Journal of Marketing and Consumer Research
ISSN 2422-8451 An International Peer-reviewed Journal
Vol.93, 2024

The Effect of Tourism Service Marketing Mix on Tourist destination loyalty: The Mediating Role of Perceived Destination's Market Competitiveness in Ethiopia

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Abstract
The objective of this study is to investigate how perceived destination market competitiveness affects the relationship between the tourism service marketing mix and tourist destination loyalty, specifically in the context of Ethiopian tourist destinations that have transitioned from "involvement" to "consolidation" stages. The population of the study is all international tourists visiting various destinations with partulcar emphasis of Top 5 destination in Ethiopia. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed and 343 questionnaires were returned at the end of the data collection process and used for the subsequent statistical analysis, which gave the response rate of 86 percent. To analyze the research model, Partial Least Squares (PLS) technique using the SmartPLS 4 software has been used. To assess the measurement model two types of validity were being examined - first the convergent validity and then the discriminant validity. All Cronbach alpha coefficients are over 0.7, ranging from 0.709 to 0.760, indicating strong internal consistency, and are used to assess the items' unidimensionality in terms of reliability. The investigation's findings demonstrate that the following antecedents—accessibility, people, product, promotion, physical evidence, and process—showed a significant effect on destination tourist loyalty. Price, however, had no significant effect on tourists' loyalty to a destination. This study has also demonstrated that a destination's capacity to compete in the tourism industry is significantly impacted by three key elements of the marketing mix: promotion, physical evidence, and process. However, there was no significant effect of price, people, or accessibility on the destination's market's competitiveness. Destination's market competitiveness mediates the relationship between accessibility, people, price, process and promotion since the indirect effect estimates are higher than the direct effects estimates. However, physical evidence and product does not mediate the relationship between antecedent of marketing mix and tourism destination loyalty since the indirect effect estimates are lower than the direct effects estimates. Destination marketers should focus on variables which showed a significant effect tourist destination loyalty as well as Market competitiveness. Moreover, more research is required by destination researchers to determine why accessibility, population, or price did not significantly impact the competitiveness of the destination's market.

Key Words: Tourism marketing mix, Destination marketing, Destination market competitiveness, Destination loyalty. Destination choice
DOI: 10.7176/JMCR/92-02

Publication date: September 30th 2024

1. Introduction

Increased investment in tourist locations has led to increased worldwide competition for arrivals, since multiple destinations provide increasingly comparable tourism offerings (Dwyer 2015; Woyo 2018). Tourism contributes significantly to economic development (Amoah & Amoah, 2019). According to this viewpoint, several countries have developed policies, structures, and assistance for the tourism industry in order to boost their GDP and payment balance. Tourism is seen as a significant economic force that generates jobs, foreign exchange, income, and tax revenue for every country (Mwinuka 2017). The tourist business is growing, and marketing for tourism institutions is becoming increasingly important globally (Nqosa et al, 2019). Tourism and hospitality, whether as a service or commodity, can differ from a wide range of other existing services and goods. The increased marketing services mix components play an important role in the positioning phase (Getahun & Dhaliwal, 2017). Global tourist firms are experiencing rapid transformation as a result of market globalization and greater competitiveness (Ratten & Rodoula, 2010). To remain competitive, tourism firms must be aware of their customers' needs and wishes, as well as make prospective tourists aware of their offerings and persuade them via effective tourism marketing tactics.

The tourist business is a complicated network of independent providers dedicated to serving the consumer. A wide range of stakeholders are involved, many of whom have competing requirements, ambitions, and interests in the industry (Buhalis 2003). Five elements describe the overall tourism system: a traveller-generating region, a destination region, a transit region, the travel and tourism sector, and the external environment. The extended

framework incorporates the six "A's" that are seen as vital for examining tourism locations by focusing on tourism products and services. These include facilities, attractions, ancillary services, activities, available tourist packages, and accessibility (Buhalis, 2000). These "A's" indicate the destination's amalgamation within the target region, which includes amenities (hotels, restaurants, etc.), attractions (museums), ancillary services (e.g., health care), and activities. This demonstrates that tourism may greatly contribute to the economic growth of tourist sites by creating new job opportunities, improving infrastructure, and drawing foreign exchange revenues. Tourism appears to be a substantial, significant growth industry in the global economy. This industry could play an important role in improving a country's trade performance. As a result, several national governments have worked to increase their competitiveness in the global tourism sector. As a result, governments have begun to develop local groups aimed at promoting their destinations overseas (Faulkner, 1992).

According to the American Marketing Association (AMA), marketing is the process of creating, distributing, supporting, and pricing products, services, and ideas in order to promote customer-friendly exchange and establish and maintain positive interactions with stakeholders in a dynamic environment. Marketing identifies unmet needs, determines which target markets the firm can best serve, and makes decisions on appropriate products and services to fulfill the chosen markets (Nicolaides, 2018; Thwala & Slabbert, 2018). In general, tourism marketing is a subset of marketing that adheres to the same concepts.

Kotler and Armstrong (2007) described tourism marketing as the practice of balancing tourist requirements with the goals of a tourist organization or region. Tourism marketing is an activity that tourism institutions engage in to create, promote, deliver, and share products that provide value to clients, partners, and the community (Pomering et al, 2011). Tourism marketing activities are primarily concerned with the development of tourism products or services, as well as reasonable pricing policies to control tourism volumes between peak and recession seasons, a distribution channel to target markets, and the development of the tourism services package by integrating all tourism services (Hong, 2008).

The tourist industry has been very economically vital over the previous few decades, becoming one of the fastest growing segments in today's corporate environment. For example, in 2018, there were 1.4 billion international visitor arrivals (+6%), reinforcing 2017's outstanding results and making 2018 the second strongest year since 2010. The Middle East (+10%) and Africa (+7%) increased faster than the global average, while Asia, the Pacific, and Europe grew at 6%. The tourism business is seen as an important aspect of the world economy due to its ability to produce revenue and employment (Musavengane, Siakwah, & Leornard 2019; Woyo & Slabbert 2019).

A destination is a geographic location that includes all of the amenities and infrastructure required for the stay of a certain tourist or tourism sector. Destinations are the competitive units for inbound tourism. Destinations are thus an essential component of a tourism product. (WTO 1992; Bieger 1996). The destination life cycle provides insight into the evolution of tourism destinations and tourist products, allowing for a more strategic approach to tourism marketing. (Mason, P. 2008), destination marketing is a sort of marketing that promotes a certain destination. Understanding the roots and preceding growth stages of a place in tourism is critical for strategy building (Butler, 1980, pp. 5-12).

The model states that every destination has six stages of development in the destination life cycle, which are outlined below.

Table-1: Summary of the Six-Stage Destination Development Lifecycle

Stage	Characteristics
Exploration	Very low accommodation; capacity, few visitor numbers; Visitors are mainly attracted by natural facilities; Price for touristic services and prices are high; Tourists are perceived as a "guests"
Involvement	Market areas are approximately defined; Accommodation capacity is low, while occupancy levels are high; Prices for services considered as very high.
Development	Tourist stars to be perceived as "customers"; Development of additional tourism facilities and infrastructures; Number of tourists during peak seasons is more than capacity of accommodation
Consolidation	Tourism becomes the major part of economy; Prices for services are going down; The negative impact on ecology systems reach its peak
Stagnation	Peak number of tourist arrival has been reached; Destination is not considered fashionable; Local people perceives tourist as "foreigners"
Post-stagnation	The 2 scenarios are possible in this stage: rejuvenation or decline

Source: The stages of destination life cycle (Mason, P. 2008)

The destinations selected for this study in Ethiopia are currently situated in the transition period from ***"involvement" to "consolidation" stage based on expert's criteria***. Ethiopia is trying its best to benefit from mega events and national holiday's , religious festivities held in country for creating country image, promote the destination as well as it is a good opportunity to develop an infrastructure.

Because of the economic benefits of tourism, tourist destinations all over the world are increasing their investments in the industry to boost local economies (Reisinger, Michael, & Hayes 2018), including Ethiopia. Increased investment in tourist destinations has resulted in increased global competition for arrivals, as multiple places offer increasingly similar tourism products (Dwyer 2015; Woyo 2018). Worldwide competition requires destinations to ensure that they are competitive (Dwyer 2015); as a result, the importance of competitiveness on destination performance is rapidly increasing because Ethiopian tourism has enormous potential and resources that neither the government nor the private sector have fully exploited. Tourism growth is intended to benefit society because it is a key indication of Ethiopia's economic success.

Global competition is pressuring destinations to assure their competitiveness (Dwyer 2015); as a result of global and economic changes, the impact of competitiveness on destination performance is rapidly increasing (Ayikoru 2015; Dupeyras & MacCallum 2013; Dwyer 2015). Competitiveness is a complicated construct whose assessment has not been defined because it encompasses multiple factors (Dodds & Holmes 2020; Woyo 2018). Several different definitions are visible in the literature. According to D'Hauteserre (2000:23), destination competitiveness is 'the ability of a tourism destination to sustain its market position and share and/or build upon them across time'.

Dupeyras and MacCallum (2013) define destination competitiveness as: … the ability of the place to optimize its attractiveness for residents and non-residents, to deliver quality, innovative and attractive tourism services to consumers and to gain market shares in the domestic and global market places, while ensuring that the available resources supporting tourism are used efficiently and in a sustainable way. (p. 7).

There is a growing body of work on destination competition, indicating that academics are interested in this topic (Dodds & Holmes 2020; Kubickova & Martin 2020; Villa, Darcy & Gonzalez 2015; Woyo 2018; Zehrer, Smeral, & Hallmann 2017). Despite the expanding body of research on destination competitiveness, measuring it remains a challenge. More than 40 years of research have been conducted on brand loyalty and/or consumer loyalty. Jacoby and Chestnut (1978) trace its origins back to Copeland's (1923) research of a behavior he dubbed "brand insistence." Loyalty study is a relatively new phenomenon in the tourist, hospitality, recreation, and leisure industries, extending back around ten years (e.g., Backman and Crompton 1991a, 1991b; Pritchard and Howard 1997; Selin et al. 1988). Jacoby and Chestnut (1978) observed that two important assumptions concerning brand loyalty evaluation are commonly made.

A tourist destination's marketing mix is essentially made up of a complex set of variables that work together to generate the desired outcome, which should be the consequence of increased demand output effectiveness when compared to supply and marketing expenditures made by tourism-related enterprises. The marketing mix is crucial in assisting tourism sector stakeholders in identifying areas where they can launch marketing campaigns to increase demand for tourism products and improve acceptability (Bhatia, 2002). As a result, examining and completely comprehending each component of the marketing mix—which must be regulated and incorporated into well-planned marketing campaigns—is critical for marketing success.

To better understand how the tourism service marketing mix influences visitor destination loyalty at various Ethiopian tourist locations, this study sought to determine how destination competition mediates the relationship between the two.

In accordance with the aforementioned objectives, the following research questions were generated.

- RQ-1: what is the effect of marketing mix for tourism services on international tourists' destination loyalty?
- RQ-2: What is the extent to which the destination market's competitiveness is influenced by the marketing mix used for tourism services?
- RQ-3. Does Destination Marketing Competitiveness mediate the relationship between tourism service marketing mix and tourist destination loyalty?

2. Theoretical Review

A variety of theoretical frameworks and models help to understand competitive advantage. Competitive advantage is gained when an organization creates or acquires a set of characteristics that enable it to outperform its competitors. During the early period, there were two major conceptions of competitive advantage: the Market-Based View (MBV) and the Resource-Based View. The resource-based paradigm has also influenced the knowledge-based and capability-based perspectives on strategy. A more recent formulation, the relational view of strategy, has attracted a lot of attention. An even more recent idea presents a concept of fleeting advantage, which successfully challenges much of the prevailing wisdom.in this section The Market-Based View (MBV), The Resource-Based View (RBV), The Capability-Based View, The Knowledge-Based view, The Relational View of Strategy and Transient Advantage will be will be highlighted.

2.1 The Market-Based View (MBV)

The Market-Based View (MBV) of strategy contends that industry variables and external market orientation are the key drivers of business success (Bain 1968; Caves & Porter 1977; Peteraf & Bergen 2003; Porter 1980, 1985, 1996).Bain's (1968) Structure-Conduct-Performance (SCP) framework and Porter's (1980) five forces model (based on the SCP framework) are two of the most well-known ideas in this field. The sources of value for the firm are incorporated in the competitive environment that defines its end-product strategic position. A company's strategic position refers to its distinct set of operations that distinguish it from its competitors. In this view, a company's profitability or performance is wholly controlled by the structure and competitive dynamics of the industry in which it participates (Schendel 1994).

2.2 The Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View (RBV) focuses on the firm's internal environment as a source of competitive advantage and stresses the resources that firms have generated to compete in the environment. The RBV originated with Penrose (1959), who proposed that the resources possessed, deployed, and exploited by organizations are actually more essential than industry structure. The term ‘resource-based view' was coined considerably later by Wernerfelt (1984), who saw the firm as a collection of assets or resources that are semi-permanently linked to it. Prahalad and Hamel (1990) introduced the concept of core competencies, which focuses on a critical category of resource: a firm's capabilities. Barney (1991) also stated that a firm's resources are the major source of competitive advantage. Early researchers simply divided firm resources into three categories: physical, monetary, and human (Ansoff, 1965). These grew into more thorough descriptions of organizational resources (skills and knowledge) and technology (technical know-how) (Hofer & Schendel, 1978). Amit and Shoemaker (1993) offered an alternative taxonomy that includes physical, human, and technology resources and capacities.

2.3 The Capability-Based View

The Capability-Based View According to Grant (1991), capabilities generate competitive advantage, whereas resources generate capabilities. Amit and Shoemaker (1993) took a similar stance, arguing that a firm's capabilities, not its resources, contribute to its long-term competitive advantage. Grant (1996) defines organizational capability as 'a firm's ability to do a productive activity repeatedly, which connects either directly or indirectly to a firm's capacity for creating value through the transformation of inputs to outputs'. Haas and Hansen (2005), as well as Long and Vickers-Koch (1995), emphasized the relevance of capabilities, arguing that a firm's capacity to utilize its capabilities to conduct critical internal operations can provide a competitive advantage. The Capability-Based View According to Grant (1991), capabilities generate competitive advantage, whereas resources generate capabilities. Amit and Shoemaker (1993) took a similar stance, arguing that a firm's capabilities, not its resources, contribute to its long-term competitive advantage. Haas and Hansen (2005), as well as Long and Vickers-Koch (1995), emphasized the relevance of capabilities, arguing that a firm's capacity to utilize its capabilities to conduct critical internal operations can provide a competitive advantage. Amit and Shoemaker (1993) defined capabilities as 'a firm's ability to deploy resources, usually in tandem with organizational processes, to achieve a desired purpose. They are information-based, tangible or intangible processes that are unique to the firm and evolve over time as a result of intricate interactions among its resources. Teece et al. (1997) define dynamic capabilities as 'the firm's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external skills to handle dynamically changing circumstances'.

2.4 The Knowledge-Based view

The Knowledge-Based perspective regards knowledge as a generic resource; nevertheless, other scholars (Murray 2000; Teece et al. 1997; Tiwana 2002) argue that knowledge has unique qualities that make it the most significant and valuable resource. Hamel and Prahalad (1994) contend that knowledge, know-how, intellectual assets, and competences are the primary drivers of outstanding performance in the information era. Evans (2003)

and Tiwana (2002) also argue that knowledge is a firm's most valuable resource. Evans (2003) observed that when material resources are employed in a corporation, they drop, whereas knowledge assets expand. According to Tiwana (2002), technology, capital, market share, and product sources are easy for other enterprises to duplicate, however knowledge is the sole resource that is difficult to replicate. Grant (1996) proposed that there are two sorts of knowledge: information and know-how. Beckmann (1999) presented a five-level knowledge hierarchy, which included data, information, knowledge, expertise, and capabilities. Zack (1999) categorizes organizational knowledge into three types: core knowledge, advanced knowledge, and innovative knowledge. Core knowledge is the fundamental knowledge that allows a corporation to survive in the market in the near term. Advanced knowledge equips the firm with comparable knowledge to its competitors, allowing the firm to actively compete in the short term. Innovative information gives the company a competitive advantage over its competitors. Firms with innovative expertise can develop unique products or services, perhaps helping them become market leaders (Zack 1999).

2.5 The Relational View of Strategy

The Relational Perspective of Strategy Dyer and Singh (1998) proposed a relational view of competitive advantage, emphasizing dyad/network routines and processes as a key unit of analysis for understanding competitive advantage. The relational viewpoint challenges the RBV's notion that resources are owned by a single firm. According to Dyer and Singh (1998), a firm's key resources may extend outside its bounds. According to Dyer and Singh (1998), inter-firm links can provide relational rents as well as a competitive advantage. A relational rent is defined as 'a supernormal profit jointly generated in an exchange relationship that cannot be generated by either firm in isolation and can only be created via the joint idiosyncratic contributions of the unique alliance partners' (Dyer & Singh 1998). They identify four relational rents as sources of competitive advantage: (1) relation-specific assets, (2) knowledge-sharing routines, (3) complementary resources and competencies, and (4) good governance.

2.6 Transient Advantage

A recent proposal (McGrath 2013) made a compelling argument for challenging standard assumptions regarding the time span of strategy creation and execution procedures. Traditionally, strategies were developed with the expectation that they would govern the firm's activity for extended periods of time (months, if not years). Strategies would thus be revised/reformulated on an irregular basis. Given how the present corporate environment has evolved, options for gaining a competitive advantage are limited. This means that the strategy life cycle will need to be significantly shorter, with a quick response to changing market conditions.

2.7 Marketing Mix Strategy

Baloglu and Leung (2013) argue that in order to sustain its advantage and carve out a unique niche for it-self in the global tourist industry, a destination needs to remain competitive, considering the several competing theories of competitive advantage that have been explored thus far. It is important to comprehend how these locations are run when researching the tourism industry (Pike & Page, 2014). The fact that things change makes the concept of competitiveness true. For this reason, competitive strategies—that is, ways to compete in the global market—are essential for tourism destinations, managers, and industry players. UNWTO (2016) projects that by 2030; the tourism industry will have welcomed 1.8 billion visitors, growing at an annual pace of 3.3%. Success and prosperity in a destination depend heavily on its capacity to compete (Go & Govers, 2000; Gooroochurn & Sugiyarto, 2005; Mazanec et al., 2007). As a result, it is crucial that destinations comprehend what must be done to surpass rival locations. For destination marketers to stay globally competitive in the global tourist industry, they must thus modify their marketing mix strategy.

3 Empirical Literature Review

Kotler (2005) defined marketing as a social and managerial activity that facilitates the creation, provision, and exchange of commodities of value between individuals and organizations in order to satisfy needs and desires. This section will focus on the components of the tourism marketing mix, destination loyalty, and the function that destination competition plays as a mediator. Using the relevant statistical tools, hypotheses will be analyzed after being established on the basis of the literature review. According to Goodre (1997), a destination's ability to offer superior tourism experiences, commodities, and services in comparison to other locations seems to be connected with that destination's competitiveness. Destination competitiveness is defined as a destination's capacity to maintain its market share in comparison to that of its competitors (Craigwell, Worrell, and Smith, 2006). Furthermore, according to Crouch and Ritchie (2000), a destination's competitiveness is determined by a variety of assets, including infrastructure and methods for turning resources into profits (manufacturing), whether they are created or inherited. One can observe the concept of competitiveness through the six dimensions of strength and performance: economic, social, cultural, political, technological, and environmental

strengths (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). However, it is impossible to assess the competitiveness of the tourism sector from a single perspective because of its unique traits and cross-sectoral components.

Ritchie and Crouch (2003) state that a destination's ability to increase tourism spending, attract more visitors while providing them with rewarding, memorable experiences, and do so profitably—all while enhancing the quality of life for residents and preserving the destination's natural capital for future generations—is what truly distinguishes a destination as competitive. Melian Gonzalez and Garcia Falcon (2003) describe destination resources as strategic assets that determine the highest degree of activity that a destination can achieve. A location's ability to perform is based on its resources; they entice entrepreneurs who invest in infrastructure, increasing the destination's appeal to tourists and increasing its competitiveness.

The tourism marketing mix is a collection of promotional initiatives that are coordinated, enhance one another, and foster competition. According to Porter (1985), a company is considered competitive when it can give its clients a benefit over those of its rivals, such as lower costs for comparable products or better deals on rival brands' offerings. It's the capacity of an organization to compete with rivals in the same market for the same products and services and to develop skills on par with or better than those of rivals. In general, a location is considered competitive if it outperforms another in terms of market share, visitor numbers, profitability, or success. According to De Keyser and Vanhove (1994), competitiveness might be characterized, for example, as the destination's effectiveness in achieving its long-term objective on an international or regional scale. The destination can attain more profitability and the lowest social cost without endangering the state of the environment and resources thanks to the significance of long-term competitiveness.

3.1 Destination Marketing Mix /Tourism Marketing Mix Dimensions/ and Destination Loyalty

Ameur et al. (2015) researched and explored the characteristics of the marketing mix and its influence on customer loyalty in an Algerian travel and telecommunications company, and the findings offered favorable evidence for customer loyalty. According to Nyarko et al. (2016), the travel and telecommunications industries must focus on the marketing mix elements in order to provide, satisfy, and increase consumer loyalty. The marketing mix encompasses everything a company can do to influence consumer demand for its products (Kotler and Armstrong, 2008). According to Kotler, Philip (2007), the four Ps make up the marketing mix and have a significant impact on the sale of travel services. The marketing mix includes four components: place, price, promotion, and product. He included three additional Ps for industry and service groups. They are: individuals, physical evidence, and processes. This study focused on the seven Ps of the tourism marketing mix (Morrison, 1996), which are highlighted below:

3.1.1 Tourist Product and Destination Loyalty

A product is defined as anything that may be presented to a market for consideration, purchase, or use to satisfy a desire/need (George, 2014).Kotler (Kotler et al., 2015) defines a product as anything that may be provided to a market for acquisition, consideration, and use in order to satisfy desires or requirements (Kotler & Keller, 2006).The primary characteristics of tourism products (Gronroos, 1978; Maqablih and Sarabi, 2001): Attractiveness factors include natural attractiveness, cultural attractiveness, social attractiveness, and an abundance of tourist services and facilities. There are numerous tourist sites that impact tourists' decisions to visit any country and remain for an extended period of time. Climate, flora and animals, beautiful scenery, and mineral water are all examples of natural attractions (Maqablih and Deab, 2000). Cultural attractions include historical sites, museums, traditional arts, and festivals. Social attractiveness is focused with local people's way of life and kindness to tourists (Cooper et al., 1998; Abu Rahmah et al., 2001). Abundance of Tourist Services and Facilities - includes hotels, resorts, furniture housing, motels, and all of the tourists' needs for their stay, as well as various types of transportation for their journeys, restaurants for food and entertainment, and others such as tourism guides, gift shops, and traditional industry. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed in regard to this research:

H1: Product has a positive and a siginfanct effect on Tourist destination loyalty.

3.1.2 Tourism Product Pricing and Destination Loyalty

Price refers to the amount of money charged for purchasing and using a product or service (Fyall and Garrod, 2005). Markgraf (2015) contends that the price charged should correspond to the product. Price impacts a place's competitiveness against other destinations and includes transportation costs to and from the destination, lodging, food, attractions, and tour service charges (UNWTO, 2007). The pricing mix consists of the actual price charged by the firm, volume discounts, and discounted prices for multiple bundles of products (Reid and Bojanic, 2010), as well as pricing strategies such as the sale of package plans (comprising meals, room, and recreational facilities), non-peak period/off-season sales, group business, and longer stays (Devashish, 2011). Price refers to

the price that customers are willing to pay for the fulfillment of a demand, as well as the amount that the company is willing to accept to meet the need (George, 2014). Kotler and Armstrong (2007) defined price as the sum of all the values (money) exchanged by the consumer for interest, possession, or usage of the goods. Pricing is one of the most successful and crucial components of the marketing mix because it is the sole variable that creates revenue (Palmer, 2001). According to Kotler and Armstrong (2007), pricing refers to the amount of money that customers must pay to receive the product. Prices can be viewed as characteristics that must be simplified in order to obtain specific types of services or products (Kushwaha & Agrawal, 2015).Travel service packages, including pricing and value-added, require more attention, and researchers have used this relationship in many studies on various travel services (Almuhrzi & Alsawafi, 2017; Pourkhani et al., 2019). Price is a critical consideration in establishing an efficient destination marketing strategy. It must also be set in order to meet both client (tourist) satisfaction and destination marketing goals. Thus, the following theory is proposed:

H2: Price has a positive and a siginfanct effect on Tourist destination loyalty.

3.1.3 Tourist Accessibility and Destination Loyalty

According to Kotler (2007), the place (distribution) in tourism provides a guideline for diverse tourist destinations. The place (distribution) in tourism provides the proper tour time and distances from various locations, suggestions for different travel routes, attraction and support facilities along different travel routes, and educating potential tourists (customers) about alternative travel routes. Kotler and Armstrong (2010) described place/distribution as a set of interdependent enterprises that are tortuous in their approach to offering a product for usage. Davis-Sramek et al. (2008) defined the place as any location where a client can get a product or service (Owomoyela and Oyeniyi, 2013). Tourist Accessibility focuses on developing time, place, and ownership utilities for destination marketing. Darcy (1998) classifies the term "accesses" into three dimensions: physical access, sensory access, and communication access. Access should not be considered a difficulty in any of the three categories. Instead, access provision should be understood as an inclusive marketing process that allows tourism players to capitalize on the potential of 'accessibility' for selling tourist products and services to the broadest possible client base (Darcy, 1998). Previous research on the relationship between geography and consumer loyalty yielded conflicting results (Almuhrzi & Alsawafi, 2017). According to Godfrey and Clarke (2000), tour operators and travel agents are two of the most well-known intermediaries in the tourist sector.

H3: Accessibility has a positive and a siginfanct effect on Tourist destination loyalty.

3.1.4 Tourism Promotion and Destination Loyalty

The communication mix includes all interactions between the company and its customers (Reid & Bojanic, 2010). Communication is more closely related to where information about products and services is distributed, such as trade shows, web sites, resellers, direct mail, and tourist attractions (Reid and Bojanic, 2010; and Rodriguez, 2013).Promotion refers to the efforts made in various media and communication to display the territory's tourism brand in a clear and concise manner, capturing the attention of potential tourists and persuading them to visit the territory and purchase the tourism product (Dolan, 2002). Promotion is the activity of highlighting items or services to clients (Nuseir & Madanat, 2015). The marketing communication mix (Promotion mix) is the exact combination of advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations, and direct marketing instruments that a firm uses to achieve its advertising and marketing goals (Kotler 2007). Promotion is critical in developing client loyalty in the travel industry (Almuhrzi & Alsawafi, 2017). Promotion encompasses all vehicles used to inform people about a product or service. Therefore, we offer the following theory.

H-4: Promotion has a significant and positive effect on Tourist destination loyalty.

3.1.5 People and Destination Loyalty

Given the inseparability of tourism products, numerous stakeholders are involved in the buying and selling process: the consumer, other customers, and the firm's service professionals (Zeithaml et al. 2006). People are individuals that provide services to clients, either directly or indirectly, and have a big impact on how well customers accept the service (Sadq et al, 2016). Customer service representatives must prioritize personal attention, interpersonal care, readiness to assist, politeness, and promptness in order to dramatically improve customer-employee interactions (Kushwaha & Agrawal, 2015). It is commonly recognized that the modern industry is based on human resources rather than capital. As a result, while exact outcomes vary depending on the service provided, personnel in the tourism business have positive and significant links with customer loyalty (Almuhrzi and Alsawafi, 2017; Tayebi et al., 2019). According to Kotler (2007), the hospitality industry focuses on people's conduct, quality control, and personal marketing. Zeithaml et al. (2006) identified individuals as essential stakeholders, including customers, other customers, and company personnel who actively participate in

the purchase and sale of tourism products. Reid and Bojanic (2010) state in their study that personnel attitude, expertise, and appearance are vital in ensuring overall satisfaction (Amin & Islam, 2017). The level of training and knowledge that staff members have, their own conduct, their discretion when providing services, and customer satisfactions with the services they receive are all factors that influence service delivery quality (Mohammad, 2015, 74). Furthermore, tourism is labor intensive, and the visitor experience is based on engagement with local populations and well-trained professionals working in those areas (UNWTO, 2007). Therefore, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H5: People have a positive and significant effect on Tourist destination loyalty.

3.1.6 Physical evidence and Destination Loyalty

According to Kannan and Srinivasan (2009), physical evidence in tourism is mostly based on travel experience, stay, and comfort. Physical evidence is something that a customer may instantly associate with the goods. Because the tourism product is so intangible, the location, design, people, and everything else at the tourism office may be linked to the experience in store. For example, when tourists visit a historic site for the first time, they remember not only the gorgeous edifice, but also all of the other variables such as transportation options, nearby markets, people's behavior, and so on as a holistic experience. Sarker, Wang Aimin, and Sumayya Begum (2012) discovered a favorable association between physical evidence and tourist satisfaction. Physical evidence includes the setting in which the tourist service is provided, as well as any tangible products that aid in the execution and transmission of the tourist service. Thus, the following theory is proposed:

H-6: Physical Evidence has a significant and positive effect on Tourist destination loyalty.

3.1.7 Service delivery Process and Destination Loyalty

The term process refers to the real processes, flow of activities, and procedures of service delivery and operational systems (Zeithaml et al. 2006). Processes simplify lives for tourism firms while also allowing customers to acquire services as easily as feasible (Rodriguez, 2013). Physical evidence includes the environment in which the organization and the customer interact, as well as any tangible factors that improve communication or service performance throughout delivery (Zeithaml et al., 2006). Physical evidence is significant since it is the environment in which the product is consumed and sold (Bachelor of Management Studies Team 2014). Customers cannot experience a service before it is delivered, so destination marketers must present testimonials from other guests who have visited the tourist destination, as well as images depicting all aspects of the tourist destination (Rodriguez, 2013). This increases potential customers' faith in a product, which in most situations has intangible attributes. The service delivery process encompasses all measures performed by the service provider to ensure that the beneficiaries receive the services (Cranfield, 2000). According to Nouri and Soltani (2015), the system supports the organization's daily activities as well as customer service. The notions of procedure and perseverance are critical in the service marketing mix because clients can have an immediate impact on the delivery process and seller determination (Hashim & Hamzah, 2014). In Kannan and Srinivasan (2009) define the tourism process as follows: (a) trip planning and anticipation, (b) travel to the site/area, (c) recall, and (d) trip planning packages. Well-designed processes make services more convenient for tourists (Rodriguez 2013). This increases the tourist's confidence, contentment, and loyalty significantly. As a result, the investigation may provide a theory. As a result, the investigation may provide a theory.

H-7: Process has a significant and positive effect on Tourist destination loyalty

3.2 Tourist Destination Loyalty

Oliver (1999, p. 34) defines loyalty to mean "a deeply-held predisposition to repatronize a preferred brand or service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same brand purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior" . Kuusik et al. (2011) define destination loyalty as a tourist's intention to return to the destination (Kozak, 2001; Jang and Feng, 2007), as well as the tourist's assessment of a recommendable place (Chen and Gursoy, 2001). Similarly, Kuenzel and Katsaris (2009) define post-visit behavior as the intent to return (purchase intention/loyalty) and recommendations via word-of-mouth.

3.3 The mediating role Destination Competitiveness of Marketing Mix and Destination loyalty

According to Crompton (1992), each destination offers a variety of tourism-related goods and services to attract tourists, and each traveler is given the option of choosing from a list of locations (p. 408). According to Geogulas (1970) (p. 443), destination places with unique natural and/or man-made components attract non-local visitors (or tourists) for a variety of activities. "This geographical unit visited by a tourist may be a self-contained

center, a village, town, or city, a district or region, an island, a country, or a continent," according to Butkart and Medlik (1974) (p.3). "The destination represents the raison d'etre for tourism; it is the reason for travelling, and the attractions at the destination generate the visit," as Cooper et al. (1993) explain the tourist destination on page 277. "The destination represents the raison d'etre for tourism; it is the reason for travelling, and the attractions at the destination generate the visit," as Cooper et al. (1993) explain the tourist destination on page 277. In 1997, they defined the dynamic destination as "a system consisting of three resource bases: the attraction base, the facility base, and the market base" (p. 9).

According to Scott and Lodge (1985, p. 3), competitiveness is "a country's ability to create, produce, distribute, and/or service products in international trade while earning rising returns on its resources". Competitiveness is a complicated construct whose assessment has not been defined because it encompasses multiple factors (Dodds & Holmes 2020; Woyo 2018). Several different definitions are visible in the literature. According to D'Hauteserre (2000:23), destination competitiveness is 'the ability of a tourism destination to sustain its market position and share and/or build upon them across time'. According to Dupeyras and MacCallum (2013), destination competitiveness involves optimizing a location's attractiveness for both residents and non-residents, providing quality and innovative tourism services, and gaining market share in domestic and global markets while using available resources efficiently and sustainably. (p. 7). Research on evaluating destination competitiveness has primarily focused on advanced and mature tourism destinations such as Australia (Abreu-Novais, Ruhanen & Arcodia 2018), Austria and Switzerland (Mazurek 2014), Canada (Dodds & Holmes 2020), the Caribbean (Bolaky 2011), European destinations (Vinyals-Mirabent 2019), Spain, and Turkey (Andreas-Caldito). There are several studies that investigate competitiveness globally; however, there are few studies from a developing country perspective (Ayikoru, 2015; Du Plessis & Saayman 2017; Du Plessis, Saayman & Van de Merwe 2015) that have used supply-side data to understand the important destination competitiveness factors (Woyo 2018).Prior study has shown that destination competitiveness has three key objectives: residents' economic well-being, destination attractiveness and satisfaction, and sustainability (Abreu-Novais et al. 2018). Given the uniqueness of each destination, measuring a destination's competitiveness in the face of political challenges may alter the criteria or the value of particular factors. Azzopardi (2011, P.22), The ability of the destination to identify and exploit comparative advantage and create and enhance competitive advantages to attract visitors to a destination by offering them a unique overall experience for a fair price that satisfies the profit requirements of the industry and its constituent elements, as well as the economic prosperity objectives of the residents, without jeopardizing, the inalienable aspirations of future generation

- **H-15:** Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between tourism product and tourist destination Loyalty
- **H-16:** Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between Price and tourist destination Loyalty.
- **H-17:** Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between Accessibility and tourist destination Loyalty
- **H-18**: Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between Promotion and tourist destination Loyalty.H-19: Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between People and tourist destination Loyalty
- **H-20:** Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between Physical Evidence and tourist destination Loyalty.
- **H-21**: Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between Process and tourist destination Loyalty

4 Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development

4.1 Conceptual Framework of the study

To Schoell and Lvy (1982), "a well-blended marketing mix means that the right product is available at the right price, in the right location at the right time, and that both current and potential customers are aware of it" (p. 37; emphasis added). A destination marketing policy that follows the research model must consider several key and critical aspects that influence its performance. Stremeersch and Tellis (2002) suggested a combination of market offerings to achieve the goal, which included people, physical evidence, product, accessibility, advertising, price, and service quality and experience. Based on the preceding literature analysis, the suggested model was developed with seven predictor variables: tourist product, accessibility, people, pricing, promotion, physical

evidence, and service quality/experience. Each of these criteria was directly related to tourism destination market competitiveness.

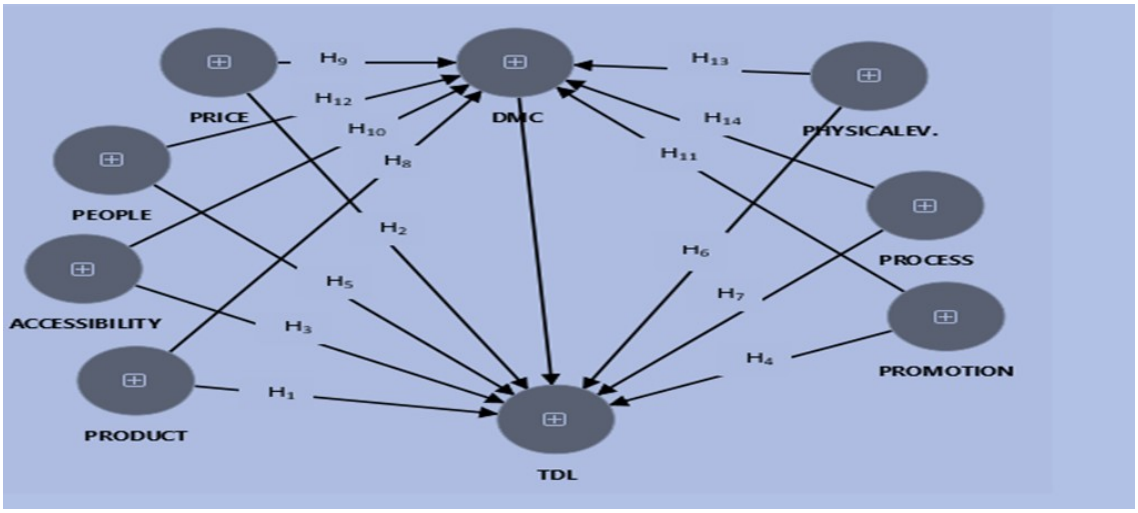


Figure-2-1: Conceptual Framework of the study

4.2 Hypothesis of the study

Tourism Marketing Mix dimensions has a positive a significant effect on Tourist destination loyalty:

H-1: Product has a positive and a significant effect on Tourist destination loyalty.
H-2: Price has a positive and a significant effect on Tourist destination loyalty.
H-3: Accessibility has a positive and a significant effect on Tourist destination loyalty.
H-4: Promotion has a significant and positive effect on Tourist destination loyalty.
H-5: People have a positive and significant effect on Tourist destination loyalty.
H-6: Physical Evidence has a significant and positive effect on Tourist destination loyalty.
H-7: Process has a significant and positive effect on Tourist destination loyalty

Tourism Marketing Mix dimensions has a significant effect on Destination market competitiveness:

H-8: Product has a positive and a significant effect on Destination market competitiveness.
H-9: Price has a positive and a significant effect on Destination market competitiveness
H-10: Accessibility has a positive and a significant effect on Destination market competitiveness
H-11: Promotion has a significant and positive effect on Destination market competitiveness
H-12: People have a positive and significant effect on Destination market competitiveness
H-13: Physical Evidence has a significant and positive effect on Destination market competitiveness
H-14: Process has a significant and positive effect on Destination market competitiveness

Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between Marketing Mix dimensions and tourist destination Loyalty:

H-15: Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between tourism product and tourist destination Loyalty
H-16: Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between Price and tourist destination Loyalty.
H-17: Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between Accessibility and tourist destination Loyalty
H-18: Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between Promotion and tourist destination Loyalty.H-19: Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between People and tourist destination Loyalty
H-20: Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between Physical Evidence and tourist destination Loyalty.
H-21: Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between Process and tourist destination Loyalty

5 Research Methods

5.1 Population of the Study

Population is defined by Veal (2005), as the total set of units of analysis under study. Zikmund (2003) defined population as the entire group being studied. The population of the study is all international tourists visiting various destinations with partulcar emphasis of Top 5 destination in northern In Ethiopia. The sample consisted of 400 randomly selected respondents. Data obtained from 343 questionnaires was analyzed using the SmartPLS 4 software. The marketing mix factors under study were products/services; price, place, promotion, people, processes and physical evidence and service quality experiences .The primary unit of analysis in this study is international tourists -visiting various tourist destinations in Ethiopia. The opinion of International tourist to evaluate destination competitiveness is relevant because they do have an international exposure in visiting various tourist destinations.

5.2 Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling technique was used to select top 5 destination based on the tourist traffic coming into top destinations. However, stratified proportional sampling techniques was taken to determine the number of respondents at each destination point. No domestic tourists were selected for the purpose of the study.

5.3 Research Instrument

To measure the predictor variables (tourist product, accessibility, people, pricing, promotion, physical evidence, and service quality and experience), a structured research instrument was developed. Tourists from overseas were asked to rate the competitiveness of the destination market and each predictor variable. The marketing mix components that affect tourist destinations, mediated by destination competitiveness, were evaluated using a 5-item Likert type scale, with 1 denoting strongly disagree and 5 denoting strongly agree. Each predictor and outcome variable in this survey has a set of items that were chosen from the literature and pilot tested.

5.4 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed at ten significant destination places, and the researcher gathered the completed forms by enumerator trade. Approximately 70% of the 384 surveys were completed, with 250 of them being fully completed.

6 Results and Discussion

6.1 Demographic Profile

A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed and 343 questionnaires were returned at the end of the data collection process and used for the subsequent statistical analysis, which gave the response rate of 86 percent.

6.2 Data Analysis and Hypothesis Examination

To analyze the research model, Partial Least Squares (PLS) technique using the SmartPLS 4 software (Ringle, Wende & Becker, 2018 has been used. Following the recommended two-stage analytical procedures by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), the measurement model (validity and reliability) was tested followed by an examination of the structural model (testing the hypothesized relationship) (see Hair et al., 2017; Ramayah et al., 2011; 2013; Rahman et al., 2016). Besides, to test the significance of the path coefficients and the loadings a bootstrapping method (5000 resamples) was used (Hair et al., 2017).

6.2.1 Measurement Model

Before analyzing the data by SMART-PLS statistical tool, the data was first inserted in to SPSS and a preliminary stage of measurement item was first identified. Then, the psychometric properties of the measurement model in terms of internal consistency, reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were evaluated by SMART-PLS. Similarly, Measure of sampling adequacy (0.81), Cronbach Alpha (0.87) reliability measure was verified by SPSS 23 version. To assess the measurement model two types of validity were being examined - first the convergent validity and then the discriminant validity.

6.2.2 Reliability and Convergent Validity

The convergent validity of the measurement is usually ascertained by examining the loadings, average variance extracted (AVE) and also the composite reliability (Gholami et al., 2013; Rahman et al., 2015). A measurement instrument has good reliability, if the question-statements (or other measures) associated with each latent

variable are understood in the same way by different respondents. Therefore, all Cronbach alpha coefficients which evaluate the items in terms of uni-dimensionality of as set of scale items are above 0.7 ranging from 0.709 to 0.760 demonstrating good internal consistence.

However, Cronbach alpha is based on a restrictive assumption that all indicators are equally important. An alternative conceptualization of reliability is that it represents the proportion of measure variance attributable to the underlying dimension (Werts et al. 1974). According to Chin et al. (1996, p.33), while Cronbach's alpha with its assumption of parallel measures represents a lower bound estimate of internal consistency, a better estimate can be gained using the composite reliability. Similarly, composite reliability of all latent variables of this is above 0.7 ranging from 0.760 to 0.891 for all measures. Similarly, Dhillon Goldstin rho measures internal consistence like composite reliability which is acceptable above 0.7(Gefen, 2000). On the other hand, the average variance extraction (AVE) of all variable is above the threshold of 0.5. The AVE threshold frequently recommended for acceptable validity is 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 1: Reliability analysis

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
ACCESSIBILITY	0.755	0.760	0.586
DMC	0.760	0.805	0.682
PEOPLE	0.709	0.794	0.818
PHYSICALEV.	0.722	0.818	0.767
PRICE	0.713	0.816	0.773
PROCESS	0.737	0.827	0.651
PRODUCT	0.716	0.812	0.653
PROMOTION	0.749	0.794	0.549
TDL	0.759	0.891	0.617

Source: Own Survey, 2024

6.2.3 Discriminant Validity

AVE may also be used to establish discriminant validity by the Fornell–Larcker criterion: for any latent variable, the square root of AVE should be higher than its correlation with any other latent variable. This means that for any latent variable, the variance shared with its block of indicators is greater than the variance it shares with any other latent variable. In SmartPLS output, in the Fornell-Larcker criterion table, the square root of AVE appears in the diagonal cells and correlations appear below it. Therefore, in absolute value terms, if the top number (which is the square root of AVE) in any factor column is higher than the numbers (correlations) below it, there is discriminant validity.

Table 2: Latent variable Correlation and Discriminant Validity

	ACCESSIBILITY	DMC	PEOPLE	PHYSICALEV.	PRICE	PROCESS	PRODUCT	PROMOTION	TDL
ACCESSIBILITY	0.765								
DMC	0.285	0.826							
PEOPLE	-0.258	0.104	0.904						
PHYSICALEV.	-0.153	0.075	0.075	0.876					
PRICE	-0.053	0.124	0.124	0.305	0.879				
PROCESS	-0.062	0.139	0.139	0.019	-0.029	0.807			
PRODUCT	0.325	0.495	0.495	-0.029	0.040	0.078	0.808		
PROMOTION	0.126	0.501	0.501	0.018	0.071	0.075	0.509	0.741	
TDL	0.011	0.117	0.117	0.124	0.169	0.291	0.044	0.015	0.785

Source: Own Survey, 2024

In a good model, indicators load well on their intended factors and cross-loadings with other factors they are not meant to measure should be markedly. Discriminant validity is shown when each measurement item correlates weakly with all other constructs except for the one to which it is theoretically associated. From the total of 81 indicators, 30 indicators were eliminated out the model because their outer loadings were smaller than 0.70, therefore, the 51 observed variables were reliable and were used in the next analysis.

When the correlation of the latent variable score with measurement item need to show an appropriate pattern of loading, one in which the measurement item load highly on their theoretically assigned factor and not highly on other factors. In this case, all loadings are highly showed appropriate pattern of loading than the cross-loading o other variables. At a minimum, no indicator variable should have a higher correlation with another latent variable than with its own latent variable. If it does, the model is inappropriately specified.

Table 3: Discriminate validity

	ACCESSIBILITY	DMC	PEOPLE	PHYSICALEV.	PRICE	PROCESS	PRODUCT	PROMOTION	TDL
ACC1	0.713	-0.003	0.027	0.448	0.382	-0.05	-0.062	-0.076	0.139
ACC3	0.714	0.231	0.172	-0.091	-0.074	0.116	0.243	0.089	-0.051
ACC5	0.812	0.065	-0.034	0.255	0.194	0.016	0.064	0.125	0.231
ACC6	0.842	-0.01	0.005	-0.13	-0.058	0.199	-0.112	-0.069	0.015
ACC7	0.812	0.312	0.052	-0.016	-0.004	0.064	0.396	0.26	-0.026
ACC8	0.703	0.003	0.148	-0.005	0.237	0.058	-0.054	-0.166	0.408
ACC9	0.756	-0.02	0.061	0.184	0.026	0.199	0.148	-0.016	0.129
DMC1	0.088	0.778	0.462	0.101	0.027	0.107	0.152	0.131	0.235
DMC2	-0.061	0.768	0.198	0.327	0.007	0.203	-0.029	0.058	0.151
DMC3	-0.032	0.734	0.048	0.390	0.013	0.121	0.035	0.064	0.182
DMC4	0.054	0.736	0.005	0.056	0.046	0.283	0.044	0.097	0.275
DMC5	-0.014	0.890	0.541	0.181	0.026	-0.162	0.081	0.077	0.195
DMC6	-0.054	0.814	0.049	0.291	0.247	0.314	0.043	-0.08	0.255
DMC7	0.126	0.713	0.023	0.246	0.407	0.218	0.067	-0.039	0.275

PEP1	0.066	0.288	0.850	-0.112	-0.04	-0.02	0.018	0.173	0.013
PEP2	0.162	0.023	0.779	-0.013	0.11	0.07	0.081	0.028	0.047
PEP3	0.162	0.123	0.785	-0.013	0.11	0.07	0.139	0.128	0.047
PEP6	-0.115	0.004	0.790	0.049	0.113	-0.001	-0.21	0.242	0.49
PEP9	-0.108	0.061	0.774	0.154	0.306	-0.089	0.015	-0.023	-0.001
PEP10	-0.051	0.076	0.775	0.354	0.187	0.422	0.059	0.009	0.135
PEV1	0.029	-0.041	0.037	0.890	-0.199	-0.125	-0.119	0.083	-0.277
PEV2	0.082	-0.038	0.092	0.805	0.45	0.232	-0.005	-0.003	0.252
PEV4	-0.033	-0.208	-0.037	0.895	-0.159	-0.085	-0.225	-0.138	-0.186
PEV7	0.301	0.281	-0.223	0.879	0.01	0.043	0.104	0.187	-0.023
PEV8	0.255	0.176	0.06	0.810	0.042	0.03	0.037	0.198	0.031
PEV10	0.037	0.389	0.234	0.880	0.087	0.198	0.126	0.081	0.119
PRI1	-0.37	-0.185	-0.193	-0.085	0.866	0.004	-0.295	-0.224	0.076
PRI2	0.078	-0.003	0.027	0.448	0.729	-0.05	-0.062	-0.076	0.139
PRI3	0.108	0.365	0.357	0.117	0.763	0.072	0.302	0.152	0.021
PRI4	0.112	-0.005	0.172	-0.091	0.730	0.116	0.243	0.089	-0.051
PRI6	0.018	0.027	-0.034	0.255	0.828	0.016	0.064	0.125	0.231
PRI7	0.081	0.058	0.005	-0.13	0.713	0.199	-0.112	-0.069	0.015
PRC1	-0.005	0.003	0.148	0.103	0.237	0.703	-0.054	-0.166	0.408

PRC2	0.184	-0.02	0.061	0.056	0.026	0.756	0.148	-0.016	0.129
PRC5	-0.032	0.07	0.148	0.39	0.121	0.734	0.035	0.064	0.182
PRC7	-0.014	0.159	0.541	0.181	-0.162	0.89	0.081	0.077	0.195
PRC8	-0.054	0.018	0.049	0.291	0.247	0.701	0.043	-0.08	0.255
PRD1	-0.005	0.003	0.148	0.103	0.237	-0.054	0.703	-0.166	0.408
PRD2	0.184	-0.02	0.061	0.056	0.026	0.148	0.756	-0.016	0.129
PRD5	-0.032	0.07	0.148	0.39	0.121	0.035	0.734	0.064	0.182
PRD7	-0.014	0.159	0.541	0.181	-0.162	0.081	0.892	0.077	0.195
PRD8	-0.054	0.018	0.049	0.291	0.247	0.043	0.701	-0.08	0.255
PRD9	0.126	0.078	0.023	0.246	0.407	0.067	0.754	-0.039	0.275
PRO1	-0.033	0.108	0.091	0.074	0.462	0.203	0.118	0.7013	0.411
PRO5	0.162	0.023	0.081	-0.013	0.11	0.07	0.028	0.779	0.047
PRO7	-0.156	-0.075	0.125	0.065	-0.045	0.086	0.017	0.700	-0.125
PRO9	-0.115	0.004	0.242	0.049	0.113	-0.001	0.127	0.791	0.491
TDL1	0.349	0.101	-0.074	-0.001	0.061	0.101	0.198	0.123	0.835
TDL3	-0.108	0.061	-0.001	0.154	0.306	-0.089	0.015	-0.023	0.774
TDL4	-0.051	0.076	0.483	0.354	0.187	0.422	0.059	0.009	0.891
TDL5	0.08	0.149	0.094	0.13	0.191	0.201	0.03	0.07	0.702

Source: Own Survey, 2024

Ideally, there is simple factor structure, by rule of thumb taken to mean that intended loadings should be greater than 0.6 (some use 0.5). The table above achieved indicators loads as all well on their intended factors.

6.2.4 Collinearity Statistics (VIF)

As a rule of thumb, we need to have a VIF of 5 or lower (i.e., Tolerance level of 0.2 or higher) to avoid the collinearity problem (Hair et al., 2011). Similarly, the recommended threshold for VIFs test multicollinearity also 3.3 or less for latent variable. To check the possibility of multi-co-linearity test whenever factor loadings are exceeding 0.70 values the correlation between the predictors of a variable has to be verified. Existence of multi co-linearity falsely inflates the standard errors and certain model parameters may sometimes become unstable (Kock, 2011). To assess the degree of multicollinearity, variance inflation factors (VIFs) are evaluated for each of the predictor variables. As shown in table 4 all VIFs value were less than 3.3 ranging from 1.023 to 2.643 meeting the recommended threshold values which points to the nonexistence of multi-collinearity for all outer indicators. Similarly, the inner VIF values are less than the recommended level ranging from 1.027 to 2.737.

Table 4: Collinearity Statistics (VIF)

	Factors	Outer VIF Values	DMC	TDL
ACCESSIBILITY	ACC1	2.025	1.027	2.448
	ACC3	1.667		
	ACC5	1.104		
	ACC6	2.135		
	ACC7	2.137		
	ACC9	1.118		
	ACC10	1.079		
DMC	DMC1	1.092		2.101
	DMC2	1.078		
	DMC3	1.324		
	DMC4	1.291		
	DMC5	1.731		
	DMC6	1.502		
	DMC7	2.625		
PEOPLE	PEP1	1.045	1.85	2.112
	PEP2	1.383		
	PEP3	2.582		
	PEP6	1.468		
	PEP9	1.272		
	PEP10	1.216		
PHYSICALEV.	PEV1	1.741	2.737	1.89
	PEV2	1.632		
	PEV4	1.023		
	PEV7	1.086		
	PEV8	1.085		
	PEV10	2.444		
PRICE	PRI1	1.992	1.193	1.085
	PRI2	1.972		
	PRI3	1.036		
	PRI4	1.678		

	PRI6	1.915		
	PRI7	2.846		
PROCESS	PRC1	1.148	1.148	1.503
	PRC2	1.129		
	PRC5	1.090		
	PRC7	1.103		
	PRC8	1.089		
PRODUCT	PRD1	1.335	1.134	2.103
	PRD2	1.302		
	PRD5	1.742		
	PRD7	2.513		
	PRD8	1.636		
	PRD9	1.056		
PROMOTION	PRO1	2.394	1.91	1.307
	PRO5	1.593		
	PRO7	1.479		
	PRO9	2.283		
TDL	TDL1	1.227		
	TDL3	1.752		
	TDL4	2.643		
	TDL5	1.034		

Source: Own Survey, 2024

6.2.5 R-Square and R -Square Adjusted

The R square of this study was large. The R2 value, 0.752 showed Accessibility, product, price, people, promotion, physical evidence, and process were predicted approximately by 75.2% percent of the variations in Destination's Market Competitiveness. The R2 value, 0.437 showed that Accessibility, product, price, people, promotion, physical evidence, process and Destination's Market Competitiveness were predicted approximately by 43.7 percent of the variations in Tourism Destination Loyalty.

Table 5: Quality Criteria

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Destination's Market Competitiveness	0.752	0.733
Tourism Destination Loyalty	0.437	0.387

Source: Own Survey, 2024

6.2.6 F-Square/Effect Size

Following Cohen (1988), 0.02 represents a "small" f2 effect size, 0.15 represents a "medium" effect, and 0.35 represents a "high" effect size. We can say that the effect of process (.388) from the model is high on Destination's Market Competitiveness. Accessibility (.195), people (.160), physical evidence (.171), product (.204), and promotion of (0.182) show a medium effect on Destination's Market Competitiveness while the effect of price dimensions is weak on Destination's Market Competitiveness.

Similarly, the effect of people (0.368) from the model is high on Destination's tourism loyalty. Destination's Market Competitiveness (.201), price (.161), and product (.179) show a medium effect on Destination's tourism loyalty while the effect of Accessibility, physical evidence, process, and promotion dimensions are weak on Destination's tourism loyalty.

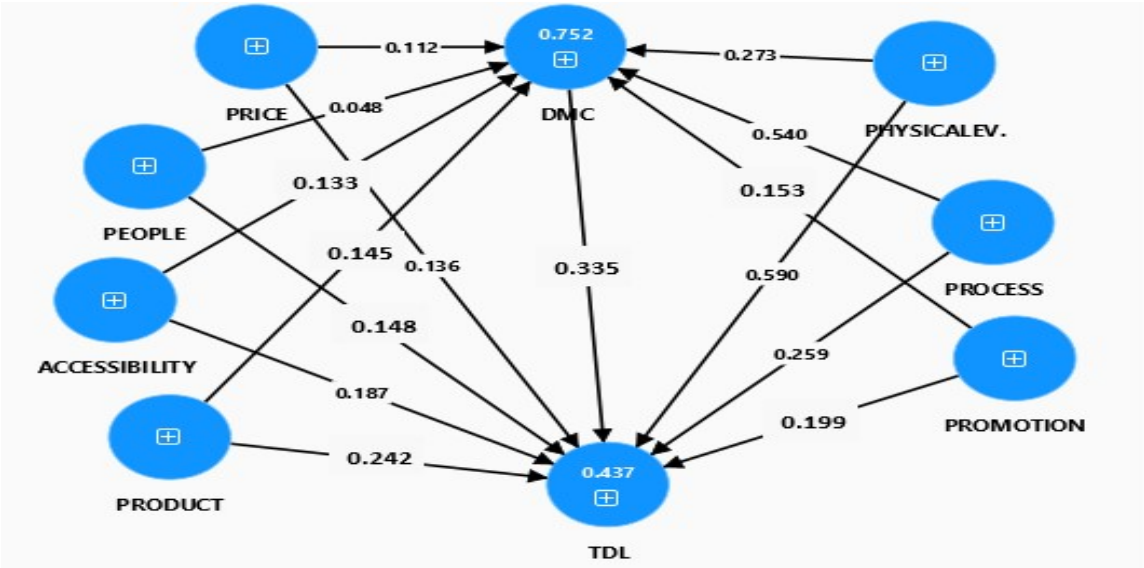
Table 6: Effect Size (f square)

	ACCESSIBILITY	DMC	PEOPLE	PHYSICALEV	PRICE	PROCESS	PRODUCT	PROMOTION	TDL
ACCESSIBILITY		0.195							0.013
DMC									0.201
PEOPLE		0.160							0.368
PHYSICALEV.		0.171							0.115
PRICE		0.109							0.161
PROCESS		0.388							0.128
PRODUCT		0.204							0.179
PROMOTION		0.182							0.127
TDL									

Source: Own Survey, 2024

6.3 Hypothesis Testing Results

To assess the structural model, Hair et al. (2017) suggested looking at the R^2, beta (β) and the corresponding t-values via a bootstrapping procedure with a resample of 5,000. They also suggested that in addition to these basic measures researchers should also report the effect sizes (f2). As asserted by Sullivan and Feinn (2012), while a *p*-value can inform the reader whether an effect exists, the *p*-value will not reveal the size of the effect. In reporting and interpreting studies, both the substantive significance (effect size) and statistical significance (p-value) are essential results to be reported (p.279). As shown in Figure 1, Accessibility, product, price, people, promotion, physical evidence, process and Destination's Market Competitiveness the variance explained by these of dimensions is 43.7 percent for Destination's tourism loyalty. Similarly, Accessibility, product, price, people, promotion, physical evidence, and process the variance explained by these of dimensions is 75.2 percent for Destination's Market Competitiveness.



Source: Own Survey 2024: Figure 1: Tourism Marketing Mix on Destination Loyalty Mediated by Destination Market Competitiveness

The findings of this study indicate that among the antecedents, Accessibility, product, people, promotion, physical evidence, and process are positively correlated to Destination's tourism loyalty and are found to be significant predictors of Destination's tourism loyalty. However, price is positively correlated to Destination's tourism loyalty but insignificant.

Similarly, among the tourism marketing mix dimensions, product, process, physical evidence, and promotion are positively correlated to Destination's market competitiveness and are found to be significant predictors of Destination's market competitiveness. However, among the tourism marketing mix dimensions accessibility, people and price is positively correlated to Destination's market competitiveness but insignificant. Hahn and Ang (2017) have summarized some of the recommended rigor in reporting results in quantitative studies which includes the use of effect size estimates and confidence intervals, the use of Bayesian methods, Bayes factors or likelihood ratios, and decision-theoretic modeling.

As suggested, we have included effect sizes and confidence intervals as part of our reporting.

Table 7: Summary of hypothesis Testing

	ath Coefficient Beta(β)	STDEV	T value |β/STDEV|	P-Value	VIF	Decision
ACCESSIBILITY -> TDL	0.187	0.062	3.026	0.008	2.448	Supported
PEOPLE -> TDL	0.148	0.069	2.133	0.002	2.112	Supported
PHYSICALEV. -> TDL	0.590	0.075	7.847	0.000	1.890	Supported
PRICE -> TDL	0.136	0.083	1.645	0.421	1.085	Not Supported
PROCESS -> TDL	0.259	0.062	4.191	0.005	1.503	Supported
PRODUCT -> TDL	0.242	0.034	7.139	0.007	2.103	Supported
PROMOTION -> TDL	0.199	0.056	3.535	0.009	1.307	Supported
DMC -> TDL	0.335	0.072	4.621	0.000	2.101	Supported
ACCESSIBILITY -> DMC	0.133	0.081	1.633	0.401	1.027	Not Supported
PEOPLE -> DMC	0.048	0.121	0.397	3.421	1.850	Not Supported
PHYSICALEV. -> DMC	0.273	0.072	3.788	0.000	2.737	Supported
PRICE -> DMC	0.112	0.118	0.949	0.621	1.193	Not Supported
PROCESS -> DMC	0.540	0.152	3.553	0.000	1.148	Supported
PRODUCT -> DMC	0.145	0.073	1.986	0.011	1.134	Supported
PROMOTION -> DMC	0.153	0.051	2.972	0.015	1.910	Supported

6.3.1 Explaining Antecedents of Tourism Marketing Mix Dimensions on Destination's Tourism Loyalty

A mediating effect is created when a third variable/construct intervenes between two other related constructs (Hair, et al., 2010). The indirect effects are the path coefficient from independent variable to mediating variable then to dependent variable. The SEM analysis produced direct and indirect impact analysis. Table 8 shows that the indirect effect estimates and the mediating effect. Hence, Destination's market competitiveness mediates the relationship between accessibility, people, price, process and promotion since the indirect effect estimates are higher than the direct effects estimates. However, physical evidence and product does not mediate the relationship between antecedent of marketing mix and tourism destination loyalty authenticity since the indirect effect estimates are lower than the direct effects estimates.

Testing the mediating role of Destination's market competitiveness based on bootstrapping result Beta (β).

	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	P-Value	Result	Mediation Type
ACCESSIBILITY-> DMC -> TDL	0.187	0.204	0.000	Significant	Mediate
PEOPLE-> DMC -> TDL	0.148	0.228	0.000	Significant	Mediate
PHYSICALEV. -> DMC -> TDL	0.59	0.132	0.062	Insignificant	Not Mediate
PRICE -> DMC-> TDL	0.136	0.268	0.000	significant	Mediate
PROCESS -> DMC-> TDL	0.259	0.302	0.000	Significant	Mediate
PRODUCT-> DMC -> TDL	0.242	0.102	0.091	Insignificant	Not Mediate
PROMOTION-> DMC -> TDL	0.199	0.264	0.000	Significant	Mediate

Source: Own Survey, 2024

Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Decision
Tourism Marketing Mix dimensions have a positive a significant effect on Tourist destination loyalty.	
H-1: Product has a positive and a significant effect on Tourist destination loyalty.	Supported
H-2: Price has a positive and a significant effect on Tourist destination loyalty.	Not Supported
H-3: Accessibility has a positive and a significant effect on Tourist destination loyalty.	Supported
H-4: Promotion has a significant and positive effect on Tourist destination loyalty.	Supported
H-5: People have a positive and significant effect on Tourist destination loyalty.	Supported
H-6: Physical Evidence has a significant and positive effect on Tourist destination loyalty.	Supported
H-7: Process has a significant and positive effect on Tourist destination loyalty.	Supported
Tourism Marketing Mix dimensions have a significant effect on Destination market competitiveness	
H-8: Product has a positive and a significant effect on Destination market competitiveness.	Supported
H-9: Price has a positive and a significant effect on Destination market competitiveness.	Not Supported
H-10: Accessibility has a positive and a significant effect on Destination market competitiveness.	Not Supported
H-11: Promotion has a significant and positive effect on Destination market competitiveness	Supported
H-12: People have a positive and significant effect on Destination market competitiveness	Not Supported
H-13:Physical Evidence has a significant and positive effect on Destination market competitiveness	Supported
H-14: Process has a significant and positive effect on Destination market competitiveness	Supported
Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between Marketing Mix dimensions and	
H-15: Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between tourism product and tourist destination Loyalty	Not Supported
H-16: Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between Price and tourist destination Loyalty.	Supported
H-17: Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between Accessibility and tourist destination Loyalty.	Supported
H-18: Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between Promotion and tourist destination Loyalty.	Supported
H-19: Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between People and tourist destination Loyalty.	Supported
H-20: Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between Physical Evidence and tourist destination Loyalty.	Not Supported
H-21: Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between Process and tourist destination Loyalty.	Supported

Own Survey, 2024

6.3.2 Discussion of the hypothesis

The 21 hypotheses of the study, which were developed and tested following a thorough literature analysis, are presented in relation to results from earlier studies. From the 21 hypothesis test the following hypothesis are found having a significant effect on Tourist destination loyalty.

- **H-1:** Product has a positive and a significant effect on Tourist destination loyalty. Product has a positive and a significant effect on Tourist destination loyalty at 95% confidence level. This study's findings are in line with those of George, 2014).Kotler (Kotler et al., 2015); Kotler & Keller, 2006; . Gronroos, 1978; Maqablih and Sarabi, 2001; Maqablih and Deab, 2000; and Cooper et al., 1998; Abu Rahmah et al., 2001).

- **H-3:** Accessibility has a positive and a significant effect on Tourist destination loyalty. Accessibility has a positive and a significant effect on Tourist destination loyalty. The findings of this study are supported at 95% confidence level. This study's findings are in line with those of (Davis-Sramek et al. 2008; Owomoyela and Oyeniyi, 2013; Darcy, 1998; and Godfrey and Clarke, 2000.)
- **H-4:** Promotion has a significant and positive effect on Tourist destination loyalty. Promotion has a significant and positive effect on Tourist destination loyalty at 95% confidence level. This study's findings are in line with those of (Reid & Bojanic, 2010; Reid and Bojanic, 2010; and Rodriguez, 2013; Dolan, 2002, Nuseir & Madanat, 2015, Kotler 2007 and Almuhrzi & Alsawafi, 2017).
- **H-5:** People have a positive and significant effect on Tourist destination loyalty. People have a positive and significant effect on Tourist destination loyalty at 95% confidence level. This study's findings are in line with those of (Zeithaml et al. 2006; , Sadq et al., and 2016; Kushwaha & Agrawal, 2015; Reid and Bojanic, 2010; Amin & Islam, 2017; Tayebi et al., 2019; and Mohammad, 2015, 74).
- **H-6:** Physical Evidence has a significant and positive effect on Tourist destination loyalty. Physical Evidence has a significant and positive effect on Tourist destination loyalty at 95% confidence level. The result of this study consistent with the work of (Kannan and Srinivasan (2009); Sarker, Wang Aimin, and Sumayya Begum, 2012)
- **H-7:** Process has a significant and positive effect on Tourist destination loyalty. Process has a significant and positive effect on Tourist destination loyalty at 95% confidence level. The result of this study consistent with the work of Rodriguez, 2013; Zeithaml et al., 2006; Nouri and Soltani (2015; Hashim & Hamzah, 2014; Kannan and Srinivasan, 2009 and Rodriguez 2013.
- **H-8**: Product has a positive and a significant effect on Destination market competitiveness. Product has a positive and a significant effect on Destination market competitiveness at 95% confidence level. The result of this study consistent with that of Scott and Lodge, 1985 and Dodds & Holmes 2020; Woyo 2018).
- **H-11:** Promotion has a significant and positive effect on Destination market competitiveness. Promotion has a significant and positive effect on Destination market competitiveness at 95% confidence level. The result of this study consistent with the work of (Crompton, 1992; Geogulas 1970; Butkart and Medlik, 1974).
- **H-13:** Physical Evidence has a significant and positive effect on Destination market competitiveness.
- Physical Evidence has a significant and positive effect on Destination market competitiveness at 95% confidence level. The result of this study is in line with that of (D'Hauteserre, 2000 and Dupeyras and MacCallum, 2013.)
- **H-14:** Process has a significant and positive effect on Destination market competitiveness. Process has a significant and positive effect on Destination market competitiveness at 95% confidence level. The result of this study is in line with that of (Abreu-Novais, Ruhanen & Arcodia 2018; Mazurek 2014 and Dodds & Holmes 2020.)
- **H-16:** Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between Price and tourist destination Loyalty. Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between Price and tourist destination Loyalty at 95% confidence level. The result of this study is consistent with (Ayikoru, 2015; Du Plessis & Saayman 2017; Du Plessis, Saayman & Van de Merwe 2015.)
- **H-17:** Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between Accessibility and tourist destination Loyalty. Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between Accessibility and tourist destination Loyalty at 95% confidence level. The result of this study is consistent with (Woyo 2018; Abreu-Novais et al. 2018 and Azzopardi, 2011.)
- **H-18:** Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between Promotion and tourist destination Loyalty. Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between Promotion and tourist destination Loyalty at 95% confidence level. The result of this study is consistent with (Dupeyras and MacCallum, 2013 and Mazurek 2014.)
- **H-19:** Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between People and tourist destination Loyalty. Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between People and tourist destination Loyalty at 95% confidence level. The result of this study is consistent with (Dupeyras and MacCallum, 2013 and Mazurek 2014.)

- **H-21:** Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between Process and tourist destination Loyalty. Perceived Destinations Market Competitiveness mediates the relationship between Process and tourist destination Loyalty at 95% confidence level. The result of this study is consistent with (Dupeyras and MacCallum, 2013 and Mazurek 2014.)

The following hypotheses including Prices have a positive and a significant effect on tourist destination loyalty (H-2); Prices have a positive and significant impact on destination market competitiveness (H-9); Accessibility has a positive and significant impact on destination market competitiveness (H-10); and the relationship between physical evidence and tourist destination loyalty is mediated by perceived destination market competitiveness (H-20) were not statistically significant and call for additional research.

7 Conclusion

The main focus of this study was on how the marketing mix for tourism services affects international tourists' loyalty to a destination and how destination competitiveness mediates the relationship between marketing mix and destination loyalty. The three sets of questions were examined at significant locations using inclusion and exclusion criteria to determine which locations were most frequently visited by foreign tourists. RQ-1: what is the effect of marketing mix for tourism services on international tourists' destination loyalty? RQ-2: What is the extent to which the destination market's competitiveness is influenced by the marketing mix used for tourism services? and RQ-3. Does Destination Marketing Competitiveness mediate the relationship between tourism service marketing mix and tourist destination loyalty? The outcomes that were obtained included the following:

- The first research question is "What is the effect of marketing mix for tourism services on international tourists' destination loyalty?" The study discovered that the following factors—accessibility, people, product, promotion, physical evidence, and process—had a substantial impact on destination tourist loyalty. However, the effect of price on tourist loyalty to a destination was insignificant.
- The study's second research question was whether the marketing mix utilized for tourism services affects the competitiveness of destination markets. This study also found that the three primary elements of the marketing mix—promotion, physical Evidence, and process—have a significant impact on a destination's capacity to compete in the tourism sector. However, price, people, and accessibility had no significant effect on the destination's market competitiveness.
- The study's third research question was whether Destination Marketing Competitiveness mediates the relationship between tourism service marketing mix and tourist destination loyalty. The market competitiveness of the destination mediates the relationship between accessibility, people, price, process, and promotion, as the indirect effect estimates are greater than the direct effect estimates. However, physical evidence and product do not mediate the relationship between marketing mix antecedents and tourism destination loyalty because indirect effect estimates are smaller than direct effect estimates.

This study indicated that the majority of the tourism marketing mix variables was significant predictors of destination loyalty and competitiveness. Furthermore, destination market competitiveness moderated the relationship between tourism marketing mix and destination loyalty, prompting further investigation into why these few marketing mix variables failed to be important drivers contrary to prior studies.

8 Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations are suggested:

- Accessibility, people, product, promotion, physical evidence, and process significantly impact destination tourist loyalty. Thus, destination marketers need to improve the infrastructure, train tourism marketers at destination points, use appropriate promotion strategies to reach actual and potential tourists; upgrade the physical evidence, including websites, physical tour operator layout, employee uniforms, brochures, marketing material, souvenirs, and service delivery process-all real components that facilitate performance or service communication to enhance International tourist destination loyalty.
- The marketing mix, including promotion, physical evidence, and method, significantly impacts a destination's tourism competitiveness. Thus, destination marketers must improve the development of an appropriate destination promotion strategy, upgrade the physical evidence, including destination infrastructural development, and create a superior service delivery culture at destination points in order to compete with global tourist destinations and attract more tourists.

- The study found that the destination's market competitiveness moderated the relationship between accessibility, people, price, process, and promotion. Thus, tourism destination marketers must focus on accessibility, developing well-trained multilingual employees, setting affordable and reasonable tourist product prices, revisiting and upgrading the service delivery culture, and developing a working and an up-to-date destination promotion strategy in order to remain competitive in the global tourism market and improve international tourist traffic in the country.

9 Limitation and direction for future study

- The study found no substantial connection among price and tourist loyalty to a destination. This necessitates additional investigation into why the pricing of tourism items is determined to be insignificant in comparison to other tourism marketing mixes.
- The study found that price, people, and accessibility did not significantly impact the destination's market competitiveness. Other researchers should look into why these three key marketing elements were not significant predictors of destination market competitiveness.
- In this study , Physical evidence and product do not mediate the association between marketing mix antecedents and tourism destination loyalty, as indirect effect estimates are lower than direct effect estimates (contrary to previous studies). Further investigation is required to determine why these two marketing mix variables did not contribute significantly.
- This study was entirely quantitative, although a mixed research technique could have uncovered more information on variables that were not significant predictors.
- This study is cross-sectional and does not account for recurrent visits to selected destinations to identify recurring patterns. Thus, researchers can conduct longitudinal studies to better understand recurrent visits patterns.

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