
THE EFFECT OF AGRITOURISM ON DEVELOPING RURAL COMMUNITIES: EVIDENCES FROM SAUDI ARABIA AND EGYPT

HUTHAYFAH MADKHALI

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION, JAZAN UNIVERSITY, SAUDI ARABIA

ABSTRACT

This study aims to assess the link between agritourism and job creation, handicraft sales, living standard, and governmental support. The study also aims to explore the mediating role of governmental support in the link between agritourism and job creation, handicraft sales, and living standards. To meet the aim of the study, a survey was constructed to collect data from agritourism workers in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Four hundred eighty-three questionnaires were issued, but only 313 were analyzed. The results indicated that agritourism was significantly and positively linked with job creation, handicraft sales, living standards, and governmental support. The results also revealed that governmental support significantly and positively correlates with job creation, handicraft sales, and living standards. Moreover, the results concluded that governmental support plays a partial mediating role in the link between agritourism and job creation, handicraft sales, and living standard. Theoretical implications for developing agritourism studies, as well as practical implications, are provided for owners, consultants, and policymakers of small-scale tourism businesses in rural areas.

KEYWORDS: Agritourism, job creation, handicraft sales, living standards, governmental support, local communities, Saudi Arabia, Egypt.

INTRODUCTION

Many researchers consider agritourism a driver for rural development (Król, 2019). According to McGehee & Kim (2004), farmers turn towards agritourism in search of solutions to the low profitability of agricultural products, the high operating costs of farms, and the increased competition in the market from imported products. For many years farmers in many countries abandoned their farms seeking better jobs. However, in the past few years, an increasing number of farms began implementing agritourism activities in search of profitability. Such

activities and farms are expected to increase further in the coming years (Seitbattalovna Kenebayeva, 2014), especially in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and other Middle Eastern countries where tourism is growing dramatically.

Agritourism is defined as “the act of visiting a working farm, horticultural, or agri-business operation for the purpose of enjoyment, education, or active involvement in the activities of the farm or operation” (Che et al., 2005, p. 227). It represents a link between tourism and agriculture, aiming to diversify farms' activities and new sources of income (Srisomyong & Meyer, 2015). Farms that engage in agritourism activities drive development in their areas as they create jobs, attract visitors to their areas, support other farms, and contribute to local prosperity (Li & Li, 2021). As a result, in many countries, governments nowadays support agritourism to limit migration from rural areas, improve incomes for rural communities, and contribute to gender equality (Joyner et al., 2018).

Therefore, a noticeable amount of research was conducted on agritourism and its economic contribution to rural communities. However, the scope of these studies was limited to regions where agritourism is a long-standing activity, e.g., Europe, South & East Asia (Barbieri, 2020; Kim et al., 2019; Bachok et al., 2019; Ait-Yahia Ghidouche et al., 2021). In the Middle East, especially Saudi Arabia and Egypt, agritourism is a relatively recent phenomenon, and hence its contribution to their rural socioeconomics remains relatively unexplored. This study, therefore, tests the effects of agritourism on improving job creation, handicraft sales, and living standards of rural communities, especially in economies with a strong reliance on government subsidization, comparing Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The rationale behind this comparison is to test the difference in such effects on the two neighboring countries that share cultural aspects but differ in their economic status. Furthermore, the study will contribute to the existing knowledge of agritourism by comparing its effects on rural socioeconomics, considering the mediating role of government support.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

AGRITOURISM

Local communities suffer from many economic problems, such as infrastructure deterioration, increasing poverty, increasing unemployment, decreasing income sources, migration, and reduced prices of agricultural products. Agritourism has been used to achieve

sustainable development in some local communities through its support for the optimal use of available resources, income generation, cultural heritage preservation, and its limited environmental impacts (Khairabadi et al., 2020). Farms are used to increase income by providing recreational tourism services and selling crops in markets (Brune et al., 2023). Many farming families tended to diversify agricultural production to preserve their farms due to many factors, such as climate changes, low incomes, dependence on natural products, and environmental pressures. Government policies also played a role in those families' search for agricultural diversification (McGehee et al., 2007; Uludağ & Erdoğan, 2019). Agritourism activities are visible on farms whose owners seek to reduce the decline in their income, diversify sources of income, and deal with crises and problems in the surrounding environment, such as fluctuations in agricultural markets or climate changes (Brune et al., 2023).

Likewise, Arroyo et al. (2013) depicted that agritourism is linked to key aspects, namely the place of activity (the farm), the site authenticity, the activities quality, and the desire to travel to the site. It is broadly defined as visiting agricultural environments, such as farms or gardens, for leisure, recreation, or educational purposes, according to Arroyo et al. (2013). It is understood that agritourism takes place on a working farm or other agricultural environment and generates income for the farm or adds value to it, as Tew and Barbieri (2012) mentioned. Agritourism is also described as actions that farmers undertake as part of their agricultural activities to enjoy and educate visitors (Srisomyong & Meyer, 2015). Also, agritourism is a complementary activity for farmers, not a substitute for agriculture. This pattern is based on receiving visitors, welcoming them, and meeting their needs on their farms (Frumkin, 2019). The needs of those visitors are accommodation in natural areas, food, distinctive tourist experiences, and various recreational services that do not harm the environment (SgROI et al., 2018; Roman, 2015). Agritourism is based on the integration between agricultural production and some tourism activities and services, such as providing an attractive natural environment for visitors to relax and enjoy, exploiting the workforce in agribusiness, and diversifying sources of income (Rong-Da Liang, 2017). Agritourism is also characterized by using low investments to generate additional revenue for farmers (McGehee, 2007).

According to Pehin Dato Musa and Chin (2022b), agritourism is a strategy to support the economic conditions of farm families and community vendors. The importance of agritourism goes beyond the economic aspect to include promoting local food and handicrafts,

exploiting environmental resources, enjoying natural areas, and discovering tangible and intangible resources within farms and the surrounding community. Agritourism brings many economic benefits to the local community, farm owners, and other citizens (Tew & Barbieri, 2012; Canovi, 2019). Tew and Barbieri (2012) revealed that agritourism contributes to attracting new customers, improving the quality of family life, providing services and products that are not harmful to the environment, increasing farm income, providing additional revenues to maintain agriculture, optimal utilization of farm resources, operating periodically without exposure to the problem of seasonality, providing various jobs for society, and minimizing negative activities harmful to the environment.

Agritourism also helps reduce poverty in communities working in this field (Bhatta et al., 2019), enhances the authenticity of these communities, improves relations between agricultural and urban communities, and develops disadvantaged local areas (Bannor et al., 2022). As confirmed by Brune et al. (2023) and Magno and Cassia (2021), it continued to achieve positive results despite the Covid-19 crisis, as its operations, services, revenue volume, and visitor satisfaction increased. Similarly, agritourism also contributes to preserving rural heritage and protecting the natural environment and distinctive landscapes. The multiplicity of activities offered by these farms motivates visitors to increase spending and increases farm profits (Joyner et al., 2018). Agritourism also supports tourism development in the local community, which reflects positively on the citizens' social and economic aspects (Petrović et al., 2017).

Agritourism represented one of the approaches that farm families relied on to diversify into agricultural production and exploit their farms (McGehee et al., 2007). Pehin Dato Musa and Chin (2022a) also showed that agritourism is a tourism activity that aims to diversify agricultural activities and achieve sustainable development through customers visiting the farm to experience the life of farmers or to learn. Moreover, it increases the local community's well-being (Fakfare & Wattanacharoensil, 2021). Liang et al. (2021) highlighted that providing distinguished services to agricultural visitors, whether inside the farm or in the surrounding markets, enhances their satisfaction and increases the intention to repeat the visit.

THE ROLE OF AGRITOURISM IN DEVELOPING LOCAL COMMUNITIES

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGRITOURISM AND JOB CREATION

Lago (2017) demonstrated that expanding agritourism activities provides more job opportunities, as the need for many workers appears, whether in coordinating work and visits, reservations, restaurants, accommodation, shops selling souvenirs, guidance, recreational facilities, and accompanying visitors on their agricultural tours. Agritourism provides job opportunities for many individuals who serve visitors to improve their quality of life, which contributes to improving local communities (Galluzzo, 2022). The organization of farms hosting some agricultural festivals and celebrations is a way to attract more visitors to participate, representing a unique and distinctive experience for many visitors that generates more job opportunities for local agricultural communities (Fahmi et al., 2013). So, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H1: Agritourism is positively associated with job creation.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGRITOURISM AND THE HANDICRAFT SALES

Kizos and Iosifides (2007) explained that attracting agricultural tourists leads to their acquaintance with the handicrafts of the local community, which increases the sales of these handicrafts and provides more income for local community residents. There may be an increase in selling handicrafts to the local community due to visitors buying them (Khairabadi et al., 2020). Agritourism also supports authenticity and pride in cultural heritage and its preservation. Further, it supports handicrafts and their development, the growth of their sales, and the increase in the incomes of their workers (Petrović et al., 2017). Elshaer et al. (2022) added that agritourism supports developing small enterprises and isolated rural areas, revitalizing handicrafts, and selling handicrafts. Therefore, the following hypothesis can be assumed:

H2: Agritourism is positively related to handicraft sales.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGRITOURISM AND IMPROVING LIVING STANDARDS

Naidoo and Sharpley (2016) clarified that the expansion of agritourism has the benefit of promoting local community development and increasing well-being. Joyner et al. (2018) indicated that agritourism improves the living standards of the host farm owners, their families, workers, and the surrounding community. This improvement happens through the role of agritourism in attracting visitors who spend money to take advantage of these farms' activities and buy from shops, restaurants,

and housing. Agritourism has increased farm revenues associated with agritourism, and the lives of those working on these farms have improved significantly (Arroyo et al., 2013; Doh et al., 2017). It also helps attract several customers, enhancing the farm family's quality of life (Tew & Barbieri, 2012). Naidoo and Sharpley (2016) showed that agritourism contributes to improving the living standards of the local community by increasing recreational opportunities, stimulating the retention of agricultural lands, and diversifying sources of income (Schilling et al., 2006).

Catalino and Lizardo (2004) also added that visitors are willing to pay more money to have a unique experience related to participating in agricultural experiences, where they find pleasure in participating in agricultural activities such as participating in planting some crops, harvesting, collecting milk, feeding animals, and other activities they prefer away from crowded cities. Che et al. (2005) reported that agritourism improves and develops local communities by increasing sales of fresh agricultural products, such as vegetables and fruits, milk and dairy products, and eggs and processed agricultural products, such as dried fruits and pickles. These sales enhance markets of agricultural communities, the absence of a surplus among farmers, and increase incomes that provide an adequate standard of living. Barbieri (2020) also stated that improving the well-being of the farm family is the most important motivation for farmers to diversify their activities and operations within farms to stimulate demand for agritourism. Prayukvong et al. (2015) added that agritourism could be used as a tool for local development through its role in providing economic opportunities to enhance the financial security of farm families, create diverse job opportunities, and sustain existing agricultural activities, which is reflected in providing a better standard of living. As indicated by Liang et al. (2021), it supports the economic sustainability of local communities and improves living standards. Hence, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H3: Agritourism is positively associated with improving the living standard.

AGRITOURISM AND GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

Liang et al. (2021) illustrated that governments increased interest in their policies related to agritourism as a response to the expansion of this pattern, the increase in demand for it, and the desire to develop local communities sustainably. Arroyo et al. (2013) noted the emergence and growth of agritourism as an important economic activity for farmers in the United States due to government support. The expansion of

agritourism is also related to the amount of support provided by public institutions in any country, such as the support provided by the authorities responsible for tourism for agritourism (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014). Government support for agritourism is also highlighted by integrating agritourism into the state's policies and plans for community and rural development (Srisomyong & Meyer, 2015). Khairabadi et al. (2020) pointed out that the expansion of agritourism makes the state develop infrastructure and services to facilitate the arrival of visitors and raise the level of service.

Satriawan et al. (2015) referred to the need for coordination between government and private institutions and farm owners to expand agritourism activities and services and to provide the necessary support and resources to motivate farmers and their families to work on their farms and diversify their sources of income. Agritourism is also affected by government policies, according to Srisomyong and Meyer (2015), who indicated that government initiatives and interventions helped the agricultural sector to survive, diversify sources of income, and diversify agricultural services and activities. In addition, these initiatives supported traditional handicrafts and achieved many economic benefits for the local community (Srisomyong & Meyer, 2015).

Likewise, the support provided by the government regarding investment mechanisms and policies should motivate and encourage farm owners to invest and exploit their farms, settle in them, and diversify their activities. As well, governmental incentives and benefits granted to investors, such as tax exemptions, financial support, and technical support, encourage them to enter the field of agritourism investment (Broccardo et al., 2017). In addition, financial institutions may also support farm owners to develop and modernize their farms in a way that qualifies them to develop agritourism (Fahmi et al., 2013).

Government compensation is also an essential strategy for farmers due to declining farm income and an incentive to engage in agritourism (McGehee & Kim, 2004). Expanding agritourism activities in local communities limits the marginalization and neglect of these areas. This expansion forces the state to develop these areas to be eligible to attract customers (Król, 2019). Some governments in developed countries support agritourism by training agricultural families to exploit their farms to attract visitors, providing them with distinct environmental services, and marketing their services and activities. Besides, government policies also play an essential role in agritourism by supporting sustainability in

tourism development, creating jobs, and improving farmers' living standards (Abdullah et al., 2022).

In addition, the study of Alsaban and Shatwan (2022) clarified the need for farmers for financial and training support to motivate them to engage in agritourism and expand their farms' activities and services to attract visitors. According to Khanal and Shrestha (2019) and Slocum and Curtis (2017), agritourism needs government support through tax facilities in licensing, purchasing equipment, and machinery, developing infrastructure in the local community, providing health services, and providing guidance for the success of expanding agritourism activities. Governmental support for agritourism is also represented in giving it a priority within development policies and increasing the financial support allocated to it, in addition to the possibility of providing loans to motivate farmers to work in agritourism. Accordingly, the following hypotheses can be proposed:

H4: Agritourism is positively associated with government support.

H5: Governmental support is positively associated with job creation.

H6: Governmental support is positively associated with handicraft sales.

H7: Governmental support is positively associated with living standards.

H8: Governmental support mediates the relationship between agritourism and job creation.

H9: Governmental support mediates the relationship between agricultural tourism and handicraft sales.

H10: Governmental support mediates the relationship between agritourism and improving living standards.

METHODOLOGY

SAMPLE AND DATA COLLECTION

For the objectives of this study, a quantitative method was adopted. A questionnaire was selected to collect data from Saudi Arabia and Egypt agritourism workers. The questionnaire was created online, and the link was distributed to agritourism workers via social media platforms (Facebook and LinkedIn). The researchers also assured the confidentiality of the data and information supplied. All participants were unpaid volunteers. From January 2023 to February 2023, 483 questionnaires were distributed to workers, and 364 questionnaires were gathered. With a response rate of 64.8%, only 313 replies (Egypt= 217; Saudi Arabia= 96) were appropriate for further analysis.

Among the 313 respondents, 282 (90.1%) were male, and 31 (9.9%) were female. Most respondents (47.6%) were between 35 and 45 years, followed by 24.9% of respondents aged between 25 and 35 years.

Around 60.1% of the respondents held a secondary or less degree, and about 26.8% held a bachelor's degree. In addition, 50.1% of respondents have experience in agritourism between 5 and 10 years, 22.7% (less than five years), 15.7% (between 10 and 15 years), and 11.5% (15 years and above), as indicated in the table (1).

Table (1) characteristics of respondents

Characteristics	Description	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	282	90.1%
	Female	31	9.9%
Age	Less than 25 years	4	1.3%
	From 25 to less than 35 years	78	24.9%
	From 35 to less than 45 years	149	47.6%
	From 45 to less than 55 years	60	19.2%
	55 years and above	22	7%
Educational level	Uneducated	18	5.8%
	Secondary or less	188	60.1%
	Bachelor	84	26.8%
	Postgraduate	16	5.1%
	Other	7	2.2%
Years of work in agritourism	Less than 5 years	71	22.7%
	From 5 to less than 10 years	157	50.1%
	From 10 to less than 15 years	49	15.7%
	15 years and above	36	11.5%

COMMON METHOD BIASES

The Common Method Variance (CMV) was estimated before proceeding with additional data analysis. When cross-sectional data collecting techniques (such as simultaneous surveys) are employed to quantify variables, CMV detects false correlations, as Tehseen et al. (2017) stated. Therefore, this study used the Harman single-factor test and the principal component analysis (PCA) approach to assess CMV (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The CMV test results demonstrate that no single dominating factor explains more than 50% of the total variance. As a result, CMV is acceptable in this study.

MEASURES

The questionnaire had two sections. The first section had 40 questions about latent variables uncovered throughout a prior literature review, whereas the second section included four questions about sample characteristics. The questionnaire was initially developed in English and translated into Arabic by a bilingual (English and Arabic) professional translator; then, another bilingual specialist translated it back into English.

Agritourism (AGR) was evaluated using a 9-item scale constructed by Tew and Barbieri (2012), Joyner et al. (2018), and Petrovic et al. (2017). For example, *"Agritourism is a promising tourism pattern"*, *"Agritourism is not seasonal"*, *"Agritourism contributes to attracting a large number of visitors"*, and *"The level of spending in agritourism is high"*. To determine the elements of agritourism, McGehee and Kim (2004), Songkhla and Somboonsuke (2013), and Król (2019) proposed a 14-element of agritourism. Sample items include *"Availability of traditional agriculture"*, *"Traditional farming and irrigation methods"*, *"Involving the local community in the tourism process"*, *"The accommodations are traditional"*, *"Involving tourists in the harvest season"*, and *"Security and safety in the design of farms and tourism activities"*. Job creation (JBR) was assessed using the 3-item scale developed by Lupi et al. (2017) and Lago (2017). Sample items include *"Tourism provides multiple job opportunities for local citizens,"* *"The jobs provided by tourism are commensurate with the nature of the local community,"* and *"There is a demand from citizens to work in the field of tourism"*.

Handicraft sales (HNS) were measured using 3-item scales established by Kizos and Iosifides (2007) and Khairabadi et al. (2020). Sample items include *"There is a variety of handicrafts that are presented to visitors"*, *"There is a noticeable increase in the volume of sales of handicrafts with the increase in visitor turnout"*, and *"Revenue from selling handicrafts increases with more visitors visiting the place"*. Improving the living standard (LVS) was assessed using a 7-item measure borrowed from Naidoo and Sharpley (2016) and Arroyo et al. (2013). For example, *"Tourism drives developing infrastructure to meet the needs of the local community"*, *"Tourism supports improving many services (water, electricity, sewage, communications) that meet the needs of society"*, and *"Tourism contributes to improving the quality of services provided to the community"*, *"A suitable income is available for families working in tourism"*, and *"Tourism enhances local citizens' sense of the quality of life"*. Lastly, a four-item scale established by Liang et al. (2021), Satriawan et al. (2015), and Abdullah et al. (2022) was used to assess

government support for agritourism. Sample items include *"The government supports workers in the field of agritourism"*, *"There are facilities provided to workers in the field of agritourism"*, *"The government provides financial assistance and tax exemptions to encourage the expansion of agritourism"*, and *"The state provides technical support to agritourism workers"*.

ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

WarpPLS software 8.0, a partial least squares-structural equation modeling technique, was utilized in the current study to assess the outer model, estimate the inner model, and test the study hypotheses.

RESULTS

ELEMENTS OF AGRITOURISM

Table No. (2) Reveals the elements of agritourism. These elements include authentic customs and traditions (290 respondents), crop diversity (287 respondents), traditional agriculture availability (286 respondents), handicrafts (283 respondents), traditional farming and irrigation methods (281 respondents), and landscapes availability (276 respondents). They also involve traditional accommodations (276 respondents), linguistic and cultural heritage (275 respondents), security and safety in farms and tourism activities' design (253 respondents), agriculture as a primary source of local community's income (248 respondents), harvest seasons celebration (236 respondents), good health services (216 respondents), local community involving in the tourism process (192 respondents), and involving tourists in the harvest season (159 respondents).

Table (2) Elements of Agritourism

Elements	Frequencies	%
Traditional agriculture availability	286	8%
Traditional farming and irrigation methods	281	7.9%
Authentic customs and traditions	290	8.2%
Harvest seasons celebration	236	6.6%
Handicrafts	283	7.9%
Local community involving in the tourism process	192	5.4%
Agricultural crops diversity	287	8.1%
Landscapes availability	276	7.8%
Traditional accommodations	276	7.8%
Agriculture as a primary source of local community's income	248	6.9%

Involving tourists in the harvest season	159	4.5%
Linguistic and cultural heritage	275	7.7%
Good health services	216	6.1%
Security and safety in the design of farms and tourism activities	253	7.1%

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND FACTOR LOADINGS

Item loading of more than 0.5 is acceptable, according to Hair et al. (2021). All item loadings for the current study were calculated and confirmed to be acceptable, ranging from 0.539 to 0.895. The mean values for agritourism, job creation, handicraft sales, living standards, and governmental support are (4.20.546), (3.96.724), (3.84.803), (3.92.793), and (3.39.940), accordingly as indicated in the table (3).

Table (3) Descriptive statistics and factor loadings

	Mean	SD	Factor Loading
Agritourism (AGR)	4.20	0.546	-
AGR1	3.90	0.838	0.539
AGR2	4.18	0.809	0.809
AGR3	4.38	0.732	0.807
AGR4	4.20	0.862	0.720
AGR5	3.95	0.832	0.567
AGR6	4.23	0.740	0.832
AGR7	4.39	0.726	0.849
AGR8	4.26	0.796	0.732
AGR9	4.34	0.703	0.569
Job Creation (JBR)	3.96	0.724	-
JBR1	4.42	0.816	0.740
JBR2	3.80	0.915	0.816
JBR3	3.67	0.998	0.835
Handicraft Sales (HNS)	3.84	0.803	-
HNS1	4.38	0.850	0.641
HNS2	3.67	1.06	0.895
HNS3	3.48	1.05	0.865
Living Standard (LVS)	3.92	0.793	-
LVS1	4.27	0.973	0.810
LVS2	4.01	0.926	0.813
LVS3	3.87	.988	0.825
LVS4	3.83	0.907	0.821

	Mean	SD	Factor Loading
LVS5	3.57	1.12	0.712
LVS6	3.95	0.971	0.863
LVS7	3.94	0.965	0.865
Government Support (GVS)	3.39	0.940	-
GVS1	3.52	1.10	0.872
GVS2	3.34	1.04	0.873
GVS3	3.42	1.07	0.875
GVS4	3.28	1.14	0.865

MEASUREMENT MODEL ASSESSMENT

Manley et al. (2021) proposed evaluating the outer model for the reliability and validity of the researched reflective constructs. Internal consistency reliability was confirmed, as every Cronbach's alpha value (from 0.714 to 0.916) exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70, and composite reliability values also exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70 (ranging between 0.840 and 0.933) (Hair et al., 2021). Additionally, convergent validity is proven since the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values are more significant than the proposed value of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2020). As well, the square roots of AVE should have the greatest squared association with any other variable. The square roots of AVE for all variables are bigger than the greatest associations with any other variable, as seen in table (5). As a result, discriminant validity is adequate. As for multi-collinearity, the value of the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) should be lower than 5. (Hair et al., 2021). All VIF values are less than 5 as seen in table (4). As a result, there is no collinearity in the structural model. Prior to testing hypotheses, model fit was conducted. The requirements are met by all model fit and quality index findings (see table 4).

Table (4) Measurement Model First Order Reflective variables

Variables	α	CR	AVE	VIF	Model fit and quality indices
Agritourism	0.881	0.906	0.523	1.156	Average path coefficient (APC)=0.356, P<0.001
					Average R-squared (ARS)=0.301, P<0.001
Job Creation	0.714	0.840	0.637	1.801	Average adjusted R-squared (AARS)=0.297, P<0.001
					Average block VIF (AVIF)=1.030, acceptable if ≤ 5 , ideally ≤ 3.3
Handicraft Sales	0.725	0.847	0.653	1.905	Average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF)=1.766, acceptable if ≤ 5 , ideally ≤ 3.3
					Tenenhaus GoF (GoF)=0.442, small ≥ 0.1 , medium ≥ 0.25 , large ≥ 0.36

Living Standard	0.916	0.933	0.667	2.173	Simpson's paradox ratio (SPR)=1.000, acceptable if ≥ 0.7 , ideally = 1
					R-squared contribution ratio (RSCR)=1.000, acceptable if ≥ 0.9 , ideally = 1
Government Support	0.894	0.927	0.759	1.795	Statistical suppression ratio (SSR)=1.000, acceptable if ≥ 0.7
<i>Note: α = Cronbach's Alpha; CR=Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted ; VIF = Variance Inflation Factors</i>					Nonlinear bivariate causality direction ratio (NLBCDR)=1.000, acceptable if ≥ 0.7

Table (5) Discriminant validity assessment

	AGR	JBR	HNS	LVS	GVS
AGR	(0.723)				
JBR	0.185	(0.871)			
HNS	0.288	0.488	(0.798)		
LVS	0.252	0.514	0.607	(0.808)	
GVS	0.340	0.631	0.552	0.591	(0.817)

STRUCTURAL MODEL ASSESSMENT

The inner model can be examined using specific measurements such as beta (β), p value, and R^2 (Hair et al., 2020). As indicated in Figure (1), Agritourism (AGR) significantly and positively correlates with job creation (JBR) ($\beta = 0.27$; $p < 0.01$). As well, agritourism (AGR) significantly and positively correlates with handicraft sales (HNS) ($\beta = 0.19$; $p < 0.01$). At the same time, the findings showed a significant and positive link between agritourism (AGR) and living standard (LVS) ($\beta = 0.24$; $p < 0.01$). Hence, H1, H2, and H3 are all supported. The study findings also uncovered that there is a significant and positive link between agritourism (AGR) and governmental support (GVS) ($\beta = 0.19$; $p < 0.01$). In addition, the findings demonstrated that governmental support (GVS) has a significant and positive link with job creation (JBR) ($\beta = 0.47$; $p < 0.01$), handicraft sales (HNS) ($\beta = 0.48$; $p < 0.01$), and living standard (LVS) ($\beta = 0.65$; $p < 0.01$), demonstrating the supportive of H5, H6, and H7. Further, agritourism (AGR) explained 4% of the variance in governmental support (GVS) ($R^2 = 0.04$), while agritourism (AGR) and governmental support (GVS) explained 33% of the variance in job creation (JBR) ($R^2 = 0.33$), 31% in handicraft sales (HNS) ($R^2 = 0.31$), and finally 53% in living standard (LVS) ($R^2 = 0.53$). The R^2 values indicate that the structural model has strong explanatory power (Kock, 2022).

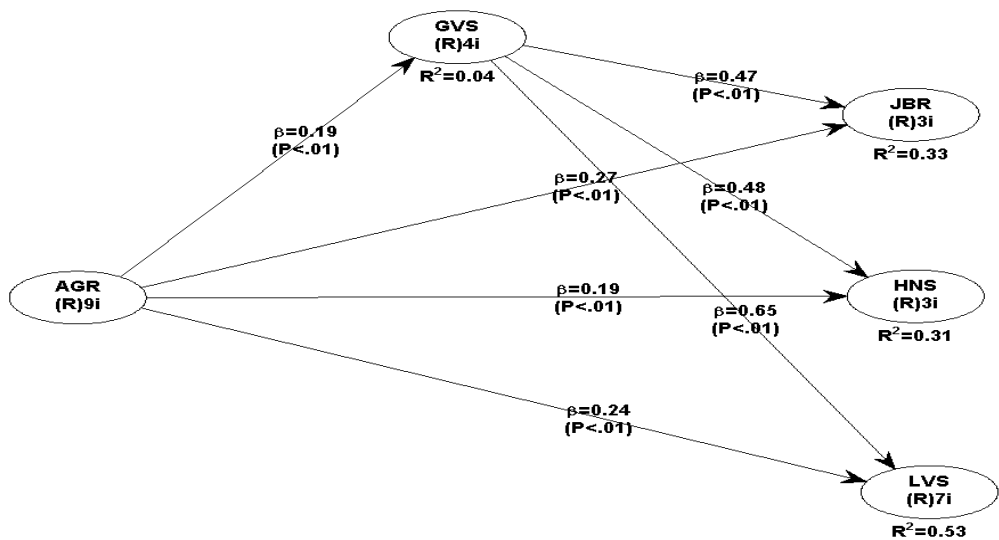


Figure (1) the path coefficient results

A mediation analysis was performed, as shown in Table (6), to highlight the mediating role of governmental support (GVS) in the link between agritourism (AGR) and job creation (JBR), handicraft sales (HNS), and living standard (LVS). The findings show that government support (GVS) partially mediates the link between job creation (JBR), handicraft sales (HNS), and living standards (LVS). In other terms, government support (GVS) mediates the positive influence of agritourism (AGR) on job creation (JBR), handicraft sales (HNS), and living standards (LVS). H8, H9, and H10 are thus all supported.

Table (6) indirect effect results

Paths	Significance		Outcomes
	Direct Effect	Indirect effect via GVS	
AGR → JBR	p<0.001	p= 0.021	Partial Mediation at 5%
AGR → HNS	p<0.001	p= 0.017	Partial Mediation at 5%
AGR → LVS	p<0.001	p<0.001	Partial Mediation at 5%

DISCUSSION

The objectives of the current study were to assess the link between agritourism (AGR) and job creation (JBR), handicraft sales (HNS), living standard (LVS), and governmental support (GVS), evaluate the link between governmental support (GVS) and job creation (JBR), handicraft sales (HNS), and living standard (LVS), and examine the mediating role of governmental support (GVS) in the link between agritourism (AGR) and job creation (JBR), handicraft sales (HNS), and living standard (LVS). In order to meet the study objectives, a quantitative approach was used, with a questionnaire used to collect data from agritourism workers (313 responses). The study's findings back up the proposed study model and all of its hypotheses.

The results show that many elements support the expansion of agricultural tourism, such as authentic customs and traditions, crop diversity, traditional agriculture availability, handicrafts, traditional farming and irrigation methods, landscapes availability, traditional accommodations, linguistic and cultural heritage, security and safety in farms and tourism activities' design, agriculture as a primary source of local community's income, harvest seasons celebration, good health services, local community involving in the tourism process, and involving tourists in the harvest season.

Many previous studies have indicated these elements (e.g., Songkhla and Somboonsuke, 2013; McGehee & Kim, 2004; Król, 2019). For example, Songkhla and Somboonsuke (2013) showed some basic elements that farm owners provide for the expansion of agritourism, such as linguistic and cultural heritage, authentic customs and traditions, harvest seasons celebration, traditional agriculture availability, and local community involvement in the tourism process. McGehee and Kim (2004) clarified that involving farm owners in agritourism needs some elements, such as security and safety in farms and tourism activities' design, involving tourists in the harvest season, traditional farming and irrigation methods, and landscapes availability. Król (2019) also listed these elements to include crop diversity, good health services, landscape availability, handicrafts, agriculture as a primary source of local community's income, and traditional accommodations.

The results also demonstrated a significant positive relationship between agritourism and job creation. This result is consistent with what Srisomyong and Meyer (2015) indicated, that agritourism supports developing new activities for farms and modernizing existing activities, which creates new job opportunities for farm owners and citizens of the

local community. Agritourism has been used to improve local communities' economic and social conditions through job creation and improved incomes, as highlighted by Bachok et al. (2019). Domi and Belletti (2022) also emphasized that providing new job opportunities for farming families, in addition to original agricultural jobs, is one of the benefits of agritourism. The expansion of the farm's activities, the full exploitation of its resources, and its development to receive visitors provide new job opportunities such as reservation, accommodation, tour guides, and selling gifts and souvenirs (Lago, 2017).

Moreover, the results depicted that agritourism is significantly and positively associated with handicraft sales. The expansion of agritourism will contribute to the diversification of income sources for farm owners and the surrounding community by benefiting from the services provided to visitors, as well as visitors' interest in buying some gifts from the handicrafts of the local community, which increases their sales and revenues (Galluzzo, 2021). Kizos and Iosifides (2007) concluded that some citizens in local communities' work in the handicraft industry and that increasing the number of visitors for agritourism in these communities may lead to the marketing of these crafts and increase sales of unique and distinctive handicraft products for the local community. Pehin Dato Musa and Chin (2022b) also highlighted that visitor spending is not only inside the farm but may extend to spending outside the farm, whether in restaurants or accommodations, as well as in souvenir shops, creating an opportunity to increase handicraft sales. Khairabadi et al. (2020) and Joyner et al. (2018) showed that the presence of unique handicrafts in the local community might motivate visitors to increase spending and, consequently, improve workers' incomes. Importantly, agritourism supports small businesses, the revival of handicrafts, and their sales (Elshaer et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the results illustrated that agritourism is significantly and positively linked with improving living standards. This finding is confirmed by the study of Fakfare and Wattanacharoensil (2021), which showed that agritourism supports improving the standard of living of the local community and enhancing its well-being. Agritourism also helps provide economic and social protection to rural communities (Galluzzo, 2021). The role of agritourism in improving the living standards of farm families as well as the local community is highlighted through its role in reducing the abandonment of farms, developing their activities, creating new activities that provide job opportunities, diversifying sources of income, increasing sales of agricultural products, and increasing the market value of their products (Bachok et al. al., 2019; Joyner et al.,

2018; Kizos & Iosifides, 2007), as well as the role of agritourism in reducing poverty in local communities working in this field (Bhatta et al., 2019). Farmers can use the incomes generated from agritourism to improve their living standards, improve their quality of life, and use part of them to develop farm infrastructure to ensure their long-term sustainability (Giourga & Loumou, 2006). Arroyo et al. (2013) and Doh et al. (2017) emphasized that agritourism increases revenues for farm families working in agritourism and subsequently improves their lives. Diversifying sources of income to improve the living standards of farm families and the local community represented motives for involving these families and the local community in agritourism activities (Barbieri, 2020).

Additionally, the results highlighted a significant and positive link between agritourism and government support. Considering governments' awareness of the importance of agritourism in achieving economic and social sustainability for local communities, agritourism has attracted the attention of policymakers by placing it among development priorities and providing support to encourage farmers to engage in it (Kim et al., 2019). Srisomyong and Meyer (2015) stated that government policies and initiatives support the agricultural sector to achieve sustainable and diverse activities and provide tourism services that create unique visitor experiences. Government support for agritourism increased with the expansion of this type of tourism and its positive role in the sustainable development of local communities (Liang et al., 2021).

The study's results also showed that government support is significantly and positively associated with job creation. Satriawan et al. (2015) clarified the role of government support in creating job opportunities in agritourism through the role of government institutions in supporting farm owners and motivating them to exploit all agricultural resources in providing new tourism products and services that diversify their incomes and at the same time create more job opportunities for existing individuals who serve the visitor. As McGehee et al. (2007) and Uludağ & Erdoğan (2019) argued the policies and government support provided to farm families contributed to their search to diversify their agricultural activities and develop new activities for their farms, which need more labor. Similarly, the results indicated that government support is significantly and positively linked with handicraft sales. Government support for agritourism workers and developing infrastructure for local agritourism communities will open new markets for the products and services of these communities, providing an opportunity for promoting unique and distinctive handicrafts for these communities (Srisomyong &

Meyer, 2015). Also, government support to farm owners and local communities motivates them to diversify their sources of income, whether by exploiting their agricultural resources or marketing their distinctive cultural heritage (Satriawan et al., 2015). Srisomyong and Meyer (2015) also emphasized the role of government initiatives in developing traditional handicrafts in local communities.

Moreover, the results depicted a significant and positive link between government support and improving living standards. Srisomyong and Meyer (2015) supported this result, stating that with the increasing demand for agritourism and its positive role in developing local communities and improving living standards, some governments have included developing agritourism among their community development priorities. In addition, Arroyo et al. (2013) reported that government support for agritourism as one of the promising economic activities has contributed to reducing poverty in local communities working in agritourism and improving living standards.

Regarding the mediating role of government support, the results highlighted the partial mediating role of government support in the link between agritourism and job creation, increasing handicraft sales, and improving living standards. Broccardo et al. (2017) pointed out that the government support provided by the state to farm owners to increase their investments in their farms and diversify their activities, as well as the incentives provided by the government to investors in agritourism, have contributed to expanding agritourism, attracting more visitors, and reducing the migration of rural citizens to Urban in search of job opportunities. Also, the financial and technical support provided by the government to farmers to motivate them to develop their farms and diversify their activities to attract more visitors has contributed to increasing job opportunities, whether for the farm family or citizens of the local community (Alsaban & Shatwan, 2022). Furthermore, the increase in the number of visitors to farms and stimulating markets in local communities due to government support for agritourism in these communities was also reflected in increased income sources through increased sales of handicrafts (Srisomyong & Meyer, 2015). Likewise, government support for agritourism in local communities reduces poverty due to their long-term marginalization, thus providing a decent life for them (Król, 2019). In other words, government actions related to supporting agritourism contribute to providing more job opportunities and improving incomes as a result of increased sales of local services and products, which is ultimately reflected in improving living standards and improving the quality of life in local communities (Abdullah et al., 2022).

THEORETICAL AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The role of agritourism in growing local communities regarding job creation, handicraft sales, and living standards has been conceptualized and practically shown based on a literature study. Several studies have shed light on agritourism intending to enhance local communities' living standards (Songkhla & Somboonsuke, 2013; Rogerson and Rogerson, 2014 Bachok et al., 2019; Sgroi et al., 2018; Pehin Dato Musa & Chin, 2022b) Theoretically this study empirically assessed the link between agritourism and job creation, handicraft sales, living standard, and government support. Also, the study assessed the link between government support and job creation, handicraft sales, and living standard. Additionally, this study explored the role of government support in mediating the link between agritourism and job creation, handicraft sales, and living standard.

As previously stated, various studies emphasize the importance of agritourism and government support in developing local communities. Nevertheless, in developing countries, the role of agritourism and government support in promoting local communities is still evolving. This study is highly beneficial to both farmers and the government. It emphasizes the necessity of developing and sustaining agritourism in local communities and focuses on decision-makers and governmental bodies involved in agritourism in developing countries. The findings have significant implications for decision-makers, governmental bodies, and farmers who may promote agritourism to increase its role in attaining sustainable development for local communities. There is a need to integrate the roles of ministries and governmental institutions related to the agricultural sector to support farm owners and investors, motivate them to invest in agritourism, and provide outstanding agricultural and tourism services and products that contribute to developing local communities.

To increase its supportive role for agritourism, the government should provide policies that stimulate investment in agritourism, facilitate procedures for establishing agritourism projects, grant soft loans, provide support and technical advice to farmers, and provide tax exemptions at the start of operating these projects to motivate them to participate in agritourism. In addition, the government and farm owners should consider the environmental dimension when developing local communities and farms to be qualified to receive visitors so that this does not negatively affect the environmental and natural attractions that attract visitors. Besides, expanding investments in support services for agritourism, such as accommodations, restaurants, cafes, camps, recreational activities, and

handicrafts, will support the success of tourism activities in farms and local communities. In order to ensure the proper development of agritourism services and products, farmers, their families, and rural community members will need training that equips them with the necessary skills and experience, e.g., hospitality, customer service, marketing, and tour guiding techniques.

Additionally, farmers should pay constant attention to the quality of agricultural and tourism services and products provided to visitors to increase their satisfaction and motivate them to spend more on the one hand and preserve the environment on the other hand. Farming families working in agritourism should also be supported by spreading awareness of the value of agritourism through conferences, seminars, and advertisements that focus on this type of tourism and motivate them to engage in agritourism. Moreover, there is a need to allocate places for handicrafts in local communities, with farms providing agritourism services and activities and training workers in these crafts to preserve the local cultural heritage.

The results of the study showed that there is a small percentage of women working in agritourism. Therefore, local communities and governments should empower women by enabling them to work in agritourism. There is also a need to influence the perspectives towards women's work in agritourism, especially in societies such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Like any scientific study, the current study has limitations that future studies must handle. This study was carried out in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Despite the cultural similarities between the two countries, the economic conditions and governments' abilities to support rural communities differ. Future research may focus on comparing two similar Arab countries with similar economic status, e.g., Saudi Arabia and UAE. This study also evaluated government support for agritourism in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, which both have developing economies and only recently began developing agritourism. Finally, future research should evaluate government support for agritourism in some developed countries that have established agritourism sectors (such as Italy, the UK, and Spain), and compare the size of this support.

Moreover, the study explored the influence of agritourism on developing local communities regarding job creation, handicrafts, and living standards. Future studies should investigate how agritourism affects other variables, including environmental sustainability, visitor movement,

model village creation, and economic support. Furthermore, in the current study model, government support was included as a mediator variable between agritourism and job creation, handicraft sales, and living standard. Further studies are needed to evaluate the role of other factors (for example, farmer and investor attitudes, local communities' perceptions of tourism, and technology) in mediating the link between agritourism and job creation, handicraft sales, and living standard.

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