

## A Dimensional Framework of Tourism Indicators Influencing Destination Competitiveness

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### Abstract

The tourism industry has become more competitive with recent developments in information technology. This has assisted tourists to select the best tourist destination, often those providing the highest standard of services within a reasonable price range. This objective of this study was to develop a framework of tourism indicators that drive destination competitiveness, using a systematic review methodology. Research has confirmed that the tourism industry is more susceptible to events influencing its competitiveness than any other sectors of the economy. The interpretivistic research paradigm with qualitative methodology data was followed. A systematic review of the available literature both contemporary and secondary data on was collected. Once the collected data was sourced and sorted according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the information was analysed using thematic analysis. The thematic analysis identified three themes, each holding sub-themes indicative to tourism indicators which influence destination competitiveness namely: 1) core-indicators, 2) facilitating-indicators and 3) supporting indicators. A proposed dimensional framework of destination competitiveness indicators was developed, which could aid researchers to investigate the socioeconomic dynamics that may be functional between developed and developing countries.

**Keywords:** Competitiveness, destination, framework, indicators, tourism

### Introduction

Due to increasing competition among cities, countries and nations, competitiveness has become a popular theme of the contemporary literature on urban economy (Bilim & Bilim, 2014; Lubbe, Douglas, Fairer-Wessels & Kruger, 2015). According to several authors (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Candela & Figini, 2012), the reasons for increased competition in the tourism industry are due to the number of new destinations entering the market while the source market remain unchanged and those destinations have become easily substitutable. Additionally, the competition between destinations is also complicated by internal and external factors that influence the perceptions of tourists when travelling to a destination (Du Plessis & Saayman, 2015).



Determining the level of competitiveness of destinations is important in measuring their performance; competitiveness in the tourism industry is usually measured through indicators or indexes in the form of destination competitiveness frameworks (Croes & Kubickova, 2013:146; Du Plessis & Saayman, 2015). Martín, Mendoza and Román (2017) confirm that different approaches have been suggested to measure, model and manage competitiveness in tourism. Since the widely acknowledged model of national competitiveness developed by Porter (1990), the number of studies (Croes, 2011; Gomezelj & Mihalic, 2008; Kayar & Kozak, 2010; Omerzel, 2011) discussing the important determinants or resources of competitiveness in the tourism sector have increased considerably. The tourist destination indicators that influence tourism competitiveness can change rapidly and this situation creates further challenges and a need for on-going research and development of tourist destination indicators (Dupeyras & MacCallum, 2013). Due to the latter, identifying and understanding the tourist destination indicators that drive destination competitiveness is of importance to both researchers and tourism policymakers (Bilim & Bilim, 2014; Tsai, Song, & Wong, 2009). This discussion has triggered the objective of this research paper to develop a framework of tourism destination indicators that influence destination competitiveness.

This paper proceeds by indicating the research methodology utilised within this study. The latter is followed by a literature review on indicators that influence destination competitiveness. A dimensional framework based on the thematic analysis of extant literature of the past 20 years is presented and thereafter, followed by a conclusion and suggestions for further research.

The researchers utilized a systematic review methodology by Petticrew and Roberts (2006). The paper followed a qualitative research paradigm and utilized a systematic review methodology by Petticrew and Roberts (2006). Petticrew and Roberts (2006) seven step process was followed. The final step in this process, assess the literature, was done using a thematic analysis approach. A thematic analysis enables the researcher to sift through the secondary recorded data collection from Google Scholar with key words destination competitiveness. The thematic analysis approach utilized was informed by Tesch's framework to ensure the rigour of the analysis of the extant of literature (Creswell, 2009). The following themes emerged: 1) core-indicators, 2) facilitating-indicators and 3) supporting indicators. These and the sub-themes will be discussed, followed by the proposed dimensional framework for destination competitiveness.

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the results (Morrow, 2005). Credibility was ensured by collecting data from anecdotal academic studies, mostly journal articles, and a data analysis process guided by Tesch's process to create the themes for discussion. Transferability was ensured as a general framework was developed that can be tested in any country. Dependability was ensured by utilising primarily contemporary sources in the literature review to develop the dimensional framework. Confirmability was ensured by using multiple sources to develop the comprehensive general framework but leaving room for researchers in any country to tailor the measuring instrument to be applicable to their specific country or destination conditions. Bias was thus mitigated by using the views of different authors from multiple sources and as a means of triangulation to increase the content validity of the results (Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012).

### **Theoretical overview of the evolution of destination competitiveness models**

Destination competitiveness can be defined as the ability of a destination to optimise its attractiveness for residents and non-residents by delivering quality, innovative and attractive tourism services to consumers and gaining market shares on the domestic- and global market places (OECD, 2016). The thematic analysis revealed destination competitiveness models by



Crouch and Ritchie (1999), Dwyer and Kim (2003), Enright and Newton (2004, 2005) and Ritchie and Crouch (1993, 2000, 2003) World Economic Forum's (2015) that can inform the development of a dimensional framework of tourism indicators influencing destination competitiveness.

Crouch and Ritchie's (1999) model presented four levels of destination competitiveness, namely qualifying determinates, destination management, core resources and attractions, as well as supporting factors and resources. This model was built upon by, Ritchie and Crouch (1993, 2000, 2003), where a fifth level of destination competitiveness was introduced, namely destination policy, planning and development. Dwyer and Kim (2003) developed the Competitive Indicators of a Destination (CID) in order to determine the crucial factors for destination competitiveness. They identified the following elements: resource endowments (natural and cultural or heritage); resources created (tourist facilities, activities offered, etc.); support factors (general infrastructure, service quality, or accessibility of the destination); and destination management elements. Enright and Newton (2004, 2005) presented two main variables in destination competitiveness as attractors and business-related factors.

The World Economic Forum (WEF) developed the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) and provides a measure of the performance of the travel and tourism industry in each of 140 economies in the world, ranking each according to approximately 75 indicators (Lubbe et al., 2015). The travel and tourism competitiveness index provide a strategic tool for countries to measure their tourism factors and policies and how feasible tourism development can be implemented (World Economic Forum, 2015). The index includes four main indicators, namely enabling environment, travel and tourism policy and enabling conditions, infrastructure, as well as natural and cultural resources (World Economic Forum, 2015).

Thus, various researchers have developed models/frameworks, which aim to determine the drivers that make destinations competitive and/or give their destination a competitive advantage over others. A better understanding of what drives destination competitiveness can assist in improving the tourism industry considerably (Crouch, 2011).

### **Criticism on destination competitive models**

Although these previously mentioned models are comprehensive, they have been criticised by numerous authors (Croes & Kubickova, 2013; Du Plessis & Saayman, 2015; Lubbe et al., 2015) for their lack inapplicability to all destinations, for not being tourism industry specific, and only focusing on developed countries. Mazanec (2009) reasons that the replication of standard frameworks and measures inhibits the progress in tourism research on destination competitiveness. Additionally, McKercher, Denizci-Guillet and Ng (2012) argue that innovation has been inhibited in tourism by the application of paradigms, models and methods drawn from other disciplines without questioning their applicability to tourism. March (2004:3) posed the following question: "Does the lack of five-star hotels in the Maldives and the abundance thereof in the Caribbean make the latter destination more competitive than the former?" For some travelling segments, the lack of carrying capacity of the Maldives is very attractive and the commercialisation of the Caribbean little short of abhorrent. This example illustrates that a more applicable indicator would have been the availability of different star grading of accommodation at the destination. Doing so makes the indicator applicable to all destinations and not just to those destinations offering five-star-graded accommodation. Destination competitiveness is thus a multidimensional concept that incorporates different aspects of tourism, for example, economic development, tourism market strength, image and



tourism products, accommodation standards, food safety, health and safety and technology (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Du Plessis & Saayman, 2015; Trimcev & Dimoska, 2012).

Thus, for a destination to be considered competitive, it needs to excel in many ways as detailed in the preceding paragraphs and cannot just focus on a selected few indicators. Therefore, it is important to identify competitive indicators that can be applicable to all or many destinations. The rationale is that destinations can determine which indicators they will use as key to entice tourists to visit the destination and which indicators they need to develop over time to enhance the tourism experience or which the country needs to pay attention to for promoting tourism demand.

### **Tourism indicators influencing destination competitiveness**

As a result of the thematic analysis conducted on indicators influencing destination competitiveness, the following three main constructs emerged namely; core-, facilitating- and supporting indicators. Core indicators in tourism are considered as the basic requirements for a destination to be competitive and include safety and security, accessibility, infrastructure, accommodation- and food standards. Facilitating indicators in tourism are perceived as variables that facilitate the tourist experience and include: quality of visitor's experience, climate and natural resources, as well as cultural heritage and creative tourism resources. Supporting indicators in tourism are external variables that can either hinder or promote tourism growth within the tourism destination and, include political-, economic-, social- and technology indicators. These will be discussed in the following sections.

#### **Core indicators**

##### **Safety and security**

According to several authors (Dimitrov, 2009; Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Hussain, Ekiz, Bouchon & Kumar, 2015), elements of tourist safety include low crime rates, visual policing and effectiveness of crime prevention units. Tourists become victims of crime as they are usually relaxed, off-guard and unaware of local crime hotspots (Omisore, Badiora, & Fadoyin, 2013). Ensuring the security of tourists can be seen as a precondition for a thriving tourist destination (Chauhan & Khanna, 2009; Elliot, Papadopoulos & Kim, 2011; Korstanje, 2009; Moyo & Ziramba, 2013). Destinations with an unsafe tourist reputation can be easily substituted for a destination with a "safer" tourist image (Chauhan & Khanna, 2009). Safety of tourists can, therefore, be seen as a factor that restricts and confines people's movement, options, participation in activities and opportunities (Swart, Bob & Turco, 2010).

The fear of crime and safety concerns significantly influence the image of destinations and therefore affects decisions potential tourists make regarding destination selection (Perry & Potgieter, 2013). Therefore, tourists who have felt threatened or unsafe, are not likely to return to the destination, and they are less likely to recommend the destination to others (George, 2010). The element of fear and risk associated with decision-making is more evident in in-service industries such as tourism (Blackwell, Miniard & Engel, 2006:123). Furthermore, the media also influence visitation and the profiling of tourist destinations, as negative impersonations and attention can prevent potential tourists from visiting a destination (Perry & Potgieter, 2013).

##### **Accessibility**

Accessibility in tourism refers to the ease with which visitors can travel to and enter a country and includes visa requirements and speed through customs and, therefore, influences how appealing a destination maybe for a tourist (Chen & Wu, 2009). Every country has the



sovereign right to choose who may or may not enter its territory (SA Embassy, 2013). This right is implemented through visa- applications and requirements. Visa requirements can deter potential travellers from visiting a certain destination from the outset (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2012). According to several authors (Boratyński & Szymborska, 2006; Neumayer, 2010; Tchorbadjiska, 2007; Whyte, 2009), visa requirements can represent obstacles to tourists even before they arrive at the destination for the following reasons: additional cost and annoyance of applying for visas before travel commences; the individual having to travel to the embassy or one of the few consulates (for some visas) and often having to wait for any service, possibly for hours; the issuing consulate or embassy sometimes denying the application without giving any reason; and having to plan holidays in advance limiting spur-of-the-moment travel. Thus, visa requirements are perceived to be one of the biggest obstacles with regard to accessibility (UKinbound, 2013).

### **Infrastructure**

Infrastructure is the basic facilities, services, and installations of a country, which include: roads, sewage, power lines (electricity supply), and public institutions, including schools, post offices, medical facilities and airports (Farlex, 2013). According to Seetanah, Juwaheer, Lamport, Rojid, Sannasse and Subadar-Agathe (2011), the following infrastructure will enhance the attractiveness of a destination: a transportation network and medical facilities.

The transportation network of a country can be seen as its lifeblood, as it is one of the main components for a thriving economy, specifically the tourism industry (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2012). How tourists get to, from and within a certain destination falls within the responsibility of the transportation sector of the tourism industry (Rodrique, 2013). The transportation sector is thus an essential part of the tourism industry (Ali, 2012; Lubbe, 2005). Goeldner and Ritchie (2012) state that tourism and transportation are indistinguishably linked. A country's transportation network can be divided into three subcategories, namely: ground-, port-, and air transportation (Holloway, Humphreys & Davidson, 2009; Keyser, 2002; Rowe, Smith & Borein, 2002).

Ground transportation, in a tourism context, consists of the availability of public bus and train services (Thompson & Schofield, 2007). According to Dwyer and Kim (2003), public transportation at the destination plays an important role in the destination selection process, and how appealing a destination will be for tourists. Public transportation is necessary to assist people to partake in activities at different geographical locations (El-Geneidy & Levinson, 2006). According to the World Economic Forum (2013), Switzerland and Germany are regarded as countries with the best basic infrastructure in the world, especially with regard to public ground transportation.

Airport transportation in a tourism context is related to the availability of regular aviation services both domestic and international, as well as low-cost airlines (Davidson & Cope, 2002). Donzelli (2010) avows that the emergence of low-cost carriers such as Mango, Kulula and FlySafair, has supported local tourism development, including creating jobs, stimulating tourism and increasing tax revenues. Furthermore, Graham and Dennis (2010) agree that the emergence of low-cost airlines has increased tourist numbers. Fu, Oum and Zhang (2010) state that the economic effects of low-cost carriers included increased competition, reduced prices and air traffic stimulation.

Port transportation, in a tourism context, relates to the cruising industry. Cruising combines leisure, entertainment and accommodation on board with calls to various ports, satisfying the need of the tourist to discover new places and come in contact with different cultures (Mylonopoulos, 2004). Cruising can take many different forms, ranging from small scale specialist ships taking niche market tourists to Antarctica and the Galapagos Islands to



enormous mass-entertainment cruise ships that within themselves are the attraction (Page & Connell, 2006). The main cruise regions include the Caribbean and the Mediterranean. Alaska and Northern Europe are popular during the summer months in the Northern Hemisphere. The cruising industry is dominated by Carnival Corporation and Royal Caribbean Cruises that have about 70% of the market share (Rodrique, 2013). Cruising vacations are one of the fastest growing segments of the leisure travel industry – with ship sizes and numbers, passengers, ports, and profits all on the rise (Morgan & Power, 2011).

Between approximately 22% to 64% of travellers experience some sort of illness while travelling to other countries; most of these illnesses are mild and self-limited, such as diarrhoea, respiratory infections, and skin disorders (Freedman, Chen & Kozarsky, 2016). Therefore, medical facilities at the destination are an important consideration for travellers. Some tourists travel with the sole purpose of receiving medical care in the destination they intent to visit; this is referred to as medical tourism (Paffhausen, Peguero & Roche-Villarreal, 2010). Medical tourism is on the increase in SA due to the high standard of facilities in the private sector (Newbould & Newbould, 2009). South Africa is undertaking vigorous medical tourism sector developments (Taiwan Institute of Economic Research, 2007). Smith, MacLeod and Robertson (2010) and Tresidder (2011) indicate that medical tourism includes operations for either cosmetic surgery/procedures or dentistry in clinics or hospitals; therapeutic treatments for the purpose of rehabilitation and healing; organ transplants and medical well-being where the tourist/patient is treated for a specific medical condition. Medical tourists are mostly from the UK, the USA, Hong Kong, Canada, Belgium, Holland, Germany and Israel (George, 2004).

### **Accommodation standards**

Accommodation refers to all establishments offering overnight stays to all groups of tourists on a commercial basis and covers all forms of accommodation establishments ranging from all-inclusive hotels to camping and self-catering chalets (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2012). The accommodation sector is a major global growth industry (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2011). Furthermore, the economic grasp of the accommodation sector is exceptionally broad: its supply chain produces business activities for many other sections of the economy and, in particular, for the retail, recreation, transport and restaurant sectors (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2011). The hotel subsector of accommodation is extremely diversified in the types of businesses that operate under its umbrella; the largest hotel chain in the world includes portfolios that cover more than 6 000 hotels and each employs more than 150 000 people (International Labour Organization, 2010). Global destination competitiveness relies on quality and standards, therefore, making star graded accommodation a profoundly powerful marker in the minds of world travel consumers (Von Ulmenstein, 2012).

### **Food standards**

The human race is the only life form on earth that ceremonially prepares and eats food together and this is a habit shared by all human beings across every culture (Povey, 2011). Tourism is a major contributor to the modern experience economy in which food plays an important role. Food in the tourism industry provides much more than nourishment as it is a key part of all cultures, the main element of a global intangible heritage and a progressively important attraction for tourists (Richards, 2012). This fact is further validated by the inclusion of the Mediterranean diet of Spain, Greece, Italy and Morocco in UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in November 2010 (United Nations World Tourism Organisation, 2012a). Thus, food experiences are becoming part of the distinctive intangible culture of destinations (Scott, 2010). Therefore, food safety and standards are very important to the competitiveness of any tourist destination (Tanceva & Petrevska, 2011). Driven by the



growing tendencies for authenticity and the need to have a first-class experience, food is shaping gastro destinations such as France and Italy (Yeoman, 2008). Food products and culinary specialists in gastronomic tourism are becoming the vehicle for a closer understanding of cultures as they act as indicators of people and territories (López & Martín, 2006). Good food can be perceived as a prerequisite for destination competitiveness (Mitchell, Hall & McIntosh, 2000). Fields (2002) adds to the debate that physical motivators to travel can be closely related to the opportunity to taste new and exotic foods while on holiday.

## **Facilitating indicators**

### **Quality of the visitor's experience**

Tourist destinations are multifaceted sets of services and attractions with a variety of functions focusing on delivering quality to tourists (Vajčnerová, Šácha & Ryglová, 2013). Therefore, quality services and customer satisfaction are important determinants of destination competitiveness (Caber, Albayrak & Matzler, 2012). Understanding and responding to the diversity of visitors' needs and expectations are challenges and call on the creativeness of destination stakeholders. Each person arriving at the destination brings with him/her, his/her own unique set of expectations (Jager & Sanche, 2010). According to various authors (Leask, 2012; Shaw, Bailey & Williams, 2011; Stickdorn, 2014; Vajčnerová et al., 2013), the quality of a visitor's experience is influenced by the availability of attractions, ancillary services and service quality. These are discussed in more detail next.

### **Attractions**

Any type of feature the destination has, including places, venues or activities which lure tourists, can be classified as attractions (Ho & Ap, 2009). According to Ho and Ap (2009), the aims of attractions are to: attract visitors, including locals and tourists, and manage them accordingly; provide pleasurable and enjoyable experiences for visitors to spend their leisure time; develop an attraction which is inviting and for the enjoyment of visitors; and provide facilities and services to meet and cater to the needs of visitors. Goeldner and Ritchie (2012) pose that attractions are the main motivators for travel; if not for attractions luring tourists to destinations, there would be little need for any other tourism services such as accommodation and transportation.

### **Ancillary services**

Ancillary services in tourism are services that are provided to tourists to increase their comfortability and enjoyability of the travel experience (Tait & Mazibuko, 2011). Cakici and Harman (2007) state that ancillary services are the foremost destination attributes that significantly influence destination image and revisit intentions of tourists. Ancillary services include all the services provided to the tourist that do not usually form part of the original product. Thus, ancillary services can be classified as the augmented part of the tourism service (Tait & Mazibuko, 2011).

### **Service quality**

Service quality is greatly dependent on the degree of actual service performance in meeting the customer's expectation (Chakrabarty, Whitten & Green, 2007). Furthermore, Xia, Jie, Chaolin and Feng (2009) and Chen and Chen (2010) point out that service quality at the destination is directly linked to tourist satisfaction. Millán and Esteban (2004) claim that satisfaction is perceived as the final result of all activities carried out during the process of purchase and consumption of tourism products or services. Therefore, to ensure the success and survival in



the competitive tourism industry, tourism organisations should place emphasis on consistent quality service delivery to tourists (Chowdhary & Prakash, 2007).

One of the biggest obstacles in delivering consistent quality service in tourism is service heterogeneity. The latter encompasses the variation in the quality of tourism service delivery vary from product to product, destination to destination, from establishment to establishment and from day to day within the same establishment (Bhasin, 2016). However, training staff to develop skills necessary to do their job well can reduce the effect of heterogeneity, especially in the case of the front-line staff that comes in direct contact with the tourists on a constant basis (Kapoor, Paul & Haldner, 2011). Furthermore, employing competent staff and providing information about how they should behave towards tourists in their respective jobs, and motivating them to deliver the best service, can limit the effects of heterogeneity.

### **Climatic- and environmental conditions**

Tourism is greatly dependent on environmental- and climatic conditions as the majority of tourism activities take place outdoors (Lim, Min & McAleer, 2008). Climate is defined as the prevailing weather condition observed as a long-term average in a certain location, whereas weather is the manifestation of climate at a specific point in time and place (Nèmeth & Mika, 2009). Climatic conditions are an important factor in tourists' decision-making and also influence the successful operation of tourism businesses. Therefore, climate is seen as one of the main tourism resources, as it acts as a facilitator that makes tourism activities possible and enjoyable (Kozak, Uysal & Birkan, 2008).

Thus, having favourable environmental- and weather conditions is important to tourist satisfaction and will essentially influence the continued success of any tourism destination as these favourable conditions facilitate tourism (Kozak et al., 2008). The importance of favourable environmental- and climatic attributes should be reflected in advertising material, as destinations can use these to attract tourists (Gòmez-Martín, 2005). According to Coughlan and Prideaux (2009), unfavourable environmental- and weather conditions have a more distinct effect on tourist satisfaction than good weather has, as these deter tourists from participating in tourism activities. However, Tarifa in Spain has capitalised on its frequent and strong wind to become a major windsurfing destination (Globe Trekker, 2016).

Liên (2010) provides the following example relating to weather conditions; individuals who live in countries with a cooler climate usually prefer to travel to the tropics due to the difference in weather conditions when compared to their own country; on the other hand, individuals who live in the tropics might prefer to travel to cooler areas to escape the heat in their home country or to enjoy snow.

### **Cultural heritage and creative tourism resources**

The culture of a specific country or region focuses on the traditional communities who have unique customs, art and social practices that distinguish them from other cultures (Collins-Kreiner & Sagi, 2011). Cultural tourism is one of the oldest forms of tourism and still draws many tourists to different parts of the world (Richards & Munsters, 2010). Therefore, cultural tourism is an important part of the global tourism market (Richards, 2011). Furthermore, cultural and nationality variances influence the tourists' destination of choice (Mahika, 2011). Tourists rarely select a destination with a similar culture to their own; they often tend to select a destination where the culture is different from their own (Richards & Munsters, 2010). The latter is referred to as cultural distance - cultural distance is the degree to which the culture of the originating region differs from that of the host region (Richards, 2011).

On the other hand, heritage in tourism relies on living and built elements of culture and folkways. These include immaterial heritage elements, such as music, dance, language,





religion, cuisine, artistic traditions, festivals and material vestiges of the built and cultural environment, including monuments, historic public buildings and homes, farms, castles and cathedrals, museums and archaeological ruins and relics (McNulty & Koff, 2014). Thus, heritage tourism encompasses both the tangible and intangible aspects of both culture and heritage (Southall & Robinson, 2011).

Creative resources in tourism are defined as a tourism product that offers tourists the opportunity to develop their creative potential with cultural- and heritage resources, by means of active tourist participation (Richards, 2011). Therefore, by active participation, the tourist becomes an inhabitant of the region he/she is visiting, becomes part of the local community and co-creates with the local inhabitants (Gombault, Falaix, Hatt & Piriou, 2015). Active participation by tourists in creative practices such as music, dance and art is on the increase (Richards, 2011). Thus, creative tourism can be a key development option for re-inventing tourism in destinations by creating a different tourism product in a saturated market (Smith, 2006:13). This can be achieved by providing the tourist with a wide selection of activities ranging from learning local crafts and other practices such as pottery, mosaics, masonry, painting and playing local music (Eryurt, 2017).

## **Supporting indicators**

### **Political indicators**

Political indicators that can influence the tourism industry are political instability and public turmoil (Saunders, 2011). Political instability refers to concerns relating to government unity, consistent and predictable governmental actions, corruption, current president (presidency), legislative strength, and stability of democracy (Abu, Karim & Aziz, 2015; Asongu, 2015). In other words, how government is structured and institutionalised, and other areas of governance are organised can affect tourism demand (World Economic Forum, 2014). High levels of political lawlessness can cause irreparable damage to the image of a destination. Webster and Ivanov (2015) provide three influences of political instability on tourism demand: political instability directly influences inbound tourism demand due to security concerns of tourists; political instability creates tension among neighbouring countries and may result in various political actions such as visa restrictions, non-recognition of passports to more severe actions like border closures; and political instability most often leads to economic instability in the country, resulting in decreased incomes and less money available for tourism spending.

Therefore, political stability is a critical requirement for attracting international tourists to a destination (World Economic Forum, 2013). Weaknesses in the functioning of government and restraints on civil liberties are having a corrosive effect on the image of South Africa (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2015). Citizens depend on government for sound decision-making that guarantees expected standards of living, particularly in marginal populations where the poor's alternatives are limited (Lagi, Bertrand, & Bar-Yam, 2011).

Public turmoil includes racism, xenophobia, terrorism and labour- and social unrest (strikes) (Abu et al., 2015; Asongu, 2015). Countries affected by public turmoil will eventually experience a decline in the number of international tourists and visitation. No country has been able to shield its tourism industry against the impact thereof (Haddad Nasr & Ghida, 2015). Public turmoil theoretically damages the social- and cultural image of a country and threatens tourism demand and investment (Saunders, 2011). However, it is not only the tourism industry that is affected but also all tourism-related businesses (Jenkins, 2013).



### **Economic indicators**

Tourism is viewed as an important instrument for economic growth and development as it can generate substantial economic benefits (Tang & Tan, 2013). Smeral (2009) concludes that, with the recent world recession and economic crisis, many countries have become more aware of the economic importance of tourism and are taking measures to encourage tourism demand and assist tourism enterprises. Tourism can play a significant role in the economy of host destinations in areas such as foreign exchange earnings, foreign direct investment, government revenue (taxation), tourism multiplier effect, improved living standards and alleviating poverty (Pratt, 2012; Rifai, 2011).

Tourism is the main source of foreign exchange for one third of developing countries such as South Africa, and among the top three sources of export earnings for almost half of the least developed countries (Rifai, 2011). Tourists spend money within the destination and attracting foreign exchange via inbound tourism is an attractive goal for any country. According to Barros and Machado (2010), the tourists' intention to visit and/or to return to a destination is strongly affected by the prices charged at their holiday destination. Tourists will spend more or less depending not only on their income but also depending on some economic factors such as the exchange rate (Nimanussornkul & Do, 2017). Thus, destinations should promote value for money tourism products coupled with superior service and first-rate experiences (Pratt, 2012). This can be achieved by providing affordable tourism products and having well-trained staff and keeping up with industry trends. By doing this, the destination will increase its foreign exchange earnings and increase tourist visitation numbers.

### **Social indicators**

The social impacts of tourism have been regarded as the manner in which tourism and travel affect changes in collective and individual value systems, behavioural patterns, community structures, lifestyle, and the quality of life (Hall & Lew, 2009). Thus, social impacts of tourism also include the influence on the culture of the local people. Therefore, the term socio-cultural seems to be a more appropriate term to use in the discussion to follow. Tourism can thus affect the host community in a number of ways- by changing the way people live, think and work (Ahmed, 2015).

Tourism in a social context can reveal the importance of the local cultures; create a sense of pride in local heritage and; enrich the understanding and interest in history and culture on behalf of the local residents (Weaver & Lawton, 2014). Furthermore, tourism can spark increased awareness amongst local people of the need to protect and preserve their local resources (Ahmed, 2015). This, in turn, can lead to the conservation of the local cultural heritage of an area and rebirth of its crafts, architectural traditions and ancestral heritage (Zaei & Zaei, 2013).

Kumar and Hussain (2014) conclude that besides generating revenue and creating jobs, tourism development also contributes to infrastructure improvements in destination areas, e.g. road and rail improvements, airport developments and, improvements in telecommunications and utilities such as water and power supply (Institute for Sustainable Tourism, 2015). In this way, local people can benefit from improved facilities that are provided for tourists and lead to improved standards of living for the local residents. The tourism industry supports the creation of community facilities and services that otherwise might not have been developed and can improve the standards of living and well-being of the local residents of the destination (Keyser, 2009).

Tourism can create prospects for community groups to include special interest groups such as women, youths and other socially disadvantaged groups, as well as to provide them with opportunities to be represented in tourism decision-making processes (Odede, Hayombe



& Agong, 2015). Thus, tourism can lead to empowerment and social inclusion as the status of women within communities improves as they play an active part in community planning (Nyaupane, Morais & Dowler, 2006). Women's participation in the tourism sector is limited by a lack of equal opportunities in employment markets, shortcomings in women's economic literacy, challenges in forming profitable and sustainable cooperatives and lack of inclusion in tourism supply chains, especially in an African context (United Nations World Tourism Organisation, 2012b). As a result of including local residents, specifically socially disadvantaged groups in tourism development and planning, tourism can limit social conflicts between local residents and tourists (Ambrož, 2008). Therefore, the adoption of a participatory process for planning and decision-making with local residents is essential (Pratt, 2012).

### **Technological indicators**

New trends and innovations in the “globalised” world have led to a situation where all destinations are urged to adapt to the rapid changes in technology and implementation of tourism standards set by developed countries (Tanceva & Petrevska 2011). Tourism is a major adopter of and is profoundly influenced by technological developments in terms of digital capabilities and innovative services (Buck et al., 2015). According to Wang, Park and Fesenmaier (2012), mobile technology through the emergence of smartphones and software applications (apps) will become the next wave of innovation driving travel and tourism.

Mobile technology is now widely used by consumers; enhancing connectivity and enabling real-time information provision (Buck et al., 2015). Furthermore, mobile technology is transforming the tourism landscape in terms of bookings, customer service and consumer behaviour (Du Toit-Helmbold, 2015). Mobile devices are now used for remote check-in, paperless boarding passes, real-time travel news updates and maps (Magrath, 2014). Smartphones are becoming the booking device of choice in emerging markets (Floater & Mackie, 2016). Smartphones have the ability to facilitate both the behavioural- and psychological dimensions of the tourist experience by enabling information search (Wang et al., 2012). Thus, smartphones are allowing the traveller to learn more about new travel opportunities and real-time information regarding the destination visited (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). Furthermore, apps that assist in language translation are growing in popularity (Wang & Xiang, 2012). These applications allow translation of multiple formats such as text- and voice-based translations (Samiljan, 2016). Furthermore, the retail industry will permeate people's lives while travelling as mobile virtual assistants (applications) point out nearby restaurants and shops, and guide people's purchasing choices based on their personal preferences, buying history and moods at different times of the day (Floater & Mackie, 2016).

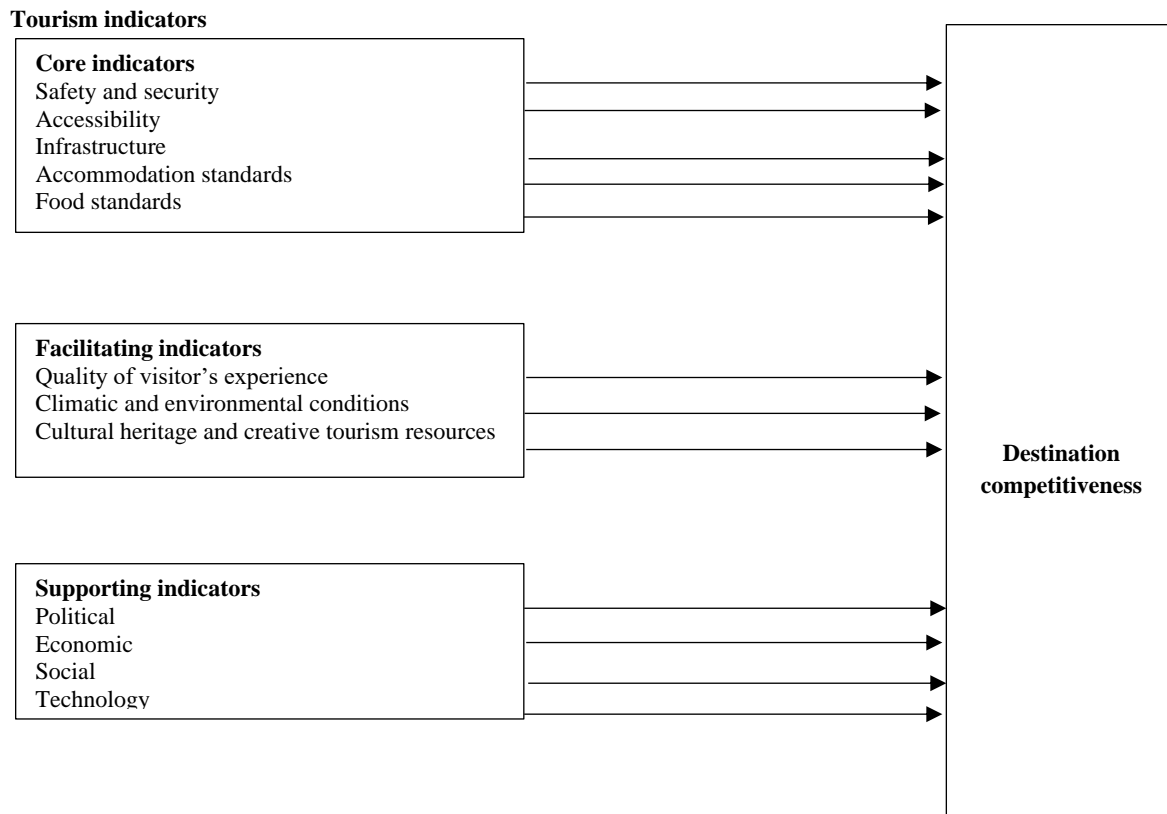
Moreover, digital technology, social media and online distribution platforms are changing the relationship between consumers and producers, supporting co-creation and facilitating the personalised experiences sought by consumers (OECD, 2016). Social networks are becoming ‘virtual shop windows’ and with the growth in technology, consumers are able to share their thoughts thus steering the buying preferences and behaviours of those around them who trust their opinions (Du Toit-Helmbold, 2015). Research amongst more than 28,000 Internet users in 56 countries by The Nielsen Company (2016) confirms this trend. The results indicate that 92 percent of the respondents stated that they trust earned media, such as recommendations from friends and family and social media reviews, above all other forms of advertising. Earned media refers to any unpaid publicity that is owned and created by a third party, for example, customers and/or journalists (Stephen & Galak, 2012).

Furthermore, free- or open Wi-Fi access is one of the most desired tourism product prerequisites with pictures of hotels and restaurants appearing on social media sites in real-

time, allowing consumers to document their travels (Du Toit-Helmbold, 2015). According to Tripadvisor (2016), two in three travellers will look elsewhere if in-room Wi-Fi is not included in the accommodation price. Dwyer et al. (2008) conclude that the development and revolution in technology and innovative services will continue to influence the suppliers of the various tourism products, the tourist and the industry as a whole.

### Proposed dimensional framework and hypotheses

Based on the preceding summative content analysis, the following theoretical dimensional framework of the tourism indicators influencing destination competitiveness.



**Figure 1.** Tourism indicators influencing destination competitiveness.  
 (Source: Researchers’ own construct)

The dimensional framework depicted in Figure 1 proposes that core tourism indicators by means of safety and security, accessibility, infrastructure, accommodation- and food standards influence destination competitiveness. It further proposes that facilitating tourism indicators such as quality of visitor’s experience, climatic and environmental conditions and cultural heritage, as well as creative tourism resources can influence destination competitiveness. As seen in Figure 1, the dimensional framework also proposes that supporting tourism indicators such as political-, economic-, social- and technology indicators can influence destination competitiveness.

Based on the dimensional framework (Figure 1) the following three sets of hypotheses were developed that can be tested in any country to determine which core-, facilitating- or supporting tourism indicators can influence destination competitiveness.



### **First set of hypotheses: The influence of core tourism indicators on destination competitiveness**

- *H<sub>1.1</sub>: Safety and security influence destination competitiveness.*
- *H<sub>1.2</sub>: Accessibility influences destination competitiveness.*
- *H<sub>1.3</sub>: Infrastructure influences destination ism.*
- *H<sub>1.4</sub>: Accommodation standards influence destination competitiveness.*
- *H<sub>1.5</sub>: Food standards influence destination competitiveness.*

### **Second set of hypotheses: The influence of facilitating tourism indicators on destination competitiveness**

- *H<sub>2.1</sub>: Quality of a visitor's experience influences destination competitiveness.*
- *H<sub>2.2</sub>: Climatic and environmental conditions present influence destination competitiveness.*
- *H<sub>2.3</sub>: Cultural heritage and creative tourism resources present influence destination competitiveness.*

### **Third set of hypotheses: The influence of supporting tourism indicators on destination competitiveness**

- *H<sub>3.1</sub>: Political indicators influence destination competitiveness.*
- *H<sub>3.2</sub>: Economic indicators influence destination competitiveness.*
- *H<sub>3.3</sub>: Social indicators influence destination competitiveness.*
- *H<sub>3.4</sub>: Technology indicators influence destination competitiveness.*

### **Implications and Conclusion**

This study explored the development of a theoretical dimensional framework of the tourism indicators influencing destination competitiveness. Three main sets of tourism indicators emerged from the thematic analysis namely core-, facilitating- and supporting indicators. These indicators can thus influence the extent of competitiveness of a tourist destination globally.

These tourism indicators can now be used as a dimensional framework to compile a structured questionnaire based on issues highlighted in the thematic analysis discussed in this paper. If tested empirically in a country or destination by means of quantitative research study, it can be used to identify core, facilitating and supporting competitive indicators. The core (essential) indicators are key (essential) to destination competitiveness. The facilitating tourism indicators are those that can enhance tourists' experience at the destination. The supporting tourism indicators are those variables that can if portraying a favourable image of a country or destination promote destination competitiveness or if unfavourable make a country or destination unattractive to visit. This comprehensive general dimensional framework is thus only a starting point to identify the core -, facilitating and supporting indicators that can influence a specific country or destination's tourism competitiveness. The final dimensional framework will differ for destinations when tested empirically. It is also suggested that tourism decision-makers should not just rely on the framework but compare their destinations with the competitive indicators of other global destinations to make an informed decision on which indicators to emphasise and used as a unique tourism promotional tool to enhance their competitiveness.



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