

Tourism Competitiveness in Qatar: Tourists' Perspectives

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to develop an evidence-based integrated model of destination competitiveness and apply it to the case of Qatar, given that the country has faced a recent blockade and growing competition from destinations in neighboring countries, such as Oman and Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Turkey. From the perspective of visitors' experiences, a questionnaire based on the Dwyer-Kim integrated model of destination competitiveness is deployed to identify the determinants of tourism performance in Qatar. These determinants were then ranked based on their degree of contribution to tourism performance. The results show that the highest-ranked determinants related to core resources, especially heritage-based artistic and architectural features, such as historic sites and traditional arts and culture. In contrast, natural resources—such as national parks, wildlife, and nature-based activities—were among the lowest-ranked determinants. The findings offer some strategies through which Qatar can improve its level of tourism competitiveness.

Keywords: Qatar tourism; tourism destination competitiveness; Dwyer-Kim model; competitiveness indicators; factor analysis

JEL Classification: C12, C83, L83, N15

1. Introduction

The travel and tourism industry has been one of the major catalysts for globalization and socioeconomic growth for countries over the past century. Indeed, it is a sustainable, infinite source of economic activity that affects a broad spectrum of sectors, such as business, investment, health, and sports, to name but a few (Qatar Tourism Authority, n.d.). Currently, Qatar's tourism sector is ranked 51 out of 140 countries in the 2019 Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index, based on its competitiveness as a tourist destination. Additionally, this sector represented 9.1% of Qatar's GDP and 11.8% of total employment in 2019 (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2020). Furthermore, the contribution of tourism to economic performance in Qatar has been empirically examined by Ozturk and Maryam (2021) based on the tourism-led-growth hypothesis, and their findings suggested that tourism significantly stimulates long-term economic growth, so they recommended further investment strategies to develop Qatar's tourism industry.

Recent events, most notably the blockade of Qatar during June 2017-January 2021 and the global COVID-19 pandemic, have hampered the growth of Qatar's tourism sector (Yap et al., 2020). During the blockade, however, Qatar displayed effective crisis management and recovered steadily thanks to a number of mitigation strategies, such as facilitating visas, investment, and so on. Qatar consequently became the most visa-open economy in the Middle East (World Tourism Organization, 2019).

In addition to these challenges, the country faces growing destination competition from nearby countries, such as Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. Nazmfar et al. (2019) performed a comparative analysis of Travel and Tourism (T&T) competitiveness indices among the Middle East countries, with Qatar being placed in the high competitiveness group for its tourism policy component. Qatar, along with the UAE, also reportedly showed the strongest performance and improvement in tourism during the 2015–2017 period. Furthermore, Qatar is a “new incumbent” in the MENA region’s tourism industry (Saleh et al., 2021), so merely focusing on ranking destinations based on competitive advantage is not sufficiently indicative of tourism competitiveness. The competitiveness of a destination is defined as its ability to highlight its local tourist attractions and provide services and experiences that will draw in more tourists than other destinations, and this has emerged as a matter of extreme relevance when scientifically researching the field of tourism (Cibinskiene, 2012).

Qatar is perceived as a destination offering many differing flavors of tourism, with its more popular products being based on cultural and sports tourism. The country’s cultural heritage sites, such as Al Zubarah and the newly built \$434 million National Museum of Qatar, have made Qatar an appealing destination for cultural tourists. Zieba (2017), discovered that cultural tourists tend to have higher incomes, a higher level of education, and greater cultural capital, and they are more likely to participate in cultural activities. However, a drawback of Zieba’s study is that it solely examined the individual characteristics of cultural tourists in Austria, and his research did not make any comparisons with other countries. As the Qatar National Tourism Council (QNTC) aims to increase tourist arrivals from emerging markets like Africa, Asia, and Europe, it is important to explore the particular characteristics of tourists from these markets when they visit Qatar. In doing so, travel agencies can use the research outcomes to target and promote cultural tourism to potential tourists in these emerging markets. Hosting sporting mega-events like the 2022 FIFA-World-Cup in Qatar could enhance the world’s awareness of Qatar as a tourist destination through coverage, social media, and advertisement (Scharfenort, 2012). Kaplanidou et al. (2016) examined whether hosting the 2022-World-Cup in Qatar would change the perceptions of Qatar as a tourist destination and the country’s characterization in the US tourism market. Their research revealed that in the US market, awareness of the World-Cup improved their perceptions of Qatar as a politically stable and wealthy country. Motivated by Kaplanidou et al. (2016), this current study aims to explore perceptions of Qatar as a tourist destination from a traveler’s perspective.

Research into tourists’ motivations for visiting Qatar is limited, and there is a research gap related to empirical frameworks (Yap et al., 2020). In reality, multiple aspects of a trip and the preferences of the tourists themselves can influence such observations (Weaver et al., 2007). Understanding these motivations is important, however, because it would allow marketers to recognize how they can influence tourists’ perceptions of Qatar as a travel destination. According to Saleh et al. (2021), only a handful of studies have examined the tourism sector of Qatar and other GCC countries, so there is an urgent need for further studies in this area, especially given that Qatar has invested heavily in tourism infrastructure ahead of the 2022-FIFA-World-Cup, which the country is hosting. Moreover, the existing literature on Qatari tourism has been based on secondary data or qualitative techniques (Musinguzi, 2016).

Giampiccoli and Mtapuri (2015) conducted a literature survey for Qatar’s tourism-diversification strategy and its growth trajectory. The authors explored the potential of Qatar’s original 3S model (sea, sand, and sun) and the newer 5S model (shopping, sport, safari, skyscrapers, and surgery). The authors concluded that tourists to Qatar tend to be high-income visitors looking for a one-stop tourist experience, such as shoppers of luxury goods, sports adventurers, health enthusiasts, and so on. Furthermore, Henderson (2015) conducted a comparative study between the tourism-development process and policies of Qatar and Oman. The author observed that tourists stayed comparatively longer on average in Oman than Qatar because the former has a wider variety of tourist attractions. However, the author credited Qatar for its efforts to encourage stopover-tourism and sporting events. These competitive advantages reflect travelers’ motivations for visiting these respective countries.

Morakabati, Beavis and Fletcher (2014) conducted a survey to assess Qatar’s image as a destination in the UK. The survey investigated UK residents’ attitudes and perceptions for visiting Middle Eastern nations based on various attributes, such as personal safety, civil liberties, political stability, and the religious and cultural traditions of the host population. The authors reported that although Qatar was perceived to be a low-risk country, with it falling into a similar category as the UAE and Turkey, Qatar was still ranked low in terms of destination appeal. This study included UK residents with no prior experience of travelling to the Middle-East, let alone Qatar. Moreover, the study was more focused on evaluating the risk-perceptions rather than each destination’s competitiveness. This study aims to fill the research gap by performing a theoretical and empirical analysis of the determinants of tourism competitiveness based on travelers’ perceptions of Qatar and their motivations for visiting it following the GCC blockade but amid the global pandemic. Foreign travelers’ experiences included in the study are not restricted to

any single nation or region.

Our aim was therefore to apply, for the first time, an evidence-based integrated model of destination competitiveness to Qatar. This study also introduces new constructs for tourism determinants that are customized for Qatar. To achieve this, a survey questionnaire was developed to capture tourists' experiences of Qatar. The results presented are based on a survey of 300 foreign travelers to Qatar. The responses were collected during a very restrictive period in terms of both the blockade and the COVID-19 pandemic, which together presented challenges to travel. Various statistical-and-testing-methods were used, including exploratory factor analysis to identify the relevant constraints and key determinants of tourism performance in Qatar, subsequently ranking them in order to determine the competitiveness of Qatar as a tourist destination.

The remainder of this paper is organized as: a model of destination competitiveness is introduced in Section 2, followed by the survey-based methodology in Section 3. Section 4 presents the results of the empirical analysis, while Section 5 summarizes the findings and offers some policy recommendations.

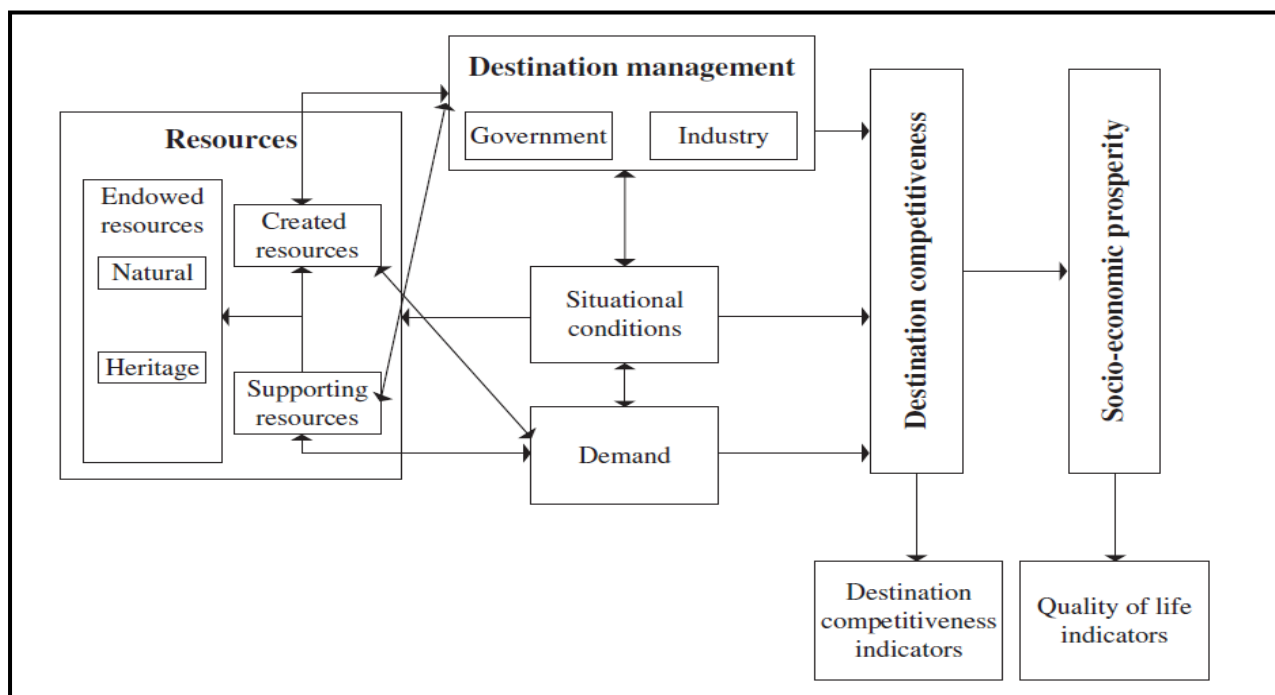
2. A Model of Destination Competitiveness: Theoretical Framework

The main challenge faced by nations when promoting themselves as attractive tourist destinations is achieving a competitive advantage. Countries should focus on ensuring that their overall "appeal" exceeds that of their competitors by offering unique tourist experiences. According to Crouch (2011), many such stakeholders influence visitors' experiences, such as tourism-based firms (e.g., hotels, tour operators, airlines, etc.), supporting industries (e.g., the arts, recreation, entertainment, sports, etc.), destination-management institutions (i.e., private or/and public partnerships), local-residents, and the government (e.g., tourism-councils and organizations). It is vital to analyze the significance of these players in determining the competitiveness of a tourist destination and its strengths and weaknesses, so models that encompass key indicators for measuring a country's destination competitiveness have been gaining traction. Indeed, a well-developed model of destination competitiveness would be highly beneficial for stakeholders in the tourism sector, both private and public, in terms of identifying opportunities, analyzing strengths and weaknesses, and countering potential threats (Zehrer and Hallmann, 2015). A commonly adopted model, namely the model of destination competitiveness, was developed by tourism researchers Dwyer and Kim (2003). Their model adopts the main elements of the tourism-destination-management framework developed by Crouch and Ritchie (1999). Moreover, they included demand conditions as a feature of destination-competitiveness. This model has been empirically applied to assess the competitive advantage of several countries such as South Korea (Dwyer and Kim, 2003), Australia (Dwyer et al., 2003), Slovenia (Rcef, 2004), Brazil (Ritchie and Crouch, 2010), and Oman (Al-Masroori, 2006), among others. Such studies generally employ surveys targeted at tourism operators, suppliers, and other stakeholders to empirically analyze this model. From a demand perspective, Reisinger et al. (2019) applied this model to study the UAE's destination competitiveness from travelers' perspectives. Similar studies of tourist-based destination competitiveness have focused on Taiwan (Chen et al, 2016), West Virginia (Zhou et al., 2015), and regional Turkey (Caber, 2012).

Due to its wider use in the applied research, this study also adopted the Dwyer–Kim model (see Figure 1) to evaluate Qatar's competitiveness as a tourist destination by incorporating visitors' experiences. Teixeira et al. (2019) also studied destination competitiveness by focusing on the perceptions of tourists as consumers of tourism products, and they found that satisfaction translates into loyalty to the tourist destination, thus contributing both directly and indirectly to a destination's competitiveness. In addition, Morakabati, Beavis and Fletcher (2014) stressed the need to evaluate tourists' perceptions in order to improve Qatar's image and identity as a destination. Based on widely adopted Ritchie and Crouch (2010), the key determinants of our model are listed below:

1. Inherited/endowed resources
2. Created resources
3. Supporting factors and resources
4. Destination management
5. Situational conditions
6. Demand conditions

Figure 1. The Dwyer-Kim integrated model of destination competitiveness



Source: Vanhove (2011, p. 177)

The core resources (endowed-and-created) and supporting resources are the primary factors underpinning a destination's competitiveness. Although these core resources are fundamental for determining competitiveness, their level of significance varies across different destinations (Crouch, 2011).

Endowed/inherited resources can be classified into two groups: natural resources (e.g., climate, beaches, flora, etc.) and cultural/heritage resources (e.g., arts, customs, cuisine, literature, language, historic sites, etc.).

Created resources represent things like tourism infrastructure, recreational facilities, transportation, festivals, shopping facilities, and so on.

Supporting factors and resources represent those things that enhance a visitor's overall experience, such as service quality, destination accessibility, level of hospitality, general infrastructure, and so on (Enright and Newton, 2004).

Destination management, meanwhile, manifests in attributes that amplify the appeal of the core resources and improve the effectiveness of the supporting factors, such as through public and private destination-management institutions, policies, human resource development, environmental regulation, and so on (Dwyer et al., 2020).

Situational conditions are external forces that can affect the tourism destination, such as the political, economic, legal, social, and/or cultural situation in a country. These can have a positive or negative influence on the behavior of tourism stakeholders (Omerzel, 2006).

Demand conditions comprise the three main elements of awareness, preferences, and perceptions, and these heavily influence demand for tourism. Awareness can be created through promotional activities and branding. Qatar becoming a sports hub is an example of this. Promoting the image of a country as a tourist destination influences perceptions and subsequently attracts tourism inflows (Morakabati et al., 2014), and tourists' preferences and motives influence the sort of tourism-based products and services that should be developed in an economy.

The competitiveness indicators under each of these categories are not uniformly applied to all destinations, because each set should specifically pertain to the characteristics of the particular tourist destination. Hence, the chosen factors (e.g., core resources and attractions) and sub-factors (e.g., special events, culture, history, etc.) should vary based on the level of economic development and motives for visiting the destination (Porter, Schwab and Sachs, 2004). Indeed, these indicators are relative and depend on destinations' comparative advantages. Crouch (2011) conducted a rigorous study to determine and rank the most significant attributes based on survey destination managers and tourism researchers. Their responses were analyzed using the analytic hierarchy process, resulting in a series of 36 factors and sub-factors being measured and ranked. Even though this study is subject to distortion and bias, these factors had been widely applied to empirically investigate tourist destinations.

Subsequently, Crottiand Misrahi (2015) used the sub-factors relating to each factor that had been further developed by the World Economic Forum, and these can be broadly measured using the Travel-and-Tourism (T&T) Competitiveness Index. This index is empirically applied to evaluate the destination competitiveness of 141 countries and rank them on an annual basis. Following Crottiand Misrahi (2015), this study employs eight categories of supporting resources, destination management, affordability and financial services, service quality, created resources, natural resources, heritage resources, and specialized tourism in order to evaluate the competitiveness of Qatar tourism.

3. Survey Methodology

This section discusses the empirical methodology, including the survey instruments, data collection, and sample characteristics.

3.1. The Survey Instrument and Data Collection

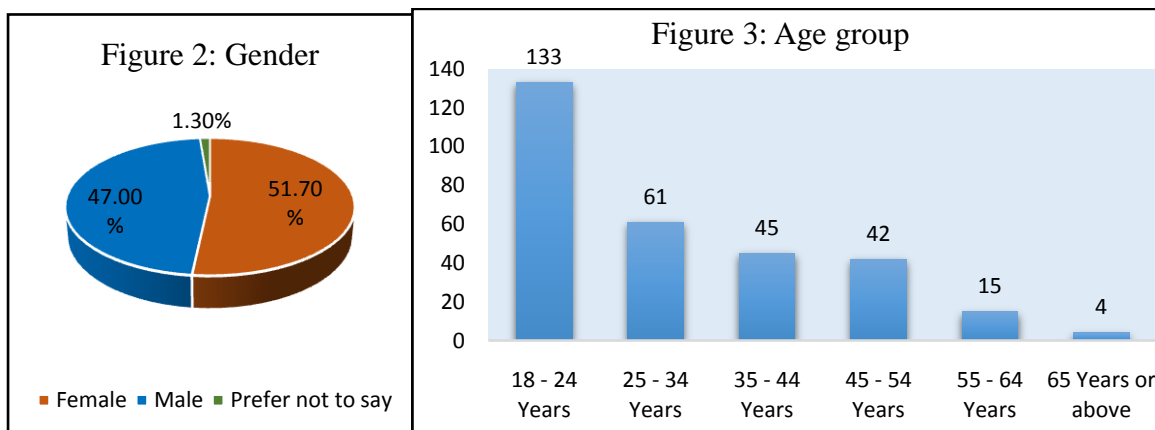
Based on the model, an extensive survey questionnaire was developed and shared with several business partners to garner their feedback. The objective of the survey was to assess destination attractiveness from a visitor’s perspective. The survey instrument was underpinned by a set of competitive indicators under each key determinant. In order to obtain a clear idea of respondents’ perceptions, the determinants were deconstructed and grouped into nine categories: 1) endowed resources (natural), (2) endowed resources (heritage), (3) created resources, (4) supporting resources, (5) destination management, (6) situational conditions I: politics and regulations, (7) situational conditions II: business environment (8), situational conditions III: business competitiveness, and (9) demand conditions.

The target group comprised non-Qataris who were aged 18 or above and had travelled to Qatar at least once in the last seven years (2014–2020). The survey was conducted over a period of six months from May 2020-to-October 2020. The main challenge to collecting data was the COVID-19 pandemic, and we believe this was responsible for a relatively low response rate. Consequently, a range of different strategies was employed to collect data. This included reaching out to tourism-based businesses/institutions and travel agencies to collect the email addresses of foreign travelers and the use of personal contacts. The five-point Likert scale was used, where the options offered were not applicable (0), well below average (1), slightly below average (2), average (3), good (4), and excellent (5). There was also an additional section for analyzing the perceptions of visitors travelling to Qatar for business reasons.

To reiterate, the main aim of this study was not to rank Qatar against other competitive destinations but rather to ascertain Qatar’s internal strengths and weaknesses as a tourist destination. The standard SPSS software package was used.

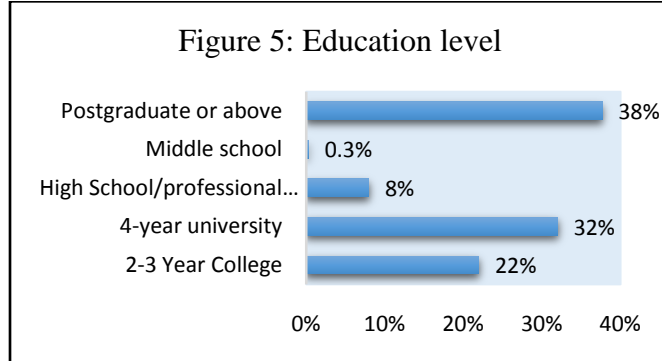
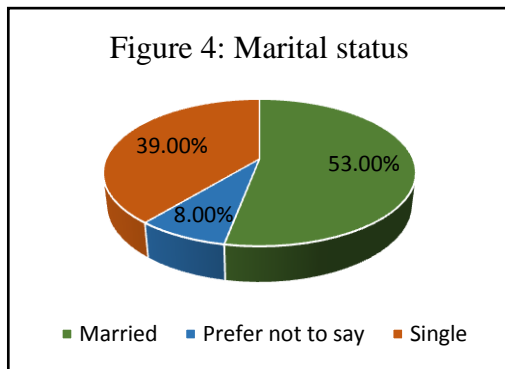
3.2. Sample Characteristics

The survey population was characterized according to the survey responses. As illustrated in Figure 2, there was a relatively even distribution between males (47%) and females (51.7%). Figure 3 displays the age-group distribution of the respondents, with younger adults aged from 18 to 34 years representing the majority (64%) of the participants.



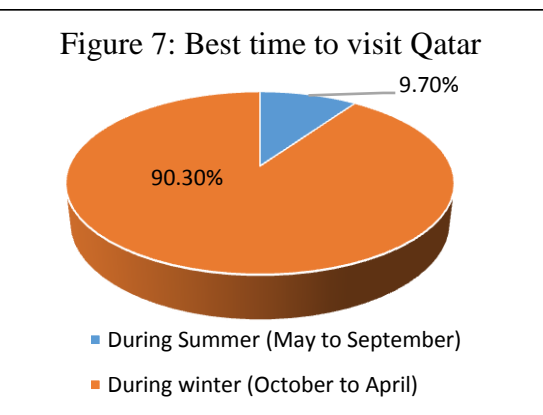
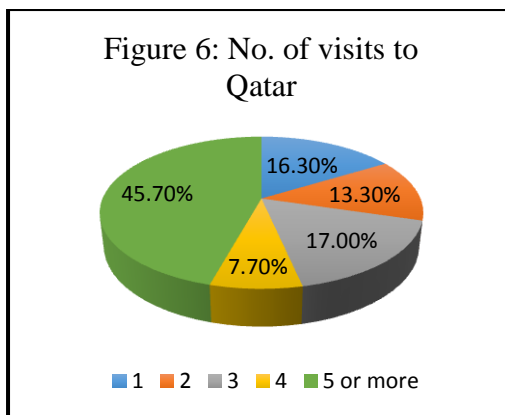
Source: Authors’ calculation

For marital status (Figure 4), just over half of respondents were married (53%) and a smaller proportion was single (39%). Regarding the educational level of the survey population (Figure 5), the vast majority of respondents had a tertiary-level education of some kind. Out of the sample, 38% had completed a postgraduate degree or above, 32% had completed four-year university degree.



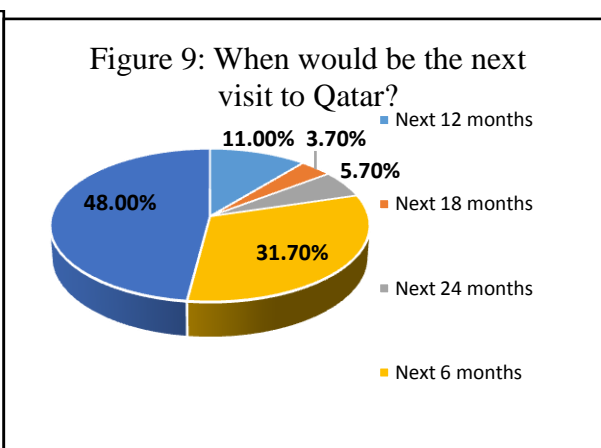
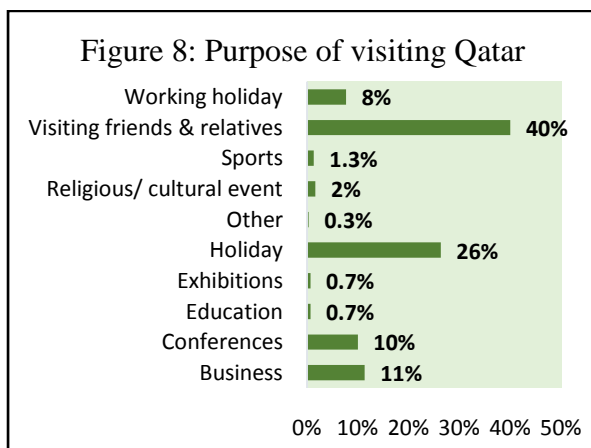
Source: Authors' calculation

Figure 6 shows the distribution for the number of times that each tourist had visited Qatar. Interestingly, 45% of the respondents had visited Qatar five or more times, followed by three times (17%). This implies that these travelers have ample experience of visiting Qatar. In addition, most respondents thought the best time to visit Qatar (Figure 7) was winter (i.e., October to April) with a staggering response rate of 90.3%.



Source: Authors' calculation

An important element to consider is travelers' motivations for visiting Qatar, and this is conveyed in Figure 8. About 40% of participants were visiting friends and relatives in Qatar, 26% were on holiday, 10% went there to attend conferences, 11% went for business purposes, and 8% were on a working holiday. The high percentage of travelers visiting Qatar to see friends and relatives is likely attributable to the sizeable expatriate population in the country (Saleh et al., 2021).



Source: Authors' calculation

4. Empirical Analysis

This section presents the empirical results findings and discusses them.

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

The ratings by the survey participants for Qatar's competitive indicators are ranked. The mean and standard deviation for each of the grouped sub-categories have been calculated and presented in ascending order. The mean measures the average value of the sample's observations, whereas standard deviation reflects the spread of the data, thus indicating whether the respondents' opinions are broadly aligned or diverse. The tables list each group in ascending order according to the mean value. Alternatively, the determinant with the smallest mean score within each group is displayed first, indicating that it has a lower rating relative to other determinants in the group. It should be noted that standard deviations greater than 1 indicate varied perceptions among the respondents.

Table 1 lists the averages and standard deviations of the attributes categorized under endowed resources, which can be further classified into natural and heritage resources. The natural endowed resources of a destination embody the core environmental system within which tourists experience the destination (Dwyer and Kim, 2003), and they are critical for various tourist experiences. Culture and heritage, meanwhile, help a destination to develop a unique identity that appeals to prospective visitors (Murphy et al., 2000).

The highest-ranked core resources in Qatar were mainly heritage-based, specifically artistic and architectural features, historic sites, and traditional arts and culture. In contrast, natural resources—such as national parks, wildlife, and nature-based activities—were ranked relatively low. This confirms the findings of Nazmfar et al. (2019), who conducted a comparative analysis of the T&T indices of Middle Eastern countries and found that Qatar had a negative and lower ranking when it comes to competitiveness in natural resources. It could be argued that this reflects the limited wildlife and national parks in Qatar. On the other hand, Qatar's rich *Khaleeji* culture, customs, traditional songs, cuisine, and so on—as well as spectacular architectural landmarks like the Zubara Fort, the Qatar National Museum, Souq Waqif, and so on are widely appealing to tourists, so they could perhaps be developed even further. The standard deviations are greater than those for the responses for both natural and heritage resources, indicating that the participants have different opinions about these attributes. This contrasts with heritage attributes, where responses are less diverse than those for natural resources, implying that heritage is a bigger draw for visitors to Qatar.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics: Endowed resources (natural and heritage)

Competitiveness indicator	Mean	Std. Dev.	Observations
(Natural) [National parks]	3.43	1.173	300
(Natural) [Flora and fauna (e.g., animals, natural landscapes)]	3.46	1.197	300
(Natural) [Nature-themed activities]	3.47	1.327	300
(Natural) [Attractiveness of climate for tourism]	3.63	1.218	300
(Natural) [Water-based activities]	3.66	1.232	300
(Natural) [Unspoiled nature (e.g., beaches, natural heritage)]	4.04	1.141	300
(Heritage) [Traditional arts (e.g., indigenous music, songs, dance, etc.)]	4.06	1.047	300
(Heritage) [Historic and heritage sites]	4.09	1.046	300
(Heritage) [Artistic and architectural features]	4.13	1.101	300

*Notes: $n=300$, m =mean, SD =standard deviation. Source: Own calculations.

Created resources like tourism infrastructure, entertainment, and special events are vital to enhancing the appeal of a tourist destination. The average of the mean scores for the ten sub-categories of created resources in the sample is 3.63 (Table 2), and Qatar is ranked above average on the indicators for health resorts and spas and sports and recreational facilities but below average for visitor accessibility to natural areas, cruises, rural tourism, and ecotourism. These rankings can be explained by the fact that Qatar's capital spending is anticipated to be around \$60bn for projects related to the FIFA World Cup and other legacy projects (Henderson, 2015). The relatively low ranking given to the above-mentioned attributes could therefore be due to the existing green spaces and farms being privately owned, so there may be an untapped potential for rural tourism and ecotourism. The survey results indicate that there is unexplored potential for specialized forms of tourism, such as cruises, rural tourism, ecotourism, entertainment events and festivals, and conferences. Thus, these forms of tourism require strategies.

Table2: Descriptiv estaticistics: Createdresources

Competitiveness indicator	Mean	Std. Dev.	Observations
Visitor accessibility to natural areas	3.40	1.356	300
Variety of cruises (e.g., cruise ships, boat rides, etc.)	3.50	1.367	300
Rural tourism	3.56	1.288	300
Ecotourism	3.60	1.202	300
Arts and film festivals	3.61	1.279	300
Adventure activities (e.g., desert safari, buggy safari, etc.)	3.65	1.301	300
Conference tourism	3.70	1.338	300
Recreation facilities (e.g., parks and children's playgrounds)	3.71	1.322	300
Sport facilities (e.g., golf, tennis)	3.74	1.262	300
Health resorts, spas	3.83	1.277	300

Note: Average of mean scores = 3.63. Source:Own calculations.

Supporting factors undoubtedly underpin a destination's competitiveness. The general infrastructure of a destination—such as its transportation network, telecommunications, healthcare facilities, financial services, and food services—are a key supporting factor that improves the overall quality of tourists' experiences. The accessibility of a destination is based on various factors, such as the ease of procedures for acquiring visas and entry permits, airport efficiency, tourist guidance, and the quality of access through different means, such as by land, sea, and air (McKercher, 1998). The mean of the individual mean scores for supporting resources is 4.04 (Table 3). Qatar is ranked above average for airport quality (Hamad International Airport was ranked the world's third-best airport and the best airport in the Middle East by the SKYTRAX World Airport Awards 2020 (Gulf Times, 2021)), food services, quality of accommodation, shopping experience, tourist guidance and information, and telecommunications but below average for nightlife, amusement parks, and special events. There is also considerable room for improvement in areas such as amusement/theme parks, festivals, and entertainment-based activities, which local residents could also benefit from.

Table3: Descriptiv estaticistics: Supporting resources

Competitiveness indicator	Mean	Std. Dev.	Observations
Nightlife (e.g., bars, discos, dancing)	3.18	1.664	300
Amusement/Theme parks	3.39	1.435	300
Special events, festivals	3.89	1.300	300
Community support for special events	3.95	1.241	300
Entertainment (e.g., theaters, galleries, cinemas)	3.98	1.221	300
Health/medical facilities to serve tourists	4.05	1.250	300
Quality of tourism services and infrastructure	4.06	1.120	300
Financial institutions and currency-exchange facilities	4.07	1.157	300
Local tourism transportation efficiency/quality/frequency	4.09	1.092	300
Accessibility of destination	4.14	1.004	300
Telecommunications for tourists	4.17	1.067	300
Tourist guidance and information	4.20	1.040	300
Different shopping experiences (e.g., easy directions, ample choices)	4.23	0.982	300
Accommodation (variety/quality)	4.28	0.969	300
Food-service facilities	4.43	0.849	300
Airport efficiency/quality	4.49	0.832	300

Note: Average of Mean scores = 4.04. Source:Own calculations.

Destination management helps to systematically emphasize the unique competitive advantages of a country to ensure its long-term success as a tourist destination (Hassan, 2000). It includes aspects such as human resource development, marketing and planning, and the establishment of destination-management organizations.

Hospitality reflects the attitudes and behaviors of the local community, other residents, and tourism firms toward visitors, with the potential to create a positive experience. Hospitality in Qatar is rated highly (Table 4), and its residents and hospitality firms are ranked above average (4.13) for friendliness, efficiency, ease of communication, and trust between residents and tourists. However, the friendliness and attitudes of customs and immigration officials were ranked comparatively lower (below average). Local residents are generally likely to support, and engage in, a tourism-development program if they perceive that the benefits of tourism outweigh the disadvantages (Dwyer et al., 2020), so the rankings imply that the locals are aware of the benefits of developing tourism.

Table4: Descriptiv estaticistics: Destination management

Competitiveness indicator	Mean	Std. Dev.	Observations
Efficiency and friendliness of customs/immigration officials	3.93	1.264	300
Attitudes of customs/immigration officials	3.94	1.259	300
Destination links with major markets of origin	3.94	1.280	300
Efficiency and friendliness of tourism/hospitality firms	4.03	1.225	300
Hospitality of residents toward tourists	4.16	1.080	300
Communication and trust between tourists and residents	4.23	1.040	300
Cleanliness	4.65	0.709	300

Note: Average of Mean scores = 4.13. Source:Owncalculations.

Situational conditions influence the performance of the tourism sector and the overall related environment, and this in turn influences a destination's competitiveness. On the micro level, a thriving business environment and healthy competition among the tourism-based firms help improve quality of service. On the macro level, aspects like political stability, civil safety, and human rights contribute to the positive image of a destination. The affordability of the tourism experience is also a significant factor (Omerzel, 2006). Our survey therefore considered three main determinants as being relevant to Qatar: political rights and regulations, business competitiveness, and the business environment. These determinants were further divided into the sub-determinants listed in Table 5 below.

The average of the mean scores for the situational conditions is 3.92, with Qatar being ranked above average for the security/safety of visitors with a high level of agreement, the friendliness of local people, and political stability. It ranked below average, however, for freedom of movement and speech, affordability, value-for-money accommodation, and the availability of tourism programs for visitors (Table 5). The 2019 T&T Index ranks Qatar in the top five for the lowest homicide rates, which is a sub-index of the security and safety of visitors (World Economic Forum, 2019).Das and DiRienzo (2009) empirically investigated the relationship between tourism competitiveness and freedom of the press, which acted as a proxy for civil rights and political freedom. The authors concluded that countries that are sensitive to civil liberties can successfully compete in global tourism alongside more-open nations. Attributes like visa requirements, value for money in the destination tourism experience, e-commerce facilities, and economic freedom are ranked relatively averagely, implying some room for improvement in these areas. However, Qatar has made commendable improvements in its visa requirements ranking, having jumped from 119th to 3rd in ranking for international openness in the 2019 T&T Index (World Economic Forum, 2019).

Table5: Descriptiv estaticistics: Situational conditions: Politics and regulations, business environment, business competitiveness

Competitiveness Indicator	Mean	Std. Dev.	Observations
Politics & regulations [Civil liberties (Freedom of movement & speech)]	3.64	1.516	300
Business competitiveness [Prices are reasonably cheap]	3.73	1.101	300
Business environment [Value-for-money accommodation]	3.79	1.138	300
Business environment [The existence of tourism programs for visitors]	3.85	1.192	300
Business environment [Management capabilities]	3.87	1.155	300
Business environment [Value-for-money shopping]	3.87	1.109	300

Politics & regulations [Visa requirements as an impediment to visiting]	3.89	1.276	300
Business environment [Value-for-money experiences]	3.91	1.078	300
Business environment [Use of e-commerce, including e-banking]	3.95	1.255	300
Politics and regulations [Economic freedom (Allow competition to offer high-quality, low-cost goods and services)]	3.97	1.257	300
Business competitiveness [Easy of dealing with local businesspeople]	3.97	1.107	300
Politics and regulations [Political stability]	4.02	1.299	300
Business competitiveness [Friendliness of local people]	4.02	1.079	300
Politics and regulations [Security/safety of visitors]	4.40	0.885	300

Note: Average of Mean scores = 3.92. Source:Own calculations.

Demand conditions influence travelers' motives and preferences for visiting a destination (Dwyer et al., 2003). This survey asked the respondents to rate the international awareness of Qatar and its tourism products along with its image and identity as a destination. Table 6 indicates that Qatar's brand image was weighted more heavily than the awareness of Qatar as a tourist attraction. Awareness can be cultivated through promotional activities, while the brand image plays to preferences, so an actual visitation will be based on the "fit" between a destination's perceived offerings and a tourist's preferences (Omerzel, 2006). Despite improvements in the effectiveness of Qatar's marketing and branding strategies to attract tourists (5.2/7), Qatar's ranking is relatively low compared to other destinations, and it has slipped from 30th to 33rd position (World Economic Forum, 2019).

Table6:Descriptivestatistics:Demand conditions

Competitiveness indicator	Mean	Std. Dev.	Observations
Demand [International awareness of destination and its products]	3.88	1.157	300
Demand [Destination's image and brand]	4.08	0.983	300

Note: Average of Mean scores = 3.98. Source:Own calculations.

4.2. Factor Analysis and Discussion

4.2.1. Reliability Test

To ensure robust results for our empirical analysis, a reliability test using Cronbach's alpha was conducted to examine the internal consistency of the survey questions. Cronbach's alpha is one of the most commonly used reliability tests when a survey's responses are framed using a Likert scale (Green et al., 2000). In this survey, the scale rating ranges from 0 to 5. The overall Cronbach's alpha for our study was 0.967, which implies a high-level of consistency (Table 7). This indicates that the questions were clearly understood by the survey respondents. It also implies that the survey instrument was a reliable measure for assessing tourists' perceptions of Qatar as a tourist destination. All items were included in the analysis because the competitive indicators scored above the acceptable range of 0.6-0.7 (Ursachi et al., 2015). In conclusion, the survey responses' scales were reliable.

Table 7: Reliability test results

No	Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Number of items
C1	Endowed resources – Natural	0.818	6
C2	Endowed resources – Heritage	0.820	3
C3	Created resources	0.876	10
C4	Supporting resources	0.937	16
C5	Destination management	0.883	7
C6	Situational conditions – Politics & regulations	0.837	5
C7	Situational conditions – Business environment	0.896	6
C8	Situational conditions – Business competitiveness	0.746	3
C9	Demand conditions	0.809	2
	Overall	0.967	58

To assess the factorability of the data, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Test for measuring sampling adequacy were used. The KMO value was 0.934, which is close to 1.0, thus indicating that a high proportion of variance in the variables could be explained by underlying factors and supporting its suitability for factor analysis. Furthermore, the result of the Bartlett's test was significant ($p < .05$) and calculated as 12460.24, indicating that the null hypothesis of there being no correlation between the variables could be rejected. These attributes are therefore highly correlated with the population, so they are appropriate for conducting factor analysis (Pallant, 2011).

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Test for measuring for sampling adequacy.		0.934
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approximate Chi-Square	12460.248
	Degree of freedom	1653
	Significance	0.000

4.2.2. Exploratory Factor Analysis

An exploratory factor approach was applied to assess the presence of any significant relationships between the observed variables and the underlying constructs. Accordingly, the Principal Components Analysis (PCA) method with Varimax rotation was applied using SPSS on 58 items from the destination-competitiveness model for the 300 responses. A cut-off value of 0.5 was imposed on the loading factors. In order to determine the number of factors to extract, a combination of Kaiser's criterion of only retaining factors with a latent root or eigenvalue greater than 1.0 and the scree test was utilized. On examining the rotational component matrix, items with no factor loadings above 0.5 or ones that cross-loaded on more than one factor were excluded from further analysis, with us deeming them inconsistent. A total of 15 variables were removed from the initial dataset of 58 variables, resulting in consistent loadings (using a methodology adopted from Dwyer et al., 2004), so the reduced dataset had 43 variables (Table 8).

Table 8: Eight-factor solution for destination-competitiveness indicators

	Factor Loadings	Model Elements
Factor 1: Supporting resources		
Financial institutions and currency exchange facilities	0.735	4
Local tourism transportation efficiency/quality/frequency	0.682	4
Quality of tourism services and infrastructure	0.671	4
Entertainment (e.g., theaters, galleries, cinemas)	0.669	4
Tourist guidance and information	0.669	4
Community support for special events	0.664	4
Health/medical facilities to serve tourists	0.659	4
Special events, festivals	0.643	4
Diverse shopping experiences	0.616	4
Ecotourism	0.588	3
Telecommunications for tourists	0.528	4
Factor 2: Destination management		
Civil liberty (freedom of movement and speech)	0.751	6
Destination links with major origin markets	0.74	5
Political stability	0.674	6
International awareness of destination and products	0.66	9
Destination's image and brand	0.63	9
Attitudes of customs/immigration officials	0.597	5
Factor 3: Affordability & financial services		
Value-for-money shopping	0.695	7
Value-for-money accommodation	0.688	7
Existence of tourism programs for visitors	0.64	7
Management capabilities	0.626	7
Use of e-commerce, including e-banking	0.6	7
Prices are reasonably cheap	0.528	8
Value for money in destination's tourism experiences	0.515	7
Factor 4: Service quality		

Airport efficiency/quality	0.733	4
Accommodation (variety/quality)	0.725	4
Food service facilities	0.592	4
Security/safety of visitors	0.581	6
Cleanliness	0.578	5
Factor 5: Created resources		
Sports facilities (e.g., golf, tennis)	0.755	3
Adventure activities (e.g., desert safari, buggy safari, etc.)	0.749	3
Variety of cruises (cruise ships, boat rides, etc.)	0.737	3
Recreation facilities (e.g., parks and children's playgrounds)	0.649	3
Arts & film festivals (e.g., concerts, international film festivals)]	0.635	3
Factor 6: Natural resources		
Water-themed activities	0.785	1
Nature-themed activities	0.682	1
Flora and fauna	0.664	1
National parks	0.622	1
Factor 7: Heritage resources		
Historic and heritage sites	0.766	2
Artistic and architectural features	0.764	2
Traditional arts (e.g., indigenous music, songs, dance)	0.702	2
Factor 8: Specialized tourism		
Conference tourism	0.856	3
Rural tourism	0.794	3
Model element:		
Endowed resources (natural)		
Endowed resources (heritage)		
Created resources		
Supporting resources		
Destination management		
Situational conditions I: Politics and regulations		
Situational conditions II: Business environment		
Situational conditions III: Business competitiveness		
Demand Conditions		

The results of this analysis yielded the groupings between the eight factors. Indeed, this eight-factor solution explains 66.3% of the total variance, which is reasonable for the dataset of this model. The eight factors produced by the PCA are discussed below. The percentage variance explained by each factor is given in brackets.

Factor 1: Supporting resources (14.74%)

There are 11 variables which explain 14.74% of the variance in the model. This factor mainly comprises supporting resources, except eco-tourism which is a created resource.

Factor 2: Destination management (10.66%)

The second factor had six variables loading on it. Three of the destination competitiveness indicators are destination management, situational conditions: politics and regulations, and demand conditions. The variables themselves are civil liberty, destination links with major origin markets, political stability, international awareness of the destination's products, brand image, and the attitudes of customs/immigration officials. All these point to areas of destination management.

Factor 3: Affordability and financial services (8.87%)

The seven variables included in this factor are mainly situational conditions pertaining to the business environment (six variables) combined with one variable for business competitiveness. The loaded factors convey travelers' perceptions of the ease and affordability of visiting Qatar and using e-commerce services.

Factor 4: Service quality (8.32%)

This factor includes five attributes that represent the quality of services in Qatar, namely airport efficiency, accommodation quality, food service facilities, security/safety of visitors, and cleanliness.

Factor 5: Created resources (7.04%)

The fifth factor only includes some variables under created resources, namely sports facilities, adventure activities, variety of cruises, recreational facilities, and arts and film festivals.

Factor 6: Nature-based resources (6.67%)

Variables included under nature-based endowed resources constitute the sixth factor. They include water- and nature-based activities, flora and fauna, and national parks.

Factor 7: Heritage resources (5.46%)

Historic and heritage sites, artistic and architectural features, and traditional arts are heritage-based endowed resource indicators that are included in this factor.

Factor 8: Specialized tourism (4.52%)

This factor includes two variables from the created resources indicator, namely, conference tourism, and rural tourism.

5. Findings and Discussion

It would not be sensible for the factor analysis to replicate the exact groupings of the destination-competitiveness indicators that were initially suggested in the model. By omitting inconsistent variables, the factor analysis explains how the 43 chosen competitive indicators, as opposed to the initial 58, are related based on the tourists' perceptions. The factor analysis implies the relative importance of supporting resources in Qatar, compared to other indicators, in developing destination competitiveness. Supporting factors and resources are foundational attributes that are critical to establishing an excellent and robust tourism sector (Fernández et al., 2020). Attributes such as health facilities, currency exchange, general infrastructure, and telecommunications are amplifying factors that add value to a visitor's experience and serve to emphasize the core resources. Interestingly, the respondents were able to clearly distinguish between natural, created, and heritage resources, with these being the primary indicators underpinning destination competitiveness and acting as a major motivation for inbound tourism (Fernández et al., 2020). However, two of the created resources, conference-based tourism and rural tourism, were linked separately. Therefore, tourism marketing strategies that treat natural and heritage resources as distinct markets seem viable. Furthermore, attributes that concern value for money for shopping, accommodation, and tourism services seem to be connected and relatively coherent in the minds of respondents. The factor analysis therefore seems to reveal a logical and consistent relationship between the competitiveness indicators, and this is compatible with the original model and has no major contradictions.

4.3. Hypothesis Testing

The primary objective of this study was to examine Qatar's competitive strengths and weaknesses as a tourist destination from visitors' perspectives. Hence, this study hypothesized and tested the resource-based view, which states that a destination's competitiveness is primarily dependent on its distinct core resources (Melian- Gonzales and Garcia- Falcon, 2003; Enright and Newton, 2004). The remaining factors—such as destination management, infrastructure, supporting resources, and so on—play a secondary role. Accordingly, for each of the indicators in the competitiveness model, mean values were calculated for individual competitive statements under each element using a method adopted from Omerzel (2006) and Armenski et al., (2011). The mean scores for each of these categories were defined as follows: Inherited Resources: Natural and Heritage (INHRES); Created Resources (CREATRES); Supporting Resources (SUPPORES); Total Inherited and Created Resources (CORERES); Destination Management (DESMGT); Situational Conditions I, II, and III (SITCON); and Demand Conditions (DEMCON). Based on the research objective, the following null hypothesis was set up (the same for all pairs):

$H_0: \mu_1 - \mu_2 = 0$ ("the difference between the paired population means is equal to 0")

In order to verify Qatar's competitive factors, the following hypotheses were proposed:

Hypothesis 1: "Core resources are the most important to competitiveness relative to the other elements."

Hypothesis 2: "Supporting resources are the second-most important to competitiveness relative to other elements."

Table 9: Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Lower	Upper		
Pair 1	CORERES - SUPPORES	-.33884	.66621	-.41453	-.26314	-8.809	.000
Pair 2	CORERES - DESMGT	-.42657	.78638	-.51592	-.33723	-9.396	.000
Pair 3	CORERES - SITCON	-.22134	.73927	-.30533	-.13734	-5.186	.000
Pair 4	CORERES - DEMCON	-.28134	.93596	-.38768	-.17499	-5.206	.000
Pair 5	SUPPORES - DESMGT	-.08774	.64464	-.16098	-.01449	-2.357	.019
Pair 6	SUPPORES - SITCON	.11750	.53246	.05700	.17800	3.822	.000
Pair 7	SUPPORES - INHRES	.26194	.71731	.18044	.34344	6.325	.000
Pair 8	SUPPORES - CREATRES	.40798	.86435	.30978	.50619	8.175	.000

Source: Own calculations

To test the null hypothesis, a paired-sample t-test with a 95% confidence interval was performed, and the results of this are shown in Table 9. There are statistically significant differences between the model elements in all cases, so all the null hypotheses can be rejected. The results contradict the resource-based view that core resources are the primary attributes for Qatar's destination competitiveness. Indeed, the hypothesis test results indicate that core resources are less important than supporting resources, destination management, situational conditions, and demand conditions. Furthermore, supporting resources were found to be more competitive than situational conditions, inherited resources, and created resources. Hence, when approaching the model with the resource-based view, Qatar's main strength is its supporting resources, including tourism infrastructure, health facilities, shopping, transportation, and so on. These results are consistent with the exploratory factor analysis, which showed supporting factors being the strongest factor-loading components. This implies that supporting resources play a role as the most significant predictor of Qatar's competitiveness. This finding was expected given the negative ranking of Qatar's natural resources compared to other Middle Eastern nations in a study conducted by Nazmfar et al. (2019). In addition, Qatar is ranked low in the T&T Index for natural resources (136th) and cultural resources (92nd) out of the 140 countries analyzed (World Economic Forum, 2019). Research into destination competitiveness conducted by Reisinger et al. (2019) in the UAE from tourists perspectives also yielded similar results. The infrastructure and supporting resources therefore prove to be a stronger factor in destination competitiveness than the primary resources. We can therefore conclude that tourists consider a destination's infrastructure, facilities, healthcare, accommodation, food quality, financial services, and the quality of tourism services to be important characteristics that motivate them to visit a destination. Policy makers should therefore develop strategies that strengthen and advance the existing supporting infrastructure, services, and resources.

5. Conclusion and Policy Implications

This study provides new insight into the relevant constraints on, and the determinants of, tourism performance in Qatar and ranked them in order to assess the competitiveness of Qatar as a tourist destination. Applying the destination-competitiveness model, a survey of previous visitors to Qatar was developed to evaluate their perceptions of visiting Qatar. On performing exploratory factor analysis and hypothesis testing for the survey data, we found that supporting resources were more important to competitiveness than situational conditions, inherited resources, and created resources. The exploratory factor analysis showed that supporting factors were the strongest factor-loading component. This implies that supporting resources and factors play a role as the most significant predictor of Qatar's competitiveness as a destination. The results also showed that the tourists view Qatar as highly advanced in destination infrastructure but lacking in tangible resources. The results also suggest that developing strategies to facilitate destination accessibility will improve Qatar's tourism competitiveness (Fernández et al., 2020). The tourists' low view of Qatar's endowed and created resources suggests a need to explore strategies to promote Qatar's heritage, culture, and physiography and show it in a different light. Tailored destination-marketing strategies for specialized tourist activities—such as food tourism, where the focus is on unique, authentic food experiences—could also serve to showcase Qatar's heritage and culture (Okumus, 2021). Indeed, the country could offer affordable culinary tourism, such that tourists associate their travel experiences with the foods they eat during their visit. The authenticity of cultural food can make a good and lasting impression on tourists, and Qatar can distinguish itself from other competitors using its cuisine.

In addition, based on the empirical findings presented in this paper, Qatar is ranked below average for freedom of movement and speech, price affordability, value-for-money accommodation, and the existence of tourism programs for visitors. Hence, some tourism strategies need to be developed for creating more attractive and innovative tourist attractions, as well as encouraging affordable tour packages that add value to a visitor's experience. The factor of demand (international awareness of the destination and its products) is also ranked among the lowest, indicating that there is a need to improve the international community's awareness of Qatar as a tourist destination and promote its tourism-based products and services.

It is also worth noting that due to the high degree of homogeneity among the six GCC member nations, any situational conditions or external shocks that affect tourism in one country can have spillover effects on the other members, so for future research in this area, it would be beneficial to perform a comparative analysis using the same empirical model for the entire Gulf region (Saleh et al., 2021). What is more, government and other destination-management organizations need to familiarize themselves with destination branding.

They should develop relevant tourism-specific strategies, so they can outperform the competitors and establish strong competitive positions in the local, regional, and international markets. In addition, countries that excel as an international tourist attraction and rely on revenue from the tourism sector should invest heavily in the quality of their tourism workforce (Gomezelj and Mihalič, 2008). This will ensure sustainable growth that is based on a knowledge-based competitive advantage. To achieve this, private and public organization should both commit to education and training for hospitality and tourism. Furthermore, governments could assist businesses operating in the tourism sector to train their employees in areas such as hospitality-management practices and tourism-based marketing skills. Executive-level educational courses—such as sustainable tourism, hospitality and tourism management, heritage conservation, travel and aviation industry management, and so on—could be established at a university level. The government should also promote entrepreneurial activities that encourage the private sector to establish their own businesses in the tourism sector, attend relevant training programs, and actively engage in international tourism forums and conferences. Another key issue to consider is the process of “Qatarization,” which refers to hiring natives rather than expatriates in the travel and tourism sector. Sadi and Henderson (2005) examined the impact of the similar process of “Saudization” on Saudi Arabia's hotel and tourism industry. There would seem to be a need for a flexible, slow, phased-in transition to filling recruitment needs by training natives to undertake these management roles.

Another important concept to be considered by policymakers is the strategic significance of developing sustainability-focused tourism (Assaf and Josiassen, 2012). Policies aimed at increasing growth in the number of visitor arrivals should be approached pragmatically, because these can potentially overload the productive capacity and consequently exhaust the resources (Martín et al., 2018). Tourism growth policies should therefore assess the long-term socioeconomic and environmental implications.

Acknowledgement

This research is an outcome of grant # [NPRP12S-0214-190086] from the Qatar National Research Fund (a member of the Qatar Foundation). The findings reflected in this work are solely the responsibility of the authors. We also acknowledge the work of our research assistants, Fathma Mehjabin and Lolwa Ali Malki.

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