THE IMPACT OF PERCEIVED DESTINATION COMPETITIVENESS ON TOURIST-BASED DESTINATION BRAND EQUITY IN EMERGING DESTINATIONS

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PhD

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

2021

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

School of Hotel and Tourism Management

The Impact of Perceived Destination Competitiveness on Tourist-based Destination Brand Equity in Emerging Destinations

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

June 2020

CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and that to the best of knowledge and belief, it reproduces no material previously published or written, nor material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

ZANDIVUTA TEARGAS KANKHUNI

Abstract

In an increasingly competitive global tourism market, destinations have turned to the extensive use of promotion to create awareness of the attributes that set them apart from the competition. Thus, their ultimate aim is to create sustainable destination brands. Insights from both theory and practice, however, show that destinations can only create sustainable brands by offering tourism products that are functionally and experientially different from the competition. This demonstrates the importance of destination competitiveness in the formation of tourist-based destination brand equity. Against this backdrop, some gaps were identified in the literature. First, the most studies on destination competitiveness and destination branding have been conducted in mature destinations in the global north, and their findings are often inapplicable in small, unknown, and emerging destinations like those in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Second, relatively fewer studies have mainly analysed destination competitiveness from the demand point of view, despite the emphasis put on the demand-side perspective in many destination competitiveness frameworks. Third, studies on tourist-based destination brand equity have mainly analysed the cognitive dimensions of the concept, leaving out equally important affective elements such as destination trust. Similarly, tourist-based destination brand equity studies have mostly considered destination loyalty as the primary outcome of destination brand equity with the measurement of destination loyalty transferred from the general marketing literature; consequently, these studies do not focus on wanderlust as an important element of leisure travel and the rarity of repeat visits in small, 'once-in-a-lifetime', or developing destinations. Furthermore, the few studies that have explored the relationships between destination competitiveness and destination brand equity lacked a strong theorization with which to explore specific relationships between the dimensions of the two concepts.

To fill the aforementioned lacunae, the current study utilised from the notion of reciprocity and the concept of customer equity to examine the impact of destination

competitiveness on destination brand equity from international tourists' perspective in Malawi, an emerging destination in Southern Africa. Grounded in the positivist paradigm, the study adopted a quantitative approach for its data collection and analysis. Based on a review of literature, a survey of destination stakeholders, and interviews with tourists, 29 destination attributes, and 26 statements were generated to measure destination competitiveness and tourist-based destination brand equity respectively. In the tourist-based destination brand equity model, the study adopted destination brand awareness, perceived quality, and destination brand image, which are commonly used in tourist-based destination brand equity studies. Additionally, the study incorporated brand trust and brand commitment. Commitment, which constituted items reflecting word of mouth/engagement, attachment, and social responsibility, was used as a proxy for destination loyalty. The items were screened by a panel of destination stakeholders and experts, after which the research instrument was piloted (n = 60). Tourists' comments were incorporated to improve the phrasing of the destination competitiveness attributes while a principal component analysis and applicable procedures confirmed the destination brand equity dimensions.

The study assessed Malawi's performance against its competitors in the SSA region and draw comparisons with "best-practice" destinations outside the region. A total of 768 usable surveys were collected from tourists exiting the country at the Kamuzu International Airport using a counting rules approach. The sample included only those who visited for either holiday or volunteerism. 474 respondents assessed the destination against their favourite destinations previously visited in the SSA region while 294 assessed Malawi against their favourite destination previously visited outside the SSA region. Data analysis utilised descriptive statistical analysis in SPSS version 25 and structural equation modelling (partial least squares procedure) using SmartPLS version 3.

A comprehensive competitive analysis was conducted on the destination competitiveness attributes. Both groups of respondents perceived Malawi positively on attributes related to hospitality. Assessed against competitors in the region, Malawi performed poorly on natural resource attributes such as safari and wildlife reserves, while the same attributes received higher ratings from those who assessed the destination against outside-SSA destinations. There was consensus between the two groups in their perception of Malawi on created resources and supporting infrastructure attributes, which they rated poorly. Also, important similarities and differences were noted in the perceptions of the two groups on the destination competitiveness attributes. Furthermore, a near-far destination analysis of competitiveness was conducted on the 29 destination attributes, which offers Malawi guidance on the attributes to prioritise and the set of destinations to use as benchmarks in its quest to improve its competitiveness.

The results of the SEM support the conceptual model and the proposed relationships. The proportion of the variances explained in the dependent variables and predictive relevance values supported the two structural models' sufficiency in explaining the effect of perceived destination competitiveness on tourist-based destination brand equity. In the SSA sub-sample, 17 of the 22 hypotheses were confirmed in the revised model. In the outside-SSA sub-sample, 12 of the 19 hypotheses were confirmed in the revised model. Dimensions of perceived destination competitiveness significantly influenced destination brand equity, albeit with different strengths in the two models. In the SSA sample, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand image significantly influenced brand trust. Furthermore, brand awareness, brand image, and brand trust predicted brand commitment. There was no significant relationship between perceived quality and brand commitment. The mediating effect of trust was found to be responsible for the non-significant relationship. In the outside-SSA sample, only perceived

quality, among the original brand equity constructs, predicted brand trust. Brand awareness, perceived quality, brand image, and brand trust all predicted brand commitment.

The multi-group analyses revealed the moderating effects of the ranking of the destinations-of-comparison and tourists' country of origin on the examined relationships. In the SSA sub-sample, the model was more supported among respondents who assessed Malawi against low-ranking SSA destination than among those who assessed Malawi against South Africa. Regarding source markets, the model found stronger support among American tourists than British tourists. In the outside-SSA sub-sample, the model was more efficient in explaining the causal links in the sub-sample that assessed Malawi against low-ranking destinations than among those who assessed Malawi against highly-ranked destinations.

The study makes several theoretical and empirical contributions to the scholarship on destination competitiveness and brand equity. It confirms the importance of functional attributes such as inherited and created resources in the formation of tourist-based destination brand equity and demonstrates the importance of abstract attributes such as hospitality in T tourist-based destination brand equity formation. The study also incorporates brand trust into the tourist-based destination brand equity model to illustrate the importance of both cognitive and affective assessments in tourist-based destination brand equity evaluation. Further, the study adopts and validates destination commitment as a primary outcome of tourist-based destination brand equity in place of destination loyalty in its traditional sense, thereby recognising the unique nature of travel insofar as loyalty is concerned. In terms of practical implications, the study shows Malawi's standing compared to its competitors from a tourist perspective and, more importantly, shows the relative importance of destination competitiveness factors in the formation of tourist-based destination brand equity. This information together with the insights derived from the multi-group analysis could be useful to

destination stakeholders in resource allocation, destination positioning, and market segmentation.

Keywords: Destination competitiveness, destination brand equity, destination trust, destination commitment, partial least squares (PLS), sub-Saharan Africa, Malawi

Acknowledgements

In Africa, there is a proverb that says, “It takes a village to raise a child.” The road to, and my attendance of, the doctoral training that culminated in this thesis were never lone efforts. Numerous people played significant roles to help me get this far.

First, I owe a profound debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Lorenzo Masiero, for his guidance, constructive criticism, and most importantly, patience, when at times I struggled to grasp even seemingly basic concepts required of me as a PhD student. I will always remember his profound advice: that we shouldn’t do things because they are easy, we should do things because they are necessary. I am also grateful to my co-supervisor, Dr Nelson Tsang, for his advice in the writing of the thesis. I am also grateful to the members of my supervisory committee, Dr Wantanee Suntikul, Dr Denis Tolkach, and Professor Cathy Hsu, for their instructive comments at the confirmation stage of the thesis. Gratitude also goes to Prof Bob McKercher, Dr Markus Schuckert, and Dr Jinsoo Lee for the knowledge they shared with me during the coursework of the PhD programme.

I also thank my employer in Malawi, Mzuzu University, for the financial support and the Teaching Postgraduate Studentship from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University that enabled me to pursue the PhD programme.

I also thank my classmates and officemates in the PhD office. The discussions, laughter, and shared activities made the PhD journey more worthwhile and bearable.

I am also grateful to my parents, family, and friends for their prayers and encouragement. The realisation that my parents cannot read this acknowledgement even if they wanted to kept me going.

Last but not least, I am grateful to God, for the gift of life.

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To my parents, with love and gratitude.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope and Background of Research

The market environment in which global tourism operates in is very competitive (Rabbiosi, 2015). By the early 2000s, slightly over two-thirds of global arrivals were recorded in only 10 destination countries, implying that rest of the destinations in the world had to fight for and share only a third of international tourists (Morgan & Pritchard, 2002). Thus, destinations need to be creative so that they can become unique and recognizable, possibly attaining sustainable competitive advantage (Krešić & Prebežac, 2011). Research into destination competitiveness constituted one of the prominent streams of inquiry in tourism research in the last three decades because destinations and enterprises are keen on understanding how to attain competitive advantage and overcome their competitive shortfalls (Kozak, Kim, & Chon, 2017).

Kozak et al. (2017) catalogue three streams of research on destination competitiveness: (1) studies that have evaluated competitiveness from a supply point of view, (2) studies that have assessed destinations' ability to offer competitive products and services from tourists' perspective, and (3) studies that have combined the two approaches. Nevertheless, relatively fewer studies have analysed destination competitiveness from the tourists' perspective (Andrades-Caldito, Sánchez-Rivero, & Pulido-Fernández, 2014). The incorporation of consumer perceptions is expected to enrich the interpretation of the concept of destination competitiveness (Wilde, Cox, Kelly, & Harrison, 2017). This is because tourists have the final say when choosing their vacation destination.

Indeed, the creativity with which destination management organisations (DMOs) have approached such a competitive environment has mostly included branding (Miličević, Mihalič, & Sever, 2017). Usually, this is done utilizing marketing tools similar to those applied in managing consumer and corporate brands (Gómez Aguilar, Yagüe Guillén, & Villaseñor

Roman, 2016). Chekalina, Fuchs, and Lexhagen (2018) state that DMOs invest in logos, slogans, brochures, website, and events to execute their branding strategies. The question that should be asked, however, is whether destinations "really create successful and fundamentally memorable brands" (Chekalina et al., 2018, p. 31). Govers (2013) contends that logos and slogans should not be equated to brands; hence, despite the attention that they may attract, they do not significantly contribute to the long-term uniqueness of destinations.

The modern tourist is experienced and sophisticated and considers travel not just as merely visiting the destination, but gaining personal satiation and identity (Lewis-Cameron & Roberts, 2010). Thus, instead of looking at branding as a "sales pitch that sees the destination through rose-tinted spectacles" (Hankinson, 2004, p. 116), destinations should provide competitive experiences to tourists that are already in the destination (Miličević et al., 2017), ultimately creating long-lasting impressions on the tourist's mind. Thus, research needs to focus on how consumers respond to the brand (Round & Roper, 2015) in a destination, which is a marketplace where demand and supply primarily interact (Beritelli, Bieger, & Laesser, 2014; Buhalis, 2000). This is because, for one to understand tourists' evaluation of a destination's brand, they should first determine the tourists' perceptions of the destination's capacity to offer competitive experiences (Chekalina et al., 2018). Indeed, as Andrades-Caldito et al. (2014) contend, a destination's capacity to attract tourists and provide them with competitive experiences is usually reflected in destination awareness, image, or brand equity.

Competitiveness is regarded as offering experiences which the competition will find difficult imitate, thereby ultimately attracting consumers to the same service provider, product or destination over and over again (Armenski, Marković, Davidović, & Jovanović, 2011; Cracolici & Nijkamp, 2009; Saayman, Engelbrecht, & Kruger, 2015). Destinations constantly compete among themselves to occupy a prime position in the consideration set of potential travellers to enhance their chances of being chosen as a vacation destination (Woodside &

Lysonski, 1989). A destination's competitiveness is reflected in its ability to increase visitors' expenditure and tourist arrivals by delivering satisfying and memorable experiences while sustaining destination resources to enhance the quality of life of the locals in the destination (Wong, 2018). Thus, destination competitiveness is not an end in itself but rather the means to an end. In seeking to be competitive, destinations aim to influence tourist behaviour through increased likelihood in destination selection (Sirakaya, McLellan, & Uysal, 1996), trust (Artigas, Yrigoyen, Moraga, & Villalon, 2017), and destination loyalty (Wong, 2018). The ability of a destination to competitively offer value to their customers such that the customer becomes somehow attached to the destination can be explained by the concept of customer-based brand equity (Kladou, Giannopoulos, & Mavragani, 2015; Wong, 2018). In their study, Gartner and Ruzzier (2011) contend that a destination cannot simply claim to be better than others, but it must be seen to be so in both function and experience and that the tourist must be aware of the difference and value of the before destination brand equity can be improved. Based on the foregoing, the present study considers it worthwhile to further explore the impact of destination competitiveness on customer-based destination brand equity.

Even though there is literature on customer-based destination brand equity in recent years, there is still limited empirical evidence on the applicability of customer-based destination brand equity to tourism destinations (Jamilena, Pena, & Molina, 2017) and a lack of consensus on how to effectively measure destination brands (Boo, Busser, & Baloglu, 2009; Pike, Bianchi, Kerr, & Patti, 2010). Even more important is that the term customer-based brand equity connotes equity as assessed by customers in the general marketing literature despite the differences between destination brands and consumer or product brands (Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011). The current study, therefore, takes a different approach (as a few other studies have done), by referring to the concept as tourist-based destination brand equity to reflect the centrality of the tourist in the assessment of destination brand equity.

The intensification of competitions among destinations in the global tourism environment means that tourists have many destinations to choose from, resulting in most destinations becoming substitutable (Ayikoru, 2015). For destinations in the sub-Saharan Africa region, the problem of substitutability is exacerbated by the fact that many people in Western or Asian countries, where the major source markets for the destinations are, perceive the continent as one homogenous place (Matiza & Oni, 2014). While many of the destinations might make generic claims of unique tourist offerings such as safari and other forms of nature-based tourism, such "wallpaper" advertising makes these destinations identical to the intended audience (Currie, 2013). Most studies on destination competitiveness and branding have focused on well-known and highly visited destinations (Avraham & Ketter, 2013; Virgo & de Chernatony, 2006), despite the growing importance of emerging destinations globally in terms of share of international arrivals (Goffi, Cucculelli, & Masiero, 2019; UNWTO, 2018b). The nuanced challenges confronting non-traditional destinations implies that the notion of competitive advantage applied in traditional strategy and destination competitiveness literature could be inappropriate (Ayikoru, 2015), as empirical evidence demonstrates that the dynamics of competitiveness and branding may differ between emerging and mature destinations (Arnegger & Herz, 2016; Wilde et al., 2017). Even from a practical viewpoint, it would be difficult to devise and implement research-driven policy interventions since there is limited academic inquiry and theorization around tourism in sub-Saharan Africa (Manrai, Lascu, & Manrai, 2019). Given the foregoing, the issue of how destinations without a solid experience with the tourism phenomenon can effectively compete and succeed ought to be on the agenda of critical inquiry in tourism studies (Ayikoru, 2015).

The term "emerging destination" usually connotes destinations in developing countries or areas (Zmyslony, 2014). Considering that the analysis of the competitiveness of any tourism destination requires geographic (country)-specific criteria and data (Lubbe, Douglas, Fairer-

Wessels, & Kruger, 2015), the current study explores the impact of destination competitiveness of destination brand equity, in the context of Malawi, an emerging destination in sub-Saharan Africa. Malawi is situated in a vibrant travel and tourism region with an acknowledged potential for the sector to be a developmental focus (Christie, Fernandes, Messerli, & Twining-Ward, 2014). Lake Malawi (a freshwater lake, the third-largest in Africa and 9th largest in the world, said to be the most biologically diverse water body in the world drawing comparisons with the Galapagos Islands) is the jewel in the country's tourism crown. Other major tourism draws include wildlife, cultural and heritage assets and, lately, events and festivals. The country's economy is primarily dependent on agriculture with the sector making up to slightly over a third of its gross domestic product (GDP) (World Bank, 2017). In pursuit of economic diversification, the government of Malawi has focused on enhancing the country's tourism industry investment climate, developing supporting facilities, restocking wildlife reserves, relaxing the visa system for tourists, and intensifying international marketing (Bello, Lovelock, & Carr, 2016; Malawi Department of Tourism, 2019). Such a level of tourism development, challenges, and efforts expended make this destination a suitable emerging destination context for the present study. It should be noted that much as the study focuses on Malawi as a case study, the analysis of destination competitiveness, as explained in Chapter 2, requires that a destination be compared with a specified set of other destinations. Thus, much as Malawi was used as a case study in the current research, the destination was assessed primarily against other emerging destinations in the sub-Saharan Africa region. Consequently, the competitive standing of the competing destinations can also be somehow ascertained from the findings of the study. It is from the foregoing that the study seeks to explicate its findings in relation to a group of destinations ("emerging destination"), rather than a singular destination (Malawi).

1.2 Problem statement

Due to intensifying competition for tourists, destinations are now directing a lot of resources into marketing activities to make them stand out. However, it has been stated that there is a difference between tourism destinations and consumer products; hence, destinations should concentrate on understanding the quality of tourist experiences they offer are if they want to create lasting impressions and relationships their visitors. While there are studies that demonstrate that effective branding can increase the competitiveness of tourist destinations (Miličević et al., 2017; Pike & Mason, 2011), nascent empirical evidence points to the opposite, i.e. improved destination competitiveness enhances the formation of customer-based brand equity (Wong, 2018; Wong & Teoh, 2015). Further knowledge gaps have also been observed. First, while it is evident that the available destination competitiveness models have enhanced our understanding of destination competitiveness, most have been applied from the supply-side perspective, overlooking the demand-perspective (Dwyer, Mellor, Livaic, Edwards, & Kim, 2004; Wilde et al., 2017). If a destination is to enhance or sustain its competitiveness, its tourism product must be developed in line with consumer expectations (Khan & Raina, 2014). Since customer-based brand equity is understood from the tourists' perspective, it is necessary to understand destination competitiveness from tourists' perspective as well so that the relationship between the two constructs can be better understood.

Second, looking at the destination brand equity concept, scholars have ordinarily explored destination loyalty as the outcome construct in destination brand equity models. However, several studies on destination loyalty show that there are problems related to its conceptualisation that need to be addressed via empirical investigations in line with a study's objectives (Campón-Cerro, Hernández-Mogollón, & Alves, 2017; Riley, Niininen, Szivas, & Willis, 2001). The fact that tourists have to pay for tourism products at a distance (Campón-Cerro et al., 2017), thus facing the risk of poor experiences in new destinations, oftentimes

leads tourists to return to familiar destinations (McKercher, Denizci-Guillet, & Ng, 2012). This puts emerging destinations, like most destinations in the sub-Saharan Africa region, at a great disadvantage.

Furthermore, the constant pursuit of novelty in leisure travel makes absolute destination loyalty difficult to achieve (Bianchi & Pike, 2011; McKercher et al., 2012). Additionally, empirical studies have demonstrated that repeat visits could be less common in 'once-in-a-lifetime', iconic, small, or developing destinations (Pinkus, Moore, Taplin, & Pearce, 2016; Rivera & Croes, 2010). What is more, some studies have noted that it is difficult to achieve loyalty during the early stages of introducing a product or a service (Al-Hawari, 2011). In such instances, various scholars have argued that constructs that capture expressions of trust, word-of-mouth, and place, or affective attachment are a more realistic alternative to loyalty (Al-Hawari, 2011; McKercher et al., 2012). To address the aforementioned shortfalls as per the context of the present study, the current thesis explores destination brand commitment as the primary outcome of destination brand equity.

The limited studies that have explored the impact of destination competitiveness on destination brand equity have done so at a broad level (Wong, 2018; Wong & Teoh, 2015). Empirical evidence is still limited to the relationships between specific factors of destination competitiveness and specific components of destination brand equity. It has also been claimed in these studies, without empirical evidence, that abstract attributes of destination competitiveness such as hospitality of residents and service staff do not play any role in the development of destination brand equity. The current study seeks to empirically test the relationships and outline the attendant theoretical and practical implications.

Furthermore, since both destination competitiveness and destination brand equity are broad concepts that are usually studied independently using disparate theories, the few studies that have explored the two concepts together lacked the theoretical foundation to support the

explored relationships. This lack of theorization has contributed to a lack of understanding of how the two concepts are related (Miličević et al., 2017). The current study draws from the notion of reciprocity and customer equity concept to support the proposition that if a destination invests resources competitively to enhance the experiences of its visitors, the visitors will reciprocate the destination's efforts by having favourable overall cognitive and affective assessments of the destination.

Additionally, whereas there is extensive literature on destination competitiveness and destination brand equity in well-known destinations, there is limited literature on non-traditional or emerging destinations (Aqueveque & Bianchi, 2017; Lubbe et al., 2015). This is despite the notion factors that are key to a destination's competitiveness are place-specific, usually contingent upon tourism resources and targeted tourist markets (Tsai, Song, & Wong, 2009). In light of the foregoing, the current thesis investigates the influence of perceived destination competitiveness on tourist-based destination brand equity in an emerging destination context. It seeks to examine whether tourists' perceived experiences, as a product of their interaction with the destination's resources, assets, and people, influence tourist-based destination brand equity. With destination competitiveness as its main focus and point of departure, the study seeks to consolidate the elements of destination competitiveness applicable to an emerging destination. Thereafter, the study seeks to analyse the competitiveness of an emerging destination by drawing comparisons with regional competitors and "best-practice" destinations elsewhere. Subsequently, the study seeks to examine the influence of identified components of destination competitiveness on destination brand equity dimensions, ultimately examining the moderating effects of destination classification and tourists' place of origin on the examined relationships. To classify destinations in both the competitive analyses and multi-group analyses aspects, the study draws on Plog's model of psychographics to categorise the destinations. Plog's model of psychographics, as detailed in the next chapter, relates the

personalities of travellers to their preferred destinations and the probable activities the travellers will engage in while in those destinations (Plog, 1974).

1.3 Research question and objectives

Broadly, this thesis addresses the question: To what extent does perceived destination competitiveness influence tourist-based destination brand equity? In addressing the broad research question, the study is informed by the following specific objectives;

1. Conduct a comprehensive competitive analysis of an emerging destination, using Malawi as a case study, against destinations at different levels of ranking both within and outside the SSA region.
2. Expand and validate the tourist-based destination brand equity model by integrating brand trust and brand commitment into the model in an emerging destination context.
3. Empirically test a model that explores the influence of perceived destination competitiveness on tourist-based destination brand equity.
4. Examine the moderating effects of destination-related and tourist-related factors on the relationship between perceived destination competitiveness and tourist-based destination brand equity.

Figure 1.1 visually depicts the major concepts and relationships examined in the thesis.

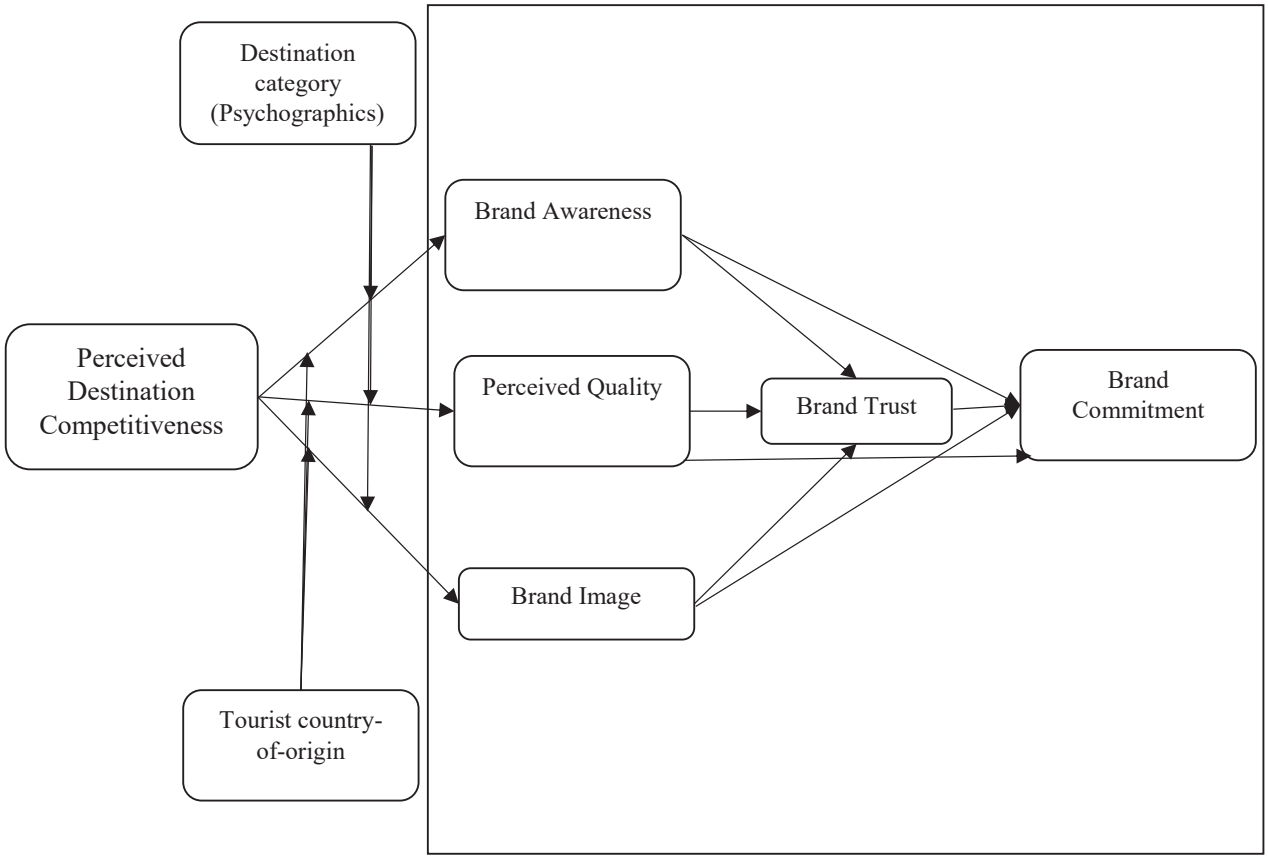

Figure 1.1. Major concepts and examined relationships

1.4 Significance of the study

1.4.1 Empirical and theoretical contributions

The current study makes several theoretical contributions. First, unlike several studies that have focussed on destination competitiveness as an end in itself, the current study investigated how the various factors of destination competitiveness are related to one another or examined other constructs common in tourism research such as tourist behavioural intentions, the current study investigates how destination competitiveness, as perceived by tourists, influences the formation of destination brand equity in the minds of tourists. The novelty of the study rests on the notion that destination brand equity is a relatively new stream

of research with an expanding number of dimensions whose antecedents have not been fully explored. Even though studies point out that destination competitiveness could influence destination brand equity, such studies have been conducted at a broad level; hence, there is little empirical evidence regarding the specific relationships between the two concepts. The current study has demonstrated the specific relationships that exist among the components of the two constructs. The prominence of inherited resources in influencing destination brand equity dimensions reinforces the notion of the primary importance of inherited resources in developing destinations vis-à-vis created resources in mature destinations (Wilde, Cox, Kelly, & Harrison, 2017). The findings will provide a foundation for future research that seeks to further examine these relationships in different tourism contexts. Furthermore, contrary to prior studies in which it was advanced, often in the absence of empirical evidence, that abstract perceived destination competitiveness dimensions like hospitality do not significantly impact tourist-based destination brand equity (Wong, 2018), the current study demonstrated that even abstract elements of perceived destination competitiveness are drivers of tourist-based destination brand equity.

Also, the thesis considered the pursuit of novelty as an important element of leisure travel. This, along with the view that emerging and small destinations are not guaranteed repeat visitation, justified the re-conceptualisation of destination loyalty as destination commitment by combining elements of attitudinal loyalty and place attachment. By validating the tourist-based destination brand equity concept and testing its structural links with commitment as the outcome variable, the current study responds to the calls by scholars that the unique context of travel should be considered when the loyalty concept, as traditionally conceptualised in general marketing research, is applied in tourism research (McKercher et al., 2012; Pearce & Kang, 2009). Specifically, in using commitment as a proxy for loyalty, the study recognises the unique characteristics of leisure travel in general, and the unlikelihood of repeat visitation in small,

emerging, or ‘once-in-a-lifetime’ destinations. Furthermore, the results demonstrated that one of the strongest drivers of destination commitment was the brand (social) image dimension. This brings to the fore the importance of engaging tourists’ hearts and minds in tourism marketing and the delivery of tourism experiences, even in emerging destinations. This particular finding contributes to theory on the influence of self-concept on tourist behaviour (Sirgy & Su, 2000). Additionally, the reframing of measurement scales for brand equity dimensions like awareness in a destination context would help provide reliable and relevant measurement scales to what is a growing field of inquiry in tourism. Lastly, by situating the study in an emerging destination, this study extends the literature on destination competitiveness and destination brand equity, which is currently dominated by studies in well-established destinations.

1.4.2 Practical implications

First, this is one of the few studies that have simultaneously conducted destination competitive analysis and comparative analysis with “best-practice” destinations. Considering that most competitive analyses only include destinations in a specific geographic area (Kozak, 2002a), the present study included, in the competitive analysis, destinations that are outside the focus destination’s vicinity. Thus, the study is in line with the notion that besides geographic proximity, a destination’s competitiveness is determined by the similarity of tourism resource stock, levels of economic development, and competitive rankings, among others (Assaf & Dwyer, 2013). Instructive insights obtained from the competitive and comparative analyses could prove useful in designing and implementing product development strategies or marketing communication tactics in Malawi. For instance, the abysmal performance of attributes related to medical infrastructure for tourists and the threat of disease should trigger destination managers in Malawi and similar destinations into action, considering that with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the global tourism industry, a destination’s ability to inspire market

confidence as being safe and capable of controlling the spread of disease will, to a considerable extent, determine the rebound of tourism (Rogerson & Baum, 2020). Additionally, the current study incorporated Plog's psychographics model in the competitive analysis, and thus, furthers the notion that heterogeneity of destinations should be considered when comparing or benchmarking international tourism destinations (Assaf & Dwyer, 2013). For instance, it was observed that Malawi competed favourably against low-ranking allocentric destinations than it did against highly-ranked psychocentric destinations. Beyond the traditional competitive analysis, comparisons were made with better performing and ranked destinations. Such a finding could guide low-ranking destinations like Malawi in destination segmentation, targeting, and positioning endeavours.

Second, the study exhibits the roles of various destination competitiveness factors in the formation of specific brand equity dimensions. Based on the results of this empirical examination, it is hoped that destination managers and businesses will understand how to enhance both cognitive and affective assessments by tourists. This can help them allocate resources efficiently as they can easily ascertain the effectiveness of the various destination competitiveness factors in influencing destination brand equity. For instance, the results show that if a destination in the sub-Saharan region is seeking to enhance its brand (social) image in the returning tourists (to the region) segment, it should focus more on making its inherited resources and qualifying and amplifying determinants competitive than other destination competitiveness factors. Moreover, the study demonstrates the importance of destination trust in the formation of tourists' commitment to a destination, especially when the destinations are assessed against other destinations within the sub-Saharan Africa region.

Third, knowledge of the effect of destinations of comparison and tourists' country of origin on the impact of destination competitiveness on destination brand equity provides a basis on which stakeholders can devise effective destination positioning and market segmentation

strategies. For instance, cognizant of the finding that being more competitive against destinations at the same level of competitiveness ranking or economic development largely influences the formation of destination brand equity, destinations might identify and concentrate their marketing efforts on source markets interested in the given set of destinations. In the case of the current study, destinations like Malawi, Mozambique, and Zambia may efficiently expend their marketing resources if they focus on tourist segments that have experienced or keen on off-the-beaten-track destinations. Such key insights would be difficult, if not impossible, to glean if the two major concepts in the study were analysed from a supply perspective.

1.5 Definition of terms

Destination: A tourist destination connotes a well-specified geographic region such as a town, an island or a country Hall (2000), or a geographical region viewed by its visitors as a unique place, with political and legal framework guiding its tourism development (Buhalis, 2000).

Destination competitiveness: Destination competitiveness is a measure of a destination's capacity to provide goods and services that are experientially better than those provided by the competition, specifically on the elements of experience that tourists perceive to be essential (Dwyer & Kim, 2003).

Perceived destination competitiveness: As an extension of the preceding term, perceived destination competitiveness relates to tourists' perceptions of a destination's capacity to deliver experiences better than the competition on the elements of the tourism experience deemed essential by the tourists.

Destination branding: "The set of marketing activities that (1) support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, wordmark or other graphic that readily identifies and differentiates a destination; that (2) consistently convey the expectation of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; that (3) serve to consolidate and reinforce the emotional

connection between the visitor and the destination; and that (4) reduce consumer search costs and perceived risk" (Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005, p. 337).

Destination brand equity: Destination brand equity connotes overall tangible and intangible elements that a destination represents as expressed in the cognitive and affective assessments of the destination by its visitors.

Destination brand trust: Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) conceptualise brand trust as the belief held by the typical consumer that the brand will deliver as per its expected functions. Thus, destination brand trust connotes the willingness of visitors to rely on the service providers in a destination to perform functions in a manner expected of them in an ideal situation.

Destination brand commitment: Destination commitment connotes the expression of trust, emotional attachment, and positive word of mouth by a visitor towards a destination.

1.6 The organisation of the thesis

The thesis is organised into six chapters. Chapter 1 has provided the background information, its problem statement, the main research question, and the study's objectives. The chapter further presented an overview of the study's theoretical contributions and managerial implications. Chapter 2 reviews the extant literature on destination competitiveness and destination brand equity. The chapter further discusses the theoretical underpinning of the study and the resultant conceptual framework. Chapter 3 presents the methodological procedures of the study. The chapter further presents the processes followed in the design of the data collection instrument and reports the results of the pilot study. Chapter 4 reports the results of the study in two sections, a comprehensive competitive analysis and structural equation modelling with partial least squares. Chapter 5 discusses the findings of the study and demonstrates how the results add to theory and inform practice. Chapter 6 presents a summary of the study's key findings, outlines its limitations, and suggests areas for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The current chapter reviews the literature on the major constructs examined in the study. First, a brief review of what tourist destination connotes is given. Thereafter, the chapter presents a review of the competitiveness concept regarding its origins, its evolution, the conceptual models used to assess the concept, justification for its assessment from the demand perspective, and the debate on what should constitute a destination's competitive set. The chapter also briefly discusses the difference between destination image and destination competitiveness, and provides a justification on why the present study focused on the latter. The chapter further introduces Plog's model of psychographics which is later applied in the data analysis. Subsequently, the chapter elucidates the concept of destination brand equity, discussing its origins in the marketing literature and the significant differences that arise in its application to the tourism field. The chapter closes with a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of the study, the formulation of hypotheses, and the study's conceptual framework.

2.1 Tourist destination

Most tourism activities take place at destinations, and destinations form the foundation for the description of tourism systems (Pike, 2008). Destinations are ordinarily considered the unit of analysis in tourism research (Buhalis, 2000; Klimek, 2013; Wang & Pizam, 2011). Hall (2000) defines a destination as a well-specified geographical region such as an island, a city, or a country. Destinations have also been considered products or brands (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2009; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Kim (1998) considers a destination as a complex product constituting elements such as an area's climate, natural and cultural assets, infrastructure and superstructure, and services. Hankinson (2007) posits that the development of positive brand images for cities, regions, and countries using techniques associated with classical product brands is now deemed as requiring strategic marketing intervention. To Buhalis (2000), a destination is a geographical region viewed by its visitors as a unique place

with political and legal blueprints to guide tourism marketing and planning. He adds that destinations provide a combination of tourism products services collectively represented by the brand name of the destination. Since the present study is situated within the idea of a destination aspiring to distinguish itself as a distinct brand, it adopts Buhalis's (2000) definition.

As mentioned earlier, from a demand perspective, travellers are spoilt of choice in the number of destinations, and, on the supply perspective, destination managers want to stand out in a highly competitive marketplace (Dawes, Romaniuk, & Mansfield, 2009; Shirazi & Som, 2011). Thus, destination managers need to make their destinations attractive and competitive by, among other means, formulating customer-centric marketing and management strategies (Pike, 2008). Furthermore, the increasing number of destinations and the increasing appeal of well-established ones continue to put pressure on destination managers to find innovative strategies to compete in the global market environment, a task that calls for an appreciation of the key success factors that can determine the competitiveness of the destinations (Gomezelj & Mihalič, 2008).

2.2 Competitiveness

Arguably, analysis of competitiveness can be traced back to the seminal work of Adam Smith on classical economics, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776. Smith contended that to achieve an *absolute advantage*, nations have to focus on the division of labour and specialisation. He contended that the division of labour leads to specialisation which in turn leads to lower average costs of production. He further opined that lower average costs of production lead to competitiveness (Dwyer, 2007; Palmer & Ramos, 2014). Later, Richard Ricardo proposed the theory of *comparative advantage*. In his book, *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, published in 1817, he posited that a country could still import a good even if the country was the lowest-cost producer of the good. Ricardo argued that competitiveness is based on the differences among countries in terms

of their resources (capital, land, labour, and natural resources) and further submitted that resource-endowment differences lead to specialisation which in turn motivates the need for trade. Later, Porter (1990) argued that a nation's competitiveness is largely influenced by the creativity and enterprise of the nation's industry. He challenged as flawed the prevailing thinking of the time that factors like resource endowments, exchange rates, labour costs, and interest rates were the important determinants of competitiveness.

Palmer and Ramos (2014) state that the evolution of the competitiveness concept has been similar to the evolution of the destination competitiveness concept. Early models of destination competitiveness were developed with the assumption that exogenous factor endowments (culture, climate, capital) were the key determinants of destination competitiveness. However, as with general competitiveness, endogenous factors (technological innovation, knowledge, human capital) were later added to the concept. Applying the concept to destinations, Porter argued that a destination's sustainable competitive advantage is a product of its resource allocation abilities in the long-term.

Tiffin (2014) asserts that the measurement of competitiveness is a complex process as there is no commonly embraced definition of the concept or a set of universally well-defined determinants. Porter (1990) also states that there are differences in how competitiveness is understood in that while some think of it as a macroeconomic phenomenon, others perceive it as a function of low-cost and readily available labour. Still, others reckon it to be a product of government policy. Another popular conceptualisation relates to differences in the handling of industrial issues such as labour-management relations. In this regard, Porter (1990, p. 76) states that "the only meaningful concept of competitiveness at the national level is productivity. The principal goal of a nation is to produce a high and rising standard of living for its citizens…Productivity depends on both the quality and features of products…and the efficiency with which they are produced. Productivity is the prime determinant of a nation's

long-run standard of living; it is the root cause of national per-capita income. The productivity of human resources determines employee wages; the productivity with which capital is employed determines the return it earns for its holders".

2.2.1 Defining destination competitiveness

Ritchie and Crouch (2000, p. 5) have referred to destination competitiveness as "tourism's holy grail" since intensified competition between destinations has led to the acknowledgement of competitiveness as a key success factor (Novais, Ruhanen, & Arcodia, 2018a). In the last three decades, researchers, destination managers, and organisations have tried to determine how destination competitiveness can be conceptualised, defined, and, ultimately, measured (Novais et al., 2018a; Wilde et al., 2017). However, there is little agreement in the scholarship on tourism destination competitiveness. According to Novais et al. (2018a), this lack of consensus in the literature can be attributed to three related causes. First, the concept of destination competitiveness is nuanced and multidimensional (Li, Song, Cao, & Wu, 2013). Second, the concept has been associated with various concepts and topics within the wider tourism management literature such as branding, destination image, marketing, and management.

Also, as Novais et al. (2018a) state, the multidimensional character of the concept has resulted in a lack of agreement in its definition. Definitions have been developed from diverse perspectives such as economics, attractions, satisfaction, and sustainability (Abreu-Novais, Ruhanen, & Arcodia, 2016). Related to the lack of a common definition, the third cause of controversy on the concept is the lack of a rigorous approach to its measurement. Diverse approaches have been applied to measure the concept so much that researchers have come up with different and oftentimes contradictory responses to the questions of what and how to measure and who measures it. Attempts at measuring the concept have been constrained by debates and disagreements on what is the best approach to measure it and whether the concept

should be measured from the supply side or the demand side (it should be borne in mind that most studies on destination competitiveness have been taken from the supply side because supply-side stakeholders are considered experts and hence are expected to have insightful information on the concept).

The first challenge to the examination of the concept of destination competitiveness is the lack of consensus on how it should be defined (Abreu-Novais et al., 2016). Definitions help in the formulation of hypotheses (Mazanec et al., 2007) and thus, are important in every field of critical inquiry (Abreu-Novais et al., 2016). From an economics perspective, several definitions have been advanced. d'Hauteserre (2000) defines the concept as the ability of a destination to defend its market share and position and expand upon the same with time. In their study, Dwyer, Forsyth, and Rao (2001) define destination competitiveness as the function of price differences observed with exchange rate movements and the efficiency levels of different subsectors of the tourism industry. Some scholars associate the concept with objective indicators such as arrivals, market share, tourist spending, job creation, and value-added services by the tourism sector (Heath, 2003). Ritchie and Crouch (2003) conceptualise destination competitiveness as a destination's capacity to increasingly attract visitors and profitably increase their expenditure. The economic component is often considered the core of destination competitiveness since it is only when a destination can utilise its advantageous position to higher tourism receipts can it be considered competitive (Li et al., 2013).

Other definitions primarily focus on attractiveness and tourist satisfaction. A destination's attractiveness reflects its visitors' opinions and feelings about a destination's capacity to meet or exceed their expectations (Estevão, Ferreira, & Nunes, 2015). Enright and Newton (2004) argue that a destination is said to be competitive if it can appeal to and meet or exceed the needs of its visitors. Vengesayi (2003) posits that destination competitiveness reflects a destination's ability to offer to visitors better experiences than that offered by other

destinations. Destination attractiveness is considered a key determinant of destination competitiveness (Mikulić, Krešić, Miličević, Šerić, & Ćurković, 2016). Ritchie and Crouch (2003, p. 110) echo this view by stating that "when all the complexities of destination choice are stripped away, it is essentially the core resources and attractions that underlie the basic desire to travel to a given destination". The idea of using tourist satisfaction as a reflection of destination competitiveness seems to originate with the realisation that a destination's success is indirectly linked to the destination's capacity to deliver tourist preferences and tourism experiences considered to be more superior to those provided by other destinations (Gallegati, 2012).

The last dimension advanced in most of the destination competitiveness studies is sustainability (Novais et al., 2018a). Pulido-Fernández and Rodríguez-Díaz (2016) state that the competitiveness of a destination is contingent upon the sustainability of the destination's economic and environmental resources. Buhalis (2000) argues that destination competitiveness should consider the sustainability of resources to ensure the success of the destinations in the long term. Hassan (2000) lent credence to the dimension when he described competitiveness as a destination's ability to offer experiences while sustaining its resources for future generations' use and holding on to its market share. Thus, the sustainability dimension in defining destination competitiveness has two components. One component focuses on conserving the destination's natural assets to allow for long term use (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003) whereas the other side considers the time factor. Achieving an advantage over competitors is not the ultimate objective of destination competitiveness, but rather sustaining that advantage over an extended period. It should also be noted that destinations or nations primarily compete in the global travel market to improve the living standards of their residents (Dwyer & Kim, 2003). Therefore, ecological, social, cultural, and political sustainability should be considered in destination competitiveness. In a nutshell, Lubbe et al. (2015)

catalogue five key elements of destination competitiveness: destination's capacity to efficiently organise the resources essential for tourism demand; delivery of memorable tourist experiences; performance above the competition; a positive impact on the wellbeing of the residents; and sustainability.

Despite the many definitions, Pforr, Voigt, and Locher (2016) observe that there is no commonly agreed conceptualisation or components of destination competitiveness. Still, for its working definition, the current study draws on the work of Dwyer and Kim (2003) who defined destination competitiveness as destination's capacity to deliver experiences better than the competition on the elements of the tourism experience deemed essential by tourists. This definition was deemed suitable for the study as it implies a competitive element at its core.

2.2.1.1 The difference between destination competitiveness and destination image

It is imperative, before going further, to discuss the difference between destination competitiveness and destination image, given that the latter has been studied for decades and its items are more or less similar to the items used to assess the former. Indeed, the assessment of destination competitiveness is an extension of the long practice of destination image research. However, there are subtle but pertinent differences in the foci of these two concepts (Vinyals-Mirabent, 2019). First, whereas tourism services, in general, are considered an integral aspect of destination image, it is uncommon in destination image studies to focus specifically on the firms that provide the services and the factors that may determine the competitiveness of these firms (Enright & Newton, 2004). More importantly, whereas destination image focuses on the contribution of destination attributes to a destination's uniqueness (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011), competitiveness endeavours to identify a set of universal attributes that determine whether destinations are sufficiently competitive in the market and allow longitudinal comparative analyses across destinations (Mendola & Volo, 2017). Thus, destination competitiveness demands more than an understanding of a destination's image; it

requires a frame of reference with competitor destinations, as competitiveness reflects destination's perceived performance, relative to the competition, on specific destination attributes (Lovelock, 1991).

Contrary to competitiveness theory, destination image considers the destination's attributes as key determinants differentiating the destination in the consumers' minds towards the desired positioning (Qu et al., 2011; Vinyals-Mirabent, 2019). Thus, while destination competitiveness seeks to identify the broad attributes across destinations, destination image focuses on promoting them as a unique sequence of DNA. To relate the two, destination image can be considered as one of the building blocks of destination competitiveness. Indeed, recognising the importance of destination image, Ritchie and Crouch (2000) included destination image as a predictor of destination competitiveness. As pointed out by Kim and Wiks (2010), it is the works of Ritchie and Crouch that shifted researchers' attention from destination attractiveness (image) to destination competitiveness.

Given that the primary objective of the present study is to investigate the ability of a destination to offer competitive tourism experiences better than other destinations on the attributes of the tourism experience considered to be very important by the tourists (Dwyer & Kim, 2003), the investigation focuses on destination competitiveness, rather than destination image analysis.

2.2.2. Evolution and the early models of destination competitiveness

The competitiveness of the global tourism environment, resource constraints, and the embracing of competitiveness as a key to success have all contributed to the increase in interest in the concept of destination competitiveness (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Enright & Newton, 2004; Novais et al., 2018a). From the 1990s, scholars have developed theoretical and conceptual frameworks with which to measure destination competitiveness but, apparently, scholars and practitioners alike still struggle its measurement due to the complexity and vagueness of its

components (Hanafiah, Hemdi, & Ahmad, 2016). As mentioned earlier, the concept of competitiveness was borrowed from economics. The word "competitiveness" has its roots in the Latin word, *competer*, which means to "participate in a business rivalry" (Komsic & Dorcic, 2016). The extant literature on international competitiveness shows that the concept is studied from two approaches: the micro perspective and the macro perspective. At the macro level, destination competitiveness is concerned with a country's capacity to compete in global markets. At the micro-level, the focus is on the firm-level where it is expected that the behaviours of a firm will determine its competitiveness (Dwyer & Kim, 2003).

Alderson (1937) is considered one of the early scholars to propose the concept of "sustainable competitive advantage". He contended that a firm needs to possess unique and rare attributes to differentiate itself from the competition. Hong (2008) catalogues two ways by which sustainable competitive advantage can be attained: "learning by doing" and "technological innovation". The learning-by-doing approach holds that improvements in productivity and efficiency will be achieved through the continuous use of tools and techniques by workers, leading to shortcuts and optimisation of processes and ultimately reducing the time, cost and materials required in carrying out a task (Arrow, 1962). The technological innovation approach, on the other hand, is predicated on the application of new knowledge or techniques in the provisioning of goods and services that are better than those of the competition (Boycheva, 2017). Both approaches focus on productivity. From the early 1990s, economists started to argue that competitiveness should be considered from other perspectives besides productivity. Thus, other models emerged to help explain competitiveness, including cost-benefit analysis, the resource-based theory, and multi-factor ranking models (Hong, 2008).

The traditional cost-benefit analysis approach employs economic theory to explain competitiveness by considering relative total costs and financial performance (Artto, 1987), based on three dimensions: (1) cost competitiveness: mostly associated with perfectly

competitive markets in which unit (labour) costs become the basis of comparison, (2) price competitiveness: associated with heterogeneous markets where relative export price becomes the basis of measurement and (3) non-price competitiveness: determined by price, cost or both, of a non-separable part. Artto (1987) refers to the three dimensions as "total competitiveness", a criterion for evaluating firm competitiveness by focusing on net income (total revenue minus costs). The resource-based view (Barney, 1991) suggests that enterprises can attain sustainable competitive advantage if they possess unique and almost inimitable resources. According to Wernerfelt (1984), most products require the use of resources, which can be used in a variety of products. Hence, to reveal the optimal strategic activities of a firm, one has to first specify its profile. Although the resource-based theory is commonly applied to assess firm competitiveness, some few scholars (Massukado-Nakatani & Teixeira, 2009; Peters, Siller, & Matzler, 2011; Zhou, Maumbe, Deng, & Selin, 2015) have applied it at the destination level.

Multi-factor ranking models were developed to identify appropriate strategic combinations required to attain a sustainable competitive edge, and to address the inadequacy of single criterion approaches such as profitability in measuring industry or firm performance (Hong, 2008). The annual Global Competitiveness Report is an example. In the model, about 100 variables within nine "pillars" are assessed using quantitative and survey data to measure the competitiveness of nations (WEF, 2017a). The Report, based on expert opinion, presents a competitiveness framework that aggregates data into country-level scores and then ranks countries using a weighting system (Ketels, 2016).

Except for the Global Competitiveness Report, the competitiveness models discussed above mostly analysed the competitiveness of the firm (Tsai et al., 2009) and only a few have been applied to tourism destinations. Bordas (1994) states that the tourism business is a three-dimensional concept encompassing the market, value offering, and technology. Thus, Bordas (1994) argues, the competitiveness of destinations should not be considered at the firm level

but at the cluster level. The cluster theory is based on Marshall's (1920) work which suggests that the concentration of firms in a geographical area brings about extra economic benefits and economies of scale. Bordas (1994) defines a cluster as a collection of tourist attractions, associated infrastructure and enterprises in a given geographic region (Bordas, 1994). He contends that competitiveness should be analysed between clusters and tourist businesses and not countries. Porter (1998) also applies the cluster theory to destination competitiveness by stating that:

> *"The quality of visitors' experience depends not only on the appeal of the primary attraction, but also on the quality and efficiency of complementary business such as hotels, restaurants, shopping outlets, and transportation facilities" (p. 81).*

However, Porter's views on cluster theory and its application in tourism have been criticised on two fronts. First, since the theory emphasised a supportive home environment for destination success, it failed to consider the contribution of transnational corporations and foreign direct investment to destination competitiveness. Second, it is contended that the theory could not practically demonstrate how the network relationships work to increase cluster success, considering that interconnectedness is difficult to measure (Kim & Wicks, 2010). To address the shortfalls, researchers began to develop tourism-specific models to explain destination competitiveness. Kim and Wiks (2010) submit that the studies of Ritchie and Crouch shifted the attention of scholars from destination attractiveness to destination competitiveness.

2.2.3 Subsequent destination competitiveness frameworks

Ritchie and Crouch (1993) presented the Calgary model, drawing on Porter's (1980) diamond model. They argued that economic competitiveness model like the one by Porter could be applied to a tourism destination context. Ritchie and Crouch's (1993) model, deriving from their research conducted for more than a decade (Crouch & Ritchie, 1994, 1995, 1999;

Ritchie, Crouch, & Hudson, 2001; Ritchie & Crouch, 2000; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003), is arguably the most rigorous, complex and comprehensive destination competitiveness model (Assaker, Hallak, Vinzi, & O'Connor, 2014; Gomezelj & Mihalič, 2008; Mazanec et al., 2007; Tsai et al., 2009; Zehrer, Smeral, & Hallmann, 2017), even though Laws (1995) also developed a similar model (Capone, 2015). Ritchie and Crouch's (2003) model distinguishes comparative (destination's resources) and competitive (capacity to efficiently organise the resources) advantages on five levels: qualifying and amplifying determinants; destination management; destination policy, planning and development (DPPD); core resources and attractors; and supporting factors and resources. The *core resources and attractors* represent the destination's main appeal and encompass culture and history, climate and physiography, and market connections, etc. *Supporting factors and resources* provide the bedrock on which a tourism industry can thrive. Examples include accessibility, infrastructure, enterprise, and political will. *Qualifying and amplifying determinants* determine the extent or potential of a destination's competitiveness (Ritchie & Crouch, 2010). Safety and security, location, cost/value, and carrying capacities are examples.

Destination policy, planning, and development are the central elements in resource deployment and they include philosophy/values, positioning/branding, monitoring and evaluation, and destination audit. *Destination management* focuses on the quality of service/experience, research and information dissemination, financing, resource sustainability, and crisis management (Zehrer et al., 2017). Virtually no model is without criticism (Abreu-Novais et al., 2016) and Ritchie and Crouch's has been faulted for being grounded in several potential cause-effect suppositions (Croes, 2011; Mazanec et al., 2007). The model does not clearly explain how this potential is transformed into ability (Croes & Kubickova, 2013). For instance, it is widely assumed that an increase in tourist expenditures leads to improved living standards of the populace in the destination (Abreu-Novais et al., 2016) but the link between

the relationship seems neither linear nor well-established (Crouch & Ritchie, 2012). Furthermore, since the model is intended to determine competitiveness at the macro-level, its applicability at the firm-level, for instance, is not explained just as how the relative importance of the various factors in influencing tourism arrivals is not discussed (Kaynak & Marandu, 2006).

Dwyer and Kim (2003) proposed a holistic approach to address some of the weaknesses identified in Ritchie and Crouch's model. The approach combined elements of the firm and national competitiveness and major elements of destination competitiveness as proposed by Crouch and Ritchie. Dwyer and Kim's (2003) model recognises demand as a vital element in destination competitiveness and also regard destination competitiveness not an end in itself but rather a vehicle towards attaining regional or national prosperity. They classified destination competitiveness indicators into five subcategories: (1) *endowed resources*, such as lakes, climate and belief systems; (2) *supporting factors* such as infrastructure, hospitality, and accessibility; (3) *situational conditions* such as economic conditions, socio-cultural factors, and technology advancements; (4) *destination management*, including destination marketing management, human capital development, and environmental management policies; and (5) *demand conditions* such as tourist motivations, perceptions, and preferences. Since the model constitutes more or less the same factors and components as advanced in Ritchie and Crouch's model except for the 'demand conditions' component, its criticisms are similar to those of Ritchie and Crouch's model. Furthermore, Azzopardi and Nash (2017) state that the development of the model was fraught with irregularities as the response rate and turnout in the survey and workshops/focus group discussions respectively were low during the data collection process.

Enright and Newton (2004) argue that Ritchie and Crouch's work was an extension of a long tradition of destination image research that focused on the role of tourism-specific

factors such as climate, accommodation, and scenery in influencing a destination's competitiveness. To make destination competitiveness more comprehensive, Enright and Newton (2004) identified two general categories of destination competitiveness factors: tourism-specific factors such as physiography and special events; and generic business factors, such as industrial and consumer demand, market ties and governance, and policies. They identified 15 tourism-specific factors and 37 business-related attributes to analyse the competitiveness of Hong Kong and concluded that destination competitiveness must indeed combine destination attributes and business-related attributes to explain the phenomenon (Assaker et al., 2014). Perhaps the major contribution by Enright and Newton (2004) is the proposition that the importance of destination competitiveness determinants differ according to the destination (Abreu-Novais et al., 2016). The strength of the model, however, is also the probable source of its weakness: the model's use of direct (subjective) rating of factor importance by tourists has been faulted (Assaker et al., 2014; Mazanec et al., 2007; Zhou et al., 2015).

Heath (2003), in a quest to develop a model relevant to southern African destinations, emphasises inseparability between tourism development and marketing, which is line with the idea of "competitive marketing" as proposed by Bordas (1994). Heath faulted existing models of the time for not emphasising the key success factors and important networks such as communication and information management (Abreu-Novais et al., 2016), which are essential in establishing a comprehensive sustainable destination competitiveness framework. Heath presented his framework in the form of a house-building approach: *foundations* which include key attractors, essentials like personal safety, enablers in the form of infrastructure such as airports, value-adders such as value for money, enhancers such as hospitality, and facilitating factors such as distribution channels. Additionally, the model consists of *cement* represented by information management, research, and management. The model also includes a *strategic*

marketing framework, sustainable development policy, and a tourism script which is the strategic framework. Notwithstanding the fact the model was developed for developing destinations, Crouch and Ritchie (2012) find it sufficiently generic for easy application in other contexts. However, Azzopardi and Nash (2017) contend that although Heath's model enriches other destination competitiveness frameworks through its emphasis on the improvement of human capital, information management, and communication, the model advances unrealistic linear relationships among the various components. Azzopardi and Nash (2017) further submit that the model is yet to be empirically tested.

Hassan (2000) proposed a destination competitiveness model with a special focus on stakeholder collaboration and the sustainability of the natural environment. He argued that to sustain their competitiveness, well-known destinations are diversifying their tourism products to appeal to environmentally conscious tourists. He opined that tourism depends on sensitive resources that need to be safeguarded given which destinations must manage the balance between growth orientation and environmental commitment (Hudson, Ritchie, & Timur, 2004). Hassan (2000) argued that one commonality among destinations that perform better than their competitors is a strategic emphasis on environmental sustainability in tourism development. The model is based on four determinants: (1) *comparative advantage,* including climate/location, tourist-oriented service, and infrastructure; (2) *demand orientation* which constitutes tourist motivations and their environmental awareness and acceptance of local customs, etc.; (3) *industry structure* including industry suppliers such as telecommunications providers, core service providers such as tour operators, and stakeholders such as non-governmental organisations; and (4) *environmental commitment* encompassing environmental regulations, carrying capacity constraints and enforcement organisations, among others. The limitation of this model is that Hassan (2000) failed to specify the key performance indicators

for measuring environmental and market sustainability, which are the key features of his proposed framework (Hudson et al., 2004).

2.2.4 In search of comparative analysis

In pursuit of a comparative destination competitiveness framework, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) and the Christel DeHaan Tourism and Travel Research Institute at the University of Nottingham developed the Competitiveness Monitor in 2001. The model was based on social and economic data available and comparable across nations and consisted of eight destination competitiveness indicators; social development, human resources, price competitiveness, technology advancement, the level of openness, infrastructure development, human tourism, and environmental quality. Although the model was embraced by many in the international community, its relevance was found to be limited due to missing data and a lack of specific implementation or success measures (WEF, 2007). Mazanec et al. (2007), for instance, express that the major criticism of the *monitor* relates to its epistemological standing as it does not explain the relationship between the eight competitive dimensions and destination performance, arguing that a destination competitiveness model is of little significance if it fails to demonstrate how it relates to the destination's success.

Given the limitations inherent with competitiveness monitor, the WTTC partnered with the World Economic Forum to develop the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI), first published in 2007. The index captures the key variables that make it conducive for the travel and tourism sector to flourish in different countries (Wu, Lan, & Lee, 2012). It features three sub-indices made up of 14 pillars associated with the travel and tourism (T&T) sector. Sub-index A: the T&T regulatory framework sub-index featuring five pillars: (1) policy, rules and regulations; (2) environmental sustainability; (3) safety and security; (4) health and hygiene; and (5) prioritization of travel and tourism. Sub-index B: the T&T business environment and infrastructure sub-index constituting five pillars: (1) air transport

infrastructure; (2) ground transport infrastructure; (3) tourism infrastructure; (4) ICT infrastructure; and (5) price competitiveness in the T&T sector. Sub-index C: (1) human resources; (2) affinity for T&T; (3) natural resources; and (4) cultural resources. While the index is widely considered as comprehensive, several limitations have been noted. It has been argued that destinations aim for different segments hence it would make more sense to compare destinations among segments, not in general (Tsai et al., 2009). Given that the index considers countries as homogenous, its failure to account for differences in country sizes and their level of tourism development, is one of its limitations (Croes & Kubickova, 2013). Furthermore, Croes and Kubickova (2013) contend that the index appears more of a compilation of data than a real framework that demonstrates clear verifiable relationships to aid inferential analysis.

Drawing on the work of Porter (1985), Kozak and Baloglu (2011) proposed a model of destination competitiveness comprising five major factors: (1) the supply (or controllable) side; (2) demand (or uncontrollable) side; (3) tour operators operations, (4) emergence of new destinations and substitute products and services, and; (5) external factors. The supply side consists of destination characteristics such as accessibility, safety and security, and infrastructure. The demand side features tourist perceptions such as destination image, satisfaction, and familiarity. Tour operator operations constitute factors like marketing and the use of information technology. External factors include exchange rates and government intervention strategies in the tourism sector.

Mazanec and his colleagues (Mazanec & Ring, 2011; Mazanec et al., 2007) sought to interpret the competitive factors outlined by the Competitiveness Monitor as formative latent constructs and introduce criteria for tourism performance as the ultimate result of destination competitiveness. They advanced an explanatory model of destination competitiveness made up of 8 formative constructs: (1) education; (2) social competitiveness; (3) tourism price competitiveness; (4) environmental preservation; (5) infrastructure; (6) heritage and culture;

(7) communication facilities; and (8) openness. Furthermore, the model has 3 measures of a destination's tourism performance: tourism growth (gradient) and two market share indicators (ordinary market share and distance-weighted market share). Mazanec et al. (2007) concluded that destination competitiveness models should demonstrate cause-effect relationships if they are to be meaningful to tourism practitioners.

Croes and Kubickova (2013) developed a ranking system for tourist destinations, arguing that the relationships between inputs and outputs as represented by several variables are not automatic. They claim, like Mazanec and his colleagues above, that the relevance of a destination competitiveness framework rests in its ability to measure destination performance. They proposed a tourism competitiveness index based on productivity, satisfaction, and residents' quality of life. The results showed inconsistencies with the World Economic Forum's (WEF) travel and tourism competitiveness index. While the WEF's results show that top-ranking destinations are not primarily better in terms of real tourism receipts per capita and quality of life, Croes and Kubickova's (2013) proved to the contrary.

2.2.5 The universal applicability of destination competitiveness frameworks

Despite the numerous models and frameworks, Azzopardi and Nash (2017) suggest that since there is no universal set of competitiveness attributes applicable to all destinations, making the exploration of attributes applicable to different contexts necessary. Indeed, March (2004) opines that the lack of luxury hotels at some destinations and their abundance at other destinations does not make the latter destinations more competitive since some tourist segments are interested in less developed destinations and, thus, could find highly developed ones less appealing. Lubbe et al. (2015) catalogue two major approaches for analyzing destination competitiveness. The first approach embraces the significant attributes of competitiveness (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Its shortfalls, Lubbe et al. (2015) argue, include the fact that not all attributes are of similar significance in influencing the competitiveness of destinations in

general or specific destinations in isolated customer segments and the challenge of obtaining the relevant data for each attribute, particularly in developing economies.

The other approach analyses a destination's competitiveness in comparison with one or several other selected destinations (Enright & Newton, 2004; March, 2004). The second approach holds that there is a difference between "important" and "determinant" attributes. Important indicators are not always consequential whereas determinant indicators have the strongest influence on destination competitiveness (Lubbe, 2015). If destinations are similar on an indicator (for instance, cuisine), the indicator could be considered significant for competitiveness but will not qualify as a determinant indicator. The second approach requires determination of the relative importance of indicators that determine the competitiveness of the destination in question (thus making the investigation destination-specific) and, in the end, analyzing how the destination performs against its major competitor(s) (Lubbe, 2015).

Worth exploring is the significance of competitiveness factors critical to destinations at varying levels of development (Wilde & Cox, 2008). Limited studies, however, have investigated the competitiveness of emerging or developing destinations (Bianchi, Pike, & Lings, 2014; Dwyer, Dragićević, Armenski, Mihalič, & Knežević Cvelbar, 2016). A critical mass of studies on destination competitiveness has been carried out in established destinations like Australia, the USA and in Europe, and (see Li & Xu, 2015). Addressing the barriers to tourism development and harnessing tourism's full economic benefits is contingent upon a holistic research approach in developing destinations (Aqueveque & Bianchi, 2017). Therefore, this study examines destination competitiveness in Malawi, an emerging destination in southern Africa.

2.2.6 Destination competitiveness from the tourists' perspective

Despite the relevance of the demand perspective as an explanatory factor of destination competitiveness, few studies have examined the concept from the perspective of tourists

(Andrades-Caldito et al., 2014; Meng & Uysal, 2007). In their study, Queiroz Neto, Lohmann, Scott, and Dimmock (2017) identify three streams of early and original works on destination competitiveness with a focus on Ritchie and Crouch's research: (1) generation of ideas (Crouch and Ritchie, 1993); (2) consolidation of a conceptual framework (Crouch and Ritchie, 1999) and; (3) ranking of determinant indicators proposed in the framework (Crouch, 2011). They submit that not only was the demand dimension left out from the original model but also the data for the conceptualisation of the models were only from the supply side. According to Andrades-Caldito et al. (2014), destination competitiveness is contingent upon a destination's capacity to deliver experiences that meet or exceed its target segments' expectations and wants and the promotion of the requisite experiences to the necessary market segments. Thus, it is imperative to examine destination competitiveness from the tourist point-of-view. Similarly, Mazanec et al. (2007) submit that a demand-orientation should also be adopted the examination of destination competitiveness to complement industry-based measures.

Additionally, Kozak and Rimmington (1999) argue that both qualitative/subjective (hospitality, access to tourist markets, marketing by tour operators, value for money, safety, and security, etc.) and quantitative/objective (tourist numbers and tourist revenues, etc.) measurement can be helpful when assessing destination competitiveness. Kozak (2002b) suggests that there is a need to account for the comparative qualitative elements of destination competitiveness because these will eventually drive destination performance. He explains that qualitative elements include those destination features which tourists liked the most or disliked during their visit. Kozak's (2002) suggestion is perhaps based on the notion that to arrive at a favourable evaluation or otherwise, tourists compare these destination features against their experiences of other destinations (Yüksel & Yüksel, 2001). In a similar vein, Dwyer et al. (2004), in their study on firm and national competitiveness, concluded that a further understanding of the concept would require an exploration of consumer preferences,

destination attributes, and the various components of travel decision making. Zehrer et al. (2017) argue that subjective assessments are perhaps more suitable than objective metrics in assessing destination performance across competitor destinations since the relative observations might show the assessments in terms of individual evaluations.

Cracolici and Nijkamp (2009) state that contrary to studies on destination image, the understanding of tourist destination competitiveness should go beyond specific tourist attributes of territorial areas and account for a wider set of factors connected to both the competitiveness of firms and how tourists perceive the destination. Awareness of alternative destinations, their offerings, and the positioning of destinations on tourists' minds are important determinants of tourist flows that seem to be unaccounted for in principal models of destination competitiveness such as Ritchie and Crouch's model (Armenski et al., 2011). Lo, Chin, and Law (2019) submit that information from the demand side is a critical factor towards the attainment of destination competitiveness. Pansiri (2014) contends that for destinations to become competitive, they need to design market research-driven competitive strategies. He adds that market research highlights market forces helps destinations understand the movements of international tourists in different destinations.

Of course, some have raised objections that it is not rational to ask tourists to assess destination competitiveness indicators such as policies or management abilities (see Bordas, 1994). To such objections, Andrades-Caldito et al. (2014) argue that tourists are better placed to assess such determinants since they (tourists) experience or consume the outcomes of the policies and management abilities (accessibility, signage, environmental sustainability, etc.) at the destination. The relevance of understanding destination competitiveness from the tourist's perspective rests on the notion that tourists have the final say in deciding where to travel to (Andrades-Caldito et al., 2014).

Research that considers destination competitiveness from the supply side mostly

considers objective factors that influence the choice of travel destination such as tourism resources or attractions at the destination and price. However, since subjective factors, too, are integral to the selection of travel destinations (Qiu, Masiero, & Li, 2018), the current study analyses destination competitiveness from the tourist perspective, specifically investigating the concept's downstream effect on destination brand equity.

Taplin (2012) applied competitive importance-performance analysis (CIPA) among wildlife park visitors to establish the importance vis-à-vis performance of destination competitiveness indicators and the market position of the park. The author states that this was done to improve the importance-performance analysis technique that is applied in destination competitiveness studies; however, the study did not shed light on how the destinations faired as compared to their competitors. The study put into perspective one integral tenet of competitiveness that the phenomenon is not absolute but rather relative. Andrades-Caldito, Sánchez-Rivero, and Pulido-Fernández (2013) assessed four major components of destination competitiveness from the demand side by calculating a modified Bray-Curtis dissimilarity index to determine how changes in destination image impacted the overall competitiveness of a destination in Andalusian provinces in Spain. The study ranked the provinces according to the impact of their images on the overall image of Andalusia and also analysed how the dimensions of Ritchie and Crouch's (2003) model explained the provincial destination images. Lee, Choi, and Breiter (2016) studied the competitiveness of convention destinations from the attendees' perspective at three venues in the United States of America. Not surprisingly, concluded that some destination competitiveness factors are more influential than others in the competitiveness of convention destinations as compared to, for instance, leisure destinations.

Hallmann, Müller, and Feiler (2014) tested an adapted model of destination competitiveness on sports tourists to identify the factors of destination competitiveness that influence tourists' perceived satisfaction with the experiences offered in selected German,

Swiss and Austrian winter sports resorts. They concluded that destination competitiveness factors included in Ritchie and Crouch's (2003) model, except for core resources and attractions, influenced the tourists' post-consumption perceived satisfaction with the offered experiences in the considered destinations. Andrades-Caldito et al. (2014) also examined destination competitiveness using the demand perspective, to establish the relationships among its determinants and concluded that endowed resources affect created resources. Silva, Correia, Santos, and Ambrósio (2014) studied the competitiveness of the Azores region of Portugal in the Scandinavian market. Based on insights from tourists, they concluded that factors that inform the selection of a destination as a primary choice do not apply when selecting the destination as a second choice and that a destination usually competes for visitors with several other destinations. Hallmann, Mueller, and Peters (2015) assessed the competitiveness of three destinations in Switzerland, Germany, and Austria from both demand and supply perspectives. Based on insights from tourists at the post-consumption stage and stakeholders, the study revealed that "software" innovations such as well-trained human resources and cleanliness are pertinent drivers of destination competitiveness.

Queiroz Neto et al. (2017) explored the important attributes of a scuba diving destination from the tourist point of view in an imagined scuba diving destination. The study identified factors essential to the competitiveness of such destinations and also found that the scuba diving experience influenced tourists' perception of the majority of the identified factors. This study is one of the few studies that examined the destination competitiveness concept using a hypothetical destination but involved respondents that had visited scuba diving destinations before.

Wilde et al. (2017) sought to ascertain the relative significance of destination factors to the performance of destinations and investigate whether there is a difference in the significance of the destination attributes between developing and mature destinations. Based on a sample of

Australian tourists, the study concluded that destination competitiveness factors identified by tourists are not very different from the ones identified in supply perspective, but the attributes differed in importance between developing and mature destinations. Wong (2017) examined the impact of destination competitiveness on destination loyalty in selected Malaysian destinations. Using tourist ratings of destination features, the five destinations under consideration were ranked. The study concluded that the destination competitiveness factors proposed in Ritchie and Crouch's (2003) model positively influence destination loyalty.

Woodruff (1997) states that the customer is an important resource in measuring competitive advantage since service providers have to consider what the customers' perceptions are towards a product or a service. Following this line of thought, one can argue that understanding destination competitiveness from the demand side is key to the delivery of value-added services to enhance the relative performance of a destination (Hassan, 2000; Queiroz Neto et al., 2017). As Lee, Choi, and Breiter (2013) argue, a perception-based approach to understanding destination competitiveness may improve the clarity of the destination competitiveness concept. Above all, to achieve competitiveness, destinations need to leverage their resources to create and sustain value for their stakeholders, in particular, especially customers (Srivastava, Fahey, & Christensen, 2001).

As demonstrated in the studies reviewed above, there is a burgeoning literature on destination competitiveness from the tourist point-of-view. However, a contentious issue is whether the respondents in such studies should be intercepted before they visit the destination or after. Kozak (2004b) observes that numerous destination competitiveness related studies do not provide enough evidence to demonstrate that respondents involved in the studies have visited the destination(s) under question. Kozak (2004b) argues that this results in a lack of in-depth exploration of the destinations' competitiveness. Kozak (2004b) also intimates that for respondents to give a truthful reflection of a destination's performance, they should have visited

and experienced the same. Furthermore, destination competitiveness measures would be more valid if at least two destinations are compared and tourists of multiple nationalities are involved (Kozak, Baloğlu, & Bahar, 2010). In response to the aforementioned issues, the current study evaluates a destination's competitiveness by specifically targeting respondents from various countries that had visited the destinations under comparison.

2.2.7 The basis of comparison: proximate destinations or similar but "best-practice" destinations?

An issue worthy of consideration in understanding perceived destination competitiveness is the question of which destinations to compare with a specific destination. Kozak and Rimmington (1999) state that a specific tourism destination is not more or less competitive in absolute terms, but against competitors. Hence it is imperative to identify the competitors that constitute the competitive set. Gaining a better understanding of the competitive set is the foundation of an effective evaluation of the competitiveness of a destination. Surprisingly, the concept of the competitor set has not been extensively researched by tourism scholars (Novais, Ruhanen, & Arcodia, 2018b). One approach in identifying the competitor set is to consider destinations that are geographically close to the destination and possess similar natural, climatic and cultural characteristics. For instance, Armenski, Gomezelj, Djurdjev, Deri, and Aleksandra (2011), in a study of Serbia's competitiveness as a travel destination, argued that considering that Serbia is a land-locked country with no possibility of the development of coastal tourism, it would be irrational to compare it to coastal destinations such as Slovenia and Croatia.

On the other hand, it should be noted that some destinations cannot be in direct competition because they have different types of offerings or have accessibility issues. Nevertheless, substitution among direct and indirect competitors can take place if a different type of vacation is chosen (Kozak & Rimmington, 1999). Such a phenomenon is further

reinforced by an emerging trend that has seen travellers become increasingly experienced and more aware of the world and dynamics in their pursuit of tourism experiences available in the international market. Thus, beyond comparing themselves to neighbouring destinations, destinations can aspire to learn best practices from similar but distant destinations by drawing comparisons with "destinations of excellence" from the tourist perspective (Kozak & Baloglu, 2010). Luštický and Bína (2014) identified the Czech and Slovak Republics as belonging to the same competitive set but used Great Britain, given to its better ranking than the two countries in tourism surveys, as a baseline destination from which to draw best practices. Thus, in determining competitor sets, it could also be useful to compare emerging destinations with popular or favourite destinations because in arriving at their evaluation, tourists will consider their experiences of other destinations (Kozak & Rimmington, 1999), especially in regions in which the tourists have limited travel experience.

Through competitive analysis, a destination can identify its most important competitors based on the nature of services offered, the competitors' objectives, strengths and weaknesses and, ultimately, determine its own strategic and relative standing in the market (Martin & Tomas, 2012). However, seeking to learn only from geographically closer destinations can sometimes be a short-sighted approach towards attaining a competitive advantage since the market leader or the strongest competitor could be in another region. Beyond its geographic vicinity, a destination can aspire to compare itself to relatively similar destinations to identify and learn best practices regardless of location (Kozak, 2004a). Destinations in different geographical locations may not necessarily possess heterogeneous tourism features (Assaf & Dwyer, 2013). Lubbe et al (2015), for instance, in a study of South Africa's tourism competitiveness, found that respondents from the USA considered Australia and 'Tanzania and Kenya' as South Africa's main competitors. Similarly, Assaf and Dwyer (2013) grouped destinations like Paraguay, Peru, Malawi, and Nicaragua in the same category of competition

even though they are all not in the same geographic location. Nonetheless, limited studies exist that seek to identify destination attributes and how they are perceived compared to destinations at different levels of development (Wilde et al., 2017).

Elliot and Papadopoulos (2016) conducted a comparative place image study among Australia, Canada, Japan, the United States of America, and South Korea, justifying the selection of these destinations as satisfying the need for both similarity and diversity effective for comparative research. In a competitive analysis of Sun/Lost City resort, South Africa, by Botha, Crompton, and Kim (1999), respondents identified 441 resort destinations from across the world as the resort's competitors. The authors argued that presenting a preselected list of destinations for the respondents to choose from would have been unrepresentative as the study participants were from different regions of the world. Consequently, their scale of competitors was different.

It is important to state that even tourists that have not visited other destinations within the vicinity of the destination under examination will still make comparisons and make post-visit judgements. Research shows that, oftentimes, these judgements are formed based on tourists' past experiences with the same and/or other destinations (Neal & Gursoy, 2008). Oftentimes, tourists use past experiences to create a reference point against which they assess their experiences at the new destination (Masiero & Qiu, 2018; Neal & Gursoy, 2008). Pursuing this vein of thought, Yüksel and Yüksel (2001) conducted a comparative tourism performance analysis of Turkey by asking tourists to compare the performance of Turkey's tourism attributes against those of the summer holiday destination that they had most recently travelled to. The authors asserted that in evaluating a destination's performance against other destinations, tourists might use other experience-based bases of comparison such as best holiday destination, favourite holiday destination, or average destination. Consequently, they made a recommendation for future studies to examine the applicability of the experience-based

norm to predict tourists' post-consumption judgements in various tourism contexts.

Indeed, Abreu-Novais et al. (2016) argue that the traditional mentality of competitors as the destinations that are geographically near to one another is now obsolete as improvements in accessibility, reduction in travel times, and costs have made it possible for previously non-competing destinations to directly compete. Even more substantial is the idea that competitor destinations might not be relevant to all individuals at all times. Qiu et al. (2018) posit that factors such as motivation and personality influence travel destination choice as different personalities are likely to select different destinations just as travellers with different motivations would select different destinations. Thus, from the tourist-centric perspective, the competitive set is oftentimes dynamic. Hypothetically, if an African-American tourist intends to visit Africa to trace their African ancestry, they might consider Ghana, Senegal, or Tanzania as possible destinations. If the same tourist, however, intends to visit an exotic destination on a hiking expedition, then Tanzania (Mount Kilimanjaro) could be considered alongside Kenya (Mount Kenya) and Nepal (Mount Everest).

Given the foregoing, and as detailed later in the methods section, the current study combined two approaches in determining the basis of comparison: comparison with a visited in the SSA region and, in the case of those visiting sub-Saharan Africa for the first time, comparison with their favourite destination previously favourite previously visited destination with similar tourism resource stock as Malawi, either at the same or different level of development. Beyond comparing destinations in the same location, a comparison of destinations at different levels of development using several destination attributes from the demand side will make an important addition to the destination competitiveness literature (Wilde et al., 2017).

2.3 Plog's model of psychographics

As alluded to earlier on, one of the key issues in destination competitive analysis is the determination of a destination's competitive set. The present study uses Plog's (1974) model of psychographics to classify destinations of comparison outside the sub-Saharan Africa region. Plog's (1974) model of psychographics is predicated on individuals' personality traits. The model posits that people in the population are normally spread along a continuum of personalities, from "allocentric", through "midcentric", to "psychocentric". Grifith and Albanese (1996) presented Plog's continuum into five categories: (1) dependable (psychocentric), (2) near-dependable (near-psychocentric), (3) mid-centric, (4) near-venturer (near-allocentric), and (5) venture (allocentric). In an attempt to address the question, "why destinations rise and fall in popularity", Plog investigated travellers' personalities in relation to destinations' popularity. The model posits that destinations may rise or fall in popularity as traveller personalities evolve (Chen, Mak, & McKercher, 2011).

The model further explains the ideal activities, vacations, and destinations pursued by specific traveller personalities. Plog (2004) posits that a straight-line relationship exists between psychographic profiles and individuals' preferred activities on holiday, stating that venturers are actively involved in leisure activities on holiday than dependables (Merritt et al., 2016). Regarding destination types, dependables prefer to visit destinations with adequate provisioning of amenities such as accommodation and restaurants, and usually sign-up for well-planned and guided trips, probably due to limited travel experience since their international trips are far much apart. On the contrary, venturers like to visit distant destinations; prefer underdeveloped, less-crowded destinations, and prefer independent travel, even visiting places whose local languages they do not speak.

Much as Plog's model is widely cited in attempts to explain the relationship between traveller personality types and their preferred destinations, the model has been faulted for

failing to account for differences in motivation at different times, given that, for instance, tourists can take a winter skiing holiday in an allocentric destination, but then proceed to visit a psychocentric destination in the summer (Hudson, 1999). Still, the model continues to offer a reflection of ideal traveller behaviour, as evidenced by its use in tourism literature (Merritt et al., 2016), and a frequently visited website dedicated to classifying travel destinations based on Plog's psychographics research (Best Trip Choices, 2012).

In the present study, the model is used to classify destinations of comparison into different categories in line with their characteristics and the traveller personality types that the destinations appeal to, as per the website besttripchoices.com. As the common approach in identifying members of a destination's competitive set is to include destinations in the same geographic region on the basis that they normally share natural, cultural and climatic features, the use of Plog's model advances the understanding of destination competitiveness, given that the said traditional approach of identifying competitors is now considered both obsolete and limiting (Abreu-Novais et al., 2016). It is only rational that the model is used to classify destinations in a competitive analysis since decision-making regarding destination choice is influenced by, among several factors, tourists' characteristics (e.g. motivation and personality) and destination-related factors (e.g. costs and accessibility) (Yoo, Yoon, & Park, 2018).

2.4 Destination branding

It has been argued that brands are one of the most significant drivers of a destination's success (Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2004) since they can be used to communicate the distinctiveness of a destination (Miličević et al., 2017). The first scholars to advocate the need for destination branding were Ozretić Došen, Vranešević, and Prebežac (1998) and Morgan and Pritchard (1999). Destinations are becoming increasingly competitive against one another so much so that differentiation has become a critical success factor in destination management and marketing. For instance, Morgan and Pritchard (2002) reported that about 70% of tourists

worldwide only visited 10 destination countries, resulting in the rest of the world destinations scrambling for 30% of international travellers. The case for branding rests on the notion that customers perceive a difference in products since a product with a different brand cannot be easily replaced. Even though there is hardly any agreement on what branding is (Anholt, 2004), Blain et al. (2005) proposed a definition that has become widely accepted. They define the concept as:

> *"The set of marketing activities that (1) support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, wordmark or other graphic that readily identifies and differentiates a destination; that (2) consistently convey the expectation of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; that (3) serve to consolidate and reinforce the emotional connection between the visitor and the destination; and that (4) reduce consumer search costs and perceived risk. Collectively, these activities serve to create a destination image that positively influences consumer destination choice"* (p. 337).

Branding can help destinations position themselves differently from other destinations with similar tourism offerings, gain loyalty from visitors, and improve returns of local businesses and other players in the tourism value chain. Accordingly, Hanna and Rowley (2011) argue that destination branding is executed to create and promote favourable associations with the destination and make the destinations stand out from the competition. For the customer, branding makes the travel decision-making easy through a reduction in search costs, reduced perceived risk, and enhanced pride (Pike, 2009). Branding, some have argued, can be traced back to the time of slavery as slaves were pressed with a hot iron to identify their owner. According to Low and Fullerton (1994), the concept was first applied to products in the late 19th century. Herman (2003) further states that the word has its origins in the Viking (Old Norse language) word '*brandr*' which translates as 'to burn'; thereby lending credence to the claim that the practice has its roots in cattle branding where the livestock was branded to

identify them since cattle of multiple owners grazed together on communal ranches. However, Gartner (2014) argues that there is evidence to the effect that the practice of endowing products with brand value through name identification or other means is as old as trade itself.

In tourism studies, destination branding is still a new field of inquiry. Gartner (2014) states that inquiry into destination branding has its foundations in destination image studies. Destination image research was propelled to the centre of tourism academic inquiry by the seminal work of Boulding (1956). Boulding (1956) argues that reality is rarely objective since it is individuals' worldviews that shape what they consider to be the reality and that our attitudes or feeling towards a place, thing, or person are primarily determined by images. Ekinci (2003) argues that destination branding is set in motion when tourists, upon evaluating the image of a destination, find in it a strong emotional attachment. Thus, although destination image and destination branding are similar, the latter is more associated with the emotional element of destination image. Based on the foregoing, Ekinci (2003) submits that destination branding is the second phase in the process of establishing a positive destination image.

Ultimately, through branding, destinations seek to establish strong relationships with their visitors by meeting the visitors' basic and emotional needs (Ekinci, 2003). Specifically, destination branding will be successful if the visitors find their self-image to be congruent with the destination image. A brand is said to have a personality that mirrors a "set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). For a destination to be successful at branding, it should establish a clear personality for itself on the minds of visitors. For example, Paris can be considered romantic, Wales as welcoming, and Spain as family-oriented and friendly (Morgan & Pritchard, 2002). In a global tourism marketing environment where most destinations lay claim to above-the-average facilities, attractions, friendliest residents, and exceptional standards of customer service, the need for differentiation cannot be

overemphasised (Morgan & Pritchard, 2004). Consequently, destination branding seems to be the probable answer to this need for differentiation (Piggott, 2001).

2.5 Brand equity

Szőcs (2014) states that the early 1980s saw the wide application of the concept of brand equity primarily by agencies such as Coopers and Lybrand, Interbrand, and Young and Rubicam, especially in manufactured goods markets. Tasci (2018) posits that the basis of the studies on the concept can be traced to the studies of Aaker (1991; 1992; 1996) and Keller (1993a; 2003). Even though many scholars have examined the brand equity concept, there seems to be fragmented and inconclusive literature on the concept (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010). Winters (1991), for instance, contends that if one was to "ask ten people to define brand equity, you are likely to get ten (maybe 11) different answers as to what it means" (p.70). Even though there are disagreements around what brand equity is, there are some definitions that have been commonly embraced in the literature and practice. The Marketing Science Institute (1989) considers brand equity as that which consumers can view "as both a financial asset and as a set of favourable associations and behaviours" (Seno & Lukas, 2007). Farquhar (1989) defines brand equity as the added value endowed by a brand to a product. The value provided by the brand serves as a link between the brand's past performance and its prospects (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010; Keller, 2003).

Aaker (1991) conceptualises brand equity as "a set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name, and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or that firm's customers" (p. 15). Leuthesser (1988) defines brand equity as "the set of associations and behaviours on the part of the brand's consumers, channel members and parent-corporation that enables a brand to earn greater volume or greater margins that would have been impossible without the brand name and, also, provides a strong, sustainable and differential advantage". Even though the various definitions provided above

might seem different, they have two fundamental themes. First, the "brand" is independent of the "product" or "service" sold by the firm (Zhu, 2009). Second, "equity" is of value to the firm, and it ascends from the brand's importance to customers, both existing and prospective.

Christodoulides and de Chernatony (2010) point out that scholars have examined brand equity mainly from two approaches: the financial approach and the customer approach. The former considers the financial value brand equity adds to the firm, oftentimes called firm-based brand equity (FBBE). The latter, customer-based brand equity, reflects the value a brand gains based on consumers' perceptions and their associated behaviours. Simply put, brands with high levels of brand equity enjoy price premiums, inelastic price sensitivity, and larger market shares (Zhu, 2009). The following section discusses commonly cited models of brand equity and the relevant drivers and outcomes of customer-based brand equity.

2.5.1 Customer-based brand equity models

Aaker (1991) conceptualises brand equity as "a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers" (p. 15). He classified the assets and liabilities on which brand equity into five categories: brand loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality, brand association, and other proprietary assets such as trademarks and patents. Keller (1993) proposed a brand equity model with two dimensions – brand awareness (a product of brand recall and brand recognition) and brand image (a constellation of brand associations) which have brand knowledge as their root. According to Keller (1993), customer-based brand equity arises when a customer knows a brand and, as consequently, retains strong, positive, and specific associations with the brand which may, in turn, result in repeat purchase and recommendation behaviours (Kladou et al., 2015). Aaker (1996) proposed a model with five dimensions of customer-based brand equity – brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and proprietary assets such as patents and trademarks. Since patents

trademarks are difficult to measure from the consumer's perspective (Uford, 2017) and are not directly relevant to customer-based brand equity (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010), most studies use the first four dimensions.

Yoo and Donthu (2001) combined Aaker's (1991) and Keller's (1993) models to propose and empirically test a model of customer-based brand equity that would be parsimonious, psychologically robust, and applicable across cultures. The study ended up with 10 items under three dimensions of customer-based brand equity – brand associations/awareness, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. Even though the fact that the study combined brand associations and brand awareness, which are different constructs, has been cited as a limitation, Christodoulides and de Chernatony (2010) opine that among the models that use the indirect approach to measure customer-based brand equity, Yoo and Donthu's (2001) work stands out as one with the fewest weaknesses (Almeyda-Ibáñez & George, 2017).

Vazquez, Del Rio, and Iglesias (2002) explored the perception of value by the consumer resulting from the utilities obtained by the consumer once they have purchased the brand. Almeyda-Ibáñez and George (2017) state that the theoretical underpinning of the study was its definition of customer-based brand equity: "the overall utility that the consumer associates with the use and consumption of the brand: including associations expressing both functional and symbolic utilities" (Vazquez et al., 2002, p. 28). The study constructed a measurement scale for customer-based brand equity that combines brand name utilities and product utilities and proposed four dimensions of customer-based brand equity – functional utility emanating from the brand name, symbolic utility emanating from the brand name, functional utility proceeding from the product, and symbolic function attached to the brand.

Shankar, Azar, and Fuller (2008) developed an approach to monitor and control brand equity for multi-product brands using consumer surveys and economic performance metrics.

The model is made up of two components – (a) value calculated from discounted cash flow measurements and (b) comparative brand importance calculated with the use of brand choice frameworks. The study identified brand associations, brand reputation, brand fit, brand uniqueness, brand trust, brand fame, and brand regard as drivers of brand image. Even though the approach developed in the study can be used to assess brand equity for multi-product brands from both financial and consumer perceptions, it only offers an average estimation of brand equity. This is because only comparative brand importance is assessed on an individual basis since competitors' financial performance information is rarely made available (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010). Almeyda-Ibáñez and George (2017) contend that each approach has its own merits and demerits and, so far, researchers are yet to combine the advantages of the various perspectives in a single model.

2.6 Tourist-based brand equity for tourism destinations

The brand equity concept was introduced to the tourism destination research context at the beginning of the new millennium (Lockshin & Spawton, 2001). Traditionally, destination brand equity studies have focused on the formulation of destination brand performance frameworks to measure the effectiveness of destination marketing initiatives and predict destinations' brand performance (Chekalina et al., 2018). The conceptualization of the concept is inconsistent and unclear in the literature (Šerić, Mikulić, & Gil-Saura, 2018). After reviewing destination brand equity literature, Kladou et al. (2015) averred that some dimensions and variables are explored in greater detail than others and links among the dimensions are usually not examined.

Since the introduction of the concept in tourism destination research, several studies have explored the concept: customer-based brand equity for gambling destinations (Boo et al., 2009); international travellers to Korea (Kim, Han, Holland, & Byon, 2009); brand equity for destination Slovenia (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007); brand equity for a host community (Pike &

Scott, 2009); brand equity for an emerging short-break destination (Pike, 2007); short-haul tourists visiting Slovenia (Konecnik Ruzzier, 2010); and international visitors to Mongolia (Chen & Myagmarsuren, 2010). A few more empirical studies have also been undertaken in recent years: tourist satisfaction and brand equity (San Martín, Herrero, & García de Los Salmones, 2018), customer-based brand equity for the Sarajevo brand (Duman, Ozbal, & Duerod, 2018); cross-market validity of customer-based brand equity for destination brands (Tasci, 2018); customer-based brand equity among sports vs non-sports tourists (Tasci, Hahm, & Breiter-Terry, 2018); comparing customer-based brand equity models among competing convention cities in East Asia (Kim, Moon, & Choe, 2016), and brand equity of Austria and Switzerland using a sample of tourists from Hong Kong (Kim, Schuckert, Im, & Elliot, 2017).

Even though the term 'brand equity' and its components are deeply explored concepts in the general marketing and management literature, research on brand equity components in tourism research is at the inception stage (Dedeoğlu, Van Niekerk, Weinland, & Celuch, 2018; Pike & Bianchi, 2016). Specifically, amid this growing body of literature, specific gaps in knowledge can still be found. The first is that the most previous studies chose a few destination brand equity components; hence, the models developed lack comprehensiveness (Dedeoğlu et al., 2018). Kotsi, Pike, and Gottlieb (2018) state that the primary variables that have been studied in destination brand equity models are destination brand value, destination brand association, destination brand quality, and destination brand awareness. These are typically studied to ascertain their association with destination brand loyalty. Tasci (2018), however, expresses that notwithstanding that several studies have examined the dimensions and composition of customer-based brand equity in different contexts, there is hardly an agreement about either its dimensions or their linkages.

Cognizant of the significant differences that exist between product brands and destination brands and between product customers and tourists, the current study

conceptualizes the customer-based brand equity concept as tourist-based destination brand equity. Gartner and Ruzzier (2011) outline two major differences between product brands and destination brands. First, product brands are predictable in that customers buy products with the expectation that the product will perform regardless of where it is bought. This is hardly the case with destinations since seasonality can alter the characteristics of destinations. Moreover, destination development and changes in resident demographics can change the general characteristics of the destination. Second, unlike largely tangible products, or whose intangible elements such as status can trigger a purchase, destinations are experiential. Inherent in the tangibility of products are advantages such as trial and test periods, which are impracticable with destinations. Moreover, destinations are amalgams of various stakeholders such as residents, private enterprises, and government agencies whose interests might be different. The social, cultural, economic, technological, and political forces that emanate from these interests present management challenges to destination managers (Yousaf, Amin, & Gupta, 2017). Such challenges are not common with product brands. Indeed, it has been argued that the universality of the brand should be contextualised in line with destination attributes and tourism characteristics, before general branding principles are applied to the tourism destination context (Ghafari, Ranjbarian & Fathi, 2017; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). According to Gartner (2014), the foregoing might even lead some people to ask whether destinations can be thought of as brands. Konecnik and Gartner (2007), however, opine that destinations are somehow similar to product brands because names of destinations might offer a sense of assurance like the names of consumer product firms. The stated differences coupled with the rising cost of travel means that tourists assume more risk in purchasing destination-related products. Therefore, the concept must be analysed as, distinct from the way it is understood in the general marketing literature. Much as its dimensions are almost the same as used under customer-based brand equity, the term tourist-based destination brand equity simply recognises

and communicates the two major distinct aspects at play in the model: the tourist and the destination. Previous studies (Gartner& Ruzzier, 2011; Gomez, Lopez, & Molina, 2015; Sartori, Mottironi, & Corigliano, 2012; Yousaf, Amin, & Gupta, 2017) have also used the same term or slight variations of the same.

2.6.1 Components of tourist-based destination brand equity

Aaker (1991) proposed a brand equity model with brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and other proprietary brand features such as patents, trademarks, and channel relationships as components, the first four relating to the customer and the last one linked to the firm (Schivinski, 2015). Keller (1993) conceptualised brand equity as the awareness and how strong, favourable, and specific the brand associations that consumers retain in their minds are. Sharp (1996) proposed a customer-based brand equity framework composed of brand image, brand awareness, and relationships with the customer base. Lassar, Mittal, and Sharma (1995) also proposed social image, trustworthiness, value, performance, and identification (sentimental attachment) as brand equity dimensions.

In the tourism industry, numerous studies have examined the concept using different dimensions. Chen and Tseng (2010), in a study of the airline industry, explored brand equity as a composition of awareness, image, quality, and loyalty. Other researchers added or removed dimensions from those presented by Aaker (1996) and Keller (1993): imagery association (Douglas, Mills, & Phelan, 2010); resonance, experience, feelings, and judgment (Wong, 2018); brand assets (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014); consumer value (Tasci et al., 2018); brand fondness (Foroudi, Jin, Gupta, Foroudi, & Kitchen, 2018) and brand trust and brand sympathy (Burmann, Jost-Benz, & Riley, 2009). Considering these numerous dimensions, it will not be far-fetched to state that there is limited agreement on the measurement of brand equity as the literature on the concept seems to be fragmented and still growing.

The current study explores the impact of perceived destination competitiveness on tourist-based destination brand equity focusing on destination brand awareness, perceived quality, destination brand image, destination brand trust, and destination brand commitment. To the best of my knowledge, no one study has investigated the impact of perceived destination competitiveness on the specified destination brand equity dimensions.

2.6.1.1 Destination brand awareness

Brand awareness reflects the strength of a brand as perceived by the intended consumers, on a given spectrum (Aaker, 1996). Dedeoğlu et al. (2018) state that destination brand awareness is important, as a primary component of brand equity because it brings about favourable information and attitudes that can enhance the possibility of buying the brand's offerings (Baldauf, Cravens, & Binder, 2003). Homburg, Klarmann, and Schmitt (2010) define brand awareness as the decision-makers' capacity to isolate or recognise a brand. For tourists to buy services from a service provider or choose a particular destination, they need to be aware of the service provider/destination. Brand awareness is a significant dimension since a consumer's capacity to select a brand among several brands will be influenced, to a significant extent, by their brand awareness to the brand connection (Keller, 2009; Lin, 2013).

There are at least three ways in which brand awareness is valuable to brands (Woodward, 2000): brand awareness aids in information retrieval when making a purchase decision and, thus, helps a destination or product to be a candidate for the consideration set. Brand awareness also brings about a sense of familiarity for the brand – given that services usually require a thorough evaluation before a purchase is made as compared to goods, familiarity is important in the purchase decision making of services. Lastly, brand awareness provides an avenue on for people who have an association with a brand connect or form an attachment to the brand – it has been documented that people possessing knowledge and

associations about a product can recall those associations as twice as those people with no prior encounter with the product.

Previous research has mainly focused on top-of-mind features of awareness (e.g., Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Boo et al., 2009; Pike et al., 2010). In most instances, studies on destination brand awareness have used the following measurement items (or variations of the same): (1) this destination has a good name and reputation; (2) this destination is very famous; (3) the characteristics of this destination come to my mind quickly; and (4) when I am thinking of [a similar travel/leisure activity], this destination comes to my mind quickly. However, as Aaker (1996) observes, top-of-mind elements are problematic to ascertain when consumers have prior exposure with a product. In a tourism context, the Attrition Curve of Tourist Demand which builds on the General Model of Destination Choice (Woodside & Lysonski, 1989) submits that prospective tourists undergo the stages of awareness, consideration, preference, and intention before visiting a destination (Ruhanen, Whitford, & McLennan, 2015). Thus, tourists who have visited a destination are already aware of that destination; hence, measurement items above are likely to be less meaningful. Also, people who have visited a destination may not be able to tell how famous a destination is. Wong (2018), for instance, opted not to measure destination brand awareness since the study participants (tourists) had already been to the destinations and had to be aware of them.

According to Yuan and Jang (2008), awareness refers to, broadly, the knowledge held by the consumer. They argue that as a consumer is aware of a lesser-known product through exposure at certain events or festivals, their future behavioural intentions toward the product will be strengthened. In their study of wine festival attendees, they used the following two statements to measure awareness: (1) my visit increased awareness of local wines; and (2) my visit increased awareness of local wineries. The current study builds on the scale by Yuan and

Jang (2008) to apply a scale of brand awareness that focuses on awareness in an on-site or post-visit context.

2.6.1.2 Destination brand quality

In a physical product context, Lassar et al. (1995) equate brand quality to brand performance which they define as a "consumer's judgement about a brand's fault free and long-lasting physical operation and flawlessness in the product's physical construction" (p. 13). In a tourism-specific context, destination brand quality reflects how an individual perceives quality and it is used to compare a brand against its competitors (Keller, 2003). Brand quality has also been defined as "the consumer's judgement about a product's overall excellence or superiority" (Zeithaml, 1988, p. 3). In a tourist destination context, the concept has been defined as how consumers perceive the quality of a destination's attributes (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Dam, 2018). Previous studies show that the elements of perceived quality, a term used interchangeably with brand quality, include facilities and the non-physical aspects of the destination (Boo et al., 2009; Pike & Bianchi, 2016).

Lewis and Chambers (1989) define perceived quality as "consumer judgement resulting from comparisons made by consumers between expectations and the perception of the service performance" (p. 313). Destination brand quality is one of the key dimensions of destination brand equity and is, thus, of relevant in explaining tourists' attitudes towards a destination (Boo et al., 2009). Differences between actual quality and perceived quality could have consequences on the perceptions of the consumer (Gordon, 2010). This is because though a brand may be offering products with higher quality, consumers may have doubts or an unfavourable image due to a firm's past performance or perceptions of the offering. Thus, whereas actual quality is what a firm or destination delivers at a particular point in time-related to specific features of the product or service, brand quality relates to the long term quality perceptions that consumers have about a destination or a firm's product. However, several

destination brand equity studies state that the two are equivalent (Bianchi & Pike, 2011; Boo et al., 2009) and hence apply measurement scales that take no cognizance of the probable difference between the two. Regardless of the number of items and the variety of components used to assess the perceived quality dimension, it is a widely recognised dimension of destination brand equity (Tasci, 2018).

2.6.1.3 Destination brand image

Brand image has been conceptualised as the reasoned or emotional perceptions consumers attach to specific brands (Keller, 2003). Lassar et al. (1995), who used the social image term, define the concept as the consumer's perception of the reverence with which those close to the consumer consider the brand. It encompasses the attributions a consumer makes and perceives that other people assign to the common consumer of the brand. Blain et al. (2005) submit that brand image should be incorporated into the definition of destination brands.

Drawing on the self-concept literature, Sirgy and Su (2000) contend that tourists are keen on protecting their self-identity and, thus, may feel uncomfortable if they visit a destination that does not seem to reflect their identities. Destination brand image is a significant determinant of destination success (Bigne, Sanchez, & Sanchez, 2001) since it predicts tourist behaviour by motivating visits to destinations (Chen & Tsai, 2007). This is because high levels of brand image (associations) will likely enhance the likelihood of destination choice (resonance and loyalty) (Pike, 2007). The importance of the relationship between destination brand image and brand equity has been exhibited by Cai (2002) and Saraniemi (2011), where the latter tested a model for the impact of destination brand image on brand equity. Indeed, tourism and hospitality brand image is seen as a key dimension of brand equity (Konecnic & Gartner, 2007; Kim & Kim, 2005).

Dobni and Zinkhan (1990) contended that there are various definitions of brand image in the literature which may lead to confusion about its assessment. Pike, Bianchi, Kerr and Patti

(2010) submit that there is not yet a universal scale for measuring destination brand image due to a dearth of replication studies. Even in the general marketing literature, a consensus has not yet been reached on the appropriate measurement of the brand image concept (Martinez & de Chernatony, 2004). In the present study, the concept is limited to the aspects of social and self-image (Boo et al., 2009; Lassar et al., 1995; Sirgy & Su, 2000), both of which are common in literature and have a replication value (Pike et al., 2010). There is evidence to the effect that brand image is strongly linked to customers' self-concepts (Aaker, 1996; Solomon, 1999) and that, to earn brand equity, destinations need to create brand images that engage the affective senses of tourists (Boo et al., 2009).

2.6.1.4 Destination brand trust

The majority of studies examining trust in the tourism industry have focussed on particular sectors such as airlines, restaurants, and or tourism suppliers (Artigas et al., 2017). The present study adds to the few studies that have focussed on travel destinations as subjects of tourists' trust. Trust is defined as a person's expectation or confidence concerning another person's honesty, emanating from his/her experience, trustworthiness, and intentions about a change (Moorman, Deshpande, & Zaltman, 1993). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) conceptualise brand trust as the belief of the average consumer that the brand will deliver as per its expected functions. Trust is evident when one party in a commercial exchange has confidence in certain special attributes of the other party (Wang, Law, Hung, and Denizci-Guillet, 2014). Trust alleviates the uncertainty in a situation where consumers feel insecure since they know they can depend on the brand not to disappoint (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). The transient nature of tourism activities may increase tourists' perception of risk associated with a destination (Su, Lian, & Huang, 2020). More so, given the risk perceptions and uncertainty associated with travel to emerging destinations especially in Africa (Adam, 2015;

Lepp, Gibson, & Lane, 2011), the understanding and enhancement of destination trust cannot be overemphasised.

Mainly, brand trust has been studied from two distinctive approaches (Wang, et al., 2014). One research stream considers trust as subjective anticipation about certain features of an exchange partner in a relationship or transaction (Anderson & Weitz, 1989; Lee & Back, 2008). The features, which include perceived credibility and benevolence of an exchange party, act as signals used to assess the trustworthiness of the seller (Wang et al., 2014). The second research stream considers customer trust as a signifier of behaviour intention to believe a partner in a commercial exchange situation that could be risky (Coleman, 1990).

The development of brand trust is oftentimes reflected as an individual's cumulative experiential learning (Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005). The experience could be a product of direct experience (for example trial) and indirect contact (for instance word of mouth) with the brand (Keller, 1993; Krishnan, 1996). However, it is direct experience (i.e. consumption) with the brand that strongly influences the formation of brand trust because it establishes associations and judgements that are more pertinent and can be easily retrieved from the mind (Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005). Delgado-Ballester and Luis Munuera-Alemán (2005) argue that brand equity is best explained when brand trust is taken into consideration hence businesses are encouraged to build brand trust to benefit from the substantial competitive and economic advantages emanating from brand equity as an interactional, market-based asset. In an event tourism context, Lee and Back (2008) state that satisfied conference attendees will believe that the conference will deliver on its promises and associate it with reduced perceived risk as compared to conferences they have not attended before. The creation and reinforcement of the bond between a destination and tourists depend on the tourists' experiences of a destination's products and services (Hyun, 2009; Wu & Chang, 2006), provided inhabitants (Pizam, 1999) and public and private institutions (Stylidis, Biran,

Sit, & Szivas, 2014) that must be honest, competent, and benevolent (Hosmer, 1995; Sanzo, Santos, Vázquez, & Álvarez, 2003). Given the foregoing, it can be argued that perceived destination competitiveness, which is a result of tourists' experience of a destination, could influence destination brand trust.

According to the Commitment-Trust Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), trust is a crucial predictor of relationship commitment since customers feel that they should only continue their relationship with service providers if the service providers are trustworthy (Zillifro & Morais, 2004). It has also been expressed that it would be easy to brand a destination that instils trust in its visitors (Chen & Phou, 2013). Research in the wider marketing field also affirms that trust towards a brand influences commitment to the brand (Artigas et al., 2017). Moliner, Sánchez, Rodríguez, and Callarisa (2007) found that customers' trust in a travel agency is a strong predictor of the customers' commitment to the travel agency. The extant literature illustrates that trust is an outcome of destination personality and image (Chen & Phou, 2013), organisational attributes including corporate reputation (Johnson & Grayson, 2005), or cognitive awareness of a travel destination (Chen & Phou, 2013). Despite existing works that point to the importance of brand trust, few studies in tourism explore how trust develops and the factors that influence tourists' trust towards a destination (Artigas et al., 2017; Dedeoğlu et al., 2018; Lee & Back, 2008).

Furthermore, scholars have recommended further research examining the effect of trust on post-consumption behaviours (DeWitt, Nguyen, & Marshall, 2008; Su, Hsu, & Marshall, 2014). Additionally, Dedeoğlu et al. (2018) submit that there is a need to examine brand trust within the scope of brand equity especially among products with an amalgam nature, which destinations are. Sannassee and Seetanah (2015) contend that even though there are numerous determinants of destination loyalty, trust is the missing link emanating from the interplay of destination competitiveness and tourist post-consumption behaviours. The current study,

therefore, explores the trust-commitment relationship and the antecedents (perceived brand quality, destination brand image, and brand awareness) of brand trust in a general destination context.

2.6.1.5 Destination brand affective commitment

Previous studies have normally used destination loyalty as the outcome construct in destination brand equity models. Destination loyalty measurement is classified into behavioural, attitudinal, and composite approaches. The behavioural approach is reflected in consumers' actual or reported purchasing activities and scholars have often operationalised it as a process of purchase, the share of purchase, and the likelihood of purchase (Chi, 2005). This approach has been criticised as having no conceptual basis and only provides a snapshot view of a dynamic phenomenon (Dick & Basu, 1994). The attitudinal approach is reflected in word-of-mouth referrals and complaining behaviour. The main criticism against this approach ascends from the notion that attitude alone can hardly determine familiarity and situational factors (Baloglu, 2002). The composite approach combines the other two approaches. This approach has been faulted since not all quantified scores may evenly apply to the two approaches, as they may have different measurements.

In the present study, commitment, which is conceptualised as a combination of attitudinal loyalty and place attachment is used as the outcome variable of destination brand equity. First, when tourists seek new experiences, they are very unlikely to return to a destination, thus repetition may not be the best predictor of loyalty (Iso-Ahola, 1982). It has also been argued that achieving loyalty during the early stages of introducing a product or a service to a market could be difficult (Al-Hawari, 2011). In their study, San Martín et al (2018) argued that the desire of people to pursue variety in their travel experiences and the failure of the behavioural approach to loyalty to distinguish between true loyalty and spurious loyalty justifies the use of the attitudinal approach to loyalty. Similarly, Bianchi and Pike (2011)

contend that it is difficult to measure destination loyalty, specifically in the long-haul setting because of the irregular, 'once-in-a-lifetime', or multi-destination nature of long-haul travel. Based on the foregoing, Bianchi and Pike (2011) conclude that attitudinal aspects of loyalty are more applicable to long-haul travellers. Since the study was conducted in Malawi, a destination that is in its early stages of tourism development and largely depends on long-haul source markets for its leisure travel segment, commitment is applied as a more reasonable replacement for loyalty (Al-Hawari, 2011). Indeed, as a destination goes through its life cycle, it first attracts venturer-type travellers who are in pursuit of novelty and change, and to such travellers, returning to the same destination is seen as fatigued and may lead to a loss of curiosity and interest, thus making absolute loyalty very unlikely (Moreira & Iao, 2014).

Commitment refers to the attachment between parties, which results in the willingness to continue a relationship (Fullerton, 2005). Commitment is considered a two-dimensional concept – affective commitment and calculative commitment (Nusair, Bilgihan, Okumus, & Cobanoglu, 2013). Research shows that affective commitment is a more effective predictor of loyalty over calculative commitment (Evanschitzky et al., 2006), hence the current study will focus on affective commitment. Affective commitment is referred to as "the extent to which a customer identifies with and feels a positive attachment for a partner" (Fullerton, 2011, p. 92). It has been argued that affective commitment is a critical element of attitudinal loyalty and it distinguishes true loyalty from spurious loyalty (Baloglu, 2002).

Customers that are strongly committed to a brand tend to visualise a strong bond between themselves and the brand (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Consequently, commitment has been suggested as a determinant of customer-based brand equity (Kim et al., 2008; Zhang, Shabbir, Pitsaphol, & Hassan, 2014). Mattila (2001) also states that affective commitment increases the willingness of customers to recommend restaurants and to become less irritable and more understanding in the event of occasional service failure. In their study, Seric, Mikulic,

and Gil-Saura (2018) found that, among several brand equity dimensions like perceived quality, awareness and trust, affective brand commitment has the largest impact on overall brand equity in a hotel context. Similarly, trust and commitment have been stated as key elements of relationship marketing (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), and as antecedents of destination and hotel brand equity (Dioko & So, 2012) that are relatively new in the brand equity literature (Hsu, Hung, & Tang, 2012). In support, Silva and Correia (2017) state that the commitment concept has largely been left out in previous research at the general destination context. In their study, Rather, Tehseen, Itoo, and Parrey (2019) express that studies, especially in developing countries, are required to further the generalizability of empirical evidence in demonstrating the development process of post-consumption behaviours, of which commitment is an example. Consequently, the current study seeks to explore destination brand affective commitment as an outcome of brand equity in an emerging destination context.

2.7 Destination competitiveness and destination brand equity

Pike and Mason (2011) submit that it is the view of several scholars that branding is a necessary strategy to improve the competitiveness of destinations. While destination image assessment is considered the most plausible approach for ascertaining destination competitiveness, emerging research shows that destination brand equity is a comprehensive alternative to assessing the performance of destinations (Pike & Mason, 2011). Lee and Back (2010) state that destination branding can bring out better performance in destinations akin to how branding in consumer products can give the firm a competitive edge. Blain et al. (2005) also note that the primary importance of branding lies in its potential to create and enhance a distinct personality or image for a destination which sets it apart from competitors. Furthermore, other researchers have also established that branding can enhance a country's social, economic, and political environments and that it is increasingly being regarded as a tool with which to achieve competitive advantage by destinations (Che-Ha et al., 2016; Magnusson,

Krishnan, Westjohn, & Zdravkovic, 2014). Thus achieving greater destination brand equity is synonymous with attaining competitive edge for the destination (Pike, 2009).

It is evident from the foregoing that effective destination branding can enhance the competitiveness of destinations. Nevertheless, there are current studies show an opposite effect, i.e. improved destination competitiveness can result in an enhanced customer-based destination brand equity (Wong, 2018). In their study, Biedenbach and Marell (2010) found that customer experiences positively affect brand equity components in a business-to-business service context. In a hotel context, Xu and Chan (2010) also found that service delivery is an antecedent of brand equity. From a destination-specific perspective, Apostolakis, Jaffry, Sizeland, and Cox (2015) contend that successful destination branding depends on the destination's 'locally generated' comparative advantages such as cultural heritage assets. Jensen and Richardson (2005), in a study of a city destination, recommended that destinations that seek to generate higher perceived brand equity for themselves should utilise their unique features and attributes.

Destination service performance, a concept closely related to destination competitiveness, has also been found to contribute positively to customer-based destination brand equity (Yang, Liu, & Li, 2015). However, the study by Yang et al. (2015) conceptualised destination service performance using 7 items that could not holistically capture the concept of perceived destination competitiveness. In their study, Chekalina et al. (2018) found that destination resources (intangible, tangible and social) have a positive influence on customer-based destination brand equity (value in use, value for money, loyalty, and awareness). The study, however, did not consider brand trust and commitment, concepts that have proved to be important brand equity dimensions in consumer product marketing literature. Bianchi and Pike (2011) propose the have emphasised the need for a consideration of new antecedents of destination brand equity.

Additionally, scholars seem to concur that marketing activities influence brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993; Simon & Sullivan, 1993; Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000). Studies on the impact of marketing activities on brand equity have mostly considered promotion and distribution/place functions of the marketing mix (Kumar, Dash, & Malhotra, 2018; Mukherjee & Shivani, 2016; Villarejo-Ramos & Sanchez-Franco, 2005; Yoo et al., 2000). The travel destination itself, which in the case of the present study is the proxy for the product function in the marketing mix, has largely been overlooked. Given that most of the previous studies have been conducted in fields other than tourism, the current study explores how tourist perceptions of a destination, assessed against its competitors, enhance the formation of destination brand equity.

2.8 Theoretical underpinnings of the study

The study draws on several theories, models, and concepts. First, as stated earlier, competitiveness theory can be contextualised in terms of competitive and comparative advantages. The theory assumes that destination development and competitiveness (or lack of) emanate from the destination's natural and man-made features (Lo, Chin, & Law, 2019). The comparative advantage approach highlights the role of natural resources in giving an edge to a destination over its competitors. The competitive advantage approach explicates the creation and use of built resources such as tourism infrastructure to develop destinations and gain an advantage over competitor destinations.

In a recent study, Croes, Ridderstaat, and Shapoval (2020) present a definition of destination competitiveness which has four dimensions: long-term performance grounded in productivity, relativity (i.e. ability to attract tourists than competitors), offering product quality and memorable experience, and dynamic processes (i.e. continuously improving product quality). The need for productivity encourages the effective use of resource in a destination so that the destination can gain an edge over its competitors (relativity). Thus, how effective a

destination uses its resources relative to its competitors will be reflected in the product quality and memorable experience as perceived by the tourist. Indeed, Andrades-Caldito et al. (2014) articulate that the overall value that destination resources have to the destination's visitors will be expressed in destination image, in visitors' evaluation of the value for money offered at the destination, or, in support of the central thesis of the current study, in brand equity.

Even though the definition offered by Croes et al. (2020) ends at tourist satisfaction and memorable travel experiences as the primary objective of destination competitiveness from the tourist's point of view, the literature reveals that efforts made by service providers towards the consumer are, more often than not, reciprocated by the consumer. Morais, Dorsch, and Backman (2004), drawing on resource theory, stated that when providers offer certain resources to their customers, the customers are likely to reciprocate the gesture by investing equitably in the interaction in the form of praise, commitment, reference, and future purchases. The explanation for such customer behaviours can further be drawn from the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960).

The norm of reciprocity is based on the notion that individuals feel psychologically beholden to return a favour directed at them, thereby creating a feeling of pleasure; on the other hand, failure to reciprocate a favour generates feelings of guilt (Dahl, Honea, & Manchanda, 2005; Kim & Lee, 2013). Morales (2005) also contended that customers show "personal reciprocity" by rewarding service providers for efforts expended at them individually. In the business context, reciprocity is viewed as one of the key factors that contribute to sustained relationships between a firm and its consumers (Wu, Chan & Lau, 2008). In a group tour business, for instance, tour organisers may offer repeat customers preferential treatment in the group by referring to them as information sources for new customers. As a way of reciprocating this assignment of status, the customers may feel obligated to help with the trip and recommend the tour company to others (Morais, Dorsch, & Backman, 2004).

Closely related to the notion of reciprocity is the concept of customer equity. Dorsch and Carlson (1996) conceptualize customer equity as the value of tangible and intangible resources (e.g. loyalty, trust) that customers invest in a service provider as a result of the social investments made by the service provider to the customer at a more personal level. They argue that that the exchanges explained by the concept are susceptible to exploitation by the competition in that if the service provider cannot invest a lot in a customer for the latter to feel socially intimate to the former, the customer can move to another provider. This feature of customer equity makes it even more applicable to the destination competitiveness context.

The concepts of reciprocity and customer equity have been commonly applied to explain, at a micro-level, relationships between tourists and individual service providers at a destination. Even so, it should be understood that a destination is partly an amalgam of service providers, and the relationships that travellers can establish with service providers in a destination will ultimately be of benefit to the destination as a whole. Indeed, Komppula (2014) found that without committed, innovative, and risk-taking small businesses, no destination will become competitive. Furthermore, previous research shows that small business operators like tour guides and taxi drivers, through their interactions with tourists, significantly influence tourists' post-visit evaluations and behaviours (Kladou & Mavragani, 2015; Nguyen, 2015). Wang, Chen, Lin, and Ryan (2018), in a study of tourists' loyalty using the Chinese concept of *guanxi*, found that when a destination provides more value to tourists, tourists will be more willing to develop value with the destination, through revisit intentions or word of mouth (WOM) recommendation, among others. Consequently, the current study adopts the concepts of reciprocity and customer equity to explain the relationship between a destination and tourists at the macro (destination) level.

Within the tourist-based destination brand equity component of the theoretical framework, relationships are explained by the work of Keller (2003). Keller (2003) suggests

that consumers undergo the processes of the branding ladder, which results in brand equity. At the pinnacle of the branding ladder is brand resonance, viewed as the key indicator of tourist-based destination brand equity. Keller (2003) explicates that brand resonance in four components: behavioural loyalty, sense of belonging, attitudinal attachment, and active interaction with the brand. In the context of destination brands, brand resonance might be reflected through repeat visits, attachment and strong place identification, feelings of kinship and belonging, and desire to invest resources to interact with the destination.

Additionally, the present study draws on the place attachment concept to support the theoretical framework. Grounded in the attachment theory, place attachment or place bonding is considered an important indicator of destination marketing effectiveness, as the loyalty tourists develop to a destination may strongly be related to the extent of tourists' attachment toward the destination (Jiang, Ramkissoon, Mavondo, & Feng, 2017). Tourists may become attached to a destination through their increased knowledge, visits, and emotional connections with the destination (Yuksel, Yuksel, & Bilim, 2010).

Studies cited in this thesis applied the norm of reciprocity and customer equity concept using loyalty in its traditional sense of revisit and WOM recommendation. McKercher et al. (2012), however, opine that measures of loyalty associated with return intentions are not specifically useful. Instead, they aver that metrics of attitudinal loyalty that capture feelings of personal attachment, expressions of trust, and positive WOM are effective indicators of loyalty. In a study of visitors to the Galapagos, Rivera and Croes (2010) observed that tourists showed loyalty by the willingness to recommend, but not to revisit. This is typical of iconic, small, or once-in-a-lifetime destinations (Moore, Rodger, & Taplin, 2017; Pinkus et al., 2016). Additionally, leisure travel has at its core the element of wanderlust where the traveller yearns for something new and different, at least most of the time they travel, in which case repeat visitation might be difficult to achieve (McKercher et al., 2012). In a similar vein, Pearce and

Kang (2009) submit that the loyalty construct, as it is traditionally measured in the general marketing literature, cannot be adopted wholesale in tourism research. Given the foregoing, the study used destination trust and commitment (a combination of attachment and WOM) instead of repeat visitation since the study was undertaken in a small and emerging destination that might not attract a significant volume of repeat visitation.

In summary, the study draws on the concepts of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) and customer equity (Dorsch & Carlson, 1996) to investigate the impact of perceived destination competitiveness on a destination's tourist-based brand equity. Figure 2.1 presents the theoretical underpinnings of the study.

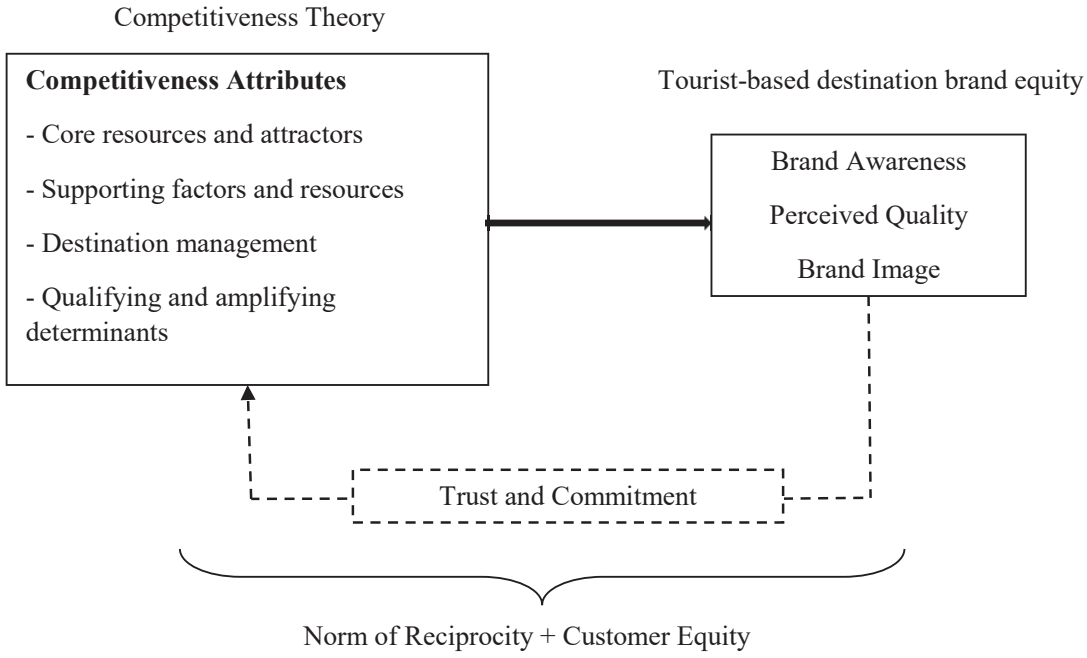

Figure 2. 1. A model of perceived destination competitiveness as a predictor of destination brand equity

2.9 Hypotheses and conceptual framework of the study

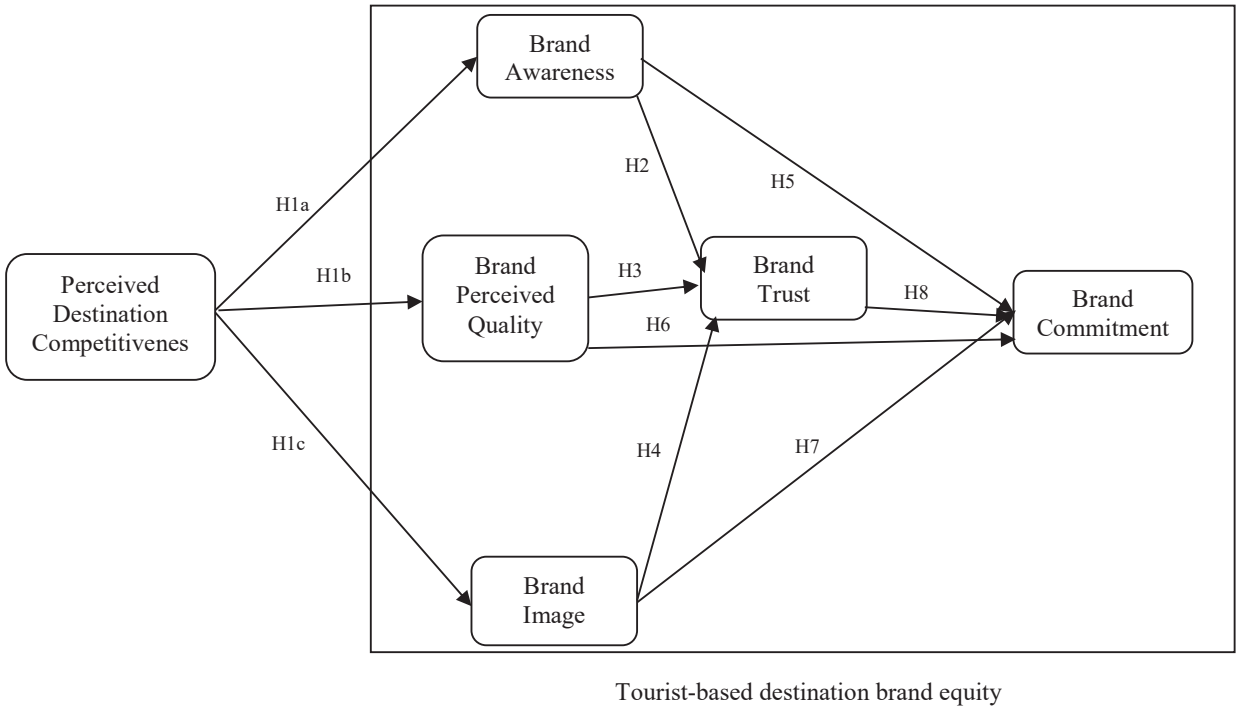

Figure 2. 2. Conceptual model of the study

Yang et al. (2015) established that destination service performance has a positive influence on destination brand quality. In their study, Chekalina et al. (2018) also found that destination resources (intangible, tangible and social) have a positive influence on brand awareness. Further, Yuan and Jang's (2008) study of wine festival attendees established that wine festival quality (facilities, wine and organisation) has a positive influence on wine festival awareness. A destination's cultural assets, an important constituent of destination competitiveness, have a positive influence on a destination's brand equity (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014). For instance, Gomez, Lopez, and Molina (2015) found that destination image (constituting natural, cultural, social, infrastructural, and affective aspects) is positively related with destination brand equity (encompassing awareness, loyalty, and perceived value) in a wine tourism destination. However, the study did not demonstrate the specific relationships between destination image and destination brand equity. If consumers perceive a product or service to be of high quality, they tend to attach positive brand perceptions to the product/service since

they consider the money, time and effort they spend to obtain and consume the product/service as worthwhile (Dedeoğlu et al., 2018). Besides monetary values, consumers assess products and services in terms of hedonic value, which is a product of affection and social benefits. Further, Farber and Hall (2007) found that extraordinary travel experiences trigger positive emotional responses in tourists. Wong (2018) also intimates that functional elements of destination competitiveness positively influence destination brand equity. From the foregoing, the following hypotheses are formulated:

Hypothesis 1a: Perceived destination competitiveness will positively influence destination brand awareness.

Hypothesis 1b: Perceived destination competitiveness will positively influence destination brand quality.

Hypothesis 1c: Perceived destination competitiveness will positively influence destination brand image.

Based on a synthesis of the literature from marketing, sociology and consumer behaviour, Hsu and Cai (2009) proposed that brand knowledge (conceptualised as consisting brand awareness and brand image) has a positive influence on brand trust in tourist destinations. However, Hsu and Cai's (2009) study did not empirically test the relationship. There is also evidence suggesting that experience (in consuming/using a product) leads to spontaneous knowledge about a brand, which consumers trust more than information from elsewhere (Baker, Hunt, & Scribner, 2002). Furthermore, Chen & Phou (2013) demonstrated that image, conceptualised as cognitive awareness of a travel destination, is positively related to destination trust. Additionally, Artigas et al. (2017) found that the more positive the tourist's cognitive perception of a destination's residents, facilities, and attractions, the greater the tourist's trust toward the destination. Given that the reviewed studies conceptualised awareness as part of destination image and not as it is understood in destination brand equity, the present study seeks

to examine if and to what extent destination brand awareness influence destination trust. Therefore, it is proposed that:

Hypothesis 2: Destination brand awareness will positively influence tourists' destination brand trust.

In a study of guided tours, Chang (2014) found that tour guide service performance positively influences tourists' trust. In a study of urban tourists, Le and Dong (2017) found that perceptions of destination quality positively impact on destination trust. Wu, Cheng, and Ai (2018) also identified a positive relationship between experiential quality and trust among cruise tour passengers. Furthermore, Su, Hsu, and Swanson (2017) found that service quality positively influences tourists' trust toward destination service providers at a heritage attraction. As mentioned earlier, the majority of studies examining antecedents and outcomes of trust were conducted in specific tourism industry segments. The present study seeks to contribute to the literature examining whole travel destinations as subjects of tourists' trust. Thus, it is hypothesised that:

Hypothesis 3: Destination brand perceived quality has a positive influence on destination brand trust.

Artigas et al. (2017) assert that tourists' affective evaluation of a destination will positively influence their trust towards the destination. Su et al. (2014) also opine that since emotions have an instant and well-defined influence on an actor's behaviour, it is necessary to study the emotions associated with consumer behaviour in a tourist behaviour model. In their study, Han, Nguyen, and Lee (2015) found that brand image indirectly (via brand reputation) influence brand trust. Additionally, Chiang and Jang (2007) reported that brand image, including statements that express the status symbol and reputation of a hotel brand, positively influence potential guests' trust towards the hotel brand. To understand the relationship in a general travel destination context, the following hypothesis is postulated:

Hypothesis 4: Destination brand image will positively influence tourists' destination brand trust.

There is empirical evidence that suggests that both affective and cognitive evaluations of destination brands play significant roles in the formation of behavioural intentions (revisit/recommendation) and destination loyalty (Duman, Ozbal, & Duerod, 2018). For instance, Yuan and Jang (2008) established that attendees' awareness of local wines and wineries positively influenced the attendees' future intentions. Ferns and Walls (2012) also found that destination awareness positively affects tourists' visit intentions at the pre-trip information search stage. Additionally, Li, Petrick and Zhou (2008) submit that there is a strong relationship between destination knowledge (of which awareness is a component) and destination loyalty and encourage further research on the suggested relationship. Additionally, various studies have found the perceived quality of a destination to be an effective determinant of tourists' loyalty to destinations (Boo et al., 2009; Herrero, San Martin, & Collado, 2017; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014). In a 'once in a lifetime' destination context, however, Pinkus et al. (2016) found that perceived service quality of a national park positively influenced WOM intentions but had no influence on revisit intentions. There is also empirical evidence to the effect that the more visitors socially identify with a destination, the more they are likely to return to the destination or, if not, recommend the destination to others (Boo et al., 2009; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014). This is because brand image can be a measure of social approval to the tourist. As many studies have conceptualised the destination loyalty construct as a combination of revisit and WOM intentions, it will be interesting to know the impact that the three independent variables have on destination commitment, which will be used as a replacement for destination loyalty in this study. Given the preceding theoretical rationale, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 5: Destination brand awareness will positively influence tourists' destination brand commitment.

Hypothesis 6: Destination brand perceived quality will positively influence tourists' destination brand commitment.

Hypothesis 7: Destination brand image will positively influence tourists' destination brand commitment.

In their proposition of the commitment-trust theory, Morgan and Hunt (1994) observed that an increase in customer trust and commitment leads to an enhanced relationship between the consumer and provider. Alongside trust, consumers' commitment to a provider is key to the understanding of customer-provider relationships. Such commitment explains why customers may be willing to fly with a favourite airline, stay at a preferred lodging establishment, or book a holiday through a preferred tour operator even though competitors might offer better options in the form of discounts or convenience (Zillifro & Morais, 2004). Morgan and Hunt (1994) posit that trust is an important precedent of relationship commitment because customers recognise that exclusive relationships with providers have attendant risks, hence providers should continually work to develop and maintain customers' trust. Trust is important, especially for service providers in emerging destinations where tourists would likely have feelings of uncertainty (Osman & Sentosa, 2013).

In a consumer behaviour context, affective commitment creates a bond between the customer and the service provider (Bansal, Irving, & Taylor, 2004). In the airline sector, there is empirical evidence to the effect that brand credibility (a concept closely associated with brand trust) and brand trust positively influence customers' affective commitment (Jeng, 2016; Mikulić, Šerić, & Matas Milković, 2017). In the travel destination context, Moliner et al. (2007) established that trust towards a destination positively influences tourist commitment towards the destination. Given theforegoing, the following is postulated:

Hypothesis 8: Destination brand trust will positively influence tourists' affective commitment towards the destination.

2.10 Conclusion

Destination competitiveness has been referred to as the 'holy grail' of tourism studies. From its application in economics and management in general, the concept has been studied relatively more from a supply perspective. Meanwhile, there is an emerging body of destination competitiveness literature exploring the concept from the demand side. The current study contributes to this strand of literature by examining the concept from the tourist's perspective. With competition intensifying and destinations increasingly looking for ways to provide experiences that will ultimately create and maintain long term relationships with their visitors, it is imperative to understand the impact that relative destination experiences might have on tourists' perceptions of destinations' brand equity. This study, therefore, investigates how travellers' perception of a destination's competitiveness influence their perception of the destination's brand equity.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the philosophical foundations of the study and how they help to achieve its objectives. Specifically, the chapter presents the choice of and the rationale for the methodological approaches adopted, how data were obtained and analysed, and how reliability, validity, and generalisability of the study results were ensured.

3.1 The philosophical foundations of the study

Morgan (1983) submits that *how* one studies a phenomenon embodies a set of assumptions about what is being studied. The nature of *what* or the objective of the study and the kinds of knowledge assumed about the phenomenon under investigation determine which methods are the most appropriate (Danermark, Ekstrom, Jakobsen, & Karlsson, 2002). The '*what*' of the present study is the influence of perceived destination competitiveness on tourists' perceptions of a destination's brand equity. In addressing the *what* and *how* questions, the researcher 'composes' a POEM – an expression of intentions on how the research process will be executed (Brunt, Horner, & Semley, 2017). POEM is an acronym that stands for Paradigm, Ontology, Epistemology and Methodology. A research paradigm is a set of beliefs or conventions that direct researchers in conducting research (Creswell, 1998). Ontology describes the position the researcher takes in addressing their research question (Brunt et al., 2017) and helps the researcher to answer the question of what it is investigated. Epistemology is the theory of knowledge that drives research, representing the set of rules and principles used to explore reality to obtain knowledge (Brunt et al., 2017). Lastly, methodology connotes what the researcher does to address the positions posed by the prior elements – i.e. the philosophical stance of the research, research methods and the theory informing the research altogether constitute the methodology (Brunt et al., 2017).

Neuman (2006) states that there are three broad approaches used in conducting research: interpretive social science, positivist social science, and critical social science.

According to Neuman (2006), several current studies in social science are guided by the first two approaches. Researchers guided by interpretivism construct meaning according to their own subjective experiences, i.e. the construction of meaning is an ongoing process since individuals' experiences are subject to change. Interpretivism, therefore, will likely adopt a relativist ontological perspective and a subjective epistemology (Brunt et al., 2017).

Positivism can be traced back to Auguste Comte (1798-1857) who is credited as the father and founder of sociology. Comte suggested that theory and observations have circular dependence on each other in that while the theory may be advanced through reasoning, it only becomes authentic if it can be verified through observations (Bhattacherjee, 2012). In positivism, a researcher is a factual person who believes that the truth is objective such that if they were to generate data from the facts, another researcher could replicate the study and obtain similar outcomes (Brunt et al., 2017). The approach assumes that reality is objective, going beyond an individual's perspective and that it is reflected in the measurable statistical normalcy of behaviour (Wildemuth, 1993). Positivists think that precise and oftentimes large amounts of quantitative data are necessary to answer research questions at hand. They also seek robust, exact measures and "objective" procedures to achieve their research objectives (Neuman, 2006). Thus, positivist researchers are bound to have a realist view of what is real and an objective epistemology, i.e. they approach reality as a matter of fact and remain objective in their pursuit of knowledge (Brunt et al., 2017).

Critical social science (CSS) has its roots in the works of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud. CSS criticises positivism for defending the status quo instead of approaching the meaning of the social world as work in progress. CSS researchers also level criticism against interpretivism for its subjective and relativist approaches (Neuman, 2006). They submit that with the interpretive approach people's values and ideas are bound to contaminate the outcomes of the research due to the element of subjectivity. Other scholars refer to critical social science

as post-positivism. This paradigm advances that neither realism (positivism) nor subjectivism is a rational approach for conducting research (Brunt et al., 2017). Post-positivism uses a variety of methods to unearth reality, which is usually done using a discover-and-verify approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In a post-positivist world, hypotheses are initially formulated as assumptions, without the researcher having a clear picture of what the reality is. Researchers employing a post-positivist approach adopt a realist ontological stance and a realist epistemology, i.e. they view the social world as a matter of fact and, to some extent, remain objective in the pursuit of knowledge since they believe that reality has to be interrogated until knowledge has been gained (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The study's general objective is to examine the impact of tourists' perception of destination competitiveness on their assessment of destination brand equity dimensions. To address this objective there is a need to formulate hypotheses and test the proposed conceptual model. In developing a conceptual model and formulating hypotheses, the study assumes that there is a known reality but it has to be empirically tested because some of the assumed relationships may not be as they appear to be, "so falsification is necessary at the start" (Brunt et al., 2017, p. 20). The current study adopts a positivist approach because it will be inadequate to address the research question by considering the perceptions of only a few respondents and use that to validate a relationship between perceived destination competitiveness and tourist-based destination brand equity. The study, therefore, needs to capture effects and outcomes and ascertain whether any statistically significant relationships exist. Above all, the study adopted the positivist approach because there is already a research foundation on the two issues under consideration on which the current study was built. This position aligns with one of the objectives of the data analysis technique (structural equation modelling), which is to test an existing theoretical assumption against empirical data.

In line with the chosen approach, this study addresses the research questions using quantitative methods. Such an approach is referred to as quantitative methodology (Ponterotto, 2005) since it mainly focuses on assessing relationships between variables (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In sum, this thesis employs a quantitative methodology. Since in positivism the belief is that social science should be objective and free of the researcher's values, an etic perspective is adopted.

3.2 Study setting and population

3.2.3 Study area

The emerging destination to be considered in this study is Malawi, a nation with a human population of 18 million in south-east Africa. Malawi has a land area of 11,484 square kilometres and is bordered by Tanzania to the north, by Mozambique to the south and east and by Zambia to the east. The name 'Malawi' literally means 'flames' and it has its roots in the social norms which connect the people to the land, the life of the spirits and the seasons through the use of fire, both ritual and practical. For administrative purposes, the country has three principal regions: the northern region which has the least population density; the central region dominated by the high interior Central African Plateau and is home to the capital city, Lilongwe, and the southern region which is the most densely populated and diverse region (Conroy, 2006). The British Government declared the land that makes up Malawi today as a protectorate in 1893. The country gained independence from the British on 6th July 1964.

From the 1800s to the current day, the country's economy has primarily depended on agriculture. At present, the agricultural sector contributes to about a third of Malawi's gross domestic product (World Bank, 2017). Only in the last two decades has there been a structural shift towards higher productive sectors not dependent on agriculture (World Bank, 2016). One of the sectors that have been used to diversify the country's economy beginning in the late

colonial period is tourism (Magombo, Rogerson, & Rogerson, 2017). Recently, the government of Malawi has renewed its efforts towards tourism development in line with the decades' old diversification strategy (Mwanakatawe & Kebedew, 2015).

The country's major tourist attraction is Lake Malawi. The lake, which takes up one-fifth of the country, is 580 km long and the third largest lake in Africa. Malawi also has wildlife reserves which, after several years of wanton poaching, are making a comeback after being handed over to concessionaires under public-private partnerships. The concessionaires have reintroduced the famous 'big five' game (lion, leopard, rhino, buffalo and African elephant) in two of Malawi's national parks. The country is also well known for its friendly and hospitable people as a result of which tourism marketing efforts of the country in international markets are built around the slogan "The Warm Heart of Africa". The country also has landscapes that are popular with visitors such as the Nyika Plateau to the North and Mulanje Mountain, Central Africa's highest mountain, in the South. Considering its small size, diversity of attractions and differences in topography across the country, the Department of Tourism recently launched the use of the tagline "Compact in size. Rich in contrast. Big in hospitality" in addition to the "Warm Heart of Africa" tagline. The World Travel and Tourism Council (2018) estimates the tourism industry's total contribution to the gross domestic product at 7.7% and, as of 2017, was growing at a rate of 2.8% per annum. In comparison to other destinations in the region such as Tanzania and Zambia, practitioners and scholars alike agree that Malawi has underperformed (Magombo et al., 2017). Critical challenges to the country's tourism potential include the absence of direct air connection from Europe and Asia and limited or poor international marketing (Magombo et al., 2017; World Bank, 2010).

Based on the tourism destination pyramid suggested by Christie et al. (2014) in a study commissioned by the World Bank, African destinations can be categorised based on income ranking and the scale of tourism sector development. At the bottom of the pyramid are *pre-*

emergent countries that are yet to harness the potential of their tourism sectors. These countries have limited vested interest in tourism and possess limited short-to-medium-term tourism growth potential. Examples include Liberia, Somalia and South Sudan. Next are *potential* tourist destinations – such as Cameroon, Ethiopia and Madagascar – which are countries that have shown some interest in the sector but lack the requisite capacity to manage the same. Third, are *emerging* destinations – countries that are scaling up tourism, have strong governance institutions, prioritising tourism, and are significantly better off in terms of competitiveness and quality. Countries in this category include The Seychelles, Rwanda and Malawi. At the top are *consolidating* destinations – countries that are deepening tourism success, are well vested in the sector and are performing and benefitting at the highest level in the sub-Saharan Africa region. Namibia, South Africa and Kenya are in this category.

Specific challenges exist for African destinations within the different categories of the pyramid (Christie et al., 2014). Since branding is a tool that numerous destinations have turned to make themselves known in the international tourism market, it would be interesting to situate this study in Malawi, as it is a destination yet to establish itself as a premier destination in southern Africa. Blanke, Brown, Garcia, & Messerli (2011) identified three groups of challenges to the competitiveness of African tourism: (1) regulatory and policy frameworks; (2) business environment and infrastructure and; (3) human, cultural and natural destination elements. Other studies have identified a constellation of challenges to the same: safety and security of destinations, human resource capacities, the quality of tourist attractions, and safety and efficiency of transportation from source markets to the destinations (Christie et al., 2014; Novelli, 2016). Most of these studies on competitiveness in southern Africa are either conceptual or have used objective measures or the supply-side perspective, except for South Africa (Engelbrecht, 2015; Haarhoff, 2007; Plessis & Saayman, 2018) and Botswana (Pansiri,

2014). The current empirically explores the competitiveness factors from a demand point of view in an emerging destination context.

3.2.4 Study population

The study targeted international tourists who visited Malawi either on vacation or to work on volunteer projects. The UNWTO (2019) reports that about 837,000 international tourists travelled to Malawi in 2017 (the latest statistics available). Hence, this is the figure that ought to be used to determine the study's representative sample. However, as explained later in this chapter, the study determined its sample size based on the dictates of structural equation modelling, which was utilized to analyse data in the study.

3.2.5 Sampling of respondents

In the majority of studies, it is practically impossible to study all the elements in a population given which sample are usually investigated to decipher something related to the population (Clark, Riley, Wilkie, & Wood, 1998). To ensure inferential extrapolation, it is recommended that studies of this nature use random sampling since this sampling approach allows researchers to use statistical analyses to determine the magnitude "of 'error' between the sample and its representativeness of the rest of the population" (Brunt et al., 2017, p. 86). However, Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) contend that it is oftentimes not possible for researchers whose objective is to test hypotheses to use random sampling because each element of the population has to be identified. The study intercepted tourists at the destination's major exit point, the Kamuzu International Airport in Malawi's capital, Lilongwe. The counting rules approach was used to sample respondents during data collection.

3.2.6 Sample size

A common question posed by researchers is how big their sample should be (Muthén & Muthén, 2002). Brunt et al. (2017) opine that the question that should be asked is "what is

the minimum number I can get away with?" (p. 92). Clark et al. (1998) also state that determining sample size is a complex decision to both experienced researchers and amateurs alike. Issues to consider include characteristics of the population being studied, cost, and objectives of the study. As detailed later in the current chapter, the study uses a component-based structural equation modelling (SEM) method of partial least squares (PLS) to analyse the data. Till date, sample size determination in SEM-based studies remains a puzzling issue among researchers (Westland, 2010). According to Muthén and Muthén (2002), no rule of thumb applies to all situations as the sample size for a study may be determined by the complexity of the model, the symmetry of the constructs, volume of missing data, consistency of the latent constructs and how strong the links are between the latent constructs. Others have argued that a ratio of 10 cases per measurement item suffices in SEM-based studies (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 1998).

In PLS-SEM, researchers should adopt the greater of the following options as the minimum sample size: (1) ten multiplied by the number of items on a variable, or (2) ten multiplied by the number of the largest number of proposed links directed to a particular dependent variable in the model (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). For the current thesis, destination brand commitment was the most complex latent construct with 7 indicators while destination brand awareness, perceived quality, and destination brand image each had 6 paths directed at them in the initial structural model. Thus, going by the 10 times rule, a sample of 70 responses were required at the minimum for the study (Hair, Sarstedt, Pieper, & Ringle, 2012). The data collection process yielded a total of 768 usable responses, which is way above the required minimum sample size.

3.3 Survey instrument

Data for the study were obtained with the use of structured questionnaires. Structured questionnaires are usually useful for factual information, and, even within an opinion survey,

factual questions allow us to ascertain how representative the sample is since we can relate the pattern of answers with given features of the general population. Rigorous assessment of representativeness is, perhaps, the most advantageous aspect of structured questionnaires (Bechhofer & Paterson, 2000). Since a lot of studies have been done on the two major concepts investigated in this study, numerous scales are available to measure them. It is worth noting, however, that scale development is a continuous process with ongoing changes (Neuman, 2006). Thus, the study relied on the extant literature and adjusted the scales where appropriate.

The extant literature reveals the following as some of the studies that contain the commonly used scales for perceived destination competitiveness: Wilde et al. (2017); Hallmann et al. (2014); Caber, Albayrak, and Matzler (2012); Chen, Chen, and Lee (2011); Kozak, Baloglu, and Bahar (2010); Meng (2006); Enright and Newton (2005); Dwyer et al. (2004); and Ritchie, Crouch, and Hudson (2001). According to Dwyer et al. (2004), no fit-one-fit-all list of destination competitiveness indicators exists, hence any given list of indicators may be used to measure the relative performance of a particular destination at a particular time. Reiterating this view, Lubbe et al. (2015) mention that in assessing the competitiveness of destinations, researchers should ensure that the attributes used are destination-specific. The measurement scales and survey tool for the study were developed through a series of recommended activities for developing a standardized survey tool (Churchill Jr, 1979; DeVellis, 2017). The first step in scale development is item generation. In addition to a rigorous literature review and as advised by Lubbe et al. (2015) above, an open-ended survey on factors influencing the destination competitiveness of Malawi was distributed to 20 public and private sector industry players in Malawi. A total of 51 items were generated to measure perceived destination competitiveness.

Initial items on tourist-based destination brand equity were adapted from studies on customer-based destination brand equity and the general marketing field. Furthermore, in-

depth interviews were conducted with 12 international tourists who were visiting Malawi to gain insights on brand equity attributes of an emerging tourist destination. The interviews, conducted in English in May 2019, lasted between 20 and 40 minutes. A total of 37 items were identified to assess tourist-based destination brand equity.

A common approach to ensuring the content validity of a survey instrument is to assemble an expert panel and ask for their views on the suitability of the instrument (DeVellis, 2017). Three academics with expertise in tourism research, ten graduate students in tourism-related fields and six tourism industry experts from Malawi were involved in this process. Guided by comments from the expert panel, the number of items was reduced and sections of the questionnaire were rearranged. In the end, 29 items were retained to measure perceived destination competitiveness (Table 3.3) whereas 27 items were retained to assess the five dimensions of tourist-based destination brand equity (Table 3.1).

Table 3. 1 Tourist-based destination brand equity dimensions and measurement items

Brand awareness
The trip enabled me to know more about Malawi's people and their ways of life
The trip increased my knowledge of Malawi's tourist attractions
If I ever think of visiting southern Africa again, Malawi will easily come to mind
Overall, I know Malawi better now than I did before
Brand perceived quality
Malawi provides tourism offerings of consistent quality
Malawi provides quality tourism experiences
I can expect superior performance from Malawi's tourism offerings
Tourism products and services in Malawi are excellent
Brand image
My friends will think highly of me because I visited Malawi
Image of Malawi as a destination is consistent with my self-image
Visiting Malawi reflects who I am as a person
I feel proud that I have visited Malawi
Visiting a place like Malawi is one of the most important ways of expressing my individuality
Brand trust
Malawi is a destination that meets my expectations
I could rely on service providers in Malawi to solve any problems with the trip
Service providers in Malawi were honest and sincere in addressing my concerns
I feel confident that Malawi is a good tourist destination
Service providers in Malawi are fair in their dealings with travellers
Service providers in Malawi would compensate me in some way in case of a service failure
Brand commitment
Malawi felt like a second home to me

I am willing to contribute resources (money/time) to social causes in Malawi
Malawi has a great deal of personal meaning to me
I have a sense of belonging to this destination
I will tell my friends and family that Malawi is worth visiting
I would give service providers in Malawi a benefit of the doubt if I had a poor service experience
I would pay slightly more for services if it would help improve the quality of life of the local people

3.4 Pilot test

The modified instrument was piloted to ensure the generalizability and validity of the measurement scales to be used in the main study. The researcher approached and secured permission from the management of Airport Developments Limited, a government agency in charge of airports in Malawi, to collect data at the Kamuzu International Airport in the capital city, Lilongwe. The survey was administered to visitors of non-Malawian origin at the boarding gate of the airport. The researcher first asked the respondents screening questions to ensure that only those that had visited Malawi either for holiday purposes or to work on volunteer projects for less than a year participated in the survey. Section A of the questionnaire asked about respondent' current trip: the purpose of visit, length of stay; the number of visits they had made to Malawi (including the current one); other countries visited as part of the trip (minus stop-over countries), travel companion, and travel arrangement. Section B had three parts: Part 1 asked whether the respondents had visited a sub-Saharan country before and, if any, which of the countries they enjoyed the most as a vacation destination. If the respondent had not visited a sub-Saharan country before, they were asked to state their favourite destination from their previous vacations elsewhere. Thus, the survey intercepted a set of respondents who assessed Malawi against other destinations within the SSA region and another set of respondents who were visiting the region for the first time and asked them to assess Malawi against their favourite previously visited destinations outside the region.

Part 2 asked the respondents to compare the destination they mentioned in Part 2 and indicate how closely a list of 29 statements on perceived destination competitiveness compared with their opinion. As Table 3.3 shows, the statements on perceived destination

competitiveness were phrased to assess Malawi's standing against another destination. In Part 3, study participants were requested to rank their agreement (or disagreement) against 27 items of tourist-based destination brand equity dimensions. In both Parts 2 and 3, the statements were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). Section B of the questionnaire collected demographic details of the respondents such as age, gender, marital status, education level, occupation, and total budget for the trip (excluding airfare). The section further asked the respondents to mention the destinations that they had closely considered as alternatives before settling on visiting Malawi and the words/phrases that best describe Malawi as a tourist destination. The questionnaire was designed in English based on the assumption that most of the international visitors to Malawi are fluent in the English language.

3.4.3 Pilot sample and results

Using a predefined systematic counting rule approach, passengers arriving at the departure lounge of KIA was asked to respond to the survey. Passengers who refused to participate were replaced before the next count. Those who accepted to participate were each given a self-completed questionnaire which they completed and returned to the researcher before their departure. In total, 60 responses were obtained for the pilot test. Data were screened to check for missing values, outliers and normality by calculating descriptive statistics including the means, standard deviation, and skewness using Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS) software version 25. Table 3.2 presents the demographics and trip-related characteristics of the pilot sample.

Table 3. 2. Demographic and trip-related characteristics of the pilot sample

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage	*M(SD)*
Age	Below 20 years	2	3.6	
	20-29	22	40.0	
	30-39	15	27.3	
	40-49	5	9.1	
	50-59	5	9.1	
	60 and above	6	10.9	
	Not indicated	5		
Gender	Female	33	58.9	
	Male	23	41.1	
	Not indicated	4		
Marital status	Single	34	60.7	
	Married	18	32.1	
	Others	4	71.	
	Not indicated	4		
Highest education	Secondary school	2	3.6	
	College diploma	5	8.9	
	College/university degree	44	78.6	
	Postgraduate	5	8.9	
	Not indicated	4		
Occupation	Company employee	21	37.5	
	Own business	15	26.8	
	Civil servant	3	5.4	
	Agricultural/fishery	1	1.8	
	Student	9	16.1	
	Retired	2	3.6	
	Unemployed	5	8.9	
	Not indicated	4		
Nationality	British	16	29.1	
	American	8	14.5	
	Dutch	4	7.3	
	Dutch	3	5.5	
	Other nationalities	24	43.6	
	Not indicated	5		
Tripographics	First-time visitor	41	68.3	
	Repeat visitor	19	31.7	
	Holiday	49	81.7	
	Volunteer	11	18.3	
	First time – Sub-Saharan	5	91.7	
	Africa	55	8.3	
Length of stay	Returning – Sub-Saharan	48	80.0	
	Africa	10	16.7	
	Less than a month	2	3.3	
	1 – 3 months			
	Above 3 months			
Budget (excluding airfare in US$)				2397.73 (2498.30)

It can be observed from the table above that most of the respondents (92%) had visited the sub-Saharan region before. The most popular previous favourite sub-Saharan destination

among the pilot sample was Zambia which was mentioned by about 22% of the respondents, followed by Kenya (13%) and South Africa (12%). Respondents that had not visited the region before mentioned countries and regions across the world as their favourite vacation destinations previously visited. The descriptive results of the perceived destination competitiveness attributes showing how Malawi was perceived against the previously visited destinations have been presented in Table 3.3. A principal component analysis with varimax rotation was performed on the perceived destination competitiveness items to identify underlying components. The value for the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test of sampling adequacy was 0.566 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant (χ^2 (231) = 478.107, $p < .001$). According to Kaiser (1974), KMO values above 0.8 are meritorious and those above 0.9 are marvellous. Hair, Wolfinbarger, Ortinau, and Bush (2008), however, maintain that KMO values greater than 0.5 are acceptable, especially in the purification of measurement items. A seven-factor solution of perceived destination competitiveness was derived, explaining 68.29% of the total variance (Table 3.4). All the Cronbach's alpha coefficients met the minimum threshold of 0.60 (Hair et al., 2006).

Table 3. 3. Descriptive analysis of perceived destination competitiveness attributes using the pilot study sample

Attribute	Mean	Standard Deviation
Malawians are more welcoming and friendly	4.20	0.92
Malawi has a more pleasant climate	3.65	0.80
Malawi has more open visa regulations and regulations for tourists	3.05	1.11
Malawi has a greater level of general infrastructure (roads, airport, transport, telecommunications, etc.)	2.82	0.89
Malawi has better accommodation facilities (quality, quantity, design of facilities, etc.)	2.77	0.81
Malawi offers more hospitable services (courteous and helpful staff, etc.)	3.70	0.87
Malawi offers a better African experience (safari, sunrises/sunsets, terrain/landscapes, etc.)	3.28	0.94
Malawi has better national parks and wildlife reserves	2.75	0.93
Malawi is more accessible (numerous flights from country, near home)	2.47	0.91
Malawi has better environmental conditions (unspoiled and undamaged environment)	3.10	0.92
Malawi has a more diverse range of tourist attractions and resources for its small size	3.50	0.83
Malawi is smaller and easier to cover within a short time	3.82	0.93

The websites of service providers in Malawi offer better information	2.92	0.87
It is easier to find information about Malawi on the internet	2.97	0.82
The destination is better connected with intermediaries in the tourism sector (tour operators, airlines, hotel chains, etc.)	2.83	0.87
Malawi is more "unique" (different culture, special events/festivals, local way of life)	3.43	0.89
Malawi has more cultural groups and languages	3.18	0.95
It is easier to access and use information technology services as a visitor in Malawi	3.07	0.86
Malawi offers greater personal security (fewer robberies, less harassment, etc.) and is more peaceful	3.85	0.89
Malawi is more stable politically	3.52	1.11
Malawi has more preserved nature and beautiful scenery	3.28	1.08
Malawi has better food variety and quality	2.72	0.96
Malawi is cheaper for holidays	3.72	0.87
Malawi is less crowded with tourists	4.12	0.98
Service providers in Malawi are more willing to help visitors with their vacation (ease of making reservation, foreign exchange facilities, foreign language help, etc.)	3.63	0.71
Malawi offers more opportunities for adventure and recreational activities (hiking, swimming, diving, snorkelling, cycling, sailing, etc.)	3.08	0.96
Malawi has more sufficient signage and better quality directions/information tourists	2.83	0.83
There is less threat of disease while travelling in Malawi	2.75	0.88
Malawi has better health and medical facilities for tourists	2.72	0.67

Table 3. 4. Principal component analysis of perceived destination competitiveness attributes in the pilot sample

Attribute	Factor loading	Cronbach's alpha
Factor 1 (Eigen-value = 4.02. Variance explained = 18.28)		0.65
The websites of service providers in Malawi offer better information	0.85	
It is easier to find information about Malawi on the internet	0.87	
The destination is better connected with intermediaries in the tourism sector (tour operators, airlines, hotel chains, etc.)	0.57	
It is easier to access and use information technology services as a visitor in Malawi	0.62	
Factor 2 (Eigen-value = 2.60. %. Variance explained = 11.82)		0.76
Malawians are more welcoming and friendly	0.71	
Malawi offers more hospitable services (courteous and helpful staff, etc.)	0.80	
Service providers in Malawi are more willing to help visitors with their vacation (ease of making reservation, foreign exchange facilities, foreign language help, etc.)	0.89	
Factor 3 (Eigen-value = 2.42. %. Variance explained = 11.02)		0.61
Malawi has better environmental conditions (unspoiled and undamaged environment)	0.68	
Malawi has a more diverse range of tourist attractions and resources for its small size	0.66	
Malawi offers more opportunities for adventure and recreational activities (hiking, swimming, diving, snorkelling, cycling, sailing, etc.)	0.72	

Factor 4 (Eigen-value = 1.91. %. Variance explained = 8.66)			0.65
Malawi offers a better African experience (safari, sunrises/sunsets, terrain/landscapes, etc.)	0.73		
Malawi has better national parks and wildlife reserves	0.53		
Malawi is more "unique" (different culture, special events/festivals, local way of life)	0.73		
Factor 5 (Eigen-value = 1.56. %. Variance explained = 7.09)			0.69
Malawi is smaller and easier to cover within a short time	0.61		
Malawi offers greater personal security (fewer robberies, less harassment, etc.) and is more peaceful	0.82		
Malawi is less crowded with tourists	0.79		
Factor 6 (Eigen-value = 1.44. %. Variance explained = 6.56)			0.66
Malawi has more cultural groups and languages	0.64		
Malawi has better food variety and quality	0.84		
Malawi is cheaper for holidays	0.62		
Factor 7 (Eigen-value = 1.07 %. Variance explained = 4.87)			0.60
Malawi has a greater level of general infrastructure (roads, airport, transport, telecommunications, etc.)	0.77		
Malawi has more sufficient signage and better quality directions/information tourists	0.61		
Malawi has better health and medical facilities for tourists	0.61		

Note: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure = 0.566; Bartlett's test = 478.107 ($p < 0.001$); total variance explained = 68.29%.

Principal component analysis with varimax rotation was also performed on the tourist-based destination brand equity items. The value for the KMO test of sampling adequacy was 0.656 with Bartlett's test of sphericity being statistically significant (χ^2 (171) = 512.054, $p < .001$). Thus, the principal component analysis was considered appropriate. A five-factor solution was extracted, accounting for 68.36% of the total variance. The items converged around the five brand equity dimensions as initially proposed. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were between 0.63 and 0.89, thereby meeting the threshold requirement recommended by Nunnally (1978).

Table 3. 5. Descriptive analysis and PCA results (tourist-based destination brand equity: pilot sample)

Attribute	Mean	SD	Factor loadings
Brand awareness (% Variance explained = 5.49. Cronbach's alpha = 0.63)			
The trip enabled me to know more about Malawi's people and their ways of life	4.28	0.80	0.80
If I ever think of visiting southern Africa again, Malawi will easily come to mind	4.42	0.76	0.59
Overall, I know Malawi better now than I did before	4.32	0.69	0.59

Brand quality ((% Variance explained = 7.25. Cronbach's alpha = 0.70)			
Malawi provides tourism offerings of consistent quality	3.05	0.93	0.74
Malawi provides quality tourism experiences	3.56	0.85	0.73
I can expect superior performance from Malawi's tourism offerings	3.26	0.81	0.72
Brand image ((% Variance explained = 9.42. Cronbach's alpha = 0.81)			
My friends will think highly of me because I visited Malawi	3.61	0.80	0.71
Image of Malawi as a destination is consistent with my self-image	3.42	0.76	0.70
Visiting Malawi reflects who I am as a person	3.61	0.80	0.82
I feel proud that I have visited Malawi	4.12	0.73	0.77
Brand trust ((% Variance explained = 19.11. Cronbach's alpha = 0.82)			
I could rely on service providers in Malawi to solve any problems with the trip	3.18	0.71	0.75
Service providers in Malawi were honest and sincere in addressing my concerns	3.30	0.84	0.88
I feel confident that Malawi is a good tourist destination	3.72	0.88	0.69
Service providers in Malawi are fair in their dealings with travellers	3.25	0.85	0.88
Service providers in Malawi would compensate me in some way in case of a service failure	2.77	0.74	0.52
Brand commitment ((% Variance explained = 27.08. Cronbach's alpha = 0.89)			
Malawi felt like a second home to me	3.34	1.13	0.77
I am willing to contribute resources (money/time) to social causes in Malawi	3.93	0.89	0.73
Malawi has a great deal of personal meaning to me	3.74	1.04	0.83
I have a sense of belonging to this destination	3.54	1.14	0.88

Note: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure = 0.656; Bartlett's test = 512.054 ($p < 0.001$); total variance explained = 68.36%.

3.5 Data collection

With the permission obtained from authorities as earlier explained in the pilot study section, data for the main study was collected in the departure lounge of the Kamuzu International Airport in Malawi from June to August 2019. Even though the majority of international travellers to Malawi enter and leave the country by road (UNWTO, 2019), it was considered rational to collect data at the airport since respondents would have the time and comfort to respond to the self-completed questionnaires. Furthermore, statistics show that the majority of international travellers who leave Malawi by road are cross-border business travellers, who were outside the scope of the study (UNWTO, 2019). Airports offer the main or only exit for tourists exiting a destination and this allows researchers to access large potential study populations, especially for topics related to tourists who have just finished their trip

(Bauer, 2014). Bauer (2014) adds that airport surveys have several benefits such as high response rates and are effective for capturing short term events such as behaviour, experiences and perceptions while they are still "fresh" in the minds of the respondents. Understandably, the tourism research community has long utilised exit surveys at airports to explore various phenomena about tourists.

3.5.3 Population and sampling profile

The study targeted travellers who had visited Malawi for holiday, leisure, and recreational purposes and to help with volunteer projects. The UNWTO (2019) reported 837,000 arrivals in Malawi in 2017, of which 264,000 visited for holiday, leisure, recreational and other personal purposes. The study focused on tourists that had visited Malawi for either holiday or to work on volunteer projects and had stayed in Malawi for less than a year. It was assumed that these respondents had the required experiences to provide appropriate responses to the questions in the survey instrument. The study sought to assess Malawi's performance against its competitors in the SSA region and to draw comparisons with "best-practice" destinations outside the region. Accordingly, a deliberate approach was taken to target tourists with travel experience in the SSA region and those visiting the region for the first time. As detailed in Chapter 2, analysing a destination's standing against both proximate competitors and "best-practice" destinations elsewhere can offer a comprehensive understanding of destination competitiveness to both practitioners and scholars.

Even though volunteer tourists do not consider themselves as being 'at leisure' (Stoddart & Rogerson, 2004), it is the view of Scheyvens (2002, p. 111) that "there is likely to be some free time for leisure pursuits" for volunteer tourists during their time in a destination. In a study of volunteer tourists to South Africa, Stoddart and Rogerson (2004) found that at the end of their projects, older volunteers extended their stay to visit wildlife reserves and major tourism attractions. Unlike destinations in developed countries, volunteer tourism is an

important segment of the tourism industry in developing economies. This is because destination stakeholders are looking for alternatives to mass tourism since this can bring about positive changes in host communities (Bargeman, Richards, & Govers, 2018). Volunteer tourism is one type of tourism identified as a plausible alternative to mass tourism. Indeed, volunteer tourism grew exponentially from the early 2000s as people from the more developed global north travelled, seeking sustainable and interactive tourism experiences in developing countries (Keese, 2011). Against this backdrop, the present study included volunteer tourists as part of the study population.

3.5.4 Sampling technique

Respondents were selected using a predefined systematic counting rule. Before a questionnaire was administered, a potential participant was asked about their purpose of visit to Malawi, if they had spent more than a night but less than 365 days, and whether or not they were resident in Malawi. Non-residents who were in the country for at least a day and were visiting either for leisure or volunteer projects qualified for survey administration. Passengers who declined the request were replaced before the next count. Those who agreed to participate were given a self-completed questionnaire which they completed and returned to the researcher before their departure. In the end, a total of 768 questionnaires were collected.

3.6 Data analysis

Data screening measures were undertaken after the data for the main study had been collected. To obtain meaningful findings, several statistical procedures and methods were employed. Mean values, independent samples t-tests, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and relevant graphs were used to address objective 1. The following data analysis procedures were applied to address the rest of the objectives. A principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted to identify the underlying components and collect information on the constructs,

both on the items of perceived destination competitiveness and tourist-based destination brand equity. The KMO test of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity were used to ascertain the adequacy of the data for item reduction.

Thereafter, the PLS technique was used to assess the validity of the measurement (outer) model. As part of the model assessment, validity tests such as discriminant and convergent validity were conducted. According to Fornell & Larcker's (1981) approach, discriminant validity is achieved when the square roots of the average variance extracted (AVE) of each construct exceed the correlations of the latent construct with other latent constructs. The Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations criterion, considered stricter than the Fornell and Larcker's method, suggests that discriminant validity is established when the HTMT ratios are less than 0.85 (Kline, 2011). Convergent validity is achieved when the AVE is greater than 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981a) and composite reliability is greater than 0.7. The internal consistency of each construct was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach's > 0.6). Consequently, the structural (inner) model was tested. Bootstrapping with the requisite number of subsamples was used to test the statements of hypothesis. Furthermore, the study applied the blindfolding technique to assess the predictive relevance of the exogenous variables. Cohen's f^2 (Hair et al., 2012) and Stone-Geisser's Q^2 (Geisser, 1974; Stone, 1974) were computed to assess the relationship effect sizes and predictive relevance respectively. Lastly, multi-group analyses were undertaken to assess the moderating impact of tourist-related and destination-related factors on the examined relationships.

3.7 Justification for adopting structural equation modelling

Structural equation modelling is a second-generation multivariate technique that combines the mechanics of factor analysis and regression to concurrently explore the relationships between measurement items and latent constructs (Gefen, Straub, & Boudreau, 2000). The technique ensures robust assessment of the structural model and a complete

understanding of how the model fits the data compared to the use of regression analysis (Gefen et al., 2000; Hair, Hult, & Ringle, 2014). Multiple regression was not be applied because it can only handle the relationship between several exogenous variables and one endogenous variable and has no functional test for latent construct validity or reliability. Neither does it test the structural relationships among latent variables (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2009).

There are two techniques for testing causal links in SEM: (1) covariance-based SEM and (2) partial least squares (PLS) SEM. The PLS technique is becoming increasingly popular among researchers in tourism-related fields. Ali, Rasoolimanesh, Sarstedt, Ringle, and Ryu (2018) observed increasing attention to and usage of PLS-SEM among hospitality researchers between 2001 and 2015. The advantage of the method is that it can cope with small samples and non-normal data. The method copes well with violations of normality since in its computations no assumptions are made about the symmetry of the observed variables (Hair Jr, Sarstedt, Hopkins, & Kuppelwieser, 2014).

Also, PLS-SEM can easily cope with complex models and models with limited theoretical support. For the current study, the data do not conform to the assumptions of multivariate normality. Moreover, in the multi-group analyses, the datasets were divided into smaller sub-samples that would not meet the sample size thresholds of covariance-based SEM (Hair et al., 2011). Furthermore, as noted earlier, limited studies have explored the relationship between perceived competitiveness and destination brand equity (Wong, 2018); hence, it can be argued that the present study is exploratory. Scholars recommend PLS-SEM for exploratory research (Al-Emran, Mezhuyev, & Kamaludin, 2018; Hair et al., 2014). Therefore, the current study adopted PLS-SEM for testing the proposed theoretical model. This was conducted using SmartPLS version 3 (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2015).

3.8 Conclusion

Grounded in a positivist research philosophy where the researcher plays a neutral etic role, the study investigates the role that perceived destination competitiveness plays in the formation of tourist-based destination brand equity. Data were collected at Kamuzu International Airport, one of Malawi's major points of exit, using self-completed questionnaires. Likert type scales were utilised to assess the respondents' perception of the two major concepts in the study. The data collection exercise yielded 768 responses, way above the minimum sample size required per the dictates of PLS-SEM. Structural equation modelling (partial least squares procedure) with SmartPLS version 3 was applied to assess the proposed conceptual model. Figure 3.1 illustrates the the study's research design.

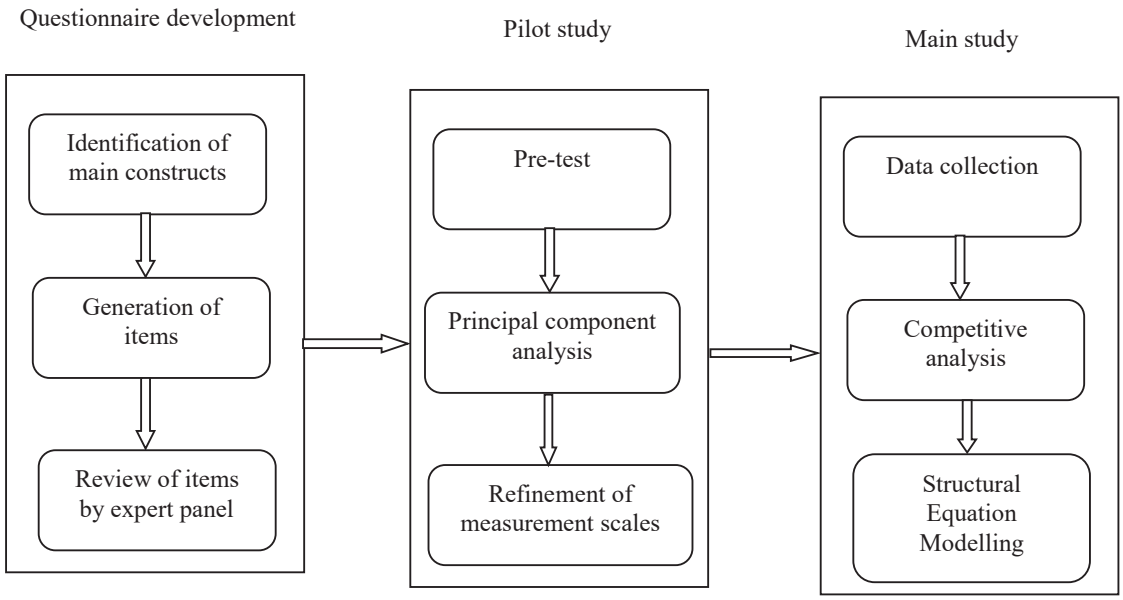

Figure 3. 1. Research design

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The current chapter outlines the findings of the study. Data screening operations, normality test results and sample descriptive characteristics are first presented. A rationale for dividing the sample into sub-samples is provided, after which a comprehensive destination competitive analysis using descriptive analyses is undertaken. Thereafter, principal factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis results for the two major constructs are presented. Then, results for measurement model assessments for the two groups are presented. Subsequently, the results of the structural model assessments for each of the sub-samples are presented. The findings section (structural model) of each sub-sample ends with multi-group analysis.

4.1 Data screening

Data were checked for missing values and probable oversights at data entry. Fifteen questionnaires were discarded because they had more than 20% of missing data. Additionally, 20 questionnaires were discarded as the respondents had indicated business or work as the purpose of the trip. The data were also checked for outliers. Multivariate outliers were checked by computing the squared Mahalanobis distance (D^2). The squared Mahalanobis distance was computed for each of the 29 variables of perceived destination competitiveness. Thereafter, the right-tail area for each D^2 under a chi-square distribution with 29 degrees of freedom (based on the number of variables) was computed. In total, 28 cases had a probability for D^2 less than 0.001, indicating multivariate outliers in these said cases (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). However, upon examining each case, no unusual patterns were noted in the responses; hence, they were retained for further analysis.

In structural equation modelling, it is generally expected that the data would not deviate from the conditions of normality. Therefore, the Shapiro-Wilk test was conducted on the 29 variables of perceived destination competitiveness to assess for univariate normality and the

results showed that all the items significantly departed from univariate normality ($p<0.001$). Multivariate normality was assessed with the use of Mardia's test (Mardia, 1985). The test returned p-values of less than 0.05 for both skewness and kurtosis scores, which indicates a significant departure from multivariate normality. This, however, should not be a cause for concern since PLS-SEM uses bootstrapping, which entails repeated random sampling with replacement from the original sample to generate a bootstrap subsample, thereby obtaining standard errors for structural testing (Hair et al., 2011).

4.2 Descriptive characteristics of the sample in the main study

A total of 768 responses were obtained for the study. Out of these, 474 respondents assessed Malawi in comparison with destinations in the sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) region. The remaining 294 respondents assessed Malawi against their favourite destination previously visited outside the SSA region. The demographic and trip-related characteristics of the two groups are presented in Tables 4.1 and 4.2, respectively. For the presentation of the descriptive and trip-related characteristics, the first group was called the sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) sample while the second one was termed the outside sub-Saharan Africa (outside-SSA) sample. Thirteen demographic and trip-related characteristics are examined: age; gender; marital status; highest education attained; occupation; nationality; the purpose of the visit; the number of visits; length of stay, travel party, travel arrangement, whether they visited other destinations on the same trip, and budget (excluding airfare).

The largest age group in the overall sample was the 20-29 years category, with 31% and 44% of the SSA sample and the outside-SSA sample, respectively, belonging to this group. Both groups included more female respondents than males, with females constituting 52% and 57% of the SSA sample and the outside-SSA sample respectively. In both samples, there were more single respondents. The majority of the respondents in both samples were

college/university graduates, with 71% and 60% of the respondents in the SSA sample and outside-SSA sample respectively falling under this category. About 40% of the respondents in the SSA sample were company employees, followed by business owners who constituted 21% of the sample, with students coming third at 17% of the sample. The outside-SSA sample was dominated by students who made up 42% of the sample, followed by company employees at 30%.

The respondents in the overall sample originated from over 50 countries. The SSA sample was dominated by respondents of British, American and German origin whereas the outside-SSA was dominated by British, American and Dutch travellers. Travellers of African origin constituted a very small component of the respondents (10% in the SSA sample and 0.3% in the outside-SSA sample), the majority of them being South Africans. Even though South Africa is an important tourism generating country for Malawi in Africa, most of these tourists visit Malawi by road, probably explaining the low number captured at the airport. While 88% of the respondents in the outside-SSA sample were visiting Malawi for the first time, the SSA sample had 57% first-time visitors.

Most of the study participants in the outside-SSA group had travelled with friends whereas in the SSA sample, there was almost an equal representation of those travelling alone, with a partner or spouse, and in the company of friends, though the last category had a slightly higher representation. About 69% of respondents in the SSA sample had arranged their trips independently whereas the rest had their trips arranged by travel companies/tour operators or volunteer companies. There was almost equal representation of arranged and independent trips in the outside-SSA sample. About 70% of the respondents in the SSA sample stayed for 20 days or less whereas 85% of respondents in the outside-SSA stayed for 30 days or less. About 79% and 84% of the respondents in the SSA sample and outside-SSA sample respectively indicated how much they had spent while visiting. The mean expenditure per tourist was US$

2400.97 for the SSA sample and US$ 2171.17 for the outside-SSA sample. Thus, even though respondents in the outside-SSA group reported a longer average length of stay in days than those in the SSA group, the latter spent more per day than the former during their visit. That said, there was no statistically significant difference between the two samples in terms of expenditure (t (618) = 1.482, p = 0.135).

Table 4. 1. Demographic characteristics of survey participants

Variable	Category	SSA	Outside-SSA	Chi-square	p-value
Age	Below 20 years	25	61		
	20-29	146	126		
	30-39	101	56		
	40-49	76	23	86.43	.000
	50-59	61	16		
	60 and above	57	7		
	Total	466	289		
Gender	Female	248	168		
	Male	225	124	1.90	.179
	Total	473	292		
Marital status	Single	225	201		
	Married	188	64	34.19	.000
	Others	53	27		
	Total	466	290		
Highest education	Secondary school	46	63		
	College diploma	55	37		
	College/university degree	330	173	22.00	.000
	Postgraduate	37	17		
	Total	468	290		
Occupation	Company employee	186	87		
	Own business	100	38		
	Civil servant	31	23		
	Agricultural/fishery	7	1		
	Housewife	6	1	68.05	.000
	Student	78	122		
	Retired	38	8		
	Unemployed	20	11		
	Total	466	291		
Nationality	British	101	76		
	American	89	75		
	Dutch	33	24		
	German	52	8	139.60	.000
	South African	37			
	Australian	21	8		
	Other nationalities	127*	96*		
	Total	460	287		

*The specific nationalities in the "Other nationalities" category are listed in Appendix 2

A series of chi-square tests were conducted to ascertain whether there were any levels of association between trip-related and demographic characteristics and the two groups of tourists. The results showed statistically significant differences in all but two (gender and length of stay) of the variables investigated. For instance, tourists who had visited a sub-Sahara African destination before were more likely to be in the 40+ age categories, married and travelling with their spouse or partner. On the contrary, those visiting sub-Saharan Africa for the first time were more likely to be in the 39-and-under age categories, with only high school education, single and travelling in the company of their friends. Among nationalities, more German and South African travellers were reported in the SSA sample than expected. South Africa is a major tourist source market for several destinations in southeast Africa; hence, this possibly explains why the South Africans had visited other destinations in the region before visiting Malawi. As for the German tourists, the German outbound travel market has a long history of travel consumption associated with repeat visitation (Kozak & Martin, 2012; Küsel & Ras, 2010), which possibly explains why several Germans had previously visited other destinations in the region before visiting Malawi.

Table 4. 2. Trip-related characteristics of the respondents

Variable	Category	SSA	Outside-SSA	Chi-square	p-value
Number of visits	Once	271	259		
	Twice	93	17	81.20	.000
	Three times or more	110	18		
	Total	474	294		
Purpose of visit	Holiday	360	108		
	Volunteer	114	186	114.44	.000
	Total	474	294		
Length of stay	Less than a month	391	241		
	1 – 3 months	67	39	.998	.61
	Above 3 months	16	14		
	Total	474	294		
Travel party	Alone	123	51		
	Spouse/partner	122	31		
	Friends	154	182	67.57	.000
	Family	66	28		
	School group	8	2		
	Total	473	294		

Travel arrangement	Independent	326	137		
	Package tour	97	51	73.43	.000
	Volunteer company	51	102		
	Total	474	290		
Number of destinations visited on the trip	Only Malawi	345	246		
	Multi-destination	129	48	12.13	.000
	Total	474	294		
Mean budget in US$ (excluding airfare)		2400.97	2171.17		

4.3 Main analysis I: Destination competitive analysis

4.3.1 Perceived destination competitiveness

For meaningful examination of perceived destination competitiveness, the countries against which Malawi was compared to were classified into several sub-categories according to the extant literature. In a study on destination benchmarking, Assaf and Dwyer (2013) categorised destinations into three groups based on their rankings on the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index averaged from three editions of the Index. Destinations with a score of close to 5 and above (out of 7) were put in the same group. The second group had countries with a middle-ranking on the Index and the third group had countries at the bottom of the index, with scores close to and below 4. The current study categorises country destinations according to geographical proximity to Malawi, their ranking on the TTCI, and Plog's allocentric-psychocentric continuum classification. The third approach categorises destinations according to tourist personality types the destinations attract and the type of experiences pursued by the tourist personality types (Litvin & Smith, 2016; Plog, 1974, 2001).

Primarily, the website besttripchoices.com, which catalogues the experiences of various destinations across the world and the traveller personality types the destinations are likely to attract in line with Plog's traveller personality types, was used to classify the destinations outside of the SSA region. Previous research has established that travel personality influences

destination choice (Cruz-Milán, 2019; Masiero & Qiu, 2018; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2004). According to Plog (2001), allocentrics (venturers) prefer to visit less-touristic destinations to experience the place before others discover them. This is because allocentrics are self-confident and have wide-ranging travel interests. On the contrary, psychocentrics like to visit well-known (dependable) destinations, with familiar features, because they are not as confident as allocentrics. In the middle of the continuum are mid-centrics who have a balanced blend of the other two personality characteristics. It must be noted, however, that specific locations or activities undertaken at the destinations of comparison were not asked in the questionnaire. The current study, thus, takes a generalist approach in classifying the destinations without considering the said or other variables.

Three editions of the TTCI (WEF, 2015, 2017b, 2019) were used to compute scores to rank the destinations of comparison. Destinations that had an average score of at least 4 (out of 7) were categorised as high-ranking, whereas those that had an average score of less than 4 were categorised as low-ranking. Destinations within the sub-Saharan Africa region were classified into the same group since they are in the same geographical location but they were sub-divided into two categories according to rankings on the TTCI. Among these destinations, South Africa had an average score of 4.03, thus falling under the similar and high-ranking category (within the SSA region). Destinations outside the region were first categorised into three groups: allocentric (venturer) destinations; mid-centric destinations; and psychocentric (dependable) destinations. The three destination categories were further divided into either highly-ranked or low-ranking categories according to their rankings on the TTCI, resulting in six categories (Table 4.3). The decision to have only two ranking categories was made to simplify the comparative analysis since Malawi is a low-ranking destination. Table 4.4 shows the top 11 destinations within the SSA region and the frequencies at which they were compared to Malawi.

Table 4. 3. Categories of destinations of comparison outside the SSA region (n = 294)

	Allocentric (venturer) destinations	**Mid-centric destinations**	**Psychocentric (dependable) destinations**
Highly-ranked destinations	Argentina (1), Australia (5), Brazil (3), Chile (6), Costa Rica (6), Cuba (6), Finland (1), Grenada (1), Indonesia (9), Ireland (4), Japan (1), Malaysia (3), New Zealand (2), Panama (4), Peru (9) **N = 61**	Austria (4), Turkey (5), Italy (12), Sweden (2), Norway (1), Iceland (3), The Netherlands (2), Croatia (3), Belize (2), Portugal (2), United Kingdom (4), South Korea (2), India (4), Hong Kong (1), Cyprus (1), Mexico (5), Thailand (3), USA (14) **N = 70**	Denmark (2), Spain (12), Germany (2), France (8), Czech Republic (3), Singapore (2), Greece (7) **N = 36**
Low ranking destinations	Morocco (11), Cambodia (6), Paraguay (4), Nicaragua (11), Honduras (8), Colombia (5), El Salvador (1), Bolivia (5), Nepal (4), Myanmar (2), Vietnam (14), Sri Lanka (13), Philippines (5), Bhutan (4), Mongolia (2), Venezuela (3) **N = 87**	Dominican Republic (2), Israel (1), Ecuador (4), Egypt (7), Jordan (4), Morocco (11), Tunisia (6) **N = 35**	Jamaica (5) **N = 5**

Table 4. 4. Top 11 destinations of comparison from the SSA region

Destination	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Zambia	95	20
South Africa	88	18.5
Tanzania	48	10
Botswana	38	8
Kenya	36	7.5
Namibia	40	8.4
Mozambique	37	7.8
Uganda	23	4.8
Zimbabwe	20	4.2
Ethiopia	10	2.1
Rwanda	8	1.6
Ghana	6	1.2
Madagascar	5	1
Rest of sub-Saharan Africa	20	4.2

4.3.2 SSA region versus outside-SSA region comparison

First, a comparison in perceptions between the two major groups was made. Table 4.5 shows how the two groups perceived Malawi's destination attributes in line with their respective bases of comparison. A wider range of mean scores of 2.2 was reported in the SSA

sample compared to the outside-SSA sample which had a mean score range of 1.84. Fifteen destination attributes were perceived as above average (>3) by both groups whereas nine attributes were perceived as below average (<3) by both groups. The two groups perceived the remaining destination attributes differently with the average score (3) as the reference point. For instance, respondents in the SSA sample perceived attribute 26 ('Opportunities for adventure and recreational activities (hiking, swimming, diving, snorkelling, biking, sailing, etc.') as above average, unlike those in the outside-SSA sample who perceived the same as below average. The widest gap in terms of perception between the two groups was observed on attribute number 19 ('Malawi offers greater personal security (fewer robberies, less tourist harassment, etc.') with a mean difference of 0.86.

Generally, respondents in the outside-SSA sample rated Malawi poorer than respondents of the SSA sample. To illustrate, whereas the lowest perceived attribute for the SSA sample had a mean score of 2.52 (accessibility from tourist generating regions), there were six destination attributes with mean scores of less than 2.52 as perceived by outside-SSA sample respondents. Furthermore, 18 destination attributes were rated poorer by the outside-SSA group than the SSA group. These attributes mostly included created resources at the destination such as general infrastructure (roads, airports, etc.), accommodation facilities, internet accessibility, information availability, destination accessibility from tourists' home country, and tourist signage.

Additionally, there were 10 destination attributes on which respondents comparing Malawi with destinations outside the SSA region perceived Malawi better than those comparing it to destinations in the region. The attributes included friendliness of the residents, staff hospitality and courtesy in tourism establishments, natural parks and wildlife reserves, cultural uniqueness and diversity, preserved nature and beautiful scenery, and the ratio of

tourists to residents (tourist crowding). The two groups identically perceived the climate attribute of the destination.

Table 4. 5. Descriptive results of perceived destination competitiveness items (n (SSA sample) = 474; n (Outside-SSA) = 294)

Items	SSA sample Mean	SD	Outside-SSA Mean	SD	*t*-value	*p*-value
Malawians are more welcoming and friendly	4.36	0.77	4.39	0.72	-0.62	0.536
Malawi has a more pleasant climate	3.89	0.79	3.89	0.88	0.01	0.994
Malawi has more open visa regulations and regulations for tourists	3.19	0.99	3.15	1.11	0.50	0.621
Malawi has a greater level of general infrastructure (roads, airport, transport, telecommunications, etc.)	2.66	0.98	2.26	1.04	5.42	0.000
Malawi has better accommodation facilities (quality, quantity, design of facilities, etc.)	2.82	0.92	2.46	1.01	4.99	0.000
Malawi offers more hospitable services (courteous and helpful staff, etc.)	4.09	0.87	4.29	0.81	-3.22	0.001
Malawi offers a better African experience (safari, sunrises/sunsets, terrain/landscapes, etc.)	3.45	0.99	4.02	0.95	-7.88	0.000
Malawi has better national parks and wildlife reserves	3.03	1.00	3.73	0.99	-9.52	0.000
Malawi is more accessible (numerous flights from country, near home)	2.52	0.96	2.40	1.01	1.68	0.093
Malawi has better environmental conditions (unspoiled and undamaged environment)	3.17	1.03	3.07	1.04	1.27	0.205
Malawi has a more diverse range of tourist attractions and resources for its small size	3.39	0.92	2.84	1.04	7.45	0.000
Malawi is smaller and easier to cover within a short time	3.89	0.87	3.38	1.10	7.12	0.000
The websites of service providers in Malawi offer better information	2.95	0.91	2.84	1.00	1.61	0.109
It is easier to find information about Malawi on the internet	2.97	0.91	2.83	0.99	1.99	0.047
The destination is better connected with intermediaries in the tourism sector (tour operators, airlines, hotel chains, etc.)	2.91	0.87	2.79	0.86	1.85	0.065
Malawi is more “unique” (different culture, special events/festivals, local way of life)	3.65	0.86	3.85	0.94	-3.14	0.002
Malawi has more cultural groups and languages	3.33	0.89	3.69	0.96	-5.36	0.000
It is easier to access and use information technology services as a visitor in Malawi	3.03	0.93	2.91	0.98	1.69	0.092
Malawi offers greater personal security (fewer robberies, less harassment, etc.) and is more peaceful	4.05	0.83	3.19	1.05	12.48	0.000
Malawi is more stable politically	3.18	1.05	2.65	1.14	6.55	0.000
Malawi has more preserved nature and beautiful scenery	3.41	0.97	3.71	0.96	-4.22	0.000
Malawi has better food variety and quality	3.05	0.95	2.83	1.10	3.05	0.002
Malawi is cheaper for holidays	3.74	0.92	3.57	1.07	2.22	0.027
Malawi is less crowded with tourists	4.13	0.80	4.24	0.79	-1.90	0.058
Service providers in Malawi are more willing to help visitors with their vacation (ease of making reservation, foreign exchange facilities, foreign language help, etc.)	3.97	0.87	4.19	0.82	-3.40	0.001
Malawi offers more opportunities for adventure and recreational activities (hiking, swimming, diving, snorkelling, biking, sailing, etc.)	3.03	0.88	2.84	0.95	2.79	0.005

Malawi has more sufficient signage and better quality directions/information tourists	2.82	0.89	2.49	0.89	5.01	0.000
There is less threat of disease while travelling in Malawi	2.92	0.91	2.28	1.05	8.86	0.000
Malawi has better health and medical facilities for tourists	2.70	0.82	2.19	0.99	7.64	0.000

To ascertain whether statistically significant differences in perceptions existed between the two subsamples, a series of independent samples *t*-tests were computed. Results showed statistically significant differences in 20 of the 29 destination attributes (Table 4.5). The 9 items on which statistically significant differences were not observed included friendliness of residents, climate, and price competitiveness, attributes that were generally rated high across both groups. This could mean that tourists perceived Malawi to be very hospitable, price competitive, and of good climatic conditions for travel regardless of the destination-of-comparison. Furthermore, no statistically significant differences were observed between the groups' perception of information availability, quality of environmental conditions, and accessibility of the destination; attributes that were generally rated as just average or below par by both groups. Thus, despite the observable mean differences between the two groups and regardless of the differences in the bases of comparison, both groups perceived Malawi as performing poorly on the stated attributes.

4.3.3 Outside sub-Saharan Africa comparison

Comparisons were further made to see how Malawi was perceived between categories of destinations-of-comparison outside the SSA region (Table 4.6). There were notable differences in the way destination attributes were perceived between the six groups. Respondents who compared Malawi against highly-ranked destinations such as Portugal, France, and Argentina perceived Malawi favourably than the rest in nature and culture-related attributes but perceived Malawi poorly in terms of created resources such as accessibility, the general level of infrastructure, the variety and quality of accommodation facilities, and the

threat of disease while travelling within the destination. On the contrary, respondents comparing Malawi to low-ranking allocentric destinations such as Vietnam and Sri Lanka perceived Malawi better than the rest in terms of created resources and less favourably than the rest on nature-related resources. An aggregate score was calculated for each of the destinations-of-comparison categories using the attribute mean scores (Table 4.6). Malawi was perceived as the most competitive against low-ranking psychocentric destinations (Jamaica) and declined in perceived competitiveness against low-ranking mid-centric destinations (e.g. Egypt and Jordan), low-ranking allocentric destinations (e.g. Vietnam and Colombia), highly-ranked allocentric destinations (e.g. Australia and Japan), highly-ranked psychocentric (e.g. Spain and France) destinations and highly-ranked mid-centric destinations (e.g. the United States of America and Italy), in that order. It must be noted that, as a rule of thumb, the minimum acceptable sample size for a one-way ANOVA test should be one more than the number of groups. However, the low-ranking psychocentric destination category (Jamaica) had five observations only; thus the results should be understood with that limitation in mind.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests with Scheffe posthoc tests were computed to check for any statistical differences in perceptions among the groups. Statistically significant differences in perception were observed on 12 destination attributes (Table 4.6). The Scheffe test revealed differences between groups on 3 of the 12 destination attributes (‘general infrastructure’, ‘accommodation facilities’, and ‘easiness to cover the destination in a short period’). On the three attributes, respondents who compared Malawi to low-ranking allocentric destinations differed from those who compared the destination to highly-ranked mid-centric destinations. Malawi was perceived better against low-ranking allocentric destinations compared to how it was perceived against highly-ranked mid-centric destinations. In absolute terms, however, Malawi performed poorly on the first two attributes against both categories of destinations but performed above average on the third attribute.

Table 4. 6. Outside-SSA region destination comparison

Attributes	Allocentric High Ranking (n = 61)	Allocentric Low Ranking (n = 87)	Mid-centric High Ranking (n = 70)	Mid-centric Low Ranking (n = 35)	Psychocentric High Ranking (n = 42)	Psychocentric Low Ranking (n = 5)	*p*-value
Malawians are more welcoming and friendly	4.26	4.47	4.37	4.43	4.33	5.00	0.222
Malawi has a more pleasant climate	3.85	4.01	3.69	4.09	3.72	4.80	0.015*
Malawi has more open visa regulations and regulations for tourists	3.20	3.09	3.01	3.34	3.17	4.00	0.369
Malawi has a greater level of general infrastructure (roads, airport, transport, telecommunications, etc.)	2.28	2.60	1.90	2.29	1.97	3.00	0.000**
Malawi has better accommodation facilities (quality, quantity, design of facilities, etc.)	2.49	2.75	2.07	2.69	2.19	3.00	0.000**
Malawi offers more hospitable services (courteous and helpful staff, etc.)	4.15	4.29	4.31	4.34	4.33	5.00	0.303
Malawi offers a better African experience (safari, sunrises/sunsets, terrain/landscapes, etc.)	3.95	3.89	4.16	3.91	4.28	4.00	0.252
Malawi has better national parks and wildlife reserves	3.64	3.63	3.80	3.63	4.11	3.80	0.194
Malawi is more accessible (numerous flights from country, near home)	2.48	2.61	2.14	2.60	2.08	2.40	0.017*
Malawi has better environmental conditions (unspoiled and undamaged environment)	3.26	3.08	2.97	2.80	3.17	3.20	0.368
Malawi has a more diverse range of tourist attractions and resources for its small size	3.03	3.02	2.51	2.71	2.81	3.60	0.011*
Malawi is smaller and easier to cover within a short time	3.51	3.68	3.09	3.11	3.33	3.60	0.012*
The websites of service providers in Malawi offer better information	2.74	2.95	2.73	3.17	2.61	2.80	0.137
It is easier to find information about Malawi on the internet	2.72	2.95	2.71	3.20	2.58	3.00	0.063
The destination is better connected with intermediaries in the tourism sector (tour operators, airlines, hotel chains, etc.)	2.67	2.91	2.67	3.03	2.58	3.60	0.018*
Malawi is more “unique” (different culture, special events/festivals, local way of life)	3.85	3.75	3.87	3.69	4.19	4.20	0.174
Malawi has more cultural groups and languages	3.61	3.63	3.70	3.54	4.11	3.80	0.126
It is easier to access and use information technology services as a visitor in Malawi	2.74	3.00	2.86	3.29	2.75	3.00	0.111
Malawi offers greater personal security (fewer robberies, less harassment, etc.) and is more peaceful	3.26	3.25	3.06	3.20	3.06	4.20	0.220
Malawi is more stable politically	2.75	2.87	2.43	2.77	2.25	2.60	0.045*
Malawi has more preserved nature and beautiful scenery	3.67	3.49	3.80	3.80	4.06	3.80	0.071
Malawi has better food variety and quality	2.92	2.87	2.56	3.03	2.83	3.20	0.254
Malawi is cheaper for holidays	3.51	3.45	3.57	3.97	3.53	4.20	0.159

Malawi is less crowded with tourists	4.26	4.01	4.41	4.29	4.33	4.60	0.029*
Service providers in Malawi are more willing to help visitors with their vacation (ease of making reservation, foreign exchange facilities, foreign language help, etc.)	4.08	4.20	4.19	4.26	4.25	4.40	0.873
Malawi offers more opportunities for adventure and recreational activities (hiking, swimming, diving, snorkelling, biking, sailing, etc.)	2.90	2.93	2.61	3.17	2.64	2.80	0.050
Malawi has more sufficient signage and better quality directions/information tourists	2.56	2.67	2.31	2.60	2.14	2.80	0.021*
There is less threat of disease while travelling in Malawi	2.34	2.45	2.14	2.49	1.81	2.60	0.025*
Malawi has better health and medical facilities for tourists	2.36	2.33	1.86	2.40	2.03	2.20	0.014*
Aggregate	**3.21**	**3.27**	**3.09**	**3.30**	**3.15**	**3.56**	

* Significant at the 0.05 level, **Significant at the 0.001 level.

4.3.4 Comparisons against SSA region destinations

As already mentioned, the SSA destinations-of-comparison were classified into two categories: those that compared Malawi against low-ranking SSA destinations and those that compared Malawi against South Africa, the only destination that had an average score of at least 4 on the TTCI in the SSA region. First, a comparison was made between the two sub-categories, and then, comparisons are made among the rest of the low-ranking SSA destinations. The results showed that on 13 destination attributes Malawi was perceived better by those who assessed against it to South Africa, compared to those who did their assessments against the rest of the destinations in the SSA region (Table 4.7). These attributes included friendliness of the residents, courtesy of tourism service employees, cultural uniqueness, price competitiveness, personal security, and tourist crowding. On the other hand, respondents who compared Malawi to low-ranking SSA destinations perceived Malawi better on a set of 13 attributes as compared to those who assessed Malawi against South Africa. These attributes included general infrastructure, accommodation facilities, accessibility from the country of origin, availability of information online, and the threat of disease while travelling in the country. South Africa is a far more developed country in terms of general infrastructure, transport, and accessibility in the sub-Saharan region (Giampiccoli, Lee, & Nauright, 2015) - and this possibly explains why Malawi was rated poorly against it in the said attributes.

Table 4. 7. Comparison against South Africa and other SSA region destinations

Destination attributes	Low-ranking SSA N = 386 Mean	South Africa N = 88 Mean	*t*-value	*p*-value
Malawians are more welcoming and friendly	4.30	4.60	-3.91	0.000**
Malawi has a more pleasant climate	3.86	4.00	-1.70	0.089
Malawi has more open visa regulations and regulations for tourists	3.19	3.19	-0.06	0.955
Malawi has a greater level of general infrastructure (roads, airport, transport, telecommunications, etc.)	2.71	2.47	2.12	0.035*
Malawi has better accommodation facilities (quality, quantity, design of facilities, etc.)	2.82	2.81	0.13	0.895

Malawi offers more hospitable services (courteous and helpful staff, etc.)	4.04	4.31	-2.61	0.009**
Malawi offers a better African experience (safari, sunrises/sunsets, terrain/landscapes, etc.)	3.39	3.72	-2.85	0.005**
Malawi has better national parks and wildlife reserves	3.02	3.07	-0.38	0.703
Malawi is more accessible (numerous flights from country, near home)	2.55	2.42	1.14	0.253
Malawi has better environmental conditions (unspoiled and undamaged environment)	3.14	3.31	-1.40	0.162
Major has a more diverse range of tourist attractions and resources for its small size	3.39	3.39	0.46	0.648
Malawi is smaller and easier to cover within a short time	3.88	3.93	-0.61	0.542
The websites of service providers in Malawi offer better information	3.00	2.72	2.73	0.007**
It is easier to find information about Malawi on the internet	3.01	2.80	2.05	0.040*
The destination is better connected with intermediaries in the tourism sector (tour operators, airlines, hotel chains, etc.)	2.94	2.75	2.07	0.039*
Malawi is more "unique" (different culture, special events/festivals, local way of life)	3.61	3.82	-2.09	0.038*
Malawi has more cultural groups and languages	3.33	3.32	0.128	0.898
It is easier to access and use information technology services as a visitor in Malawi	3.07	2.88	1.81	0.070
Malawi offers greater personal security (fewer robberies, less harassment, etc.) and is more peaceful	4.01	4.22	-2.12	0.034*
Malawi is more stable politically	3.18	3.18	0.08	0.937
Malawi has more preserved nature and beautiful scenery	3.39	3.52	-1.19	0.233
Malawi has better food variety and quality	3.10	2.85	2.22	0.027*
Malawi is cheaper for holidays	3.72	3.80	-0.70	0.484
Malawi is less crowded with tourists	4.10	4.24	-1.42	0.155
Service providers in Malawi are more willing to help visitors with their vacation (ease of making reservation, foreign exchange facilities, foreign language help, etc.)	3.94	4.10	-1.55	0.122
Malawi offers more opportunities for adventure and recreational activities (hiking, swimming, diving, snorkelling, biking, sailing, etc.)	3.05	2.93	1.13	0.258
Malawi has more sufficient signage and better quality directions/information tourists	2.84	2.74	0.96	0.338
There is less threat of disease while travelling in Malawi	2.96	2.76	1.81	0.071
Malawi has better health and medical facilities for tourists	2.74	2.52	2.23	0.026*

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$

Conversely, South Africa has gained a negative image as an unsafe holiday destination (George & Booyens, 2014; Musavengane, Siakwah, & Leonard, 2020) owing to instances of violence and resentment aimed at foreigners in recent years (Mario Matsinhe, 2011; Tella & Ogunnubi, 2014). This, perhaps, explains why the destination was found to be less competitive regarding the friendliness of residents and personal security attributes as compared to the rest of the SSA destinations. The two groups of respondents perceived Malawi equally on three attributes: 'visa regulations and requirements', 'political stability', and 'tourism resource

diversity'. An independent samples *t*-test revealed statistically significant differences in perceptions on 11 of the 29 destination attributes.

To obtain a more granular understanding of the relative standing of Malawi against the other destinations in the SSA region, computations were made for the ratings of perceived destination competitiveness attributes for each destination-of-comparison. Table 4.8 shows the relative standing of Malawi against Zambia, Tanzania and Kenya, Botswana and Namibia, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, and Uganda and Rwanda. The destinations were paired based on their geographical proximity and, thus, their probable natural and cultural resource similarity.

Malawi was perceived as most competitive on destination attributes regarding residents' friendliness, the courtesy of service employees, and the perception of personal safety among tourists. The destination was perceived as least competitive on accessibility and general infrastructure. As mentioned earlier, Malawi considers its friendly/welcoming residents as a unique selling proposition in its tourism marketing and branding initiatives with the slogan "The Warm Heart of Africa" (Avraham & Ketter, 2017). The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (WEF, 2019) ranked Malawi higher than all the eight destinations on the Safety and Security aspect under the Enabling Environment pillar of the TTCI. On tourist service infrastructure (accommodation facilities), Malawi is perceived to be less competitive against seven of the destinations and at par with Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

Aggregate comparison scores were computed for each of the 9 destinations-of-comparison (Table 4.8) and the following is how the destinations ranked from the most competitive to the least competitive against Malawi: Botswana, Namibia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Rwanda, Zambia, and Mozambique. An aggregate score was also computed to rank the destinations using overall scores from three previous editions of the TTCI. Namibia was ranked as the most competitive, Tanzania as the fourth most competitive and Mozambique placed last. Although the TTCI uses more indicators to derive its overall scores unlike the 29

used in the current study, there is a similarity between the results of the current study and the TTCI rankings. This lends credence to using the demand approach in understanding destination competitiveness, especially considering the commonly held view that tourists are less capable of evaluating a destination's competitiveness considering that they do not stay long in a destination (Omerzel, 2006; Reisinger, Michael, & Hayes, 2019). Based on this and other findings in the PLS-based multi-group analysis, the implications for adopting the demand-side perspective will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Furthermore, an aggregate comparison score was computed for each of the 29 destination attributes. Figure 4.1 presents a graphical illustration of the results. As stated earlier, mean scores below 3 indicated that Malawi was perceived in less competitive terms against the competitor on the attribute under consideration. Drawing on the work of Yüksel and Yüksel (2001), the range between 3 and 3.31 was considered the level at which Malawi's performance was the same as the other destination. Scores above 3.31 indicated that Malawi performed better than the other destination. The results show that it is only on 9 attributes that Malawi was perceived to perform better than the rest of the destinations in the category. These attributes include friendliness of the residents, climate, cultural uniqueness, personal security and safety, the hospitality of service providers, and price competitiveness.

The visa requirements and regulations attribute was perceived better over Mozambique and similar in performance to the rest of the destinations. Malawi was perceived as similar to Tanzania in terms of the diversity of its tourism resources, but better than the rest of the destinations on the same. On the quality of the information provided on tourism business websites, Malawi was rated at the same level as Kenya, Mozambique, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, but performed poorly against Botswana, Namibia, and Tanzania.

Table 4. 8. Malawi's relative standing against the top 8 destinations of comparison (N=409)

Attributes	ZAMBIA Mean	MOZAMBIQUE & ZIMBABWE Mean	TANZANIA & KENYA Mean	BOTSWANA & NAMIBIA Mean	UGANDA & RWANDA Mean
Malawians are more welcoming and friendly	4.47	4.39	4.29	4.18	4.10
Malawi has a more pleasant climate	3.99	3.95	3.88	3.55	3.90
Malawi has more open visa regulations and requirements for tourists	3.32	3.40	3.04	3.08	3.00
Malawi has a greater level of general infrastructure (roads, airport, transport, telecommunications, etc.)	2.76	2.98	2.58	2.54	2.52
Malawi has better accommodation facilities (quality, quantity, design of facilities, etc.)	2.95	3.04	2.64	2.68	2.74
Malawi offers more hospitable services (courteous and helpful staff, etc.)	4.15	4.21	3.99	3.87	4.03
Malawi offers a better African experience (safari, sunrises/sunsets, terrain/landscapes, etc.)	3.65	3.56	3.12	3.15	3.61
Malawi has better national parks and wildlife reserves	3.13	3.28	3.32	2.71	3.19
Malawi is more accessible (numerous flights from country, near home)	2.87	2.81	2.33	2.32	2.16
Malawi has better environmental conditions (unspoiled and undamaged environment)	3.18	3.33	3.12	2.97	3.35
Major has a more diverse range of tourist attractions and resources for its small size	3.45	3.60	3.32	3.40	3.13
Malawi is smaller and easier to cover within a short time	4.04	4.02	4.01	3.68	3.90
The websites of service providers in Malawi offer better information	3.05	3.23	3.00	2.78	3.10
It is easier to find information about Malawi on the internet	3.16	3.25	2.94	2.82	3.06
The destination is better connected with intermediaries in the tourism sector (tour operators, airlines, hotel chains, etc.)	3.01	3.12	2.83	2.77	2.97
Malawi is more "unique" (different culture, special events/festivals, local way of life)	3.82	3.65	3.60	3.55	3.68
Malawi has more cultural groups and languages	3.48	3.33	3.32	3.26	3.26
It is easier to access and use information technology services as a visitor in Malawi	3.20	3.12	3.05	2.85	3.06
Malawi offers greater personal security (fewer robberies, etc.) and is more peaceful	3.98	3.96	4.18	4.00	4.00
Malawi is more stable politically	2.99	3.58	3.21	3.12	3.23
Malawi has more preserved nature and beautiful scenery	3.44	3.49	3.45	3.14	3.39
Malawi has better food variety and quality	3.21	3.18	3.06	2.96	3.19
Malawi is cheaper for holidays	3.81	3.49	3.73	3.90	3.68
Malawi is less crowded with tourists	4.11	3.96	4.26	4.15	4.13
Service providers in Malawi are more willing to help visitors with their vacation (ease of making reservation, foreign					

exchange facilities, foreign language help, etc.)	4.11	4.11	3.88	3.71	4.00
Malawi offers more opportunities for adventure and recreational activities (hiking, swimming, diving, snorkelling, biking, sailing, etc.)	3.15	3.35	3.00	2.88	2.77
Malawi has more sufficient signage and better quality directions/information tourists	2.89	2.98	2.92	2.64	2.71
There is less threat of disease while travelling in Malawi	3.01	3.07	2.95	2.81	2.90
Malawi has better health and medical facilities	2.76	2.96	2.70	2.54	2.68

On the national parks and wildlife reserves attribute, the destination was perceived slightly better than Mozambique, similar to Zambia, but lower than the rest of the destinations. Even though there have been successful efforts to restock and revamp wildlife reserves in Malawi in recent years (Lindsey et al., 2017), the country is not known for safari travel in the southeast African region; thus the findings can be said to reflect the reality on the ground. Perceived accessibility, the sufficiency of tourist signage/information and directions for travellers, the threat of disease while at the destination, and health and medical facilities for tourists were all rated poorly regardless of the destination-of-comparison.

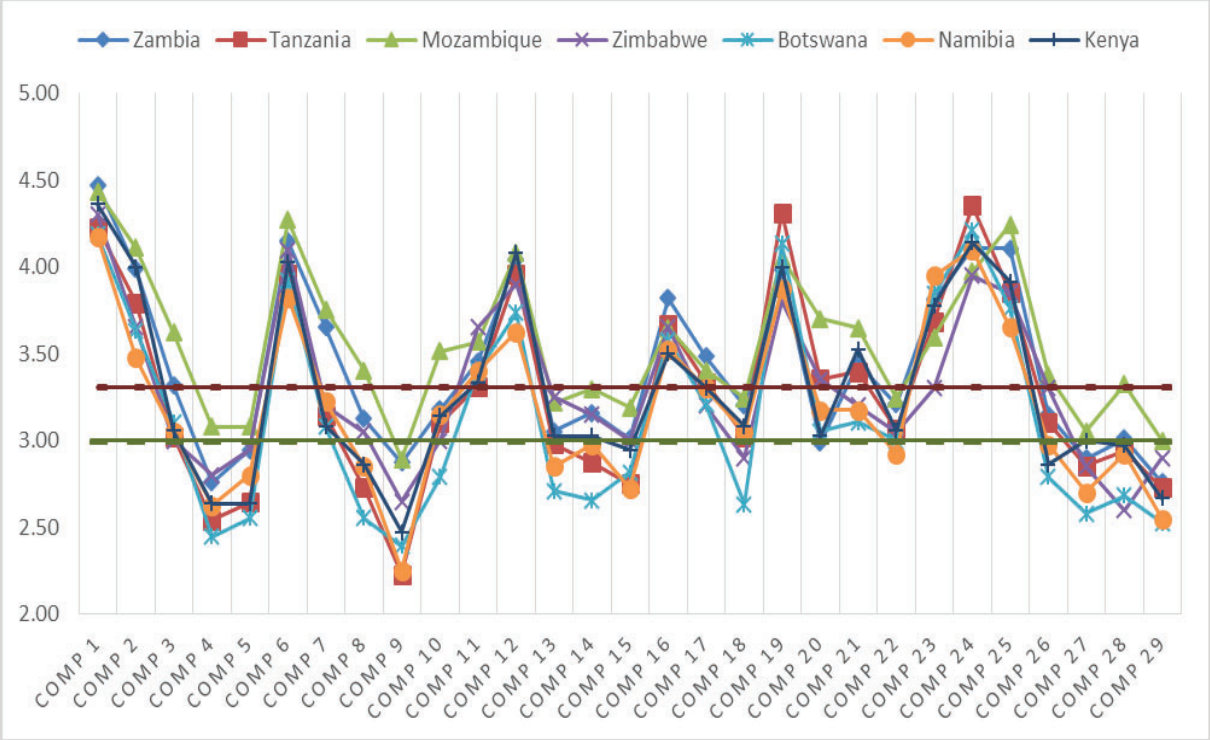

Figure 4. 1. Malawi's competitiveness against low-ranking SSA destinations

It was also necessary to benchmark Malawi against "best practice" destinations by using Malawi's standing against low-ranking destinations in the SSA region. Thus, the ratings against low-ranking SSA destinations were compared to ratings against highly-ranked allocentric destinations, including South Africa and other high-ranking allocentric destinations outside the SSA region (Table 4.9).

Table 4. 9. Independent samples t-test results between low-ranking SSA destinations and highly-ranked allocentric destinations

Destination attributes	Low-ranking SSA Mean	SD	Highly-ranked Allocentric Mean	SD	*t*-value	*p*-value
Malawians are more welcoming and friendly	4.30	0.80	4.46	0.72	2.18	0.030
Malawi has a more pleasant climate	3.86	0.79	3.94	0.82	1.00	0.316
Malawi has more open visa regulations and regulations for tourists	3.19	0.98	3.19	1.08	0.08	0.934
Malawi has a greater level of general infrastructure (roads, airport, transport, telecommunications, etc.)	2.71	0.99	2.39	1.00	-3.33	0.001
Malawi has better accommodation facilities (quality, quantity, design of facilities, etc.)	2.82	0.91	2.68	0.98	-1.57	0.118

Malawi offers more hospitable services (courteous and helpful staff, etc.)	4.04	0.86	4.24	0.88	2.46	0.014
Malawi offers a better African experience (safari, sunrises/sunsets, terrain/landscapes, etc.)	3.39	0.99	3.81	0.92	4.56	0.000
Malawi has better national parks and wildlife reserves	3.02	1.00	3.30	1.00	2.89	0.004
Malawi is more accessible (numerous flights from country, near home)	2.55	0.97	2.44	0.94	-1.12	0.263
Malawi has better environmental conditions (unspoiled and undamaged environment)	3.14	1.01	3.29	1.04	1.54	0.125
Malawi has a more diverse range of tourist attractions and resources for its small size	3.39	0.92	3.24	.00	-1.59	0.113
Malawi is smaller and easier to cover within a short time	3.89	0.88	3.76	0.93	-1.54	0.124
The websites of service providers in Malawi offer better information	3.00	0.90	2.72	0.94	-3.16	0.002
It is easier to find information about Malawi on the internet	3.01	0.90	2.77	0.97	-2.79	0.005
The destination is better connected with intermediaries in the tourism sector (tour operators, airlines, hotel chains, etc.)	2.94	0.87	2.72	0.81	-2.73	0.007
Malawi is more “unique” (different culture, special events/festivals, local way of life)	3.61	0.87	3.83	0.92	2.66	0.008
Malawi has more cultural groups and languages	3.33	0.89	3.44	1.02	1.18	0.240
It is easier to access and use information technology services as a visitor in Malawi	3.07	0.91	2.82	1.00	-2.78	0.006
Malawi offers greater personal security (fewer robberies, less harassment, etc.) and is more peaceful	4.01	0.83	3.83	1.06	-2.10	0.036
Malawi is more stable politically	3.18	1.06	3.01	1.14	-1.65	0.099
Malawi has more preserved nature and beautiful scenery	3.39	0.97	3.58	0.95	2.12	0.035
Malawi has better food variety and quality	3.10	0.96	2.88	0.98	-2.39	0.017
Malawi is cheaper for holidays	3.72	0.93	3.68	1.01	-0.49	0.624
Malawi is less crowded with tourists	4.10	0.80	4.25	0.79	1.88	0.061
Service providers in Malawi are more willing to help visitors with their vacation (ease of making reservation, foreign exchange facilities, foreign language help, etc.)	3.94	0.86	4.09	0.88	1.80	0.072
Malawi offers more opportunities for adventure and recreational activities (hiking, swimming, diving, snorkelling, biking, sailing, etc.)	3.05	0.88	2.92	0.88	-1.53	0.127
Malawi has more sufficient signage and better quality directions/information tourists	2.84	0.90	2.66	0.89	-2.02	0.044
There is less threat of disease while travelling in Malawi	2.96	0.91	2.59	0.97	-408	0.000
Malawi has better health and medical facilities for tourists	2.74	0.79	2.46	0.96	-3.44	0.001

Independent samples t-tests established 16 statistically significant differences in perceptions between the two groups of respondents. The 16 attributes include hospitality (of the residents and tourism service employees), uniqueness of culture, and the natural environment (wildlife and national parks, and beautiful scenery) on which respondents who

assessed Malawi against outside-SSA destinations perceived it more favourably than those who assessed it to destinations in the region. Also included are attributes related to created resources (general infrastructure, informational availability online, access to ICT services while in the destination, tourist signage, the threat of disease while in the destination, etc.) on which those visiting the SSA region for the first time perceived Malawi poorly than those returning to the region. To draw comparisons with "best-practice" destinations, a scatter graph (Figure 4.2) was plotted using the perceived destination competitiveness ratings for SSA destinations and highly-ranked allocentric destinations on the x- and y-axes respectively. The cross-hair point of the grid was determined by the mean values averaged for all attributes for each of the samples as recommended by Ryan and Cessford (2003) and Taplin (2012). Further, an iso-performing line was introduced to indicate all data points where attributes were rated equally against the two categories of destinations, dividing the graph into six zones. This method of analysis was adapted from Abreu-Novais (2018) who compared competitiveness ratings between demand-side and supply-side perspectives.

Zone I: 'Revive and enhance but focus on close competitors': Destination attributes that fall in this zone are rated poorly by both groups but are rated slightly better against the "best practice" destinations. No destination attributes fell in this zone in the current study. Of interest, though, is the 'visa requirements and regulations' attribute which fell on the iso-performing line. The destination was equally perceived to be performing at the same level as the competitor destinations by the two groups. Thus, there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups as per the independent samples t-test computed.

Zone II: 'Aim to operate at par or above close competitors': There are two attributes in this zone: 'national parks and wildlife reserves' and 'environmental conditions'. These attributes are rated better when compared to "best practice" destinations, but perceived to be just at or below par when compared to SSA region low-ranking destinations. A statistically

significant difference was established on the first attribute while none was observed on the second one.

Zone III: ‘Enhance, promote but keep close competitors in check’: There are 9 attributes in this zone: ‘friendly and welcoming residents’, ‘helpful service providers’, ‘preserved nature and scenery’, ‘cultural uniqueness’, ‘African and wild experience’, ‘hospitable services’, ‘climate’, ‘tourist crowding’, and ‘cultural diversity’. They were all perceived as better by both groups of respondents but were are relatively rated better when compared to “best practice” destinations than to close competitor destinations. The independent samples t-test revealed statistical differences in perceptions of the first five attributes.

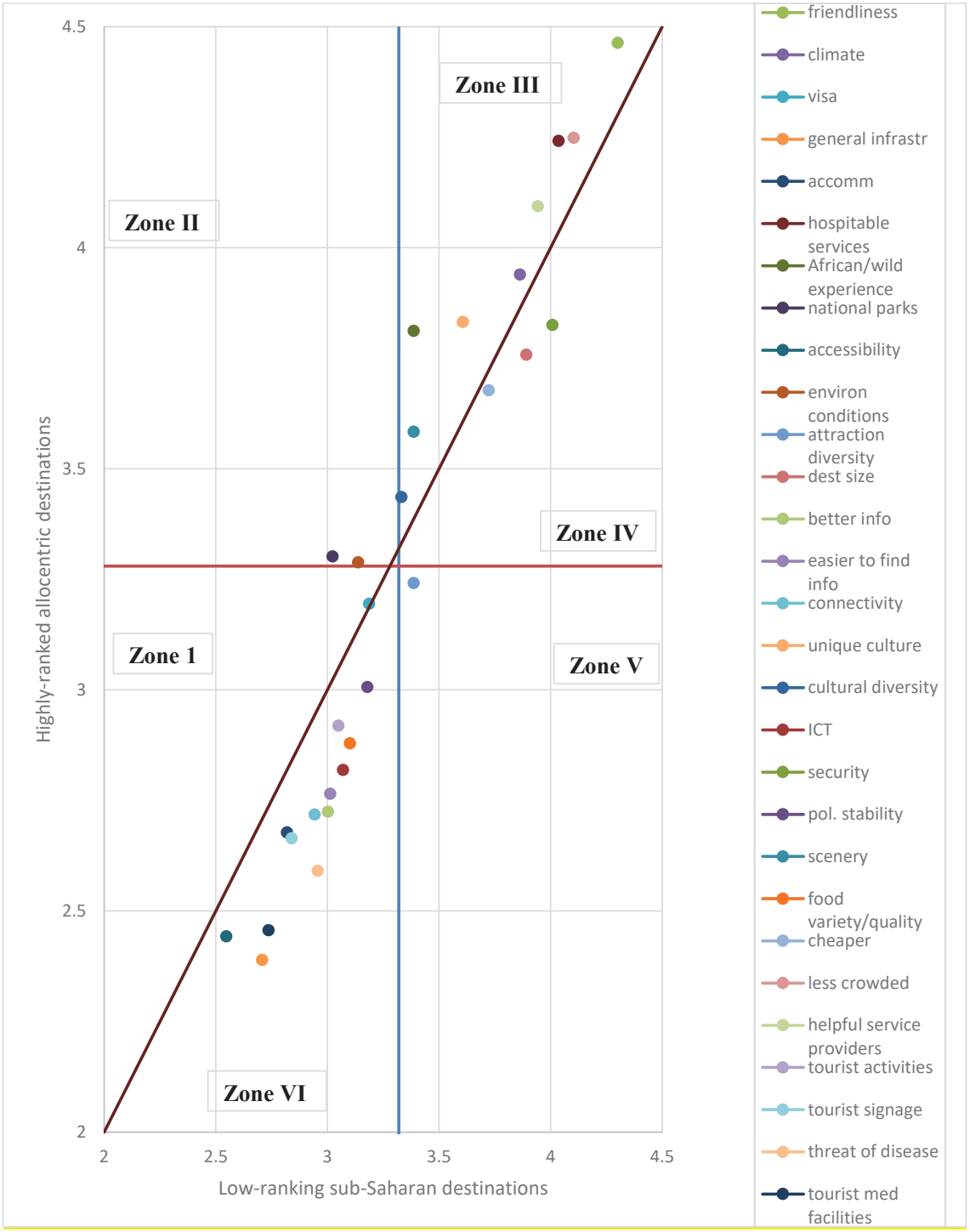

Figure 4. 2. Close competitor versus "best practice" destination analysis

Zone IV: 'Maintain, promote but aspire for "best practice"': Three attributes fall into this zone: 'price competitiveness', 'size of the destination', and 'peace and personal security'.

Like the attributes in the previous zone, these attributes were rated favourably by both groups. However, the destination was rated less competitive on these attributes when compared to "best practice" destinations than when compared to low-ranking SSA destinations. The t-tests revealed significant differences in perception of the 'peace and personal security' attribute. This probably suggests that tourists who have not visited another sub-Saharan Africa destination before their visit to Malawi did not appreciate the peace and personal security that Malawi purportedly offers as a travel destination unlike tourists returning to the region.

Zone V: 'Enhance, promote but aspire for "best practice": One attribute falls into this zone: 'tourism resources diversity'. Here, attributes were rated favourably when compared against "best practice" destinations but perceived as below par against low-ranking SSA destinations. This suggests that while those returning to the region found Malawi's tourism resources/attractions more diverse as compared to other destinations in the region, first-time visitors to the region did not find this to be the case. The independent samples t-test, however, did not establish a statistically significant difference between the two groups.

Zone VI: 'Revive and enhance, focus on close-competitors but aspire for "best practice"': Thirteen attributes fall into this zone: 'accommodation variety/quality', 'accessibility', 'political stability', 'tourist activities and programs', 'food variety/quality', 'accessibility of ICT services', 'information availability online', 'service provider website quality', 'intermediary connectedness', 'tourist information and signage', 'general infrastructure', 'threat of disease', and 'medical facilities for tourists'. Attributes in this zone were perceived poorly by respondents in both samples but were rated relatively higher against SSA destinations than they are against "best practice" destinations. The last 9 of the 13 attributes were far away from the iso-performance line, which indicates that there were wide discrepancies in ratings between the two sub-samples. This was validated by the independent samples t-test. This zone, therefore, requires the destination authorities' utmost attention

because it would be difficult for the destination to aspire to operate in line with "best practice" destinations when it cannot perform at par with close competitors in the region, considering that attributes such as accessibility, information availability and political stability greatly influence destination choice (Ahn, Ekinci, & Li, 2013; Karl, Reintinger, & Schmude, 2015).

4.4 Main analysis II (a): Structural equation analysis (SSA sample, n = 474)

4.4.1 Principal component analysis of the perceived destination competitiveness construct

Principal component analysis with varimax rotation was undertaken on items derive the underlying components. As mentioned earlier, a principal component analysis was done at the pilot study stage and this resulted in the identification of certain items for deletion. Due to the nature of the study, the items were retained in the main study. This is because other than the modelling aspect, the study also focused on competitive analysis where such items have been used as demonstrated earlier in this chapter. Furthermore, the destinations of comparison identified in the pilot study were fewer as compared to those identified in the main study. Given the foregoing, the principal component analysis was conducted again after the main study.

A factor loading threshold of at least 0.4 was used to retain items in a factor (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was 0.846 and Bartlett's test of sphericity (χ^2 (300) = 5290.16, $p < .001$). Thus, the principal component analysis was considered appropriate for item reduction. A six-factor solution that jointly accounted for 63.9% of the total variance was derived: Created Resources, Inherited Resources, Connectivity and Information Availability, Hospitality and Climate, Qualifying and Amplifying Determinants, and Topography. It is interesting to note that the Created Resource dimension comprised destination attributes provided by both the private and public sectors. This echoes the finding of Wilde et al. (2017) who observed that tourists did not differentiate attributes provided by the public sector from those provided by private sector players.

Created Resources explained the highest proportion of the total variance (24.7%), followed by Inherited Resources (13.3%), Connectivity and Information Availability (8.6%), Hospitality and Climate (6.7%), Qualifying and Amplifying determinants (5.7%) and Topography (4.7%). Except for the Topography factor, all the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were above 0.7. Nunnally (1978) propose a Cronbach's alpha threshold of 0.7. Hair et al. (2006), however, submit that a factor having Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.6 can still be retained. One item ('Malawi has better food variety and quality') was deleted for cross-loading. Another item ('Malawi has more open visa regulations and requirements for tourists') loaded as the only item on a factor and was hence deleted. Two items ('Malawi is more stable politically' and 'Malawi offers more opportunities for adventure and recreational activities such as hiking, swimming, diving, snorkelling, biking, sailing, etc.') were deleted due to low factor loadings. Table 4.10 presents the results of the principal component analysis.

Table 4. 10. Principal component analysis results of the perceived destination competitiveness construct

Attributes	Communality	Factor loading	Cronbach's alpha
Created Resources (Grand mean: 2.74)			0.82
Malawi has a greater level of general infrastructure (roads, airport, transport, telecommunications, etc.)	0.64	0.79	
Malawi has better accommodation facilities (quality, quantity, design of facilities, etc.)	0.56	0.66	
Malawi is more accessible (numerous flights from country, near home)	0.51	0.56	
Malawi has more sufficient signage and better quality directions/information for tourists	0.54	0.66	
Malawi has better health & medical facilities for tourists	0.63	0.78	
There is less of threat of disease while travelling in Malawi	0.44	0.63	
Inherited Resources (Grand mean: 3.34)			0.80
Malawi has better national parks and wildlife reserves	0.64	0.63	
Malawi offers a better African experience (sunrises/sunsets, terrain/landscape, etc.)	0.55	0.70	
Malawi has more preserved nature and beautiful scenery	0.61	0.72	
Malawi's culture is more "unique" (different culture, special events/festivals, local way of life)	0.64	0.76	
Malawi has better environmental conditions (unspoiled and undamaged environment)	0.53	0.64	
Malawi has more cultural groups and languages	0.49	0.57	
Connectivity and Information Availability (Grand mean: 2.99)			0.88

The websites of tourism service providers in Malawi offer better information	0.43	0.57	
It is easier to access and use information technology services as a visitor in Malawi	0.83	0.89	
It is easier to find information about Malawi on the internet	0.77	0.85	
The destination is better connected with intermediaries in the tourism sector (tour operators, airlines, hotel chains, etc.)	0.82	0.87	
Hospitality and Climate (Grand mean: 4.11)			0.84
Malawi offers more hospitable services (courteous and helpful staff, etc.)	0.55	0.62	
Malawians are more welcoming and friendly	0.82	0.89	
Service providers are more willing to help visitors enjoy their vacation (ease of making reservation, foreign exchange facilities; foreign language help, etc.)	0.78	0.85	
Malawi has a more pleasant climate	0.44	0.58	
Qualifying and Amplifying determinants (Grand mean: 4.01)			0.72
Malawi is less crowded with tourists	0.88	0.92	
Malawi offers greater personal security (fewer robberies, etc.) and is more peaceful	0.80	0.89	
Malawi is cheaper for holidays	0.55	0.69	
Topography (Grand mean: 3.64)			0.67
Major has a more diverse range of tourist attractions and resources for its small size	0.76	0.81	
Malawi is smaller and easier to cover within a short time	0.74	0.80	

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure = 0.846; Bartlett's test = 5290.16 ($p < 0.001$); total variance explained = 63.9%.

4.4.2 Principal component analysis for the tourist-based destination brand equity construct

Considering that the brand trust and brand commitment dimensions have just been integrated into the destination brand equity model, the model had to be validated. Thus, the data set was randomly split into two subsamples. A principal component analysis with varimax rotation was utilized to identify underlying components using the first subsample (n = 238). Items with factor loadings of at least 0.4 were retained for further analysis since this cut-off point is widely used to consider a variable as significant (Comrey & Lee, 1992). A threshold value of at least 1.0 was adopted for the eigenvalues of the factor solution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). A minimum cut-off point of 0.4 was set for communalities (Pituch & Stevens, 2015). The KMO value was 0.882, with Bartlett's test of sphericity being statistically significant, χ^2

(210) = 2360.88, p < .001. Thus, the principal component analysis was considered appropriate for item reduction.

Five dimensions as proposed in the tourist-based destination brand equity model were extracted. The five dimensions jointly accounted for 64.9% of the total variance: brand commitment (34.66%), brand trust (11.69%), brand image (7.86%), brand quality (5.56%), and brand awareness (5.12%). The dimensions had the following number of items: brand commitment: 5 items; brand trust: 5 items; brand image: 4 items; brand awareness: 4 items, and brand quality: 3 items. Cronbach's alpha scores were all above 0.6 (Hair et al., 2006), demonstrating the internal consistency of the dimensions. The results from the principal component analysis have been summarised in Table 4.11.

Table 4. 11. Principal component analysis results of tourist-based destination brand equity (n = 238)

Factors	Communality	Factor loading	Cronbach's alpha
Brand awareness (eigenvalue: 1.08, % of variance = 5.12)			0.72
The trip enabled me to know more about Malawi's people and their ways of life	0.53	0.64	
The trip increased my knowledge of Malawi's tourist attractions	0.63	0.72	
If I ever think of visiting southern Africa again, Malawi will easily come to mind	0.57	0.56	
Overall, I know Malawi better now than I did before	0.61	0.77	
Brand quality (eigenvalue: 1.17, % of variance = 5.56)			0.84
Malawi provides tourism offerings of consistent quality	0.79	0.80	
Malawi provides quality tourism experiences	0.66	0.67	
I can expect superior performance from Malawi's tourism offerings	0.74	0.79	
Brand image (eigenvalue: 1.65, % of variance = 7.86)			0.78
My friends will think highly of me because I visited Malawi	0.56	0.64	
Image of Malawi as a destination is consistent with my self-image	0.54	0.59	
Visiting Malawi reflects who I am as a person	0.75	0.83	
I feel proud that I have visited Malawi	0.68	0.72	
Brand trust (eigenvalue: 2.46, % of variance = 11.69)			0.83
I could rely on service providers in Malawi to solve any problems with the trip	0.59	0.69	
Service providers in Malawi were honest and sincere in addressing my concerns	0.78	0.84	
I feel confident that Malawi is a good tourist destination	0.64	0.69	
Service providers in Malawi are fair in their dealings with travellers	0.67	0.76	
Service providers in Malawi would compensate me in some way in case of a service failure	0.48	0.51	
Brand commitment (eigenvalue: 7.28, % of variance = 34.66)			0.86
Malawi felt like a second home to me	0.70	0.76	
I will tell my friends and family that Malawi is worth visiting	0.58	0.61	

I am willing to contribute resources (money/time) to social causes in Malawi	0.57	0.63
Malawi has a great deal of personal meaning to me	0.77	0.84
I have a sense of belonging to this destination	0.81	0.84

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure = 0.882; Bartlett's test = 2360.88 ($p < .000$); total variance explained = 64.9%.

Subsequently, the five-factor solution obtained in the PCA was confirmed by PLS factorial analysis applied to the hold-out sample (n = 236). The PLS factorial analysis method is similar to confirmatory factor analysis in covariance-based SEM. Table 4.12 displays the results of the PLS factorial analysis. The Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values were all above the 0.7 threshold required for the measures, thereby demonstrating the internal consistency of the constructs (Nunnally, 1978). Except for one item under the brand awareness construct, all the factor loadings were above 0.7. Items with factor loadings less than 0.7 can still be retained if they do not negatively affect the psychometric characteristics of the construct under which they are (Rasoolimanesh, Ringle, Jaafar, & Ramayah, 2017). Given that the average variance extracted (AVE) and the composite reliability (CR) values for the brand awareness construct exceeded the 0.5 and 0.7 thresholds respectively (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 1998), the item was retained for further analysis.

Table 4. 12. PLS factorial analysis of tourist-based destination brand equity (n = 236)

Latent constructs and items	Factor loading	SD	*t-value*	Cronbach's alpha	AVE (CR)
Brand awareness				0.71	0.53 (0.82)
The trip enabled me to know more about Malawi's people and their ways of life	0.62	0.06	9.67		
The trip increased my knowledge of Malawi's tourist attractions	0.81	0.02	43.76		
If I ever think of visiting southern Africa again, Malawi will easily come to my mind	0.79	0.03	29.28		
Overall, I know Malawi better now than I did before	0.70	0.04	19.57		
Brand quality				0.82	0.73 (0.89)
Malawi provides tourism offerings of consistent quality	0.88	0.01	75.06		
Malawi provides quality tourism experiences	0.86	0.01	66.38		
I can expect superior performance from Malawi's tourism offerings	0.85	0.02	38.37		
Brand image				0.76	0.59 (0.85)
My friends will think highly of me because I visited Malawi	0.75	0.03	29.47		
Image of Malawi as a destination is consistent with my self-image	0.70	0.04	18.69		
Visiting Malawi reflects who I am as a person	0.83	0.02	52.81		

I feel proud that I have visited Malawi	0.80	0.02	41.98		
Brand trust				0.84	0.61
I could rely on service providers in Malawi to solve any problems with the trip	0.78	0.02	33.58		(0.87)
Service providers in Malawi were honest and sincere in addressing my concerns	0.83	0.02	49.02		
I feel confident that Malawi is a good tourist destination	0.73	0.02	31.58		
Service providers in Malawi are fair in their dealings with travellers	0.78	0.02	45.02		
Service providers in Malawi would compensate me in some way in case of a service failure	0.70	0.03	22.21		
Brand commitment				0.87	0.66
Malawi felt like a second home to me	0.85	0.02	47.71		(0.90)
I will tell my friends and family that Malawi is worth visiting	0.70	0.03	27.44		
I am willing to contribute resources (money/time) to social causes in Malawi	0.72	0.03	22.96		
Malawi has a great deal of personal meaning to me	0.87	0.02	59.63		
I have a sense of belonging to this destination	0.87	0.02	53.30		

Furthermore, the discriminant validity of the model was assessed using the Fornell and Larcker and the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) approaches. As shown in Table 4.13, the square roots of the AVE values for the latent constructs exceeded the correlations of the variable at hand and any of the variables in the model (Fornell & Larcker, 1981a). Again, the HTMT values were less than 0.85 (Henseler, Hubona, & Ray, 2016), demonstrating the discriminant validity of the model. The loadings for all the items on their constructs were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

Table 4. 13. Discriminant validity: Fornell and Larcker and HTMT methods.

	BA	BQ	BI	BT	BC
BA	**0.71**				
BQ	0.43 [0.47]	**0.79**			
BI	0.48 [0.52]	0.44 [0.47]	**0.71**		
BT	0.36 [0.50]	0.69 [0.75]	0.51 [0.55]	**0.73**	
BC	0.44 [0.46]	0.36 [0.41]	0.62 [0.70]	0.38 [0.50]	**0.77**

BA: Brand awareness, BQ: Brand perceived quality, BI: Brand image, BT: Brand trust, BC: Brand commitment. The diagonal scores (in bold) are the square roots of the AVEs for the respective latent constructs. The non-diagonal values are the correlations between the respective latent constructs. HTMT ratios are in the parentheses.

4.4.3 Evaluation of the overall measurement model (n = 474)

The overall measurement model was assessed using SmartPLS 3. The loadings, reliability, discriminant and convergent validity of the latent constructs in the model were assessed. Except for the Topography construct, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were all above the recommended minimum of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978). The outer loadings for the items were above the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2014) except for Comp2, Comp10, BA4, and BT6. Hair et al. (2014) suggest than an indicator can be retained if its factor loading is less than 0.7 but higher than 0.5 so long as the average variance extracted values of the latent construct to which the indicator belongs is above the recommended value of 0.5. The AVE values were all above the recommended value of 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981a); hence, the four stated items were retained for further analysis. Furthermore, all the outer loadings were significant on their latent constructs ($p < 0.000$), providing further evidence of indicator reliability. The smallest composite reliability value was 0.82, which is above the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2006).

Table 4. 14. Factor loadings, reliability, and convergent validity.

Variable and items	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	AVE (CR)
Created Resources		0.81	0.56
Malawi has a greater level of general infrastructure (roads, airport, transport, telecommunications, etc.)	0.77		(0.87)
Malawi has better accommodation facilities (quality, quantity, design of facilities, etc.)	0.77		
Malawi is more accessible (numerous flights from country, near home)	0.72		
Malawi has more sufficient signage and better quality directions/information tourists	0.76		
Malawi has better health and medical facilities for tourists	0.73		
Inherited Resources		0.80	0.55
Malawi offers a better African experience (safari, sunrises/sunsets, terrain/landscapes, etc.)	0.79		(0.86)
Malawi has better national parks and wildlife reserves	0.70		
Malawi has better environmental conditions (unspoiled and undamaged environment)	0.68		
Malawi is more "unique" (different culture, special events/festivals, local way of life)	0.74		
Malawi has more preserved nature and beautiful scenery	0.80		
Hospitality and Climate		0.83	0.67
Malawians are more welcoming and friendly	0.84		(0.89)
Malawi has a more pleasant climate	0.69		

Malawi offers more hospitable services (courteous and helpful staff, etc.)	0.88		
Service providers in Malawi are more willing to help visitors with their vacation (ease of making reservation, foreign exchange facilities, foreign language help, etc.)	0.86		
Connectivity and Information Availability		0.88	0.73
The websites of service providers in Malawi offer better information	0.89		(0.92)
It is easier to find information about Malawi on the internet	0.90		
The destination is better connected with intermediaries in the tourism sector (tour operators, airlines, hotel chains, etc.)	0.76		
It is easier to access and use information technology services as a visitor in Malawi	0.86		
Qualifying Determinants		0.82	0.73
Malawi offers greater personal security (fewer robberies, less harassment, etc.) and is more peaceful	0.89		(0.89)
Malawi is cheaper for holidays	0.77		
Malawi is less crowded with tourists	0.91		
Topography		0.67	0.75
Malawi has a more diverse range of tourist attractions and resources for its small size	0.84		(0.86)
Malawi is smaller and easier to cover within a short time	0.89		
Brand Awareness		0.72	0.54
The trip enabled me to know more about Malawi's people and their ways of life	0.65		(0.82)
The trip increased my knowledge of Malawi's tourist attractions	0.78		
If I ever think of visiting southern Africa again, Malawi will easily come to my mind	0.82		
Overall, I know Malawi better now than I did before	0.66		
Brand Perceived Quality		0.83	0.73
Malawi provides tourism offerings of consistent quality	0.88		(0.90)
Malawi provides quality tourism experiences	0.84		
I can expect superior performance from Malawi's tourism offerings	0.86		
Brand Image		0.77	0.60
My friends will think highly of me because I visited Malawi	0.77		(0.86)
Image of Malawi as a destination is consistent with my self-image	0.73		
Visiting Malawi reflects who I am as a person	0.80		
I feel proud that I have visited Malawi	0.79		
Brand Trust		0.83	0.60
I could rely on service providers in Malawi to solve any problems with the trip	0.77		(0.88)
Service providers in Malawi were honest and sincere in addressing my concerns	0.84		
I feel confident that Malawi is a good tourist destination	0.75		
Service providers in Malawi are fair in their dealings with travellers	0.83		
Service providers in Malawi would compensate me in some way in case of a service failure	0.68		
Brand Commitment		0.86	0.64
Malawi felt like a second home to me	0.86		(0.90)
I will tell my friends and family that Malawi is worth visiting	0.75		
I am willing to contribute resources (money/time) to social causes in Malawi	0.68		
Malawi has a great deal of personal meaning to me	0.84		

I have a sense of belonging to this destination	0.86

4.4.4 Discriminant validity

Two approaches were applied to test discriminant validity (Tables 4.15 and 4.16): the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) and the Fornell and Larcker (1981a) method.

Table 4. 15. Discriminant validity: Fornell and Larcker method

	CrR	IR	HC	CI	QD	BA	BQ	BI	BT	BC
CrR	**0.75**									
IR	0.43	**0.74**								
HC	0.18	0.43	**0.82**							
CI	0.61	0.29	0.18	**0.85**						
QD	0.10	0.25	0.18	-0.03	**0.86**					
BA	0.24	0.36	0.20	0.13	0.27	**0.73**				
BQ	0.56	0.50	0.29	0.35	0.10	0.45	**0.86**			
BI	0.32	0.41	0.31	0.20	0.27	0.39	0.38	**0.77**		
BT	0.52	0.43	0.31	0.32	0.19	0.40	0.61	0.45	**0.78**	
BC	0.22	0.41	0.39	0.15	0.23	0.41	0.35	0.57	0.44	**0.80**

The diagonal scores (in bold) are the square roots of the AVEs for the respective latent constructs. The non-diagonal values are the correlations between the respective latent constructs.

Table 4. 16. Discriminant validity: HTMT method

	CrR	IR	HC	CI	QD	BA	BQ	BI	BT	BC
CrR										
IR	0.43									
HC	0.18	0.53								
CI	0.61	0.35	0.21							
QD	0.10	0.31	0.22	0.07						
BA	0.24	0.45	0.25	0.16	0.36					
BQ	0.56	0.61	0.34	0.41	0.13	0.56				
BI	0.32	0.51	0.38	0.23	0.33	0.51	0.47			
BT	0.52	0.52	0.36	0.38	0.23	0.50	0.73	0.55		

BC	0.22	0.47	0.46	0.17	0.29	0.48	0.41	0.71	0.48

HTMT values between two latent constructs should be less than 0.85 for the two constructs to be considered different (Kline, 2011). Fornell and Larcker's method, on the other hand, states that discriminant validity is established when the square root of average variance extracted value of a latent construct exceeds the correlation of the construct with other constructs. The HTMT test is considered a more robust approach for checking discriminant validity compared to the Fornell and Larcker's approach (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). Based on the results of the two assessment approaches, there were no problems with discriminant validity.

4.4.5 Hypothesis testing

Next, the significance of the path coefficients in the model was examined. The study adopted the non-parametric bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa) bootstrapping approach with 4,999 subsamples. The BCa approach was chosen because of its ability to adjust for bias due to non-normal data distribution and skewness of the distribution (Efron, 1982). Additionally, SmartPLS version 3 guidelines recommend the BCa approach as it is the most stable approach and does not need excessive computation time. As for the subsample size, the figure 4,999 was chosen because it is adequately close to infinity for regular situations, controllable in terms of calculation time, and allows for the unanimous specification of empirical bootstrap confidence intervals (Henseler et al., 2016). Out of the 25 proposed hypotheses, 16 were fully supported (Table 4.17). R^2 coefficients for brand awareness, brand perceived quality, brand image, brand trust, and brand commitment were 0.179, 0.358, 0.231, 0.432, and 0.392 respectively.

After examining the path coefficients, the model was revised and non-significant paths were deleted using the stepwise approach. The standard root mean square residual (SRMR) value was 0.044 in the estimated (revised) model, below the recommended maximum

threshold of 0.08 (Henseler et al., 2015) and indicating a fit of the model to the data. The R^2 coefficients for brand awareness, brand perceived quality, brand image, brand trust and brand commitment for the final model all changed to 0.178, 0.358, 0.228, 0.432 and 0.392, respectively suggesting that the revision of the model did not result in substantial loss of predictive power. R^2 values establish that about 18% of the variance in awareness was explained by the variance in Created Resources, Inherited Resources, and Qualifying and Amplifying Determinants while 36% of the variance in perceived quality was accounted for by the variance in Created Resources, Inherited Resources, Hospitality and Climate, and Connectivity and Information Availability. Twenty-three percent of the variance in value was explained by the variance in Created Resources, Inherited Resources, Hospitality and Climate, and Qualifying and Amplifying Determinants while 43% of the variance in trust was explained by the variance in awareness, quality and brand image. Lastly, 39% of the variance in commitment was explained by the variance in awareness, brand image, and brand trust. According to Chin (2010), R^2 values of 0.67, 0.33, and 0.19 are substantial, moderate, and weak respectively. In consumer behaviour research, an R^2 value of 0.2 is considered high (Hair et al., 2014); therefore, the R^2 values obtained in the current study are comparatively high by consumer behaviour research thresholds (Rasoolimanesh, Jaafar, Marzuki, & Abdullah, 2019). The link between Created Resources and Brand Awareness, which was not significant in the initial model became significant in the revised model (Table 4.18).

The first broad hypothesis (hypothesis 1) postulated that perceived destination competitiveness will positively influence awareness, perceived quality, and brand image. In line with perceived destination competitiveness factors extracted in the principal component analysis, hypothesis 1 was broken down into 18 statements. Hypothesis 1-1a posited that Created Resources will positively influence destination brand awareness. The analysis supported the relationship (β=0.10, t=2.22, p< 0.05). This suggests that tourists who in their

evaluation find the created resources of a destination to be better than its competitors will develop more awareness of the destination.

Hypothesis 1-1b posited that Created Resources will positively influence destination brand quality. The results supported the relationship (β=0.29, t=6.33, p< 0.001). This suggests that the more competitive a destination is in its Created Resources as perceived by tourists, the more its overall quality evaluation will be as perceived by the tourists. Hypothesis 1-1c proposed that Created Resources will positively influence destination brand image. The results confirmed the relationship (β=0.14, t=3.32, p< 0.05). This suggests that the more tourists perceive a destination to be competitive in its Created Resources, the more they will socially identify with the destination.

Hypothesis 1-2a posited that Inherited Resources will positively influence destination brand awareness. The analysis confirmed the relationship (β=0.28, t=6.28, p< 0.001), implying that the more competitive a destination is in terms of its Inherited Resources as perceived by tourists, the more knowledgeable tourists will become of the destination.

Hypothesis 1-2b proposed that Inherited Resources have a positive impact on the perceived quality of a destination. The test of the hypothesis returned a positive and statistically significant path coefficient value (β=0.34, t=8.43, p< 0.001). This suggests that the more competitive a destination is regarding its inherited resources as perceived by tourists, the better the tourists' perceived quality of the destination.

Hypothesis 1-2c postulated that Inherited Resources will positively influence a destination's brand image. The results of the test of hypothesis established a positive and statistically significant path from Inherited Resources to destination brand image (β=0.25, t=4.97, p< 0.001). Thus, the more tourists perceive a destination as competitive regarding its inherited resources, the more the tourists will socially identify with the destination.

Hypothesis 1-3b posited that Connectivity and Information Availability will positively influence tourists' perceptions of destination quality. The result established a positive and statistically significant path from Connectivity and Information Availability to perceived quality (β=0.09, t=2.00, p< 0.05). This suggests that the better tourists perceive a destination regarding its connectivity and information availability compared to its competitors, the better the tourists' evaluation of the destination's quality will be.

Hypothesis 1-4b postulated that Hospitality and Climate will positively influence the perceived quality of a destination. The test of the hypothesis confirmed the relationship (β=0.08, t=1.98, p< 0.05), implying that competitive hospitality in a destination will enhance tourists' overall quality evaluation of the destination. Hypothesis 1-4c proposed that Hospitality and Climate will positively and significantly influence destination brand image. Results supported the hypothesis (β=0.15, t=3.45, p< 0.05), thereby suggesting that if tourists find a destination to be more competitive in terms of its hospitality and climate, the more the tourists will socially identify with the destination.

Hypothesis 1-5a posited that the Qualifying and Amplifying Determinants dimension predicts destination brand awareness. The results of the test of hypothesis supported the relationship (β=0.20, t=4.65, p< 0.001). Thus, the more competitive tourists perceive a destination regarding its qualifying and amplifying determinants, the more aware the tourists will become about the destination.

Hypothesis 1-5c proposed that there is a positive relationship between Qualifying and Amplifying Determinants and destination brand image. The results supported the hypothesis (β=0.18, t=3.90, p< 0.001). This suggests that the more competitive a destination is regarding its qualifying and amplifying determinants as evaluated by tourists, the more the tourists will socially identify with the destination.

Hypothesis 2 postulated that destination brand awareness will positively impact destination brand trust. The results supported the hypothesis (β=0.10, t=2.27, p< 0.001), thereby suggesting that the more tourists become aware of a destination, the more likely they are to trust the destination. Hypothesis 3 posited that brand perceived quality will positively influence tourists' trust towards a destination. The results confirmed the hypothesis (β=0.48, t=12.09, p< 0.001). Thus, quality plays a key role in how tourists develop trust towards the destination. Hypothesis 4 postulated that destination brand image positively impacts destination brand trust. The results of hypothesis testing confirmed the hypothesis (β=0.24, t=6.26, p< 0.001) and implies that tourists who will have positive evaluations of a destination's brand image are likely to trust the destination more.

Hypothesis 5 proposed that destination brand awareness will positively impact destination brand commitment. The results of the test supported the relationship (β=0.18, t=4.07, p< 0.001), thereby suggesting that destination brand awareness is key to the development of tourists' commitment towards a destination.

Hypothesis 7 postulated that destination brand image will have a positive impact on destination brand commitment. The results of hypothesis testing confirmed the hypothesis (β=0.44, t=10.73, p< 0.001), thereby implying that the more tourists socially identify with a destination, the more they are likely to become committed to the destination. Lastly, hypothesis 8 postulated that there is a positive and statistically significant path between destination brand trust and destination brand commitment. The results supported the relationship (β=0.44, t=12.61, p< 0.001), suggesting that the more tourists will trust a destination, the more likely they are to become committed to the destination.

Table 4. 17. Results of hypothesis testing (initial model)

Hypothesis	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	*t*	*P*-Value	Supported
H1-1a: CrR → Brand Awareness	0.088	0.087	1.594	0.111	No

H1-1b: CrR → Brand Perceived Quality	0.285	0.285	6.215	0.000***	Yes
H1-1c: CrR → Brand Image	0.110	0.109	2.207	0.027**	Yes
H1-2a: IR → Brand Awareness	0.254	0.254	4.939	0.000***	Yes
H1-2b: IR → Brand Perceived Quality	0.340	0.340	7.533	0.000***	Yes
H1-2c: IR → Brand Image	0.230	0.231	4.349	0.000***	Yes
H1-3a: CI → Brand Awareness	0.007	0.008	0.132	0.895	No
H1-3b: CI → Brand Perceived Quality	0.090	0.093	1.973	0.048**	Yes
H1-3c: CI → Brand Image	0.043	0.046	0.780	0.436	No
H1-4a: HC → Brand Awareness	0.037	0.038	0.786	0.432	No
H1-4b: HC → Brand Perceived Quality	0.080	0.080	1.981	0.048**	Yes
H1-4b: HC → Brand Image	0.148	0.149	3.527	0.000***	Yes
H1-5a: QD → Brand Awareness	0.189	0.189	4.369	0.000***	Yes
H1-5b: QD → Brand Perceived Quality	0.000	0.001	0.001	1.000	No
H1-5c: QD → Brand Image	0.169	0.169	3.684	0.000***	Yes
H1-6a: Top → Brand Awareness	0.043	0.045	0.890	0.374	No
H1-6b: Top → Brand Perceived Quality	0.007	0.009	0.193	0.847	No
H1-bc: Top → Brand Image	0.061	0.062	1.380	0.168	No
H2: Brand Awareness → Brand Trust	0.097	0.098	2.254	0.024**	Yes
H3: Brand Quality → Brand Trust	0.475	0.476	12.086	0.000***	Yes
H4: Brand Image → Brand Trust	0.235	0.235	6.218	0.000***	Yes
H5: Brand Awareness → Brand Commitment	0.179	0.179	4.070	0.000***	Yes
H6: Brand Quality → Brand Commitment	0.021	0.019	0.432	0.672	No
H7: Brand Image → Brand Commitment	0.441	0.441	10.940	0.000***	Yes
H8: Brand Trust → Brand Commitment	0.436	0.439	12.421	0.000***	Yes

Note: ** $p<0.05$, *** $p<0.001$

Table 4. 18. Results of hypothesis testing (revised model)

Hypothesis	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation	*t*-value	*P*-value
H1-1a: CrRes → BA	0.100	0.102	0.045	2.216	0.027**
H1-1b: CrRes → BQ	0.286	0.287	0.045	6.333	0.000***
H1-1c: CrRes → BI	0.143	0.146	0.043	3.320	0.001**
H1-2a: IR → BA	0.278	0.281	0.044	6.280	0.000***
H1-2b: IR → BQ	0.342	0.343	0.041	8.427	0.000***
H1-2c: IR → BI	0.249	0.250	0.050	4.969	0.000***
H1-3b: CI → BQ	0.090	0.093	0.045	2.004	0.045**
H1-4b: HC → BQ	0.079	0.080	0.040	1.980	0.048**
H1-4c: HC → BI	0.148	0.150	0.043	3.448	0.001**
H1-5a: QD → BA	0.199	0.201	0.043	4.653	0.000***
H1-5c: QD → BI	0.175	0.176	0.045	3.899	0.000***
H2: BA → BT	0.097	0.100	0.043	2.274	0.023**
H3: BQ → BT	0.475	0.475	0.040	12.002	0.000***
H4: BI → BT	0.235	0.236	0.038	6.260	0.000***
H5: BA → BC	0.183	0.184	0.042	4.361	0.000***
H7: BI → BC	0.442	0.443	0.041	10.730	0.000***
H8: BT → BC	0.143	0.144	0.034	3.281	0.001**

Subsequently, the predictive relevance and effect sizes of the significant paths were examined. Predictive relevance was assessed by computing Stone-Geisser's Q^2 values. Cross-validated predictive relevance scores were computed using the blindfolding approach in

SmartPLS 3 at an omission distance of 7. The default omission distance in SmartPLS 3 is between 7 and 12. Guidelines in the software state that the omission distance should be chosen so that the number of cases in the sample divided by the omission distance is not an integer. Since there were 474 responses in the data set, blindfolding tests were run with the lower end default value (7). All the Q^2 values were positive, supporting the model's predictive relevance regarding the dependent latent constructs (Shmueli et al., 2019). Table 4.19 presents the results of the predictive relevance and effect size inferences. Among the perceived destination competitiveness factors, the inherited resource factor exerted the strongest effects on awareness, perceived quality, and image. Perceived quality and brand image exerted the strongest effects on brand trust while brand image exerted the strongest effect on brand commitment. Figure 4.1 presents a summary of the results from the PLS-SEM analysis.

Table 4. 19. Predictive relevance and effect size

Endogenous Variable	Predictor	Q squared Included	Q squared excluded	Predictive relevance (q^2)	R^2 included	R^2 excluded	Effect size
Brand Awareness	IR	0.085	0.082	0.00328	0.174	0.110	0.077
	CR	0.085	0.055	0.03279	0.174	0.165	0.011
	QD	0.085	0.066	0.02077	0.174	0.140	0.041
Perceived Quality	IR	0.261	0.199	0.08390	0.358	0.273	0.132
	CR	0.261	0.220	0.05548	0.358	0.301	0.089
	HC	0.261	0.258	0.00406	0.358	0.352	0.009
	CI	0.261	0.258	0.00406	0.358	0.352	0.009
Brand Image	IR	0.131	0.106	0.02877	0.230	0.187	0.056
	CR	0.131	0.121	0.01151	0.230	0.212	0.023
	HC	0.131	0.121	0.01151	0.230	0.212	0.023
	QD	0.131	0.116	0.01726	0.230	0.201	0.038
Brand Trust	BA	0.254	0.250	0.00536	0.434	0.427	0.012
	BQ	0.254	0.152	0.13673	0.434	0.272	0.286
	BI	0.254	0.229	0.03351	0.434	0.391	0.076
Brand Commitment	BA	0.254	0.231	0.03083	0.392	0.365	0.044
	BI	0.254	0.154	0.13405	0.392	0.262	0.214
	BT	0.254	0.236	0.02413	0.392	0.378	0.023

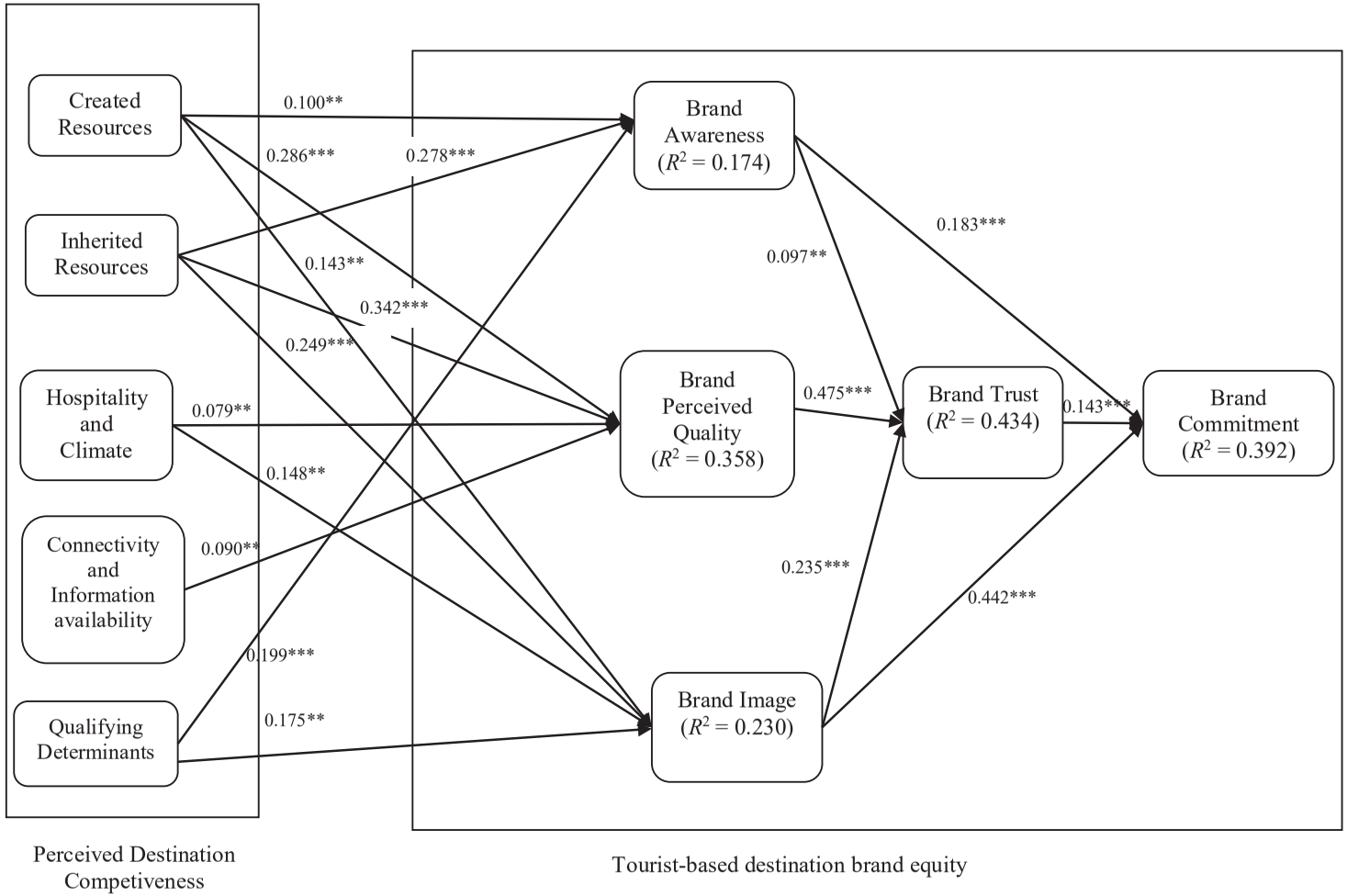

Figure 4. 3. Structural model (revised) with standardized parameter estimates (n = 474)

4.4.6 Mediating effects

A further study of the relationships proposed in the final model led to an evaluation of the significance of the mediating effects that could emerge. The study, therefore, explored the influence of awareness, quality, and value on destination brand commitment through destination brand trust. The mediating relationships were assessed using the product of the path coefficients of each of the links in the mediating chain and their associated confidence intervals (Hayes, Preacher, & Myers, 2011). A one-tail, bias-corrected, and percentile bootstrapping at the 95% confidence interval with 4999 subsamples was performed (Henseler et al., 2015). For illustration purposes, the path coefficients between brand awareness and brand trust, and between brand trust and brand commitment were 0.097 and 0.143 respectively. The product of the two values is 0.014, which falls within the confidence interval shown in Table 4.20. The confidence interval excludes zero, indicating that the mediated impact of awareness on commitment through trust is significant. The indirect effect of destination perceived quality on commitment through trust is also significant (0.475*0.143 = 0.068). Lastly, the results show that trust exerts a mediating effect on the impact that brand image can have on brand commitment (0.235*0.143 = 0.034).

Table 4. 20. Mediation analysis

Mediating chain	Path coefficient product and Confidence Interval
Destination brand awareness → Trust → Commitment	0.014 [0.004, 0.029]
Destination perceived quality → Trust → Commitment	0.068 [0.034, 0.105]
Destination brand image → Trust → Commitment	0.034 [0.016, 0.055]

Table 4. 21. Evaluation of effects

Relationship	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect
Created Resources → Awareness	0.100	-	0.096
Created Resources → Perceived quality	0.286	-	0.287
Created Resources → Brand Image	0.143	-	0.143
Created Resources → Trust	-	0.075	0.075
Created Resources → Commitment	-	0.095	0.095
Inherited Resources → Awareness	0.278	-	0.278
Inherited Resources → Perceived quality	0.342	-	0.342
Inherited Resources → Brand Image	0.249	-	0.249
Inherited Resources → Trust	-	0.163	0.163

Inherited Resources → Commitment	-	0.189	0.189
CI → Perceived quality	0.090	-	0.090
CI → Trust	-	0.043	0.043
CI → Commitment	-	0.006	0.006
Hospitality and Climate → Perceived quality	0.079	-	0.079
Hospitality and Climate → Brand Image	0.148	-	0.148
Hospitality and Climate → Trust		0.072	0.072
Hospitality and Climate → Commitment		0.075	0.075
Qualifying determinants → Awareness	0.199	-	0.199
Qualifying determinants → Brand Image	0.175	-	0.175
Qualifying determinants → Trust		0.059	0.059
Qualifying determinants → Commitment		0.121	0.121
Destination brand awareness → Trust	0.097	-	0.097
Destination brand awareness → Commitment	0.183	0.013	0.196
Perceived quality → Trust	0.475	-	0.475
Perceived quality → Commitment	0.021	0.064	0.085
Destination brand image → Trust	0.235	-	0.235
Destination brand image → Commitment	0.442	0.033	0.475

4.4.7 Multi-group analysis: South Africa vs. low-ranking SSA destinations

Subsequently, multi-group analysis (MGA) was undertaken to establish whether there were any discrepancies in the hypotheses between respondents that had compared Malawi against South Africa and those that had compared Malawi against low-ranking destinations in the SSA region. Before conducting MGA, measurement invariance should be established between the compared sub-samples (Hair et al., 2014; Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2016). Henseler et al. (2016) propose the measurement invariance of composites (MICOM) method to examine measurement invariance in PLS-SEM. MICOM involves three steps: (a) assessment of configural invariance, (b) composite invariance assessment, and (c) equal means and equal variance assessment.

The study adopted a multi-group analysis technique with a multi-method approach: Henseler's MGA (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009) and the permutation method proposed by Chin and Dibbern (2010). The two methods are regarded as the most robust in comparing path coefficients between groups (Sarstedt, Henseler, & Ringle, 2011). Henseler's MGA is a non-parametric significance test for differences in group-specific bootstrapping results. A statistically significant difference is established if the test returns a p-value of path coefficient

differences less than 0.05 or greater than 0.95. For the permutation test, a statistically significant difference is established when the p-value is less than 0.05.

To perform the MGA, a partial invariance was, first, established between the two groups using MICOM technique (Table 4.22) to meet the requirement for comparing and explaining results under MGA in PLS-SEM (Henseler, et al., 2016). The R^2 values indicated that each of the group-specific models adequately explains tourists' commitment to the destination. Nonetheless, there were differences regarding the variances explained in the dependent variables. Specifically, the model explained for 47.2% of the variance in the commitment of the respondents who compared Malawi against South Africa, and it explained 38% of the variance in destination commitment of respondents who assessed Malawi against low-ranking SSA destinations. Similarly, compared to the SSA sample, the sample that compared Malawi to South Africa showed relatively higher explained variances in awareness ($\Delta = 0.036$), perceived quality ($\Delta = 0.147$), and trust ($\Delta = 0.051$), but a lower variance explained for brand image ($\Delta = 0.061$).

Consequently, the significance and strength of the examined relationships were assessed across the two groups. Path coefficient differences between the two models showed differences between 0.001 and 0.259 (in absolute terms). The broadest difference in the path coefficients was noted on the link between Created Resources and destination brand image ($\Delta = 0.259$), which was statistically significant ($p < 0.005$). While Created Resources positively and significantly influenced brand image in the 'Malawi versus other SSA destinations' group, the path between the two constructs was insignificant in the Malawi versus South Africa group. Only 7 of the 17 paths were supported in the group that compared Malawi against South Africa whereas 15 of the 17 paths were significant for the group that compared Malawi against other destinations in the SSA region. Thus, even though the variance explained values were higher in the group that compared Malawi against South Africa, the test of significance results

supports the suitability of the model to the sub-sample that had assessed Malawi against low-ranking SSA destinations over the sample that assessed Malawi against South Africa. Table 4.23 presents the results of the multi-group analysis.

Table 4. 22. Invariance assessment using the permutation technique

LC	Compositional invariance (Correlation = 1)		PI exists	Equal mean value assessment		Equal variance assessment		FM invariance exists
	C = 1	Cis		D	CIs	D	CIs	
CR	0.993	[0.986, 1.000]	Yes	-0.195	[-0.246, 0.217]	-0.142	[-0.363, 0.332]	Yes
IR	1.000	[0.988, 1.000]	Yes	0.256	[-0.248, 0.226]	-0.094	[-0.325, 0.293]	No
HC	0.996	[0.980, 1.000]	Yes	0.328	[-0.225, 0.220]	-0.177	[-0.293, 0.266]	No
CI	0.998	[0.982, 1.000]	Yes	-0.298	[-0.236, 0.224]	0.030	[-0.350, 0.302]	No
QD	0.993	[0.970, 1.000]	Yes	0.195	[-0.242, 0.224]	-0.028	[-0.450, 0.374]	Yes
BA	0.989	[0.977, 1.000]	Yes	0.150	[-0.232, 0.233]	-0.074	[-0.308, 0.295]	Yes
BQ	0.993	[0.997, 1.000]	Yes	0.122	[-0.247, 0.225]	0.036	[-0.363, 0.318]	Yes
BI	0.997	[0.987, 1.000]	Yes	0.163	[-0.233, 0.249]	0.162	[-0.346, 0.287]	Yes
BT	0.998	[0.995, 1.000]	Yes	0.023	[-0.243, 0.219]	0.269	[-0.357, 0.324]	Yes
BC	0.994	[0.987, 1.000]	Yes	0.161	[-0.222, 0.229]	0.004	[-0.289, 0.243]	Yes

Note: LC = latent construct. PI = Partial invariance. C = Correlation. CIs = Confidence intervals. D = Differences. FM = Full measurement.

Table 4. 23. Results of the multi-group analysis: South Africa versus other SSA destinations

Hypothesis	Against South Africa (path coefficient)	Against other SSA destinations (path coefficient)	Path coefficient differences	*P*-value Henseler's MGA	*P*-value Parametric test
H_a1-1a: CrRes → BA	0.058	0.115**	0.057	0.323	0.667
H_a1-1b: CrRes → BQ	0.286**	0.287***	0.001	0.498	0.997
H_a1-1c: CrRes → BI	-0.065	0.194***	**0.259**	**0.013****	**0.028****
H_a1-2a: IR → BA	0.377***	0.254***	0.128	0.119	0.272
H_a1-2b: IR → BQ	0.432***	0.312***	0.116	0.125	0.255
H_a1-2c: IR → BI	0.342**	0.220***	0.097	0.187	0.421
H_a1-3b: CI → BQ	0.107	0.098**	0.013	0.470	0.944
H_a1-4b: HC → BQ	0.090	0.077	0.016	0.446	0.916
H_a1-4c: HC → BI	0.182	0.140**	0.066	0.327	0.632
H_a1-5a: QD → BA	0.164	0.214***	0.040	0.303	0.609
H_a1-5c: QD → BI	0.036	0.214***	0.169	0.061	0.130
H_a2: BA → BT	0.156	0.084	0.084	0.269	0.556
H_a3: BQ → BT	0.479***	0.478***	0.011	0.494	0.994
H_a4: BI → BT	0.221**	0.233***	0.002	0.492	0.982
H_a5: BA → BC	0.101	0.198***	0.067	0.534	0.539
H_a7: BV → BC	0.527	0.426***	0.105	0.253	0.313
H_a8: BT → BC	0.197**	0.132**	0.113	0.371	0.374
R^2 Awareness	0.211	0.175	0.036		
Perceived quality	0.483	0.336	0.147		
Image	0.194	0.255	0.061		
Trust	0.478	0.427	0.051		
Commitment	0.474	0.380	0.094		

Note: ** p<0.05, *** p<0.001

4.4.8 Multi-group analysis: (US) American vs. British tourists

A multi-group analysis was also performed to ascertain whether there were any statistically significant differences in the examined relationships between American and British tourists. The two were chosen because together they constitute over 40 percent of the sample that had compared Malawi to sub-Saharan Africa destinations. As mentioned earlier, the USA and the UK are important tourist source markets for Malawi.

First, the MICOM approach was used to establish measurement invariance. Step 1 of the procedure showed that measurement invariance could not be established on the Inherited Resources factor of perceived destination competitiveness. An examination of the item outer loadings on the factor led to the deletion of item 10 ('Malawi has better environmental conditions 'un-spoilt and undamaged environment'') after which partial measurement invariance was established (Table 4.24). Thereafter, the group-specific parameter estimates for the British and American sub-samples were compared at the structural level. The R^2 values showed that each of the group-specific models very well explains tourists' commitment to the destination. Nevertheless, there were differences regarding the variances explained in the dependent variables. Even though the model explains almost the same level of variance in destination brand commitment in the two groups ($\Delta = 0.004$), the American tourists sub-sample showed relatively greater explained variances in destination brand awareness ($\Delta = 0.179$), perceived quality ($\Delta = 0.010$), brand image ($\Delta = 0.038$), and trust ($\Delta = 0.117$). These results suggest that the model is, relatively, more relevant to American tourists than British tourists.

Further, the significance and strength of the examined relationships were assessed across the two groups. In the American tourist model, 14 of the 17 examined paths were significant. On the contrary, only 8 of the 17 examined paths were supported in the British tourist model. The path coefficient differences between the two models showed differences between 0.004 and 0.399 (in absolute values). The widest difference in the path coefficients

was noted on the link between Inherited Resources and destination brand image (Δ = 0.399). Henseler's MGA and the permutation tests revealed that four of the examined paths statistically differed between the two groups. Specifically, among the Americans, relatively stronger relationships were observed between Created Resources and brand image (Δ = 0.316, $p < 0.05$), Hospitality and Climate and brand image (Δ = 0.256, $p < 0.05$) and Qualifying and Amplifying determinants and awareness (Δ = 0.375, $p < 0.010$). A smaller effect was observed between Inherited Resources and brand image (Δ = 0.399, $p < 0.05$) (Table 4.25). The results provide additional evidence that the structural model might be more applicable to American tourists than their British counterparts.

Table 4. 24. Invariance assessment: American versus British tourists

LC	Compositional invariance (Correlation = 1)		PI exists	Equal mean value assessment		Equal variance assessment		FM invariance exists
	C = 1	CIs		D	CIs	D	CIs	
CR	0.995	[0.964, 1.000]	Yes	0.015	[-0.287, 0.293]	-0.462	[-0.484, 0.438]	Yes
IR	0.995	[0.984, 1.000]	Yes	0.008	[-0.281, 0.283]	-0.016	[-0.301, 0.325]	Yes
HC	0.998	[0.984, 1.000]	Yes	-0.123	[-0.266, 0.281]	0.028	[-0.355, 0.355]	Yes
CI	0.998	[0.947, 1.000]	Yes	-0.013	[-0.308, 0.266]	0.213	[-0.373, 0.368]	Yes
QD	0.997	[0.972, 1.000]	Yes	-0.289	[-0.302, 0.298]	0.059	[-0.404, 0.365]	Yes
BA	0.991	[0.984, 1.000]	Yes	0.177	[-0.287, 0.286]	0.070	[-0.437, 0.340]	Yes
BQ	0.998	[0.998, 1.000]	Yes	0.024	[-0.303, 0.281]	0.086	[-0.357, 0.352]	Yes
BV	0.998	[0.990, 1.000]	Yes	-0.190	[-0.290, 0.288]	0.135	[-0.363, 0.362]	Yes
BT	0.999	[0.995, 1.000]	Yes	0.063	[-0.265, 0.287]	-0.409	[-0.338, 0.365]	No
BC	0.995	[0.992, 1.000]	Yes	-0.104	[-0.266, 0.300]	0.332	[-0.289, 0.243]	No

Table 4. 25. Results of the multi-group analysis: American versus British tourists

Hypothesis	American tourists (path coefficient)	British tourists (path coefficient)	Path coefficient differences	*P*-value Henseler's MGA	*P*-value Parametric test
H_a1-1a: CrRes → BA	0.171**	0.083	0.088	0.619	0.607
H_a1-1b: CrRes → BQ	0.414***	0.248**	0.166	0.213	0.213
H_a1-1c: CrRes → BI	0.283***	0.027	**0.256**	**0.026****	**0.034****
H_a1-2a: IR → BA	0.256**	0.403***	0.147	0.196	0.200
H_a1-2b: IR → BQ	0.286**	0.445***	0.159	0.225	0.225
H_a1-2c: IR → BI	0.213**	0.612***	**0.399**	**0.003****	**0.002****
H_a1-3b: CI → BQ	0.049	0.054	0.004	0.945	0.976
H_a1-4b: HC → BQ	0.100	0.104	0.004	0.974	0.976
H_a1-4c: HC → BI	0.208**	-0.108	**0.316**	**0.014****	**0.016****
H_a1-5a: QD → BA	0.438***	0.063	**0.375**	**0.005****	**0.004****
H_a1-5c: QD → BI	0.292**	0.127	0.165	0.256	0.526
H_a2: BA → BT	0.034	0.109	0.074	0.576	0.576
H_a3: BQ → BT	0.507***	0.437**	0.070	0.524	0.529
H_a4: BI → BT	0.322**	0.236**	0.086	0.475	0.466
H_a5: BA → BC	0.255**	0.195**	0.060	0.645	0.651
H_a7: BI → BC	0.202***	0.441***	0.239	0.101	0.097

H_a8: BT → BC	0.306**	0.123	0.182	0.188	0.181
R^2 Awareness	0.365	0.186	0.179		
Perceived quality	0.372	0.362	0.010		
Image	0.371	0.333	0.038		
Trust	0.517	0.400	0.117		
Commitment	0.383	0.379	0.004		

4.5 Main analysis II (b): Structural equation analysis (Outside SSA sample, n = 294)

4.5.1 Principal component analysis of the perceived destination competitiveness construct

A principal component analysis was conducted on the 294 cases that had compared Malawi to destinations outside the SSA region. Only items having a minimum factor loading value of 0.4 were retained for further analysis (Comrey & Lee, 1992). A threshold value of at least 1.0 was adopted for the eigenvalues of the factor solution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The present study adopted a minimum threshold of 0.4 communalities (Pituch & Stevens, 2015). The KMO value was 0.830 with Bartlett's test of sphericity being statistically significant, χ^2 (190) = 3087.76, p < .001, supporting the factor solution.

Five factors that jointly accounted for about 67% of the total variance were extracted. The factors were labelled Created Resources (26.8%), Connectivity and Information Availability (13.8%), Hospitality and Climate (11.9%), Inherited Resources (8.7%), and Topography and Visa (5.5%). Together, the factors constituted 20 items as the rest were deleted owing to either low factor loadings or cross-loadings. The smallest Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.61, which establishes internal consistency in the extracted factors (Hair et al., 2006). Factor loadings of all the retained 20 items were above 0.4, meeting the recommended threshold (Guadagnoli & Velicer, 1988). Table 4.26 presents the results of the principal component analysis.

Table 4. 26. Principal component analysis results of the perceived destination competitiveness construct (n = 294)

Factors	Communality	Factor loading	Cronbach alpha
Created Resources (Eigen-value: 5.4; % of variance = 26.8; grand mean: 2.55)			0.82
Malawi has better health and medical facilities for tourists	0.68	0.78	
There is less threat of disease while travelling in Malawi	0.61	0.75	
Malawi offers more opportunities for adventure and recreational activities (hiking, swimming, diving, snorkelling, biking, sailing, etc.)	0.55	0.72	
Malawi has more sufficient signage and better quality directions/information for tourists	0.53	0.68	
Malawi is more stable politically	0.45	0.65	
Malawi has better food variety and quality	0.53	0.64	
Connectivity and Information Availability (Eigen-value: 2.8; % of variance = 13.8; grand mean: 2.84)			0.90
It is easier to find information about Malawi on the internet	0.91	0.94	
It is easier to access and use information technology services as a traveller in Malawi	0.90	0.94	
The websites of tourism service providers in Malawi offer better information	0.91	0.94	
The destination is better connected with intermediaries in the tourism sector (tour operators, airlines, hotel chains, etc.)	0.50	0.53	
Hospitality and Climate (Eigen-value: 2.4; % of variance = 11.9; grand mean: 4.19)			0.87
Malawi offers more hospitable services (courteous and helpful staff, etc.)	0.90	0.94	
Service providers in Malawi are more willing to help visitors enjoy their vacation (ease of making reservation, foreign exchange facilities, foreign language help, etc.)	0.84	0.91	
Malawians are more welcoming and friendly	0.88	0.88	
Malawi has a more pleasant climate	0.48	0.62	
Inherited Resources (Eigen-value: 1.74; % of variance = 8.7; grand mean: 3.82)			0.69
Malawi has better national parks and wildlife reserves	0.77	0.87	
Malawi offers a better African experience (safari, sunrises/sunsets, terrain/landscapes, etc.)	0.75	0.86	
Malawi has more preserved nature and beautiful scenery	0.47	0.60	
Topography and Visa (Eigen-value: 1.1; % of variance = 5.5; grand mean: 3.13)			0.61
Malawi is smaller and easier to cover within a short period	0.70	0.81	
Malawi has a more diverse range of tourist attractions and resources for its small size	0.63	0.69	
Malawi has more open visa regulations and regulations for tourists	0.44	0.58	

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure = 0.830; Bartlett's test = 3087.76 ($p < .001$); total variance explained = 67%.

4.5.2 Evaluation of the measurement model

Having extracted perceived destination competitiveness factors, the measurement model was evaluated. Items extracted with the components of the tourist-based destination brand equity model in the SSA region sample were also used in this sample. The results of the measurement model are summarized in Table 4.27. Two items, Comp3 and Comp20, were deleted for low factor loadings. Items BC3, BV1, BA2, and Comp2 were retained because even though their loadings were less than 0.708, the AVEs of their associated latent constructs were above 0.5. Hair et al. (2014) contend than an item can be retained if its factor loading is less than 0.708 but higher than 0.5 so long as its associated latent construct's AVE is above 0.5. The values for composite reliability were all above the 0.7 threshold (Hair et al., 2014). Discriminant validity was assessed using the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations and the Fornell and Larcker's method (Tables 4.28 and 4.29).

Table 4. 27. Results of model evaluation

Variable and items	Factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha	AVE (CR)
Created Resources		0.82	0.58
Malawi has better food variety and quality	0.77		(0.87)
Malawi offers more opportunities for adventure and recreational activities (hiking, swimming, diving, snorkelling, biking, sailing, etc.)	0.71		
Malawi has more sufficient signage and better quality directions/information tourists	0.74		
There is less threat of disease while travelling in Malawi	0.76		
Malawi has better health and medical facilities for tourists	0.83		
Inherited Resources		0.69	0.61
Malawi has better national parks and wildlife reserves	0.77		(0.82)
Malawi offers a better African experience (safari, sunrises/sunsets, terrain/landscapes, etc.)	0.80		
Malawi has more preserved nature and beautiful scenery	0.77		
Hospitality and Climate		0.88	0.74
Malawians are more welcoming and friendly	0.90		(0.92)
Malawi has a more pleasant climate	0.69		
Malawi offers more hospitable services (courteous and helpful staff, etc.)	0.93		
Service providers in Malawi are more willing to help visitors enjoy their vacation (ease of making reservation, foreign exchange facilities, foreign language help, etc.)	0.89		
Connectivity and Information Availability		0.89	0.76
It is easier to find information about Malawi on the internet	0.89		(0.93)
It is easier to access and use information technology services as a traveller in Malawi	0.90		

The websites of tourism service providers in Malawi offer better information	0.76		
The destination is better connected with intermediaries in the tourism sector (tour operators, airlines, hotel chains, etc.)	0.86		
Topography		0.67	0.74
Malawi is smaller and easier to cover within a short period	0.93		(0.85)
Malawi has a more diverse range of tourist attractions and resources for its small size	0.77		
Brand Awareness		0.72	0.54
The trip enabled me to know more about Malawi's people and their ways of life	0.73		(0.82)
The trip increased my knowledge of Malawi's tourist attractions	0.69		
If I ever think of visiting southern Africa again, Malawi will easily come to my mind	0.79		
Overall, I know Malawi better now than I did before	0.71		
Brand Perceived Quality		0.82	0.74
Malawi provides tourism offerings of consistent quality	0.89		(0.90)
Malawi provides quality tourism experiences	0.84		
I can expect superior performance from Malawi's tourism offerings	0.85		
Brand Image		0.75	0.58
My friends will think highly of me because I visited Malawi	0.63		(0.84)
Image of Malawi as a destination is consistent with my self-image	0.77		
Visiting Malawi reflects who I am as a person	0.87		
I feel proud that I have visited Malawi	0.75		
Brand Trust		0.86	0.64
I could rely on service providers in Malawi to solve any problems with the trip	0.81		(0.90)
Service providers in Malawi were honest and sincere in addressing my concerns	0.87		
I feel confident that Malawi is a good tourist destination	0.77		
Service providers in Malawi are fair in their dealings with travellers	0.82		
Service providers in Malawi would compensate me in some way in case of a service failure	0.73		
Brand Commitment		0.84	0.62
Malawi felt like a second home to me	0.80		(0.89)
I will tell my friends and family that Malawi is worth visiting	0.72		
I am willing to contribute resources (money/time) to social causes in Malawi	0.68		
Malawi has a great deal of personal meaning to me	0.81		
I have a sense of belonging to this destination	0.91		

Table 4. 28. Discriminant validity: Fornell and Larcker's method

	CrR	IR	HC	CI	Top	BA	BQ	BI	BT	BC
CrR	**0.75**									
IR	0.23	**0.78**								
HC	0.21	0.17	**0.86**							
CI	0.35	0.08	0.29	**0.87**						
Top	0.49	0.08	0.15	0.20	**0.86**					
BA	0.05	0.20	0.17	-0.14	-0.00	**0.73**				
BQ	0.56	0.36	0.23	0.18	0.32	0.33	**0.86**			

BI	0.00	0.09	0.12	0.08	0.02	0.03	0.05	**0.77**		
BT	0.51	0.26	0.15	0.16	0.36	0.20	0.56	0.02	**0.78**	
BC	0.22	0.23	0.34	0.11	0.17	0.39	0.33	0.12	0.34	**0.79**

Table 4. 29. Discriminant validity: HTMT method.

	CrR	IR	HC	CI	Top	BA	BQ	BI	BT	BC
CrR										
IR	0.27									
HC	0.25	0.21								
CI	0.39	0.17	0.32							
Top	0.63	0.15	0.18	0.22						
BA	0.16	0.26	0.20	0.18	0.11					
BQ	0.67	0.45	0.27	0.20	0.41	0.33				
BI	0.06	0.11	0.15	0.10	0.04	0.08	0.07			
BT	0.60	0.34	0.40	0.17	0.46	0.24	0.66	0.08		
BC	0.26	0.29	0.39	0.13	0.20	0.50	0.40	0.71	0.40	

4.5.3 Testing the structural model

Subsequently, the path coefficients in the structural model were examined using bootstrapping with 4,999 subsamples. Only 8 of the 19 examined paths were supported in the saturated model (Table 4.30). As observed in the SSA destinations sample, the Topography dimension had no statistically significant impact on awareness, perceived quality, and brand image. The R^2 values for brand awareness, perceived quality, brand image, brand trust, and brand commitment were 0.102, 0.375, 0.025, 0.317, and 0.115 respectively.

The structural model was then revised by deleting insignificant paths using the stepwise approach. Thereafter, hypothesis testing was performed using bootstrapping with 4,999 subsamples. The R^2 values for the revised model were 0.098, 0.370, 0.015, 0.316, and 0.265 for brand awareness, perceived quality, brand image, brand trust, and brand commitment respectively. Thus, while the values of four R^2 coefficients slightly decreased, one R^2

coefficient value increased by more than twice. The R^2 values indicate that 10% of the variance in brand awareness was explained by the variance in Inherited Resources, Connectivity and Information Availability, and Hospitality and Climate. Thirty-seven percent of the variance in brand perceived quality was explained by the variance in Created Resources, Inherited Resources, and Hospitality and Climate. About 2% of the variance in brand image was explained by the variance in Hospitality and Climate. About 32% of the variance in brand trust was explained by the variance in brand perceived quality and almost 27% of the variance in brand commitment was explained by the variance in brand awareness, brand perceived quality, brand image, and brand trust. Except for the R^2 value for destination brand image, the R^2 values for the dependent variables were above the 0.10 threshold recommended by Falk and Miller (1992). The results of the revised model have been presented in Table 4.31.

The first broad hypothesis (hypothesis 1) postulated that perceived destination competitiveness will positively influence awareness, perceived quality, and image. In line with perceived destination competitiveness factors extracted in the EFA, hypothesis 1 was broken down into 15 statements, out of which only 6 were supported. The results of the revised model (significant paths) have been presented here. Hypothesis H_b1-1b posited that Created Resources will positively influence destination brand quality. The test of the hypothesis confirmed the relationship (β=0.48, t=11.10, p< 0.05). This suggests that tourists who find the created resources of a destination to be better than its competitors will likely develop a positive evaluation of the destination's overall quality.

Hypothesis H_b1-2a postulated that Inherited Resources will positively impact destination brand awareness. The results confirmed the hypothesis (β=0.17, t=2.77, p< 0.05) and suggest that inherited resources play a significant role in enhancing awareness among tourists. H_b1-2b predicted that there is a significant relationship between Inherited Resources and destination brand quality. The hypothesis was confirmed (β=0.23, t=4.79, p< 0.001),

thereby implying that if tourists find inherited resources of a destination competitive, they will likely have a higher perception of the destination's overall quality.

Hypothesis H_b1-3a predicted that Connectivity and Information Availability will predict destination brand awareness. The results established a significant but negative path coefficient between the two latent constructs (β=-0.20, t=3.49, p< 0.001). Thus, among the samples, competitive connectivity and online information resources led to a decrease in destination awareness and vice-versa.

Hypothesis H_b1-4a postulated that Hospitality and Climate will have a positive impact on destination brand awareness. The result supported the relationship (β=0.19, t=2.82, p< 0.05). Thus, hospitality and climatic conditions play an important role in the development of brand awareness among visitors. Hypothesis H_b1-4b predicted that Hospitality and Climate will positively influence perceived quality. The hypothesis was confirmed (β=0.08, t=1.72, p< 0.05), thereby implying that competitive hospitality and climate as perceived by tourists will make the tourists have a higher perception of the destination's overall quality. Hypothesis H_b1-4c postulated that hospitality and climate will positively influence destination brand image. The hypothesis was supported (β=0.12, t=2.04, p< 0.05). Thus, if tourists perceive a destination's hospitality and climate as competitive, they are likely to socially identify with the destination.

Hypothesis H_b2 proposed that perceived quality will positively influence destination brand trust. The hypothesis was confirmed (β=0.56, t=13.32, p< 0.000). Thus, a destination with higher overall quality will likely earn visitors' trust. Concerning hypotheses 3, 4, and 5, the results established that awareness (β=0.34, t=7.26, p< 0.001), perceived quality (β=0.14, t=2.15, p< 0.05) and brand image (β=0.12, t=2.00, p< 0.05) all have positive and statistically significant impacts on destination brand commitment. The final hypothesis (H_b6) postulated that destination brand trust will positively influence destination commitment. The results

confirmed the relationship (β=0.34, t=6.63, p< 0.001), implying that the more tourists trust a destination, the more they will be committed to the destination.

Table 4. 30. Results of hypothesis testing (initial model).

Hypothesis	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	*T*	*P*-value	Supported
H_b1-1a: CrR → Brand Awareness	0.065	0.062	0.786	0.216	No
H_b1-1b: CrR → Brand Perceived Quality	0.461	0.464	8.864	0.000***	Yes
H_b1-1c: CrR → Brand Image	-0.071	-0.071	0.858	0.196	No
H_b1-2a: IR → Brand Awareness	0.175	0.179	2.852	0.002**	Yes
H_b1-2b: IR → Brand Perceived Quality	0.230	0.233	4.767	0.000***	Yes
H_b1-2c: IR → Brand Image	0.079	0.083	1.189	0.117	No
H_b1-3a: CI → Brand Awareness	-0.225	-0.224	3.354	0.000***	Yes
H_b1-3b: CI → Brand Perceived Quality	-0.037	-0.036	0.699	0.242	No
H_b1-3c: CI → Brand Image	0.062	0.061	0.782	0.217	No
H_b1-4a: HC → Brand Awareness	0.191	0.192	2.635	0.004**	Yes
H_b1-4b: HC → Brand Perceived Quality	0.089	0.089	1.660	0.048**	Yes
H_b1-4c: HC → Brand Image	0.102	0.110	1.437	0.075	No
H_b1-5a: Top → Brand Awareness	-0.033	-0.031	0.488	0.313	No
H_b1-5b: Top → Brand Perceived Quality	0.073	0.074	1.419	0.078	No
H_b1-5c: Top → Brand Image	0.021	0.024	0.294	0.385	No
H_b2: Brand Awareness → Brand Trust	0.054	0.057	0.913	0.181	No
H_b3: Brand Perceived Quality → Brand Trust	0.547	0.547	12.518	0.000***	Yes
H_b4: Brand Image → Brand Trust	-0.013	-0.011	0.247	0.402	No
H_b5: Brand Trust → Brand Commitment	0.339	0.347	6.631	0.000***	Yes

Table 4. 31. Results of hypothesis testing (revised model)

Hypothesis	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation	*T*	*P*-Value
H_b1-1b: CrR → Brand Perceived Quality	0.484	0.489	0.044	11.099	0.000***
H_b1-2a: IR → Brand Awareness	0.168	0.173	0.061	2.774	0.003**
H_b1-2b: IR → Brand Perceived Quality	0.231	0.234	0.048	4.789	0.000***
H_b1-3a: CI → Brand Awareness	-0.203	-0.212	0.058	3.493	0.000***
H_b1-4a: HC → Brand Awareness	0.194	0.199	0.069	2.816	0.002**
H_b1-4b: HC → Brand Perceived Quality	0.085	0.083	0.049	1.723	0.045**
H_b1-4c: HC → Brand Image	0.124	0.136	0.061	2.038	0.021**
H_b2: Brand Perceived Quality → Brand Trust	0.562	0.562	0.042	13.316	0.000***
H_b3: Brand Awareness → Brand Commitment	0.336	0.343	0.046	7.263	0.000***
H_b4: Brand Perceived Quality → Brand Commitment	0.135	0.132	0.063	2.153	0.016**
H_b5: Brand Image → Brand Commitment	0.115	0.125	0.058	1.989	0.024**
H_b6: Brand Trust → Brand Commitment	0.339	0.347	0.051	6.631	0.000***

Note: **$p < 0.05$, ***$p < 0.001$

The predictive relevance (Stone-Geisser's Q^2 values) and effect sizes of the significant paths were also examined. The cross-validated predictive relevance scores were

computed using the blindfolding approach at an omission distance of 8. All the Q^2 values were above zero, supporting the model's predictive relevance regarding the dependent latent constructs (Shmueli et al., 2019). Inference on effect size was guided by Cohen's classification of 0.35 (large), 0.15 (moderate) and 0.02 (small) (Hair, Sarstedt, Pieper, & Ringle, 2012). Connectivity and Information Availability exerted the largest (but negative) effect on brand awareness while Created Resources exerted the largest effect on perceived quality. A large effect was also observed between perceived quality and brand trust. Similarly, brand awareness exerted the largest effect on brand commitment (Table 4.32). Figure 4.2 shows the revised structural model with the parameter estimates.

Table 4. 32. Effect size and predictive relevance

Endogenous Variable	Predictor	Q^2 Included	Q^2 excluded	Predictive relevance (q^2)	R^2 included	R^2 excluded	Effect size (f^2)
Brand Awareness	IR	0.044	0.032	0.013	0.093	0.065	0.031
	CI	0.044	0.025	0.020	0.093	0.055	0.042
	HC	0.044	0.028	0.017	0.093	0.060	0.036
Brand Perceived Quality	CR	0.263	0.107	0.212	0.370	0.156	0.340
	IR	0.263	0.229	0.046	0.370	0.320	0.079
	HC	0.263	0.260	0.004	0.370	0.363	0.011
Brand Image	HC	0.005	0.000	0.005	0.015	0.000	0.011
Brand Trust	BQ	0.196	0.000	0.244	0.316	0.000	0.462
Brand Commitment	BA	0.151	0.091	0.091	0.265	0.159	0.144
	BQ	0.151	0.147	0.004	0.265	0.255	0.014
	BV	0.151	0.144	0.008	0.265	0.253	0.016
	BT	0.151	0.136	0.018	0.265	0.242	0.031

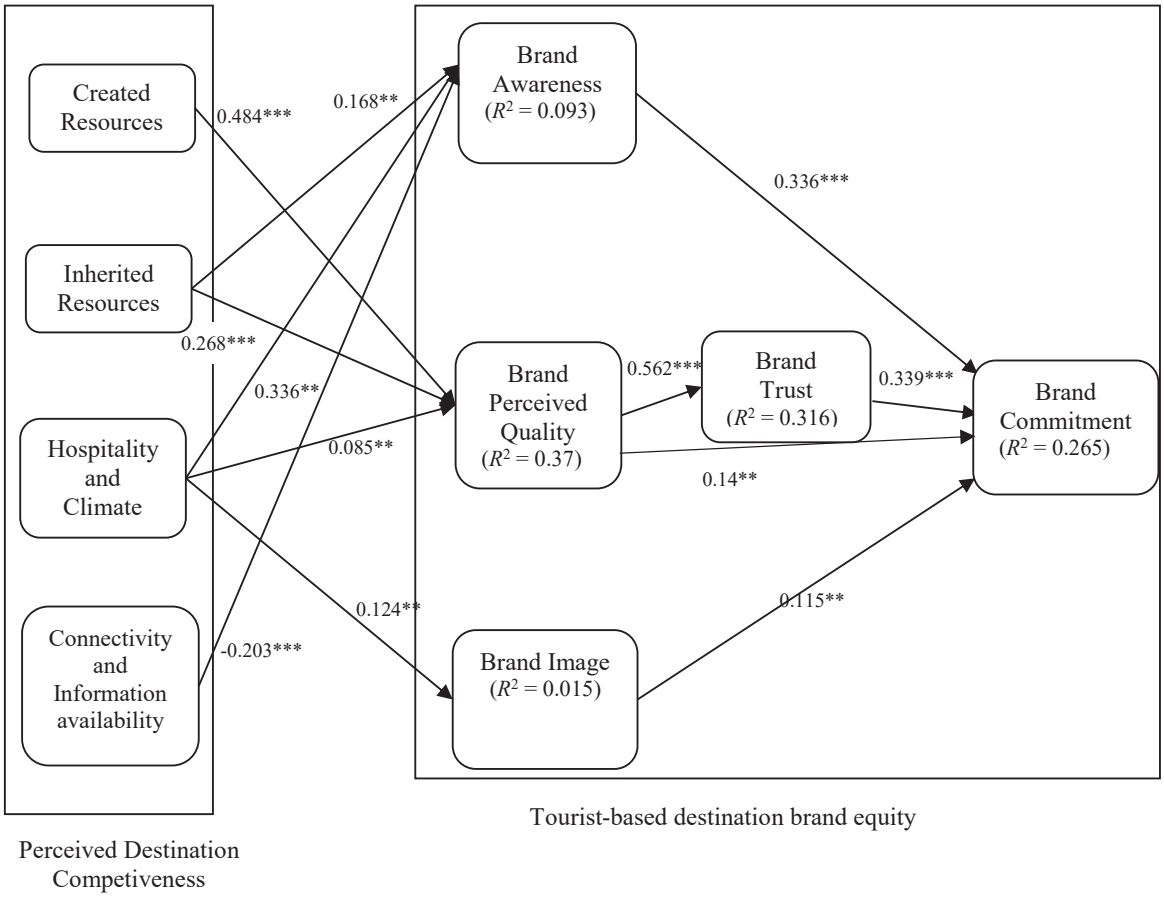

Figure 4. 4. Structural model (revised) with standardized parameter estimates (n = 294)

4.5.4 Multi-group analysis (highly-ranked versus low-ranking destinations)

Thereafter, a multi-group analysis was conducted to ascertain the moderating effects of the destination ranking on the examined relationships. This was done given the potential limitation of the interpretation of SEM results which concerning the distinctiveness of observations (Henseler, et al., 2009). First, partial invariance was established between the two groups (Table 4.33) using MICOM technique (Henseler et al., 2016) as explained earlier.

The group-specific parameter estimates for the two groups were then compared at the structural level. The R^2 values indicated that each of the group-specific models very well explained tourists' commitment to the destination. However, there were differences regarding the variances explained in the dependent variables. Particularly, the model explains 33.4% of the total variance in destination brand commitment of respondents that compared Malawi to

low-ranking destinations outside the SSA region. On the contrary, the model explained 27% of the total variance among respondents who compared the destination to high-ranking destinations outside the region. Similarly, compared to the group that compared Malawi to high-ranking destinations outside the region, the low-ranking destination group exhibited relatively higher explained variances in destination brand awareness (Δ = 130), perceived quality (Δ = 0.002), and commitment (Δ = 0.068), but lower R^2 values for destination brand image (Δ = 0.030) and trust (Δ = 0.084). Thus, the model is, relatively, more relevant to the respondents that assessed Malawi against low-ranking destinations than the respondents that compared Malawi to high-ranking destinations.

The results revealed stronger inter-group disparities in path coefficients between 0.056 and 0.353. The widest difference was observed on the path between destination brand trust and destination brand commitment (Δ = 0.353). Henseler's MGA and permutation tests revealed statistically significant differences between the two groups in the path coefficients between brand perceived quality and brand commitment (Δ = 0.334, $p < 0.010$) and between brand trust and brand commitment (Δ = 0.353, $p < 0.010$). Eight of the twelve examined paths were confirmed among the respondents who had assessed Malawi against low-ranking destinations whereas only 6 relationships were supported in the group that assessed Malawi against highly-ranked destinations (Table 4.34). The results provide more support to the suitability of the model for the sub-sample that compared Malawi to low-ranking destinations over the group that assessed Malawi against highly-ranked destinations. The interpretation of these differences is a significant component of the managerial implications of the study to be discussed in the next chapter.

Table 4. 33. Results of the measurement invariance test

LC	Compositional invariance (Correlation = 1)		PI exists	Equal mean value assessment		Equal variance assessment		Full measurement invariance exists
	C = 1	CIs		D	CIs	D	CIs	
CR	0.998	[0.992, 1.000]	Yes	-0.326	[-0.236, 0.227]	0.127	[-0.303, 0.304]	No
IR	0.999	[0.945, 1.000]	Yes	0.259	[-0.236, 0.230]	0.109	[-0.328, 0.294]	No
HC	0.995	[0.978, 1.000]	Yes	-0.195	[-0.232, 0.229]	0.032	[-0.371, 0.393]	Yes
CI	0.923	[0.764, 1.000]	Yes	-0.390	[-0.232, 0.232]	0.164	[-0.293, 0.314]	No
BA	0.996	[0.971, 1.000]	Yes	0.195	[-0.241, 0.242]	-0.306	[-0.385, 0.415]	Yes
BQ	1.000	[0.998, 1.000]	Yes	0.088	[-0.241, 0.242]	-0.031	[-0.317, 0.313]	Yes
BI	0.961	[0.569, 1.000]	Yes	-0.182	[-0.244, 0.231]	0.062	[-0.259, 0.257]	Yes
BT	1.000	[0.997, 1.000]	Yes	-0.187	[-0.232, 0.234]	-0.048	[-0.366, 0.339]	Yes
BC	0.997	[0.991, 1.000]	Yes	0.016	[-0.239, 0.238]	0.042	[-0.253, 0.276]	Yes

Note: LC = Latent construct. PI = Partial invariance. Config. Invariance = Configural invariance.

Table 4. 34. Multi-group analysis: low-ranking destinations versus highly-ranked destinations

Hypothesis	Low-ranking destinations (path coefficient)	Highly-ranked destinations (path coefficient)	Path coefficient differences	*P*-value Henseler's MGA	*P*-value Parametric test
CrRes → BQ	0.420***	0.513***	0.093	0.288	0.268
IR → BA	0.280**	0.145	0.135	0.832	0.831
IR → BQ	0.308***	0.175**	0.133	0.186	0.155
CI → BA	-0.306***	-0.136	0.170	0.231	0.158
HC → BA	0.280**	0.145	0.135	0.308	0.315
HC → BQ	0.043	0.115	0.072	0.461	0.473
HC → BI	0.043	0.178*	0.135	0.356	0.267
BQ → BT	0.520***	0.595***	0.075	0.356	0.379
BA → BC	0.363***	0.307***	0.056	0.558	0.580
BQ → BC	**-0.033**	**0.301*** **	**0.334**	**0.007**	**0.007**
BI → BC	0.164	0.106	0.058	0.562	0.604
BT → BC	**0.377*** **	**0.024**	**0.353**	**0.002**	**0.004**
R^2 Awareness	0.188	0.058	0.130		
Perceived quality	0.377	0.375	0.002		
Image	0.002	0.032	0.030		
Trust	0.270	0.354	0.084		
Commitment	0.334	0.266	0.068		

Note: Bold values denote statistically significant paths across groups. Note: *$p < 0.1$, **$p < 0.05$, ***$p < 0.001$

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This current chapter discusses the results presented in Chapter 4. The discussion of the findings is done in line with the objectives of the study – that is, conducting a comprehensive competitive analysis of Malawi as an emerging destination against destinations identified using a modified tourist experience-based model; adapting and validating destination trust and commitment dimensions to a tourist-based destination brand equity model; exploring the impact of perceived destination competitiveness on tourist-based destination brand equity, and examining the moderating effects of destination- and tourist-related factors on the relationship between perceived destination competitiveness and tourist-based destination brand equity by way of multi-group analysis.

5.1 Objective 1: Conduct a comprehensive competitive analysis of an emerging destination using Malawi as a case study

The study presented 768 international tourists with 29 destination competitiveness indicators on which to assess Malawi against their favourite destinations previously visited. Four hundred and seventy-four of the respondents assessed Malawi against destinations within the sub-Saharan Africa region whereas the rest compared Malawi with destinations outside the region. Over 90% of the respondents in the sub-Saharan Africa sample identified 8 countries as their favourite destinations previously visited in the region. The most popular destination of comparison was Zambia (95 respondents), followed by South Africa (88 respondents). The least popular destination among the top 9 identified destinations of comparison was Zimbabwe (20 respondents). Together with Botswana, Kenya, Namibia, Uganda, and Tanzania, the eight countries stand out for their unique wildlife experiences and are, thus, dominant in online searches for “Africa” and “safari”, accounting for the majority of the country destinations within the region that international tourists search for on the internet (Manrai et al., 2019). It

is, therefore, not surprising that a higher proportion of the respondents in the SSA region sample had visited these countries before their trip to Malawi.

In the SSA sample, respondents rated the 'friendliness and the welcoming nature of the locals' attribute as the highest in performance. Service staff's attitude towards tourists emerged as the third highest-rated indicator while service providers' willingness to make tourists' stay pleasurable was the fifth highly-rated destination attribute. Personal security emerged as the fourth-highest rated attribute. The performance of the four indicators shows that the destination performed relatively well in terms of the attitudes of residents and service employees towards tourists. Previous studies have pointed out the same as Malawi's tourism strengths in a region that is oftentimes associated with political and social instability (Avraham & Ketter, 2017; Rodriguez et al., 2016). The stated strengths have earned the country the moniker, "the Warm Heart of Africa". This can be advantageous to destination Malawi as hospitality and especially security are important for emerging destinations since visitors in pursuit of novel experiences do not want to do away with everyday comforts, particularly the security of their usual places of domicile (Ayikoru, 2015).

Malawi was also rated relatively better on having a good climate for vacation, prices, natural and cultural resources, and environmental conditions. In the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness 2019 Report (WEF, 2019), the Southern Africa region was rated 5.7 out of 7 on price competitiveness. Malawi scored 5.6 out of 7, placing third place after Botswana and Namibia among the top 9 destinations of comparison identified by tourists. A positive value for money evaluation gives destinations an edge because price competitiveness is a key contributor to the overall competitiveness of a destination (Winzar, Baumann, & Chu, 2018). Among the natural and cultural attributes, Malawi was perceived to be competitive in terms of landscapes and scenery, and unique cultural aspects of the locals. These are what Ritchie and Crouch (2003) categorise as core resources and attractions.

Particularly, Malawi did not perform better than its competitors on the wildlife reserves and safari attribute. The majority of international travellers to the sub-Saharan region visit because of the safari tourism opportunities the region offers. The fact that Malawi scored just above average on the wildlife attribute should be a cause for action for the destination. Similarly, the adventure and recreation activities attribute was rated as average. Admittedly, it would take a monumental effort to restock Malawi's wildlife reserves to the levels of competitors like Zambia and Tanzania. However, the adventure and recreational activities attribute can easily be improved so that the destination can operate above some of its competitors (Bello et al., 2016). As argued by Yüksel and Yüksel (2001), a destination's attributes that have been rated similar to its competitors constitute both opportunities and threats as any slight improvement in the competitors' offerings might put the destination at a disadvantage. The importance of the core resources and attractions is succinctly summarised by Ritchie and Crouch (2003) who asserted that holding constant all the dynamics of destination selection, it is the core resources and attractions that determine the willingness of tourists to visit a particular place. Thus, Malawi will struggle to attract tourists if it is less competitive on core attractions and resources even when it is competitive on other attributes such as hospitality and security.

On the rest of the attributes, tourists perceived Malawi performing poorly than the rest of the competitors, in general. These attributes are generally in three dimensions: information availability and online presence, accessibility and general infrastructure, and tourism (built) infrastructure. The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report (2019) ranks Malawi behind the rest of the destinations (the 8 destinations mentioned earlier) in ICT readiness, tourist service infrastructure, and air transport infrastructure, and ranks Malawi above only Botswana in terms of international openness. Previous empirical studies have also observed that the development of tourism in Malawi is stalled by poor quality infrastructure, limited air access,

and limited investments in communication technologies and road networks (Gartner & Cukier, 2012; Magombo et al., 2017). Even though the said attributes do not constitute the core attractions that attract tourists, they are equally important. As Manrai et al. (2019) observe, although tourists pursue unique wildlife and nature-based experiences in the SSA region, they also require a well-established and efficient tourism infrastructure such as lodging and communication facilities. Empirical studies have demonstrated that the enhancement of destination competitiveness is contingent upon the strategic interface of a destination's core resources and support factors (Azzopardi & Nash, 2017; Reisinger et al., 2019).

Notably, the country was perceived as competitive on two attributes that highlight the country's other self-declared unique selling proposition – the diversity of tourist attractions and resources despite the country's small size. However, it was not possible to ascertain whether this performance added value to the destination's overall competitiveness because the importance of the attributes to the tourists was not measured. However, thoughts on the importance of the attributes have been presented later in this chapter on of the effects of perceived destination competitiveness dimensions on tourist-based destination brand equity.

Given that the destinations of comparison are different in terms of economic development, an attempt was made to compare tourists' perceptions of Malawi in comparison to South Africa vis-à-vis their perceptions of Malawi against the rest of the identified countries in the SSA region. On 13 attributes, which included friendliness of the locals, the attitude of tourism service employees, price competitiveness, and personal security, tourists who compared Malawi against South Africa perceived Malawi performing better, in comparative terms, than those who compared it against other destinations in the SSA region. On the other hand, those who had assessed Malawi against South Africa reckoned Malawi's performance to be poorer than how it was perceived against the other SSA destinations on attributes such as accessibility, general levels of infrastructure, accommodation facilities, and the threat of

disease. South Africa belongs to the upper-middle-income-country category (World Bank, 2017), and countries with higher economic and income levels will likely develop efficient tourism infrastructure, which oftentimes guarantees exceptional tourist experiences (Giampiccoli et al., 2015; Manrai et al., 2019). However, South Africa has an image problem owing to public security and safety concerns (George & Booyens, 2014; Musavengane et al., 2020) caused by instances of violence and resentment towards migrants in recent years (Mario Matsinhe, 2011; Tella & Ogunnubi, 2014). This possibly explains why the destination was found to be less competitive on locals' attitudes towards visitors and personal security compared to the rest of the SSA destinations. The favourable rating that Malawi received on the personal safety and security attribute can a stepping stone towards image enhancement for the destination given the stereotypical security-related concerns associated with the region in the international media (Avraham & Ketter, 2017;Okupe, Ward, & Adeola, 2018)).

The two groups of respondents perceived Malawi almost equally on visa requirements and regulations and political stability, rating the two attributes as just above average. Malawi has a history of political stability in the region as compared to neighbouring countries such as Mozambique. However, this study was conducted in the aftermath of the May 2019 presidential election in Malawi. It has been stated that election time is usually associated with apprehension about social stability in many countries of the region (Dimopoulos, Queiros, & van Zyl, 2019); hence, this possibly explains the country's poor ratings on the attribute. Unsurprisingly, Malawi's visa regime was not perceived as highly competitive against both categories of competitor destinations because, until 2019, Malawi had reciprocal visa requirements for all countries that required visa for Malawi nationals. This meant that citizens of almost all major tourist generating countries for Malawi required a visa to enter the country. Furthermore, the visa fee ($75) per single entry charged for tourists was viewed as relatively prohibitive by industry experts and players. The recent downward revision of the visa fees to $50 and the

introduction of online visa processing by the country should, hopefully, encourage tourism flows into the country. A World Bank-commissioned study on tourism in sub-Saharan Africa, where leisure tourism is primarily dependent on organized tours, observed that too-expensive or difficult-to-obtain visas are retrogressive as tour operators may decide to exclude a country from their regional itineraries, citing examples of Mozambique and Madagascar where arrivals increased after visa requirements had been eased (Christie et al., 2014).

For a deeper analysis, Malawi was compared with Zambia, Tanzania and Kenya, Botswana and Namibia, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, and Uganda and Rwanda. The pairs were decided based on the destinations' geographical proximity and tourism resource endowments. Malawi was perceived as most competitive on destination attributes regarding residents' friendliness, the hospitality of service employees, and feeling of personal safety among tourists. Malawi received the fiercest competition from the Namibia and Botswana pair whereas the Zimbabwe and Mozambique pair and Zambia posed the least competitive rivalry. Except for a few attributes such as price competitiveness and service staff and resident attitudes, Malawi's performance against Namibia and Botswana was poor. Like South Africa, Namibia and Botswana are middle-income countries with diverse tourism resources that give the two countries an edge against many other countries in the region (Manrai et al., 2019). The next most competitive pair was Tanzania and Kenya. Kenya is a traditionally popular safari destination whose government has prioritised the travel and tourism sector through natural resource conservation, small and medium-sized enterprise financing, and human resource training, among others (Okello & Novelli, 2014), whereas Tanzania has managed to attract increasing, high-value tourists with longer lengths of stay, a feat that has eluded many sub-Saharan African countries with equal or even larger tourism industries (Christie et al., 2014; Nelson, 2012).

Aggregate comparison scores were computed for each of the 9 destinations of comparison using data from this study and also data from three previous editions of the TTCI. Using primary data from the current study destinations (excluding South Africa) ranked against Malawi as follows from the most competitive to the least competitive: Botswana, Namibia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Rwanda, Zambia, and Mozambique. In the TTCI data rankings, Namibia came first, Tanzania placed fourth, and Mozambique came last. Although the TTCI uses more indicators to derive its overall scores unlike the 29 used in the present study, a similar result was observed between the results of the present study and the TTCI rankings. This lends credibility to the usage of the demand approach in destination competitiveness studies, especially given the argument that tourists are less capable of evaluating a destination's competitiveness due to their lack of expertise in tourism issues and short stays in destinations (Omerzel, 2006; Reisinger, Michael, & Hayes, 2019). The insights obtained from the demand approach could be valuable in destination positioning and market segmentation efforts. A case in point is the results of the multi-group analysis in which the structural model was highly supported among tourists who had previously visited low-ranking SSA destinations than among tourists who had previously visited South Africa. This finding can guide destination planners and marketers to position Malawi as a destination for travellers seeking experiences in emerging off-the-beaten-track destinations. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to glean the stated insight from a study informed by a supply perspective.

A score range was also computed to specifically determine attributes where Malawi performed below, at par, or above the destinations of comparisons. The findings revealed that it is only on 9 attributes that Malawi performed better than the rest of the destinations in the SSA region (excluding South Africa). These attributes include friendliness of the residents, climate for vacation, cultural uniqueness, personal security and safety, the hospitality of service providers, and price competitiveness. Except for cultural uniqueness, and personal security and

safety (which can scare away travellers, especially if competitors are perceived much better (Sirakaya, Sheppard, & McLellan, 1997), the rest of the attributes do not serve as primary attractions (Ritchie & Crouch, 2010), which means that there is a need for the country to develop its core attractions and created resources. Even the cultural resources do not seem to mean much for a destination that lies in a region that is primarily associated with safari tourism. Perhaps, this justifies calls for the country to focus its tourism development initiatives around Lake Malawi and other nature-based tourist activities which could offer tour operators the incentive to include the country on otherwise safari-focused itineraries (Tyynelä & Rantala, 2003).

Beyond the SSA region destinations, notable differences emerged in the way that tourists perceived Malawi against six groups of destinations classified according to Plog's allocentric-psychocentric continuum and TTCI competitive rankings. Respondents who compared Malawi against highly-ranked destinations such as Portugal, France, and Argentina perceived Malawi favourably than the rest on nature and culture-related attributes but perceived the country poorly on accessibility, the general level of infrastructure, variety and quality of accommodation facilities, and the threat of disease. Again, this shows the importance of support facilities even when core resources and attractions are in place. Whereas Malawi was perceived to be less competitive against other SSA destinations in terms of core attractions like wildlife, the destination was rated relatively better on the same attributes when assessed against outside-SSA destinations. On the other hand, those who compared Malawi to low-ranking allocentric destinations such as Vietnam and Sri Lanka evaluated Malawi better than the rest in terms of tourism infrastructure and less favourably than the rest on nature-related resources. Perhaps, an interesting aspect of this finding is the significance of novelty in the formation of tourists' destination evaluation. Indeed, scholars have pointed out how novel or fashionable experiences could be a source of comparative advantage for destinations (Pike, 2004; Wong,

2017). The finding also supports the study's argument that destination competitiveness does not only stem from geographical proximity but also destinations' tourism resource similarity and levels of economic development (Abreu-Novais et al., 2016; Assaf & Dwyer, 2013).

Furthermore, a *near-far destination analysis of competitiveness* was conducted. Destination attributes were classified into six categories according to how tourists perceived them. Using the six categories, the analysis offered Malawi guidance on which set of attributes to focus on as a benchmark in its quest to improve its tourism products. Attributes in zones III and IV make the destination competitive over both proximate competitors and far-away destinations. The destination needs to consolidate these attributes while closely monitoring the performance of the attributes of the geographically near destinations. Even though Malawi was perceived to be performing well against the "best practice destinations" on the national parks and wildlife reserves attribute, it does not necessarily mean that the country has a competitive edge over the destinations. Not many countries outside the SSA region are known for safari tourism; hence, even though the external competitive analysis makes sense for attributes such as accommodation and environmental conditions, for instance; reading too much into cultural or natural resource comparisons would be going against the "apple to apple comparison" principle required in benchmarking studies (Kozak, 2002a).

On the other hand, attributes in Zone I (e.g. visa requirements) and zone VI (e.g. accessibility, general infrastructure, political stability, and ICTs) need special attention. Malawi's dismal performance on the political stability attribute should be a cause for concern because, first, political stability has been one of the country's strong points as a destination in a region associated, oftentimes stereotypically, with political instability. Second, while the attribute is not classified under core attractions, it, nonetheless, determines the scale of tourism development (Crouch and Ritchie, 2010) as tourists are unlikely to visit a politically unstable destination. The infrastructure attributes are very important because they are the foundation on

which the tourism industry thrives (Ritchie & Crouch, 2010). One might argue that it would be extremely challenging for Malawi to suddenly improve on infrastructure indicators since the infrastructural development seems to ascend from economic prosperity (Gartner & Cukier, 2012). Manrai et al. (2019), however, contend that regardless of the level of economic development, the government's investment in tourism infrastructure will likely boost tourism, which will enhance economic growth.

5.2 Objective 2: Expand and validate the model of tourist-based destination brand equity by integrating brand trust and brand commitment into the model in an emerging destination context

The second objective of the study was to expand and validate the tourist-based destination brand equity model by simultaneously integrating trust and commitment dimensions with the traditional components of brand awareness, perceived quality and brand image into the model in an emerging destination context. In this regard, a five-factor solution was extracted through principal analysis. The model exhibited high levels of validity assessed through internal consistency and convergent and discriminant validity. The valid and reliable multi-dimensional model validated in this study responds to calls by scholars that more dimensions must be integrated into the tourist-based destination brand equity model and the model must be tested in various destination contexts (Tasci, 2018). Ghafari et al (2017) have also contended that dimensions of brand equity more applicable to tourism should be emphasised in the application of the brand equity concept to tourism destinations. Destination brand awareness was measured using indicators that captured the post-visit knowledge of the tourists, contrary to traditional destination awareness indicators that use a top-of-mind awareness orientation that may be difficult to measure when tourists are already at the destination (Aaker, 1996). The validity of the post-visit awareness dimension will be useful in the application of the brand equity concept to emerging or even under-developed destinations

as it can help DMOs identify which tourist experiences are instrumental in developing or enhancing awareness on the part of the visitor (Oppermann, 1999).

The validity of the model validated in the study also means that the brand equity model can incorporate destination brand trust as its integral dimension (Dedeoğlu et al., 2018). This is even more important when the model is applied to developing destinations where tourists may feel insecure due to their lack of confidence in the credibility and reliability of service providers and residents (Wang et al., 2014). The proponents of the development of destination brand equity argue that the concept enhances tourists' loyalty to destinations; hence, the inclusion of the trust dimension in the model is appropriate as tourists will likely travel to or refer to others a destination that they identify as trustworthy and reliable (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006) and given that trust is a crucial element in destination choice (Hsu & Cai, 2009). Moreover, the validity of the model with a focus on destination brand commitment, which combines indicators of attachment and word of mouth recommendation, suggests that the model can be applied to iconic, small, emerging, or 'once in a lifetime' destinations that may not attract repeat visitation as espoused in traditional destination loyalty indicators (Moore et al., 2017; Rivera & Croes, 2010). This partly addresses the concern by some scholars that the loyalty concept, as conventionally understood in marketing literature, should not be directly imported into tourism research without considering the unique characteristics of the tourism field (Pearce & Kang, 2009; Pinkus et al., 2016). In sum, this study responds to calls from various scholars for further studies on the destination brand equity concept (Dedeoğlu et al., 2018; Pike & Bianchi, 2016).

5.3 Objective 3: Empirically test a model that explores the influence of perceived destination competitiveness on tourist-based destination brand equity

The third objective was to examine the influence of perceived destination competitiveness on tourist-based destination brand equity. The relevant assessments revealed

that the variables used exhibited acceptable psychometric characteristics. The internal reliability and construct validity of each of the latent variables were above the cut-off points, indicating that reliable and valid measurement scales were used to explore the influence of perceived destination competitiveness on tourist-based destination brand equity. While most of the indicators of perceived destination competitiveness were drawn from various studies and were explored for multidimensionality, most of the items used to conceptualise tourist-based destination brand equity had been used in previous studies, even though their contexts were different from that of the current study. The findings of the study, especially using the sub-Saharan Africa destinations sample, generally support the proposed conceptual framework and the postulated hypotheses, demonstrating the usefulness of the model in understanding the impact of perceived destination competitiveness on tourist-based brand equity in an emerging destination context.

The causal relationships' predictive relevance (Stone-Geisser's Q^2) scores and endogenous constructs' explained variance values (with a few exceptions), thereby supporting the adequacy of the structural model to explain the impact of perceived destination competitiveness on tourist-based destination brand equity. Regarding the study's hypotheses, 17 of the 22 hypotheses were supported using the SSA sample data, while 12 of the 22 causal relationships were confirmed in the outside-SSA sample data. This possibly suggests the suitability of the model for the SSA sample over the outside-SSA sample. Furthermore, trust was found to mediate the effects that brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand image can have on brand commitment.

Additionally, the PLS multi-group analyses demonstrated that the proposed conceptual model was invariant across various populations. The model was validated in each of the sub-samples generated according to the rankings of the destinations of comparison and tourists' country of origin. However, there were some group-specific differences regarding explained

variances and causal paths regarding tourists' country of origin and the ranking of the destinations of comparison. What follows is a discussion of the results of hypothesis testing, first with the SSA sample and then the outside-SSA sample.

Six perceived destination competitiveness factors were extracted in the SSA sample by way using principal factor analysis. These factors were termed Inherited Resources (grand mean = 3.34), Created Resources (grand mean = 2.70), Hospitality and Climate (grand mean = 4.08), Connectivity and Information Availability (grand mean = 2.97), Qualifying and Amplifying factors (grand mean = 3.97), and Topography (grand mean = 3.64). Based on the ratings, Malawi was perceived to be most competitive on the hospitality and climate dimension and least competitive on the created resources dimension.

Inherited Resources constitute the environmental context within which the tourist experiences the destination, as well as the culture of the destination, history, customs, and belief systems (Dwyer & Kim, 2003). Dwyer and Kim's (2003) categorisation differentiates between natural resources and heritage resources. In the current study out of the five attributes constituted the Inherited Resources dimension, four related to natural resources and one related to heritage resources loaded together. The tests of the hypotheses revealed that inherited resources influence destination brand awareness, perceived quality, and destination brand image. The strongest effect was noted on perceived quality, whereas the weakest effect was on brand awareness. According to Wong (2018), functional elements of destination competitiveness such as locals' way of life and festivals influence a destination's brand equity. Wong's (2018) study, however, did not specify the dimensions of destination brand equity that are positively influenced by the said functional attributes of destination competitiveness as his study conceptualised destination brand equity as a higher-order model. In the current study, however, the dimensions of destination brand equity that are influenced by competitive inherited resources have been specified. The results further confirm the findings of Kladou and

Kehagias (2014) who found that tourists' perceptions of a destination's cultural assets will significantly enhance the tourists' awareness of the destination. Given that the strongest effect was on perceived quality which is one of the most significant components of destination brand equity (Kim et al., 2018), this study submits that an improvement in Malawi's competitiveness in inherited resources will likely enhance the destination's brand equity. Thus, on one hand, the fact that the inherited resource dimension was rated to be the fourth most competitive dimension should be a cause for concern for Malawi. On the other hand, it allows the country to improve in this area since the enhancement of this destination competitiveness dimension will help improve the destination's brand equity.

Created Resources encompass factors such as tourism infrastructure (accommodation, transportation networks, etc.), quality of management, and accessibility, among others (Dwyer & Kim, 2003). This was the dimension on which Malawi was the least competitive. Previous studies have also established that many emerging destinations struggle to offer competitive supporting factors and conditions for their tourism industries (Manrai & Manrai, 2019; Novelli, 2016). The findings of the current study revealed that created resources positively influence destination brand awareness, perceived quality, and destination brand image. Like inherited resources, the strongest effect was on the link between created resources and perceived quality. Prior studies have empirically established that destination resources positively influence a tourist's evaluation of the destination (Chekalina et al., 2018). Unlike previous studies that used a top-of-mind approach to awareness, the current study used a post-visit 'knowledge-enhancement' orientation, hence destination awareness was modelled as a consequence of destination competitiveness. The confirmation of the hypothesis supports the findings of Yuan and Jang (2008) who found that the performance of a wine festival will enhance attendees' awareness of the festival. Indeed, it has been argued that destination awareness is a function of both informational familiarity and, in the present study, experiential familiarity (Hsu & Cai,

2009). Comparatively, the created resources dimension came second to inherited resources regarding the strength of impact on the destination brand equity dimensions.

The findings also revealed that created resources strongly influence destination brand image. As brand image was conceptualised as tourists' self-identification with the destination and expressions of pride having visited the destination, it means that competitive created resources will enhance tourists' self-identification with the place they visit, even in developing destinations. This confirms the results of previous studies that showed that created resources play a critical role in tourists' social identification with a destination (Wong, 2018; Wong & Teoh, 2015). It is important to mention that making created resources more competitive is crucial to destination success since destination brand image has a strong influence on destination commitment.

Connectivity and Information Availability constitute attributes that border on collaboration among enterprises in the tourism sector and the availability of information that tourists may seek online. Even though these attributes loaded on a different factor, they form part of created resources. The results showed that this dimension of perceived destination competitiveness positively influences only perceived quality among the three relationships examined. Thus, developing a competitive system that enables the tourist to meet their information and communication needs such as online inquiries and bookings will enhance the tourist's destination overall quality evaluation. The need for such a system is supported by a plethora of empirical studies that attest to the role of information in enhancing destination brand equity (Baldauf et al., 2003; Wong, 2018; Zillifro & Morais, 2004).

Hospitality and Climate was Malawi's most competitive dimension of perceived destination competitiveness. As mentioned earlier, this set of attributes is what Malawi prides itself on as a travel destination. The results demonstrated that the dimension positively influences perceived quality and destination brand image. The causal link to destination brand

image was the stronger path between the two paths, implying that the better the attitudes of the locals and service staff towards tourists, the greater the overall evaluation of quality the tourists will assign to the destination and, more importantly, the association the tourists will have with the destination. Perhaps, the relatively weaker effect on perceived quality confirms previous findings that hospitality experienced at a destination does not contribute significantly to the destination's overall competitiveness or the enhancement of brand equity (Reisinger et al., 2019; Wong, 2018). For Malawi, the World Bank (2010) advised that the country's positioning which is based on friendly and welcoming residents is not distinctive or strong enough as it would be uncommon for tourists to assume that there would be unfriendly reception for visitors unless the destination has gained such a negative reputation, which is not the case with Malawi. Similarly, Sirakaya et al. (1997) found that while a negative image can scare away potential tourists from a destination, high levels of safety and security do not greatly determine an individual's likelihood of choosing a particular destination.

The results show that qualifying and amplifying determinants positively influence destination brand awareness and destination brand image. The implies that ensuring good personal security and safety for tourists and maintaining a good tourist-to-resident ratio (crowding) will greatly enhance tourists' knowledge of and their social identification with the destination. In other words, a safe and secure destination will encourage tourists to intensely explore the destination's attractions and deeply interact with its residents out which awareness and social and self-image can develop (George & Booyens, 2014). Although it is often said that the aforementioned attributes are typically outside the responsibility of destination managers, they extremely important given their influence on destination choice (Ritchie & Crouch, 2010), hence destination managers or business operators can lobby government authorities to implement policies that will position destinations favourably to tourists. For

instance, DMOs can lobby governments to offer competitive visa charges and tourist taxes or airport ground handling fees for airlines.

Within the destination brand equity model, the study established a positive influence of awareness, perceived quality, and brand image on brand trust. Trust is formed from interactions with the destination and is a consequence of benefits received by the tourist from products and services provided at the destination (Dedeoğlu et al., 2018). The results demonstrated that the strongest effect on trust stemmed from perceived quality, seconded in strength by the effect from destination brand image. This finding reinforces the position of various scholars on the need for trust to be incorporated into the conceptualisation of destination brand equity (Dedeoğlu et al., 2018). It can, thus, be asserted that emerging destinations are likely to earn the trust of their visitors if they focus on providing high-quality experiences to tourists (Chang, 2014; Su et al., 2017). The finding also established that brand awareness and brand image positively influence destination brand commitment, with destination brand image exerting a stronger effect. In their study, Chow, Ling, Yen, and Hwang (2017) found that among awareness, perceived quality, and brand image, the latter exerted the strongest effect on loyalty. Since the current study used commitment as a proxy for loyalty, the results corroborate the results from previous studies that identified that brand image or identification is a predictor of destination loyalty (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014; Pike & Bianchi, 2016).

The study, however, could not establish a positive impact of perceived quality on commitment. While this finding contradicts previous studies that supported the relationship (Kim, Holland, & Han, 2013; Kim et al., 2018), the current study found that perceived quality influences commitment but through the mediating effect of trust. This implies better overall quality evaluations does not guarantee destination brand commitment until the destination earns the trust of the tourists. Furthermore, the findings support the prediction that destination brand trust influences destination brand commitment, confirming the classical relationship

explicated in the trust-commitment theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Trust is, perhaps, more relevant to emerging destinations due to the uncertainties associated with such destinations. The fact that trust influences commitment presents both a threat and an opportunity in that a lack of trust might result in less commitment whereas its presence will strengthen the tourist-destination relationship. With many destinations across the world, both mature and emerging, struggling with developing trust with tourists (Liu, Wang, Fang, & Zhang, 2019), the examination of the trust dimension under the tourist-based destination brand equity model should be a timely endeavour.

Regarding the outside-SSA sample, hospitality and climate had the most far-reaching influence on destination brand equity as the perceived destination competitiveness dimension positively influenced brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand image. Thus, compared to returning visitors, first-time visitors to the SSA region evaluated destination brand equity more favourably because of the hospitality of residents and service staff in Malawi. In terms of strength of impact, however, the Created Resources dimension exerted the biggest effect on perceived quality, supporting the importance of attributes like general infrastructure, accommodation, and recreation activities towards a destination's overall quality evaluation. Inherited Resources also had a positive influence on destination brand awareness and perceived quality, with the largest effect exerted on the latter.

Surprisingly, Connectivity and Information Availability negatively influenced destination awareness. It should be noted that the grand mean value for the connectivity and information availability factor was 2.84 while the brand awareness dimension had a grand mean of 4.46. On one hand, this could mean that when tourists perceived Malawi to be less competitive in terms of information resources or connectivity they might have gone out to explore by themselves and ended up becoming more aware of the destination. On the other hand, it could mean that the more competitive the tourists perceived the attributes under the

dimension to be, they less aware they became of the destination. This can raise questions about the credibility or quality of the information provided online to the tourists. The finding could also mean that the more tourists are engaged with communication devices like smartphones while at the destination, the less they explore the destination, hence limited awareness. Ayeh (2018), for instance, intimate that heavy usage of mobile media devices may have negative outcomes on tourist experiences including social interactions and appreciation of the scope of the natural landscape, thereby reducing destination awareness. Based on the two probable scenarios mentioned above, the current situation provides Malawi with an opportunity to improve the competitiveness of the factor while offering an opportunity for tourists to explore the destination more intensely.

Regarding the examined relationships among the destination brand equity dimensions, only perceived quality had a significant effect on trust. Conversely, awareness, perceived quality, and brand image all positively influenced commitment. Furthermore, trust influenced commitment. How these findings relate to literature has been discussed under the SSA sample above.

5.4 Examine the moderating effects of destination-related and tourist-related factors on the relationship between perceived destination competitiveness and tourist-based destination brand equity

A series of multi-group analysis was undertaken to examine the moderating effects of the ranking of the destinations of comparison and tourists' country of origin on the hypothesised relationships. For the SSA sample, the MGA revealed considerable differences in the structural models for those who compared Malawi against South Africa compared to those who assessed Malawi against other destinations in the SSA region. There are notable differences in the variances explained in the dependent variables. While the model explained 47.2% of the variance in the commitment of the respondents who compared Malawi against

South Africa, it explained 38% of the variance in brand commitment among respondents who assessed Malawi against low-ranking SSA destinations. Similarly, compared to the SSA group, the group that assessed Malawi against South Africa had revealed relatively higher explained variances in awareness, perceived quality, and trust, but a lower variance explained for value. In the examined hypotheses, while Created Resources positively and significantly influenced brand image among the sub-sample that compared Malawi with other SSA destinations group, the path between the two constructs was insignificant in the Malawi versus South Africa group.

Fewer paths were supported in the group that compared Malawi against South Africa than in the group that compared Malawi against other destinations in the SSA region. Even though several paths were not found to be significant in the former, it should be noted that Henseler's approach is conservative in its estimation (Sarstedt et al., 2011). It can be argued then that even when the scores of the variance accounted for were higher in the group that compared Malawi against South Africa, the assessment of the path coefficients supports the suitability of the model for the sample that compared Malawi with low-ranking SSA destinations over the former. The disparity possibly stemmed from differences in the level of infrastructural development between South Africa and the other SSA countries considered. According to Assaf and Dwyer (2013), attributes like tourism infrastructure and pricing rather than geographic location differentiate destinations from each other. Thus, although South Africa and the rest of the SSA destinations are in the same geographical location, their differences in terms of economic and infrastructural development should be considered when comparisons are made.

Differences were also noted in the structural model between American and British tourists. More examined paths were significant in the American tourists' model than in the British tourists' model. Among the Americans, relatively stronger relationships were observed between Created Resources and brand image, Hospitality and Climate and brand image as well

as Qualifying and Amplifying determinants and awareness, and a smaller impact was observed from Inherited Resources to brand image. The results supported the suitability of the structural model to the American tourists' group compared to the British tourists' group. This can be attributed to differences in travel experience or interactions with the region between the two groups. Due to colonial, historical, and social ties between most of the southern African countries and the United Kingdom (Cornelissen, 2017), the British are likely to have had more experience of travelling to African destinations than Americans. This possibly explains why British tourists were less satisfied with their experiences than their American counterparts. As has already been indicated, novelty plays a very significant role in destination perception.

The multi-group analysis further identified differences between low-ranking and highly-ranked destinations in the outside-SSA sample. Major differences in explained variances were noted between the groups on all the dependent variables. Furthermore, the multi-group analysis revealed statistically significant differences between the two groups in the path coefficients between brand perceived quality and brand commitment and between brand trust and brand commitment. Additionally, more examined relationships were supported among the respondents who had compared Malawi with low-ranking destinations than among the group that assessed Malawi against highly-ranked destinations. These findings demonstrated the suitability of the structural model for the group that compared Malawi to low-ranking destinations over the group that assessed Malawi against highly-ranked destinations. This sheds some light on the importance of proper identification of competitors for a destination's competitive analysis (Abreu-Novais et al., 2016). Thus, although different, or highly-ranked destinations (as in the present study) can be chosen for external competitive analysis purposes, it is necessary to identify destinations similar in resources and ranking for competitive analysis.

5.5 Differences between the two models (SSA vs. Outside-SSA)

There are several differences worth noting between the models: In the sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) region sample, more perceived destination competitiveness factors with more items were extracted than in the outside-SSA region sample. This difference can be attributed to the varied destinations of comparison in the outside-SSA region sample which means that it was difficult for items to converge in the expected dimensions as the bases of comparison were relatively less standardised in the outside-SSA sample. Furthermore, more relationships between perceived destination competitiveness factors and destination brand equity dimensions were supported in the SSA model than in the outside-SSA model. For instance, whereas Created Resources significantly influenced brand awareness, brand perceived quality, and brand image in the SSA region model, it only predicted perceived quality in the outside-SSA region model. This difference can again be explained by the difference in the destinations of comparison: on one hand, Malawi was compared with destinations mostly at a similar level of economic development in the SSA region model; hence, indicators under the Created Resource factor had relatively higher mean values. On another hand, Malawi was compared with better-developed destinations in the outside-SSA region model hence Created Resources indicators had lower mean values.

Additionally, relationships between brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand image, and brand trust were supported in the SSA model. On the contrary, only the relationship between brand perceived quality and brand trust was supported in the outside-SSA region model. Thus, while brand trust played a significant role in mediating the relationship between the first three dimensions of destination brand equity (awareness, perceived quality, and image) and brand commitment in the SSA region model, it (brand trust) was not as important in the outside-SSA region model. This difference can be attributed to the fact that there were comparatively more volunteer tourists in the outside-SSA region sample than in the SSA region

sample; hence, the respondents possibly developed emotional connections with the destination even if the destination did not earn their trust as a travel destination. For the SSA region sample (dominated by leisure travellers), however, the level of tourists' commitment was, to a significant extent, determined by the level of trust earned by the destination among the sample respondents. Finally, it was noted that brand image was an important component of destination brand equity in the SSA region model compared to the outside-SSA model. Thus, respondents that had previously visited other countries in sub-Saharan Africa found it easier to socially identify with Malawi as a travel destination compared to those visiting the region for the first time. This indicates the importance of travel experience as far as the development of destination commitment is concerned.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The current chapter gives an overview of the key findings of the thesis and discusses the theoretical and empirical contributions together with the managerial implications of the results. The chapter ends with a discussion of the study's limitations and recommendations for further study.

6.1 Summary of the results

The present study first undertakes a comprehensive competitive analysis of an emerging destination, using Malawi as a case study, by applying varying bases of destinations-of-comparison in the sub-Sahara Africa region and beyond. Specifically, the first part identified a set of destination attributes applicable to the set of destinations under consideration and determined the relative competitive standings of the destinations as per tourists' perceptions. Next, the study expands the model of tourist-based destination brand equity by integrating destination brand trust and replacing destination loyalty with destination commitment in the model. Explicitly, the destination brand equity aspect assessed the cognitive and affective value tourists attach to a destination due to its exceptional performance in relation to the competition. The stated value arises from the branding process through which a destination seeks to be different from the competition in both function and experience. Thereafter, the study draws on Gouldner's (1960) notion of reciprocity and Dorsch and Carlson's (1996) concept of customer equity to examine the influence of perceived destination competitiveness on tourist-based destination brand equity. The two concepts primariry support the notion that a destination's brand equity is better predicted and enhanced by the destination's ability to offer better tourist experiences in relation to the competition. Ritchie and Crouch's (2003) model informed the measurement of destination competitiveness. Aaker's (1996) model of brand equity informed the conceptualisation of tourist-based destination brand equity.

First, a detailed descriptive analysis is conducted in which Malawi was compared with countries in the SSA region and those outside the region in line with respondents' destinations of comparison. This analysis mainly used mean values, independent samples t-tests, and analysis of variance. In general, the country seems to be performing better than its competitors within the region in terms of hospitality and climate, qualifying and amplifying determinants, and tourism resource diversity. The country was found less competitive on inherited resources (wildlife, cultural diversity, etc.) created resources (general infrastructure, accessibility, etc.) and information resources (online presence, connectivity, etc.). Furthermore, the study compares Malawi's performance against low-ranking (according to TTCI rankings) destinations with the SSA region with its performance against similar (according to Plog's categorisation) highly-ranked destinations outside the region. Six zones of performance are identified that could have significant managerial implications for emerging destinations in the region.

Thereafter, the proposed measurement model was assessed using both the SSA sample and the outside-SSA sample. The results supported 17 out of 22 causal links and mediating effects of trust in the SSA sample and 11 out of 22 causal links in the outside-SSA sample. In the SSA sample, the results demonstrated that inherited resources are the strongest predictor of tourist-based destination brand equity, confirming previous destination competitiveness studies in emerging destinations (e.g. Reisinger et al., 2019). In contradiction to previous research, the present study established that abstract elements of destination competitiveness such as hospitality influence destination brand equity (see Wong, 2018). The results also established that perceived quality was the strongest antecedent of destination brand trust, whereas brand image exerted the largest effect on brand commitment, supporting previous research in emerging destinations (e.g. Chow et al., 2017). The analysis, however, could not establish a positive relationship between perceived quality and commitment. While this finding

contradicts previous studies, it was observed that perceived quality influences commitment indirectly through the mediating effect of trust.

In the outside-SSA sample, hospitality and climate had the most far-reaching effect on destination brand equity as the perceived destination competitiveness factor predicted brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand image. Thus, hospitality and climate factor is key to the development of destination brand equity among first-time visitors to the region. The Created Resources dimension had the biggest effect on perceived quality, revealing the importance of attributes like general infrastructure and accommodation facilities towards tourists' overall quality evaluation of a destination. Inherited Resources also had a positive influence on destination brand awareness and perceived quality, with the largest effect exerted on the latter. Contrary to prediction, the Connectivity and Information Availability factor significantly but negatively influenced destination awareness. This could mean that when tourists perceived Malawi to be less competitive in terms of information resources or connectivity, they went out to acquaint themselves with the destination or that the more tourists use communication devices like smartphones while visiting, the little awareness of the destination that they gain. Contrary to the SSA sample, only perceived quality had a significant effect on trust in the outside-SSA sample. However, awareness, perceived quality, and brand image all positively influenced commitment. Furthermore, trust influenced commitment.

In the MGA analyses, results showed statistically significant differences in the examined hypotheses across the destination-of-comparison and country of origin subsamples. For example, the MGA conducted in using the SSA sample showed that the conceptual model was more supported among the subsample that assessed Malawi against low-ranking SSA destinations than among respondents who assessed Malawi against South Africa. In the outside-SSA sample, the conceptual model was more supported among American tourists than among British tourists.

Theoretical and empirical contributions and managerial implications given the findings are discussed in the sections below.

6.2 Contributions of the study

6.2.1 Theoretical contributions

The study's theoretical contributions are as follows: first, there is an implicit assumption, especially in the general marketing literature, that customer-based brand equity influences brand competitiveness. There is, however, emerging literature that contends that, in tourism destination contexts, the opposite could be true: that destination competitiveness predicts destination brand equity. The current study, drawing on the notion of reciprocity and customer equity, explored this emerging line of thought. Specifically, the few studies that have explored this line of thought has conceptualised the two concepts (perceived destination competitiveness and tourist-based destination brand equity) as higher-order constructs. Thus, while these studies may have demonstrated that perceived destination competitiveness influences tourist-based destination brand equity, they did not reveal specific relationships between the dimensions of the two major constructs. This exploratory study has established the specific relationships that exist among the dimensions of the two constructs. The results will be helpful to future research that aims to further explore these relationships in different tourism and leisure contexts. Also, whereas previous studies have argued, often without empirical proof, that abstract perceived destination competitiveness dimensions like hospitality do not influence tourist-based destination brand equity (Wong, 2018), the current study demonstrated that even abstract elements of perceived destination competitiveness are predictors of tourist-based destination brand equity.

The second theoretical contribution of the study lies in its simultaneous integration of brand trust and brand commitment in the destination brand equity model. Traditionally, the

destination brand equity model has been constituted by awareness, perceived quality, image, and loyalty dimensions. Some scholars, however, have recommended that both cognitive (e.g. perceived quality) and affective assessments like trust should be incorporated especially in the application of the tourist-based destination brand equity construct to products with an amalgam nature, which tourism destinations are an example (Dedeoğlu et al., 2018). More so, with many destinations are going through crises in recent times, it has become even more imperative for destinations to earn and assess the trust of their visitors. By incorporating brand commitment as the outcome variable of destination brand equity, the current study recognises the intricacies of absolute loyalty in travel destinations in general, and the rarity of repeat visitation in small, emerging, "once-in-a-lifetime", and long-haul destinations in particular (Bianchi & Pike, 2011). Much as destination brand trust and destination commitment have been separately incorporated into destination brand equity models before, the current study simultaneously incorporated the two dimensions into the model with the widely explored dimensions of brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand image. This endeavour responds to Dedeoğlu et al. (2018) who lamented the tendency by researchers to use a limited number of components in destination brand equity studies, a situation that has resulted into the lack of comprehensiveness of the concept. Furthermore, the study demonstrated that trust mediates the effect that awareness, perceived quality, and brand image can have on commitment, especially in the case of competitors at the same level of economic development.

Third, the thesis considered the unique nature of travel, which has at its core the concept of wanderlust and which recognises that familiarity negatively correlates with novelty. This, coupled with the view that emerging and small destinations are not guaranteed repeat visitation, necessitated the re-conceptualisation of destination loyalty as destination commitment by combining aspects of attitudinal loyalty and elements of place attachment. By validating the tourist-based destination brand equity concept and testing its structural relationships with

commitment as the ultimate dependent variable, the study helps to address the concerns by scholars that the loyalty concept, as commonly conceptualised in general marketing research, should not be transferred wholesale into tourism inquiry (McKercher et al., 2012; Pearce & Kang, 2009). This validation could guide scholars on the right loyalty elements to use in tourism studies conducted in destinations that are less likely to attract repeat visitation.

6.2.2 Empirical contributions

Empirical contributions highlight a fresh account of an empirical observation that questions established assumptions about the world or bring to light something undocumented (Agerfalk, 2014). In the present case, empirical contributions of the study relate to the specific contributions arising from the use of a case study in an emerging destination context, with tourists, not supply-side stakeholders, as respondents, and the use of several approaches in identifying bases-of-comparison in the competitive analyses. Another novel approach was the use of destination rankings and tourist nationality as moderating variables to the examined hypotheses.

First, the literature is replete with studies on destination competitiveness conducted from a supply perspective. This is because of the notion that tourists cannot effectively evaluate the competitiveness of a destination owing to their limited expertise in tourism issues and short stays in the destination. In recent years, however, the supply-side perspective has been criticised because supply-side stakeholders might have skewed opinions due to nationalist agendas or their lack of visitation to competitor destinations, among several reasons (Dwyer, Livaic, & Mellor, 2003). This study contributes to the growing literature on destination competitiveness using the demand perspective. The importance of this perspective lies in the notion that tourists have the final say in deciding which destination to visit, thus the demand point of view demonstrates a destination's appeal to visitors and its ability to meet or exceed the visitors' expectations (Andrades-Caldito et al., 2014). The demand perspective provides

important insights beyond revealing the strengths and weaknesses of the destination. In this study, the structural model was supported more among respondents who compared Malawi to low-ranking destinations than among those who compared Malawi to highly-ranked destinations. Furthermore, in the source market MGA, the model was supported more in the American sub-sample than in the British sub-sample. These key insights, which could prove useful in destination positioning and market segmentation efforts, would be difficult, if not impossible, to derive from a supply perspective.

Second, studies on destination competitiveness and destination brand equity have been conducted in established destinations, mostly in the global north. Such studies are rare in developing destinations such as the SSA region. Indeed, Manrai et al. (2019) have noted that there is a paucity of academic research and theorisation on tourism in the SSA region despite the fact the region has seen an increase in the number of arrivals in recent years (Novelli, 2016). At the global level, the UNWTO (2018) report that Africa edged other continents in terms of increase in arrivals (at 9%), followed by Europe at 8% (UNWTO, 2018a). Looking forward, destinations in developing countries were projected to receive more arrivals than developed countries by 2020 and exceed the 1 billion mark by 2030 (Goffi et al., 2019; UNWTO, 2017). From the above, it will not be far-fetched to assert that scholarly inquiry focusing on tourism in the SSA region is worthwhile. Therefore, the current study is a timely and important contribution to the much-needed literature on tourism in the region.

Third, this thesis is one of the few studies that have combined destination competitive analysis and comparative analysis with "best-practice" destinations. In light of the observation by Kozak (2002a) that most competitive analyses only consider destinations within a given geographic location, the current study took a step further to include, in the competitive analysis, destinations that are far away from the destination under investigation. This study, thus, aligns with the argument that a destination's competitor set is not only determined by geographic

proximity, but also, inter alia, the similarity of tourism resource stock, levels of economic development, and competitive rankings (Assaf & Dwyer, 2013). From the analyses, instructive insights emerged on how Malawi performed not only against other destinations in the SSA region, but also highly-ranked destinations beyond the region. The insights could prove useful in designing and implementing product development or marketing communication strategies in Malawi. Additionally, the current study integrated Plog's allocentric-psychocentric continuum in the competitive analysis, and thus, contributes to the argument that heterogeneity of destinations should be considered when comparing international tourism destinations (Assaf & Dwyer, 2013).

Finally, the MGA results demonstrated that the proposed model was more applicable to specific market segments by showing differences according to the rankings of the destinations-of-comparison and the tourists' nationalities. These differences have important marketing implications that are explained in the subsequent section below.

6.3 Managerial implications

First, the study empirically demonstrates, in order of importance, perceived destination competitiveness dimensions that influence destination brand equity. The results of the study show that inherited resources are the strongest predictor of destination brand equity in an emerging destination context. This insight is valuable to Malawi and other emerging destinations in the SSA region in terms of understanding what to invest in to develop long-term relationships with their visitors (i.e. create and enhance destination brand equity). The inherited resources constitute a destination's core resources and attractors; hence, considering that the dimension was rated fourth in terms of competitiveness, emerging destinations in the region must identify and develop their core attractions in line with their unique inherited resources and the interests of their target markets. Of course, such core attractions could not be too far

removed from wildlife, since the destinations are in a region whose primary tourism appeal emanates from safari tourism.

The same way that mature destinations depend on different resources for their competitiveness, a key consideration is the identification of core resources that could differentiate a specific emerging destination. Malawi, has, for example, with notable success, revamped its national parks and wildlife reserves by awarding concessions to private park managers via public-private partnerships (Briers-Louw, Verschueren, & Leslie, 2019). One success story out the initiative is the Majete Wildlife Reserve under the management of African Parks, an international non-governmental conservation organisation. It should be noted, however, that it will be an extremely difficult task for destinations like Malawi and Mozambique to develop their wildlife resources to the levels of competitors like Tanzania and Kenya. To differentiate its tourism offering, Malawi can also work on developing tourism activities around Lake Malawi. If developed properly, it can provide an incentive for tourists or tour operators to include Malawi on their otherwise safari-focused itineraries. Events like the Lake of Stars Music Festival, an international music festival that is held annually on the shores of Lake Malawi and has attracted sizeable international attendance and media attention in the past decade (https://lakeofstars.org/), is an example of a core attraction that can be utilised to differentiate the country's tourism offering. Another example in the region is Mozambique, which has a rich history of indigenous cultures, foreign contacts, and influences tracing back to the Greco-Roman era (Jeffery & Parthesius, 2013). The country could use such resources to position itself as a heritage destination, thus offering an alternative in a safari-focused region. Countries like Ghana and Senegal in East Africa have successfully positioned themselves as slavery-based heritage tourism destinations, for instance (Mowatt & Chancellor, 2011; Yankholmes & Timothy, 2017). The managerial implication is that having known that inherited resources are the principal determinants of perceived destination competitiveness in

the emerging destination context, DMOs and tourism operators need to assess their resources to ascertain which ones to develop and promote to attain sustainable competitive advantage.

Furthermore, the study observed that the second most important dimension in influencing destination brand equity is created resources. This was the least competitive dimension of perceived destination competitiveness for Malawi. Attributes under this dimension include accessibility, accommodation, and general infrastructure. Given that attributes like accessibility do not only influence destination brand equity, but also destination choice, emerging destinations in the region need to invest significantly in the development of these attributes in an attempt to improve their competitiveness. Except for a few countries like Ethiopia, which have reliable national carriers connecting them to major source markets, many countries in the southeast African region do not have airlines of international repute. The fact that the countries are geographically far away from their major source markets in Europe and North America only exacerbates the situation. As mentioned earlier, infrastructure development is a function of economic development; hence, emerging destinations might struggle to develop tourism infrastructure. Still, governments in these countries, especially in the SSA region, can use unconventional means to develop their tourism industries. For instance, governments may direct international aid to tourism infrastructure development to enhance overall economic growth (Manrai et al., 2019). There is evidence that investments in tourism, such as physical infrastructure, trigger overall economic growth (Dogru & Bulut, 2018).

The results also demonstrated that hospitality, Malawi's small size, and tourism resource diversity, which Malawi focusses on as its unique selling propositions, were not as important as created and inherited resources in influencing destination brand equity. A key managerial implication from this finding is that a destination has to identify and develop a set of core resources and attractions, provide the necessary supporting infrastructure, and then

wrap the offering with the hospitality aspect of the destination in the communication strategies. Perhaps, with a well-developed and coordinated transportation system, the role of the country's small size and its purported tourism resource diversity in influencing destination brand equity could be enhanced. The study also established that political stability, which the country has performed well on for many years, was perceived poorly. The year 2019 was an election year in Malawi and as it has been stated that travellers may be apprehensive about travelling to the SSA region during an election period (Dimopoulos et al., 2019). Thus, the region's DMOs need to liaise with private sector players and coordinate the requisite public relations and communication strategies to assure visitors of the destinations' ability to host them amid such apprehensions.

Furthermore, the study established that awareness, perceived quality, and brand image are drivers of trust towards travel destinations. For emerging destinations or destinations located in regions that a significant section of the travel market may have concerns visiting, destination trust is necessary to reduce the perception of risk. If destination authorities can enhance their visitors' awareness, evaluation of the overall quality and social image, there is a higher chance of earning the visitors' trust. This finding should be of interest to tourism practitioners as the responsibility to earn tourists' trust in a destination usually falls on private-sector players. This is because, although DMOs will provide overall leadership of the destination, it is the private-sector industry players that interact with the visitors at a personal level (Komppula, 2014). Thus, the players need to be honest, reliable, and proactive to earn visitors' trust. Importantly, it was found that brand awareness, brand image, and trust all influence commitment. The strongest link among the stated relationships was observed between brand image and commitment. To harness this important relationship, destination managers need to develop marketing communications and tourist activities and programs that engage the hearts and minds of tourists (Pitt, Opoku, Hultman, Abratt, & Spyropoulus, 2007),

with the ultimate aim of enhancing tourists' commitment to a destination. Commitment, used as a proxy for loyalty, is key to the long-term competitiveness of a destination. Based on the significant impacts of brand awareness and brand image on commitment, several managerial implications could be derived. For instance, providing credible information online, regularly updating websites and other information portals, being responsive to tourists' queries, and creating occasions where tourists interact more with the locals, such as through homestays or cultural events, are some of the mechanisms destinations can utilise to win the commitment of tourists.

Through the MGA analyses, the study further established that the structural model was more applicable to respondents who compared Malawi against similar and low-ranking destinations, i.e. allocentric destinations. A possible implication of this finding is that emerging destinations could target allocentric-leaning tourists who have visited similar destinations before as such tourists may have developed experiential loyalty (loyalty to particular vacation styles or destinations) (McKercher et al., 2012). Furthermore, such tourists would likely be interested to visit developing destinations that are off-the-beaten-track and are yet to see increased tourist flows (Plog, 1974). Also, rather than looking at nearby destinations such as Mozambique, Tanzania and, Zambia as only competitors, Malawi could collaborate with the said destinations to provide tourists with a variety of holiday experiences – such an experience is likely to be more satisfying than simply visiting a single destination during a trip, more so with the resource requirements of long-haul travel. A regional tourist visa for international visitors like the one proposed between Malawi and Zambia (Sangala, 2016) could be one way of achieving this. The same approach could be said of destinations like Uganda and Rwanda that compete for gorilla trekking tourists which could co-opete, taking advantage of the single tourist visa arrangement between Uganda, Rwanda, and Kenya (Okello & Novelli, 2014). A policy implication from this finding is that a careful and evidence-based identification of

destinations to co-opete with could derive even more benefits to a destination than simply competing with the destinations. Indeed, drawing on the cluster theory, Boley and Perdue (2012) suggest that a set of destinations can package their unique assets to offer a "specialised regional product" (p. 519), thus adding depth to their region, since the region's attractiveness will be a function of multiple attractions and support facilities.

6.4 Limitations of the study and recommendations for further study

This study has certain limitations and which have been pointed out below inform future studies. First, data for the study were collected at the Kamuzu International Airport, which was the only airport handling international flights out of Malawi during the data-collection period. However, a considerable volume of leisure tourists to Malawi enter and exit the country by road either independently or as part of packaged overland trips. Given that such tourists (e.g. backpackers) may explore the destinations they visit deeply and usually take multi-destination trips in the SSA region (which means that they could have recent experiences of other destinations in the region), this study has a limitation in terms of its inability to establish whether there may be differences between respondents and non-respondents. Future studies could intercept respondents at different ports of exit to capture the tourist segments that were excluded.

Second, measuring destination competitiveness and destination brand equity from one (demand) point of view means that the findings could be biased. Consequently, future studies could combine supply and demand perspectives to provide a more holistic understanding of the two concepts.

Third, the findings of the study could be limited by the definition of tourists' previous experience with the destination of comparison. There was no cut-off point as to how far back a respondent should have visited the destination of comparison for them to qualify as a respondent in the study. If the respondent had visited the destination a long time ago, things

may have since changed at the destination and hence the respondents' perceptions of the destinations visited could be outdated. Also, there could be memory lapses on the part of the respondents, in which their perceptions may be unrealistic. Hence, future studies should consider limiting the time to about two years to obtain up-to-date and hence more realistic tourist experiences.

Fourth, the study used a pre-determined set of indicators for the respondents to rate the destination. Given that not all the attributes will be equally important to all respondents, some scholars have suggested asking respondents to identify a list of attributes essential to them in a holiday destination and then asking them to assess how the destination performed on these attributes compared to the best, average, or favourite destination in the same category (Yüksel & Yüksel, 2001). Future studies could consider using this approach to enrich the understanding of perceived destination competitiveness. Related to the preceding point, the literature review revealed that there is no fit-one-fit-all list of destination competitiveness attributes. While the list of the perceived destination competitiveness attributes employed in the study was compiled from a review of the literature and in consultation with destination stakeholders, it is still possible that other relevant attributes were excluded. Future research could incorporate other attributes to expand the knowledge on the impact of disparate factors of destination competitiveness on destination brand equity.

Lastly, while the study measured destination competitiveness in comparative terms, it assessed destination brand equity in absolute terms, as is traditionally done. Future studies could explore the framing of destination brand equity statements in comparative terms to ensure uniformity in the modelling of the two and other necessary latent variables (see Baumann, Hoadley, Hamin, & Nugraga, 2017).

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Survey instrument

Hello, I am **Zandi Kankhuni**, a PhD student in Hotel and Tourism Management at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. I sincerely invite you to participate in my study, aimed at establishing the competitiveness of Malawi as a tourist destination. This is purely academic research and your participation will contribute to the success of the project. Information collected will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and used only for research purposes. The questionnaire will take about 15 minutes to fill.
Thank you for your time and help (**zandi.kankhuni@**).

SECTION A: Your Current Trip

1. Purpose of your trip to Malawi ① Holiday ② Visiting friends and relatives ③ Volunteering
   ④Others _____ (Specify)
2. How long is your current stay in Malawi? _____days
3. How many times have you visited Malawi (Including this time)? _____
4. Which other countries have you visited (or will you visit) as part of the trip?
   _____
5. Travel companion: ①Alone ②Spouse/partner ③Business colleagues ④Friends ⑤ Family
6. Travel arrangement: ①Independent ②Package tour ③Volunteer company
   ④Others (Specify) _____

Section B

Part 1: Your Previous Trips

Other than Malawi, have you visited a Sub-Saharan African country for holiday before? ①YES ② NO

If **YES**, which countries?
_____

Which of the countries did you enjoy the most as a tourist destination? _____

If **NO**, thinking about your previous leisure travels, which country was your favorite? _____

Part 2: Experience in Malawi

Compare Malawi with the destination you stated in Part 1 above on the following features and indicate how closely the following statements compare to your opinion (1 indicates strong disagreement while 5 indicates strong agreement with the statement).

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1.	Malawians are more welcoming and friendly	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Malawi offers more hospitable services (courteous and helpful staff, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Malawi has a more pleasant weather/climate	1	2	3	4	5

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
4.	Service providers in Malawi are more willing to help visitors enjoy their vacation (ease of making reservation, foreign exchange facilities, foreign language help, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Malawi offers a better African experience (safari, sunrises/sunsets, terrain/landscapes, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Malawi has better national parks and wildlife reserves	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Malawi has more preserved nature and beautiful scenery	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Malawi has better environmental conditions (unspoiled and undamaged environment)	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Malawi is more “unique” (different culture, special events/festivals, local way of life)	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Malawi has a more diverse range of cultural groups and languages	1	2	3	4	5
11.	Malawi has better food variety and quality	1	2	3	4	5
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
12.	Malawi offers more opportunities for adventure and recreational activities (hiking, swimming, snorkeling, biking, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
13.	Malawi has more open visa regulations and requirements for tourists	1	2	3	4	5
14.	Malawi is more stable politically	1	2	3	4	5
15.	Malawi offers greater personal security (fewer robberies, etc.) and is more peaceful	1	2	3	4	5
16.	Malawi is cheaper for holidays	1	2	3	4	5
17.	Malawi is less crowded with tourists	1	2	3	4	5
18.	Malawi has a more diverse range of tourist attractions and resources for its small size	1	2	3	4	5
19.	Malawi is smaller and easier to cover within a short period	1	2	3	4	5
20.	Malawi has a greater level of general infrastructure (roads, airport, transport, telecommunications, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
21.	Malawi has better accommodation facilities (quality, quantity, design of facilities, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
22.	Malawi is more accessible (numerous flights from country, near home)	1	2	3	4	5

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
23.	The destination is better connected with intermediaries in the tourism sector (tour operators, airlines, hotel chains, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
24.	The websites of service providers in Malawi offer better information	1	2	3	4	5
25.	It is easier to find information about Malawi on the Internet	1	2	3	4	5
26.	It is easier to access and use information technology services as a traveller in Malawi	1	2	3	4	5
27.	Malawi has more sufficient signage and better quality directions/information for tourists	1	2	3	4	5
28.	There is less threat of disease while travelling in Malawi	1	2	3	4	5
29.	Malawi has better health and medical facilities for travellers	1	2	3	4	5

Please evaluate these statements based on your experience in Malawi as a destination on a scale of 1 = "I strongly disagree" to 5 = "I strongly agree".

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Brand awareness	The trip enabled me to know more about Malawi's people and their ways of life	1	2	3	4	5
	The trip has increased my knowledge of Malawi's tourist attractions and activities	1	2	3	4	5
	The trip has increased my desire to gain more information about Malawi as a destination	1	2	3	4	5
	If I ever think of visiting southern Africa again, Malawi will easily come to mind	1	2	3	4	5
	Overall, I know Malawi better now than I did before	1	2	3	4	5
Quality	Malawi provides tourism offerings of consistent quality	1	2	3	4	5
	Malawi provides quality tourism experiences	1	2	3	4	5
	Malawi's tourism products and services are excellent	1	2	3	4	5
Brand image	My friends will think highly of me because I visited Malawi	1	2	3	4	5
	The trip helped me escape from difficult/stressful routines or circumstances	1	2	3	4	5
	The image of Malawi as a destination is consistent with my self-image	1	2	3	4	5
	Travelling to a place like Malawi is one of the most important ways I have of expressing my individuality	1	2	3	4	5
	I feel proud that I have visited Malawi	1	2	3	4	5
Brand	Malawi is a destination that meets my expectations	1	2	3	4	5
	I could rely on service providers in Malawi to solve any problems with the trip	1	2	3	4	5

	Service providers in Malawi were honest and sincere in addressing my concerns as a traveller	1	2	3	4	5
	I feel confident that Malawi is a good tourist destination	1	2	3	4	5
	Service providers in Malawi are fair in their dealings with travellers	1	2	3	4	5
	Service providers in Malawi would compensate me in some way in any case of service failure	1	2	3	4	5
Commitment	I will say positive things about Malawi	1	2	3	4	5
	Malawi felt like a second home to me	1	2	3	4	5
	I will tell my friends and family that Malawi is worth visiting	1	2	3	4	5
	I would pay slightly more for services if it would help improve the quality of life of the local people	1	2	3	4	5
	Malawi has a great deal of personal meaning for me	1	2	3	4	5
	I have a sense of belonging to this destination	1	2	3	4	5
	I would give service providers in Malawi a benefit of the doubt if I had a poor service experience	1	2	3	4	5

To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your personality as a traveller?

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1.	I prefer to travel on organized tour packages	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I prefer to visit familiar destinations	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I stay away from popular tourist areas/destinations	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I usually enjoy a sense of discovery in my travelling	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I prefer the usual comforts/home environment when I travel	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I am curious to learn new things while travelling	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I enjoy resting and relaxing when I travel	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I prefer to socialize with people from the same culture as my own while travelling	1	2	3	4	5

Section B: Finally, we ask a few questions about you so we can put your answers above in context.

1. Your gender: ① Female ② Male
2. Age _____
3. Nationality_____
4. Marital status: ① Single ② Married ③ Others
5. Highest educational status: ① Secondary school ② College diploma ③ College/ University degree ④ Postgraduate
6. Your current occupation: ① Company employee ② Own business ③ Civil servant ④ Agricultural/ fishery ⑤ Housewife ⑥ Student ⑦ Retired ⑧ Unemployed
7. What is your total budget for the trip? (Excluding airfare): _____US dollars.

8. Before deciding to visit Malawi, which other African country or countries did you closely consider as an alternative? _____
9. In your opinion, what words/phrase best describe Malawi?

   _____

Thank you for your participation. Safe trip!

Appendix 2. Specific nationalities of respondents in the "Other nationalities" category

Nationality	SSA sample	Outside-SSA sample
French	10	4
Brazilian	7	5
Austrian	3	
Scottish	4	19
Belgian	12	4
Canadian	11	14
Norwegian	7	2
Swiss	7	1
Irish	3	2
Zimbabwean	4	
Japanese	4	2
New Zealander	4	2
Tanzanian	4	
Italian	8	1
Danish	7	9
Polish	2	2
Taiwanese	1	7
Zambian	2	
Indian	3	
Finnish	1	2
Chinese	4	1
Icelander	1	
Sri Lankan	2	1
Rwandan	1	

Israeli	1	
Swedish	2	
South Korean	1	
Estonian	2	
Portuguese	2	1
Ugandan	1	
Cuban	1	
Kenyan	1	
Colombian	1	1
European	2	
Slovenian	1	1
Greek		5
Spanish		4
Malaysian		2
Mexican		3
Egyptian		1
Total	127	96

Appendix 3. Letter of introduction for data collection

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THE HONG KONG POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY
香港理工大學
SCHOOL OF HOTEL AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT

6 March 2019

To Whom It May Concern

I write to seek your approval for Mr Zandivuta Kankhuni to carry out research in your facility/organization. Mr Kankhuni (Student Number: 1790) is a PhD Candidate at the School of Hotel and Tourism Management, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong SAR. His study is titled "**The Impact of Perceived Destination Competitiveness on Tourist-based Destination Brand Equity in Emerging Destinations**".

Mr Kankhuni shall adhere to the principles of ethics pertaining to The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, and to those of your institution in Malawi. I will be grateful for you to grant Mr Kankhuni the support and information required to accomplish his PhD thesis. Please contact me by email: lorenzo.masiero@ for further information, where needed.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Lorenzo Masiero
Associate Professor
School of Hotel and Tourism Management
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

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E shtm.info@polyu.edu.hk T (852) 3400 2200 F (852) 2362 9362
www.polyu.edu.hk/htm

Appendix 4. Letter of permission to collect data at Kamuzu International Airport

AIRPORT DEVELOPMENTS LIMITED
KAMUZU INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
P.O. Box 30311, Lilongwe 3, Malawi. Telephone: +(265) 01 700 215 / 01 700 899 Fax: +(265) 01 701 271 / 01 700 913 / 01 700 238
Email: adl@sdnmw.com

ADL
Your Ref:
Our Ref:

The Airport Commandant
Department of Civil Aviation
Kamuzu International Airport
09 May 2019

RE: NOTICE TO CONDUCT A SURVEY BY MR ZANDI KANKHUNI

The above subject matter refers.

We have received a request from the above mentioned individual who is pursuing a PHD Program and intends to conduct a survey on Malawi Tourism. He is pursuing a PHD with the University of Hong Kong.

We request your assistance in facilitating the above request.

By copy of this letter, the Director of Security is also being requested to facilitate an area restricted permit for the individual.

Attached, please find a copies of letters for the above request for your information.

Thanking you for usual corporation and assistance.

Yours faithfully,

Richard Khamisa

Business Development Manager

CC: Director of Security – KIA Police

: Commercial Officer – ADL.

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