

## Factors Affecting the Competitiveness of Tourism Destinations (Case Study: Tabriz)

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### Abstract

Nowadays, achieving competitive advantage in tourism destination has been identified as an important strategy in the tourism industry. Therefore, tourism destinations competitiveness determinants have been studied in different cities and countries. Data is collected with questionnaire from tourism experts in Tabriz city. In this study we have tried to identify variables affecting the competitiveness of Tabriz using factor analysis and creating a multidimensional framework. According to literature, five variables; infrastructure, destination-supporting factors, tourism superstructure, tourism management and tourism resources form tourism destination competitiveness factorial structure. Calculations of the second order factor analysis, using AMOS software suggested that all considered factors have significant and positive impact on the competitiveness of tourist destinations variable. Destination management varies by a factor of 1/040 has greatest effect on the competitiveness of tourism destinations. Other factors have also a high factor loading that indicates the high explanation of variable by the test. Also, all aspects have a positive and significant correlation with the second factorial structure.

**KEYWORDS:** tourism destination competitiveness, infrastructure, destination-supporting factors, tourism superstructure, tourism management, factorial structure.

### 1. Introduction

In tourism literature, the concept of competitiveness has been applied for different purposes and its variants, also it has been meant as sustainability of the destination. Therefore, the specific marketing programs and advertising strategies such as price, quality and sustainable tourism image have been noticed. The success of integrated quality management of tourist destinations and advertising based on price has been considered as a value strategy for the destination competitiveness<sup>[10]</sup>. One of the main objectives of the planning and development of tourism, is creating more valuable tourism products and services to potential visitors, so that destinations and communities receive social and economic benefits, but there is a need to a clear understanding of the potential tourism destination to compete effectively in the saturated market<sup>[9]</sup>. Planning and promotion of tourism destinations should be guided with a thorough analysis of competitive factors of destination and development strategies<sup>[11]</sup>.

most of the studies focus on destination competitiveness while maintaining market position among other competitors of destination. Also, studies have been investigated environmental key factors and strategies that effects on increasing destination competitiveness. In particular, for the purposes of tourism destination factors such as: multiple components of natural and cultural resources, diversity of business, a systematic framework and analytical model for planning and development of destination are necessary <sup>[11]</sup>. Hassan defines the competitiveness in tourism field as “the destination's ability to create and integrate value-added products that sustain its resources while maintaining market position relative to competitors” <sup>[11]</sup>. It is also defined as "the ability of a country to create value-added and increase national wealth with asset and process management, attractiveness and integration of relationships in an economic and social model <sup>[22]</sup>.

Competitiveness mostly has been incorporated in the contexts of marketing planning and competitive strategy development <sup>[2, 19]</sup>. Pearce (1997) described destination competitiveness as “destination assessment techniques and methods that can systematically analyze and compare the features of competitor destination in planning field”. Such systematic evaluation and comparison of the main components of tourism among competitors can provide a better understanding of competitive advantage, so that it helps to develop more effective development policies <sup>[18]</sup>.

Mihalic (2000), believes that destination competitiveness from the environmental perspective can be linked to natural and man-made components and describe social and cultural environments. Environmental competitiveness can be enhanced by proper management efforts and through a number of environmental and strategies marketing activities<sup>[21]</sup>.

After Ritchie and Crouch studies (1993), a number of studies have discussed the causes and sources of competition. Four models and its affecting factors suggested by Porter (1990), was used to explain the factors affecting the destination competitiveness as a basic source<sup>[21]</sup>. These are operating conditions (e.g. skilled labor, infrastructure), the state of demand (e.g. public services), supporting industries, firm strategy, structure and competition. It is said that these factors act independently, but mutually dependent on each other. In particular, the systemic model for destination competitiveness by Ritchie and Crouch (1999), is essential for the study and understanding of relations and interactions between the forces of competitiveness. In addition, it is also suggested that a systematic analysis of the advantages or the competitive forces is required in competitiveness of tourism destination <sup>[21]</sup>.

The available tourism resources in destination form comparative advantage, while the competitive advantage relate to ability of tourism destination to use these resources effectively in the long term. Ritchie and Crouch (1993) discussed about the framework for measuring the overall competitiveness aspect of competition. Factors should be identified and developed to determine those who have influence on the competitiveness and prosperity of tourism destinations. Then, the best indicator of success in the performance of tourism destinations should be specified. In addition, the comparative power and position of a particular destination in relation to other competitors in the

market must be created. "To achieve a competitive advantage in alternative destinations has been proposed as one of the most important strategies in the tourism industry <sup>[8]</sup>.

Porter (1992), stated that "competition is a function of dynamic development, innovation and the ability to change and improve," he noted at the same time that creating a competitive advantage, is a centralized process. This idea of the competitive advantage is used in a wide variety in nations, regions and local areas <sup>[1]</sup>. Literature in general competition and lands makes a base for competitiveness of structures in a relative and multi-dimensional way in nature. Camagni (2002), states that the competitive nature of tourism in comparison to the sale of products is unique, and what the company is used about, it cannot be used directly for destination <sup>[21]</sup>.

According to Crouch and Ritchie's theory of destination competitiveness (1995, 1999) and Ritchie and Crouch (1993, 2000), an integrated conceptual model consists of six developed competitive factors: 1. Core resources and attractions including natural geography and climate, history and culture, markets and marketing, mixed activities, special events, entertainment and special structures; 2. supporting factors including infrastructure, access, facilitating resources, hospitality, companies and organizations; 3. destination management, including monitoring resources, marketing, finance and investment, capital, organizing, development of information / research, quality of service, visitors management; 4. strengthen and qualifying factors including location, affiliation, safety, awareness / image / brand/ cost / value; 5. destination policy, planning and development including the definition, philosophy, vision, positioning, development, competition / monitoring joint analysis, system evaluation <sup>[14]</sup>.

Mazanec et al. (2007), provided a model of destination competitiveness to identify measurable indicators and the formation of these indices that needed further studies. Then, researchers such as Wang et al. (2012) completed this model and provided a multi-dimensional scale to measure the competitiveness of the tourism destination <sup>[26]</sup>.

Competitiveness has become a critical and major issue in different destinations in developed and developing countries and various factors have an effect on the competitiveness of tourism destinations that determine the status of a tourist destination in comparison with other destinations. Therefore understanding the destination competitiveness factors in Iran is one of the most important factors for determining the status and developments of these destinations. Tabriz is not an exception as one of the tourist areas with different tourism resources. To determine the position of this city in comparison with other tourism areas -that can be cause of development of tourism in the region- different factors such as resources and infrastructure, superstructure, management of tourism resources and supporting factors should be investigated. Therefore, it is proposed that how all the listed factors affect the competitiveness of tourist destinations in Tabriz.

This research aims to respond to the challenging issues in this field by using the existing literature and the confirmatory factor analysis and identify the factors affecting competitiveness of the tourist destinations based on the model of Wang et al. (2012) and measure the impacts of each of these factors in Tabriz

## 2. Research hypotheses and model:

1. There is a significant relationship between infrastructure and tourism destination competitiveness.

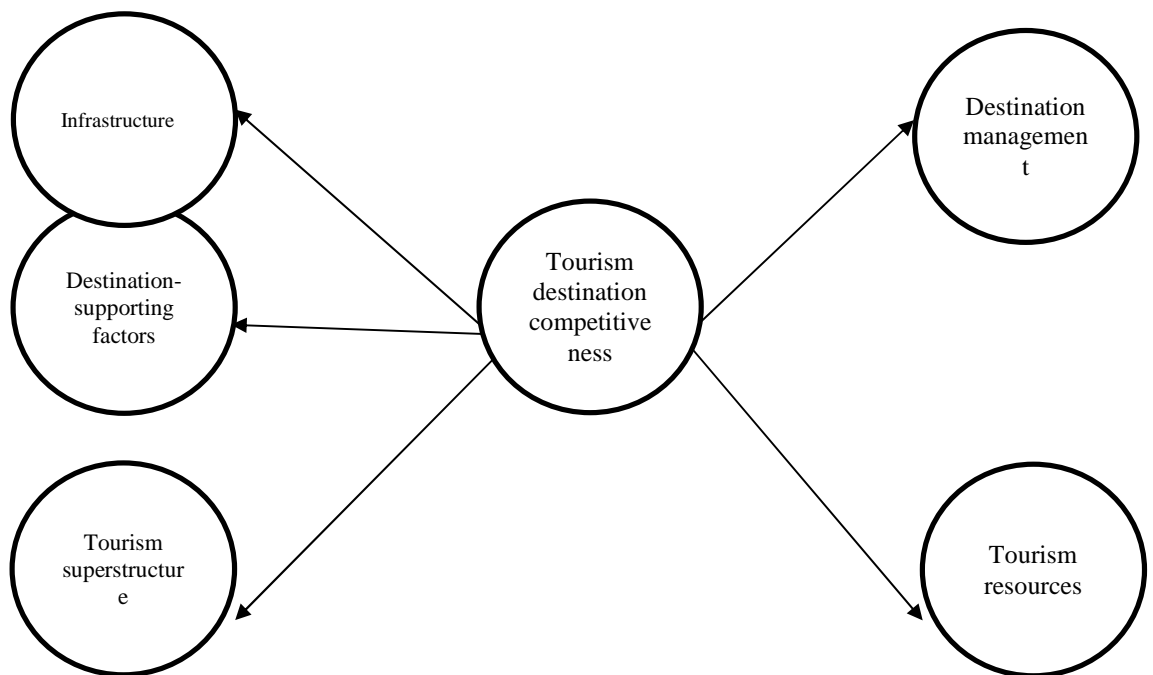
2. There is a significant relationship between the destination supporting factors and tourism destination competitiveness.

3. There is a significant relationship between tourism superstructure and tourism destination competitiveness.

4. There is a significant relationship between destination management and tourism destination competitiveness.

5. There is a significant relationship between tourism resources and tourism destination competitiveness.

Figure(a): research conceptual model



## 3. Literature review:

"Competitive Strategy is the search for a favorable competitive position in the industry. Its purpose is to create a profitable and sustainable opportunity against the forces that determine the competitive industry"<sup>[20]</sup>. In the field of tourism, the concept of destination competitiveness is used for different cases. Several authors have linked competitiveness with economic, marketing and strategic perspective, price, quality and satisfaction. Ritchie and Crouch (1993) concluded that resources and attractions recognized as a tourist destination competition. In this issue, as noted, they have

developed a conceptual model of destination competitiveness; according to this model competition is based on six dimensions: Preliminary factors, destination management, core resources and attractions, and supporting factors and resources. This model is basically concerned to the Porter's diamond model (1990) that suggests using four elements for analysis of destination competitiveness. These elements are: factor conditions, demand conditions, related and supporting industries and strategy, structure and competitiveness of companies that located in the destination <sup>[9]</sup>. Then several studies have been done on the competitiveness of tourism destinations, some of them are:

Keyser and vanhove (1994), in their article entitled " The competitive situation of tourism in the Caribbean area— Methodological approach" argues in their competitiveness model that the competitiveness situation analysis should take into account the five categories of competitiveness: Tourism Policy, macroeconomics, supply, transportation and demand factors.

Dwyer et al. (2003), in their study titled "Australia's competitiveness as a tourist destination," tested integrated model of destination competitiveness in Korea and Australia, and in 2004 have been used their method for assessment of the competitiveness of tourism in Slovenia. Integrated model defines six main competitiveness factors: inherited resources, created resources, the supporting resources factors, destination management, circumstances and conditions demand. Inherited, created and supporting resources including different features that make a destination attractive to visit.

Dwyer and Kim (2003), in their study titled "destination competitiveness factors and indices" presented a model of destination competitiveness that enables comparison between countries and industries in tourism destination. This article has four main aims: to develop a model of destination competitiveness to determine the competitiveness of destination that is a key factor of success; and to develop an appropriate set of indicators of destination competitiveness; to highlight the advantages and limitations of the model; and to identify areas for further conceptual and empirical research. The paper concluded that the development of a model of destination competitiveness and a set of related to indicators allows you to identify the relative strengths and weaknesses of tourism and can be used by industry and government to increase the number of tourists and economic and social welfare.

Lee and King (2009), in their study titled "Evaluation of destination competitiveness, emphasizing the hot springs tourism", offer to a model to identify the determinants of competitiveness in tourism sector in hot water, with particular application in Taiwan. The provided conceptual framework brings both the theory and resource-based view of the industry at the same time. Three major impacts are evident on the hot springs tourism destination and attraction of tourism resources, tourism strategy for tourism destination and the destination of this article. An evaluation of the three rounds Delphi survey is provided to examine the factors affecting competitiveness. Relying on the results of the preliminary study concluded that the development of a particular model of competitiveness is able to get nature and characteristics of destination hot springs tourism sector.

Chen et al. (2011), in their study titled " The destination competitiveness of Kinmen's tourism industry", based on empirical research, according to the response of 1623 tourists in Kinmen, studied the destination competitiveness concept and how it affects customer satisfaction with regard to the interpretation of tourists and discovered the performance

and competitiveness of services of destination. Variables such as tourist's image before visiting, satisfaction after visiting the attractions of the destination and resource, willingness to recommend, visit again and compete with foreign destinations were tested. The results of this study showed no correlation between overall satisfaction and competitive tourist destination. Results of this study show that tourism's unique features of a destination can be important variables for the competitiveness. In Kinmen, battlefields, monuments, beautiful scenery and travel security are as a competitiveness advantage, despite high prices. In addition, the destination brand image for tourism marketing and competitiveness authorities in the framework of tourism will be increasingly critical.

Wang et al. (2012), in his article entitled "The competitiveness of tourism destination in China" have studied competitiveness for multi-dimensional tourist destination tourism in China. Results show that tourism destination competitiveness in China includes five major dimensions: Destination management, tourism resources, tourism superstructure, infrastructure, and supporting factors destination. The relative importance of specific aspects of the report and all these factors has a positive impact on the competitiveness. This article in conclusion noted the limitations of the study and discussion of theoretical and practical implications of the findings.

Motorcycles haw et al. (2012), published an article entitled "Business tourism destination competitiveness: a case of Vojvodina province ". The purpose of this paper is to examine parts of Vojvodina as a tourist destination where tourism is less competitiveness compared to the other selected destination. This paper examines the relationship between destination competitiveness factors in order to determine the weakest point of the competition Vojvodina tourism and destination management opportunity in particular. The results show that two components: destination management and destination policy, planning and development are the weaknesses of the competitiveness of Vojvodina while assigned the main sources and attracted the highest ratings.

Kim (2012), in his study titled "tourist destination competitiveness, globalization and strategic development from the perspective of economic development", is acknowledged related factors of characteristics of a unique situation due to globalization and economic development for their people with the aim of providing a competitiveness model of tourism destination to help tourism policymakers in different groups. This study has been conducted aiming empirically testing competitive tourist destination in terms of economic development using structural equation modeling. Research model Proposed to examine the effects of the assumed link between competitiveness and social welfare and economic competitiveness destination in the national level. The findings show that there is a positive relationship between the TDC and the social and economic development. It also shows that tourism destination competitiveness leads to support tourism growth theory.

Little domestic studies have been done in the field of tourism destination competitiveness, so this research attempts to discover tourism destinations competitiveness and affecting factors in Tabriz city.

#### **4. Research area:**

Geographically, Tabriz, capital of East Azerbaijan province is located 46 degrees 25 minutes east longitude and 38 degrees north latitude and 2 minutes from the Greenwich

meridian. 1350 to 1550 meters above sea level height can be varied in different parts of it. It's height from sea level can be varied from 1350 to 1550 meters in different parts of it. Tabriz is comprise with an area of approximately 11,800 km is in the territory of Azerbaijan and it is the central region in the eastern part of the Lake Urmia and 619 kilometers North West of Tehran. Because the city is located in the direction of the Middle East and West Asia, it is one of the important centers of political, economic, trade and cultural of Iran [17].

Tabriz has good facilities and opportunities because it is the center of the province and has good background and experience in the civilization. So the pattern of touristic areas of the city was affected by the historic atmosphere of city and most covers central part of the city. According to the approval of the Supreme Council of Architecture and Urban Planning of Iran, this city has been recorded as one of the six historical and cultural cities of the country and is the oldest cradles of civilization in the country and has rich historical and cultural heritage and vast potential for cultural diversity and the development of urban tourism. In terms of population, according to the General Population and Housing census results in 1390, the population of Tabriz Township is about 1,695,094 people and the population of the center of the city is estimated at 1,506,188 people. The urban population is 149,603 people and the rural population of this city is 1545491 people and their families, 513,283<sup>[17]</sup>.

#### **Methodology:**

The study is an applied research based on the purpose. In terms of methodology, this study is a descriptive research. This is also due to the application of scientific knowledge to describe relationships between infrastructure, supporting causes destination, superstructure tourism, tourism management and tourism resources, tourism destination competitiveness is a applied and descriptive research.

In this study Random sampling and Cochran formula in unclear population condition is used. Data for both foreign tourists and domestic tourists (local tourists and visitors from other cities) is considered.

$$n = \frac{t^2 \cdot p \cdot q}{d^2}$$

n = number of samples

d = ±(6%) accuracy or acceptable error level

t = (1.96) the normal distribution with a confidence level

P = Q = (0.5) the percentage of assimilation responses

With regard to the replacement values in the formula the appropriate sample size for the study was at least 267 people.

For each component of questionnaires in this study is used reliable resources and varied items. Then to assess the validity content validity and for reliability chronbach alpha is used. To analyze the data, the second-order factor analysis with AMOS software version 22 is used.

#### **Empirical test results:**

With using confirmatory factor analysis the presented model in this study is tested. According to the model second order confirmatory factor analysis is used, including five aspects and the dimensions has formed the final structure of the tourism destination

competitiveness variable. Goodness of fit indicators show that the data is consistent to a large extent with the proposed model.

Confirmatory factor analysis is used when the parameters that defining main variables are hidden variable. The proposed model explains the formation of the tourism destination competitiveness. This means that tourism destination competitiveness is a hidden variable that its variable's effect must be explained through confirmatory factor analysis. The defined indicators for the tourism destination competitiveness were hidden variables and each of observable variables is able to explain it. Therefore, in this study, at first step the structure was defined and with measuring hidden indicators is observable variables of tourism destination competitiveness is shown. Factor loadings in Table 1 show the impact of each hidden variable on the factorial structures of tourism destination competitive. Then impact of each hidden variable on the tourism destinations competitiveness variable is measured.

**5. KMO test (sampling adequacy):**

In order to ensure the suitability of data for factor analysis KMO and Bartlett test indicator is used. If the index is close to 1 (at least 0.6), then the data are suitable for factor analysis. Also in Bartlett the correlation matrix hypothesis of observed variables that is one unit was tested, if the significant level is less than 0.50, correlation matrix is not one unit and there is relationship between variables and statistical null hypothesis will be rejected and shows that data is appropriate for statistical analysis.

Table 1: The KMO and Bartlett test results

|                                    |                          |          |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------|
| <b>KMO sampling adequacy index</b> |                          | 0/952    |
| Bartlett test                      | Chi-square approximation | 5984/777 |
|                                    | Degree of freedom        | 171      |
|                                    | A significant number     | 0/000    |

Source: Research Findings

As you can see, the KMO index value is close to one. Bartlett's test is also significant number 0.000 and is less than 0.50 so it shows appropriateness of data for factor analysis. Confirmatory factor analysis is performed to check whether the questions of each variable is associated with its own structure or not? Confirmatory factor analysis the basic assumption is that anything associated with the particular set of variables. The power of relationship between the factors and the observable variable is shown through factor loading. In other words, the factor loading is the correlation between hidden variable and observable variable. If the factor loading (correlation values) is less than 2.0, the observed variable, will be the poor scale for hidden variable and should be removed from the model. Factor loading between 2.0 to 3.0 shows low scale and probably should be removed from the model. Factor loading between 3.0 and 0.5 indicates that the observed variable will be low scale, but at the same time for more analysis will suffice.



Values greater than 5.0 indicate that the observable variables are also reliable scale to calculate the hidden variable [25].

Table 2: factor loadings obtained for studied indicators

| <b>Factor</b>                         | <b>Item</b>                         | <b>Standardized factor loading</b> | <b>Testt</b> | <b>P value</b> |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| <b>Infrastructures</b>                | Communication facilities            | 0/951                              | 22.450       | 0.000          |
|                                       | Water supply facilities             | 0/887                              | 19.361       | 0.000          |
|                                       | Power supply facilities             | 0/819                              | 18.080       | 0.000          |
|                                       | Services Financial facilities       | 0/877                              | 24.959       | 0.000          |
|                                       | Public Health Service facilities    | 0/831                              | 21.532       | 0.000          |
| <b>Destination Supporting factors</b> | Local Government Support            | 0/890                              | 18.278       | 0.000          |
|                                       | Assistance of local people          | 0/806                              | 18.429       | 0.000          |
| <b>Tourism superstructures</b>        | Shopping facilities                 | 0/858                              | 19.484       | 0.000          |
|                                       | Feeding facilities                  | 0/861                              | 19.604       | 0.000          |
|                                       | Accommodation facilities            | 0/860                              | 19.554       | 0.000          |
|                                       | Tourism Transportation facilities   | 0/393                              | 6.839        | 0.000          |
| <b>Destination management</b>         | Destination management organization | 0/947                              | 20.290       | 0.000          |
|                                       | Destination marketing               | 0/873                              | 19.578       | 0.000          |
|                                       | Human Resource Development          | 0/844                              | 21.893       | 0.000          |
|                                       | Data management                     | 0/825                              | 20.701       | 0.000          |
|                                       | Crisis Management                   | 0/759                              | 17.206       | 0.000          |
|                                       | Cultural activities                 | 0/901                              | 24.654       | 0.000          |

|                          |                              |       |        |       |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------|--------|-------|
| <b>Tourism resources</b> | Historical or cultural sites | 0/902 | 24.775 | 0.000 |
|                          | Landscapes                   | 0/827 | 20.360 | 0.000 |

Source: Research Findings

Table 3: Second order factor analysis

| Index                          | Standardized factor loading | t Test | P values | Hypothesis test results |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------|----------|-------------------------|
| Infrastructure                 | 0.952                       | 23.734 | 0.000    | <b>Not rejected</b>     |
| destination Supporting factors | 0.978                       | 26.678 | 0.000    | <b>Not rejected</b>     |
| Tourism superstructure         | 1.014                       | 22.156 | 0.000    | <b>Not rejected</b>     |
| Destination management         | 1.040                       | 27.145 | 0.000    | <b>Not rejected</b>     |
| Tourism resources              | 0.956                       | 24.651 | 0.000    | <b>Not rejected</b>     |

Source: Research Findings

Results from goodness of fit tests, show that the model can be accepted in whole and according to data, model has an appropriate fit.

$(\chi_2 = 385.113, \chi_2/d_f = 2.771, CFI = 0.959, GFI = 0.870, RMSEA = 0.08)$

## 6. Conclusion:

As the existing and potential current in tourism to any destination inextricably is linked to the overall competitiveness of the destination, we can feel the need to develop a framework and indicators of the competitiveness of the destination. Developing a set of indicators of competitiveness can be a valuable tool in identifying aspects and factors in tourist's decision to visit other tourism destinations. In conclusion, increasing competitiveness in the tourist destination is important not only as a way to increase the economic benefit of the country, but also to improve the standard of living of the inhabitants in a destination. Main factor to determine the tourism destination competitiveness will be the resources, natural and cultural attractions, infrastructure and superstructures and managing tourism that encourage people to visit the destination. According to the results of this research and analysis with the AMOS software in the

study area after completing the questionnaires, all five variables (tourist destination competitiveness, infrastructure, destination supporting factors, tourism superstructure, tourism resource and tourism management), have a significant and positive effect on competitiveness variable in tourism destination.

As we mentioned in analysis, all considered factors have significant and positive impact on tourism destinations competitiveness. Destination management variable by 1.040 coefficients has greatest effect on the competitiveness of tourism destinations. Other factors also have high factor loadings and all dimensions have positive and significant relationship with second order.

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