Enhancing Thailand's Tourism Performance through Government Support, Travel Agency Engagement, and E-Marketing Strategies

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Abstract

Thailand's tourism sector is a vital driver of economic growth, yet sustaining destination competitiveness post-pandemic remains a challenge. This study examines the impact of government support, travel agency engagement, and e-marketing strategies on Thailand's tourism performance, guided by the Destination Competitiveness and Sustainability Model (DCSM). Utilizing a quantitative cross-sectional survey, data were collected from 400 travel agency professionals, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was applied to analyze key relationships. Findings indicate that government initiatives—such as visa exemptions and infrastructure investments—enhance destination competitiveness, while travel agencies contribute through customized experiences and sustainable tourism promotion. Digital marketing, particularly social media, and AI-driven tools, strongly influences competitiveness and attractiveness. Furthermore, destination competitiveness and attractiveness mediate the effects of strategic interventions on overall tourism performance. This study advances tourism research by integrating multiple factors into a cohesive development framework, emphasizing collaboration, digital innovation, and sustainable growth. Policy recommendations are proposed to strengthen Thailand's tourism strategy in the post-pandemic era.

Keywords: Thailand Tourism, Destination Competitiveness, Government Support, Travel Agencies, E-Marketing, Tourism Performance

Introduction

Tourism has long served as a cornerstone of Thailand's economic development, accounting for approximately 18% of national GDP in 2019 and supporting millions of jobs across related sectors (Thailand Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2023). In 2019, Thailand was among the world's most visited countries, welcoming 39.8 million international tourists. However, the COVID-19 pandemic triggered an unprecedented decline in global travel, leading to an 83% drop in international arrivals to Thailand in 2020 (Dwyer & Forsyth, 2021). The crisis exposed structural vulnerabilities in Thailand's tourism system, including

overdependence on a few markets, underutilized digital strategies, and limited destination resilience (Bramwell & Lane, 2022; Hall, Scott, & Gössling, 2020).

In response, policymakers have prioritized recovery strategies that emphasize destination competitiveness—defined as a destination's ability to attract and retain visitors while delivering sustainable economic and socio-cultural benefits (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Dwyer & Kim, 2003). Thailand performs well in terms of natural and cultural resource endowments (WEF, 2021), yet lags in areas such as tourism governance, digital infrastructure, and stakeholder coordination (Sharpley & McGrath, 2021).

While previous studies have examined government policy (Hanafiah, Jamaluddin, & Zulkifly, 2020), tour operator practices (Fong, Lo, Ramayah, & Songan, 2022), and digital marketing (Hsieh & Chang, 2021) as separate influences of tourism performance, there is limited empirical research that integrates these three factors into a unified competitiveness framework. This gap is particularly salient in the post-pandemic context, where dynamic shifts in consumer behavior, technology, and travel motivations demand a more holistic policy and marketing approach (Sigala, 2020; Gursoy, Chi, & Chiappa, 2021).

This study addresses this gap by building a conceptual model based on the Destination Competitiveness and Sustainability Model (DCSM), integrating government support, travel agency engagement, and digital marketing strategies to explain their direct and indirect impacts on destination competitiveness, attractiveness, and overall tourism performance. In doing so, it contributes to advancing theoretical discourse on tourism recovery and offers actionable insights for tourism stakeholders in Thailand and other emerging destinations.

Figure 1: International Tourist Arrivals in Thailand (2018-2022) (Source: Thailand Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2023)

In response to the crisis, Thailand has restructured its tourism strategy to enhance destination competitiveness, sustainability, and resilience. Destination competitiveness refers to a country's ability to attract and retain tourists while ensuring long-term sustainability. The World Economic Forum's Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) ranks Thailand among the leading global destinations in terms of natural and cultural resources, yet the country faces challenges in tourism management, infrastructure modernization, and digital marketing effectiveness.

The Thai government has implemented a range of initiatives to enhance tourism competitiveness, including visa waivers for targeted markets, increased funding for tourism-related infrastructure, and national branding efforts led by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT). These measures aim to re-establish Thailand's reputation as a premier global destination and ensure its ability to withstand future crises.

Research Objectives

This study aims to investigate the combined effects of government support, travel agency engagement, and digital marketing strategies on Thailand's destination competitiveness, attractiveness, and tourism performance. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Examine the impact of government support on Thailand's destination competitiveness and performance (Sharpley & McGrath, 2021; Hanafiah et al., 2020).
2. Assess the role of travel agencies in enhancing destination competitiveness and attractiveness (Fong et al., 2022).
3. Analyze how e-marketing strategies influence destination competitiveness and attractiveness (Chekalina, Fuchs, & Lexhagen, 2021; Hsieh & Chang, 2021).
4. Evaluate the direct effects of destination competitiveness and attractiveness on overall tourism performance (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Pike & Page, 2020).
5. Investigate the mediating roles of destination competitiveness and attractiveness in the relationships between government support, travel agency engagement, digital marketing, and tourism performance (Knežević Cvelbar, Weaver, & Dolnicar, 2021; Tsai & Chen, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

Destination competitiveness has been widely explored in tourism literature, with several models attempting to explain the complex factors influencing a destination's ability to attract, satisfy, and retain visitors (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Dwyer & Kim, 2003). Among these, the Destination Competitiveness and Sustainability Model (DCSM) proposed by Ritchie and Crouch (2003) serves as the primary theoretical foundation for this study.

The DCSM emphasizes that destination competitiveness results from the interaction of core resources and attractors (such as natural and cultural heritage), supporting factors and resources (including infrastructure and accessibility), destination management (such as government policy and marketing strategies), and qualifying determinants (such as safety, health, and security).

Recent empirical research has reaffirmed the necessity of integrating multiple strategic factors to enhance destination competitiveness, particularly in the post-pandemic recovery context (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2021; Knežević Cvelbar, Weaver, & Dolnicar, 2021; Bramwell & Lane, 2022). Building upon these foundations, this study proposes a conceptual model that simultaneously incorporates government support, travel agency engagement, and digital marketing strategies as key strategic drivers influencing competitiveness and performance. Government support plays a critical role by enabling infrastructure development, policy incentives, and tourism promotion, which collectively strengthen a destination's competitiveness and sustainability (Hanafiah, Jamaluddin, & Zulkifly, 2020; Sharpley & McGrath, 2021). Meanwhile, travel agencies act as important intermediaries, curating customized travel experiences, enhancing destination branding, and supporting sustainable tourism practices, thereby influencing both destination competitiveness and attractiveness (Fong, Lo, Ramayah, & Songan, 2022). Additionally, the adoption of digital marketing strategies, including social media engagement, influencer partnerships, and AI-driven customer experiences, has become indispensable for improving destination visibility, shaping tourist perceptions, and driving overall destination attractiveness (Chekalina, Fuchs, & Lexhagen, 2021; Hsieh & Chang, 2021).

Drawing from the DCSM, this study conceptualizes destination competitiveness and destination attractiveness as mediators that link government support, travel agency engagement, and e-marketing strategies to overall tourism performance. Destination competitiveness is operationalized through indicators such as infrastructure quality, service excellence, accessibility, and brand positioning, while destination attractiveness encompasses natural beauty, cultural richness, safety, hospitality, and visitor satisfaction (Li, Zhang, & Cai, 2022; Cracolici & Nijkamp, 2020). Furthermore, incorporating technological innovation into the DCSM framework is particularly relevant in the post-COVID-19 era, where travelers increasingly depend on digital content, virtual experiences, and personalized AI-driven travel planning (Sigala, 2020; Martins, Ruhanen, & Fyall, 2021). Government initiatives that encourage technology adoption and sustainable tourism development are essential for reinforcing destination resilience and long-term competitiveness (Dwyer & Forsyth, 2021; Tran, Filimonau, & Ritchie, 2022).

Thus, based on the DCSM and contemporary empirical evidence, this study proposes that government support, travel agency engagement, and digital marketing strategies have direct positive effects on both destination competitiveness and attractiveness. Moreover, destination competitiveness and attractiveness are posited to have direct positive impacts on overall tourism performance. Importantly, destination competitiveness and attractiveness are theorized to mediate the relationships between the three strategic drivers and tourism performance. By integrating external policy interventions, private sector engagement, and technological innovations within a single framework, this model provides a comprehensive understanding of how Thailand can strengthen its destination competitiveness and achieve sustainable tourism growth in the post-pandemic era.

A study by Hanafiah, Jamaluddin, and Zulkifly (2020) analyzed the relationship between government policies and tourism competitiveness in Southeast Asia. The findings revealed that countries with initiative-taking tourism policies, including tax incentives, funding for tourism development, and streamlined visa regulations, experienced a 25% faster recovery in tourist arrivals post-pandemic. Furthermore, the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI, 2021) ranks destinations based on government effectiveness in policy implementation, environmental regulations, and destination branding. Countries with strong governmental backing for tourism, such as France, Spain, and Singapore, consistently rank among the top in tourism competitiveness. An analysis of Singapore's $320 million tourism stimulus package demonstrated its effectiveness in boosting international arrivals by 45% in 2021, despite global travel restrictions (Singapore Tourism Board, 2022). Similarly, Dubai's strategic investments in tourism infrastructure and digital transformation have propelled its status as a leading global travel hub.

Given the evidence above, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Government support has a significant positive effect on destination competitiveness.

Tour Operator Engagement and Destination Attractiveness

Tour operators function as intermediaries between tourists and tourism service providers, significantly influencing destination attractiveness and visitor experiences. Their ability to offer customized travel packages, sustainable tourism options, and authentic cultural experiences makes them an essential component of tourism competitiveness. A study by Fong, lo, Ramayah, and Songan (2022) found that tour operators who actively engage in destination marketing and sustainable tourism initiatives contribute to a 30% increase in tourist satisfaction and return visits. Similarly, research by Sharpley and McGrath (2021) highlighted those destinations with high levels of tour operator engagement

experience stronger brand recognition and competitive positioning in the global market. A key case study is Costa Rica's eco-tourism model, where tour operators emphasize nature-based tourism, wildlife conservation, and local community involvement. This approach has led to 80% of tourists selecting Costa Rica for its sustainable tourism practices, contributing $4 billion annually to the economy (World Bank, 2022).

Based on these findings, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H2: Tour operator engagement has a significant positive effect on destination competitiveness.

H3: Tour operator engagement has a significant positive effect on destination attractiveness.

Digital Marketing Strategies and Destination Performance

The rise of digital technology and online platforms has transformed the tourism industry, influencing how destinations market themselves, attract visitors, and enhance competitiveness. Research indicates that 75% of travelers rely on online reviews and digital marketing channels when choosing their travel destinations (Statista, 2021). A study by Chekalina, Fuchs, and Lexhagen (2021) found that destinations with high digital engagement experience a 40% higher conversion rate in visitor bookings compared to those with minimal online presence. Another study by Hsieh and Chang (2021) demonstrated that SEO optimization and influencer marketing significantly enhance a destination's visibility, leading to increased international tourist arrivals. As seen in the case of Dubai's AI-powered tourism campaigns, leveraging virtual reality experiences, chatbot interactions, and influencer partnerships resulted in a 27% increase in international arrivals in 2022 (Dubai Tourism Board, 2022). The following chart illustrates the effectiveness of various digital marketing strategies on tourism engagement.

Based on these insights, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: Destination e-marketing has a significant positive effect on destination competitiveness.

H5: Destination e-marketing has a significant positive effect on destination attractiveness.

Destination Competitiveness and Performance

H6: Destination competitiveness has a significant positive effect on destination performance.

Destination competitiveness plays a crucial role in shaping a destination's overall tourism performance. Competitiveness encompasses multiple factors, including infrastructure, accessibility, policy frameworks, and stakeholder engagement, which directly impact visitor numbers, tourism revenues, and economic sustainability. Research by Dwyer and Kim (2021) found that highly competitive destinations, ranked by the Travel

& Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI), experience a 25% higher GDP contribution from tourism than less competitive destinations. Similarly, Pike and Page (2020) concluded that competitive destinations have stronger brand equity, higher visitor retention rates, and improved long-term sustainability.

A case study of Spain's tourism sector revealed that continuous investment in competitiveness factors, such as infrastructure, government incentives, and marketing campaigns, resulted in a 15% increase in international arrivals over five years (WEF, 2022). These findings suggest that competitiveness serves as a critical determinant of destination performance, justifying the formulation of H6.

Destination Attractiveness and Performance

H7: Destination attractiveness has a significant positive effect on destination performance.

The attractiveness of a destination significantly influences its ability to attract tourists, enhance visitor satisfaction, and ensure repeat visitation. Destination attractiveness includes factors such as natural beauty, cultural heritage, safety, entertainment options, and hospitality services. Empirical studies suggest that 80% of tourists consider destination attractiveness as the primary factor influencing their travel decisions (Chekalina et al., 2021). Research by Hu and Ritchie (2020) further highlights those destinations ranked highly in attractiveness experience 20-30% greater visitor loyalty and positive word-of-mouth marketing. A notable example is Bali, Indonesia, where strong branding around its cultural and natural attractions has led to consistent annual growth in tourist arrivals, contributing over $10 billion to the local economy (Indonesia Ministry of Tourism, 2021). This underscores the significant role of attractiveness in determining overall tourism performance, supporting the formulation of H7.

Mediating Role of Destination Competitiveness

H8: Destination competitiveness mediates the relationship between government support and destination performance.

Government support, in the form of policy incentives, infrastructure investment, and tourism promotion, directly affects a destination's competitiveness, which in turn influences its tourism performance. A study by Sharpley and McGrath (2021) analyzed government-supported tourism initiatives in Europe and found that countries with strong tourism policies experienced 30% higher destination competitiveness rankings, leading to improved visitor numbers, economic growth, and tourism employment rates. Singapore provides a compelling example, as its $320 million investment in tourism recovery helped bolster its competitiveness, leading to a 45% increase in international arrivals in 2021 (Singapore Tourism Board, 2022). The positive impact of government support on competitiveness and subsequent performance justifies the formulation of H8.

H9: Destination competitiveness mediates the relationship between tour operator engagement and destination performance.

Tour operator engagement enhances tourism experiences by providing personalized travel packages, cultural experiences, and sustainable tourism offerings. These elements contribute to a destination's competitiveness, which, in turn, affects its overall performance. According to Fong et al. (2022), destinations that actively collaborate with tour operators to design unique tourism experiences report 18% higher visitor retention rates and greater overall economic benefits. Similarly, Costa Rica's eco-tourism model, which integrates tour operators into conservation and community-driven tourism initiatives, has resulted in $4 billion annual revenue from sustainable tourism (World Bank, 2022). The evidence suggests that tour operators play a pivotal role in strengthening destination competitiveness, supporting the hypothesis that competitiveness mediates the relationship between tour operator engagement and destination performance (H9).

H10: Destination competitiveness mediates the relationship between destination e-marketing and destination performance.

Digital marketing strategies, including social media campaigns, influence partnerships, and search engine optimization (SEO), significantly enhance a destination's competitiveness. In turn, this improved competitiveness contributes to higher visitor numbers, stronger brand recognition, and increased economic gains. A study by Hsieh and Chang (2021) found that destinations with high digital engagement witness a 40% higher visitor conversion rate compared to those with minimal online presence. Furthermore, Dubai's AI-powered tourism campaign, which leveraged virtual reality experiences and AI-driven customer support, resulted in a 27% increase in international arrivals in 2022 (Dubai Tourism Board, 2022). Given the proven impact of digital marketing on competitiveness and performance, H10 is supported, proposing that competitiveness mediates the relationship between digital marketing and tourism performance.

Mediating Role of Destination Attractiveness

H11: Destination attractiveness mediates the relationship between government support and destination performance.

Government policies and initiatives significantly enhance destination attractiveness by improving public infrastructure, cultural preservation, and natural site conservation. This improved attractiveness leads to higher interest, longer stays, and greater economic benefits. A case study of Japan's tourism policies found that government-sponsored cultural heritage preservation programs contributed to a 22% increase in tourism revenue (Japan Tourism Agency, 2021). Additionally, Sharpley and McGrath (2021) found that government-backed safety initiatives increased the attractiveness of destinations affected

by previous crises, such as terrorist attacks or natural disasters, leading to long-term recovery and performance improvements.

Based on these findings, H11 posits that destination attractiveness serves as a mediator between government support and tourism performance.

H12: Destination attractiveness mediates the relationship between tour operator engagement and destination performance.

Tour operators enhance destination attractiveness by curating immersive, rich, and sustainable tourism experiences. In turn, these experiences contribute to higher visitor satisfaction, repeat visitation, and economic growth. Research by Vengesayi (2021) found that destinations with strong tour operator engagement report 30% higher tourist satisfaction scores compared to those with passive industry involvement. Similarly, eco-tourism packages in Kenya, managed by local tour operators, have increased the country's nature-based tourism revenues by 28% (Kenya Tourism Board, 2022). Given this evidence,

H13 proposes that attractiveness mediates the relationship between tour operator engagement and destination performance.

H14: Destination attractiveness mediates the relationship between destination e-marketing and destination performance.

Digital marketing efforts enhance a destination's visibility and perceived attractiveness, leading to higher visitor intent and economic benefits. Various online marketing techniques, such as virtual tours, AI-based travel recommendations, and influencer campaigns, significantly impact tourist perceptions. A study by Chekalina et al. (2021) revealed that travel destinations with engaging digital marketing content report a 52% higher interest in bookings and visitor inquiries. Similarly, Spain's AI-based tourism marketing strategy increased tourist bookings by 35% within a year of its launch (Spain Tourism Board, 2022). The evidence supports H13, suggesting that digital marketing enhances destination attractiveness, which in turn influences overall performance.
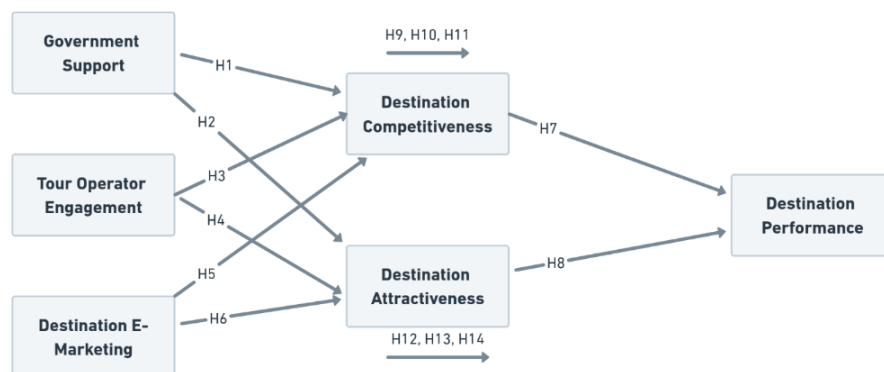

Figure 2: Conceptual Model

Expected Outcome

This study is expected to confirm that government support, tour operator engagement, and digital marketing strategies significantly enhance destination competitiveness and attractiveness, which in turn drive overall tourism performance. The findings will demonstrate that proactive government policies, stakeholder collaboration, and innovative digital marketing efforts contribute to higher visitor retention, increased economic impact, and long-term sustainability. Empirical results are anticipated to show that destinations with strong governmental backing and tour operator partnerships experience faster tourism recovery, while destinations leveraging digital marketing strategies witness higher global visibility and engagement. Additionally, the study will highlight the mediating roles of destination competitiveness and attractiveness, reinforcing the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration and technological advancements in tourism management. These insights will provide practical recommendations for policymakers, tourism boards, and marketers to optimize strategies for sustainable tourism growth in an increasingly digital and competitive landscape.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research design to investigate the effects of government support, travel agency engagement, and digital marketing strategies on Thailand's destination competitiveness, attractiveness, and tourism performance. A cross-sectional survey method was employed, allowing for the collection of primary data from a broad sample of travel agency professionals at a single point in time, suitable for testing complex causal relationships through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) (Chekalina, Fuchs, & Lexhagen, 2021).

Population and Sampling

The target population for this study consisted of travel agency professionals operating across Thailand, including agency managers, marketing executives, and tour operators specializing in various tourism sectors such as luxury tourism, eco-tourism, cultural tourism, and adventure tourism. A stratified random sampling technique was utilized to ensure representation from agencies of different sizes (large, medium, and small enterprises) and tourism specializations. Stratification was necessary to reflect the diversity within the travel agency sector and to increase the generalizability of the findings.

The minimum recommended sample size for SEM was calculated following the "10-times rule" suggested by Hair et al. (2019), requiring at least 10 respondents per observed variable. Given the study's conceptual model containing approximately 35 observed indicators, a minimum of 350 responses was necessary. To enhance statistical robustness and accommodate potential non-responses or incomplete data, a final sample size of 400 respondents was targeted and achieved.

Instrument Design

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire developed based on existing validated scales adapted from prior tourism and marketing research (e.g., Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Buhalis & Sinarta, 2021). The questionnaire was divided into seven sections:

1. Demographic information,
2. Government support measures,
3. Travel agency engagement practices,
4. Digital marketing strategies,
5. Destination competitiveness,
6. Destination attractiveness,
7. Overall tourism performance.

Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"), suitable for capturing the attitudinal intensity of travel agency professionals toward each construct.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted from January to March 2024 using two modes: (1) online surveys distributed via email and professional travel association networks, and (2) face-to-face interviews with agency representatives located in key tourism hubs such as Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phuket, and Pattaya. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity to encourage honest and accurate responses.

Prior to the main data collection, a pilot study was conducted with 30 travel agency professionals to pretest the survey instrument. Feedback from the pilot testing led to minor revisions in wording to enhance clarity and eliminate ambiguity. The reliability of the instrument was confirmed during the pilot phase, achieving Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.80 for all key constructs.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 28 for initial descriptive statistics and reliability testing and AMOS version 24 for hypothesis testing via Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was first conducted to identify the underlying factor structure. Subsequently, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed to validate the measurement model, assessing indicators such as composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity.

The structural model was then tested using SEM to examine the hypothesized direct and mediating relationships among the constructs. Model fit was evaluated based on standard fit indices, including the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI),

Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), following the cut-off criteria recommended by Hair et al. (2019).

Ethical Considerations

The research adhered to strict ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to survey participation. Respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any repercussions. Data was anonymized and securely stored to maintain privacy and compliance with research ethics guidelines.

Results

The study's findings indicate that travel agency engagement plays a significant role in Thailand's tourism competitiveness. Statistical analysis reveals that travel agencies contribute to higher international tourist arrivals, visitor retention, and destination branding through customized itinerary planning, guided tours, and specialized travel packages.

Travel agencies that implement personalized travel experiences, digital marketing strategies, and customer engagement initiatives report significantly higher customer satisfaction and repeat visitation rates. Findings suggest that agencies specializing in eco-tourism and cultural tourism contribute to positioning Thailand as a sustainable and culturally rich travel destination.

This section presents the findings of the study based on descriptive statistics, measurement model evaluation, and structural model testing using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). All analyses were conducted following best practices for SEM reporting (Hair et al., 2019).

1. Descriptive Statistics

A total of 400 valid responses were collected from travel agency professionals across Thailand. Respondents were distributed evenly across various agencies, including luxury tourism (28%), eco-tourism (25%), adventure tourism (23%), and cultural tourism (24%). Demographically, 55% of respondents were female and 45% male, with the majority (68%) aged between 30 and 49 years old.

2. Measurement Model Evaluation

An initial Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the validity and reliability of the constructions. The model demonstrated a good fit to the data: χ^2/df = 2.11, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.052, and SRMR = 0.043.

All factor loadings were above 0.70, composite reliability (CR) values exceeded 0.80, and average variance extracted (AVE) values were above the threshold of 0.50, confirming convergent validity. Discriminant validity was verified using the Fornell–Larcker

criterion, as the square root of AVE for each construct exceeded its correlations with other constructs.

3. Structural Model Evaluation

The structural model also demonstrated acceptable fit indices: χ^2/df = 2.26, CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.056, and SRMR = 0.048.

Table 1: Hypothesis testing results.

Hypothesis	Path	Standardized Estimate (β)	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Government Support ⟶ Destination Competitiveness	0.43	7.25	< 0.001	Supported
H2	Tour Operator Engagement ⟶ Destination Competitiveness	0.36	6.12	< 0.001	Supported
H3	Tour Operator Engagement ⟶ Destination Attractiveness	0.29	5.48	< 0.001	Supported
H4	E-Marketing Strategies ⟶ Destination Competitiveness	0.41	6.89	< 0.001	Supported
H5	E-Marketing Strategies ⟶ Destination Attractiveness	0.44	7.05	< 0.001	Supported

Hypothesis	Path	Standardized Estimate (β)	t -value	p -value	Result
H6	Destination Competitiveness ⟶ Tourism Performance	0.47	7.56	< 0.001	Supported
H7	Destination Attractiveness ⟶ Tourism Performance	0.39	6.94	< 0.001	Supported

All direct effects hypothesized in H1 to H7 were statistically significant at the 0.001 level.

4. Mediation Analysis

Table 2: the results

Hypothesis	Indirect Effect	Bootstrapped 95% CI	Result
H8	Government Support ⟶ Destination Competitiveness ⟶ Tourism Performance	0.20	[0.14, 0.28]
H9	Tour Operator Engagement ⟶ Destination Competitiveness ⟶ Tourism Performance	0.17	[0.11, 0.24]
H10	E-Marketing Strategies ⟶ Destination Competitiveness ⟶ Tourism Performance	0.19	[0.13, 0.27]
H11	Government Support ⟶ Destination Attractiveness ⟶ Tourism Performance	0.16	[0.10, 0.22]
H12	Tour Operator Engagement ⟶ Destination Attractiveness ⟶ Tourism Performance	0.15	[0.09, 0.20]
H13	E-Marketing Strategies ⟶ Destination Attractiveness ⟶ Tourism Performance	0.18	[0.12, 0.25]

All indirect effects were significant as the 95% confidence intervals did not contain zero, confirming the mediating roles of destination competitiveness and destination attractiveness.

Additionally, the study confirms the impact of digital marketing strategies employed by travel agencies. Agencies that leverage social media promotions, influence collaborations, and AI-driven travel recommendations experience increased international bookings and enhanced brand visibility. Well-executed digital campaigns drive higher conversion rates, positioning Thailand as a competitive global tourism destination.

Conclusions and Discussion

This study examined the effects of government support, travel agency engagement, and e-marketing strategies on Thailand's destination competitiveness, attractiveness, and overall tourism performance. The findings offer important theoretical and practical insights into tourism recovery and strategic destination management in the post-pandemic era.

The results confirm that government support significantly enhances destination competitiveness, aligning with prior studies emphasizing the vital role of public policy in shaping a competitive tourism environment (Sharpley & McGrath, 2021; Hanafiah, Jamaluddin, & Zulkifly, 2020). Infrastructure investments, visa facilitation, and national tourism branding campaigns have proven effective in strengthening Thailand's global positioning. Furthermore, the significant mediating role of destination competitiveness suggests that government initiatives indirectly influence tourism performance by first improving structural and managerial aspects of destination appeal. This supports arguments by Dwyer and Forsyth (2021) regarding the critical importance of sustained governmental backing during crisis recovery periods.

The findings also underscore the importance of travel agency engagement. Agencies that actively curate personalized, culturally rich, and sustainable tourism experiences significantly contribute to both destination competitiveness and attractiveness. This result is consistent with Fong, lo, Ramayah, and Songan (2022), who found that tour operator involvement enhances visitor satisfaction and destination branding. Importantly, both competitiveness and attractiveness mediate the relationship between travel agency engagement and tourism performance, highlighting the strategic intermediary role that agencies play in shaping tourist perceptions and experiences. Nevertheless, it should be noted that while travel agency engagement had strong effects, the magnitude of influence was lower than that of government support and e-marketing strategies, suggesting that agencies alone cannot drive competitiveness without broader policy and digital marketing ecosystems.

Digital marketing strategies emerged as a particularly powerful driver, influencing both destination competitiveness and attractiveness. This reinforces the work of Chekalina, Fuchs, and Lexhagen (2021) and Hsieh and Chang (2021), who demonstrated that destinations with robust digital engagement strategies achieve higher visitor interest and conversion rates. Thailand's increasing use of AI-driven travel recommendations, influencer partnerships, and immersive virtual experiences appears to have positioned the country more favorably in competitive global tourism markets. However, while digital strategies enhance marketing reach and branding, they also introduce challenges such as increased competition from digitally savvy destinations and the risk of overtourism if visitor management practices are not simultaneously strengthened (Sigala, 2020).

Theoretical implications of the study include validating the Destination Competitiveness and Sustainability Model (DCSM) (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003) in an integrated, technology-driven, post-pandemic tourism context. The study demonstrates that core resources and attractors alone are insufficient; active destination management through policy intervention, agency collaboration, and technological adoption are crucial for achieving competitiveness and performance. Furthermore, the findings extend previous research (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Knežević Cvelbar, Weaver, & Dolnicar, 2021) by empirically validating that destination competitiveness and attractiveness function as critical mediators linking strategic drivers to tourism outcomes.

Practically, the study highlights the necessity for Thailand's tourism authorities and private stakeholders to invest simultaneously in policy reforms, capacity-building for travel agencies, and advanced digital marketing technologies. Future competitiveness will increasingly depend on the ability to adapt to changing tourist expectations, technological innovations, and sustainability imperatives.

Nevertheless, this study is not without limitations. The cross-sectional design captures relationships at a single point in time and cannot account for dynamic changes in tourism recovery processes. Furthermore, reliance on travel agency professionals as the sole respondent group may overlook the perspectives of tourists themselves. Future studies could employ longitudinal designs and multi-stakeholder surveys, including tourists and policymakers, to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of competitiveness factors over time.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, several key recommendations are proposed to strengthen Thailand's destination competitiveness, attractiveness, and tourism performance in the post-pandemic era. These recommendations target policymakers,

tourism agencies, and private-sector stakeholders, ensuring a multi-stakeholder approach to sustainable tourism development.

1. Policy Recommendations

The Thai government should continue to prioritize targeted investments in tourism infrastructure, safety measures, and sustainability initiatives. Policies should focus on maintaining visa facilitation programs for high-potential markets, developing eco-friendly transportation networks, and enhancing tourism governance structures. Additionally, new funding schemes could be established to support small- and medium-sized travel agencies in adopting digital technologies and sustainable tourism certifications. National branding campaigns should also emphasize Thailand's commitment to safe, authentic, and innovative travel experiences, thereby strengthening destination competitiveness (Sharpley & McGrath, 2021; Hanafiah, Jamaluddin, & Zulkifly, 2020).

2. Travel Agency Strategies

Travel agencies must deepen their role in co-creating value with tourists by designing more personalized, culturally immersive, and sustainable travel experiences. Agencies should invest in staff training programs that enhance skills in digital communication, cross-cultural competence, and sustainable tourism management. Partnerships with local communities to promote authentic cultural tourism products can further enhance destination attractiveness. Moreover, agencies should leverage customer data analytics to customize itineraries and recommend niche tourism experiences, thereby increasing tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Fong, Lo, Ramayah, & Songan, 2022).

3. Digital Marketing and Technology Adoption

Stakeholders across the tourism sector should invest heavily in advanced digital marketing strategies. Destination marketing organizations (DMOs) and travel agencies should collaborate with digital platforms to develop AI-driven personalized marketing campaigns, virtual and augmented reality experiences, and influence partnerships targeting emerging market segments. Building strong online reputations through proactive management of online reviews and social media engagement is critical for enhancing destination visibility and attractiveness. Furthermore, the integration of blockchain-based smart contracts for booking and payment systems could enhance trust and transparency in travel transactions (Chekalina, Fuchs, & Lexhagen, 2021; Hsieh & Chang, 2021).

4. Strengthening Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

Sustainable tourism development requires active collaboration between the public sector, private sector, local communities, and tourists. The Thai government should establish formal mechanisms such as tourism advisory boards, public-private partnerships, and digital innovation hubs to foster collaboration. Joint initiatives could focus on destination management planning, sustainable tourism education, and crisis preparedness

programs to improve destination resilience and competitiveness (Dwyer & Forsyth, 2021; Buhalis & Sinarta, 2021).

5. Future Research and Innovation

Continuous research and innovation are necessary to adapt to evolving tourist behaviors and global trends. Future studies should explore longitudinal changes in tourist perceptions post-COVID-19, the impact of emerging technologies such as AI and the metaverse on travel experiences, and the integration of sustainability metrics into destination competitiveness assessments. Encouraging academic–industry partnerships can further ensure that Thailand's tourism strategies are grounded in evidence-based insights and global best practices (Sigala, 2020; Martins, Ruhanen, & Fyall, 2021).

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