Effect of Destination Brand on Destination Competitiveness in Southwest Region of Nigeria

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Abstract: The image and competitiveness are essential aspects to its promotion and continuous existence in the marketplace. Both destination competitiveness and its brand image are individual concepts with significant influence on the destination. Hence this study is focused on how destination brand image can influence the competitiveness of a destination. To carry out this study, six destinations of the South-West region of Nigeria were the study area, and with the aid of a structured questionnaire, the data was collected. A total of 1530 questionnaires were distributed in the various attractions of the destinations, 1008 was recovered. From the analysis of the data through Structural equation Modelling, Path analysis, it was discovered that destination brand image does have a significant effect on the destination's competitiveness. Therefore, it is concluded that management organizations should give adequate attention to the brand image as it plays a significant role in the competitiveness of a destination.

Keywords: Destination Brand; Destination Competitiveness; promotion.

1. Introduction

According to Kim*et. al* (2018), competition among destinations to attract visitors is becoming more intense than ever before and an increase in exploration of the drivers of the competition through research Destination image is essential in managing a destination, as it determines the effective management of the Destination (Carballo *et al.*,2015; Martins, 2015; Foris *et. al.*, 2020). The reason is that there are diversity of destinations offering almost the same form and type of attraction and according to United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2011), in its annual report, says "in tourism, new destinations are quick to emerge, consumer behaviour and preferences are constantly evolving, and fast-breaking crises can have far-reaching consequences. Hence, a destination must be with a positive image in the sight of tourists to remain competitive among other destinations. Destination image is the amalgamation of the knowledge, feelings, beliefs, opinions, expectations, and impressions of the tourist or potential tourist about the Destination (Henderson 2007). In summary, it combines both the cognitive and affective image of the Destination to the tourists. In creating an image for the Destination, the image of tourism business managers such as tour operators, hotel companies and airlines at the Destination is significant because their decisions impact the travelling opportunities of individuals and the development of the tourism industry of such Destination (Henderson, 2007).

Among all tourism products, the Destination is one of the most difficult to manage and market (Foris et al. 2020) and the most important (Cooper, 2012). Destination marketing is planned strategically developed activities to attract visitors to a destination (Chechelashvili, et. al. 2019). Due to tourism growth globally, destinations now compete in attracting tourists, and only places/destinations with positive reputations easily attract attention from tourists' businesses and resources (Morgan et al., 2011). Destination image seems abstract to measure, but its measurement is still possible, and this can be done by some dimensions/indicators of an image. Although the image is a complex concept to measure, individuals' views of an image of something could differ. In terms of tourism destination, in some cases, the managers could think they are portraying a particular image, whereas, from the tourists' perspective, it could mean something entirely different. Hence the formation process of an image, as mentioned by Gunn (1972) and some other researchers who have subdivided the categorisation of the

destination image. The focus of this study therefore, on the impact of destination dimensions on the Destination's competitiveness. Therefore, this study employs brand identity, brand personality, brand association, brand behaviour and attitude, and brand competence as dimensions of brand image (Wijaya, 2013) to examine the interaction of brand image on destination competitiveness. Destination competitiveness is measured in core indicators (safety and security, accessibility, Infrastructure, and Accommodation and Food (Hospitality) Standard), facilitating indicators (Quality of the visitor's experience, Attractions, Ancillary services and Climatic- and environmental conditions) and Supporting indicators (Political indicators, economic and social indicators) as indicated by Ferreira and Perks, (2020).

Based on the focus of the study, the hypothesis of the study is

H0: Destination brand image has no significant effect on the Destination's competitiveness

H1: Destination brand image has a significant effect on Destination's competitiveness.

1.1. Destination Brand Image

The image of a destination as a key concept related to understanding tourists' destination selection processes, can be facilitated by the strengths of a destination in the eyes of potential visitors (Unurlu & Küçükkancabaş, 2013). Destination image combines the ideas, beliefs and impressions of a person/individual of a particular destination (Nuria &Victor, 2020). The view of tourists about destinations determines their choice of Destination. Tourists seek details about a destination from different sources before embarking on their journey to the Destination (Garcia-Haro et al., 2021). Destination image is formed in three ways- direct experience from the visit to the Destination, information sources, or inferences (Martinez & Pina, 2003). Some of these image formations include Organic and Induced (Gunn, 1972), functional and psychological (Echtner& Ritchie, 2003), cognitive, affective and conation (Pike, 2004), amongst others. Image formation by Gunn (1998) was further characterised into eight categories by Gartner (1993), referred to like the change agents, and these are: overt induced (1), overt induced (2), covert induced (3), covert induced (4), autonomous (5), unsolicited organic (6), solicited organic (7), and organic (8).

According to Gunn (1972), and Organic image is an image formed by individuals based on either personal experience of the Destination (Milman & Pizam, 1995) or other sources of information such as the media, movies, articles, etc. which are termed unbiased. This indicates the power of the media on the promotion of tourism destinations and the impression the Destination makes on the people during their visit. Induce, on the other hand, according to Gunn (1972), is the image created by marketers of a destination-Destination Marketing Organisations- during their promotional activities of the Destination. According to Nuria &Victor (2020), the image of a destination can either be negative or positive in tourists' perspectives. Gunn (1972) suggested that marketers should focus on the induced image to alter the negative image an individual might have developed of a destination, but Ahmed (1991a) postulated that it might not be effortless to change the perception/image of the people because the media (News) is more powerful and voluminous than the marketing activities. Cognitive image is the image formed of a destination based on what is known or believed about a destination, i.e., organic and induced (Kim & Chen, 2015). Affective image, according to Fishbein (1967), is seen as the feeling of an individual about an object/destination which might be favourable, unfavourable or neutral, while a conative image is formed based on the intent of the individual having combined the cognitive and the affective image, to visit the Destination or not (Pike, 2004).

Although the view of Gunn (1972) can be said to be unique as it represents the image of a destination, according to research on image formation, it shows that individuals could form an image of a destination even without visiting the Destination, which is the organic image (Pike, 2004), and when they visit the Destination, it is possible their perception changes either negatively or positively about the Destination therefore, Pike & Ryan (2004) suggests that the images held by those that have visited the Destination should be separated from those that haven't, arguing that, an image of a destination is created when the person visits the Destination. Therefore, this argument implies the combination of both the organic and the induced as one form of image creation, which implies that the knowledge of a destination may or may not be through visitation- cognitive, affective (emotional), and conative (behavioural) image. Pike (2004) 's suggestion is limited, and this is because, as the image of a destination can be formed through either visiting the Destination or not- sourcing information from different sources also aids the decision making of tourists.

For most tourists, their experience at the Destination is a significant factor in image formation (Kastenholz, 2010). Before they even choose a destination to visit, the Destination's image is essential (Castro et al., 2007). To ensure that the tourists have a pleasant experience that they cannot easily forget, the Destination needs to live up to the promise they make based on their brand. The brand of a destination has to be managed to aid the creation of the right image for the Destination in the minds of the tourists to allow for a repeat visit and increase the visitor market (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003).

A tourist's image of a destination is formed before and after the visit to the Destination (Chon, 1990). According to Gunn (1972), the tourist's image of the Destination before visiting is organic, while the one gained after is induced. The Destination Management/Marketing Organizations (DMOs) must work on these images to

promote the Destination. This is essential to make sure that the experience of tourists at the Destination is worth the time and money spent. A tourist with good experience would hold a positive image of the brand and tell others about their experience (Lee, 2011). Wijaya (2013) asserts that brand identity, brand personality, brand association, brand behaviour and attitude, and brand competence are the dimensions of brand image that create and sustain a specific sense of feeling in the customers' hearts. In the same vein, Kaemingk (2019) posits that these dimensions enhance the customers, prospects, employees, and stakeholders in the firm's value creation.

1.2. Destination Competitiveness

A tourist destination is a complex and integrated portfolio of services offered to tourists by a place that supplies a holiday experience to meet the needs of the tourists, thereby providing a compound package of tourists' services based on the Destination's supply potential (Cracolici& Nijkamp, 2008). According to some researchers such as Enright & Newton (2004) and Cracolici & Nijkamp (2008), a destination to thrive in the world market. Competitiveness in the tourism sector is the ability of the Destination to create and integrate value-added products that sustains the Destinations' resources and maintain market position about competitors (Hassan, 2000). The concept of competitiveness in tourism is studied to ensure the continual development of destinations worldwide to ensure the sustainability of these destinations (Cîrstea, 2014). The competitiveness of a destination is on the satisfaction of tourists that visits the Destination, which is a determinant of the Destination's competitiveness (Pavlic, Perucic, & Portolan, 2011). Competitiveness is the effort and achievement of long-term profitability above alternative investment opportunities in other industries (Goffi & Cucculelli, 2014).

There is a competition among many tourist destinations in line with every business and industry's drive (Heath &Wall, 1992). Competitiveness is more common between tourism organisations and Destinations than countries because tourism is multi-faceted and very elaborate (Bordas, 1992). Tourists are most likely to compare Destination's attractions, facilities, and service standards. Hence, the debate that tourists choose a destination amongst many alternatives and access such options based on Destinations' potential to serve the tourist's benefits. Pearce (1992) concludes that destination competitiveness measures are essential for accommodation, ambience, prices, amenities, and destination location.

According to Dwyer & Kim (2003), destination competitiveness is linked to the Destination's ability to deliver goods and services that are better than the other destinations based on the experience of tourists, which is vital to the tourists. The definition of destination competitiveness is understood based on its ability to increase tourism expenditure, attract tourists while satisfying, and enhance the well-being of the Destination residents sustainably (Rey-Maquieira & Ramos, 2016). Ozyurt & Kantarci (2017) opine that the Destination's competitiveness is essential for a destination to thrive among other destinations. Different scholars have developed models of measuring destination competitiveness. Ritchie & Crouch (2003) developed a seven (7) component competitiveness model, which includes: the global (macro) environment, the competitive (micro) environment, core resources and attractors, supporting factors and resources, destination policy, planning and development, destination management, and qualifying and amplifying determinants. Upon this model, other research has developed on destination competitiveness (Goffi, 2013). This study, therefore, adopted the destination competitiveness model by Ferreira & Perks (2020). The authors came up with three leading indicators having reviewed other research on destination competitiveness measures, and these three leading indicators are Core indicators- safety and security, accessibility, infrastructure, accommodation and food standards (Hospitality standards); facilitating indicators- the quality of visitorexperience, climate and natural resources, cultural heritage andcreative tourism resources, and Supporting indicators- political, economic, social and technological indicators.

2. Methodology

A survey method was adopted for this study. The study is conducted in six states of the South-west region of Nigeria. The total population for the study is based on the number of tourists visiting each state – choosing a major tourist attraction in each state. The population of the study areas is 314,843. Using the Raosoft sample estimator software based on average distribution calculation at 95% confidence level and 5% margin error, the total sample size of the study is 1530. A research questionnaire was designed using the Likert Scale question format. The questionnaire is designed with closed-ended questions on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from (1), not at all influenced **(NI)**, (2) Slightly influenced **(SLI)**, (3) Somewhat influenced **(SI)**, (4) Very much influenced **(VMI)** and (5) Extremely influenced **(EI)**. The questions were asked based on the level of influence each factor has on the dimensions of destination brand image and competitiveness of a destination. Some factors further measured each dimension in the form of questions in the destination brand dimension. In measuring competitiveness, the dimensions were taken as the variables, and they were also measured. Data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. For descriptive analysis of the data, SPSS version 25 was used. The analysis included frequencies and confirmatory factor analysis to test for suitability of the measurement model and to ensure that the indicator variables (i.e., items in destination brand image dimensions and destination competitiveness) were indeed determining the interest of the construct. CFA was undertaken to confirm thedimensionality of the

constructs. The convergent and discriminate validities of the factor structurewere evaluated using CFA. For the inferential, path analysis was adopted to test for the effect of the destination brand dimensions on destination competitiveness. Path analysis was conducted using SMARTPLS 3.

2.1. Findings

A total of 1530 questionnaires were administered to the respondents in South-West, Nigeria, at the different tourist's destination centres looked into in the study. However, 1008 questionnaires were retrieved and considered usable for analysis. The study achieved a response rate of 65.8 %, which was considered sufficient for the study based on Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), who assert that a response rate of 50% is deemed suitable and sufficient for analysis.

2.2. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 below reveals the distribution of the surveyed respondents. The findings show that 378(37.5) are males while 630 (62.5%) are females. Table 2 reveals the age distribution of the respondents. The analysis reveals that 458(45.2%) of the respondents fall within the 16-25 age bracket, 252 (25%) are within the age bracket 26-35, 180 (17.9%) fall within the age bracket of 36-45, 80 (7.9%) of the respondents are within the age bracket of 46-55, 28 (2.8%) of the respondents are within 56-65 while 12(1.2%) are 65-and above. This indicates that most of the people who visit tourists are youthful and below 40 years of age.

Table (1): Demographics of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	378	37.5
Female	630	62.5
Total	**1008**	**100**

Table (2): Age Distribution of Respondents

AGE	Frequency	Percentage (%)
16-25	456	45.2
26-35	252	25.0
36-45	180	17.9
46-55	80	7.9
56-65	28	2.8
66-above	12	1.2
Total	**1008**	**100**

2.3. Measurement of Model fit

The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed to show the measurement fit of each of the independent and dependent variables. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is a multivariate statistical procedure used to test how well the measured variables represent the number of constructs. Hair et al. (2019) established that the CFA measures from 60 and above are sufficient measures of a specific variable. Hence, from the results of the CFA of each variable measured, there is evidence of the sufficiency of the various measures as all met with the recommendation of Hair et al. (2019).

2.4. Reflective Measurement Model

Table 3is the internal consistency and convergence validity for the relationship between brand image and destination competitiveness. The dimensions of tourism brand image and destination competitiveness was presented for the measurement model. For the Cronbach Alpha (CA), rho_A and Composite Reliability (RA), the threshold of 0.70 (Hair, Sarstedt & Ringle, 2017) was achieved as all the variables exceeded the minimum standard level. While AVE met with the threshold of 0.5 (Hair, Sarstedt & Ringle, 2017), all the indicators exceeded the minimum requirement, which supports the measures of convergence validity, thereby establishing the internal consistency reliability and convergence validity of the construct.

In measuring the extent to which a construct is empirically distinct from another construct, Discriminant validity was carried out using Fornell-Larcker and Heterotrait-Monotrait criteria. The Fornell-Larcker is where the square root of the AVE of each latent variable is more significant than its correlation with another latent variable.

Tables 4represent the discriminant validity representations using Fornell-Larcker and HTM, respectively. Each of the tables shows that all the values for the variables are below the standard level of 0.90, thereby achieving the discriminant validity of the variables.

Table (3): Internal consistency and Convergence Validity for Effect of destination brand image on destination competitiveness

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
DBI	0.843	0.846	0.889	0.615
DBP	0.798	0.839	0.863	0.567
DBAB	0.887	0.887	0.917	0.689
DBA	0.851	0.851	0.894	0.627
DBC	0.844	0.846	0.889	0.616
CI	0.898	0.899	0.929	0.765
FI	0.802	0.812	0.872	0.631
SI	0.798	0.802	0.881	0.713

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table (4): Discriminant validity result for effect of destination brand image on destination competitiveness

	DBI	DBP	DBAB	DBA	DBCB	CI	FI	SI
				Fornell-Larcker				
DBI	**0.784**							
DBP	0.915	**0.753**						
DBAB	0.901	0.694	**0.830**					
DBA	0.885	0.645	0.723	**0.792**				
DBCB	0.795	0.609	0.637	0.797	**0.785**			
CI	0.868	0.643	0.737	0.762	0.653	**0.875**		
FI	0.790	0.667	0.700	0.682	0.722	0.882	**0.794**	
SI	0.725	0.607	0.639	0.567	0.732	0.647	0.579	**0.844**
				Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT)				
DBI								
DBP	**0.637**							
DBAB	0.598	**0.685**						
DBA	0.671	0.897	**0.836**					
DBCB	0.695	0.763	0.736	**0.686**				
CI	0.829	0.812	0.731	0.657	**0.783**			
FI	0.762	0.830	0.763	0.673	0.788	**0.566**		
SI	0.746	0.683	0.756	0.590	0.747	0.637	**0.714**	

Source: Field Survey, 2021

2.5. Structural Model

Destination brand image was measured with the following dimensions- DBI (Destination Brand Image), DBP (Destination Brand Personality), DBAB (Destination Brand Attitude and Behaviour), DBA (Destination Brand Association) and DBCB (Destination Brand Competence and Benefits). The dimensions of destination competitiveness are CRI (Core Resources Indicator), FI (Facilitating Indicator) and SI (Supporting Indicator). Structural equation modelling was used to measure the effect of destination brand image on destination competitiveness.

Having carried out the reflective measurement model, and both the internal consistence and validity measures, and discriminant validity measures met all the required threshold, the structural model was measured. The first step in this model is the assessment of collinearity issues among the constructs. This is done by examining the VIF values of all the predictor construct which must be below the threshold value of 5 (Hair et al, 2019). From the result of the assessment, all of the variables show no collinearity problems as all of the variables has values close to 3 and lower, as recommended by Hair et al. (2019). The computation of the path coefficient is based on a series of regression analyses and the collinearity issues has to be ascertained to avoid bias regression result.

Table 5 is the significant path coefficient showing the correlation between destination brand image and competitiveness. The result shows a sign of the two variables indicated by the p-values of .000. This shows that for the individual dimension measuring the variables- brand image and competitiveness, there is significant

relationship. Hence, in answering research question on the effect of destination brand image on tourism destination competitiveness, the findings reveal that destination brand image is a significant driver of destination competitiveness. In other words, an increase in destination brand image will increase and boost the competitiveness of tourist's destinations.

Table (5): Path Coefficient of the relationship between destination brand image and destination competitiveness

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
DBI -> DESCOM	0.240	0.240	0.005	51.266	0.000
DBP -> DESCOM	0.262	0.262	0.006	45.546	0.000
DBAB -> DESCOM	0.233	0.233	0.005	49.543	0.000
DBA -> DESCOM	0.205	0.205	0.006	35.163	0.000
DBCB-> DESCOM	0.201	0.203	0.007	26.812	0.000
CI -> DB	0.438	0.439	0.013	32.787	0.000
FI -> DB	0.366	0.367	0.013	27.624	0.000
SI -> DB	0.249	0.248	0.013	18.519	0.000

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The destination brand, once developed, serves as the foundation for all marketing operations aimed at promoting the destination and attracting new tourists; content and messaging should constantly reflect this. The destination brand is critical to what is communicated to the rest of the world. The result is in tandem with the stance of Cucculelli & Goffi (2015), Goffi (2013) and Erenkol and Oztas (2015), who emphasised that destination branding, if correctly adopted, could be a significant driver of tourism competitiveness and destination promotion, innovation and entrepreneurship activities. This shows the importance of destination brand image in ensuring the competitiveness of a destination. Destination brand image is the reasoned or emotional perceptions attached to a specific brand of a destination (Boo et. al., 2009). Based on this finding, it can be interpreted that as people attach emotional or reasoned perception to a destination, such destination increases in its competitiveness amongst others. Therefore, destinations around the world now see the importance of branding which creates an image for the destination. According to Kankhuni (2020), the world is becoming a global competitive tourism market, hence destinations have turned to extensive use of promotion in creating awareness to set them apart in the competitive market. Therefore, the finding is significant as it shows a relationship between destination brand image and destination competitiveness.

2.6. Hypothesis Testing

Ho1: *Destination brand image has no significant effect on the destination's competitiveness*

Table 6shows the interaction between the destination brand image and destinations competitiveness. The analysis shows that 95.7% (Adj R2= .957) variation in destination competitiveness is explained by destination brand image. The result also indicates that a unit increase in destination brand image (B=.079) leads to a .079 increase in destination competitiveness, the standardised beta (β=.072) shows that there is a direct and positive relationship between destination brand image and destination competitiveness, the t-stat (t= 7.602; p=.000) shows that destination brand image has a significant effect on destination competitiveness.

Table (6): Destination brand image has no significant effect on the Destination's competitiveness

Variables	Destination Competitiveness				
Destination Brand Image	B .079	SE .011	β .07	T-stat 7.602	P-Value .000
Adj R²	.957				
F-Stat	1019.138				
P-Value	(.0000)				

As initially identified that both destination brand image and destination competitiveness do share a relationship, the hypothesis tests whether destination brand image has a significant effect on destination competitiveness. The result of the finding therefore showed that the two do not only share a relationship, destination brand image does have a significant effect on the destination's competitiveness. For a destination to be competitive, the result therefore depicts that it must have a brand image, which in most cases is expected to be positive. This therefore implies that as the destination brand image increases, the more it affects the competitiveness of the destination among other destinations. The image of a destination brand can increase if the major element of a destination brand is well provided. the image of a destination brand can increase if the major element of a destination brand is well provided. The path analysis was used to identify the goodness of fit of the variables and identify the most effective dimension of each of the variable to identify the relationship.

Figure 1 is a path analysis diagram showing the standardized factor loading and correlations between factors for the two-factor model- Destination Brand (DB) and Destination Competitiveness (DC). Destination brand image is measured using five variables which are: Destination brand identity (DBIDBI 1 to 5) 37.654, Destination brand personality (DBIDBP1 to 5) 29.058, Destination Brand Attitude and Behaviour (DBIDBAB 1 to 5) 49.966, Destination Brand Association (DBIDBA 1 to 5) 55.074, and Destination Brand Competence (DBIDBC 1 to 5), 52.036. Destination Competitiveness on the other hand is measured by three variables known as Supporting Indicator measured by three observed variables- Political, economic and destination management indicators, with factor loading of 18.808, Core Indicators measured by four observed variables- Security and Safety, Accessibility, Infrastructure and Hospitality Standards, all of which have a factor loading of 32.601, and Facilitating indicators measured by four observed variables- quality of visitor's experience, attraction, ancillary services and climatic and environmental conditions- with a factor loading of 27.206.

On the diagram, the ovals represent latent factors, squares represent the measuring variables, the arrows between ovals and squares represents the factor loadings, while the arrows between the ovals represents correlations between the factors. The diagram shows the interaction between destination brand image and destination competitiveness. The path analysis achieved a goodness fit (X2=879.34, df=236, p=.000; GFI=.98; RMSEA=.004; IFI=.95; CFI=.97). The result reveals that destination brand association (t=55.074; p=.000) is the most significant measure of brand image influencing destination competitiveness, while core resources indicators (t=32.601; P=.000) is the most significant measure of destination competitiveness influenced by destination brand image dimensions. The observed variables also indicate that accessibility to a brand destination (t=112.691) is critical to the core indicators since it is the most significant variable driving core indicators.

Path Analysis Showing the Interactions Between the Dimensions of Destination Brand Image and Destination Competitiveness
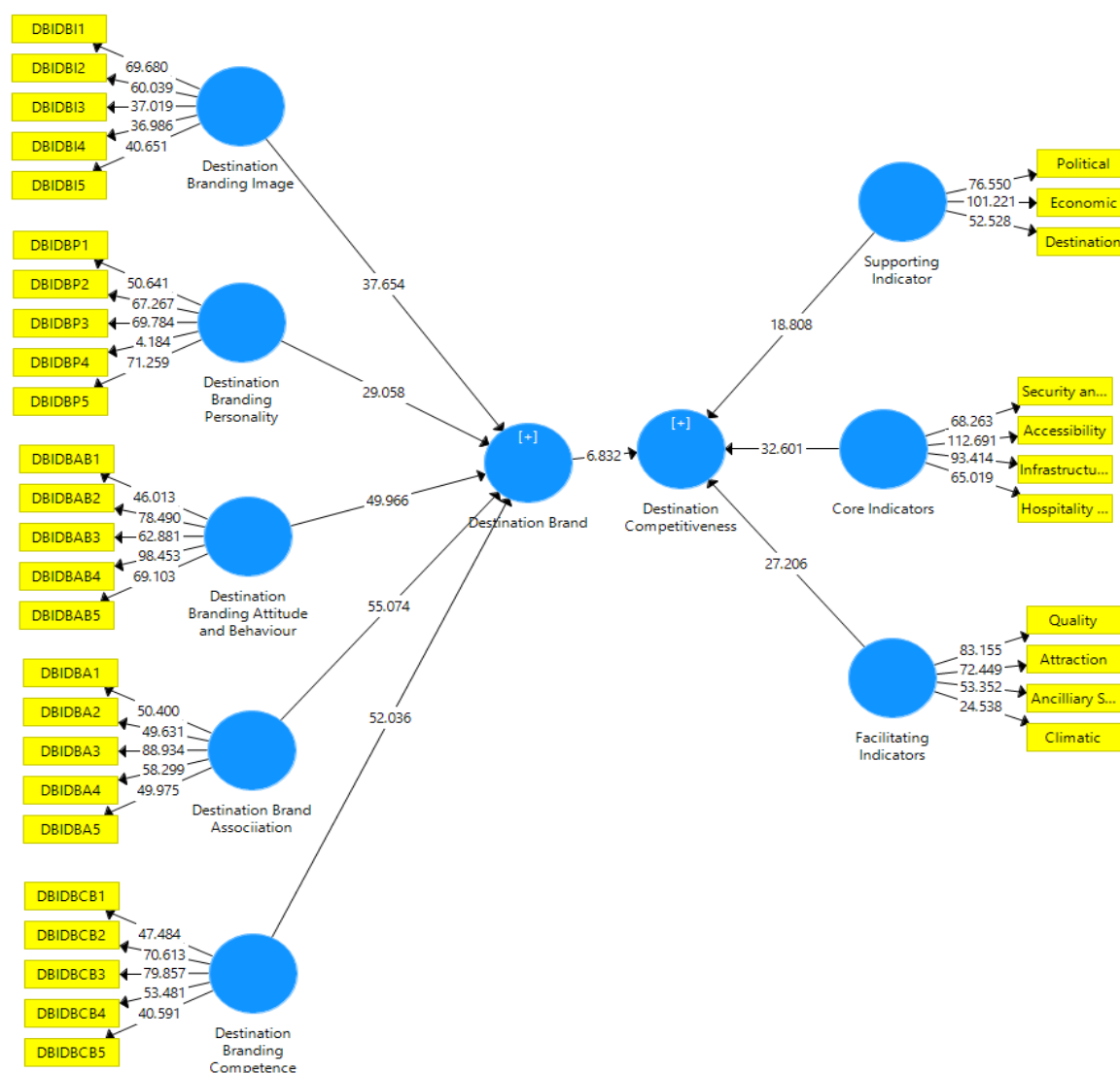

Figure (1): Destination Branding and Destination Competitiveness
Source: Field Survey, 2021

Among all the dimensions used to measure destination brand image, destination brand association is seen as the most effective for the measure of destination brand image which has significant effect on destination competitiveness. This shows that, all other attachment of a destination brand known as the brand association makes the destination more competitive. The competitiveness of a destination based on the findings is depicted more by the core resource indicator in measuring the effect of destination brand image on destination competitiveness. The core indicators include, security and safety, accessibility, infrastructures, attractions and hospitality standards (which are also what makes up destination brand association). This therefore depicts the relationship between destination brand image and destination competitiveness, as most of what depicts brand image are what depicts the competitiveness of the destination.

The observed variables also indicate that accessibility to a destination (t=112.691) is critical to the core indicators since it is the most significant variable driving core indicators. According to Cai (2002), the image of a destination brand can be described as "perceptions about the place as reflected by the associations held in tourist memory". this further enhances the importance of destination brand association. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This is in line with the findings of Miličević, Mihalič, &Sever (2017), who measured the competitiveness of a destination by the satisfaction of tourists. Their result finding indicates that tourist satisfaction is significant and positively associated with the branding processing implementation (BPI). According to Perner (2005), despite the competitive advantage a destination might have, its image is significant to its promotion. Hence, it can be said that a destination can be competitive and not have an image, but with the availability of a brand image, such a destination will have more promotion. This, therefore, refers to the importance of the brand image of a destination to its promotion and competitiveness. In their study, Day, Cai, & Murphy (2011) also found out that service providers in the tourism industry also rely on the image of the destination to promote their businesses and remain competitive. Hence, the destination benefits from the brand image, but service providers also benefit from it. According to Mihalič& Sever (2017), the competitiveness of a destination requires innovativeness, distinctiveness in the global tourism market requires branding. The findings indicate that destination brand image is of importance for the destination to be competitive.

3. Conclusion

The study examined the effects of destination brand image on the competitiveness of destinations in South-West region of Nigeria. In testing the research hypothesis on effect of the destination branding on tourism destination competitiveness, the findings reveal that destination branding is a significant driver of destination competitiveness. In other words, an increase in destination branding will increase and boost competitiveness of tourist's sites. The destination brand, once developed, serves as the foundation for all marketing operations aimed at promoting the destination and attracting new tourists; content and messaging should constantly reflect this. The destination brand is critical to what is communicated to the rest of the world. The result is in tandem with the stance of Cucculelli & Goffi (2015); Goffi (2013) and Erenkol & Oztas, (2015) who emphasised that destination branding, if correctly adapted could be a significant driver of tourism competitiveness and destination promotion, innovation and entrepreneurship activities.

This therefore indicates the important role destination branding plays on the competitiveness of the various destinations. In the face of competition, a destination is able to withstand the destination by its brand as branding helps differentiate one destination from the other.

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