EGYPT'S COMPETITIVENESS: EMPIRICAL EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DESTINATION ATTRIBUTES, TOURIST SATISFACTION, AND BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS AMONG THE HOTEL GUESTS

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Abstract

Purpose – The main objective of this study is to use the destination competitiveness model to examine guest satisfaction regarding the different attributes of Egypt within the scope of North African tourist destinations.

Design – Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used for data collection in the research.

Methodology/approach – The current study applied a self-administered questionnaire targeting visitors of Sharm El Sheikh- 4 and 5 star hotels, which included eight constructs designed to measure tourists' satisfaction with different competitiveness attributes of Egypt as a tourist destination. Data was collected through a convenience sample of 243 tourists who visited at least two Egyptian tourist destinations.

Findings – Results of the study revealed that the physiography and climate of Egypt were perceived to be the most important satisfying attributes. In addition, the availability of a diverse range of activities during tourists' visit was perceived as the least satisfying attribute. The findings also highlight the importance of Egypt's historical, cultural, and natural attractions towards the positive satisfaction of visitors, the relationship between the country's core and supporting attributes, the low affectivity of Egypt's touristic brand, the global media's overreaction to safety and security issues in Egypt, and Sharm El Sheikh's image as a destination of good value. Finally, tourists overall satisfaction was found to be positively predicting both tourists' re-purchase and intention to recommend Egypt to other tourists.

Originality of the research – With not enough previous research attempting to discern the effect of Egypt's destination attributes on tourists satisfaction, this work behaves as a gateway for a large range of future research concerning Egypt's competitiveness.

Keywords destination competitiveness, tourist satisfaction, behavioral intentions, Egypt

INTRODUCTION

Appreciating the economic benefits of tourism at a national or regional level, it is unsurprising that destinations struggle against one another and attempt to leverage their advantages in order to gain the most out of their tourism source markets. Consequently, it can be stated that the global tourism market is extremely competitive, as huge numbers of established and emerging destinations desperately endeavor to attract as many visitors as would satisfy their desired commercial and industrial gains. Adding to the complexity

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of the tourism destination formula, as Heath (2003) draws attention to, the global travel and tourism market is heavily influenced by a wide range of external and uncontrollable variables, such as, advances in technological development, changing consumer behaviors, local community participation, environmental and climatic changes, and health and safety issues.

In efforts to reduce confusion and create a structure which could standardize the elements of competitiveness, several researchers, such as Crouch and Ritchie (1999), Ritchie and Crouch (2003), Kim (2014), and Chen, Lee and Tsai (2016), have attempted to conceptualize and create interpretation models for the notion of 'Destination Competitiveness' which could be brought into public acceptance. The conclusions of their work, in common and unanimous agreement, reveal that the competitiveness of a tourism destination is entirely dependent on the ability of its different destination attributes towards providing visitors with satisfying experiences better than the ability of other destinations to do so, while sustaining its own resources and enhancing the level of well-being of its residents. The aforementioned researchers categorize the destination attributes into five distinct divisions, being, the Core Attributes, the Supporting Attributes, the Qualifying Attributes, the Destination Brand, and the Destination Management activities.

In the contemporary academic community, the model of destination competitiveness is a firmly established and widely accepted concept. Consequently, as may well be expected, a number of studies have been conducted using the model, which not only determine the competitive performance of specific destinations, but also analyze and evaluate the correlation between different destination attributes and the level of tourist satisfaction. The practicality of the destination competitiveness model is further highlighted by Baloglu et al. (2004), who in support of an increasingly popular opinion, indicate that the performance of different destination attributes is an essential indicator of the destinations ability to be competitive among others in terms of satisfying visitors. This has prompted researchers such as Wu, Li, and Li (2018), Kim (2014), Yuksel, Yuksel and Bilim (2010), and Kozak and Rimmington (2000), to make statements regarding the destination competitiveness model's role as a driver of tourist actions, and a predictor of tourist behavior. Undoubtedly, the capability of destinations to measure and anticipate the likelihood with which tourists will intend to revisit or spread word of mouth recommendations is a valuable tool in developing tourism products.

Building on the conclusions of previous research, the author of this study has two distinctive objectives. The main objective is to use the destination competitiveness model to examine guest satisfaction in regard to the different attributes of Egypt within the scope of North African tourism destinations. The second objective is to add to, and extend the body of literature relevant to attribute satisfaction, overall satisfaction, and post purchase behavior by studying the relationships between these variables. Although, these relationships have been tested in former research work, the current study may deliver new insights related to Egypt as a developing country.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous research on tourism destination competitiveness

Research on tourism destination competitiveness can be classified into two categories. The first, which includes theoretical studies which were aimed at conceptualizing and modeling the term 'destination competitiveness' and proposing the different measurements and attributes that can be operationalized to measure destination competitiveness. The second, includes an empirical approach towards research which used the destination competitiveness model and applied it practically to real world situations.

In regard to the first category, any and all research focused on the study of destination competitiveness, must in some way examine the work of Crouch and Ritchie (1999, 2000, 2003). The model, which they have developed, has been critically examined by the academic and tourism industry communities, revealing it as the most pertinent model to date. Often cited in tourism literature and used as the framework for innumerable empirical research studies, Crouch and Ritchie (1999, 2000, 2003) can be accepted as the founders and cultivators of the destination competitiveness model. Their model identified five key measures, consisting of thirty-six attributes, which constituted the competitiveness of a destination. The five measures of the model are: micro and macro environments, core attributes, supporting attributes, qualifying attributes and destination management attributes. Adding to and refining the destination competitiveness model, Dwyer and Kim (2003), and Dwyer et al. (2004), created a new model. Although heavily influenced and adoptive of the measures and indicators put forward by Crouch and Ritchie (1999, 2000, 2003), the new model differed by providing a new measure, which was 'demand condition'. Alternative theoretical models created to examine the competitiveness of tourism destinations exist, however they take a less general perspective than those of Crouch and Ritchie (1999, 2000, 2003), Dwyer and Kim (2003), or Dwyer et al. (2004). For example, the model developed by Mathew and Sreejesh (2017) specifically focuses on the environmental and sustainability aspects of destinations and the model created by Kim et al. (2017) concentrates on the destinations image.

Exploring the second category of research relevant to tourism destination competitiveness, a large body of empirical research work indicates the applicability of the model to realistic circumstances and actual situations and destinations. As stated by Cucculelli and Goffi (2012), these empirical studies help in analyzing the competitive position of particular countries, in so much as a point of reference exists with which to compare new findings with. Examples of the empirical application of these models in different countries includes: Italy (Cucculelli and Goffi, 2016), Canada (Bornhorst, Ritchie and Sheehan, 2010), Australia (Chandralal and Valenzuela, 2013), Korea (Dwyer et al., 2004), Spain (Beerli and Martín, 2004), and Hong Kong (Enright and Newton, 2004). In an identical approach, this study will be empirical in nature, through which the competitiveness of Egypt as a tourism destination will be evaluated.

Attributes of destination competitiveness and overall satisfaction

Concerning the destination competitiveness model, Kim (2011) argued that although previous studies have advanced our knowledge of the critical roles of destination attributes in attracting new visitors, few studies have examined the relationship between these attributes and customer experiences. With the intention of reconciling the gap in knowledge described by Kim (2011), the current study has been composed in appreciation of the importance of assessing the satisfaction of existing guests with the different attributes of the destination competitiveness model. As such the current study will adopt the general model developed by Crouch and Ritchie (1999, 2000, 2003). Furthermore, the current study will employ the empirical studies conducted by Crouch (2007) and Crouch (2011) as a starting point, in order to determine which attributes have displayed decisive and conclusive impacts on customer satisfaction. Following the inspection of the aforementioned research, this study has identified nineteen attributes which have a noticeable impact on customer satisfaction. These nineteen attributes will be discussed and explained hereafter.

The Core Attributes of a destination represent the most important element of destination appeal, and of its subcomponents. Crouch and Ritchie (1999) Ritchie and Crouch (2000, 2003, 2011), Crouch (2007), and Crouch (2011), reveal that the Core attributes, are those attributes which characterize the destination. These are attributes which include the physiography and climate, the organization of special events, the destinations culture and history, the availability of different types of activities, entertainment facilities, tourism super structure, and market ties.

Previous research strongly suggests that particular attributes of core resources and attractors have a notable effect on tourist overall satisfaction. Crouch (2007) explains that the physiography and climate of a destination refers to the natural environment in which the tourist is exposed to during their visit. Moreover, Crouch (2011) indicates that the physiography and climate of a destination is ranked as the most important and determinant attribute in destination competitiveness. The rationale behind this statement, as Kim et al. (2017) express, being that physiography and climate are integral parts of the tourism destination product, and as such, can significantly affect the tourists' experience.

Historical and cultural attractions are often included as core attributes, due to their illustrative ability in representing the scope of human activity, and the diversity of artistic expression of the indigenous inhabitants within tourism destinations. Peterson (1994) indicates that culture and history is highly attractive to tourists, as they prefer to experience different cultures in order to experience a different time or place, enjoy a cerebral experience, learn, share experiences with others, and teach children the history and culture of other peoples. Crouch and Ritchie (1999) provide further evidence which support the claim that culture and history are fundamental attributes of destination. They indicate that, when a destination can provide its guests with an extraordinary setting in which they can encounter new ways of life, outside that of their day to day schedule, but supplemented by authentic conditions, which stand out from those found in their regular circumstances, then the destination will have a distinctive advantage and create unique positive experiences for its guests.

The statements and claims made by Peterson (1994) and Crouch and Ritchie (1999) are confirmed through several empirical studies, which have focused on different destinations, such as those conducted by Ap and Wong (2001). These studies, which have targeted tourists, revealed that the positive perception of the destinations historical and cultural attributes, was directly linked to the sensation of satisfaction of visiting a destination in general. Further core attributes found to have a significant effect on guest experience and visitor satisfaction include, the quality and diversity of the tourism superstructure as Kim (2014) explains, the availability of entertainment activities as Khuong and Uyen (2016) indicates, and the organization of special events and festivals as Boo and Busser (2005) reveal. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

H.1: Core destination attributes will be significantly associated with overall guest satisfaction. If guest perception of core attributes is positive, overall satisfaction will be increased and vice-versa.

Supporting factors and resources, as Crouch (2007, 28) defines, are those which "support or provide foundation upon which a successful tourism industry can be established". Crouch (2007, 28) continues to state that "A destination with an abundance of core resources and attractors but a lack of adequate supporting factors and resources, may find it very difficult to develop its tourism industry". The supporting factors of a destination are comprised of various attributes that have been found to significantly affect visitor's satisfaction. One such attribute is the hospitality of local residents. This attribute, as described by Crouch (2007), reflects the level of friendliness and general attitude towards tourists that the local residents of a destination display. Researchers such as Gursoy and Rutherford (2004) argue that the success of tourism within a destination is largely dependent on the support of local residents.

There is further literature which provides strong evidence concerning the significant impact that other supporting attributes have on guest experience and satisfaction in tourism destinations. Attributes such as the availability and perceived quality of a destinations basic infrastructure as explained by Thompson and Schofield (2007), the ease of accessibility to touristic sites as mentioned by Wan and Chan (2013), the facilitating resources, and the level of cleanliness and hygiene within the touristic destination as indicated by Corte et al. (2015). Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

H.2: Supporting destination attributes will be significantly associated with overall guest satisfaction. If guest perception of supporting attributes is positive, overall satisfaction will be increased and vice-versa.

Qualifying attributes are those that, as discussed by Crouch and Ritchie (1999), are uncontrolled by the tourism sector, and include considerations such as safety and security, cost and value, and location. Strong qualifying attributes can strengthen the ability of a destination to attract new customers, whereas poorly performing qualifying attributes can severely limit the ability of destinations to attract visitors.

The importance of safety and security in tourism destinations is well understood, both logically and through the extensive body of relevant literature. As Amir, Ismail and See (2015) determine, the success of a tourism destination, in a large part, can be attributed to its ability to provide safety and security to visitors. In support of this statement, a World Tourism Organisation (WTO) report (1997, P. 11) noted "safety and security are vital to providing quality in tourism. Therefore, providing quality tourism experiences which incorporate principles of safety and security are becoming an overriding objective of tourism destinations. This requires tourism officials at every level to coordinate their efforts with other government officials, the tourism operational sector, the media, nongovernmental organisations, and interested citizens' groups".

The role of price as an important indicator of guest satisfaction is well recognized and has been the focus of several theoretical and empirical studies. In the context of the service industry, Voss, Parasuraman and Grewal (1998) confirmed the findings of Dodds, et al. (1991), through their research, which exhibited that price fairness moderated the relationship between the previous expectations and the actual perceptions of tourists, regarding purchased services. In their study of the hotel industry, Mattila and O'Neill (2003) arrived at similar conclusions when they found price to be one of the most important predictors of guest satisfaction.

In reference to location, a strong collection of previous research demonstrates the importance of location as a decisive indicator in attracting and satisfying visitors. For instance, Crouch (2011), in his empirical analysis of the determining attractors for prospected visitors, and important satisfiers of existing customers, found that location was a determinant and crucial attribute of a destination. In his work, Crouch (2011) found that from the 36 attributes of destination competitiveness, location ranked 11th in terms of determinance, and 10th in terms of importance. Recently, Mussalam and Tajeddini (2016) conducted a comparative analysis of short and long holiday visitors to Switzerland, with the aim of determining the importance of 25 key destination attractiveness attributes, and the degree to which these attributes might influence holiday destination choice and experience. This analysis acknowledged the significance of the location attribute, ranking it 1st in importance for long holiday visitors, and 2nd in importance for short holiday visitors. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

H.3: Qualifying destination Attributes will be significantly associated with overall guest satisfaction. If guest perception of qualifying attributes is positive, overall satisfaction will be increased and vice-versa.

The dimension of planning and development attributes, as Kim (2014) and Ritchie and Crouch (2011) indicate, focuses on planning and developing a strategic framework for the destination that supports tourism development and the anticipated outcomes of this development. The attributes pertaining to planning and development highlight the necessity of creating strategic frameworks for tourism destinations through the involvement of different stakeholders. Allowing for the strategic and conceptual nature of the planning and development dimension, the description of literature relevant to the subject must be concisely limited to the attribute of branding. Blain, Levy, and Ritchie (2005) define destination branding as a set of marketing activities which aim to create a unique and differentiated identity of the destination through the incorporation of

distinctive tools. Pike (2009) indicated that, branding is considered a vital but challenging aspect of current destination management practices. Justifying the importance of destination branding, Ren and Blichfeldt (2011) argued that, destination branding and marketing are essential and urgent factors used to distinguish a destination from its competitors.

Investigating the relationship between destination branding and tourist satisfaction, Crouch (2011) found that, among the destination competitiveness attributes of the planning and development dimension, the positioning and branding attributes were recorded as the most substantial in terms of both attracting visitors and satisfying existing customers. Further empirically tested research works, such as those conducted by San Martin, Herrero, and Garcia de los Salmones (2018), and Raharjo and Amboningtyas (2017), affirm the relationship, in the tourism context, between the brand equity dimensions and customer satisfaction. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

H.4: Branding attribute will be significantly associated with overall guest satisfaction. If guest perception of branding attribute is positive, overall satisfaction will be increased and vice-versa.

The final components in the destination competitiveness model are the destination management attributes. Franch and Martini (2002, 5) define destination management as "the strategic and operative decisions taken to manage the process of definition, promotion and commercialization of the tourism product, to generate manageable flows of incoming tourists that are balanced, sustainable and sufficient to meet the economic needs of the local actors involved in the destination". Delving more deeply into the subject of destination management, several notable researchers provide specific evidence concerning the impact that destination management activities have had on attracting new visitors and satisfying existing customers. Researchers such as Yoon and Uysal (2005) and Moutinho and Trimble (1991) established in their work that, destination management activities, including marketing activities, had a firm and recognizable impact on customer satisfaction in the tourism industry.

Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

H.5: Destination management activities will be significantly associated with overall guest satisfaction. If guest perception of destination management activities is positive, overall satisfaction will be increased and vice-versa.

Overall Satisfaction, Intention to Return, and Word of Mouth Recommendations

Fornell (1992) defines customer satisfaction as, the customers overall post purchase evaluation and judgment about the extent to which the product or service purchased has fulfilled the customer's needs. The topic of customer satisfaction, as Lorca and García-Diez (2004) state, has been the subject of significant interest and attention from researchers from a variety of different fields, both in the past and presently. Customer satisfaction is particularly relevant for the service domain, where the fulfillment of satisfaction is the primary purpose for the existence of many service industries. The evidence for this statement can be found in the work of Lorca and García-Diez (2004)

who state that, the justification for the considerable attention towards the topic of customer satisfaction can be related to, the need of different firms to identify a guarantee of survival in today's highly competitive market. A number of studies, such as those conducted by San Martín, Herrero, and García de los Salmones (2018), Antón Camarero, and Laguna-García (2017), Hahm et al. (2016), Sun, Chi, and Xu (2013), and Kozak and Rimmington (2000), previously found a significant relationship between the level of satisfaction that tourist have of a destination, and their intention to repurchase and / or recommend the destination to others. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:
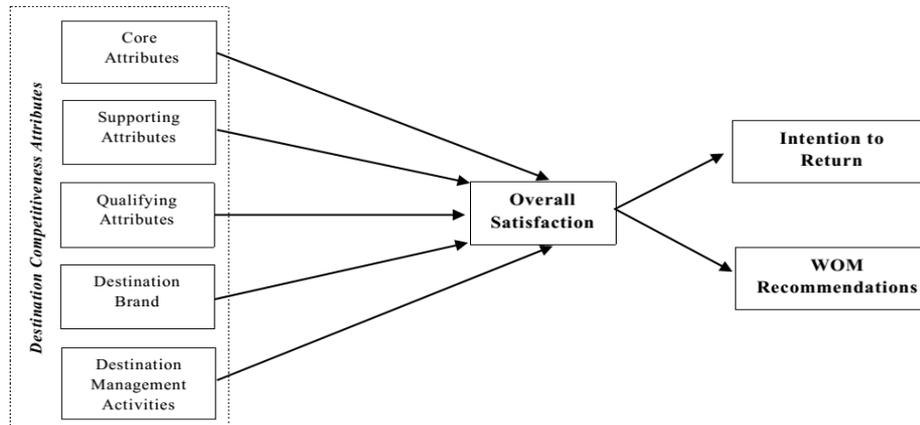
H.6: Overall satisfaction will be significantly and positively associated with re-purchase intentions.

H.7: Overall satisfaction will be significantly and positively associated with word-of-mouth recommendations.

Conceptual model

Based on the elements of the aforementioned literature, the following proposed conceptual model in figure one was composed to offer a vision of the hypothesized relationships among different variables of the current study.

Figure 1: **Conceptual model of the relationship between study variables**

METHODOLOGY

Scale development

The study employed a self-administered questionnaire which included eight constructs aimed at measuring customer satisfaction with different competitiveness attributes of Egypt as a tourism destination. Constructs of the questionnaire include customer satisfaction with different destination attributes: satisfaction with core attributes, satisfaction with supporting attributes, satisfaction with qualifying attributes, satisfaction

with destination management attributes, satisfaction of planning and development attributes (branding).

The five constructs previously mentioned, were chosen given their ability to capture customer satisfaction using different destination attributes, and primarily modeled on the general destination competitiveness model developed by Crouch and Ritchie (1999, 2000, 2003, 2005), who created the model for use in a tourism context. In regard to the main objective of the current study, destination attributes which have a conceptual and strategic nature, which are not perceived directly by customers, have been eliminated from the destination competitiveness framework. As can be expected, this has meant that fewer destination attributes have been used when compared to the original thirty-six attributes incorporated into the model developed by Crouch and Ritchie (1999, 2000, 2003, 2005). Specifically, nineteen attributes were selected to represent the five constructs mentioned above. These nineteen attributes, which have been clarified and discussed in the literature review, have been chosen based on the strong evidence demonstrated in previous research, of their ability to maintain an impact on customer satisfaction.

The questionnaire included two further constructs concerning, the overall satisfaction of visitors, and the intention of revisiting or recommending the destination to other tourists. The construct composed to measure the overall satisfaction of visitors has been assembled based on the satisfaction construct utilized by Lee et al. (2007), which has been adapted to better suit the objective of the current study. This included three items relevant to capturing overall satisfaction, being the actual satisfaction of visitors when compared to their expectations, satisfaction with respect to time, and satisfaction in terms of effort exerted. The construct developed to determine the intention to revisit Egypt was measured using three items, inspired from the work of Tosun, Dedeoğlu and Fyall (2015). Finally, the intention to recommend Egypt to other tourists construct was measured by two statements derived from the work of Molina, Frías-Jamilena and Castañeda-García (2013).

The six constructs representing the satisfaction with destination attributes, and the overall satisfaction of customers were measured with the application of a five-point Likert scale. Weighing the feedback given to the constructs regarding destination attributes, responses of 1 indicated a "very unsatisfactory" reaction, and in contrast, responses of 5 indicated a "very satisfactory" reaction. Similarly, the constructs measuring the intention to revisit and recommend to other tourists were presented using a five-point Likert scale, where responses of 1 indicated a "strongly disagree" reaction, and responses of 5 indicated a "strongly agree" reaction. The final section of the questionnaire sought to collect demographic characteristics of respondents such as age, gender, nationality, and level of education.

Sample Design and Data Collection

The research was implemented in the city of Sharm El-Sheikh in Egypt. Sharm El Sheikh was identified as an ideal environment to fulfill the objectives of the research as it is a well-established regional middle eastern destination which represents a significant portion of the touristic interest from international travelers of the country and its

geographical position, is a thriving destination which has managed to avoid the majority of negative impacts of regional and global events affecting the tourism industry, and is heavily invested in using the tourism sector as a pillar for its economy.

A personal survey was distributed among four and five star hotel guests of the city, with the assistance of five local tour guides who were trained by the researcher on questionnaire distribution and criteria for participating tourists. Some considerations were determined by the researcher and agreed with the tour guides to ensure that respondents are qualified to provide rankings on the competitiveness of the entire country. First, the tour guides were asked to distribute the questionnaire at the end of the tourist trip to Sharm El Sheikh, which takes an average of 9.2 nights according to Ragab (2015). Second, tour guides were also asked to distribute the questionnaire among tourists who have already visited at least one or more Egyptian tourist destinations rather than Sharm El Sheikh such as Cairo, Alexandria, Aswan and Luxor. Accordingly, distribution was limited only to package holiday tourists who have visited at least another Egyptian destination as part of their holiday itinerary and this was mostly done on the way back after visiting the other destination. This was done to ensure that the respondents had been exposed to most, or all, of the destination attributes during their visit, and thus would be more able to provide accurate and reliable feedback. Based on the previous criteria, a total of 259 questionnaires were distributed and collected. This was done using a convenience sampling technique over a period of two months from the beginning of January until the end of February 2018. Of the 259 questionnaires distributed and collected, 16 were considered invalid as they were incomplete, and subsequently 243 usable questionnaires were coded for data analysis, representing 93.8% of the total questionnaires delivered.

Reliability and Validity

To ensure the reliability of the questionnaire items, a pilot test was conducted prior to the distribution of the actual questionnaire. Concerning the pilot test, 40 visitors participated in providing responses, of which 32 were valid for analysis. Using SPSS (version 23), a reliability test was conducted for the seven constructs which constituted the questionnaire items. The Cronbach alpha result for the different constructs ranged between 0.83 and 0.96. Thus, it could be stated that all the questionnaire constructs possessed a composite reliability score above the acceptable level of 0.7 recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994).

Following the recommendations of Brown (1996), different considerations were taken into account to ensure the validity of the scale of the study. Firstly, to ensure content validity eight colleagues were asked to compare the questionnaire with the research objectives. This was done in order to judge the degree to which the scale constructs and items matched the research objectives. Built on other researchers' feedback, slight amendments were made for the wording used in several sentences. Secondly, to ensure construct validity, constructs that were validated and received strong support in previous studies were operationalized with the aim of collecting the data required to verify the research hypotheses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Descriptive analysis

Table 1 below highlights the demographic profile of the survey respondents. As can be observed, there is an almost identical response rate from both male and female participants, a fair representation of responses from participants of different education levels, and a somewhat heavy response rate from the older age group. As per the nationality, international tourists represent the largest proportion of visitors to Sharm El Sheikh. The relative composition of visitors has undergone a radical change in recent years. After Russian tourists accounted for the largest percentage of visitors, the situation changed radically after the crash of the Russian plane on North Sinai in 2015. This resulted in the disappearance of Russian tourists completely and relying instead on Polish, Ukrainians, Germans, Italians and other nationalities at lower percentages.

Table 1: **Respondents' Profile**

Variable	*%*	*Variable*	*%*	*Variable*	*%*
Gender		**Age**		**Nationality**	
Male	48.1	25-34	7.4	Germany	17
Female	51.9	35-44	3.7	Ukraine	23
Highest educational level		45-54	18.5	Poland	21
Basic	22.2	55-64	25.9	Italy	13
High School	33.3	65 and more	44.4	UK	5
Graduated	37.0			Other nationalities	21
Postgraduate	7.4				

Tourist Perception of Destination Competitiveness Attributes

When observing the responses given by the survey participants (Table 2), several conclusive statements can be made concerning the tourist's perception of Egypt's core attributes as a destination. Looking at the mean scores, it can easily be recognized that the physiography and climate of the country (4.81) was perceived to be the most important factor, whereas the diversity of activities during the visit (3.22) was perceived as the least important factor. Further analysis of the responses reveal that the perceived second most important factor of Egypt as a destination was its unique culture and history (4.44), and that the availability of special events out of the normal plan (3.89) was perceived as the second least important factor.

Regarding the supporting attributes of Egypt, it is clear that the respondents felt that the hospitality of the local residents (4.52) and cleanliness of touristic sites (4.07) were the most important factors. Interestingly, both the ease of accessibility to touristic sites (3.85), and the facilitating resources (3.78) such as maps and guides, were perceived to

be the least important supporting attributes of the destination. Unsurprisingly, the most important qualifying attribute of Egypt as a destination was perceived to be its safety and security (4.70). The perceived least important qualifying attribute of Egypt was, the cost of products and services compared to the value received (4.33), although the mean score demonstrates that this attribute still performed well in general. In reference to the destination management attributes, the treatment of employees (4.41), and the availability of necessary information required to support decision making (4.00) were considered the most important factors. Marketing activities to position Egypt as an attractive destination (3.70), and the Quality of products and services offered in different areas (3.85), were considered the least important factors of the management of the destination, although they maintained moderate importance. Understanding the responses pertaining to the planning and development of the destination, it can be observed that the survey participants perceived Egypt's tourism brand image (4.04) as being the most important.

Table 2: **Tourists' Perception of Destination Competitiveness Attributes**

	M.	S.D		M.	S.D
A. Core Attributes	**4.10**	**0.43**	**B. Supporting Attributes**	**4.04**	**0.44**
1. Availability of special events out of the normal plan	3.89	0.69	1. Quality of destination's basic infrastructure (.e.g., roads)	4.00	0.72
2. Physiography and climate of Egypt	4.81	0.48	2. Ease of accessibility to touristic sites	3.85	0.59
3. Unique culture and history	4.44	0.79	3. Facilitating resources (e.g., maps, audio guides, etc)	3.78	0.69
4. Diversity of activities during the visit (e.g., entertainment activities)	3.22	1.03	4. Hospitality of local residents	4.52	0.69
5. Quality of tourism superstructure (e.g. accommodation facilities, restaurants, transportation facilities, etc).	4.15	0.65	5. Cleanliness of touristic sites	4.07	0.72
C. Qualifying Attributes	**4.47**	**0.58**	**D. Destination Management Attributes**	**3.99**	**0.51**
1. Safety and security	4.70	0.53	1. Marketing activities to position Egypt as an attractive destination	3.70	0.66
2. Cost of products/services compared to the Value received	4.33	0.61	2. Quality of products and services offered in different areas	3.85	0.71
3. Location	4.37	1.10	3. Availability of necessary information required to support decision making	4.00	0.77
			4. Treatment of employees	4.41	0.63
E. Planning and Development (branding) Attributes	**3.83**	**0.55**			
1. Egypt's tourism brand image	4.04	0.64			
2. Egypt's tourism brand awareness	3.89	0.88			
3. Egypt's tourism brand value	3.56	0.74			
Overall Perception				**4.09**	**0.37**

M = Mean; S.D = Standard Deviation

Reviewing the responses concerning satisfaction and the intention to revisit (Table 3), it is clear that there was a strong overall satisfaction with Egypt as a tourism destination (4.37), that the survey participants had their expectations satisfied (4.18), and feel that the visit was worth their time and effort (4.14). Logically, as can be expected from customers displaying high levels of satisfaction, it is clear that the respondents are likely to recommend other people to visit Egypt (4.66), visit Egypt again (4.66), and general say positive things about the destination to other people (4.48). Examining the average mean scores of the destination attribute constructs, it is interesting to note that qualifying attributes (4.47) were perceived to be the most important, followed by the core attributes (4.10), which is subsequently followed by the supporting attributes (4.04), with the destination management attributes (3.99), and the planning and development attributes (3.83) considered as the least important attributes of the destination.

Table 3: **Tourists' Satisfaction, Recommendation and Return Intentions**

	M.	S.D		M.	S.D
A. Tourist Overall satisfaction	**4.23**	**.75**	**B. Recommendation & return intention**	**4.57**	**.54**
1. Satisfaction with your visit to Egypt when considering your invested time and effort	4.14	1.08	1. [a]I would recommend other people to visit Egypt	4.66	.54
2. Satisfaction with your visit to Egypt when compared with your expectation	4.18	.86	2. [a]If I have the opportunity, I will visit Egypt again	4.66	.60
3. Overall satisfaction with Egypt as a tourism destination	4.37	.55	3. [b]I would say positive things about my visit to Egypt to other people	4.48	.63
			4. [b]I will encourage my family and friends to visit this place	4.50	.58

M = Mean; S.D = Standard Deviation; a = statements measuring re-visit intention & b = statements measuring recommendation intention

Hypotheses Testing

In order to assess the extent to which different destination attributes influence the satisfaction of tourists in Egypt, Linear Regression Models were created between independent variables and dependent variables (Table 4). The analysis revealed the existence of a significant and positive relationship between two out of the five destination attributes and tourist satisfaction. First of all, core destination attributes were found to be the key predictor of tourist satisfaction (R = 0.213; R Square = 0.45), at a significance level of (0.001). Accordingly, H1 is supported. Also, supporting attributes were found to a have a significant and positive impact on tourist satisfaction (R = 0.157; R Square = 0.025), at a significance level of (0.014). Therefore, H2 is supported. On the other hand, Linear Regression Analysis indicated that there is no correlation between the three other dimensions of destination competitiveness, namely, qualifying attributes, destination management attributes and planning and development attributes and tourist satisfaction (P value $< .05$), and therefore hypotheses H3 to H5 were rejected. Although the relationship between these three individual attributes and tourist satisfaction is not proven, the relationship between all the variables combined and the tourist satisfaction

was very strong. Finally, tourist overall satisfaction was found to be positively predicting both tourist re-purchase intentions (R = 0.521; R Square = 0.272), at a significance level of (0.000), and tourist intention to recommend the destination to other tourists (R = 0.581; R Square = 0.337), at a significance level of (0.000) and therefore H6 and H7 were supported.

Table 4: **Linear Regression Analysis: Impact of Destination Attributes on Tourist Overall Satisfaction**

Independent Variables / Predictors	R	R Square	Adj. R Square	Std. Error	Change Statistics		
					R Square Change	F Change	Sig. F Change
Core Attributes [a]	.213	.045	.041	.73	.045	11.46	.001
Supporting Attributes [a]	.157	.025	.021	.74	.025	6.095	.014
Qualifying Attributes [a]	.082	.007	.003	.75	.007	1.632	.203
Destination Management Attributes [a]	.100	.010	.006	.75	.010	2.410	.122
Planning & Development Attributes [a]	.009	.000	-.004	.75	.000	.017	.895
All Destination Attributes [a]	.454	.206	.190	.67	.206	12.330	.000
Tourist overall satisfaction [b]	.521	.272	.269	.52	.272	89.854	.000
Tourist overall satisfaction [c]	.581	.337	.335	.44	.337	122.676	.000

Note: [a] dependent variable is tourist overall satisfaction; [b] dependent Variable is destination re-purchase intentions; [c] dependent Variable is word-of-mouth recommendation

Discussion of Results

Analyzing the responses provided in Table 2, the high mean scores given to the physiography and climate of the country, and the unique culture and history of Egypt, contrasted against the low scores given to, the diversity of activities during the visit, and the availability of special events out of the normal plan, provide a noteworthy remark. These scores imply that tourists consider Egypt's natural geographical position, aesthetically pleasing landscape, and intrinsic tangible and intangible culture to be the most important core attributes of the destination. In line with research participants, the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) published by the World Economic Forum (WEF) (2017) ranks Egypt highly in cultural resources and business travel (22nd out of 136), which is reflected by responses of the research, who felt highly satisfied with the country's cultural resources.

However, in contrast to the survey responses, the TTCI (2017) ranks Egypt poorly for its natural resources (97th out of 136). This contradiction can be better understood by examining the methodology of the TTCI. The TTCI (2017) builds the pillar of 'Natural Resources' using 5 index components. Egypt's poor performance in this pillar can be attributed to the following. 3 index components, being, number of World Heritage Sites, total known species, and total protected areas, use purely quantitative values. Firstly, being a country in North Africa, the total number of known species is bound to be lower than those destinations in tropical regions, placing Egypt at an inherent disadvantage in this regard. Secondly, the country has only 1 natural world heritage site, and only 11 protected areas, and as such is ranked poorly. Yet, this may not be an issue for the type

of tourists who visit Egypt, which can be understood from the index component 'attractiveness of natural assets'. This component, which uses a scale (1-7), is distributed to local industry executives, using a survey asking, "To what extent do international tourists visit your country mainly for its natural assets?". Egypt's low score in this regard (131 out of 136) implies that the countries industry leaders believe that tourists visit Egypt for purposes other than its natural resources. Accordingly, it could be argued that local business owners have a poor understanding of tourist motivations, or that the natural aspects of the country really do hold little interest for tourists. Assuming the latter, then the responses of the survey participants are not entirely surprising, having traveled to Egypt for some purpose other than to explore its natural assets, visitors were fairly content with the natural elements they did observe. Lastly, regarding the country's natural resources, the survey respondents may have simply been satisfied with the aesthetic qualities of destination, being warm and sandy, and not so concerned with visiting protected areas or seeing rare wildlife. Alternatively, it can be appreciated, as Ragab (2015) draws attention to, that tourists in the Red Sea area engage much water activity such as scuba diving and snorkeling. This area is remarked for its attractive scenery and pleasant weather. With this consideration, high scores for physiography and climate are justified and expected.

What can be inferred from the observations made regarding the supporting attributes which were perceived to be the most important, is that although tourists do not travel to Egypt because of the welcoming nature of the local people, or due to the level of care with which touristic sites are maintained, they felt that these particular elements of the destination added significant value to their experience. Tourists' high satisfaction of supporting attributes can be further appreciated through the studies of Colliers International (2014), the World Travel & Tourism Council (2017), and the UNWTO (2018) which show the growth and level of investment that the country is placing in the tourism sector. Furthermore, as highlighted by BNC (2017), Sharm Al Sheikh is receiving 17% of all active hospitality projects in Egypt, a fairly substantial amount, being second only to Cairo. Therefore, tourists in cities which are actively improving tourist facilities with much visible development are more likely to perceive indicators such as infrastructure and hygiene highly. Moreover, the TTCI (2017) ranks Egypt as 37th out of 136 countries in terms of prioritization of Travel and Tourism.

Regarding qualifying attributes, it is surprising that tourists' perceived Egypt as a safe destination despite recent events happened in Egypt. Over the last few decades, Egypt has been the center of a media storm concerning the apparent rise and strengthening of various terrorist organizations within the country which have targeted government officials, the police force, the Egyptian Christian community, and tourists. Yet, extraordinarily, the participants of the survey noted safety and security as the 2nd most satisfying attribute. In continuation, the TTCI (2017) explains how, in the country's recent history, terrorism incidents have damaged the countries tourism image, however, it notes how visitor perceptions have improved to a limited degree since 2015. Given the level of investment directed at improving this image, and the absence of further attacks or incidents, visitors may well have their satisfactions exceeded and even experience delight. The results of the study regarding visitors' high satisfaction with the cost of products/services compared to the value received were in line with the TTCI's ranking for Egypt in terms of price competitiveness (2nd out of 136). This can be appreciated

through the work of Agušaj, Bazdan, and Lujak (2017) who demonstrate, how lower prices can improve guest satisfaction, and how guests in 5 star hotels are more likely to provide positive feedback than guests in 1 or 2 star hotels.

Concerning the feedback provided for the destination management attributes, three important realizations are revealed. Firstly, that the tourism industry within Egypt has accomplished an appropriate level of labor support and put into place the necessary regulations to ensure the suitable and positive treatment of employees. Secondly, that if the respondents of the survey are truly representative of the entire scope of tourists who travel to Egypt, then Egypt is becoming a more attractive destination for socially conscious tourists. Lastly, as marketing activities to position Egypt as an attractive destination was perceived to be the least important attribute, it can be determined that the long standing romanticized interest in Egypt as a destination continues to strongly influence the desire of customers to travel to the country, and additional marketing efforts exerted by the destination to promote itself only act as secondary motivators when compared to the educational, cultural and geographic interest that the Western world has historically held for the country. Observing the planning and development attributes of Egypt, it is clear that the brand image plays a large role in the attractiveness of the destination. This is supported by the survey participants perceptions concerning the other attributes, whereby the respondents feel the image of Egypt is physically attractive, rich in culture, safe to visit, hospitable, modern, and clean. Concerning the satisfaction and intention to revisit constructs of the questionnaire, the opinions provided by the survey participants strengthen the image of Egypt as a competitive tourist destination which delivers high levels of satisfaction.

Although the competitiveness attributes of destinations in relation to customer satisfaction concerning North African destinations is very limited, some insight can be acquired through the observation of destination competitiveness indicators from reputable sources, despite their inability to relate the indicators to visitor satisfaction. Comparing Egypt's competitiveness with other North African destinations such as Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria, the TTCI (2017) indicates that, in terms of travel and tourism, Egypt is the second most competitive North African country, with a global ranking of 74, following Morocco which achieved a global rank of 65. According to the TTCI (2017), Egypt achieved the highest scores in price competitiveness, the prioritization of travel and tourism, health and hygiene, and human resources.

To conclude, several of the above-mentioned competitiveness indicators support the findings of this research. Both respondents' perceptions of fair value of the services and products purchased and the good treatment of staff scored highly, and were similarly praised by the TTCI (2017), reinforcing the notion that Egypt is a destination that targets the value segment, and that it is a country with an empathetic attitude towards tourists. Furthermore, the report demonstrates that Egypt is a destination with an emphasis on health and hygiene, which is reflected in the results of the research which show that tourists felt that the cleanliness of touristic sites was of a very satisfactory standard. Curiously, the TTCI (2017) considers safety and security, infrastructure, and natural and cultural resources as poorly performing components of the destination. However, all of these elements received fairly satisfactory feedback from the participants of this research. This could be attributed to the difference in information that the TTCI (2017) and the

tourists are exposed to, or due to the different position of their perspectives. For instance, tourists considered the safety and security of the destination to be highly satisfactory because they had never been in a dangerous situation or felt threatened during their time in Egypt, being both temporally and spatially limited. On the other hand, the TTCI (2017) may use a long-standing measurement, taking into account all dangerous activities throughout the country over a period of several years to provide a uniform calculation which can be applied to every country indiscriminately.

IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The research, having gathered materials using scientifically acceptable methods, and having analyzed the findings ethically, with a full explanation of activities being contained in this document, can be confidently concluded as an addition to the body of existing literature concerning the relationships between destination attributes and visitor satisfaction. Although there are few other examples of research works which have used the same destination competitiveness model and sought the same research objectives, this research can be used as a pillar for those who wish to better understand the links between visitor satisfaction and destination competitiveness attributes, with the specific example of Egypt. Furthermore, this research could be instrumental in any study which seeks to determine the competitive position of Egypt from among its neighbors, or in a global ranking. Alternatively, the findings contained in this research could be used in future studies which would be designed and conducted in order to gain insight into the changing perceptions of tourists towards Egypt's destination attributes over an extended time period (should further researches be conducted using the same model or framework).

The findings of this work may also be used to compare the differing perceptions of tourists visiting the different localities within Egypt. This research will be valuable for those who wish to explore the differences in destination attributes between two cities, such as Cairo and Sharm El Sheikh for instance. Consequently, future researchers will be able to comment on the apparent differences in visitor satisfaction between multiple locations. In a similar fashion, future research could concentrate on the different perceptions tourists hold regarding Sharm El Sheikh. Depending on their socio-economic status and the chosen quality of their travel package. For example, visitors on budget travel packages may perceive the destinations competitive attributes differently from those who have purchased luxury packages. The findings mentioned in this research would be extremely practical in fulfilling this purpose.

The findings and discussions contained in this research could also be valuable to both the private and public sectors within Egypt. The concerned parties and individuals of the tourism industry, both at the local and national level, will be able to use the data and related analysis displayed in this document to better appreciate the challenges and opportunities present in Egypt's contemporary tourism industry, and as such be able to make more accurate decisions for the future benefit of the country's stakeholders. As a result of this research, a wide range of fascinating additions, comparisons, and concentrations may be composed, concerning either Egypt, destination competitiveness,

destination attributes, Sharm El Sheikh, visitor satisfaction, and any combination of these subjects.

When conducting the present study, there were some limitations that could be considered for future research. First, the results of this study were based on a sample of visitors to one tourist area in Egypt. Although a number of considerations have been put in place to select the tourists participating in the study to ensure that they are adequately informed about Egypt as a tourist destination, but in future research the selection of a sample from different tourist areas that spread in Egypt's geographic range will result in a less biased and more generalizable results. Second, the sample profile included a high percentage of elderly age groups and a small percentage of youth, and therefore, future research should take into consideration the diversity of the study sample to be representative of the different socio-demographic categories.

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