonstrates how social pressures or interpersonal confrontations within the communities can undermine tourism support when demands of equity or inclusion are not fulfilled.

Moreover, the sustainability models, such as the Triple Bottom Line and the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach, are also improved by means of incorporating the environmental satisfaction into the model as a moderating variable. It provides evidence that the quality of the perceived environment impacts the translation of the economic and social outcome into sustainable development. This finding highlights the fact that sustainability is both a structural and a perceptual and psychological process, and this adds credibility to the theoretical integration between environmental psychology and (CBT). In general, the study assists in the progress of the conceptualization, which involves the interrelation between environmental satisfaction and community empowerment in CBT approaches, thereby offering an overall model, which is used to explain the material and perceptual components of sustainability.

This synthesis contributes new dimensions of theoretical discourse on the nature of the interplay of community attitudes, the condition of the environment, and economic equity in producing long-term, sustainable tourism.

Based on the above theoretical perspectives, several practical suggestions can be expressed to policymakers, tourism professionals and local community organisations in Oman and similar environments. CBT is a model of tourism that places local communities at the center of tourism management, development, and operation. This approach not only prioritizes environmental and cultural conservation but also enhances local livelihoods, making it a powerful tool for fostering sustainable tourism development. CBT provides a sustainable alternative to conventional tourism, placing emphasis on community benefits, environmental sustainability, and cultural preservation. By empowering local

communities to manage and benefit from tourism, CBT creates an inclusive model that aligns well with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and fosters long-term positive impacts. The policymakers in Oman should come up with CBT programmers' that strengthen the processes of community involvement and mitigate the social tensions that can undermine the society. Some interventions that can alleviate the negative social effects found in this study include facilitation, participatory planning, conflict-resolution training, and promotion of transparent benefit-sharing.

CBT stresses striking a balance between social, economic, and environmental objectives in order to guarantee long-term gains. By giving local communities a direct portion of tourism-related income, CBT promotes economic sustainability. By supporting conservation and eco-friendly behaviors, it advances environmental sustainability. Fair benefit sharing, cultural preservation, and community involvement all contribute to social sustainability (Sharpley, 2009). CBT promotes the involvement of all stakeholders in decision-making for the effective growth of tourism, including local communities, governments, businesses, and tourists. Instead of being passive recipients of the benefits of tourism, CBT promotes a bottom-up strategy in which communities actively plan for tourism. It ensures that local views are heard and respected, which helps to resolve problems amongst various parties (Freeman, 2010).

CBT allows communities to benefit directly from tourism revenue. By offering homestays, guiding services, cultural experiences, and selling handicrafts, locals can diversify their income sources and reduce reliance on traditional forms of income like agriculture (UNWTO, 2018). CBT generates jobs within communities, which helps to reduce urban migration and retain local talent. The income generated can then be reinvested into community projects, furthering socio-economic development (Yanes et al., 2019). CBT often involves environmental conservation as communities seek to protect their natural resources, which are essential for attracting tourists. CBT initiatives often incorporate ecotourism practices like waste reduction, habitat preservation, and sustainable resource use (Scheyvens, 1999).

Unlike large-scale tourism, CBT operates on a smaller scale, which reduces environmental stress. Community-led initiatives often enforce limits on visitor numbers, helping to prevent environmental degradation (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009). Environmental satisfaction can be used by the practitioners as a strategic management tool whereby they invest in conspicuous environmental improvements such as waste-management facilities, ecologic certifications, and heritage restoration projects to enhance the level of pride in the residents and integrate societal support of tourism. Within the context of Oman, the implementation of CBT interventions, which are consistent with Oman Vision 2040, requires improved institutional coordination of tourism authorities, municipal, and local councils.

The integration of the environmental satisfaction indicators in the regional tourism performance measurement will serve as a collective way of fostering the diversification of the economy, social integration and environmental sustainability. Lastly, there are serious risks to sustainable tourism from environmental factors. To reduce these adverse effects, eco-friendly tourism practices, effective laws, and regulations are required.

Stricter conservation regulations, eco-tourism projects, carbon offset schemes, and responsible waste management are some of the solutions (Baloch et al., 2023). Sustainable tourism relies on the protection of natural environments, which includes the preservation of ecosystems, biodiversity, and landscapes. Protected areas and national parks, for example, serve as major tourist attractions while simultaneously promoting conservation efforts. Effective management of these resources supports biodiversity, which enhances the appeal of a destination (Eagles & McCool, 2002).

CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of community-based tourism (CBT) on sustainable growth, focusing on the moderating role of environmental satisfaction. Using survey data from 402 respondents in Dhofar Governorate, Oman, and partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), the study provides insights into the relationships between community-based tourism and sustainable development.

The findings reveal that the economic dimension of CBT has a significant positive effect on sustainable growth, highlighting the importance of employment opportunities, local business development, income generation, and the contribution of tourism to community prosperity. Strengthening local entrepreneurship and ensuring that tourism revenues benefit local communities can therefore support sustainable growth. In contrast, the social dimension demonstrates a significant negative relationship with sustainable growth. This unexpected finding suggests that community participation and social interactions do not automatically generate positive sustainability outcomes.

Potential challenges may include unequal benefit distribution, stakeholder conflicts, and pressures on local cultural practices. Tourism stakeholders should consequently promote inclusive decision-making, transparent benefit-sharing mechanisms, and the preservation of local cultural identity.

The environmental dimension does not have a statistically significant direct effect on sustainable growth.

However, environmental satisfaction significantly moderates the relationship between the social and environmental dimensions of CBT and sustainable growth. These results indicate that environmental satisfaction may influence how social and environmental tourism conditions relate to sustainability outcomes. Nevertheless, its moderating effect on the relationship between the economic dimension and sustainable growth is not statistically significant.

This study contributes to the community-based tourism literature by incorporating environmental satisfaction into the sustainable growth framework and providing empirical evidence from Dhofar, a destination with distinctive cultural and natural attractions. Practically, the findings emphasize the need for an integrated tourism strategy that combines economic empowerment, inclusive community engagement, cultural preservation, and environmental management. These priorities are particularly relevant to Oman's tourism development objectives and Oman Vision 2040.

Limitations and Future Research

Similar to other research, this study has a number of limitations. First, the research is based on personal perceptions and emotions, which can be used to give biased results. Subjective measures of economic, societal, and environmental change by the respondents can be a momentary feeling of the respondent or a personal experience and not a sustained reality within the community. Future studies can utilise longitudinal designs to track the variations in perceptions over the course of time. Second, the findings might not be as generalisable as they might have become because of the convenience sampling used. Future research may employ probability-based methods like stratified or systematic random sampling. Third, the approach taken in this study was quantitative, so it could not delve deeper into the psychological and cultural processes behind the perception of the residents. In future studies, mixed-method designs could be used to combine the quantitative findings with in-depth qualitative data, and thus, obtain a more in-depth picture of the attitude and behaviours among communities. Finally, the Dhofar Governorate of the Sultanate of Oman was the only target of the research. This geographic concentration can limit the external validity of findings to areas that have various forms of governance, maturity of tourism, or even socio-cultural situations. Research on the matter could be conducted in the future using a multi-region/country comparative design to evaluate whether the negative social impact and moderating role of environmental satisfaction are local or general to the region.

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