

## Exploring the Place Brand Factors Influencing Tourism to South Africa

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### Abstract

Despite the proliferation of destination branding-related studies, there appears to be a limited academic inquiry into generic place brands and their potential influence on tourist behaviour towards destination countries. More-so within the African context. This paper explores whether there are place brand factors that potentially influence inward tourist's perceptions of South Africa as a tourism destination country. Data generated from a survey of 233 inbound tourists to South Africa were analysed using Exploratory Factor Analysis. The findings establish that South Africa's place brand consisted of six distinct factors, two of which, namely, Socio-cultural and Competitive Advantages were new place brand factors within the South African context. Theoretically, the study complements the extent of the literature within the tourism discourse by providing an international demand-side perspective on place branding within an African tourism context. Practically, this study provides both South African and African tourism practitioners with insights into the potential utility of place branding as a heuristic cue in the decision-making process of international tourists, predominantly from the European and American markets.

**Keywords:** Place brand, tourism, South Africa, tourist behaviour, exploratory factor analysis

### Introduction

Place branding has become synonymous with tourism, resulting in a plethora of academic inquiry into the development of tourism destinations as brands, and the inexorable influence that the resultant brand image exerts on tourist decision-making (Brand Finance, 2018; Elliot, Papadopoulos & Kim, 2011; Ramseook-Munhurrum, Seebaluck & Naidoo, 2015). Destination Brands (DB), which may be characterised as the sum of a tourist's, "...beliefs, ideas and impressions about a destination," (Folgado-Fernandez, Hernandez-Mogollon & Duarte, 2017), are a more pervasive taxonomy within the contemporary tourism context than place brands (PBs). To this end, DBs have been the subject of numerous contemporary studies (Lee, 2009; Nadeau, Heslop, O'Reilly & Luk, 2008; Stepchenkova, Schihkova, Kim & Rykhtik, 2018; Zhang, Xu, Leung & Cai, 2016) which have found empirical evidence of the DB-tourist behaviour nexus. However, despite the proliferation of DB studies, what seems to be lacking



within the tourism marketing discourse is empirical inquiry into the influence of the broader and more generic Place Brand (PB) on the perceptions and ultimately the behaviour of tourists (Chung & Chen, 2018; Stepchenkova & Shichkova, 2017).

According to Brand Finance (2018), South Africa is the most valuable African PB, ranked overall 49<sup>th</sup> in the world, with an estimated brand value of up to USD\$207 billion. It can, however, be argued that within the tourism context, the true utility of South Africa's PB goes beyond its financial value and is best contextualised from an information economics perspective. The information economics perspective views brands as a touchpoint between the consumer and the product, where the brand assumes the functional role of an information symmetry tool (Baalbaki, 2012). As such, this paper views South Africa's PB as a heuristic cue (mental shortcut) summing up the simplified images, beliefs and impressions held of South Africa (Martinez & Alvarez, 2010; Stepchenkova et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2016). While some similarities can be drawn between the PB (also referred to as country/nation brand) and the DB in terms of multi-dimensionality and complexity, the literature (Elliot et al., 2011; Stepchenkova & Shichkova, 2017, Martinez & Alvarez, 2010; Mossberg & Kleppe, 2005; Nadeau et al., 2008) does differentiate between the two concepts - as one being generic (PB) and the other (DB) being product-specific, as well as representing one dimension within the place branding construct.

Within the tourism marketing discourse, the PB and the DB cannot be considered to be mutually exclusive, since tourist decision-making occurs within the context of the broader generic macro-environment (Chung & Chen, 2018; Nadeau et al., 2008; Zhang et al., 2016). To this end, prior studies have to some extent supported this view by acknowledging the influence of potential macro-environmental aspects such as governance and politics (Owiyo & Mulwa, 2018); culture and heritage (Martinez & Alvarez, 2010); immigration (Moufakkir, 2014); people (Zhang et al., 2016); negative events (Tavitiyaman and Qu, 2013) and; marketing efforts (Stepchenkova, Su & Shichkova, 2019) have on tourist perceptions of and behaviour towards places. Ultimately, tourism practitioners and researchers alike are mainly concerned with the influence of the aforementioned facets on conative tourist behaviour such as the intention to (re)visit the destination (Tavitiyaman & Qu, 2013), or propensity to engage in positive word of mouth behaviour related to the tourism destination (Agapito, Valle & Mendes, 2013). Despite this concern, some authors (Martinez & Alvarez, 2010; Zhang et al., 2016) concede that the influence of PBs on tourist decision-making has been the subject of limited empirical inquiry, and is severely under-researched, more-so within the African context.

While much more is comparatively known about the influence of DBs on tourist behaviour compared to PBs, the contemporary tourism literature has been criticised for its inability to differentiate between the PB and the DB in order to exclusively interrogate the influence of tourism PB related factors on tourist perceptions and ultimately tourist behaviour (Martinez & Alvarez, 2010; Mossberg & Kleppe, 2005). A significant challenge to measuring the influence of PBs is, however, the subjective nature of the PB construct, as well as the intangibility of tourism as a product offering (Agapito et al., 2013; Martinez & Alvarez, 2010). A gap has been identified within PB literature regarding the absence of a universal, valid and reliable evaluative framework for measuring PBs and their influence on destination images from the tourist's perspective (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Elliot et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2016). The complexity of PB formation possibly exacerbates this gap in the minds of consumers (Elliot et al., 2011; Stepchenkova et al., 2018).

It is, therefore, imperative that Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) and tourism marketers be cognisant of the PB factors that influence tourists and their perceptions of their tourism destinations. Despite Dinnie (2008) making reference to South Africa as being one of the pioneers of linking the PB to their tourism product offering, to the best of the authors'



knowledge, no empirical studies have yet been conducted to comprehensively explore the PB factors that potentially influence tourist behaviour towards South Africa based on a multi-dimensional evaluative framework. As a primer to the examination of the PB - travel motives nexus within the South African context, the present study aims to explore the PB factors potentially influencing tourists in their decisions to visit South Africa.

### **Study context**

South Africa is Africa's largest travel and tourism economy, with tourism (in)directly contributing up to US\$32.1 Billion (R425.5 Billion) in total to the South African economy, and accounting for 9.2% (1.5 million jobs) of the country's total employment in 2018 (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2019). From a destination marketing perspective, South Africa is a premium tourism destination. It is home to some of the world's most iconic tourist attractions such as the world-renowned Table Mountain, one of the world's largest and ecologically diverse national parks (Kruger National Park), as well as world heritage sites such as the Cradle of Humankind and Robben Island. As a result, South Africa is the most attractive tourism destination in Sub-Saharan Africa, accounting for 70% of the region's travel and tourism GDP (World Economic Forum, 2019). Buoyed by the country's abundant natural and cultural tourism resources, South Africa was between 2014 and 2018, Africa's most competitive travel and tourism destination. However, notwithstanding South Africa's competitive and comparative tourism advantages, South Africa was in 2018, the 61<sup>st</sup> most competitive travel and tourism destination in the world (WEF, 2019). Additionally, South Africa is an African nation located on a continent that only managed to attract up to 5% of the 1.4 billion global international tourist arrivals in 2018 (World Tourism Organization, 2019). Consequently, the perception challenges associated with being located on the African continent and more pertinently South Africa as a tourism destination may pose a significant destination marketing challenge for South Africa.

The most recent World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (WEF, 2019), ranks Paraguay as the country with the best country brand strategy, with two African countries in the top five, namely Tanzania (3<sup>rd</sup>) and Egypt (5<sup>th</sup>) out of 140 countries. However, the rankings (WEF, 2019), also suggest that between 2015 and 2018 there has been a discernible regression in the competitiveness of South Africa's country brand strategy (from 4<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> globally) and the effectiveness of the country's marketing and branding activities in attracting tourists (from 25<sup>th</sup> to 60<sup>th</sup> globally). Thus, while South Africa may have a relatively strong country brand strategy, there may be a discrepancy between the brand that is marketed globally, and the actual perception held of the country - which affects the effectiveness of South Africa's tourism destination marketing efforts. The present paper, therefore, explores whether there are any place brand factors tourists associate with South Africa in their decision-making, which may, upon further study, influence South Africa's ability to attract tourists effectively.

### **Review of the literature**

Branding is a critical success factor for destinations within the competitive global tourism market - particularly given that tourism destinations are increasingly offering similar products and experiences (Lee, 2009; Tavitiyaman & Qu, 2013). To this end, Stepchenkova et al. (2018) argue that tourist behaviour is a direct consequence of the tourist's interaction with a destination's brand. It follows then that the effectiveness and efficiency of destination marketing strategies are predicated on tourism marketers being cognisant of the perceptions of tourists towards the destination both on a micro (DB) and more pertinently, macro-level (PB) (Agapito et al., 2013; Lee, 2009; Stepchenkova et al., 2018). While the DB and PB are not mutually exclusive constructs, PBs tend to be organic in nature - being more susceptible to



subjective biases and stereotypes (Matiza & Slabbert, 2020). However, the discussion relating to the DB-PB nexus is beyond the scope of the present paper. The PB is a multi-dimensional brand construct associated with the promotion of geographical locations based on primarily intangible attributes that various stakeholders utilise to inform their perceptions and consumptive behaviour (Kemp, Childers & Williams, 2012; Vela, 2013). Furthermore, Knott, Fyall and Jones (2013) suggest that PBs create ‘brand equity’ that is critical for the competitiveness of places in terms of place awareness and favourable associations. As a result, PB may be viewed as, “[...] a network of associations in the consumers’ mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioural expression of a place, which is embodied through the aims, communication, values, and the general culture of the place's stakeholders and the overall place design,” (Zenker & Braun, 2010:5).

This suggests that PBs have both cognitive and affective attributes that influence the overall perception held of a country by its various external stakeholders, who include tourists (Anholt, 2010; Chaulagain, Wittala, & Fu, 2019; Nadeau et al., 2008). These attributes influence tourist’s decision-making based on brand-related aspects such as risk, image, perceived quality (in the cognitive sphere), as well as perceived value, trust, and experience (within the affective sphere) (Agapito et al., 2013; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Stepchenkova et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2016). As a result, Avraham (2018) observes an inextricable link between PB’s and tourist decision-making, whereby within the PB-tourism nexus, PBs represent the heuristic cues that tourists utilise for information symmetry in their decision-making (Han, 1989; Matiza & Oni, 2014).

From an information economics perspective (Baalbaki, 2012; Im, Kim, Elliot & Han, 2012), it may be argued that the more positive the tourist pre-emptively perceives the PB to be, the less the information cost associated with the consumption decision-making process linked to a specific tourism destination (Cardoso, Dias, de Araujo & Marques, 2019; Lee, 2009). This suggests that the PB plays a significant role in the appraisal of potential destinations by tourists. Stepchenkova et al. (2018) support this view, advancing the notion that the PB has a *halo effect* on mostly first-time visitors who rely on the PB to make inferences on the perceived quality, experience, value for money, satisfaction or risk in their assessment of a tourism destination. Previous studies (Park & Lee, 2017; Souiden, Ladhari & Chiadmi, 2017; Qu, Kim & Im, 2011; Zeugner-Roth & Zabkar, 2015) have to some extent established that generally, PBs can predict tourist behaviour, albeit within the context of broader empirical inquiry. For instance, Stepchenkova et al. (2018) found that the overall negative brand image held of America as a country by Russian citizens had a direct negative effect on the visit intentions of Russian tourists mainly based on the ominous Russia-American geopolitical relationship. Relatedly, Alvarez and Campo (2014) found that Israel's negative PB amongst Turkish students had a direct negative effect on the willingness and intention of the students to visit Israel as tourists. While, from a sample of American and British university students, Zhang et al. (2016) found that the overall place brand image of China had a statistically significant influence on their intention to visit China as tourists based on China’s ‘character’, ‘competence’ and ‘people’.

### **Measuring place brand factors**

The notion of places as brands is grounded in Nation Branding theory, which posits that a country is positioned in the minds of consumers based on their interaction with one or a combination of six communicative dimensions namely, governance, culture and heritage, immigration and investment, tourism, exports and people (Anholt, 2002, 2007; Dinnie, 2008; Vela, 2013). These dimensions are the pillars of the Nation Brand Hexagon (Anholt, 2002) which is an evaluative framework traditionally applied to measure nation brands. Previous studies have indicated the influence of place brand factors on tourist behaviour based





dimensions including the history of the place (culture and values); socio-economic environment; the citizens of the place as well as; political factors (Brijs, Bloemer & Kasper, 2011; Souiden et al., 2017; Wang, Barns & Ahn, 2012; Žugić & Kantar, 2018).

To date, some studies have identified specific place brand factors that are associated with the Nation Brand Hexagon as being influential to tourist behaviour. For instance, in the case of Iran, the antecedents of the country's place brand within the tourism context included people, culture, tourism development (Foroudi et al., 2016). Additionally, a study of 158 tourism destination countries by Steyn and van Vuuren (2016) concluded that good governance is influential on international tourists. Kemp et al. (2012) view the culture and heritage of a place as an integral part of the PB that influences the behaviour of tourists. Relatedly, Laws and Prideaux (2005) observe that in the context of Chinese tourists, contemporary negative global natural and human-made crisis/events such as the HIV/AIDS and the SARS pandemic influenced tourist's perceptions of tourism destinations and ultimately their travel intentions. A correlation has also been observed between the marketing efforts of tourism destinations and tourist demand for their products (Alejandria-Gonzalez, 2016).

Previous studies associated with South Africa's place brand within the tourism context have associated the perceptions held of the country with factors which include, crime, xenophobia, inflation (Knott, Fyall & Jones, 2015); Apartheid heritage (Visser, 2016); tourism profile as a destination for mega sports events (Giampiccoli, Lee & Nauright (2015) as well as; immigration (Matiza & Slabbert, 2020). For the present study, inbound tourists to South Africa may make their consumptive decisions based on their perceptions of national governments and their actions (governance); the history values and heritage of the place (cultural and heritage); the attractiveness of the tourism profile of the place (tourism); the opinions held of the citizens (people), as well as; the willingness of tourists to visit, live or work in the place (immigration) (Anholt, 2002, 2007; Žugić & Konatar, 2018). While the present study does not measure exports as a place brand factor in tourism, two additional factors are included, marketing (Alejandria-Gonzalez, 2016) and negative contemporary events (Laws & Prideaux, 2005).

With these factors in mind, the present paper explores the following propositions:

- **P<sub>1</sub>**: There are no discernible PB factors that tourists may consider to be influential to their decision to visit South Africa as a tourist destination.
- **P<sub>2</sub>**: There are discernible PB factors that tourists may consider to be influential to their decision to visit South Africa as a tourist destination.

## Methodology

The data presented in this study is drawn from a preliminary study that examined governance, cultural and heritage, tourism, people, immigration, marketing and negative contemporary events as PB factors potentially influencing tourist decision-making when considering South Africa as a tourism destination. The positivistic research design was adopted for the study; as a result, a quantitative cross-sectional deductive inquiry was undertaken. Due to the hard-to-reach nature of the targeted respondents (inbound foreign tourists), a convenient purposive sample was drawn. A total of 400 questionnaires were self-administered by tourists over four days, resulting in 395 usable questionnaires. However, an effective sample of  $n=233$  was suitable for analysis, after the casewise deletion procedure. The sample was suitable for the exploratory nature of the study, as well as for Exploratory Factor Analysis (Jung & Lee, 2011; Winter, Dodou & Wieringa, 2009).

The survey was conducted amongst tourists visiting Table Mountain in Cape Town, South Africa (one of the most popular and recognisable tourist attractions in South Africa) between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of November 2018. The survey questionnaire consisted of four sections



soliciting socio-demographic, general perception, the influential PB factors of South Africa, and tourism activity motives information, respectively. The data on the influential PB factors was generated from an ordinal scale (5-point Likert scale), with responses to 44 statements (extrapolated from the literature) ranging from: (1) Not at all influential to (5) Extremely influential. The PB factors measured are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: PB factors measured in the survey

Latent variable	Observed variables sources
Governance; Tourism; Culture and heritage; Immigration; People	Filistanova, 2017; Fourie, 2015; Freemantle, 2007; Lee, 2012; Musuva, 2015; Saiprasert, 2011; Shaw, Saayman & Saayman, 2012; Simons, 2013; Verissimo, 2012; Youde, 2009
Marketing	Alejandria-Gonzalez, 2016; Lee, Lee & Lee, 2014; Madden, Rashid & Zainol, 2016; Njiru, 2016
Negative events	Douglas & Alie, 2014; Hasan, Ismail, Islam, 2017; Lubbe, du Preez, Douglas, Fairer-Wessels, 2017; Mathivha, Tshipala, Nkuna, 2017; Saha & Yap, 2014; Smith & Porsch, 2015

Author's construction

Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 25.0). Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and the Bartlett's test of sphericity were employed to determine sample adequacy and to determine the suitability of the data for factor analysis. The data reported a KMO of 0.854 and Bartlett's test of sphericity of ( $\chi^2$  (946) = 4919.853,  $p < .001$ ). Thus, the data and sample were deemed to be suitable and adequate for factor analysis at a  $KMO \geq .50$  and null significance ( $p < .001$ ) value for the Bartlett's test respectively (Field, 2011). Principal Components Analysis was conducted as an estimation method for the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) (Jung & Lee, 2011). The EFA with Oblimin with Kaiser Normalisation was employed to establish the factor model for the PB factors at Eigenvalues of  $EV > 1$  and minimum factor loading coefficient of  $\geq .40$  for the items (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2014). For practical statistical significance to be achieved for the interpretive purposes of the study, the researchers employed the recommended guidelines (factor loading cut-off in EFA of  $\geq .40$ ) for samples which are  $n \geq 200$  (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2014). Construct reliability was tested using the Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) test at  $\geq .60$ . Pearson Product-moment correlation test was employed to determine statistically significant correlations between the PB factors. Means and Standard Deviations were also calculated.

## Empirical results

### Respondent profile

Most of the respondents surveyed were male (52.8%), while a more substantial proportion of the respondents surveyed (45%) were aged between 26 and 37 years old and over the age of 50 years (20.2%) respectively. At least 59.6% of the respondents surveyed indicated they possessed either a bachelors (37.3%) or a post-graduate (22.3%) degree as their highest qualification. While a significant proportion of the respondents (74.2%) were employed, with 8.2% indicating that they were retired. In terms of country of origin, the four main tourist source countries, the United Kingdom (18.9%); Germany (15.0%); the United States of America (13.3%) and; the Netherlands (7.7%) accounted for over 50% of the respondents, with the remainder of respondents surveyed being resident in various European and Latin American countries including Belgium, Spain and Brazil. Lastly, the vast majority of the respondents (74.7%) were first-time visitors to South Africa at the time of the survey. This tourist profile is relatively consistent with a previous (Ezeuduji, November & Haupt, 2016) tourist profile study conducted in Cape Town in 2016, and the statistics from National Department of Tourism, South Africa (2018).



## Results of the factor analysis

As is evident in Table 2, a six-factor solution was extracted for the PB factors within the South African context. Factor 1, *Socio-Cultural* loaded twelve items (EV = 13.01,  $\alpha = 0.918$ , variance explained = 29.58%). The *Socio-Cultural* dimension reported the third-highest mean of  $\bar{x} = 3.42$ , tending towards ‘Somewhat influential’ on the Likert scale. The literature supports the notion of the *Socio-Cultural* dimension impacting tourism, particularly the influence of aspects such as public resource and basic utility availability (Hall, 2010); colonial heritage (Schoeman & Thuynsma, 2017); as well as the preservation and acceptance of diversity in culture and heritage (Seraphin, Yallop, Capatina & Gowreesunkar, 2018) on tourists. Factor 2, *Governance* loaded five items (EV = 3.17,  $\alpha = 0.860$ , variance explained = 7.20%). The *Governance* dimension reported the fifth highest mean of  $\bar{x} = 3.12$ , tending towards ‘Somewhat influential’ on the Likert scale. The impact of tourism *Governance* on tourists is evident in the literature, whereby aspects such as crime (Eilat & Einaw, 2004); corruption (Poprawe, 2015); as well as the rule of law, absence of terrorism, and political stability (Steyn & van Vuuren, 2016) influence the decision-making process of tourists.

Factor 3, *Marketing* loaded six items (EV = 2.74,  $\alpha = 0.885$ , variance explained = 6.23%). The *Marketing* factor reported the second-highest mean of  $\bar{x} = 3.62$ , tending towards ‘Quite influential’ on the Likert scale. Previous studies also support the notion of *Marketing* impacting tourism, particularly the influence of aspects such as value for money and the unique tourism products (Njiru, 2016); marketing promotion efforts (Madden, Rashid & Zainol, 2016) as well as the attractive uniqueness of the tourism destination in comparison to other destinations (Lee, Lee & Lee, 2014) have on tourists. Factor 4, *Tourism* loaded five items (EV = 2.35,  $\alpha = 0.659$ , variance explained = 5.35%). The *Tourism* factor reported the lowest mean of  $\bar{x} = 2.97$ , tending towards ‘Somewhat influential’ on the Likert scale. According to the literature, *Tourism* factors have an impact on tourists - particularly the influence of aspects such as relations between the tourism destination and the tourist’s home country (Chen, Lai, Petrick & Lin, 2016), how close a tourism destination is to the tourist’s country of residence (Jeuring & Haartsen, 2017), as well as the sporting events or entertainment available at the tourism destination (Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2017).

Factor 5, *Negative Events* loaded six items (EV = 1.92,  $\alpha = 0.864$ , explained = 4.36%). The *Negative events* factor reported the fourth highest mean of  $\bar{x} = 3.18$ , tending towards ‘Somewhat influential’ on the Likert scale. Previous studies support the notion of *Negative Events* impacting tourism, particularly the influence of aspects such as droughts (Mathivha, Tshipala & Nkuna, 2017); the effects of wildlife poaching (Muboko, Gandwi, Muposhi & Tarakani, 2016); economic instability (Hall, 2010); and food safety concerns (Fuchs and Reichel, 2006) on tourists. Factor 6, *Competitive Advantages* loaded five items (EV = 1.47,  $\alpha = 0.682$ , variance explained = 3.34%). The *Competitive Advantages* factor is unique and reported the highest mean of  $\bar{x} = 3.86$ , tending towards ‘Quite influential’ on the Likert scale. The rationale of *Competitive Advantages* as a unique factor is buoyed by the literature whereby tourism destination advantages such as a favourable climate and scenic beauty endowments associated with the tourism destination (Crouch, 2011); the ease of acquiring a visa to travel to the tourism destination (Moufakkir, 2014) and; the visa regime applied in relation to the tourist’s home country (Stepchenkova et al., 2018) have been found to influence tourists. The uniqueness of the *Competitive Advantages* factor in this study relates to the fact that it is based on demand-side insights, in other words, the attributes identified by tourists and not attributes conceived and measured from the supply-side.



<b>Table 2: Factor analysis of the place brand factors</b>						
<b>Statement</b>	<b>F1</b>	<b>F2</b>	<b>F3</b>	<b>F4</b>	<b>F5</b>	<b>F 6</b>
Quality of life in South Africa	0.478					
South Africa's public resources (health and education)	0.453					
Availability of efficient basic service utilities in South Africa (water, electricity)	0.596					
Equal opportunities for all who live in South Africa	0.773					
Commonality of cultural values with South Africans	0.747					
Societal equality in South Africa	0.789					
The colonial heritage of South Africa	0.735					
Entrepreneurial nature and innovativeness of South Africans	0.729					
Tolerance/openness to cultural diversity/change of South Africa	0.664					
Preservation of South Africa's cultural practices and heritage	0.482					
South Africa's friendly trade policy	0.569					
The friendliness/helpfulness of South Africans	0.509					
The political instability in South Africa		0.716				
Lack of safety from crime in South Africa		0.679				
High risk of terrorist attacks in South Africa		0.669				
Lack of control of corruption by the South African government		0.786				
Absence of visible policing in South Africa		0.723				
Acceptance of tourists by South Africans			0.499			
Sufficient information about South Africa as a tourism destination country			0.616			
The value for money that I receive from South African tourism products			0.656			
The attractive uniqueness of South Africa compared to other destinations			0.702			
Positive marketing advertisements/promotions related to South Africa			0.776			
Perception of South Africa as a tourism destination of choice			0.806			
The closeness of South Africa to my country				0.634		
South Africa's sports attractions				0.693		
South Africa's entertainment attractions				0.644		
Closeness of South Africa to other African tourist destination countries				0.519		
The relations between South Africa and my own country				0.584		
Intermittent drought in water-scarce South Africa (the drought in Cape Town and the Eastern Cape region)					0.457	
Lack of food safety (Listeria outbreak in South Africa)					0.551	
Prevalence of illegal poaching of wildlife in South Africa					0.715	
South Africa's economic growth					0.572	
The association of South Africa with the illicit trade in animal parts (such as lion bones, rhino horn, elephant tusk)					0.751	
Prevalence of social unrest					0.653	
South Africa's climate						0.529
The scenic beauty of South Africa						0.659
South Africa's man-made tourism attractions						0.532
Ease of immigration visa procedures when travelling to South Africa						0.507
Visa policy of South Africa towards my home country						0.597
<b>Eigenvalues (EV)</b>	<b>13.01</b>	<b>3.17</b>	<b>2.74</b>	<b>2.35</b>	<b>1.92</b>	<b>1.47</b>
<b>Variance explained (%)</b>	<b>29.58</b>	<b>7.20</b>	<b>6.23</b>	<b>5.35</b>	<b>4.36</b>	<b>3.34</b>
<b>Cumulative variance (%)</b>	<b>29.58</b>	<b>36.78</b>	<b>43.01</b>	<b>48.36</b>	<b>52.72</b>	<b>56.06</b>
<b>Cronbach's alpha (<math>\alpha</math>)</b>	<b>0.918</b>	<b>0.860</b>	<b>0.885</b>	<b>0.659</b>	<b>0.864</b>	<b>0.682</b>
<b>Mean (<math>\bar{x}</math>)</b>	<b>3.42</b>	<b>3.12</b>	<b>3.62</b>	<b>2.97</b>	<b>3.18</b>	<b>3.86</b>
<b>Standard Deviation (<math>\sigma</math>)</b>	<b>0.756</b>	<b>0.977</b>	<b>0.816</b>	<b>0.950</b>	<b>0.833</b>	<b>0.696</b>

Note: F= Factor, items with factor loading coefficients of <.40 (Oblimin with Kaiser Normalisation) are omitted





Table 3 presents the factor correlation matrix of the PB factors related to South Africa as a tourism destination based on the Pearson product-moment correlation test.

Table 3: Factor correlation matrix of the PB factors

<i>Factor</i>	<i>SCL</i>	<i>GOV</i>	<i>MKT</i>	<i>TOU</i>	<i>NEV</i>	<i>CAV</i>
Socio-Cultural ( <i>SCL</i> )	<b>1.000</b>					
Governance ( <i>GOV</i> )	0.420**	<b>1.000</b>				
Marketing ( <i>MKT</i> )	0.521**	0.338**	<b>1.000</b>			
Tourism ( <i>TOU</i> )	0.328**	0.387**	0.274**	<b>1.000</b>		
Negative Events ( <i>NEV</i> )	0.554**	0.411**	0.542**	0.390**	<b>1.000</b>	
Competitive Advantages ( <i>CAV</i> )	0.437**	0.328**	0.493**	0.345**	0.358**	<b>1.000</b>

Notes: \*\*Correlation is significant to the 0.001 level (2-tailed)

As is evident in Table 3, all of South Africa’s PB factors reported statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) correlations. A weak significant correlation was reported between the *Marketing* and *Tourism* ( $r = 0.274$ ) factors. This result is consistent with the discrepancy noted by the study relating to the competitiveness of South Africa’s country brand strategy and the relative ineffectiveness of the country’s marketing and branding in attracting tourists. Table 3 also shows significant moderate ( $p < 0.001$ ) correlations between the *Socio-Cultural* and the *Governance* ( $r = 0.420$ ), as well as *Tourism* ( $r = 0.328$ ) factors, respectively. Significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) moderate correlations were also reported between the *Governance* factor and the *Marketing* ( $r = 0.338$ ), *Tourism* ( $r = 0.387$ ), *Negative Events* ( $r = 0.411$ ), as well as the *Competitive Advantages* ( $r = 0.328$ ) factors, respectively. Moderate ( $p < 0.001$ ) correlations were also reported between *Marketing* and *Competitive Advantages* ( $r = 0.493$ ); *Tourism* and *Negative Events* ( $r = 0.390$ ) and *Competitive Advantages* ( $r = 0.345$ ), respectively and; lastly between the *Negative Events* and *Competitive Advantages* ( $r = 0.358$ ) factors.

Strong significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) correlations were reported between the *Socio-Cultural* dimension and the *Marketing* ( $r = 0.521$ ), and *Negative Events* ( $r = 0.554$ ) factors, respectively. This notion is supported by a previous study which established a relationship between Indian cultural practices/heritage and the marketing of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat tourism destinations as competitive and attractively unique tourism destinations of choice (Vasavada and Kour, 2016). While in the South African context, Saarinen and Rogerson (2015) associate the place-based promotion of South Africa as a tourism destination country with maximising the country’s cultural assets. The literature supports the association between the *Socio-Cultural* and the *Negative Events* PB factors. For instance, Griffiths (2017), who found that South African cultural values and practices may be directly linked to the illicit trade in wildlife which may be considered to be deleterious activities within some tourism contexts. Relatedly, drought and the consistent inability the South African government to provide basic utilities such as water may be viewed as the catalyst for the social unrest and an associated decline in tourism to both the Kruger National Park (Mathivha, Tshipala, & Nkuna, 2017) and more recently Cape Town (Drummond, 2019).

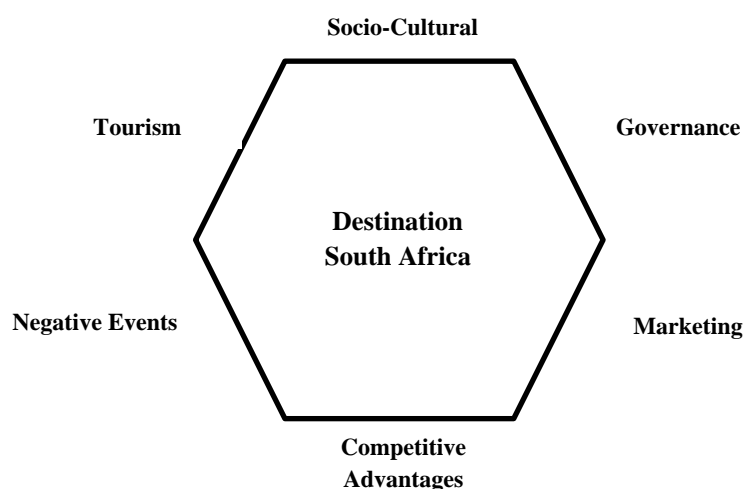
Relatedly, a strong significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) correlation was reported between the *Marketing* and *Negative Events* ( $r = 0.542$ ) factors. This notion is supported within the tourism context by (Avraham, 2018) who advances the importance of sufficient information and positive marketing communications through advertisements or promotions as a panacea to the negative stereotypes arising from negative events such as civil unrest in tourism destinations such as Egypt. More pertinently, the presence of statistically significant correlations (linear

relationships) between all the factors suggests that all the factors are cognate and that it can be reasonably assumed that they measured the same construct (PB). The correlations also support the multi-dimensional nature of PBs within the tourism context (Agapito et al., 2013; Elliot et al., 2011; Martinez & Alvarez, 2010; Stepchenkova et al., 2018).

## Conclusions and recommendations

Figure 1 illustrates the PB factors potentially influencing inbound tourists regarding South Africa as a tourism destination.

Figure 1: The Place Brand Hexagon of South Africa as a tourism destination



Source: Based on research findings

This paper provides empirical evidence that, as illustrated in Figure 1, *Socio-cultural*, *Governance*, *Marketing*, *Competitive Advantages*, *Negative Events* and *Tourism* factors of South Africa's PB are the aspects that potentially influenced tourist decision-making with regards to South Africa as a tourism destination. As it emerged, in the case of South Africa, all the aforementioned PB factors are also correlated and therefore, cognate. Previous studies (du Plessis, Saayman & van der Merwe, 2015; Jonker, Heath & Toit, 2004; Matiza & Slabbert, 2020; Saayman & du Plessis, 2003) support the findings of the present study, establishing that South Africa emerged as one of Africa's top tourism destinations based on a combination of its tourism assets and the ability to market itself as an attractive tourism destination. For instance, from a supply-side perspective Jonker et al. (2004) suggest that an integrated multi-stakeholder and multi-dimensional approach to brand marketing and positioning South Africa is a critical success factor to the competitiveness of South Africa within the tourism market. This notion is supported by Heath's (2003), who identifies the importance of an integrative approach to destination branding and competitive positioning for improved destination competitiveness within the Southern African region.

The competitiveness of South Africa's place brand within the tourism context has previously been attributed to destination brand marketing strategies such as hosting mega sports events to attract tourists which is tourism profile factor in the context of the present study (Hemmonsbe, Tichaawa & Knott, 2018; Knott et al., 2013, 2015). While, relatedly, du Plessis et al. (2015) attributed South Africa's competitiveness as a place to the country's uniqueness as an African experience for tourists (Socio-cultural factor), political stability (governance factor), profile and entertainment activities (tourism factor), as well as the country's brand and image



(South Africa's overall PB). Consequently, the extent of the literature and empirical findings of the present study suggest that  $P_1$  of this paper has no truth value. Thus, it may be concluded that  $P_2$  of this paper has a truth value - in that there are discernible PB factors that tourists may consider as having been influential to their decision to visit South Africa as a tourism destination. The contemporary literature (Agapito et al., 2013; Alvarez & Campo, 2014; Stepchenkova et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2016) generally gives credence to the notion of PBs influencing the decision-making process of tourists. As a result, the idea that the discrepancy between the South African brand that is marketed globally and the effectiveness of South Africa's tourism destination marketing and branding efforts in attracting tourists may be attributable to the PB perceptions of the country, is reasonable.

The present study contributes towards filling the discernible gap in the literature relating to empirical evidence of the PB–tourist decision-making nexus within the African context. Theoretically, the study complements the extent of tourism literature by providing an international demand-side perspective on place branding. The present study thus supports the notions of Han (1989) and Wattanacharoensila & La-ornualb, (2019) by providing empirical evidence that tourists utilise PB factors as heuristic cues for information symmetry in their decision-making. Overall, the findings also suggest that PB theory (Anholt, 2000; Dinnie, 2008) may be extended to the tourism discourse within the African context, hence contributing to the burgeoning Afro-centric tourism research agenda. Therefore, a critical lesson for African tourism practitioners is that a country's PB is vital to tourism and that it would be prudent for African tourism practitioners to proactively manage their PBs as a multi-stakeholder approach to tourism promotion.

Practically, the findings imply that DMOs must be cognisant of the factors potentially influencing tourist decision-making when considering South Africa as a tourism destination. Furthermore, South African tourism marketers and policymakers alike, must be conscious of the potential subjective significance of South Africa's PB to tourist decision-making, beyond the conventional destination brand. The contemporary literature (Chaulagain, Wiitala & Fu, 2019; Hahm, Tasci & Terry, 2018; Stepchenkova & Shichkova, 2017) does support this notion, suggesting that PBs as a manifestation of country image(s) may have a superseding influence on tourism destination brands - influencing how tourists contextualise their tourism product decision-making. This also holds for other African countries seeking to improve their competitiveness within the contemporary global tourism market.

In light of the findings, further analysis of the present data is recommended as it may also yield viable information and empirical evidence on the potential and extent of the influence the six factors identified by the present study may have on the conative behaviour of tourists across various tourism typologies in South Africa. It is also recommended that the measuring instrument developed for the present study be considered as both an evaluative framework and conversely, as a decision support model for tourism marketing in South Africa, as well as other African tourism destination countries. Within the South African context, in particular, the present study may be viewed as a primer to a broader international study incorporating South Africa's major tourism source markets - Germany, The United States of America, the United Kingdom and China. Such a study would include critical insights from previous, current (inbound) and future tourists, while validating the measuring instrument by employing Confirmatory Factor Analysis, as well as more advanced inferential statistical analysis to establish, for instance, the relationship between South Africa's PB and the intended travel behaviour of international tourists.

There are, however, certain limitations to the study that must be acknowledged. First, while the sample for this study was valid and suitable for a first initial exploratory attempt at modelling the influence of the generic PB on tourist decision-making, a larger and broader



sample in subsequent studies will serve to validate the proposed scale to measure PBs. Second, the present study also only sampled inbound tourists visiting one tourist attraction, albeit being one of the most attractive tourist attractions in South Africa. This limitation is mostly mitigated by the fact that the sample profile of inbound tourists for the study is consistent with a previous study in the region, as well as national tourism statistics from Statistics South Africa. Lastly, more exhaustive analyses of the significance and effect sizes of the influence of South Africa's PB factors on tourist decision-making would have provided complimentary empirical evidence to the findings of this study. Broader subsequent studies can address this limitation.

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