

Essential Destination Appeal Preconditions for Sustainable and Competitive Tourism in South Africa

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Abstract

To enable a country to appeal to tourists some essential preconditions must be met. If these preconditions are fulfilled, then it can generate tourism demand and bring about a sustainable competitive destination advantage. The aim of this paper is to determine which of the essential destination appeal preconditions enhances South Africa's tourism competitiveness and sustainability. A quantitative research design was utilised with a non-probability sample of 512 domestic and foreign tourists that have travelled within or to South Africa. The online survey took place on Google Forms and the data was analysed using STATISTICA version 16. The measuring instrument was validated by conducting exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficients to confirm factor reliability. Six hypotheses were tested to determine if there are relationships between three selected essential destination preconditions and sustainability and competitive tourism in South Africa. Multiple Regression Analysis revealed three statistically significant relationships, namely between country entry preconditions with competitiveness and fundamental marketing conditions with both sustainability and competitiveness. To improve South Africa's tourism competitiveness, attention should be paid to simplify visa requirements and the country's wildlife and parks must be actively marketed. To ensure South Africa's tourism sustainability, all travel and tourism organisations should ensure that information is up-to-date and that they provide multiple travel and product and service booking channels. This study may be considered one of the first in South Africa to identify that fundamental marketing conditions are influential for both competitive- and sustainable tourism in South Africa.

Keywords: Country entry; destination appeal; fundamental marketing; information sharing content; preconditions; South Africa

Introduction

The perceived attractiveness of a tourist destination is connected to destination appeal (Mak, 2008). The attractiveness of a destination is determined by a country's attributes, which in turn influence consumer behaviour and decisions. Destinations must be appealing in order to be competitive and sustainable (Du Toit-Helmbold, 2016). A destination should optimise its attractiveness as it is one of the primary reasons why one destination appeals to a visitor more than another (Ngwira & Kankhuni, 2018). Ferreira and Perks (2020) indicate that destination attractiveness has a significant effect on generating tourism demand for countries. The demand for tourism products and services is highly influenced by the tourist's first impressions (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2011). The first impression is formed before arriving at the destination. Tourists' subjective perception, subsequent behaviour, and destination selection are all influenced by their initial impression (Shin, 2009). As competition among tourist

destinations grows, a better grasp of what travellers desire and tourism trends becomes more vital when developing destination attractiveness value propositions. A sustainable competitive advantage is obtained when the overall attractiveness of one tourist destination is more desirable than that of other tourist destinations (Woyo & Slabbert, 2021).

Problem statement

It has been a difficult period for global tourism since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic owing to lockdowns and travel restrictions (Sharma et al., 2021; Verkerk, 2022). South Africa's worldwide competitive tourism score as a developing country has dropped to 68th in 2021 from 61st in 2019 (World Economic Forum, 2019; 2022). According to the World Economic Forum (2019), South Africa is ranked second in Sub-Saharan Africa in the Tourism and Travel industry index. Natural resources rated 15th and cultural resources ranked 23rd in 2019 and are recognised as the country's primary assets. However, the country only ranks 75th in terms of ICT readiness and 60th in terms of total infrastructure. In 2019, poor health and hygiene conditions rated 113th. In developing countries, such as South Africa, protecting the vulnerable population that is dependent on natural resources is particularly important to ensure that the effects of climate change do not make it more vulnerable and thus preserving the world for the future through sustainable development (De Lange et al., 2008). Furthermore, South Africa aspires to be a sustainable, economically prosperous and a self-reliant nation that protects its democracy by meeting the primary human needs of its citizens, by managing its ecological resources responsibly for current and future generations, and by advancing efficient and effective integrated planning and governance through national-, regional- and global collaboration (Keyser, 2009).

Outbound international travel has grown in 2022, but inbound foreign travel to South Africa has remained stagnant (Lings, 2022). This demonstrates that the competitive position of South Africa's tourism industry provides growth potential. This led to the research question under investigation: Which destination appeal preconditions are regarded by potential tourists as essential and can be used to enhance South Africa's tourism competitiveness and sustainability?

Literature on destination appeal preconditions

Although there are many destination appeal conditions, this article will focus on essential appeal preconditions prior to arrival in South Africa, namely information sharing-, country entry- and fundamental marketing preconditions.

Information content sharing preconditions

Preconditions for information content sharing are connected to the quality and type of information supplied prior to travel to alert potential travellers to health concerns or to give them an idea of their experience in the country. The use of technology for information exchange can either increase or decrease travel to countries. Given the severity of the Covid-19 outbreak, virtual reality can help the tourist sector establish resilience (Akhtar et al., 2021). In tourism, virtual reality is a “non-physical kind of tourism” that allows travellers to go to “a computer-generated place” without physically visiting the destination; this in turn can protect the destination from the negative influences of overcrowding at a destination (Verkerk, 2022). In addition, virtual reality can be used as a marketing tool in the form of the “try before you buy” idea that encourages travellers to visit the attraction (Tussyadiah et al., 2018). Advanced multimedia technologies and location-specific travel mobile applications are required to maintain the sustainability and competitiveness of the destination (Kim & Kim, 2017). Interactive marketing, on the other hand, may be used to distribute personalised

communication. Interactive marketing allows for two-way connection between tourism marketers and potential visitors via social media, tagging, blogs, vlogs and customer review ratings, among other things (Camilleri, 2017). With regard to content sharing, it is critical that the material on digital platforms be accurate, dependable and reputable. Potential visitors would also want to be informed about potential health dangers in a nation before visiting (Stopper, 2012). In addition to the recent Covid-19, health risks include “SARS epidemic, Ebola, Zika virus, and Avian Influenza, as well as earthquakes, storms, and tsunamis” (World Health Organization, 2017). As a result, any health dangers must be made public so that potential tourists may make an educated travel decision. Tourist locations should be proactive in lowering tourists' health risks, as this may make the location less appealing to visitors and hence less viable (Sharma et al., 2021). Furthermore, tourism areas that are malaria-free and do not require yellow fever immunisation would be more desirable (Stöppler, 2012; World Health Organization, 2016).

Country entry preconditions

Preconditions for entry into a country can be characterised as difficulties experienced in the initial planning phase and after arrival at the destination (Ferreira et al., 2020). In tourism, accessibility refers to how easily a visitor may go to a destination, whether that be through visa requirements or the ability to obtain desired goods, services and activities at the destination (Adhikari et al., 2013). Tourists view country entry conditions as necessary to entice them to travel to a destination since it reassures them regarding their mobility while there (Van Bemmelen, 2015). Mobility at the destination is essential due to the accessibility of tourism-related goods and services provided by the ground infrastructure (Campbell & Ortez, 2011). Ground infrastructure comprises organised trips as well as public bus and train services (Ferreira et al., 2020). Murphy (2013) indicates that having a large selection of public transit options makes a destination seem like a desirable travel option since it demonstrates mobility. Furthermore, the availability of ground infrastructure at the destination, such as vehicle rentals and chauffeur-driven services, can increase a location's appeal to travellers and hence boost the destination's competitiveness (Smith & Warburton, 2012). Low-cost airlines have aided in the expansion of the tourism industry and are thus a competitive alternative for tourists (Papatheodorou, 2021). Complicated, stringent and perplexing visa application rules reduce a tourist destination's competitiveness and, as a result, its sustainability (Democratic Alliance, 2013). As a result, difficult, restricted and perplexing visa applications may deter visitors from contemplating visiting a certain country (Dupeyras & MacCallum, 2013). To boost their competitiveness, destinations should adopt e-visas or visa on arrival and have consulates in important cities throughout the world (Paladhi, 2014). In addition, prior to tourist arrivals, high levels of quality service delivery and customer satisfaction enable the tourist experience and create a sound basis for tourist destination competitiveness and sustainability (Caber et al., 2012).

Fundamental marketing preconditions

The employment of appropriate marketing techniques and marketing channels to promote the country's attractions is referred to as one of the fundamental marketing preconditions (Ajake, 2015). Natural attractions within a tourist destination are considered to be the most significant element on the supply side of the tourism industry as natural attractions lure tourists to the destination and can be a competitive force (Ho & Ap, 2009). Natural attractions are features of the physical environment such as the landscape and forests, including plants and wildlife (Page, 2007). Tourists prefer destinations with national parks and wildlife reserves (Chen & Chen, 2010). According to the World Economic Forum (2015), destinations with many natural

attractions have a competitive advantage of attracting tourists. Sightseeing opportunities are strongly related to attractions (Chen & Chen, 2010). Tourists prefer destinations with a variety of sightseeing opportunities or sites, especially if they are closely situated to each other (Chen & Chen, 2010). Sightseeing attractions are associated with exceptional natural beauty and interest; they are the oldest forms of attractions and include geological formations, mountains, natural spas and scenic beauty (Lubbe, 2005).

Considering that destinations compete on a global scale, marketers must maintain current knowledge and understand the tourism industry and the environment in which they operate in order to remain competitive (Kamenidou et al., 2009). However, it is difficult to forecast what visitors would consider an appealing place nowadays since social media and the internet expose them to a multitude of information that can quickly modify their impression of a destination (Lu et al., 2021). Furthermore, in order to be sustainable, tourist firms must perform ongoing research. The more a place is promoted, the more appealing it becomes to the individual tourist, increasing the likelihood of revisitation to such a destination. If it is difficult to obtain information about a certain place, the destination becomes less desirable and competitive (Ivanov et al., 2010). Travellers who are inexperienced will rely more on promotional efforts to choose their locations than experienced travellers (Singh & Srivastava, 2019). Since Covid-19, there has been a surge in online access to tourism and travel services, as well as digital bookings through online travel agencies and sharing economy platforms, direct online reservations, digital payment methods and mobile devices (World Economic Forum, 2022).

Sustainable tourism

Sustainable tourism can be defined as a form of planning and management that looks at tourism holistically and addresses different interests such as environmental-, financial-, local community- and tourism interests. (The World Economic Forum, 2022). Thus, sustainable tourism should combine economic performance with social responsibility and environmental protection (Struwig & Janse van Rensburg, 2016). Therefore, if tourism businesses source their products and services locally, it leads to local economic development and poverty alleviation in the local area (Pratt, 2011). Furthermore, Vodeb (2014) argues that sustainable tourism requires the involvement of the local population in tourist destination planning and development as well. Therefore, all stakeholders are consistently involved in the tourism planning and development of a tourist area (Tao & Wall, 2009).

For tourism to be sustainable, tourism research should be conducted to manage the volatility within the tourism industry, and to ensure that the tourist destination is keeping up with international trends (Ferreira, 2022; Walker & Walker, 2011). Tourism development that is sustainable brings about superior customer satisfaction which, in turn, can lead to higher numbers of return travellers (Keyser, 2009). Sustainable tourism has the potential to generate direct and indirect employment to the local committee (Pravallika, 2014). Environmental resource management, within a tourist destination, is critical to its continued success, as environmental sustainability will ensure that the destination remains attractive and competitive (Maharaj & Balkaran, 2014). Furthermore, there is an increasing trend for businesses in all sectors, including tourism, to go “green”, or to become more environmentally friendly. This is the result of global pressures, primarily those concerning global warming (Bramwell & Lane, 2008). Farrell and Twining-Ward (2005) argue that sustainability needs to be conceptualised in a more comprehensive way to evaluate its interconnectedness meaningfully and critically with the natural, social and economic elements tested, using multiple scales and different time periods. With the increasing focus on the environment, climate change and sustainable

development necessitated the tourism industry to broaden its planning perspective, no longer to focus solely on marketing and economic growth (Kozak & Baloglu, 2010).

Environmental resource management refers to the management of the interaction between human activities and the environment (Pravallika, 2014). The aims of environmental resources management is to ensure that the ecosystem is protected and preserved for future human generations, and also maintain ecosystem integrity through considering ethical, economic and ecological variables (Pahl-Wostl, 2007). Furthermore, effective ecosystem management in the tourist destination is vital in supporting human well-being and is a driver in economic growth. Furthermore, tourist destinations should adopt fair trade principles for managing the relationship between capitalism and tourism (Kalish, 2011). Fair trade in the South African tourism context refers to fair wages and working conditions, fair purchasing and operations, equitable distribution of benefits and respect for human rights, culture and the environment (Fair Trade Tourism, 2016). The sustainable tourism development of a tourism destination does not mean achieving a quick and short economic benefit, but includes effects that are met by economic, sociological and environmental aspects in the long run (Angelkova et al., 2012).

Competitive tourism

Tourism competitiveness is the ability to attract and increase tourists by supplying them with experiences which satisfy them and are memorable (Cronjé & du Plessis, 2020). This should be done in a profitable manner by improving the wellbeing of people in the destinations while preserving the natural heritage for future generations (Angelkova et al., 2012).

The competitiveness of the touristic destination presents a multidimensional concept which includes economic, social, cultural, political, technological and environmental advantages (Dimoska & Trimcev, 2012). Thus, competitive tourism should focus on eliminating social inequities and discrimination within the local tourism industry and the tourist destination itself (Ferreira & Perks, 2020). Any form of intolerance and/or phobia towards others on the basis of origin, race, sexual orientation and religion will negatively affect a tourist destination (Council of Europe, 2022; Department of Tourism, 2010). In addition, tourists prefer destinations which are perceived as stable and have racial harmony (Seetanah et al., 2011). Furthermore, the tourist destination should invest in developing human capacity through education and focus on the inclusion of adopting competitive tourism practices (Bramwell & Lane, 2014). Tourist destinations should ensure (as far as possible) limited impact of tourism on local societies and cultures and the well-being of their own citizens (Zaei & Zaei, 2013).

Sustainable tourism is considered to be interlinked with competitiveness as tourism growth needs to consider economic development alongside with social-, cultural- and environmental impacts to ensure the long-term success of the industry. Sustainability should therefore be considered as an important driver for destination competitiveness (OECD, 2010). While academicians and practitioners' focus towards sustainability has shifted towards competitiveness, there is a need to understand how sustainability and competitiveness are interlinked (Behnam & Cagliano, 2017). Sustainable tourism development has attracted the increasing attention of both researchers and practitioners. Sustainable competitiveness infers attaining competitive gains today without compromising future sustainability (Kirjavainen & Saukkonen, 2020). Thus, sustainable competitiveness "is the ability to generate and sustain inclusive wealth without diminishing the future capability of sustaining or increasing current wealth levels" (Solability, 2022). The development of a knowledge-based society and sustainable economy considerably depends on the capacity to produce competitive goods and services and to distribute them in the global market (Aleksejeva, 2016). National economies

are struggling to meet the demands of the constantly changing global competitive environment to remain sustainable.

Countries, regions, and cities all over the world undergo major structural changes as the economy shifts from manufacturing towards services such as tourism and these influence their competitiveness and sustainability (Kirjavainen & Saukkonen, 2020). Sustainable tourism involves extensive cooperation between tourist companies, tourist destinations and national, regional and local authorities in order to cover a wide group of challenges and, at the same time, to remain competitive (Angelkova et al., 2012). Opportunities for sustainable tourism development and preservation of its competitiveness are largely influenced by the quality of the environment and the preservation of natural- and cultural heritages (Dimoska & Trimcev, 2012:279). Despite mounting interest in sustainable development, the relationship between sustainability and competitiveness has been only marginally explored (Jurcu & Buglea, 2015; Purvis et al., 2019).

Based on the above literature the following hypothesised model was tested.

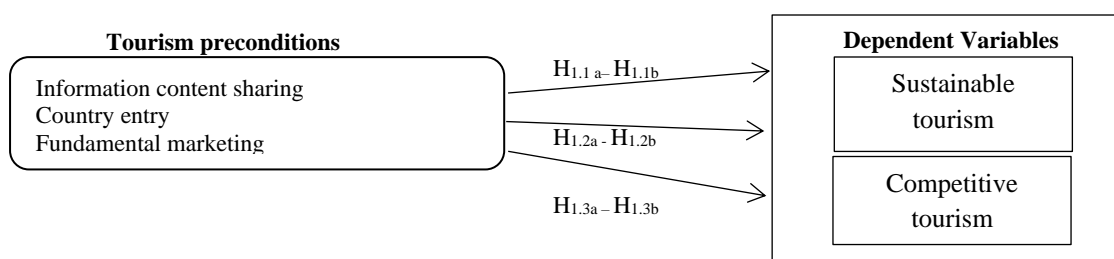


Figure 1: Hypothesised model of essential appeal country preconditions for South Africa's competitiveness and sustainability

All studies should operationalise the constructs of the study. Table 1 presents the operational definitions of the variables tested in the study.

Table 1: Operational definitions of the constructs of the study

Construct	Operationalisation
Information content sharing preconditions	Information content that promotes destination appeal about conducive physical and mental health conditions via desirable communication sharing media
Country entry preconditions	Favourable visa entry requirements and transport services availability to make the destination more appealing
Fundamental marketing preconditions	Promoting a destination through up-to-date easily accessible information about a country's natural attractions appeal while offering many product and service booking channels
Competitive tourism	Destinations offering locally sourced products and services with local communities' participation in tourism policy formulation based on international tourism trends to boost tourist demand
Sustainable tourism	Destinations providing a safe and stable tourist environment without discrimination based on race, religion and/or sexual preferences

Methodology

A positivistic research paradigm was followed whereby quantitative data was sourced using convenience and snowball sampling from tourists within and to South Africa. To participate in the study respondents had to be older than 18 years. South African affiliated tourism organisations such as The Department of Tourism, South African Tourism and tourism companies requested their staff to complete the survey. The Department of Tourism, South African Tourism and tourism companies sent the web link to the e-questionnaire on Google Forms to all their employees. Other respondents were recruited using convenience and snowball sampling. The web link was first sent to friends and family and Facebook contacts and then these respondents were requested to kindly forward the link to their friends and family. The web link was also shared on tourism related Facebook pages with the consent of the owner

of the page. A new measuring scale was developed as no existing scale could be found for the items measured in this study. Ten items were developed to test political climate appeal using a 5-point Likert scale varying from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). After data cleaning, 512 questionnaires were statistically analysed using the statistical computer package STATISTICA 16. The measuring instrument was validated by conducting exploratory factor analysis (EFA), only considering factor loadings above 0.5 and not having cross loadings. A Cronbach’s alpha cut-off point of 0.7 was regarded as confirming factor reliability (Taber, 2018). An construct with less than three items will be disregarded from further statistical analysis (Zikmund et al., 2009). Multi-collinearity was tested to confirm that multiple regression analysis could be performed. Multiple Regression Analysis was conducted to examine whether statistically significant relationships exist between country preconditions and sustainability and competitiveness of a country. The following hypotheses were tested:

H_{1.1a}: Destination information content sharing preconditions influence sustainable tourism.

H_{1.1b}: Destination information content sharing preconditions influence competitive tourism.

H_{1.2a}: Destination country entry preconditions influence sustainable tourism.

H_{1.2b}: Destination country preconditions influence competitive tourism.

H_{1.3a}: Destination fundamental marketing preconditions influence sustainable tourism.

H_{1.3b}: Destination fundamental marketing preconditions influence competitive tourism.

Empirical results

The following are the empirical results based on 512 tourists’ responses. Table 2 represents the factor extraction analysis, validity and reliability statistics for the independent variables.

Table 2: Factor matrix and validity and reliability for the independent variables

Independent variables	Loadings	Eigenvalue	Cronbach’s alpha
Information content sharing preconditions		2.05	0.700
No yellow fever immunisation requirements	0.491		
Facilities for spiritual healing	0.563		
Interactive communication on country’s website	0.631		
Virtual reality applications	0.787		
Country entry preconditions		5.15	0.868
Uncomplicated visa regulations	0.517		
Low cost aviation services available	0.549		
Exceptional tourist experience	0.410		
Visas available on arrival	0.689		
Electronic visa applications prior to departure	0.772		
One visa for entry into multiple countries	0.736		
Biometric equipment readily available	0.566		
Visa issued in stipulated time frame	0.677		
Consulates in major cities worldwide	0.598		
Fundamental marketing preconditions		2.64	0.842
Current and relevant information about destination	0.630		
Pristine wildlife reserves	0.755		
Different types of national parks to choose from	0.774		
Easily obtained destination information	0.413		
Variety of travel distribution channels for booking products and services	0.667		

Note: loadings <0.40 were suppressed



It must be noted that the data in this article is part of a broader study. All three constructs extracted from the broader study had Eigenvalues of above one (2.05, 5.15 and 2.64 respectively). In the broader study, enablers, enhancers and natural attraction tactics were tested. However, based on the loadings and factor extraction these constructs required renaming to better describe the construct content. As is apparent in Table 1, four items loaded onto the construct Information content sharing preconditions with factor loadings > 0.40, while nine items loaded for Country entry preconditions and five items for Fundamental marketing preconditions. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of at least 0.700 indicate that the items measuring these constructs are deemed reliable.

Sustainable- and Competitive tourism had Eigenvalues of 1.65 and 7.41 respectively, which are both greater than 1. To confirm validity of the dependent variables, the factor loadings for Sustainable tourism range between 0.623 and 0.715 and for Competitive tourism between 0.615 and 0.805, thus well above 0.4. The Cronbach’s alphas’ reliability scores are 0.762 for Sustainable tourism and 0.812 for Competitive tourism, confirming reliability of the inter-time consistency. Table 3 presents the results of the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient analysis.

Table 3: Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient analysis

Variable	CT	ST	ICSP	CEP	FMP
Competitive tourism (CT)	1.000				
Sustainable tourism (ST)	0.405	1.000			
Information content sharing preconditions (ICSP)	0.148	0.320	1.000		
Country entry preconditions (CEP)	0.357	0.353	0.350	1.000	
Fundamental marketing preconditions (FMP)	0.378	0.346	0.373	0.334	1.000

Table 3 shows that that all the constructs reported positive Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients. Most correlations are weak to moderate ($r < 0.49$). Competitive tourism presented the largest moderate correlation with Sustainable tourism ($r = 0.405$) showing that South Africa must be competitive as a tourist destination to enable sustainable tourism. The weakest correlation was between Competitive tourism and Information content sharing preconditions ($r = 0.148$). Of the three essential tourism preconditions, it seems that Information content sharing preconditions are not much related to Competitive tourism.

To conduct an MRA, it must be established that there is no evidence of multi-collinearity. The existence of multi-collinearity suggests a high correlation – a tolerance value of less than 0.1 and/or a Variance-Inflated Factor (VIF) greater than 10 is a cause for concern for it could result in misleading MRA results (Trochim, 2006). Table 4 summarises the multi-collinearity diagnostic testing for the dependent- and independent constructs.

Table 4: Multi-collinearity diagnostic testing for the dependent- and independent constructs

Independent	Multi-collinearity statistics	
	Tolerance value	VIF
Information content sharing preconditions	0.519	1.927
Country entry preconditions	0.493	2.023
Fundamental marketing preconditions	0.570	1.754
Dependent		
Sustainable tourism	0.838	1.193
Competitive tourism	0.836	1.196

As can be observed from Table 4, all the constructs had a tolerance value of more than 0.1 and a VIF value of less than 10, thereby suggesting that the constructs are free from collinearity and that multiple regression analysis could be conducted. Table 5 presents the summary of the multiple regression analysis.

Table 5: Summary of the multiple regression analysis

Independent variables	Dependent variables	Beta	t-value	Sig. (p)	Hypothesis no.	Hypothesis
Information content sharing preconditions	Sustainable Tourism	0.003	0.116	0.907	H1.1a	Rejected
	Competitive Tourism	0,057	1,820	0,069	H1.1b	Rejected
Country entry preconditions	Sustainable Tourism	0.015	0.335	0.739	H1.2a	Rejected
	Competitive Tourism	0,102	3,206	0,046**	H1.2b	Accepted
Fundamental marketing preconditions	Sustainable Tourism	0.143	3.477	0.000*	H1.3a	Accepted
	Competitive Tourism	0,170	4,405	0,000*	H1.3b	Accepted

*p<0.001 **p<0.05

No statistically significant relationships were found between Information content sharing preconditions and Sustainable and Competitive tourism. This finding is in contrast to findings by Chauhan and Khanna (2009) that information about spiritual healing can encourage tourists to visit a country to increase their mental health while interactive communication on the country’s website and virtual reality applications can provide them peace of mind regarding the mobility within the destination.

Only Country entry preconditions had a statistically significant relationship with Competitive tourism. Tourism stakeholders therefore perceive *country entry preconditions* as influential in the attainment of competitive tourism in South Africa. Favourable visa conditions regarded as important by respondents for competitive tourism in South Africa, include one visa that allows multiple country entries, and the issuing of visas meeting the stipulated timeframes stated in the visa applications. Furthermore, the availability of consulates in major worldwide cities with biometric equipment can contribute to an exceptional tourist experience to make South Africa more appealing to visit, and thereby more competitive globally. In this study, it seems that if these consulates are situated in a safe tourism environment where staff does not display social discrimination, it can make the country more competitive in tourism. This is in line with Neumayer’s (2010) findings that travelling to an embassy, or one of a few consulates (for some visas) then having to wait hours for service will be an unpleasant tourist experience. Taylor (2010) emphasises that for competitive tourism, all social inequities and discrimination within the local tourism industry and the tourist destination itself should be eliminated. Moreover, from the empirical results, it seems that with regards to competitive tourism, in South Africa, low-cost aviation services can make the country more appealing to visit. According to Davison and Ryley (2010), the advancement of low-cost airlines assists in the growth and competitiveness of the tourism industry.

Fundamental marketing preconditions had statistically significant relationships with both sustainable and competitive tourism. Tourism stakeholders therefore perceive *Fundamental marketing preconditions* as influential in both the attainment of sustainable- and competitive tourism in South Africa. It appears that respondents view *Fundamental marketing preconditions* such as information available on pristine wildlife reserves with different types of national parks to choose from as important in the attainment of tourism competitiveness and sustainability in South Africa. In literature, it was mentioned that natural attractions within a tourist destination are considered to be the most significant element on the supply side of the tourism industry as natural attractions lure tourists to the destination, therefore destinations should have pristine wildlife reserves and a variety of different national parks (Ho & Ap, 2009). The country currently has 21 national parks, consisting of over 4 million hectares of pristine natural beauty, which consists of 3% of the total area (South African National Parks, 2022), and South Africa is the only safari country to have four top-rated parks in the top 10 list in Africa which is based on 3 008 reviews collected via the SafariBookings website (Beekwilder, 2015). Mehmetoglu (2007) is of the opinion that nature-based tourism is one of the fastest

growing sectors of the tourism industry and destinations should therefore match the increasing consumer demand for natural attractions to remain sustainable.

Conclusions and recommendations

The statistically insignificant relationship between information content sharing preconditions and competitive and sustainable tourism may be explained by the fact that in Africa, including South Africa, technology usage by tourism businesses was limited on the one hand and access to technology for information access or sharing lags behind developed countries (World Bank, 2022). Three statistically significant relationships were found.

Country entry preconditions (H_{1.2b}) presented a weak statistically significant relationship with competitive tourism. It seems that uncomplicated visa regulations that make it easy to obtain a visa, either through an electronic application or obtaining a visa on arrival, are an important country entry precondition for competitive tourism. This has been confirmed in literature that difficulty in obtaining a visa can deter potential travellers from visiting a certain destination, thereby not making it competitive with countries where it is easy to obtain a visa (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2012).

It is recommended that government improve country entry preconditions to increase South Africa's tourism competitiveness. The most important is to compile visa regulations in an easily understood manner. The visa application process must be simplified and expedited by providing biometric equipment at all international airports to avoid tourists having to travel for in-person visa interviews. Travel agents and tour operators must be up to date with about regulation changes to ensure that they provide tourists with the correct most recent information and application procedures. In addition, the South African government must finalise the planned Tourist Visas on Arrival for tourists from United Kingdom, the United States of America, Germany, France and the Netherlands as they are the top tourist generation countries to South Africa. The government should also expedite the planned expansion of e-Visa applicant countries as it may attract more younger travellers which prefer to finalise their travel arrangements online. To make South Africa more competitive, the government should actively work towards the implementation of the planned multi-country visa entry to other southern African countries like Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Doing so can boost tourist arrivals to and from these nearby other member countries to South Africa without these tourists incurring additional cost of obtaining a visa for each country. For South Africa to be a more appealing destination, there is need for low-cost aviation airlines that can cater for budget-conscious travellers, but without sacrificing service delivery.

It is recommended that Tourism South Africa increase the country's consulates to 195 to represent all travel countries. They could also form global consular alliances with countries where there is not a South African consulate, in particular southern African countries like Namibia, to make it easier for tourists to obtain a visa if wishing to travel to South Africa.

It makes sense that there is no statistically significant relationship between country entry preconditions and sustainability. Tourists who found visa entry requirements not conducive for travelling to South Africa, will after not meeting this tourism precondition, not consider visiting South Africa in the future. Sustainability can only be ensured after a first visit to the country as this will facilitate possible repeat visits.

Fundamental marketing preconditions (H_{1.3a} and H_{1.3b}) presented weak statistically significant relationships with *sustainable and competitive tourism*. It appears that tourists value marketing information that inform them about the many national parks and wildlife reserves in the country. The World Economic Forum (2015) poses those destinations with many natural attractions have a competitive advantage over others in attracting tourists. However, as

mentioned by Mihalic (2013), tourists have become increasingly demanding about the quality of surroundings at natural attractions. Tourists also want to feel safe to travel to South Africa and not be discriminated against for their race, religion and/or sexual preference. United Nations World Tourism Organisation (2010) recommends that tourist destinations must make tourists feel safe.

Tourists also want a choice how to book for sightseeing activities or for travelling to or within the country. Travelstart (2014) confirms that tourists are increasingly making use of online bookings and social media to book travel services and to comment on their travel experience. Smart mobile phones seem to be the preferred communication medium for online bookings (Du Toit-Helmbold, 2015), although walk-in bookings are also a desirable option to some (Colman, 2016). As mentioned by Yuju-Wang (2007), marketing is a very important factor in striving towards increasing destination patronage and service consumption, for generating repeat business and traveller loyalty. Online marketing and social media have become the most used channels in tourism promotion and destination marketing (Ali & Frew, 2013).

To strive towards competitive tourism in South Africa, it is therefore recommended that South African tourism companies, create more on-line awareness about South Africa as a travel destination via social media Facebook and Twitter campaigns, especially about wildlife and game reserves. Tourists should be encouraged to share their experiences by providing reviews as it is a great marketing tool to make the country more desirable as a travel destination. Tourism companies can enable on their website a facility for a short message. Using virtual reality interactive marketing is an attractive option as potential travellers can pose questions, especially those on South African wildlife and game reserves, the country's main tourist attraction. To make South Africa more unique as a destination, tourism companies can promote creative resource tourism tours, for example, Kaapse Klopse celebrating Second New Year with songs and dance; traditional gumboot African and Khoi riel traditional dances; traditional African food like samp and beans and "smileys" (offal), African art paintings and Khoisan rock painting, street graffiti art in main cities and sand sculptures at beach cities.

To strive towards sustainable tourism in South Africa, it is recommended that South African Tourism regularly update information about the country's wildlife and national parks on their website. They should do so either monthly or immediately after becoming aware of new game reserves being established, or when an upgrading has taken place at national parks so that information remains relevant. South African Tourism and destination managers should market the country extensively on social media and in traditional marketing media like direct mail, radio and television, in particular its unique selling proposition, namely its pristine wildlife reserves and the variety of national parks as a ploy to entice tourists to visit or revisit the country. Tourism organisations should provide both online and walk-in travel product and service booking channel options. On-line bookings could be available on the webpage of the tourism organisations, as well as on the more popular travel booking sites such as Tripadvisor and Booking.com. Destination marketers could also recruit street marketers to approach tourists at popular tourist attractions to book tickets for sightseeing attractions such as visiting wildlife and game reserves. Confirmation of bookings can be sent via an email and once paid for their tickets, the tourists can be sent an email that is proof of payment and can be scanned in at the destination. This will make it more convenience to the tourist and save time from having to walk to a tourism organisation to make an in-person booking. Culture- and heritage-orientated attractions in South Africa, for example, archaeological sites like Makapansgat, monuments like the well-known Mandela statue, Afrikaans Language and French Huguenot Monuments, Castle of Good Hope and Robben Island Prison for historic public should be actively promoted as a unique South African tourism experience.

Limitations of the study

The total sample was a rather large sample size and should therefore not have influenced the generalisability of results. The study was also limited to quantitative data although the integration of both quantitative and qualitative research has become increasingly common in contemporary research. Although the study may have benefited from qualitative insights, the exploratory nature of the hypothesised model did not necessitate the generation of in-depth qualitative data for establishing an explanatory framework. Despite these limitations, this study offers a distinct contribution to the literature on essential destination appeal preconditions which enhances South Africa's tourism competitiveness and sustainability.

Recommendations for future studies

Based on the findings and conclusions derived from this study, the following recommendations are provided. The study could be extended to other countries in the world, using the same measuring instrument. A qualitative study to confirm the findings of this study and to provide greater clarity on destination appeal preconditions which enhances sustainable- and competitive tourism in South Africa.

Concluding remarks

The aim and motivation for conducting this study were to determine which of the essential destination appeal preconditions enhances South Africa's tourism competitiveness and sustainability. Multiple Regression Analysis revealed three statistically significant relationships, namely between country entry preconditions with competitiveness and fundamental marketing conditions with both sustainability and competitiveness. Of interest was the importance of fundamental marketing conditions that drive both competitive- and sustainable tourism in the county. This study may be considered one of the first in South Africa to identify that fundamental marketing conditions are influential for both competitive- and sustainable tourism in South Africa.

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