9 Tourism suppliers' view of the role of government initiatives and tourism competitiveness in distressed contexts

Erisher Woyo

Abstract

This chapter analyses the role of government initiatives in tourism competitiveness, using data collected from suppliers operating in a distressed tourist destination. The government's involvement in the process of tourism development, especially in developing countries, is critical. The role and participation of governments in tourism development vary from minimal to a high level of involvement. Developing economies with ongoing political and economic challenges like Zimbabwe have not been comprehensively researched, especially on the nexus between competitiveness and government initiatives. Using qualitative data from a convenience sample of 15 hospitality and tourism managers in Zimbabwe, it was found that the role of government is important for enhancing tourism competitiveness. The study concludes that a higher level of government involvement is needed for Zimbabwe to enhance competitiveness. The government should play a greater role, especially in providing an enabling environment for improved competitiveness while reducing corruption.

Keywords:

Government initiatives; distressed destination; tourism competitiveness; Zimbabwe

Introduction

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, international tourism was projected to reach 1.8 billion arrivals, and emerging economies were expected to have 57% of the share (UNWTO, 2019). Though tourism growth has been revised downward due to the challenges emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism still plays a critical role in the economic development of emerging economies, especially job creation and revenue generation (Lee, 2015; Woyo & Slabbert, 2020). Several destinations globally are increasing government support to promote tourism development based on the sector's contribution to gross domestic product (GDP), especially among developing economies (Crouch, 2011; Woyo, 2018). Webster and Ivanov (2014) argue that the increased spending of public resources is justified, based on the need to attract more tourist arrivals and enhance destination competitiveness.

Competitiveness is critical for a tourist destination to globally obtain a favourable market position (Leung & Baloglu, 2013; Woyo & Slabbert, 2021). Pike and Page (2014) argue that managing competitive tourist destinations is critical in studying the tourism industry. Though destination competitiveness has been an active area of research, there is a need for comprehensive research to generate insights that destinations can apply in developing strategic plans (Cronjé & du Plessis, 2020). Past studies show a shifting trend in terms of how research is investigating destination competitiveness from simply focusing on aspects of competitive advantage to emphasising the role of private and public actors in the development equation (Armenski et al., 2018; Hall & Campos, 2014; Mei et al., 2015). This implies that even destinations with ongoing crises like Zimbabwe (Woyo & Slabbert, 2020; Woyo, 2021) need to understand what competitiveness means, its models and factors (Cronjé & du Plessis, 2020) and the role the government plays in enhancing competitiveness.

Government initiatives are imperative for enhancing destination competitiveness (Croes, 2011; Croes & Kubickova, 2013). However, studies investigating the role of government in a tourism competitiveness context (see Table 9.1) are relatively fewer (Javed & Tučková, 2020), suggesting an area of research that is still in its infancy (Hall & Campos, 2014; Wan & Bramwell, 2015). This is regardless of three decades of tourism competitiveness research (Kubickova & Martin, 2020). Though the role of government in tourism development among developing countries

is prominent (Yang et al., 2008), the challenge is that research is yet to provide a nuanced understanding of the effectiveness of government initiatives and policies in enhancing tourism competitiveness (Yang et al., 2008; Kubickova, 2019), specifically from a destination with ongoing political and economic challenges like Zimbabwe (Woyo & Slabbert, 2020). This demonstrates the complexity of the relationship between government role and tourism competitiveness.

A review of past research shows that most studies on competitiveness focused more on definitional aspects, its measurements, and determinants (Abreu-Novais et al., 2016; Cronjé & du Plessis, 2020). Furthermore, African destinations, particularly those with ongoing political and economic challenges, have not been investigated (see Table 9.1). The focus of existing studies has been more on developing countries located in the Central American region. Moreover, a population gap is observed in the literature. Most of the studies were conducted using secondary data, drawn mainly from the World Trade Organisation, World Bank, Central Banks, Tourism Boards and the World Travel and Tourism Council. Therefore, methodologically, this study contributes to insights drawn from the tourism suppliers' primary data. Table 9.1 also shows that the same research gap was presented. This chapter responds to the need to understand how government initiatives and competitiveness are linked (Kubickova & Martin, 2020). Acknowledging these research gaps, this chapter investigates tourism establishments managers' perceptions regarding the government's role in enhancing destination competitiveness in a distressed context. This general aim is divided into two specific objectives: (1) identifying the government initiatives, (2) and their perceived influence on destination competitiveness in a distressed destination.

This study contributes to the literature by discussing the role of government initiatives using a destination in distress. Thus, the study's findings provide an interesting perception of government initiatives' impact on destination competitiveness. Understanding government initiatives' influence in enhancing a destination's competitiveness within a fluid political environment could help the supply side plan and develop the tourism industry better. Methodologically, this chapter provides findings based on primary data that has been qualitatively analysed in a field where most publications have been based on secondary data analysed quantitatively (see Table 9.1).

9