The Effects of Destination Competitiveness and Tourist Trust on Destination Advocacy: The Case of International tourists*

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Abstract

The tourism industry is broadly considered as a key component of economic growth and development. While many studies have shown how tourists evaluate their attitudes toward trip experience, little is known about significant components of destination competitiveness in the international context. This study aims to demonstrate the causal effects of destination competitiveness and tourist trust on destination advocacy in the international tourist context, and to explore the mediating effects of tourist trust on the relationship between destination competitiveness and destination advocacy. The data was collected from 603 international tourists and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling analysis (SEM).The research findings indicate the following: (1) that destination competitiveness has a significant impact on tourists' trust; (2) that destination competitiveness has a direct impact on destination advocacy; (3) that the impact of tourist trust on destination advocacy reveals the highest direct effect with a standardized coefficient of .83; (4) that tourist trust mediates the relationship between destination competitiveness and destination advocacy. The research findings can help all sizes of tourist business operator establish marketing programs to foster tourism business sustainability.

Keywords: destination competitiveness; tourist trust; destination advocacy

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1. Introduction

It is important for tourism businesses and governments to focus on their country's competitive position and strengths and weaknesses in order to increase tourism and boost economic growth (Dwyer et. al., 2000). In the context of globalization and increasing destination competition between tourist organizations and destinations, it is essential to find ways of differentiating specific and composite products to be successful (Mendes et al, 2010). Destination attributes (e.g. cultural, natural, and social resources, facilities, infrastructure, and services) are considered as the main components of the success of a tourist destination in the tourism system. Tourists require a variety product or destinations to achieve tourism development goals (Gunn, 1994). The importance of destination competitiveness is understood as essential in the tourism literature, and marketing planning has attempted to build trust and advocate for destinations with tourists (Deegan, 2005). The on-going competition between destinations, cities and countries in their attempts to attract international tourists serves to increase the popularity of destination competitiveness in academic circles.

Of the recent studies on tourism advocacy, Beritelli (2011) argues that the individual factor is currently needed to improve tourism advocacy. Other studies have focused on destination image as the antecedent of tourist trust and destination advocacy (Beerli, 2004; Jalilvand, 2012; Setiawan, 2014), although the results were unable to refer to the tourists' own attitudes, and instead could only describe the destination characteristics. There is therefore a lack of studies discussing the causal relationship between destination competitiveness, tourist trust and destination advocacy. However, in the service industry, Susanta et al. (2013) found no steady influence of customer trust on customer advocacy. Accordingly, an empirical study of destination competitiveness (i.e. core resources, supporting resources, destination management, and situational conditions) on tourist trust and destination advocacy in international destinations has yet to be undertaken.

The objective of this study is to examine the relationship of destination competitiveness and tourist trust on destination advocacy. The study also aims to confirm the content and construct validity before analyzing and exploring the causal relationships. Furthermore, the present study expands understanding of destination competitiveness and improves the comprehension of the managerial implications for those managing and investing in tourist destination.

2. Literature Review

The tourist destination has led academics and researchers to reconsider traditional tourism theories and concepts, which predominantly relate to supply aspects and the economic impacts on tourism destinations (Hall et al., 2004). Seaton and Benett (1996) viewed a destination as a place where people seek accommodation, transport, food, and amusement. From a supply-side perspective, a tourist destination is a place with concentrated tourism offers (Mika, 2012). Meanwhile, Cooper et al. (1998) recognized a tourist destination as an area with services and facilities focused on fulfilling the needs of tourists. Hu and Ritchie (1993) define a tourist destination as "a package of tourism facilities and services, which like any other consumer products, is composed of a number of multi-dimensional attributes". The economic benefits of the growth of a tourist destination can be understood through quantitative characteristics, such as the number of tourists, total tourist expenditure and business growth rates (Mika, 2012).

2.1 Destination Competitiveness

The concept of competitiveness involves an interactive process of institutional, political, and social change. Competitiveness is a broad concept and which can be remarked to different perspectives. Feurer and Uysal (1994) defined competitiveness as "the ability to retain the competitive position of an organization by satisfying the expectations of customers and shareholders while constantly eliminating the threats and exploiting the opportunities which arise in the competitive environment". Newall (1992) instead viewed competitiveness as "producing more and better quality goods and services that are marketed successfully to consumers". Competitiveness can therefore generate and sustain organizational profits through continuous organizational capability improvement.

Competitiveness in the tourism literature has been defined as a "destination's ability to create and integrate value-added products that sustain its resources while maintaining market position relative to competitor" (Hassan, 2017). From a micro perspective, competitiveness can be observed as a firm-level phenomenon. Barney (1991) explained that the sustainability of a company's competitiveness is based on its implementation of a value-creating strategy which potential customers are unable to duplicate. From a macro perspective, the main concerns relate to increasing real incomes nationally (Mechinada et al., 2010). In the present study, an international tourist perspective is used to explore destination, with destination competitiveness defined as the national ability to sustain national or destination competitive advantages to meet the expectations of international tourists while continually creating opportunities and capabilities within a competitive tourist environment.

Destination competitiveness for international tourists consists of four key components which relate to competition between destinations: 1) the existing environment (endowed core resources and created core resources), 2) turning tourism into a leading sector (supporting resources), 3) strengthening marketing distribution channels (destination management), and 4) building a dynamic private sector (situational conditions) (Poon, 1993). The model represents the main elements of destination competitiveness adopted by Dwyer and Kim (2000). The present study applied the framework developed by Dwyer and Kim (2000) and examines the causal analysis using data from international tourists in Bangkok, Thailand. The four elements of destination competitiveness are described as follows.

2.1.1 Core Resources

Core resources are the primary elements of destination appeal which can motivate visitors to go to a destination. Core resources are also defined as the fundamental factors that prospective travelers use to select one destination over the others (Aschalew and Gedyon, 2015). Core resources include the sustaining and maintaining national resources such as national, social, cultural, and heritage resources. Those resources can be tangible heritage, including the physical geography and climate, cultural and historical sites, as well as the national transport infrastructure. Core resources can also be intangible resources, such as languages, performing arts, rituals, festive events, social practices, or the knowledge and skills necessary to create traditional crafts (Aschalew & Gedyon, 2015; Dwyer & Kim, 2010; Hanafiah et al., 2016).

2.1.2 Supporting Resources

Supporting resources are described as one of the most important supporting factors, since even destinations with an abundance of core resources must develop and establish supporting resources a foundation for the tourism industry (Aschalew and Gedyon, 2015). The general factors of supporting resources include destination infrastructure, accessibility, and the quality and availability of local services (Dwyer and Kim, 2010). Supporting factors and resources include both public and private complementary resources, such as the accessibility of tourism resources (taxis, rental services), financial institutions (ATMs and card payment facilities), hotel availability and accommodation services, sanitation and hygiene standards, and various areas other public services (Dwyer & Kim, 2010; Hanafiah et al., 2016; Mechinda et al., 2010; Wondowossen et al., 2014).

2.1.3 Destination Management

Destination management includes the business activities of destination companies, marketing management, human resource management, and business policies. Destination management is also related to government activities, including environmental management and destination policy, planning and development (Ritchie and Crouch, 2000). Destination management can refer to activities which are implemented on a daily basis, or the policy framework established under the destination's public policy. Destination management also relates to the responsibility of the public and private sector, including the quality of the education system, the availability of qualified staff and skilled labor, government prioritization of the tourism sector, the availability of travel and tourism information, destination marketing and brand management, and the stringency of environmental regulations (Aschalew & Gedyon, 2015; Dwyer & Kim, 2010; Hanafiah et al., 2016). Destination management organizations include visitor and convention centers, and also national and regional tourist organizations which are responsible for ensuring the entire destination products and services by use of incentives and policies (Buhalis, 2000).

2.1.4 Situational Conditions

Situational conditions are factors in the external environment that affect the destination competitiveness. Situational conditions can include both opportunities and threats to the tourism business and this category also relates to the social, economic, cultural environmental, governmental, political, technological, and competitive trends that influence how business organizations operate in the specific destination (David, 2001). This factor includes influences from the broader environment, beyond the destination environment to include the influence of the tourists' home countries which can affect destination competitiveness, including demanding situations (home country environment), regulations, festivals, events, and special activities (destination environment), and political challenges (home country, destination, and the global environment) (Aschalew & Gedyon, 2015; Dwyer & Kim, 2010; Hanafiah et al., 2016; Wondowossen et al., 2014).

2.2 Tourist Trust

Trust is built upon the basis of past experiences and end results. Positive end results increase trust, while negative end results will instead result in decreased trust (Deutsch, 1958). Brand trust concerns customer feelings of security after interacting with a brand, and customer trust is based on how the brand is perceived to be reliable and the company's responsibility for consumer interests and welfare (Upamannyu et al., 2013). Trust in a business context is defined as a key part of developing a long-term business strategy, and is considered to be a

highly significant tool to enhance company and customer relationship (Alrubaiee, 2012). Chen and Mau (2009) discuss that customer trust in a company can be defined as a belief that a particular company will work to produce positive results for the customer. Trust is a noticeably important factor in the development of relationship marketing, yet trust continues remains a challenging concept to define in different contexts (Goudge & Gilson, 2005).

In tourism research, a destination is considered as a place or an attraction which is intended to be the end-point of a journey, is dependent to a geo-political boundary, and differentiated from other areas or destinations. For destination trust, the trusted entity is not a brand or a person, but is instead an area. In this study, destination trust is defined as a tourist's willingness to be open to visiting a specific destination due to their expectations that the destination will provide the positive outcomes. In previous studies, trust has been recognized as a crucial predictor of travel intention. A number of researchers have studied the role of destination trust in the travel decision-making process in different settings, such as online travel bookings (Agag & El-Masry, 2016), the medical tourism industry (Rahila & Jacob, 2017), trust building in local destinations (Ryglova et al, 2018), and holiday tourism in international destination (Mechinada et al., 2010; Muala, 2017). Trust is therefore considered as a key variable in the decision making processes, and particularly in leisure tourism.

2.3 Destination Advocacy

Advocacy is the willingness of consumers to admire and give strong recommendations to their friends and family on behalf of a product or a service provider (Harrison, 2001). Customer advocacy behavior is defined as a consumer's promotion or defense of a product, brand, or company to others (Bendapudi & Leonard, 1997). Prospective customers typically consider information from peers and even strangers leaving internet comments as less biased and more reliable than information offered by companies (Brown & Peter, 1987). Improving consumer advocacy requires businesses to learn about and develop relationships with their consumers to persuade them to become better advocates for consumer needs. But companies which lack superior products and are unable to attract customer attention must focus on relationship strategies (Urban, 2004).

In tourist research literature, destination advocacy behavior can take the form of sharing or referring a specific leisure destination with their family and friends. Destination advocacy can also come through them taking their friends or family members to experience a specific leisure destination. From a macro perspective, nation branding is becoming more common as nations seek to rapidly develop their own image and enhance their country's

position in the global tourism market. A national brand can strengthen the travelers' needs and generate economic benefits through increased tourism revenues and direct foreign investment (Lurham, 1998).

2.4 Hypotheses Development

The existing literature often shows that destination competitiveness plays a significant role in building trust. The findings of previous tourism research suggest that destination competitiveness produces greater tourist trust (Lee et al., 2005; Loureiro & Gonzalez, 2008; Su et al., 2017). Lee et al. (2005) purposed that individuals who consider destination competitiveness are likely to have a positive perception of tourists' trust, which in turn lead to a higher level of trust. Su et al. (2017) find that destination factors have a significant and positive impact on destination trust. This is consistent with Loureiro and Gonzalez (2008), who find that destination competitiveness acts as a direct antecedent of tourist trust. The hypothesis was formulated in the following statement:

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between destination competitiveness and tourist trust.

Muala (2017) and Mechinada et al. (2010) state that the most important antecedent of destination advocacy is destination competitiveness, with the core resources and destination management having the strongest effect on destination advocacy. Consistent with the results of Milman and Pizam (1995), Mechinda et al. (2010) find that destination competitiveness can influence tourist interests and their likelihood to return. In medical tourism, the relationship between destination competitiveness and destination advocacy has been evaluated from the perspective and significance of the structural path coefficients (Rahila and Jacob, 2017). Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed:

Hypothesis 2: There is a positive relationship between destination competitiveness and destination advocacy.

A number of studies have attempted to investigate the relationship between consumer trust and advocacy using path analysis with Structural Equation Model (SEM). These studies include the impact of trust on customer advocacy in hospitals (Afridi and Khattak, 2015) and in telecommunication services (Roy et al, 2014). The path analysis in the two studies found that the significance of customer trust on customer advocacy had a path coefficient value of 0.73 and 0.25 (Std. β=0.73, 0.25; p=0.00) respectively. Similarly, Kim and Cha (2002) used trust as an indicator of hospitality-based relationship finding that relationship quality had a positive impact on word-of-mouth communication and repurchase intentions. In tourism studies, Loureiro

and Gonzalez (2008) conducted an exploratory tourism research project among rural tourists at popular rural accommodations in two border regions of Spain and Portugal. Their findings confirm that tourist trust had a positive influence on destination advocacy. Meanwhile, Su et al. (2017) studied the relationship between trust and destination advocacy among domestic tourists at a World Heritage Site in China, investigating the relationship between trust and destination advocacy, finding that destination trust influences destination advocacy. The present study specifically looks at tourist trust and its impact on destination advocacy. The hypothesis was postulated in the following statement:

Hypothesis 3: There is a positive relationship between tourist trust and destination advocacy.

2.5 Mediating Effects of Tourist Trust

Previous studies argue that a direct or indirect relationship exists between destination competitiveness and destination advocacy. Some researchers report that tourist trust is likely to affect destination advocacy as mediators. According to the study of Walz and Celuch (2010), customer trust is a mediator between brand competitive and customer advocacy in retailer literature. Rahila and Jacob (2017) have examined the effect of the mediating variable (tourist trust) on customer advocacy in medical tourism. Destination competitiveness plays a significant role in building trust, which has both direct and indirect effects on destination advocacy. Meanwhile, tourist trust is an important driver and mediator of advocacy. However, this relationship has rarely been examined in the context of international tourism. In mediation concept, we assume that destination competitiveness is a crucial element affecting tourist trust, which is likely to affect destination advocacy. Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed:

Hypothesis 4: Tourist trust mediates the relationship between destination competitiveness and destination advocacy.

3. Research Method

3.1 Sample and Data Collection

Bangkok is used as the study area in this research, which is the most popular city for international travelers (MasterCard, 2018) and the capital city of Thailand. Employing a cross-sectional survey design, data was collected from international tourists arriving in Thailand via self-administered questionnaires. Sample size requirements for Structural Equation Models (SEM) have been suggested by Hair et al. (2010) that the samples per estimated parameter should be greater than 10 times. However, there is no correct sample in the absolute condition, and larger respondents are always preferable (Raykov and Marcoulides, 2000). By

using the ratio of 10:1 as suggested by Hair et al. (2010), convenience sampling was used to obtain a representative sample of 640 international tourists. A total of 603 samples were valid and usable for subsequent analysis, giving a response rate of 94 percent. Data was gathered between November and December 2018 at famous attractions along the Chao Phraya River in Bangkok. The respondents were given around 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Besides demographic data, the questionnaire was comprised of 38 questions about destination competitiveness (21 items), tourist trust (8 items), and destination advocacy (9 items).

3.2 Development of Measures

The variables in this research were adapted from previous research, with some minor modifications. In term of the exogenous constructs, this research modifies and combines the scales produced by Aschalew and Gedyon (2015), Hanafiah et al. (2016), and Wondowossen et al. (2014) to create a 21-item scale for destination competitiveness. This study also adapts the scales of Lau and Lee (1999), and Su et al. (2017) to create an 8-item scale of tourist trust. Finally, destination advocacy was measured by using a 9-item scale which modified and combined the scales from Parrott and Danbury (2015), and Roy et al. (2014). For all scales the respondents had to express their level of agreement with a given statement using a seven-point Likert scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree). Demographic information was requested in the final part of the survey.

3.3 Pilot Test

A pilot test was conducted to identify and validate the construct measures. The pilot study used convenience sample to collect data from 101 international tourists in Bangkok. After the pilot study data was analyzed, the study instruments were revised and subsequently employed in the main study. One item for the questionnaire section on destination competitiveness (core resources) was considered to remove due to its poor reliability (item-to-total correlations<0.60). The 21 items on destination competitiveness therefore been decreased to 20 items.

3.4 Reliability Test and Convergent Validity

qA Cronbach's alpha test was employed to determine the reliability of the measurement items. Nunnally (1978) recommended that the cut-off point of a coefficient should be 0.50, with coefficients greater than 0.75 considered as a good indication of construct reliability. According to convergent cut-off criteria, Hair et. al. (2010) suggest factor loading or standardized loading estimates should be greater than 0.5. The average variance extracted (AVE) should be 0.5 or higher for thumb suggesting adequate convergence (Hair et. al., 2010). Meanwhile, construct reliability (CR), which is often used in conjunction with SEM models

should be 0.6 or higher, provided that the other indicators of the model's construct validity are good.

Table 1 summarizes the results of reliability and convergent validity test. All measured items were deemed to have an acceptable level of validity, with factor loadings between .856 to .934. All latent variables were found to be acceptable, with core resources (α = .927; AVE = .820; CR = .948), supporting resources (α = .933; AVE = .789; CR = .949), destination management (α = .944; AVE = .782; CR = .956), situational conditions (α = .931; AVE = .785; CR = .948), tourist trust (α = .970; AVE = .827; CR = .975), and destination advocacy (α = .972; AVE = .820; CR = .976). Therefore, the reliability and convergent validity are considered acceptable.

Table 1: Reliability Test and Convergent Validity

Latent variables/ Observed variables	Factor Loading (λ)	Cronbach's (α)	AVE	CR
Destination Competitiveness(DC)				
Core Resource (DCCR)		.927	.820	.948
DCCR1	.896			
DCCR2	.908			
DCCR3	.924			
DCCR4	.893			
Supporting Resource (TAE)		.933	.789	.949
DCSR1	.892			
DCSR2	.912			
DCSR3	.885			
DCSR4	.874			
DCSR5	.879			
Destination Management (DCDM)		.944	.782	.956
DCDM1	.892			
DCDM2	.884			
DCDM3	.886			
	.880			

DCDM4	.893			
DCDM5	.871			
DCDM6				
Situational Conditions (DCSC)		.931	.785	.948
DCSC1	.882			
DCSC2	.889			
DCSC3	.889			
DCSC4	.873			
DCSC5	.897			
Tourist Trust (TT)		.970	.827	.975
TT1	.892			
TT2	.894			
TT3	.910			
TT4	.922			
TT5	.926			
TT6	.934			
TT7	.914			
TT8	.884			
Destination Advocacy(DA)		.972	.820	.976
DA1	.918			
DA2	.915			
DA3	.899			
DA4	.929			
DA5	.912			
DA6	.922			
DA7	.859			
DA8	.934			
DA9	.856			

4. Results and Findings

4.1 Result of Descriptive Statistics

The demographic variables drawn from the respondent's demographic information were examined with descriptive statistics. Table 2 shows a total of 603 international tourists, 343 were female (56.9%) and 260 were male (43.1%). Meanwhile, 226 of the respondents were aged between 23 to 30 years (37.5%), 150 between 31 to 40 years (24.9%), 116 less than 22 years (19.2%), 43 between 51 to 60 years (7.1%), 39 between 41 to 50 years (6.5%), and 29 over 61 years (4.8%). In terms of employment, 286 were employed (47.4%), 121 self-employed (20.1), 108 students (17.9%), 54 retired (9%), and 34 unemployed (5.6%). Japanese was the most common nationality with 63 respondents (10.4%), then 52 Americans (8.6%), 50 Germans (8.3%), 44 Chinese (7.3%), 24 Malaysians (4.0%), 23 Indians (3.8%), 17 Koreans, and 330 others (54.8%). The type of travel included 255 travelling as a group (42.3%), 164 travelling with family (27.2%), 128 travelling solo (21.2%), and 56 travelling in other ways (9.3%).

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Respondents (n=603)

Demographics	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	260	43.1
Female	343	56.9
Age		
Less than 22	116	19.2
23-30	226	37.5
31-40	150	24.9
41-50	39	6.5
51-60	43	7.1
61 and over	29	4.8
Employment status		
Employed	286	47.4
Self-employed	121	20.1
Unemployed	34	5.6
Retired	54	9.0
Student	108	17.9

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Respondents (n=603)

Demographics	Frequency	%
Nationality		
Japanese	63	10.4
American	52	8.6
German	50	8.3
Chinese	44	7.3
Malaysian	24	4.0
Indian	23	3.8
Korean	17	2.8
Others	330	54.8
Travel types		
Group (friends/couple)	255	42.3
Single	128	21.2
Family	164	27.2
Others	56	9.3

4.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The properties of the six constructs (1. core resources; 2. supporting resources; 3. destination management; 4. situational conditions; 5. tourist trust; and 6. destination advocacy) in the initial model were first tested using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the relationships between the observed and latent variables. Anderson and Gerbing (1988) suggested that construct validity should be confirmed using confirmatory factor analysis before the structural equation model is analyzed.

After all the latent variables were validated, they were placed into a single complete construct to assess the model as a whole. The most commonly used fit index is the Chi-square test, which should be insignificant ($p > 0.05$, χ^2/d.f. < 5). Other common fit indices include the comparative fit index (CFI>0.90), the goodness fit index (GFI>0.90), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA<0.07), and root mean square residual (RMR<0.08) (Kline, 2005; Hair et al., 2010). The assessment of overall absolute fit indices was presented in Table 3, the absolute fit indices were found to be unacceptable (χ^2/d.f. = 6.144, p = .00, GFI =.689, CFI =.884, RMSEA =.092, and RMR =.090), and the initial model was rejected since it achieved GFI and CFI lower than 0.90, the RMSEA was higher than the critical value of 0.70, and the RMR was higher than 0.80. The modified model was subsequently assessed.

Table 3: Construct Validity Test (n=603)

Dimensions and Items	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.
Destination Competiveness (DC)			
Core Resource (DCCR)			
DCCR1 Natural landscape (e.g. natural scenery, environment, etc.)	1.000	-	-
DCCR2 Cultural and historical attractions.	1.034	.036	28.728
DCCR3 Wonderful sceneries at the destination.	1.041	.033	31.274
DCCR4 Unique and exotic local custom at the destination.	1.017	.036	28.728
Supporting Resource (DCSR)			
DCSR1 Various modes of transportations at the destination.	1.000	-	-
DCSR2 Telecommunication services.	1.073	.035	30.595
DCSR3 Easy access to banking and financial services.	.991	.035	28.459
DCSR4 Varieties of food and beverages to choose.	.955	.035	27.590
DCSR5 Varieties of shopping items and areas.	1.024	.037	27.875
Destination Management (DCDM)			
DCDM1 Clean environment at the destination.	1.000	-	-
DCDM2 User-friendly guidance.	1.018	.036	27.969
DCDM3 Environmental conservation.	1.011	.036	27.807
DCDM4 Security and safety at the destination.	.942	.033	28.250
DCDM5 The quality of services (hotel, restaurant, etc.).	1.008	.033	30.131
DCDM6 Multilingual signage at the destination.	1.034	.037	27.730
Situational Conditions (DCSC)			
DCSC1 Varieties of tourism activities or special events.	1.000	-	-
DCSC2 Overall reasonable prices at the destination.	.988	.035	28.565
DCSC3 Distance and travel time.	1.011	.037	27.589
DCSC4 Ease of entry to the destination (Visa/passport).	.991	.037	26.572
DCSC5 The good value for currency exchange rate.	1.052	.037	28.732

Table 3: Construct Validity Test (n=603)

Dimensions and Items	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.
Tourist Trust (TT)			
TT1 I trust this destination.	1.000	-	-
TT2 I feel that I can trust this destination completely.	1.026	.034	29.764
TT3 I feel secure when I visit this destination because I know that it will never let me down.	1.033	.033	31.369
TT4 This destination meets my expectations.	1.012	.030	33.908
TT5 This destination guarantees satisfaction.	1.032	.030	34.069
TT6 I feel confidence with this destination.	1.078	.031	34.620
TT7 I could rely on this destination to respond to my need.	1.053	.032	32.655
TT8 I believe that this destination is always remembered as my best interests in mind.	1.042	.034	30.293
Destination Advocacy(DA)			
DA1 I would recommend the destination to my friends or relatives.	1.000	-	-
DA2 I would encourage friends and relatives to visit the destination.	.957	.025	37.800
DA3 I would say positive things about my trip to other people.	.893	.025	35.477
DA4 I would suggest this destination to people if they want an advice.	1.013	.026	39.705
DA5 I would defend the destination when someone says something untrue about the destination.	1.019	.028	35.929
DA6 I would support my friends or relatives if they need information about the destination.	.966	.025	38.299
DA7 I would defend the destination when some says negative about it.	.865	.029	30.201
DA8 I think I made the right decision to visit the destination.	.954	.024	40.373
DA9 I would buy a local product from the destination in the future.	.932	.031	30.081

Absolute Model Fit Indices

Model	χ^2	*d.f.*	χ^2/ *d.f.*	*p-value*	GFI	CFI	RMSEA	RMR
Initial	3845.909	626	6.144	.000	.689	.884	.092	.090
Modified	596.935	162	3.685	.000	.911	.966	.067	.079

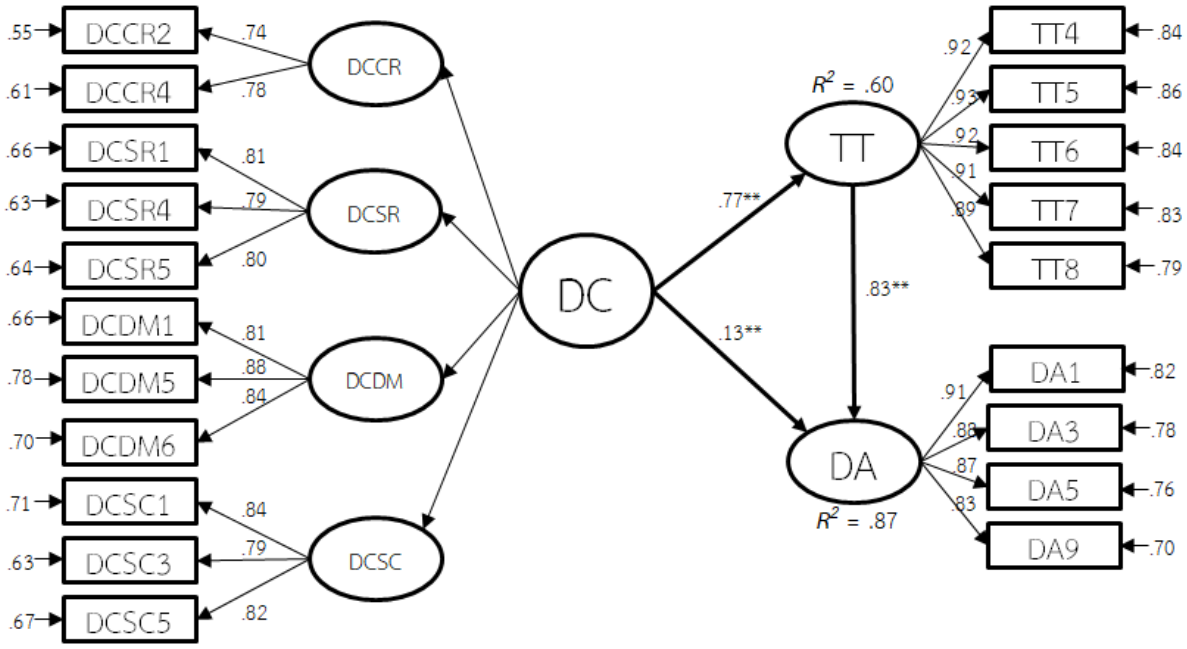
The modified model was assessed to improve the model. The modification index is an estimate or prediction of the decrease in Chi-square that will be obtained if that particular path is introduced in the model. Based on the adjusted model, the modification indices were revised by applying minimal modifications to the covariance between the items (Byrne, 2005). Seventeen observed variables were found to be redundant and subsequently removed, including "natural landscape" (DCCR1); "wonderful sceneries at the destination" (DCCR3); "telecommunication services" (DCSR2); "easy access to banking and financial services" (DCSR3); "user-friendly guidance." (DCDM2); "environmental conservation at the destination" (DCDM3); "security and safety at the destination" (DCDM4); "overall reasonable prices at the destination" (DCSC2); "ease of entry to the destination" (DCSC4); "I trust this destination" (TT1); "I feel that I can trust this destination completely" (TT2); "I feel secure when I visit this destination because I know that it will never let me down" (TT3); "I would encourage friends and relatives to visit the destination" (DA2); "I would suggest this destination to people if they want an advice for a trip" (DA4); "I would support my friends or relatives if they need information about the destination" (DA6); "I would defend the destination when some says negative about it" (DA7); and "I think I made the right decision to visit the destination" (DA8). The GFI value was above 0.9 and the RMSEA value was below 0.07, which indicated a good fit of the proposed model to the data. The modified model was therefore deemed acceptable.

4.3 Structural Equation Model

The structural model of this research sought to discover the causal relationship between destination competitiveness (DC), tourist trust (TT), and destination advocacy (DA). After examination, the overall measurement fit model and the modified model were deemed acceptable (Chi-Square = 596.935, d.f. = 162, Chi-Square per degree of freedom = 3.685, p=.000, goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = 0.911, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.966, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.067, root mean square residual (RMR) = 0.079).

The structural equation model results showed a causal relationship between the exogenous and endogenous variables. Destination competitiveness (DC) had direct effects on tourist trust and destination advocacy, which had completely standardized coefficients of .77 and .13 ($p<0.01$), respectively. Tourist trust had a direct positive effect on destination advocacy with a standardized coefficient of .83 ($p<0.01$).

Figure 1: Research Framework



Model	χ^2	*d.f.*	χ^2/ *d.f.*	*p-value*	GFI	CFI	RMSEA	RMR
Overall	596.935	162	3.685	.000	.911	.966	.067	.079

Table 4 shows that the direct effects (DE) on destination advocacy are destination competitiveness (DC) and tourist trust (TT) with standardized direct effects of .127 and .642, respectively. Destination competitiveness also had indirect effects (IE) on destination advocacy, with the standardized indirect effects of .642 (p=.000). The total effect (TE) of destination competitiveness and tourist trust were .769 and .832 respectively. The direct effect of destination competitiveness on tourist trust were .772, with this variable able to predict tourist trust with 60 percent (R^2 = 0.60). Through this analysis, the structural model was found to predict destination advocacy with 83 percent (R^2 = 0.83).

Table 4: Effects of Antecedents on Consequences

Antecedents	Consequences					
	Tourist Trust (TT)			Destination Advocacy (DA)		
	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE
Destination Competitiveness (DC)	.772	-	.772	.127	.642	.769
Tourist Trust (TT)	-	-	-	.832	-	.832

Note: DE = Direct Effect, IE = Indirect Effect, TE = Total Effect

4.4 Mediating Effects of Tourist Trust

Table 5 shows that the direct effect without mediator of destination competitiveness was significant with standardized coefficient of .768 (p=.001). According to the mediation effect analysis of classic causal step (Baron and Kenny, 1986), a direct link between the independent and dependent variables must be significant. Therefore, the mediating effect of tourist trust on the relationship of destination competitiveness and destination advocacy was further examined. The result also indicated that tourist trust partially mediated the relationship of destination competitiveness on destination advocacy with the standardized effects of .127 (p=.001).

Table 5: Mediation Test

Mediating effects	Direct effect without mediator	Direct effect with mediator	Results
DC → TT → DA	.768(p=.001)	.127(p=.001)	Partial mediation

4.5 The summary of Hypotheses Results

The results of structural model revealed that destination competitiveness (DC) had positive effects on tourist trust and destination advocacy, which had completely standardized coefficients of .77 and .13 ($p<0.01$), respectively. Therefore, Hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported. Tourist trust had a direct positive effect on destination advocacy with a standardized coefficient of .83 ($p<0.01$). Supporting Hypothesis 3. The mediating effect of tourist trust on the relationship of destination competitiveness and destination advocacy was found to be significant, and tourist trust partially mediated the destination competitiveness on destination advocacy. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was supported (Table 6).

Table 6: Hypotheses Summary

Hypotheses	Results
H1: There is a positive relationship between destination competitiveness and tourist trust.	Accepted
H2: There is a positive relationship between destination competitiveness and destination advocacy.	Accepted
H3: There is a positive relationship between tourist trust and destination advocacy.	Accepted
H4: Tourist trust mediates the relationship between destination competitiveness and destination advocacy.	Accepted

5. Conclusion and Discussion

While the need to manage destination advocacy has been proactively recognized within the tourism industry, its antecedents are not well understood. This present study merges the relationship between destination competitiveness, with tourist trust and destination advocacy in international destinations. Understanding this determination is essential given that advocacy is the main purpose of the sustainable tourism industry and that destination advocacy can significantly extend the efficiency and competitiveness of a destination's marketing effort. The results of the present study suggest that it is important to understand the destination competitiveness and the relationship between destination competitiveness and advocacy.

The empirical results concur with previous studies, such as Loureiro and Gonzalez (2008), Rahila & Jacob (2017), Su et al. (2017). A key finding of the present study is the positive and significant impact of destination competitiveness on tourist trust. For a World Heritage Site context (Su et al., 2017), supporting resources and destination management were found to be statistically significant predictors of tourist trust, although not for the holiday tourism in international destinations. The Chinese World Heritage Site in Su and Wall's (2012) study provides a good management structure, heritage education, infrastructure, and local community, which help build tourist trust and enrich the tourism attractions to encourage tourists to stay longer and spend more money (Huang, 2006). As Muala (2017), Rahila & Jacob (2017), Ryglova et al. (2018) note, destination competitiveness is an important factor for international tourists in perceiving destination advocacy. The results also show that destination competitiveness is related to building destination advocacy. This supports the results of Ryglova et al. (2018) who found that core resource (e.g. natural landscape and cultural and historical attractions) was the most significant dimension affecting destination advocacy.

Based on the relationship between tourist trust and advocacy in hospitals (Afridi and Khattak, 2015) and telecommunications services (Roy et al., 2014), with both studies finding that trust had a significant impact on customer advocacy. The results of the present support the empirical studies, finding that tourist trust had a significant and direct effect on destination advocacy (β=.832, p=.000). Consequently, the results further confirm previous tourism studies. For example, Muala (2017) found that the level of tourist trust in holiday tourism had a significant influence on destination advocacy. Trust is therefore an essential driver of destination advocacy, since trust builds an individual's confidence and contributes to a sustainable relationship between destinations and tourists (Rahila & Jacob, 2017). In addition,

the mediation effect of tourist trust on the relationship between destination competitiveness and destination advocacy has received little attention. The findings of this study confirm that trust is mediating variables between destination competitiveness and advocacy.

6. Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

These findings have several direct implications for the both public and private tourism sectors and tourism organizations, such as Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), Tourism Council of Thailand, travel agencies and tour operators. First, this study highlights the importance of destination attributes in order to emphasize more on destination advocacy. Advocates are those who not only spread positive words about the destination, but also praise the destination when talking to other people. Destination managers or marketers should focus on these key factors to meet tourist and customer expectations.

Secondly, the research findings can be linked to ongoing business relations between private organizations (e.g. hotels, event agencies, restaurants, and department stores) and local state sectors. Private organizations should not simply focus on providing services capability, prices or image, but they should also cooperate with local government sectors to promote tourist activities, unique customs, and events centered on local traditions. Together, these may help to improve the destination benefits.

Finally, the findings also state that tourist trust has an encouraging influence on destination advocacy. It is assumed that tourists who trust a destination will also feel more emotionally attached, likely to say positive things about their trip to others, and decide to return to the same destination in the future. Therefore, it would be useful to instill implant trust in tourists to sustain a long-term relationship between the tourist and destination.

Future research may seek to replicate this study either in other countries or for other tourism purposes to offer further evidence for the external validity of the empirical analysis. For example, future research may use a probability sampling technique to eliminate selection bias that is inherent in the convenience sampling technique used in the present study. With different experiences, the relationships proposed in the model can be tested by comparing groups of first-time visitors and repeat visitors. As Fakeye and Crompton (1991) note, many of the perceptual changes occur during a tourist's first direct experience rather than after multiple experiences or visits.

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