

Research Paper

Using the Delphi Technique in the Classification of Attributes of Destination Competitiveness

Philip P. W. Wong
Taylor's University, Malaysia

Abstract: A number of previous studies suggest that an increase in customer-based brand equity (CBBE) can lead to greater competitiveness of the brand by influencing consumer behaviour through the greater possibility of brand selection, increased brand loyalty, reduced price sensitivity, and a willingness to pay more for the brand (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993, Pitta & Katsani, 1995; Wood, 2000). However, in other recent studies on destination competitiveness, there is growing support for the view that certain destination competitiveness attributes can be the antecedents for the development of destination brand equity (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Pike, 2009). Therefore, it is logical to assume that the construct of destination competitiveness can be classified into two possible components of (1) 'functional attributes' being the antecedent of CBBE while the other component of (2) 'abstract attributes' is actually influenced by CBBE. Due to the scarcity of research in the classification of destination competitiveness' attributes into the components of either the functional or abstract attributes, a Delphi study was conducted to assist in the categorisation of those attributes into the relevant components of destination competitiveness. Based on the results of the Delphi-survey, the competitiveness attributes were classified into either the component of Destination competitiveness I (Functional attributes) or Destination competitiveness II (Abstract attributes). The majority of the attributes of the core resources and attractors were grouped into the functional attributes component and only a few remaining attractors were considered abstract attributes. Certain attributes of Supporting Factors & Resources were classified as functional attributes, while other supporting factors were categorised as abstract attributes. Both the Destination management attributes of local managerial skills and Staff skills were considered to be abstract attributes while the attributes under Qualifying and Amplifying Determinants were separated into either one of the two components of functional or abstract attributes.

Key words: Customer-based brand equity, Delphi-method, destination branding, destination competitiveness, destination marketing

Correspondence: Philip P. W. Wong, School of Hospitality, Tourism and Culinary Arts, Taylor's University, Malaysia. Email: PongWeng.Wong@taylors.edu.my

Suggested citation: Wong, P. P. W. (2013). Using the Delphi technique in the classification of attributes of destination competitiveness. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Innovation in Hospitality and Tourism*, 2(2): 123-143

Introduction

The competitiveness of a destination depends on its ability to increase tourist expenditure and increase visitor arrivals by providing them with satisfying, memorable experiences and doing it in a profitable and sustainable manner which will enhance the well-being of the destination residents and preserve the natural capital for future generations (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003).

Even though the competition for a bigger share of the tourists market has been growing in intensity in recent years, there has been a dearth of research in the area of destination competitiveness at either the regional, national or even city level (Kozak, 1999). Among the compelling reasons for identifying and evaluating the competitiveness of tourism destinations include (1) the emergence of new destinations, (2) the growing influence of travel intermediaries and the media in shaping travelers opinion, (3) the attitude of repeat travelers, and (4) the increasing concern of tourists about the environment in tourism destinations (Keller & Smeral, 1997).

According to Woodside & Lysonski (1989), destinations constantly compete among themselves to obtain a place in the consideration set of potential visitors as that will increase the probability of them being selected as a holiday destination. It is crucial for tourism destinations to evaluate their competitiveness attributes to enable them to discover their strengths and weaknesses, as the potential visitor's destination selection process is greatly influenced by the destination's overall competitiveness (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Dwyer, Cvelbar, Edwards & Mihalic, 2012).

A substantial number of studies support the position that effective destination branding leads to greater destination competitiveness. However, there are also other studies that make the argument for the reverse causation effect, that is, higher competitiveness can lead to an increase in customer-based brand equity for the destination. This points to the likelihood of the mediating role of a destination's CBBE in the relationship between the two possible destination's competitiveness components of 'functional attributes' (which are more tangible and measurable) and 'abstract attributes' (which are more psychological and less tangible).

Branding is regarded by many researchers as an important tool to increase the competitiveness of a tourist destination (Pike & Mason, 2011). For tourist destinations to provide satisfying and memorable experiences to tourists in a profitable and sustainable manner, it is important to understand the role of branding on destination competitiveness. Even though branding has generally been recognised as an important

tool to improve competitiveness, there has been a paucity of research on the impact of branding on a destination's competitiveness and travel behaviour, especially with regard to destinations in developing nations.

Research on the topic of destination branding is a relatively recent phenomenon, and the first studies only appeared in the late 1990s (Pritchard & Morgan, 1998; Dosen, Vranesevic & Prebezac, 1998). According to Pike, Bianchi, Kerr & Patti, (2010), there is a scarcity of research specifically in the performance evaluation of branding campaign effectiveness in tourism destinations. Pike *et al.* (2010), believe that the conceptual models of CBBE developed by Aaker (1991; 1996), and Keller (2003), can provide Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) with a performance measuring tool of the effectiveness of their branding activities.

A strong brand improves perceptions of a product's performance, reduces risks in purchase decisions, instills greater loyalty, reduces vulnerability to competitors' actions, increases profitability, reduces consumers' sensitivity to price increases, and increases the effectiveness of marketing promotional strategies (Keller, 2003, Hsu, Oh & Assaf, 2012). According to Reichheld (1996) increased customer loyalty will lead to greater competitive advantage because the company can maintain a price premium over its competitors' products because of customers' perception of some unique value associated with that brand.

According to Kotler & Gertner (2002), brands help to differentiate products and can increase customers' perception of their value and they argue that a country can be branded and country names actually amount to brands which influence consumers' purchasing decisions. Even though a country might not be actively pursuing a branding strategy, the mere mention of its name can invoke certain images related to the country. These images are likely to influence the future travel decisions of potential travelers to that nation.

Destination branding has been recognised as an essential marketing tool by destination marketing organisations to attract new tourists as well as encourage repeat visitors (Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011). A good example of successful destination branding would be the inception of the *Malaysia: Truly Asia* campaign in 1999, when Malaysia was positioned as a multi-racial one-stop destination offering the best of Asia's three main cultures of the Malays, Chinese, and Indians (Tourism Malaysia, 2012).

Although there are a substantial number of studies to support the view that an effective branding strategy will inevitably lead to increased competitiveness of a tourist destination, there are also studies that indicate an improvement in destination competitiveness can result in a stronger brand equity for the destination (Pike & Mason, 2011). A major theoretical contribution of this study is to provide an explanation for the relationships between the constructs of CBBE and destination competitiveness, and to posit that destination competitiveness is made up of two components; one

component being the *functional attributes* which is the precursor of CBBE, while the other component consists of the *abstract attributes* which is influenced by CBBE. A study of this nature can be considered timely as there has been very little research on the classification of destination competitiveness attributes into their relevant components of functional and abstract attributes to date.

The main objectives of this paper are:

- To categorise the destination competitiveness attributes into the relevant components of functional or abstract attributes using the Delphi technique
- To provide the theoretical underpinnings for the separation of the components of destination competitiveness
- To highlight the limitations of using the Delphi technique for this study

Literature Review

Competitiveness of Tourism Destinations (Comparative and Competitive Advantage)

Several factors explain why the measurement and determination of competitiveness is so important to tourism destinations. Competition has become more intensive between destinations for a bigger share of international tourist arrivals. New destinations appear on the market while existing ones are trying to expand and introduce new attractions and facilities. At the same time, some of the more mature destinations are starting to go into decline (Kozak & Rimmington, 1999; Croes, 2011; Dwyer, Cvelbar, Edwards & Mihalic, 2012)

To explain the concept of competitiveness in the tourism industry context, Crouch & Ritchie (1999), developed a framework based on Porter's (1980) models of 'five forces' of competition and his 'diamond' of national competitive advantage (Porter, 1990). According to Porter's (1990) diamond of competitive advantage, factor conditions such as historical and natural attractions are important determining factors for a tourist to visit a destination, but they are not the only factors. Expanding on Porter's theory, Crouch & Ritchie (1999) argued that in evaluating a tourism destination's competitiveness, it is essential to look at both the elements of comparative advantage as well as elements of competitive advantage of the destination.

A destination's comparative advantage consists of its naturally endowed or man-made resources such as its historical and cultural attractions, and tourism infrastructure. The condition of such resources generally do fluctuate over time, which can reduce the competitiveness of the destination. Many of the naturally occurring resources such as corals that have been destroyed and hills that have been leveled may not be renewable, while man-made facilities such as entertainment or shopping outlets are normally more renewable than natural resources. Proper management of these

resources is therefore paramount to maintaining the attractiveness and competitiveness of a destination. Effective management strategies need to be created so as to train a destination's human resources to maintain the condition of its natural assets, and to develop and expand its tourism infrastructure.

Having comparative advantage means that a destination possesses those natural or man-made attributes or factors which attract visitors to that destination. Competitive advantage, on the other hand, refers to how effectively the destination manages those resources in the long-run. A destination which is not endowed with a lot of resources may be more competitive than a well-endowed destination if the former manages to use its limited resources more effectively (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999). Such a destination is aware of its limitations, but it is able to market itself more successfully than its competing destinations, and normally it is clear objectives for its tourism development strategy.

Attributes of Destination Competitiveness

The elements of comparative and competitive advantage are generally regarded as the theoretical underpinning for the development of a conceptual framework for destination competitiveness (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Dwyer & Kim (2003), Dwyer *et al.* (2004), and Heath (2003) also came out with their models on destination competitiveness, all of which, were adapted from the model developed by Crouch & Ritchie (1999). It is generally agreed that the conceptual model developed by Crouch and Ritchie (1999), highlighted in Figure 1, remains the most widely cited



Figure 1. General conceptual model of destination competitiveness

Source: Adapted from Ritchie & Crouch (2003).

research on competitiveness of tourism destinations (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999, Ritchie & Crouch, 2000; 2003).

The two main determinants of competitiveness, that is, comparative advantage and competitive advantage are featured on the left and right, and sides of the model. The rest of the model highlights the many attributes of these two main determinants of competitiveness. The macro-environment has a significant global influence on tourist destinations as events that happened in one region can affect travel to another destination. The 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center in New York, and the outbreak of SARS disease in Asia affected travel patterns of international tourists. Any destination must overcome or adjust to the forces of the macro-environment in order to maintain its competitiveness.

A destination's micro-environment on the other hand consists of competing firms such as travel agencies, tour operators, event management companies, and other stakeholders such as the local residents, hospitality organisations, and local government bodies involved in the destination's tourism activities and these micro environment forces tend to have a more direct and immediate effect on the destination. Managers are generally more occupied with the micro environment due to their desire to provide better service to their customers in relation to their competitors and thereby remain in a more competitive position. It is critical for destination management organisations to be aware that both the macro-environment and micro-environment are constantly changing and therefore requires continuous monitoring in order to maintain and sustain the destination's competitiveness (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999).

The core resources and attractors listed in Figure 1 such as the destination's physiography and the culture and history are the destination's naturally endowed or man-made factors that provide the key reasons for travelers to select and visit the destination. Another dimension of the core resources and attractors is the market ties dimension which refers to the linkages between the visitors from the tourism originating countries and the destination they travel to. These sort of linkages could be historical, cultural, or business ties between the visitor countries and the destination (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999). Examples would be visitors from the United Kingdom traveling to Malaysia due to their colonial ties, or Chinese Malaysian tourists visiting China because of the cultural linkages.

Supporting factors and resources, as the term implies, include elements such as infrastructure, accessibility, and political will that are required to build a strong base for the development of a successful tourism industry. Without the necessary supporting factors and resources, a destination which is well-endowed with core resources and attractors may face a serious hindrance in developing its tourism industry when compared with a less well-endowed destination (Crouch, 2006). Singapore is a good example of a destination which is relatively less well endowed with core resources

and attractors but has consistently outperformed some of its regional competitors in the development of its tourism industry because of its strong supporting factors and resources.

The destination management component of the model includes activities which can improve the quality of the core resources and attractors as well as reinforcing the efficacy of the supporting factors and resources. Examples of these activities would be the marketing activities conducted by the relevant tourism authorities, such as organising and implementing promotional campaigns, product development, and market targeting strategies. Another dimension of destination management is the service dimension and Otto & Ritchie (1995) have argued that to improve the quality of service (QOS), it is necessary to provide a total quality of experience, which requires the bearing of responsibility by the destination managers for the maintenance of the core resources of the destination.

The component of destination policy, planning and development sets up the framework for the policies and strategies required to guide the destination in achieving its tourism development goals and objectives. The ultimate goal for a destination would be to achieve a level of competitiveness that is sustainable while at the same time enabling it to provide a quality of life (QOL) that is compatible with the hopes and aspirations of the local residents (Crouch, 2006; Dwyer *et al.*, 2012).

The last component in the model, qualifying and amplifying determinants, “moderates, modifies, or mitigates destination competitiveness by filtering the influence of the other three groups of factors” (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999: p. 149). This component consists of factors that can be very important to the extent that they may limit or control tourists’ demand for the destination but are largely outside the span of control of the destination managers. One such qualifying determinant is the location of the destination as geographic proximity is a major influencing factor in tourists’ destination selection, and yet there is nothing much a destination can do to change its location. Safety and security in a destination is another important qualifying determinant as most tourists will avoid a destination which is not able to provide them with safe drinking water, adequate hygiene standards, and the level of health care required should they fall ill. The cost factor can also be considered a qualifying determinant and the cost of a destination such as transportation costs, exchange rates, and costs of living are also largely influenced by socio-economic forces outside the control of destination managers.

In their study to generate a more comprehensive model of destination competitiveness, Enright & Newton (2004) expanded on the conceptualisation of destination competitiveness of Crouch & Ritchie (1999) by introducing a wide range of business-related factors within the components of supporting factors and resources, destination management and qualifying and amplifying determinants; and a number

of tourism-specific factors (tourism attractors) within the component of core resources and attractors. Using Hong Kong as the selected destination for their study, Enright & Newton (2004) evaluated the relative importance and relative competitiveness of both the tourism attractors and business factors of the destination. Findings from the study indicate that tourism attractors such as safety, cuisine, and dedicated tourism attractions were ranked the highest in relative importance, while the most important business-related factors were political stability, international access, and internal transportation facilities. Results from this study strongly support the model on destination competitiveness developed by Crouch & Ritchie (1999).

In a follow-up study, Enright & Newton (2008), added two other Asia-Pacific destinations, Singapore and Bangkok, to try to replicate the initial study in Hong Kong to determine if competitiveness attributes have the same relative importance in different locations, and whether the findings from a single destination can be used to evaluate competitiveness of other places. The results of this follow-up study indicated that all the attractors listed in the survey were regarded to possess a certain level of importance, thereby giving further support to the conceptual model of destination competitiveness developed by Crouch & Ritchie (1999).

Destination Branding

Branding a tourism destination creates a set of challenges which is not present in the branding of tangible products. A key difference between a destination brand and a product or service brand is that the name of the destination brand is actually the geographical name of the place and will rarely be changed (Cai, 2002). The challenges in branding a tourism destination are mainly due to the “complexity of the decision making process” of tourists because the tourist destination product is often considered to be intangible and risky (Cai, 2002: p. 721). A service product such as a tour package is considered intangible and risky because, unlike tangible goods, the customer is not able to sample the product before purchasing it, and the purchase decision is mainly dependant on the image possessed of the destination.

In line with the symbolic significance of the brand, Ritchie & Ritchie (1998) have defined a destination brand as “a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination; furthermore, it conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; it also serves to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience.” (p. 103)

A subsequent more comprehensive definition for destination branding provided by Blain, Levy & Ritchie (2005) is as follows:

“Destination branding is the set of marketing activities that (1) support the creation of a name, logo, word, mark or other graphics that readily identifies

and differentiates a destination; that (2) consistently convey the expectation of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; that (3) serve to consolidate and reinforce the emotional connection between the visitor and the destination; and that (4) reduce the consumer search costs and perceived risk. Collectively, these activities serve to create a destination image that positively influence consumer destination choice.” (p. 331-332)

Customer-Based Brand Equity for Destinations

Konecnik & Gartner (2007) conceptualised a model for the creation of brand equity for a destination which is shown in Figure 2. The model supports Cai’s (2002) argument that destination image is the focal point in destination branding. According to Gartner (1994), there are three components of an image which are known as the cognitive, affective, and conative components. The cognitive image is related to the awareness level of a destination; what a person knows of the place. The affective image refers to the image that triggers certain emotions felt by a person about the destination. The conative image is the component that makes a person acts on the knowledge and feelings he has on the destination, for example, to make a decision to visit the place.

In addition to the above model developed by Konecnik & Gartner (2007), another model to conceptualise consumer-based brand equity for destinations was developed by Pike (2007), when he conducted a study to measure the success levels of destination branding campaigns. Pike (2007) adapted the work of Aaker (1991; 1996), and

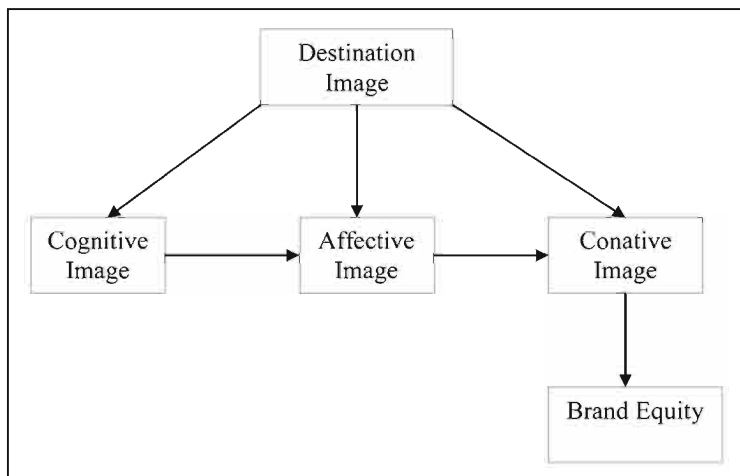


Figure 2. Creation of brand equity for a destination

Source: Adapted from Konecnik & Gartner (2007).

Keller (1993; 2003), to conceptualise consumer-based brand equity for destinations as a series of effects such as brand salience, brand associations, brand resonance, and brand loyalty.

Brand salience is considered the first step in building brand equity and it reflects the presence of the destination in the mind of the potential visitor. Salience is normally measured using top of the mind unaided recall. Previous research indicates the number of destinations that a visitor will include in his consideration set is normally restricted to four destinations, give or take two destinations (Woodside & Sherrell, 1977). These set of destinations under consideration is part of brand salience.

Brand associations are the images related to destinations stored in the memory of would-be visitors. It is therefore very important for destination management organisations to ensure the images of the destinations are positive ones (Qua, Kim & Im, 2011; Im, Kim, Elliot & Han, 2012). As can be seen from the model developed by Konecnik & Gartner (2007), the image is a core component of a destination's brand and is normally quantified by measuring the cognitive and affective components.

Brand resonance in the context of destination brand equity refers to the level of intensity a traveler has in his bonding relationship with a destination. One way to evaluate the intensity is to look at past visitations or intention to visit. The highest step in the customer based brand equity for a destination is *brand loyalty* which can be reflected in word-of-mouth recommendations and repeat visitations (Pike, 2007). Figure 3 shows the model developed by Pike (2007) that was used to measure customer based brand equity for a destination.

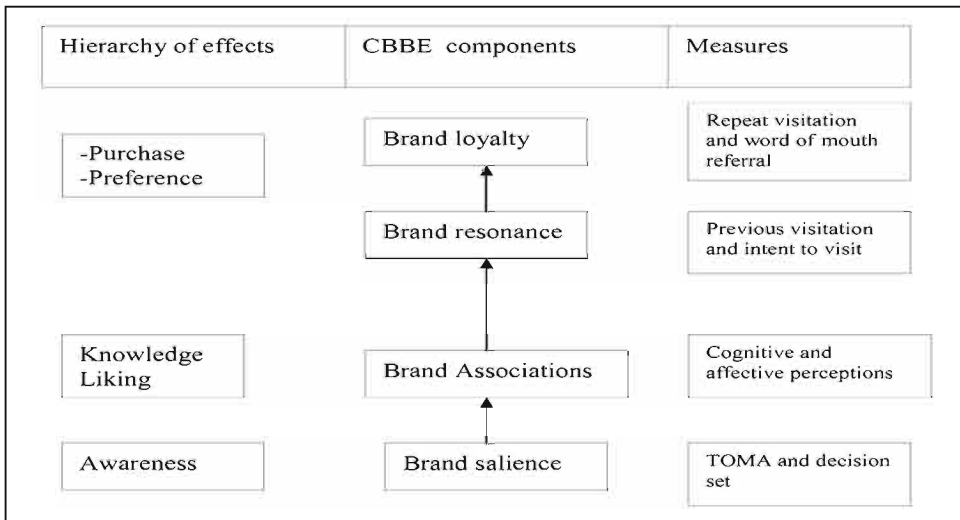


Figure 3. Customer-based brand equity for a destination

Sources: Adapted from Pike (2007).

Pike (2007) concluded that his findings support Keller's (1993) arguments that the CBBE hierarchy can be used to evaluate past performance as well as to predict the probability of future successful outcomes. As branding supports marketing communications, Keller (1993) believes that communication strategies should stress on creating positive brand salience and brand associations. To increase brand resonance, it is important to link the destination's attributes to the needs of the traveler, while a destination's ability to deliver the brand promise will lead to greater brand loyalty (Pike, 2007; Nam, Ekinci & Whyatt, 2011; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011).

Mediating Effect of CBBE of a Destination

Although previous studies suggest that destination competitiveness plays a mediating role in the relationship between the destination's CBBE and travel behaviour, other studies seem to support the argument that destination brand equity can also mediate the relationship between certain destination competitiveness attributes and travel behaviour.

A study by Echtner & Ritchie (1993) found that destination image can be measured using attributes along the 'functional/psychological' characteristics continuum. Functional characteristics include the more tangible or measurable characteristics of the destination such as the scenery, cost/price levels, and tourist attractions, while psychological characteristics are the more intangible or abstract attributes such as atmosphere, quality of service, fame and reputation. Examination of the summary of the destination image attributes compiled by Echtner & Ritchie (2003), as presented in Table 1, revealed that a number of the functional image attributes such as tourist sites/activities, national parks/wilderness activities, beaches, scenery/natural attractions, and nightlife are also used to measure destination competitiveness under the attribute of core resources and attractors.

As destination image is influenced by those attributes which are also used to measure destination competitiveness, and since destination image can be considered a pre-existing concept from which a destination brand is derived (Pike, 2009), it can be argued that destination brand equity is a mediator in the relationship between the two possible destination competitiveness components of 'functional' attributes (more tangible and measurable) and 'abstract' attributes (more psychological and less tangible).

Components of Destination Competitiveness

Review of the literature seems to indicate that the construct of destination competitiveness is most likely to be composed of two components; the first component of destination competitiveness consisting of the more 'functional' attributes is actually the antecedent of CBBE, while the second component of destination competitiveness

Table 1. Attributes used by researchers to measure destination image

▲	FUNCTIONAL (physical, measurable)
	Tourist sites/activities
	National parks/wilderness activities
	Beaches
	Fairs, exhibits, festivals
	Scenery/natural attractions
	Nightlife and entertainment
	Shopping facilities
	Facilities for information and tours
	Local infrastructure/transportation
	Cities
	Accommodation/restaurants
	Architecture/buildings
	Costs/price levels
	Climate
	Cleanliness
	Accommodation/restaurants
	Architecture/buildings
	Costs/price levels
	Climate
	Cleanliness
	Degree of urbanisation
	Economic development/affluence
	Extent of commercialisation
	Political stability
	Accessibility
	Personal safety
	Ease of communication
	Customs/culture
	Different cuisine/food and drink
	Hospitality/friendliness/receptiveness
	Restful/relaxing
	Atmosphere (familiar vs. exotic)
	Opportunity for adventure
	Opportunity to increase knowledge
	Family or adult oriented
	Quality of service
	Fame/reputation
▼	PSYCHOLOGICAL (abstract)

Source: Echtner & Ritchie (2003).

consisting of more 'abstract' attributes plays a mediating role between a destination's CBBE and travel behaviour. However, the literature also reveals a paucity of research to determine which attributes of destination competitiveness should be classified under the component of destination competitiveness I (functional attributes) and those that should be categorised under destination competitiveness II (abstract attributes) .

Methods

Classification of Destination Competitiveness Attributes Using Delphi Technique

Since there has been little research in the classification of the attributes of destination competitiveness into the components of either functional attributes or abstract attributes, a Delphi study was conducted to assist in the classification of those attributes into the relevant components of destination competitiveness. According to Kaynak & Macauley (1984), the Delphi technique is a suitable method to elicit and refine group opinion when there is a lack of exact knowledge.

The Delphi method can be used as a means to build consensus by collecting data through a string of questionnaires distributed to a selected panel of experts (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963; Dalkey, 1969; Young & Jamieson, 2001; Paraskevas & Saunders, 2012). Even though the Delphi method was originally developed as a forecasting tool, it can be adapted to generate consensus on a complex topic that requires the opinion of a panel of experts (Miller, 2001; Donohoe, 2011). Kaynak & Macauley (1984) emphasised that the Delphi technique is more of an analysis tool than a decision making tool, and therefore it is not supposed to provide a definitive result, but rather, it should be used to provide possible explanations, based on Delphi survey findings.

Advantages of the Delphi technique include the anonymity aspect for respondents which reduces pressure for group conformity, the reduction of influence of dominant respondents in a group discussion which can potentially distort the data, and a controlled feedback process which permits the participants to review their initial response which can be revised or modified if necessary (Dalkey, 1972).

The first-round questionnaire was sent to a panel of 12 experts comprising of associate professors, senior lecturers and lecturers in the fields of tourism marketing and also tourism industry practitioners. Since the aim of the study was to obtain a collective expert opinion, the panel was selected based on their knowledge and expertise on the research topic, and their ability to understand and answer the research questions (Fink & Kosecoff, 1985). According to Delbecq, Van de Ven & Gustafson (1975), a panel size of ten to fifteen experts should be adequate for a Delphi study if the experts come from a similar background. A total of eight responses were received within the time period allowed, resulting in a response rate of slightly over 66%.

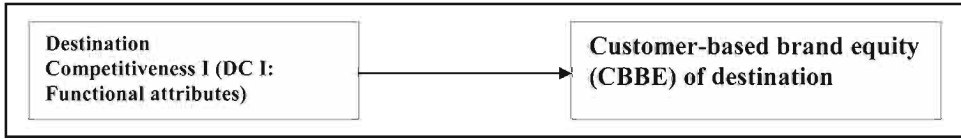


Figure 4. Destination competitiveness (DC I) influences CBBE

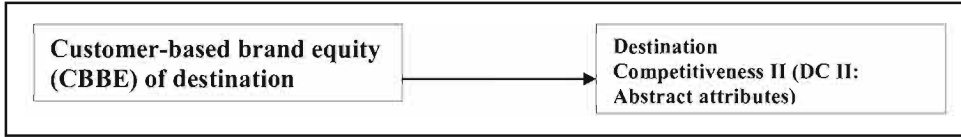


Figure 5. CBBE influences destination competitiveness (DC II)

The questionnaire provided a list of attributes used to measure destination competitiveness created by Enright & Newton (2004) and these attributes are grouped under the headings of: (1) Core Resources and Attractors, (2) Supporting Factors & Resources, (3) Destination Management, and (4) Qualifying & Amplifying Determinants.

Using their expert opinion, the panel was required to identify which of those destination competitiveness attributes (DC I) influence CBBE, and those destination competitiveness attributes (DC II) that are actually affected by CBBE. Figures 4 and 5 illustrates the possible relationships between DC I (Functional attributes), DC II (Abstract attributes), and destination’s CBBE.

They were requested to mark those competitive attributes with a ‘X’ in the appropriate column under DC I or DC II to indicate whether they believe that those attributes influence CBBE or they are actually influenced by CBBE. For example, if they think that the destination competitiveness attribute ‘cuisine’ influences CBBE, they should mark ‘cuisine’ with an ‘X’ in the column under DC I, or if they feel that the destination competitiveness attribute ‘international access’ is being influenced by CBBE, then ‘international access’ should be marked with an ‘X’ in the column under DC II as follows.

There is no fixed criterion for measuring consensus in a Delphi study and it varies from one study to another (Rayens & Hahn, 2000). Normally, consensus is

	DC I	DC II
<i>Core Resources and Attractors</i>		
Cuisine	X	
<i>Supporting Factors & Resources</i>		
International access		X

measured through frequency distributions (McKenna, 1994), and consensus is considered to be achieved when a minimum of 51% of the participants give the same response (McKenna, 1989). However, Green (1982), believed that a minimum of 70% of Delphi participants need to rate an item three or higher on a four-point Likert-type scale to indicate agreement. For this study, a 60% same response rate to a question was used as the criterion for consensus.

For those attributes which did not achieve a 60% consensus during the first round, a revised second-round or iteration questionnaire listing, only those 'undecided' attributes was sent out to the same respondents asking them to reconsider their opinion so as to achieve consensus among the panel.

Discussion

Based on the results of the Delphi-survey, the following competitiveness attributes were classified into either one of the two components of destination competitiveness consisting of either the functional attributes or abstract attributes as highlighted in Table 2.

Findings from the Delphi study indicate that all of that the attributes of the *core resources and attractors* such as Cuisine, Dedicated tourism attractions, Well-known landmarks, Different culture, Local way of life, Interesting architecture, Climate, Museums and galleries, Visual appeal, Nightlife, Interesting festivals, special events, Notable history, Music and performance belong to the functional attributes component.

Nearly all attributes of *Supporting Factors & Resources* such as Communication facilities, Good retail sector, Access to information, High quality accommodation international access and Internal transportation facilities were classified into the functional attributes component, except for one *supporting factor*, that is Government policy, which was put into the abstract attributes component.

Both the *Destination Management* attributes of Local managerial skills and Staff skills were categorised under the abstract attributes component while the attributes of *Qualifying and Amplifying Determinants* were separated into two components; Geographic location, Overall economic conditions, Costs of holiday, and Safety and Local currency rates were classified as functional attributes but the attribute of Political stability was categorised as an abstract attribute.

From the literature review, it can be seen that brand equity can significantly influence consumer behaviour in the form of greater possibility of brand selection, increased brand loyalty, reduced price sensitivity, and a willingness to pay more for the brand (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993; Pitta & Katsanis, 1995; Wood, 2000; Nam *et al.*, 2011;

Table 2. Classification of destination competitiveness attributes

Attributes of destination Competiveness I (Functional attributes)	Attributes of destination Competiveness II (Abstract attributes)
<i>Core resources and attractors</i>	<i>Core resources and attractors</i>
Cuisine	
Dedicated tourism attractions	
Well-known landmarks	
Different culture	
Local way of life	
Interesting architecture	
Climate	
Museums and galleries	
Visual appeal	
Nightlife	
Interesting festivals	
Special events	
Notable history	
Music and performance	
<i>Supporting factors & resources</i>	<i>Supporting factors & resources</i>
Communication facilities	
Good retail sector	Government policy
Access to information	
High quality accommodation	
International access	
Internal transportation facilities	
	<i>Destination management</i>
	Local managerial skills
	Staff skills
<i>Qualifying and amplifying determinants</i>	<i>Qualifying and amplifying determinants</i>
Geographic location	Political stability
Overall economic conditions	
Costs of holiday	
Safety	
Local currency exchange rate	

Ferns & Walls, 2012), and these actions inevitably lead to an increased competitiveness for the brand. However, there is also increasing evidence to support the view that certain destination competitiveness attributes can be the precursors for the development of a destination brand (Etchner & Ritchie, 2003; Pike, 2009).

Conclusion

Hence, it is reasonable to assume that the construct of destination competitiveness is most likely to consist of two components; one component of destination competitiveness (functional attributes) being the antecedent of CBBE while the other component (abstract attributes) is actually influenced by CBBE. Since there has been a paucity of research on the classification of destination competitive attributes into the components of functional or abstract attributes, a study using the Delphi method was conducted to help to achieve consensus in this complex issue.

Further research on this topic in the future can be extended to a quantitative study to determine the mediating effect of CBBE between the functional attributes and abstract attributes of destination competitiveness. Such a study will help to validate that there are indeed two components of destination competitiveness and also to ascertain the role of CBBE in the relationship between the functional and abstract attributes. Another area for suggested future research could be on the possible mediating influence of the abstract attributes of destination competitiveness in the relationship between CBBE and destination loyalty.

Limitations

The Delphi method used in this study was quite tedious and took up a substantial amount of time of the participants because it involved two rounds of survey which meant that the respondents had to fill in the questionnaires twice (some Delphi studies can take more than two rounds). This substantially increased the data collection time and it also discouraged more people from taking part in the study. There is also the possibility of some of the participants “giving in” to majority opinion after receiving feedback on the responses from the first iteration of the survey. Therefore, when conducting a study using the Delphi technique, it is important that issues such as the extended duration for data collection, adequate knowledge of research topic by the expert panel, unintentional influencing of the participants’ responses by researcher, and low response rate be carefully considered and factored into the research design.

References

- Aaker, D. (1991). *Managing brand equity*. New York: The Free Press
- Aaker, D. (1996). *Building strong brands*. New York: The Free Press.
- Blain, C., Levy S. E. & Ritchie, J.R.B. (2005). Destination branding: insights and practices from destination management organizations. *Journal of Travel Research* 43, 328.
- Cai, L.A. (2002). Cooperative branding for rural destinations. *Annals of Tourism Research* 29(3), 720-42.

- Crouch, G.I. & Ritchie, J.R.B. (1999). Tourism, competitiveness, and social prosperity. *Journal of Business Research*, 44, 137-52.
- Croes (2011). Measuring and explaining competitiveness in the context of small island destinations. *Journal of Travel Research*, 50(4), 431-442.
- Crouch, G.I. (2006). Destination competitiveness: insights into attribute importance. *International Conference of Trends, Impacts, and Policies on Tourism Development*, Hellenic Open University in Heraklion, Crete, June 15-18.
- Crouch, G.I. & Ritchie, J.R.B. (1999). Tourism, competitiveness, and social prosperity. *Journal of Business Research*, 44, 137-52.
- Crouch, G.I. (2006). Destination competitiveness: insights into attribute importance. *International Conference of Trends, Impacts, and Policies on Tourism Development*, Hellenic Open University in Heraklion, Crete, June 15-18.
- Dalkey, N.C. (1969). An experimental study of group opinion. *Futures*, 1(5), 408-426
- Dalkey, N.C. (1972). The Delphi method: An experimental study of group opinion. In Dalkey N.C., Rourke, D.L., Lewis, R. & Snyder D, (Eds.), *Studies in the quality of life: Delphi and decision making* (pp.13-54). Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Dalkey, N.C. & Helmer, O. (1963). An experimental application of the Delphi method to the use of experts. *Management Science*, 9(3), 458-467.
- Delbecq, A.L., Van de Ven, A.H. & Gustafson, D.H. (1975). *Group techniques for program planning*, Glenview, IL: Scott, Foreman, and Co.
- Donohoe, H.M. (2011). Defining culturally sensitive ecotourism: a Delphi consensus, *Current Issues in Tourism*, 14(1), 27-45.
- Dosen, D.O., Vranesivic, T. & Prebezac, D. (1998). The importance of branding in the development of marketing strategy of Croatia as tourist destination, *Acta Turista*, 10(2), 93-183.
- Dwyer, L. & Kim, C. (2003). Destination competitiveness: Determinants and indicators, *Current Issues in Tourism*, 6(5), 369-414.
- Dwyer, L., Mellor, R., Livaic, Z., Edwards, D. & Kim, C. (2004). Attributes of destination competitiveness: a factor analysis. *Tourism Analysis*, 9(1-2), 91-101.
- Dwyer, L., Cvelbar, L. K., Edwards, D. & Mihalic, T. (2012). Fashioning a destination tourism future: the cause of Slovenia. *Tourism Management*, 33(2), 305-316.
- Echtner, C.M. & Ritchie, J.R.B. (1993). The measurement of destination image: an empirical assessment. *Journal of Travel Research*, 31(3), 3-13.
- Echtner, C.M. & Ritchie, J.R.B. (2003). The meaning and measurement of destination image. *The Journal of Tourism Studies* 14(1), 37-48.
- Enright, M.J. & Newton, J. (2004). Tourism destination competitiveness: a quantitative approach. *Tourism Management*, 25, 777-788.

- Enright, M.J. & Newton, J. (2008). Determinants of tourism destination competitiveness in Asia-Pacific: Comprehensiveness and universality. *Journal of Travel research*, 43(5), 339-350.
- Ferns, B.H. & Walls, A. (2012). Enduring travel involvement, destination brand equity, and travelers' visit intentions: A structural model analysis. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 1(1-2), 27-35.
- Fink, A. & Kosecoff, J. (1985). *How to conduct surveys: A step-by-step guide*. London, U.K., Sage Publications.
- Gartner, W.C. (1994). Image formation process. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 2(2), 191 – 216.
- Gartner, W.C. & Ruzzier, M.K. (2011). Tourism destination brand equity dimensions: renewal versus repeat market. *Journal of Travel Research*, 50(5), 471-481.
- Green, P.J. (1982). The content of a college-level outdoor leadership course. Paper presented at the *Conference of the Northwest District Association for the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance*, Spokane, WA.
- Heath, E. (2003). Towards a model to enhance destination competitiveness: A Southern African perspective. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 10(2), 124-141
- Hsu, C., Oh, H. & Assaf, A. (2012). Customer-based brand equity model for upscale hotels. *Journal of Travel Research*, 51(1), 81-93.
- Im, H.H., Kim, S.S., Elliot, S. & Han, H. (2012). Conceptualising destination brand equity dimensions from a consumer-based brand equity perspective. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 29, 385-403.
- Kaynak, E. & Macauley, J.A. (1984). The Delphi technique in the measurement of tourism market potential: The case of Nova Scotia. *Tourism Management*, 5, 87-101.
- Keller, K. (1993). Conceptualising, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), 1-22.
- Keller, K.L. (2003). *Strategic brand management: Building, measuring, and managing brand equity* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Keller, P. & Smeral, E. (1997). Increased international competition: new challenges for tourism policies in European countries. *WTO/CEU-ETC Joint Seminar: Faced with Worldwide Competition and Structural Changes, What are the Tourism Responsibilities of European Governments*, Salzburg, Austria (9-10 April), pp 1-24.
- Konecnik, M. & Gartner, W. (2007). Customer-based brand equity for a destination. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 34(2), 400-21.
- Kotler, P. & Gertner, D. (2002) Country as a brand, product, and beyond: a place marketing and brand management perspective. *Journal of Brand Management*, 9(4/5), 249-61.

- Kozak, M. (1999). Destination competitiveness measurement: analysis of effective factors and indicators, *European Regional Science Conference (ERSA) papers*, p. 289. Retrieved from <http://www.sre.wu-wien.ac.at/ersa/ersaconfs/ersa99/Papers/a289.pdf>.
- Kozak, M. & Rimmington, M. (1999). Measuring destination competitiveness: conceptual considerations and empirical findings. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 18(3), 273-283.
- McKenna, H.P. (1989). The selection by ward managers of an appropriate nursing model for long-stay psychiatric patient care. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 14, 762-775.
- McKenna, H.P. (1994). The Delphi approach: A worthwhile research approach for nursing? *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 19, 1221-1225.
- Miller, G. (2001). The development of indicators for sustainable tourism: Results of a Delphi survey of tourism researchers. *Tourism Management*, 22(4), 351-361.
- Nam, J., Ekinci, Y. & Whyatt, G. (2011). Brand Equity, brand loyalty, and consumer satisfaction. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 38, 1009-1030.
- Otto, J. & Ritchie J.R.B. (1995). Exploring the quality of the service experience: a theoretical and empirical analysis. *Advances in Services Marketing and Management*, 5, 37-61.
- Paraskevas, A. & Saunders, M.N.K. (2012). Beyond consensus: an alternative use of Delphi enquiry in hospitality research. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 24(6), 907-924.
- Pike, S. (2007). Consumer-based brand equity for destinations: Practical DMO performance measures. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 22(1), 51-61.
- Pike, S. (2009). Destination brand positions of a competitive set of near-home destinations. *Tourism Management*, 30(6), 857-866.
- Pike, S., Bianchi, C., Kerr, G. & Patti, C. (2010) Consumer-based brand equity for Australia as a long-haul destination in an emerging market. *International Marketing Review*, 27(4), 434-449.
- Pike, S. & Masson, R. (2011). Destination competitiveness through the lens of brand positioning: the case of Australia's sunshine coast. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 14(2), 169-182.
- Pitta, D.A. & Katsanis, L.P. (1995). Understanding brand equity for successful line extensions. *Journal of consumer marketing*, 12(4), 51-64.
- Porter, M.E. (1980). How competitive forces shape strategy. *The McKinsey Quarterly*, Spring, 34-50.
- Porter, M. E. (1990). *The competitive advantage of nations*. New York: Free Press.
- Pritchard, A. & Morgan, N.J. (1998). Mood marketing-the new destination branding strategy: a case of Wales, the brand. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 4(3), 215-229.

- Qua, H., Kim, L.H. & Im, H.H. (2011). A model of destination branding: integrating the concepts of the branding and destination image. *Tourism Management*, 32(3), 465-476.
- Rayens, M.K. & Hahn, E.J. (2000). Building consensus using the policy Delphi method. *Policy, Politics & Nursing Practice*, 1(4), 308-315.
- Reichheld, F.F. (1996). *The loyalty effect*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Ritchie J.R.B. & Ritchie, R.J.B. (1998). The branding of tourism destinations : Past Achievements and Future Challenges. *Proceedings of Annual Congress of the International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism (AIEST)*, Marakesh, Morocco, pp. 89-116.
- Ritchie B. & Crouch, G. (2000). The competitive destination: A sustainability perspective. *Tourism Management*, 21(1), 1-7.
- Ritchie, J.R.B. & Crouch, G.I. (2003). *The competitive destination; A sustainable tourism perspective*. Wallingford, UK: CABI Publishing.
- Tourism Malaysia Corporate website (2012) Retrieved from: www.tourismmalaysia.gov.my/corporate/research.asp?page=facts_figures .
- Usakli, A. & Baloglu, S. (2011). Brand personality of tourist destinations: An application of self-congruity theory, *Tourism Management*, 32(1), 114-127.
- Wood, L. (2000). Brands and brand equity: definition and management. *Management Decision*, 38(9), 662-669.
- Woodside A. & Lysonski, S. (1989). A general model of traveler destination choice. *Journal of Travel Research*, Spring, 8-14.
- Woodside, A. & Sherrell, D. (1977). Traveler evoked, inept, and inert sets of vacation destinations. *Journal of Travel Research*, 16(1), 14-18.
- Young, S.J. & Jamieson, L.M. (2001). Delivery methodology of the Delphi: A comparison of two approaches. *Journal of Park & Recreation Administration*, 19(1), 42-58.