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Associations between travel and tourism competitiveness and culture

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, countries have been competing with each other to attract tourists due to of the unprecedented growth in new tourism destinations. Consequently, these countries have been taking several initiatives to improve the competitiveness of their destinations in comparison to those of other countries. However, it is becoming increasingly difficult for destinations to become the most popular and preferred choice among tourists. Previous literature has highlighted the need for examining the association between the culture of a particular destination and their competitiveness with respect to tourism. Little is known, however, about these associations at the present time. This study offers a cultural explanation of the travel and tourism competitiveness (TTC) of a country by investigating the relationship between destination competitiveness, as measured by TTC, and national culture. The study investigates these relationships by analysing data from 73 countries. Multiple regression was used to examine the relationships, and cluster analysis to segment the countries. The findings indicate that individualism, long-term orientation, and indulgence dimensions of national culture were significant in influencing the TTC of a country, whereas power distance and masculinity were insignificant. This study emphasises the importance of developing culturally congruent policies to improve destination competitiveness.

1. Introduction

With recent improvements in the tourism industry and the growth in disposable income, individuals are continuing to spend more on travel and tourism itineraries (Croes, Ridderstaat, & Shapoval, 2020; Kayar & Kozak, 2010; Pike & Page, 2014). This trend has resulted in growing competition among different countries. As a result, such nations are increasingly engaged in identifying new ways to attract tourists (Chathoth, Mak, Sim, Jauhari, & Manaktola, 2011; Nazarian, Atkinson, & Foroudi, 2017; Rodríguez-Díaz & Pulido-Fernández, 2020). More specifically, travel destinations aim to establish a competitive advantage to attract more tourists (Clara, Simon, Noelia, & Barbara, 2019; Kayar & Kozak, 2010; Rodríguez-Díaz & Pulido-Fernández, 2020). This has resulted in strong competition in the travel and tourism industry, with only the most competitive destinations being likely to grow (Kubickova & Martin, 2020; Pike & Page, 2014). Scholars have also recognised the vitality of destination competitiveness in attracting tourists (Crouch & Ritchie, 2012; Goffi, Cucculelli, & Masiero, 2019; Kubickova & Martin, 2020; Shoval & Birenboim, 2019). Moreover, countries that aim to become popular destinations for international tourists have generally been required to put more significant efforts into building their competitive advantage (Fernández, Azevedo, Martín, & Martín, 2020).

The previous literature on tourism and hospitality has identified different factors that can contribute to building the competitive advantage of a destination (Crouch & Ritchie, 2012). These include problem identification skills (Li & Liu, 2018), the intellectual capital of the hospitality industry (Li & Liu, 2018), branding (Xia, Vu, Law, & Li, 2019), advertisement (De Souza, Mendes-Filho, & Buhalis, 2019), green initiatives (Singjai, Winata, & Kummer, 2018), and the customisation of services (Shoval & Birenboim, 2019). In contrast, factors like national culture are rarely studied. The recent literature suggests that a deeper understanding of national culture may contribute to the creation of competitive advantage (Fernández et al., 2020). Furthermore, scholars argue that through a deeper understanding of national culture, government and policymakers could design more culturally relevant policies to attract international tourists (Fernández et al., 2020).

The previous literature has highlighted the importance of understanding the national culture while interacting with international tourists (Dai, Hein, & Zhang, 2019; Fernández et al., 2020). However, these studies are mostly limited in focus to the performance of the tourism and

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hotel industry (Nazarian et al., 2017; Sunny, Patrick, & Rob, 2019) and the training of staff (e.g. Robinson, Martins, Solnet, & Baum, 2019; Tracey & Swart, 2020). Based on these studies, attempts have been made to improve competitiveness by adopting various strategies, such as advertising (De Souza et al., 2019; Xia et al., 2019), staff training (Crouch & Ritchie, 2012; Robinson et al., 2019), adopting green practices (Singjai et al., 2018), and using advanced technology (Shoval & Birenboim, 2019; Sunny et al., 2019), Despite these efforts, many countries are not able to achieve the desired level of competitiveness for their destinations. This may result in a lower arrival rate of international tourists, which suggests that these destinations are struggling to achieve a competitive advantage (Fernández et al., 2020).

Scholars have argued that a common consensus exists in that destination competitiveness is deeply impacted by national culture (Clara et al., 2019; Goffi et al., 2019). However, the empirical evidence in support of this idea is limited. Previous literature has acknowledged that national culture is important for understanding the travel behaviour of tourists (e.g. Lim & Giouvris, 2020). However, most of these studies have focused primarily on examining the impact of national culture on travel motivations (Dai et al., 2019), behavioural patterns (Hsu, Woodside, & Marshall, 2013), beliefs (Sabiote-Ortiz, Frías-Jamilena, & Castañeda-García, 2016), and perceptions (Chen, Cheung, & Law, 2012). Moreover, most of these studies have focused on a single country, city, or cultural context, including, for example, Amsterdam (Dai et al., 2019), Turkey (Evren & Kozak, 2018), St. Gallen (Laesser & Beritelli, 2013), Europe (Vinyals-Mirabent, 2019), South Banat (Kovačević, Kovačević, Stankov, Dragićević, & Miletić, 2018), Milan (De Noni, Orsi, & Zanderighi, 2014), and Spain (Campón-Cerro, Hernández-Mogollón, & Alves, 2017), among others. While the existing literature has improved the understanding of the relationship between national culture and tourism, it is not yet clear if and how national culture helps countries to become popular tourist destinations. This research gap poses various problems, such as a realisation of the growth potential of the tourism industry and the lack of tourism policies for governments, policymakers, and the tourism management organisations that are dependent on the tourism industry. The absence of an understanding of why and how national culture is essential for tourist destination competitiveness poses a significant challenge for policymakers in designing effective tourism policies to attract tourists. Thus, a clearer understanding of national culture may help in improving the destination competitiveness of a country.

The present study aims to fill this gap and formulates two broad research questions (RQs) as follows:

RQ1. What is the role of national culture in travel and tourism competitiveness (TTC)?

RQ2. How can the different countries be grouped into clusters to more effectively recommend strategies to improve TTC?

To address RQ1, this study empirically examines the association of different national cultural dimensions and TTC. More specifically, the study utilises the cultural dimensions of 73 countries, as proposed by Hofstede (2011). The six cultural dimensions are power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence. The TTC of each of the 73 countries is measured using the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) prepared by the World Economic Forum (WEF) (World Economic Forum, 2019). The TTCI assigns each country an index indicating its leading or failing status in attracting tourists (Croes et al., 2020; Fernández et al., 2020). Furthermore, the TTCI estimates various factors and policies related to the sustainable development of the travel and tourism industry (World Economic Forum, 2019). Using the TTCI, this study establishes different factors and policies to develop the competitiveness of the tourism sector of any country. RQ2 is addressed by performing hierarchical cluster analysis, where the countries are clustered based on their various national cultural dimensions. The study then proposes various strategies for the improvement in TTC for each cluster, and these recommendations apply to tourism managers, policymakers, and government.

The present study offers a greater understanding of the association between national culture and the TTC of a country. The findings indicate that the culture of a country can significantly impact TTC. So far, only a limited number of studies have attempted to understand competitiveness by examining data from many countries. Therefore, the findings from this study extend the literature on tourism and hospitality in an important direction. This study also provides a discussion of the practical implications of these findings with recommended strategies to improve destination competitiveness for policymakers and tourism related organisations. This study is significantly different from earlier studies on destination competitiveness and contributes to literature and practice in the following three major ways. First, almost no previous studies on destination competitiveness have focused on culture in their empirical investigations (e.g. Campón-Cerro et al., 2017; De Noni et al., 2014; Evren & Kozak, 2018; Kovačević et al., 2018; Laesser & Beritelli, 2013; Vinyals-Mirabent, 2019). These studies were mainly focused on the components of competitiveness such as cost or value, safety or security, and human resources, among others. Second, previous studies on destination competitiveness have focused on single countries as their reference points. Scholars have acknowledged that culture does play a significant role in driving or inhibiting designation competitiveness (Buultjens, Neale, & Lamont, 2013; Kozak & Buhalis, 2019; Larson, Lundberg, & Lexhagen, 2013). However, little empirical evidence is available to fully support this view. The present study offers a framework that can be utilised to study the association between culture and destination competitiveness across multiple countries, encompassing a wide array of cultural contexts. The proposed framework and recommendations can be utilised or generalised to a specific country context.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows: the following section contains a review of the relevant literature on culture and TTC. The next section develops the research model and includes a description of the proposed hypotheses. The methodology section discusses the research method, followed by the results and the discussion. The section following that presents the different theoretical and practical implications of the study after the discussion. Finally, the study concludes with a section that reviews the limitations and the scope for future research.

2. Background literature

2.1. Culture

Culture represents the accumulation of distinct behavioural patterns in society (Scupin, 2020). The different macro-environmental elements, namely the economic, legal, political, and technological aspects, all influence distinct behavioural patterns (Bauman, 2013; Scupin, 2020). These patterns become traits which, in turn, become a part of the personality that is shared by many members of a country (Kim & McKercher, 2011; McKercher, 2020). National culture is shaped by the people's exposure to history, philosophy, religion, and the social values of that particular country (Vergori & Arima, 2020). However, researchers have different understandings of culture, which is reflected in the absence of a composite definition for it. Historically, with the emergence of anthropology, the term 'culture' was associated with the customs and behavioural patterns of the inhabitants in a society (Scupin, 2020). At an aggregate level, Hofstede (2011) has argued that national culture is a belief system that differentiates the people of one category from another. Hofstede (1983) developed a cultural framework by surveying members across many countries and observing the various cross-cultural differences. This cultural model was further developed by Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010), and suggests that there are six dimensions of national culture. These cultural dimensions include power distance (PD), individualism versus collectivism (IND), uncertainty avoidance (UA), masculinity versus femininity (MAS), long-term orientation versus short-term orientation (LTO), and indulgence versus restraint (INL).

The present study has adopted Hofstede's dimensions of national

culture mainly for two reasons. First, scholars have claimed that Hofstede's cultural model is one of the most influential and well-utilised frameworks for understanding national culture (Kumar, Giridhar, & Sadarangani, 2019; Nazarian et al., 2017). The framework was later validated using a meta-analysis for which more than 451 articles representing 49 countries were collected (Taras, Steel, & Kirkman, 2012). In so doing, Taras et al. (2012) indicated that there was no sign that Hofstede's model was waning in popularity. The meta-analysis concluded that Hofstede's model of culture would remain valid for at least three more decades, which ensures that it is relevant to the current context. Second, Hofstede provided cultural dimensions for several countries, and the large dataset was available for statistical analysis. The large dataset is considered prudent for analysis because it reduces any spurious effect and also makes it possible to generalise the findings (Kumar et al., 2019).

2.2. Competitiveness

Competitiveness is understood as the ability of an organization or entity to design, produce, and deliver market offerings in such a way that these offerings become more attractive than those of the competitors (Fernández et al., 2020; Kubickova & Martin, 2020). Competitiveness is considered to be an effort to achieve continuous profitability usually beyond the industry average (De Souza et al., 2019). Similarly, destination competitiveness is related to the capability of a particular destination to ensure its sustainable development (Clara et al., 2019; Kubickova & Martin, 2020). More specifically, scholars have argued that destination competitiveness refers to the destination's ability to create and deliver value while sustaining the available resources and maintaining its market position with regard to its competitors (Croes et al., 2020; Goffi et al., 2019).

Destination competitiveness includes several micro and macro-environmental factors. A review of the previous literature has indicated that very few studies explored these factors, and that those that did were mostly limited to a single country context. For example, Kozak (2007) estimated Turkey's competitive position in association with other international tourist destinations, and Clara et al. (2019) looked specifically at the cases of South America and Oceania. While the existing studies have improved the present understanding of destination competitiveness, they have not yet explained why some destinations are more popular than others. The present study therefore aims to provide a cultural explanation of destination competitiveness and how it is related to competitiveness. Accordingly, it has adopted the TTC index as a measure of the competitiveness of destinations or countries.

2.2.1. Travel and tourism competitiveness (TTC)

Travel and tourism competitiveness, or TTC, is a tool that measures the success of the travel and tourism industry of a country on the global level. This competitiveness benchmarks the TTC of several countries by assigning an index (TTCI). This index is comprised of 90 individual indictors which are indexed into 14 pillars. The pillars are measured across four factors of competitiveness, which include: (1) infrastructure; (2) natural and cultural resources; (3) enabling environment; and (4) travel and tourism policy and facilitating conditions (World Economic Forum, 2019). The first factor, infrastructure, includes the quality as well as the availability of the physical infrastructure of each country, and consists of three pillars. The three pillars are air transport infrastructure (comprised of six indicators), ground and port infrastructure (comprised of seven indicators), and tourist service infrastructure (comprised of four indicators). The second factor is natural and cultural resources, which captures the primary reasons to travel. It has two pillars, namely natural resources with five indicators, and cultural resources and business travel with five indicators. The third factor is enabling environment, which refers to the general conditions required to operate in a country. It consists of five pillars, which are business environment (with 12 indicators); safety and security (with five indicators); health and hygiene (with six indicators); human resources and the labour market (with nine indicators); and information and communication technologies readiness (with eight indicators). The last factor is travel and tourism policy and facilitating conditions, which measures the specific strategies and policies. It impacts TTC, and consists of four pillars, which are the prioritization of travel and tourism (with six indicators), international openness (with three indicators), price competitiveness (with four indicators), and environmental sustainability (with ten indicators). The WEF estimates these indicators, pillars, and TTC values by utilising datasets from intentional organisations such as, among others, United Nations Educational, World Bank, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and the World Health Organization among others. In addition, the WEF collected survey data from more than 16,000 business executives and leaders for incorporation into the assessment of TTC. The indicators, pillars, and factors have been developed to estimate TTCs and to get a comparative understanding of the travel and tourism positions of various countries.

This study adopts the TTC framework and the TTCI for two major reasons. First, TTC relies upon a current framework that is updated at regular intervals. This means that the current trends in the travel and tourism industry are well accounted for while evaluating competitiveness. For example, the indicator 'coastal shelf fishing pressure' which was used previously has been replaced by 'fish stock status' by the World Economic Forum (2019), thereby presenting a better measure of marine environmental sustainability. These changes in indicators suggest that competitiveness is current and dynamic. Second, in the recent past, scholars have used the TTCI in their research on tourism and destination competitiveness (e.g. Fernández et al., 2020; Kubickova & Martin, 2020; Rodríguez-Díaz & Pulido-Fernández, 2020; Webster & Ivanov, 2014). These studies indicate the applicability of the TTC index for use in similar research.

3. Research model and hypotheses

The previous literature suggests that national culture may have a more profound and long-term impact on the competitiveness of the travel and tourism industry than any other strategies (Kim & McKercher, 2011; McKercher, 2020). Similarly, the cultural differences among individuals also impact their processing of information, perception, and motivation, thereby leading to changes in behaviour towards travel and tourism (Goffi et al., 2019; McKercher, 2020; Vergori & Arima, 2020). Due to these insights, the present study develops a research model that aims to examine the association between national culture and TTC. In keeping with the findings from the previous literature, the present research utilises the six dimensions of the Hofstede cultural model for studying national culture (e.g. Kumar, Baishya, Sadarangani, & Samalia, 2020; Sabiote-Ortiz et al., 2016). The six dimensions of Hofstede's cultural model, namely power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence, are the independent variables of the proposed research model. At the same time, the TTC index is the dependent variable (see Fig. 1).

3.1. Power distance and TTC

Power distance refers to the extent to which the less powerful members of society acknowledge and anticipate the absence of a uniform distribution of power (Hofstede, 2001). It is a measure of power asymmetry in society, with an increased distance representing autocratic leadership and centralisation of power (Hofstede, 2011). Furthermore, this particular concept of power is embedded in the minds of those who are at the top as well as those at the bottom of the hierarchy (Hofstede, 2011). High power distance restricts the free expression of ideas and movement, especially when these activities may result in conflict between individuals and the authorities (Nazarian et al., 2017). Furthermore, high power distance countries may not be able to understand the perspectives of all stakeholders in the tourism industry

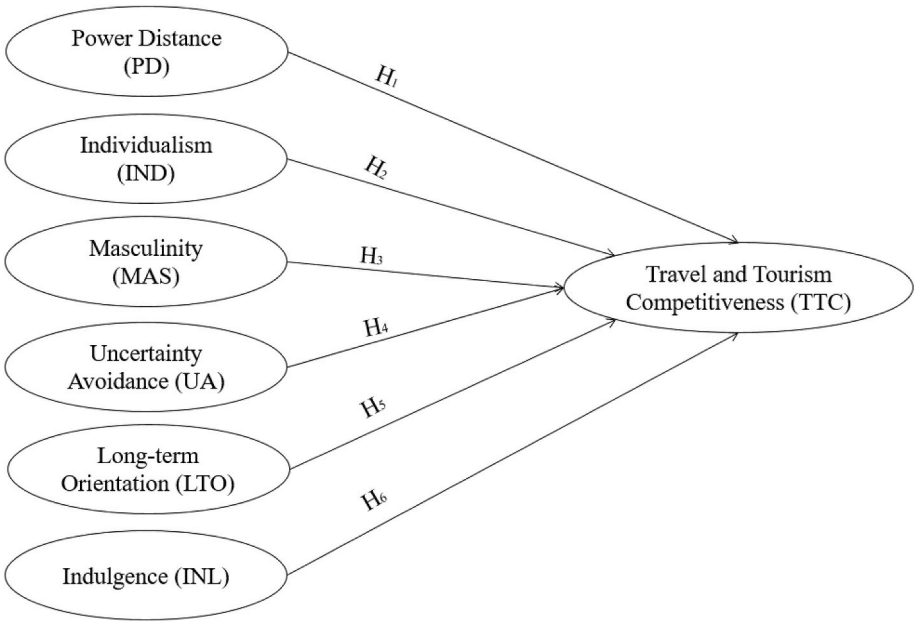

Fig. 1. Research model.

because high power distance does not support direct communication with the authorities or policymakers (Beritelli & Laesser, 2011; Kumar et al., 2019). Any attempt or strategy to improve the TTC must follow the hierarchy, and this is not usually supported if the competitiveness efforts are proposed by someone lower in the hierarchy (Crouch & Ritchie, 2012). In contrast, countries with low power distance are likely to welcome any strategy to improve competitiveness (Magnini, 2009; Nazarian et al., 2017). These countries take quicker action on the proposed strategies due to their understanding of the perspectives of all stakeholders, as they welcome communication between individuals and the authorities (Gao, Li, Liu, & Fang, 2018). Therefore, this study hypothesises that:

H1. Countries with high power distance are negatively related to TTC

3.2. Individualism and TTC

Individualism (versus Collectivism) is the degree to which people are integrated into groups (Hofstede, 2001). In an individualist culture, people lose individual ties, and self-interest is predominant (Hofstede, 2011). This is made possible by a large amount of freedom that such a society gives to individuals (Hofstede et al., 2010). On the other end, some societies have close individual ties wherein people are born into collective groups, such as extended families with guarded group interests (Hofstede, 2011). People from individualist societies have greater autonomy in the expression of opinions or ideas than those from collectivist societies (Litvin & Kar, 2004). Countries with individualist social structures are often more prepared to adopt various strategies to boost TTC and work for such aims on an individual level, whereas collectivist societies may require affirmation from all the members before implementing any strategy, which may become a time consuming and tedious process (Crouch & Ritchie, 2012; Magnini, 2009). Moreover, individualist countries welcome discussion to improve TTC and are ready to use newer technologies that may boost their competitiveness (Nazarian et al., 2017; Sunny et al., 2019). Therefore, this study hypothesises that:

H2. Countries with high individualism are positively related to TTC.

3.3. Masculinity and TTC

The range between masculinity and femininity can be understood in terms of the diffusion of values between males and females (Hofstede, 2011). Societies that tend to exhibit an aggressive or forceful nature are referred to as masculine, whereas those that tend to show a more caring or modest nature are referred to as feminine (Hofstede, 2011). Classification into the masculine dimension indicates that the people of a country are willing to take harsher and riskier steps. For example, masculine societies prefer to resolve a matter by fighting rather than discussion (Pizam & Fleischer, 2005). Tourists looking for adventure usually welcome limited risk-taking as a part of their overall travel experience (Magnini, 2009; Nazarian et al., 2017). Therefore, since most tourists are looking for exciting experiences (Crouch & Ritchie, 2012), they may be ready to become involved in risk-taking activities. Based on these ideas, this study hypothesises that:

H3. Countries with high masculinity are positively related to TTC.

3.4. Uncertainty avoidance and TTC

Uncertainty avoidance is related to society's tolerance for ambiguity (Hofstede, 2011). It estimates the extent to which members of a society are comfortable in an unstructured situation that is fresh, unfamiliar, unanticipated, and different from the usual (Hofstede et al., 2010). Uncertainty-avoiding cultures put efforts into reducing the probability of any such situations through the use of stringent behavioural codes of conduct, regulations, guidelines, and condemnation of non-standard beliefs (Hofstede, 2011). These efforts are reflected in stringent safety norms that may conflict with individual freedom (Magnini, 2009; Nazarian et al., 2017). The encroachment of a destination's regulations on the freedom of tourists may cause irritation that reduces their preference for popular destinations (Crouch & Ritchie, 2012). On the other hand, countries with lower uncertainty avoidance levels may allow people to experiment since they generally have less stringent rules and policy guidelines (Minkov & Hofstede, 2012). Destinations with relaxed rules tend to be better suited to the purposes of tourists, and their competitiveness is likely to be higher. The hypothesis is thus:

H4. Countries with low uncertainty avoidance are positively related to TTC.

3.5. Long-term orientation and TTC

Long-term and short-term orientation refer to the degree to which individuals in a society are concerned about their future (Hofstede, 2011). Those countries whose citizens are more focused on their past are classified as having a short-term oriented culture (Hofstede, 2001). In contrast, long-term oriented societies believe that the important life events will take place in the future. This is reflected in their preference for thrift as well as a pattern of huge savings (Hofstede et al., 2010). They also embrace learning from other nations and have more adaptable traditions (Hofstede, 2011). Members of long-term oriented societies also tend to learn strategies from other countries to improve competitiveness (Magnini, 2009) and invest in building a tourism infrastructure to gain the long-term benefits (Nazarian et al., 2017). Countries with long-term orientation also utilize inspiration from other countries (Huang & Crotts, 2019; Parrilla, Font, & Nadal, 2007) on travel and tourism policies, which may help in the improvement of TTC. This study thus hypothesises that:

H5. Countries with long-term orientation are positively related to TTC.

3.6. Indulgence and TTC

Indulgence refers to the orientation of society towards the free gratification of basic desires related to living a joyful life (Hofstede, 2011). Indulgent societies put greater priority on freedom of speech and leisure (Bauman, 2013). Indulgence is understood as a weaker form of control through which individuals attempt to curb their impulses and desires, whereas a stronger form of control is called restraint (Wong, Newton, & Newton, 2014). Restrained societies are not focused on leisure time and instead control the gratification of their people's desires (Hofstede, 2011). Travel and tourism activities tend to require the embrace of the free gratification of experiences (Crouch & Ritchie, 2012). Thus, indulgent societies may consider travel and tourism as one of their fundamental rights that allows for enjoyment. These countries respect the seeking of gratification by tourists, and so they develop their tourism industries accordingly. An indulgent culture tends to prevail in South and North America, in some parts of African regions, and in Western Europe where it contributes to a major part of international tourism (Hofstede, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010; World Economic Forum, 2019). Thus, this study hypothesises that:

H6. Countries with indulgence are positively related to TTC.

4. Methodology

The study uses secondary data from two sources: the WEF's 2019 report on travel and tourism, providing data on the TTC for 140 countries (World Economic Forum, 2019), and the data on Hofstede's cultural dimensions for all six dimensions, retrieved from Hofstede's website (Hofstede, 2019). This study uses the data for the 100 countries that were retrieved for determining the cultural dimensions of power distance, individualism, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance. However, the data of only 84 countries were available for long-term orientation, and only 73 countries for indulgence. Thus, the complete dataset with all cultural dimensions and competitiveness was only available for 73 countries (see Table 1). This study therefore utilises data points from only 73 countries for analysis (see Fig. 2).

The researchers also performed a cluster analysis based on the cultural dimensions of the countries. The descriptive details of the TTC components are presented in Table 2. Since the culture of one particular country is likely to be different from that of another, it is prudent to offer strategies that may apply to countries with similar cultural backgrounds. To do this, the researchers conducted a hierarchical cluster analysis to segment the countries in different clusters.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics on study variables.

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std dev
TTCI	73	2.82	5.43	4.14	0.65
PD	73	18	100	61.81	20.13
IND	73	12	91	43.34	23.20
MAS	73	5	100	48.07	19.82
UA	73	8	100	65.12	21.43
LTO	73	4	100	44.07	23.72
INL	73	0	100	47.99	23.18

Note TTCI- Travel and tourism competitiveness index, PD-Power distance, IND-Individualism, MAS- Masculinity, UA- Uncertainty avoidance, LTO- Long-term orientation, INL- Indulgence.

5. Results

The correlation analysis between the dependent and independent variables was performed (see Table 3). The correlation results offer insightful information in two ways. First, the TTC shared a significant negative correlation with power distance (r = -0.50, $p < 0.001$). However, TTC shared a significant positive relationship with individualism (r=0.62, $p < 0.001$) and long-term orientation (r=0.43, $p < 0.001$). Second, the correlations shared among the cultural variables, including, for example, power distance and individualism (r=0.71, $p < 0.001$), power distance and uncertainty avoidance (r=0.23, $p < 0.05$), power distance and indulgence (r=-0.25, $p < 0.05$), individualism and long-term orientation (r=0.23, $p < 0.05$), and long-term orientation and indulgence (r=-0.48, $p < 0.001$), were significant (Fig. 3). These correlations were also acknowledged by Hofstede (2011).

The presence of a high correlation between power distance and individualism (r=0.71, $p < 0.001$) may give rise to multicollinearity (Table 3). Thus, it became imperative to test the presence of multicollinearity in the data. The regression analysis to check the presence of multicollinearity. As predicted, the high correlation among the variables gave rise to multicollinearity. The variance inflation factor (VIF) was well beyond the acceptable limit of 10 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010), confirming the presence of multicollinearity. Therefore, the multicollinearity issue was addressed by centring or de-meaning the data and standardising the values, as suggested by Hair et al. (2010). After the transformation of the data, regression was conducted, and the VIF values were examined, which were much less than the acceptable value of 10 (see Table 4). This indicated that the multicollinearity was not severe, and so the researchers could proceed with the data analysis (Hair et al., 2010). A summary of the hypothesis testing is presented in Table 5.

The hierarchical cluster analysis indicated that the countries could be divided among four clusters on a broader level based on their respective cultural dimensions and economic growth (see Fig. 4). The cultural profiles of the four clusters are given in Table 6. The characteristics of Cluster 1 countries (e.g. Russia and Slovakia) included lower individualism, a moderate long-term orientation, lower indulgence, and moderate TTC. Cluster 2 countries (e.g. Dominican Republic and Tanzania) were those with the lowest individualism, lower long-term orientation, and lower indulgence. The cultural profile of the Cluster 3 countries (e.g. Brazil and Spain) included moderate individualism, long-term orientation, and indulgence. Countries in Cluster 3 had the highest TTC among all clusters. Cluster 4 countries (e.g. Switzerland and the Netherlands) had higher individualism, moderate long-term orientation, moderate indulgence, and higher TTC. Since the factors contributing to the development of tourism in one country can be entirely different from those in another country, this means that all the countries required a different set of strategies for improving their TTC.

6. Discussion

H1 hypothesized that there was a negative relationship between high

Albania	Estonia	Luxembourg	Saudi Arabia
Argentina	Finland	Malaysia	Serbia
Australia	France	Malta	Singapore
Bangladesh	Germany	Mexico	Slovakia
Belgium	Ghana	Morocco	Slovenia
Brazil	Greece	Mozambique	South Africa
Bulgaria	Hungary	Netherlands	Spain
Canada	Iceland	New Zealand	Sweden
Cape Verde	India	Nigeria	Switzerland
Chile	Indonesia	Norway	Thailand
China	Iran	Pakistan	Trinidad and Tobago
Colombia	Ireland	Peru	Turkey
Croatia	Italy	Philippines	Ukraine
Czech Republic	Japan	Poland	United Kingdom
Denmark	Jordan	Portugal	United Republic of Tanzania
Dominican Republic	Latvia	Republic of Korea	United States of America
Egypt	Lebanon	Romania	Venezuela
El Salvador	Lithuania	Russian Federation	Vietnam
			Zambia

Fig. 2. The list of 73 countries.

Table 2
Descriptive summary of components of travel and tourism competitiveness.

Code	Index	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std dev
TTCI	Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index	73	2.82	5.44	4.22	0.65
A	Enabling environment sub-index	73	3.15	6.21	5.08	0.72
A.01	Business environment	73	2.37	6.05	4.62	0.68
A.02	Safety and security	73	2.97	6.70	5.38	0.86
A.03	Health and hygiene	73	1.72	6.95	5.57	1.08
A.04	Human resources and labor market	73	3.37	5.85	4.77	0.61
A.05	ICT readiness	73	2.08	6.39	5.07	0.98
B	T&T policy and conditions sub-index	73	3.59	5.15	4.55	0.33
B.06	Prioritization of Travel & Tourism	73	3.42	6.17	4.80	0.67
B.07	International Openness	73	1.61	5.53	3.70	0.80
B.08	Price competitiveness	73	3.19	6.73	5.23	0.64
B.09	Environmental sustainability	73	3.43	5.98	4.46	0.59
C	Infrastructure sub-index	73	2.16	5.78	4.06	1.01
C.10	Air transport infrastructure	73	1.78	6.64	3.69	1.19
C.11	Ground and port infrastructure	73	1.98	6.40	3.89	1.06
C.12	Tourist service infrastructure	73	1.95	6.70	4.61	1.21
D	The natural and cultural resources sub-index	73	1.53	6.05	3.18	1.21
D.13	Natural resources	73	1.87	5.97	3.45	1.05
D.14	Cultural resources and business travel	73	1.05	6.96	2.91	1.61

power distance and TTC which the study results did not support. The finding was contradictory to the conclusions of the World Economic Forum (2019), which had suggested a negative association between high power distance and TTC (see Fig. 3). For example, the countries with high power distance (e.g. Mozambique, Nigeria, and Bangladesh) were often ranked lower in TTC (Hofstede, 2019; World Economic Forum, 2019). Similarly, countries ranked lower in power distance (e.g. New Zealand, Denmark, and Ireland) were ranked higher in TTC (Hofstede, 2019; World Economic Forum, 2019). The possible reasons for the lack of any association could be the absence of power asymmetry. With the increased penetration of technology and internet in our lives, people rarely have to deal with the authorities for getting their work done (Sunny et al., 2019) such as getting government approval for starting a tourism agency. Moreover, the presence of technology and social media has empowered people to the extent that they believe that power resides not only with authorities, but also with themselves (Rydén, Hossain, Skare, & Morrison, 2020). Another possible reason is the decentralisation of power. In the contemporary world, organisations and societies are moving further away from hierarchical structures where power is centred to only few members of hierarchy and preferring flat structures (Segre, 2019). This indicates that top hierarchy members no longer hold power. Moreover, people may have lost faith in the authorities' actions actually benefitting them or society (Bauman, 2013; Cohen, Duberley, & Smith, 2019), including the development of the tourism industry. These changes were also reflected in the non-significant association between power distance and TTC.

H2 predicted that there would be a positive relationship between individualism and TTC, and the study findings supported this hypothesis. This indicated that countries with higher individualism were more inclined towards improved TTC. For example, countries with high TTC included the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Canada, and all these countries also ranked high in individualism (Hofstede, 2019; World Economic Forum, 2019). Countries ranking higher on individualism were mainly part of the developed world with a high per capita income. Therefore, one possible reason for this positive relationship could be the strong infrastructure and spending power of these countries' people, with the latter facilitating international travel and tourism. Also, developed countries have a well-built infrastructure that supports travel and tourism as well as systematic investments that help them to develop competitiveness. Another possible reason could be the widespread availability of technology and resources, which are characteristic of the majority of individualistic countries (Kumar et al., 2019). Although previous studies on individualism and TTC are lacking, the findings of this study were consistent with some of those from other domains (e.g. Nazarian et al., 2017). For example, Nazarian et al. (2017) found a positive and significant relationship between individualism and organisational culture in the context of tourism and hospitality. This indicate that involving people in decision making can have far more impactful outcomes in developing favourable policies.

Table 3
Correlation analysis.

	TTCI	PD	IND	MAS	UA	LTO	INL
TTCI	1						
PD	−0.50***	1					
IND	0.62***	−0.72***	1				
MAS	0.05	0.22	0.03	1			
UA	−0.03	0.23*	−0.17	0.06	1		
LTO	0.43***	−0.05	0.23*	0.04	0.11	1	
INL	0.12	−0.25*	0.11	−0.01	−0.20	−0.48***	1

Note. ***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$.

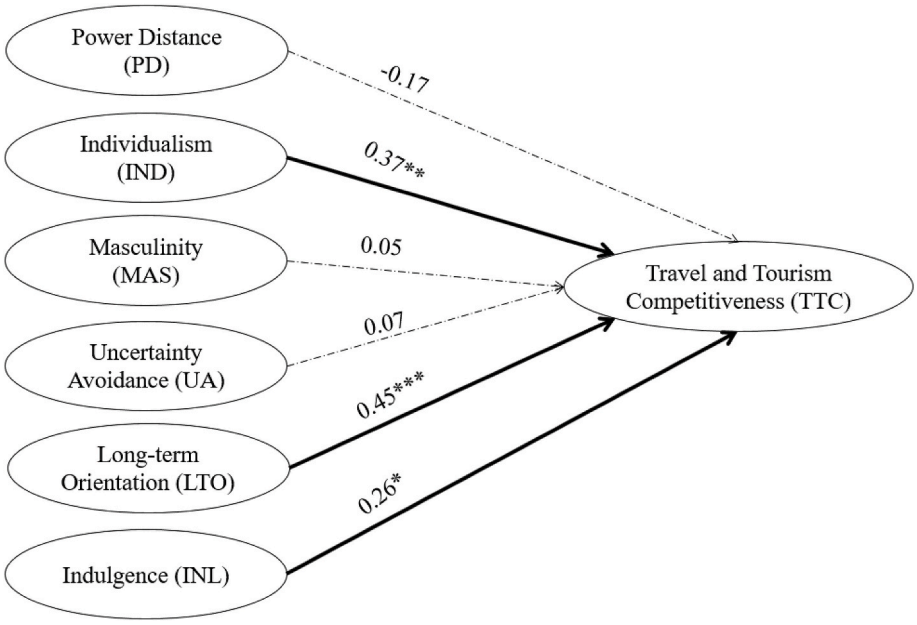

Fig. 3. Results of hypothesis testing.

Table 4
Regression analysis.

	Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
	Beta	T	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
PD	−0.17	−1.28	$p > 0.05$	0.40	2.49
IND	0.37**	2.89	$p < 0.01$	0.42	2.38
MAS	0.05	0.60	$p > 0.05$	0.88	1.14
UA	0.07	0.79	$p > 0.05$	0.92	1.09
LTO	0.45***	4.50	$p < 0.001$	0.69	1.46
INL	0.26*	2.61	$p < 0.05$	0.69	1.46

Table 5
Summary of hypothesis.

Paths in the Model	Hypothesis status
H1: PD→TTCI	Not Supported
H2: IND→TTCI	Supported
H3: MAS→TTCI	Not supported
H4: UA→TTCI	Not supported
H5: LTO→TTCI	Supported
H6: INL→TTCI	Supported

The study could not find support for hypothesis H3, which hypothesized the relationship of TTC with masculinity. Since masculine societies have tended to be competitive and driven by success (Hofstede, 2011), the lack of a relationship between masculinity and competitiveness was unexpected. There is no obvious explanation for these findings, and thus this issue requires further research. However, the non-significant results were consistent with similar findings reported by Nazarian et al. (2017). Nevertheless, previous studies did not account for or speculate about any possible reasons for the non-significant association. Thus, scholars might need to utilize qualitative designs in future studies to determine the reasons behind the non-significant associations.

H4 predicted that there would be a relationship between uncertainty avoidance and TTC, and this was not supported by the findings of this study. Rather than emphasising traditional methods, uncertainty avoidance countries have tended to look for new ways to attract tourists (Hofstede, 2011), and this can potentially make destinations more market-oriented (Crouch & Ritchie, 2012). However, such a tendency was not reflected in the study findings. One possible reason could be that the countries were not attempting to seek out new ways to attract tourists. Another possibility could be that the countries were employing more modern methods to attract tourists who were largely unaware of them or not stimulated by these methods. For example, the Indian state government of Odisha launched a campaign entitled Brand Odisha to attract more international tourists and improve destination competitiveness. However, the campaign failed to deliver the expected results (New Indian Express, 2018). The lack of any association between uncertainty avoidance and TTC demands a more in-depth exploration of the nature of this relationship.

H5 hypothesized a positive relationship between long-term orientation and TTC, which the study findings did support. This suggests that

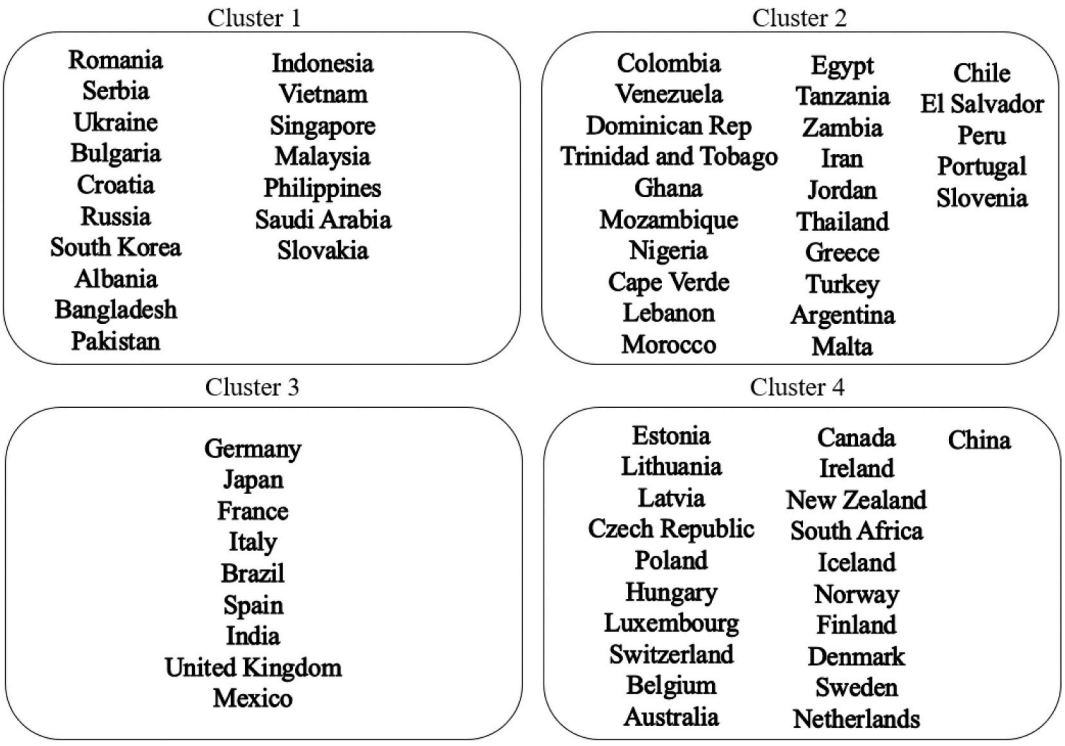

Fig. 4. Results of the hierarchical cluster analysis.

Table 6
Cultural profile (Mean value) of clusters.

Cluster	PD	IND	MAS	UA	LTO	INL	TTCI
Cluster 1	82	26	51	66	59	29	3.86
Cluster 2	7	10	11	17	11	20	0.41
Cluster 3	58	57	62	71	57	51	4.97
Cluster 4	41	68	43	56	52	52	4.49

countries with long-term orientation show enhanced TTC because they can foresee the advantages of maintaining a flourishing tourism industry. For example, the countries with high TTC, such as Japan, South Korea, China, and Belgium, were also ranked higher in long-term orientation (Hofstede, 2019; World Economic Forum, 2019). Countries with long-term orientation usually had a higher per capita income than the world average (Kumar et al., 2019). Therefore, adequate investment in the tourism and hospitality sector can be effectively implemented with strategic planning to realise the long-term benefits. For example, the development of tourism and hospitality infrastructure catering to future demands is likely to improve the competitiveness index for travel and tourism.

H6 predicted that there would be a positive relationship between indulgence and TTC, and this was supported by the findings. This indicates that countries with higher levels of indulgence tend to exhibit greater TTC. For example, countries with high indulgence, like Sweden and New Zealand, were ranked higher in TTC (Hofstede, 2019; World Economic Forum, 2019). One possible reason for the significant positive association could be free gratification. Those countries with high levels of indulgence assume free gratification as their basic right, which results in the people actively participating to the full extent in all activities, including travel and tourism. Such participation leads to demands for the development of infrastructure and related facilities, which, in turn, improve TTC. Thus, the findings of the present study indicate that newer initiatives to improve TTC are well received by those people who actively participate in making the initiative a success.

This study now turns to reviewing the findings of the hierarchical cluster analysis as well as the strategies to improve the TTC for each cluster. The cluster analysis resulted in four clusters (see Fig. 4). The countries in Cluster 1 (e.g. Slovakia, Croatia, Bulgaria) usually had lower individualism, moderate long-term orientation, lower indulgence, and moderate TTC index. To improve competitiveness, Cluster 1 countries should emphasise the reinforcement of their long-term orientation. Governments of cluster 1 countries can launch campaigns for educating the people about the long-term benefits of TTC. Cluster 1 countries generally had lower per capita income. Thus, to improve further, managers should design travel packages to foster short, but frequent, local, or international travel. Since many Cluster 1 countries are collectivist, travel and tourism campaigns must promote how the benefits of travel and tourism will improve the lives of friends and family. Additionally, such campaigns should indicate that certain types of travelling – for example, religious pilgrimages – are socially desirable and well-accepted behaviours, and people should participate in such activities in order to contribute to TTC as well as growth in tourism.

Countries in Cluster 2 (e.g. Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt) had lower individualism, lower long-term orientation, lower indulgence, and the lowest TTC. They should consider creating participation programmes for people by, for example, designing tourist packages which may include asking the preferred combination for tourism destinations from people and offering them most suitable tourist packages. In addition, managers and policymakers can use campaigns promoting more use of technology for improving individualism in society. This can be achieved by portraying travel and tourism as natural and fundamental human desires related to enjoying life and having fun.

A cultural profile of the Cluster 3 countries (e.g. Japan, France, Spain, Germany) indicates that they had a moderate level of individualism, indulgence, and long-term orientation. Cluster 3 countries had the highest TTC among all clusters. Cluster 3 countries can further improve upon their individualism and long-term orientation dimensions through educational campaigns. Managers can design travel packages which foster individualism and long-term orientations. Policymakers can also design policies to encourage people participation and to motivate people to travel.

Cluster 4 countries (e.g. Netherlands, Sweden, Norway) exhibited a higher level of individualism and moderate levels of long-term orientation and indulgence. TTC was higher in Cluster 4, and such countries can further improve their competitiveness by focusing more on individualism. An effective strategy to reduce power distance is to adopt travel and tourism policies that require the application of technologies such as mobile devices, the internet, and social media. This would enable the free flow of information and help in the decentralisation of power, thereby supporting individualism.

7. Implications

7.1. Theoretical contributions

The study has made four main contributions to the existing literature. First, the present investigation is a response to the call for more studies on competitiveness within the context of tourism and hospitality research (Crouch & Ritchie, 2012). Furthermore, the present research addresses the need for expanding knowledge of these various cultural dimensions in order to develop sound strategies for improving the competitiveness of destinations (e.g. Clara et al., 2019; Webster & Ivanov, 2014).

Second, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on tourism and hospitality by investigating the destination competitiveness across multiple countries. The extant research has considered the impact of several factors while studying destination competitiveness. These have included business and human-related factors (Croes et al., 2020), environmental or sustainability factors (Rodríguez-Díaz & Pulido--Fernández, 2020), and government (Kubickova & Martin, 2020). Only a few studies have tried to understand destination competitiveness from a cultural perspective. The present study advances knowledge of destination competitiveness by offering a cultural understanding of these particular issues. The findings suggest that national culture influences the TTC, and that individualism and long-term orientation contribute to growth in travel and tourism competitiveness. Further, this study uniquely contributed insights into the indulgence cultural dimension. Indulgence is the least examined cultural dimension of Hofstede's model. Therefore, the findings here contribute to the theoretical knowledge on this topic, and such perspective can be extended to another context such as hospitality and consumer behaviour.

Third, the present study builds upon Hofstede's (2011) cultural theory by extending it to the tourism and hospitality discipline. Studies have indicated that culture impacts travel and tourism. More specifically, the culture of any country shapes its people's behaviours, motivations, and attitudes towards tourism destinations (Kumar et al., 2019). This study extends cultural theory to TTC and has explained the latter from a cultural viewpoint. While adopting strategies for TTC, countries usually apply a top-down approach. This means that if a strategy to improve TTC works in one country, others will simply adopt that specific strategy without accounting for the cultural differences between the countries. Thus, certain strategies, when implemented without understanding the culture of the country, are less likely to result in the improvement of TTC. This study overcome this limitation by presenting impact of culture on growth of TTC.

Finally, this study improves upon the established understanding of the relationship between culture, tourism, and hospitality by analysing data from 73 countries. The study is the first of its kind to use data from multiple countries. Thus, the design allowed for the generalisation of the findings. Overall, this study significantly contributes to the existing literature on tourism and hospitality as well as the emerging literature on destination competitiveness.

7.2. Practical implications

There are three important practical implications of this study that may be of interest to a broad category of stakeholders, namely governments, policymakers, and service providers in the travel and tourism sector.

First, the findings suggest that the cultural dimensions of a country are related to the TTC. The magnitude of association was highest for long-term orientation, followed by individualism and indulgence. Policymakers can use this information to launch initiatives to produce a higher impact on competitiveness. For example, destinations should initiate campaigns to improve competitiveness that must be long-term and goal-oriented. A long-term and goal-oriented campaign can include the long-term sustenance of cultural heritage, and it may therefore attract more international tourists. Furthermore, policymakers should design policies to improve the long-term orientation of countries by investing in educational campaigns. This may be achieved by launching a campaign at the school level and inculcating the value of long-term benefits and delayed gratification.

Second, the positive association between TTC and individualism implies that TTC can be improved when individual members of society are more inclined toward individualism. An effective way to promote individualism is to grant greater freedom of expression to people and encourage the use of technology. Technology helps with the decentralisation of power and reduces power distance, thereby promoting individualism. Within such a context, managers can launch tourism packages that emphasise how visiting a destination can promote the tourists' self-interest. On the other hand, managers attempting to leverage individualism should not encourage group tourism packages.

Third, the government and policymakers should develop policies promoting indulgence. To accomplish this, policymakers should emphasise the satisfaction gained by fellow tourists after visiting a particular destination. Such promotional activities should emphasise the realisation of free gratification after visiting the destinations. For example, a promotional video for a destination should include not only a list of things to do or visit, but also reviews, feedback, and a description of the gratification felt by the tourists. Tourism and hospitality managers can leverage this dimension of indulgence to promote the hospitality and tourism of particular destinations.

8. Conclusion

The culture of a country is one of the driving factors in the development of its tourism industry. With the upsurge in new tourist destinations, countries are required to understand their national culture and develop strategies based on their own various cultural dimensions. National culture can influence the TTC of a destination, as the extant literature claims that culture is deeply associated with travel and tourism competitiveness. However, there is limited empirical evidence to support this claim. To fill this gap, this study advanced two research questions (RQs). RQ1 examined the role of national culture and TTC. To this end, the study represents the first empirical attempt to examine the association between TTC and six cultural dimensions – power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence – across 73 countries. RQ2 sought to provide a cultural explanation for the TTC of a country. In answering this question, this study performed a cluster analysis and segmented the countries into four different clusters. The strategies for improving the TTC for each cluster were also presented.

The findings presented in this paper are distinctive for four reasons. First, this study examines the relationship between TTC and culture by collecting data from 73 countries, which had never been done before. Second, individualism, long-term orientation, and indulgence were found to be the supporting cultural dimensions that favoured TTC. Third, this study contributes to the literature on destination competitiveness, TTC, and cultural theory. Finally, the results here highlight the strategies that governments, policymakers, and managers can follow to improve TTC. The conclusions and implications from the findings of the study provide some causative factors of the success or failure of TTC and some remedial steps that need to be taken by individual countries for

improving their travel and tourism competitiveness.

8.1. Limitations and future work

The present empirical study has three main limitations that should be addressed in future studies. First, although the study was extensive and included data from 73 countries, it suffers from the limitation of the generalizability of findings. The culture of each country is unique, and so generalising the findings to other countries that were not included in the study is not advised. Also, generalising the findings to improve the destination competitiveness of a particular country is limited in scope. Thus, to overcome this limitation, the study recommends that future studies should include data from many more countries in order to obtain findings that may be more generalisable to other countries. Additionally, future work could consider other factors, such as word of mouth, intentions to recommend, consumption values, economic growth, and other country's specific cultural variables, when studying the topic of TTC. Second, the research design was based on cross-sectional data that are prone to methodological bias (e.g. lack of causality). For this reason, in future studies, scholars should adopt other research designs, such as the use of panel data, qualitative research, or longitudinal and experimental designs, to bring about more significant insights. Third, the study uses secondary data for the analysis by implementing statistical tools. Future studies may overcome this limitation by using primary data for analysis or by adopting advanced analytic methods.

Author contribution

SK participated in Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation; Methodology, and Writing - original draft. AD participated in Writing - review & editing, Methodology, Project administration and Validation.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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