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Tourism enterprise competitiveness model: a study in Dong Nai, Binh Thuan and Khanh Hoa, Vietnam – literature review

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Abstract: The paper presents findings received from an analysis of over 150 studies exploring the factors that enhance the competitiveness of tourism enterprises in Vietnam, focusing specifically on the provinces of Dong Nai, Binh Thuan and Khanh Hoa. These three provinces are notable for their advanced high-speed transportation infrastructure, which aims to boost the competitive advantage of tourism destinations and attract more potential visitors. In this literature review, the author employed qualitative research methods to develop nine independent variables, one intermediary variable, and one dependent variable, drawing on five domestic and international research articles. This serious approach culminated in a quantitative research process designed to validate the model, which comprises 11 hypotheses, thereby reinforcing the significance of the research.

Keywords: competitiveness; tourism enterprises; Dong Nai; Binh Thuan; Khanh Hoa; Vietnam.

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1 Introduction

In the study of Ritchie and Crouch (2003), the authors highlighted the important need to conceptualise tourism as a development system that includes tourists, their related activities, and broader factors of investigation. In fact, tourism has a profound impact on a country's economic, political, and social development policies, playing an important role in the formulation of policies and initiatives, especially those related to sustainable development (Holden, 2008). Therefore, tourism is recognised as a key service industry in any country, contributing beneficially to economic progress through couple of diverse channels (Brida et al., 2020).

As the world is being rapidly transformed, tourism enterprises in Vietnam are facing substantial challenges that directly impact their competitiveness and sustainable development:

- 1 firstly, external factors such as the ongoing threat of pandemics, climate change, and global economic instability continue to exert negative influences on tourists' behaviour and business operations
- 2 secondly, tourism infrastructure in many localities remains underdeveloped and inconsistent, while tourism products lack distinctiveness, making it difficult to attract high-end and niche segments
- 3 thirdly, the issue of human resources has become increasingly critical, with a significant shortage of high-quality labour and specialised skills insufficient to meet the demands of modern tourism practices
- 4 finally, internal management capabilities remain weak, particularly in the areas of digital transformation, capital accessibility, and the establishment of efficient operational procedures.

Furthermore, macroeconomic factors significantly influence the business competitiveness, including:

- 1 policy and visa procedures, which present considerable impediments, such as the processing time for e-visas for international tourists often taking 3–5 working days or potentially longer, thus impacting the tourist experience
- 2 exchange rate volatility: for instance, the 3.89% increase in the USD price index in February 2024 compared to the same period last year directly affects the cost of importing international tourism services for tour operators, leading to higher tour prices; and other issues.

In short, these conditions highlight an urgent need for tourism enterprises to restructure their strategies, enhance adaptive capacities, innovate business models, and, crucially, increase investment in infrastructure and transportation to effectively navigate the current transitional period.

In the context of increasingly competitive tourism, which has emerged as a top priority in national development strategies, many surveys have been conducted on the competitiveness of tourism enterprises in various localities, such as Quang Ngai (Hung et al., 2017), Bac Lieu (Sang and Son, 2018), Dong Thap (Ho, 2020), Quang Yen (Nhung, 2021) and Dak Nong (Hai, 2023). Notably, in areas with improved infrastructure and superior transport quality, tourism competitiveness is predicted to increase, due to the

convenience and comfort that these modern infrastructures provide. This suggests that the establishment or expansion of transport routes will facilitate the increase in the number of tourists travelling through these routes (Murton, 2016). Furthermore, there has been a significant increase in food and beverage establishments, lodging, and accommodation along these extended routes to meet the needs of tourists (Chan and Bhatta, 2021). Therefore, efficient transportation and transport infrastructure connectivity have emerged as important determinants for the sustainable development of tourism destinations in relation to land use and tourism-related activities. Therefore, tourism businesses need to leverage on fast and comprehensive transportation networks to enhance the attractiveness of tourism services (Wang et al., 2021).

In short, tourism has beneficial impacts on economic development (Nunkoo et al., 2019). This correlation has been shown to be particularly strong after decades of economic progress in many countries, in which tourism has always occupied a central position, as shown in the study conducted by Brida et al. (2020). The authors assert that tourism businesses must develop strategies to develop attractive destinations while paying special attention to locations with favourable transport infrastructure. Therefore, this study aims to build a competitiveness model for tourism businesses, focusing on the scope of the study in three provinces: Dong Nai, Binh Thuan and Khanh Hoa, Vietnam.

2 Literature review

2.1 Competitiveness

The deep motivation behind this competition is the creation of differentiation and significant customer attraction for businesses competing within any industry, including the tourism sector. Indeed, competitiveness plays a crucial role as a fundamental yet essential driver for fostering progress and innovation in business. Man et al. (2002) emphasised the multifaceted nature of business competitiveness, which encompasses various key aspects that companies need to focus on, such as pricing strategies, excellent service, sustainable profitability, and the ability to meet strategic goals compared to competitors in the same industry. Expanding on this concept, Khoa (2004) defined business competitiveness as a strategic combination of essential internal capabilities and resources necessary to maintain a market presence, drive profitability, and strengthen competitive advantages in target markets.

In the hospitality and travel service sectors, Fraj et al. (2015) further highlighted the critical role of competitiveness in small and medium-sized hotels. Similarly, Rengkung et al. (2017) emphasised factors such as pricing strategy, quality service standards, profit margins, and achieving objectives in ensuring competitive advantages within the tourism service industry.

In summary, Tambade et al. (2019) argue that competition acts as a catalyst for economic progress, driving advancements across various economic sectors and encouraging markets to limit monopolistic behaviours in any industry, including the tourism sector.

2.2 *Tourist destination*

Tourist destinations play a central and pivotal role as integrated locations that encompass a mix of characteristics, including packaged tourism services, amenities, and related support activities (Page et al., 2006). These destinations serve as convergence points for travellers seeking unique experiences, immersing themselves in local cultures, and exploring both natural and man-made attractions. Notably, these destinations are not merely physical locations; they also embody symbolic narratives and the branding of the local tourism area (Hankinson, 2015).

Moreover, well-planned investment and reasonable competition in tourist destinations can generate significant value in terms of tourist satisfaction and competitiveness within the tourism industry (Osakwe et al., 2016). Furthermore, long-term investment is essential for developing unique identities (Lai et al., 2021) that enhance the overall awareness of tourists when experiencing services at the destination. Consequently, to foster competition and create a distinct character at their tourist sites, stakeholders must genuinely focus on the comprehensive quality of the destination itself.

2.3 *Competitiveness of tourist destination*

The competitiveness of a tourist destination reflects its ability to highlight its appeal to tourists and to scientifically provide goods and services better than other tourist destination. Furthermore, Jackman et al. (2011) and Das and Drienza (2012) analysed that the competitiveness of a tourist destination has a significant impact on the overall competitiveness of the destination and emphasised its relation to the welfare of the local population.

In summary, the competitiveness of a tourist destination depends on the favourable conditions of both internal and external environmental factors (Cibinskiene, 2012). Specifically, an attractive tourist destination is one that possesses resource factors such as natural resources, cultural resources, technical infrastructure, people, or technology that are truly excellent in order to provide the most positive experiences for visitors at the destination (Giang et al., 2022).

3 **Theoretical framework**

3.1 *Research model of Long (2017)*

The research by Long (2017) took place in the context of the specific socio-economic circumstances and environment prevailing in Ben Tre province, Vietnam. The main objective of this research is to clarify and empirically evaluate the determining factors affecting the competitiveness of tourism enterprises in Ben Tre, and subsequently to propose strategies to enhance this competitive advantage in the upcoming period. Specifically, the author's goals include distinguishing the variables that impact the competitiveness of tourism enterprises in Ben Tre, in conjunction with the specific socio-economic conditions and environmental factors related to the region.

The result outlined eight key determinants affecting the competitiveness of tourism enterprises in Ben Tre, with each factor demonstrating a different level of impact. HR are identified as the most important significant effect (coefficient 0.282), followed by the

second influence of the product and service quality factor (0.236), and the destination environment as the third influencing factor (0.185). Price competition is recognised as the fourth important factor (0.182), while marketing competence (0.093), brand (0.088), and corporate social responsibility (0.088) have lower levels of influence.

Figure 1 Research model of Long (2017)

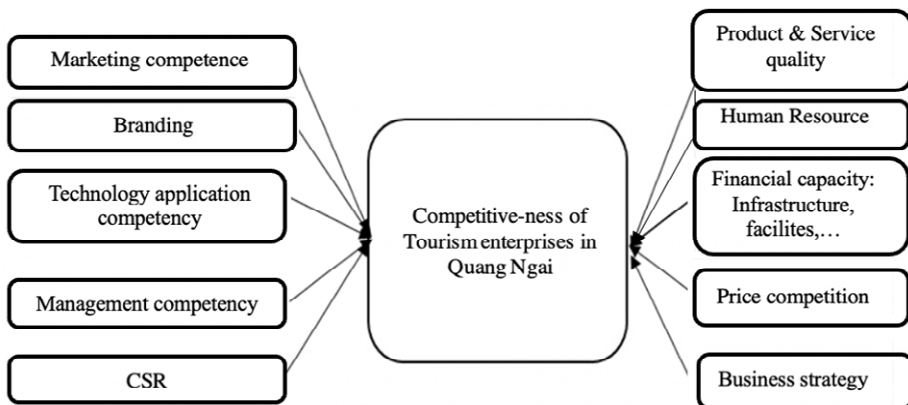


Source: Long (2017)

3.2 Research model of Hung et al. (2017)

The article by Hung et al. (2017) delves into the factors affecting the competitiveness of tourism enterprises in Quang Ngai Province. Based on the theory of competitiveness and qualitative research, the main determining factors influencing competitiveness have been identified.

Figure 2 Research model of Hung et al. (2017)



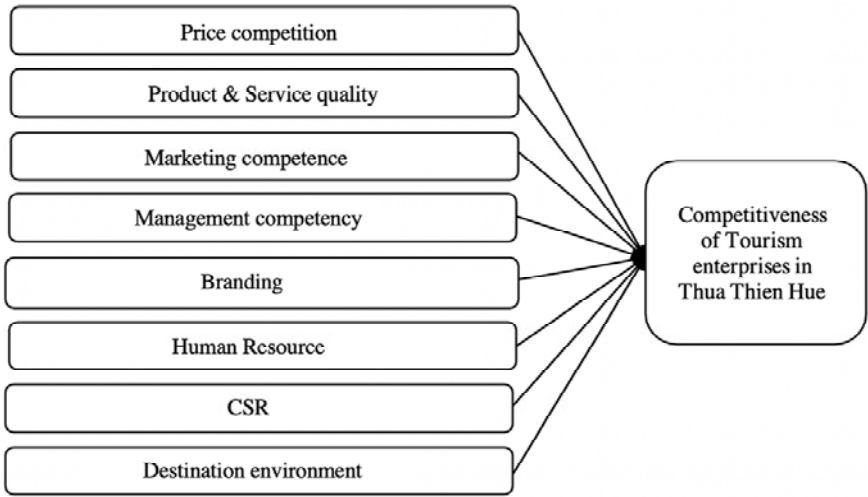
Source: Hung et al. (2017)

The research results indicate ten factors that impact the competitiveness of these enterprises (marketing competency; brand, technology application competency, management competency, operational coordination competency, social responsibility, products and services quality, human resource, financial capacity, infrastructure, pricing competition and business strategy). Notably, some factors have a strong influence on competitiveness, including human resources (0.268), brand (0.22), and the quality of tourism services (0.173). Conversely, there are also factors that have a weaker impact, such as social responsibility (0.074) and business strategy (0.035). Based on these results, the authors of this study provide managerial implications for tourism businesses, in order to propose strategies to enhance the future competitiveness of tourism businesses in Quang Ngai Province.

3.3 *Research model of Phuc (2021)*

The study by Phuc (2021) aims to clarify the determining factors based on the competitive capacity (CC) of tourism enterprises in the Thua Thien Hue (TTH) province, Vietnam. Through conducting a survey involving 244 management personnel from tourism businesses located in Thua Thien Hue province, along with the application of factor analysis and correlation regression methods.

Figure 3 Research model of Phuc (2021)



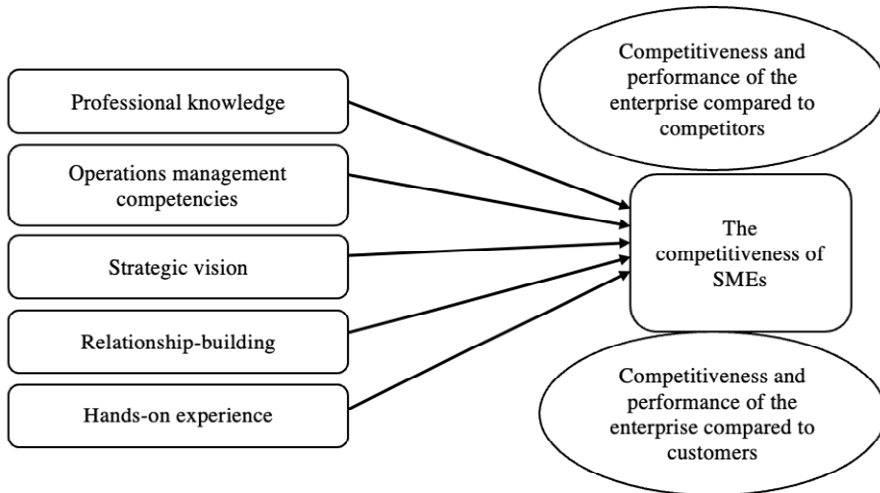
Source: Phuc (2021)

The study revealed the existence of eight key factors that impact the competitive capacity of tourism enterprises in Thua Thien Hue, specifically: human resources; quality of products and services; environmental conditions of the destination; pricing; organisational and management competence; marketing competence; brand; and social responsibility. However, the study only focused on the group of tourism enterprises in the Thua Thien Hue region, which limits its comprehensiveness and context to the province and district. Therefore, the next research paper should expand the survey area to include larger cities in Vietnam. Furthermore, the target respondents should be broadened to include other customer groups or tour guides.

3.4 Research model of Cong and Thu (2021)

This study by Cong and Thu (2021), although an international study, makes an effort to apply competitive theory to thoroughly examine the impacts of leadership capabilities on the competitive capacity of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating in the tourism sector in Vietnam. The authors collected empirical data from a group of 200 individuals in managerial roles within SMEs across the tourism industry in Vietnam. The method used was structural equation modelling (SEM).

Figure 4 Research model of Cong and Thu (2021)



Source: Cong and Thu (2021)

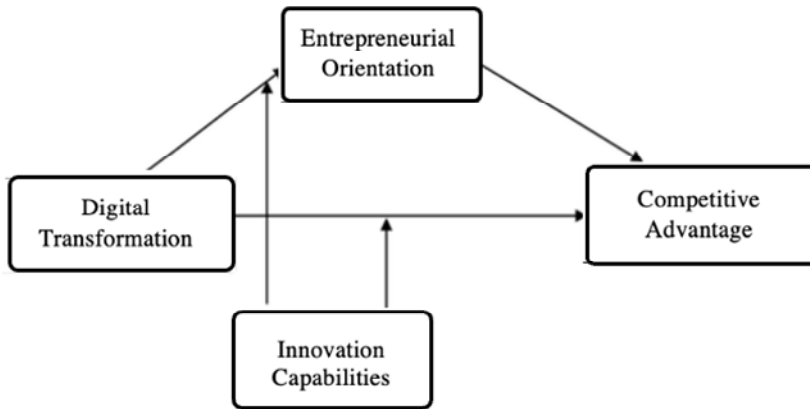
The research results indicate that:

- 1 The competitive position and operational performance of these enterprises, as perceived by customers, are influenced by:
 - a hands-on experience
 - b strategic vision
 - c relationship-building
 - d professional knowledge
 - e operations management competencies.
- 2 The competitive position and operational performance of the enterprises, when compared to their competitors, are influenced by:
 - a professional experience
 - b relationship-building
 - c strategic vision
 - d operations management competencies.

3.5 Research model of Shehadeh et al. (2023)

This study by Shehadeh et al. (2023) elucidated the important role of digital transformation not only in the manufacturing sector but also in supporting service organisations to ensure competitive advantage. The research includes assessing how digital transformation impacts competitive advantage and the mediating role of business orientation. Furthermore, innovation competence is thoroughly examined as a moderating factor in the relationship between digital transformation and competitive advantage.

Figure 5 Research model of Shehadeh et al. (2023)



Source: Shehadeh et al. (2023)

The results indicate that digital transformation not only directly influences competitive advantage but also affects business orientation. Moreover, business orientation was found to be a significant mediator in the relationship between digital transformation and competitive advantage, highlighting the important role of business mindset in the context of digital transformation. However, future studies may introduce other organisational capabilities that play a crucial role in driving competitive advantage.

3.6 Research gaps

Based on a systematic review of the above studies (2017–2023), the authors have identified and listed four significant academic gaps for further investigation:

- 1 firstly, the concept of ‘digital transformation capability’ remains underexplored, particularly within the Vietnamese context, leading to a lack of theoretical foundation regarding digital competitive advantage
- 2 secondly, current studies have principally focused on basic organisational capabilities, omitting critical dynamic capabilities such as ‘strategic flexibility or strategic vision’ which play a central role in successful transformation efforts (Shehadeh et al., 2023)

- 3 thirdly, the scope of empirical investigation is mostly limited to managerial perspectives, neglecting insights from employees and customers – key stakeholders influencing operational efficiency and service quality (Phuc, 2021; Hung et al., 2017)
- 4 finally, geographical and sectoral coverage remains narrow, with existing studies largely confined to the tourism sector in selected provinces, but not in the three provinces that we (authors) are researching.

4 Hypotheses and research model

4.1 Human resource

Human resources are defined as the totality of individuals who possess skills, knowledge, experience, and working capacity, playing an essential role in creating value for the organisation (Joshi, 2013; Sauka, 2014). Indeed, human resources can be considered the most valuable asset of an organisation, as they are the ones who carry out all production processes and service delivery. This has been clearly researched and affirmed in studies related to building competitive capacity of enterprises, particularly in the tourism service sector.

Hypothesis 1 *Human resource (HR)* has a positive relationship with the competitiveness tourism enterprises in three provinces, Vietnam.

4.2 Operation management competency

Management in enterprises is understood as organising and operating functional departments, including the board of directors, executive board, and other departments, along with functions related to management roles, in order to implement strategies and objectives in the most effective manner (Ho, 2005). In practice, management and organisational capabilities play a crucial role in enhancing the competitive advantage of businesses in today's business environment. This argument is specifically supported by the studies of Tsai et al. (2009) and Mechinda et al. (2010).

Hypothesis 2 *Operation management competency (OM)* has a positive relationship with the competitiveness tourism enterprises in three provinces, Vietnam.

4.3 Marketing competency

Improving the marketing competencies of the enterprise helps it grasp trends and push appropriate strategies to attract customers and offer more competitive services and products (Lee and King, 2009). Thus, this measure emphasises the fundamental role of marketing not only in meeting customer expectations but also in nurturing long-term relationships that enhance loyalty and brand affinity, thereby enhancing the competitiveness of the enterprise in the market.

Hypothesis 3 *Marketing competency (MC)* has a positive relationship with the competitiveness tourism enterprises in three provinces, Vietnam.

4.4 *Product and service quality*

High-quality services not only meet customer expectations but also create differentiation between the company and its competitors in a crowded market. According to Kotler (2003), “quality is the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that relates to its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs”. This highlights that perceived quality of a product or service significantly influences consumer choices and loyalty.

Hypothesis 4 *Product and service quality (SQ)* has a positive relationship with the competitiveness tourism enterprises in three provinces, Vietnam.

4.5 *Transport infrastructure*

The quality of transport infrastructure is a key factor in enhancing the competitive advantage of destinations, as it directly impacts the overall experience of tourists and the operational efficiency of tourism-related services. Indeed, Ritchie and Crouch (2003) noted that “the quality and level of transport infrastructure of a destination can significantly affect its competitiveness and attractiveness”. This statement emphasises the indispensable role of well-developed transport infrastructure in shaping the appeal of a destination.

Hypothesis 5 *Transport infrastructure (TI)* has a positive relationship with the competitiveness tourism enterprises in three provinces, Vietnam.

4.6 *Financial competency*

Financial competency not only facilitates the development of tourism transport infrastructure but also plays a vital role in enhancing the overall competitiveness of the destination. Thus, this measure emphasises the importance of strong financial management in promoting the competitive competency of tourism service businesses, especially in Vietnam (Tri, 2011). In this case, it pertains to three provinces: Dong Nai, Binh Thuan, and Khanh Hoa.

Hypothesis 6 *Financial competency (FC)* has a positive relationship with the competitiveness tourism enterprises in three provinces, Vietnam.

4.7 *Price competitiveness*

In the field of tourism industry development, pricing services plays an important role in establishing and maintaining a cautious competitive advantage for a destination, which not only affects the choice-making process of tourists but also serves as an indicator of service quality and the experience they can anticipate. Undoubtedly, competition constitutes an important aspect of strategic management, essential for enhancing the competitiveness of the enterprise (Goldberg et al., 2003).

Hypothesis 7 *Price competitiveness (PC)* has a positive relationship with the competitiveness tourism enterprises in three provinces, Vietnam.

4.8 Brand

Branding is critical in enhancing the competitive capacity of the tourism sector, as it not only creates differentiation between destinations but also forms an impression in the minds of tourists. In fact, once familiar with a brand, customers are always willing to pay a higher price for that brand (Kim and Lee, 2005). According to Kotler and Keller (2016), “a strong brand helps a product or service stand out among hundreds of other choices and creates long-term value for the business”.

Hypothesis 8 *Brand (BR)* has a positive relationship with the competitiveness tourism enterprises in three provinces, Vietnam.

4.9 Digital transformation

In the context of globalisation and the rapid development of technology, digital transformation has become a key determinant of the competitive capacity of enterprises. Schwab (2016) emphasises that “digital technologies are changing the structure of industries, creating new opportunities and simultaneously challenging companies to adapt quickly”. The application of digital technology helps businesses optimise production processes, improve working efficiency, and enhance customer experience. Digital transformation enables access to big data, analysis, and the application of artificial intelligence (AI) for more strategic decision-making.

Hypothesis 9 *Digital transformation (DT)* has a positive relationship with the competitiveness tourism enterprises in three provinces, Vietnam.

Hypothesis 10 *Digital transformation (DT)* is mediator factor and has a positive relationship with the strategic vision.

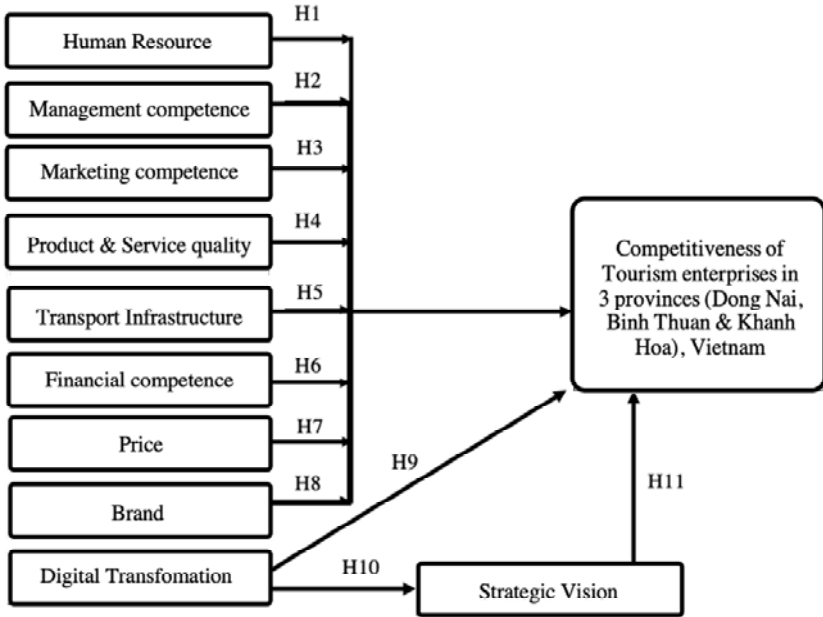
4.10 Strategic vision

Strategic orientation is one of the decisive factors influencing the competitiveness of enterprises in today’s volatile business environment. A clear strategic orientation helps enterprises define goals, allocate resources, and optimise operational processes to meet market needs. Specifically, studies by Oehmen et al. (2014) indicate that businesses with a strong strategic orientation tend to respond more quickly to market changes, improve decision-making processes, and enhance competitive capacity.

Hypothesis 11 *Strategic vision (SV)* has a positive relationship with the competitiveness tourism enterprises in three provinces, Vietnam.

From the above hypotheses, the authors decided to make conceptual model shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6 Conceptual model



Source: Author

5 Research methodology

This study employed a sequential mixed-methods approach to investigate factors influencing the competitiveness of tourism enterprises in Dong Nai, Binh Thuan, and Khanh Hoa provinces. Initially, a qualitative phase involved a comprehensive synthesis of existing literature and foundational models. This process established a robust theoretical framework, leading to the development of a conceptual model and the formulation of 11 hypotheses regarding the relationships between proposed factors and enterprise competitiveness.

Based on this theoretical framework, a measurement instrument (scale) was constructed. The content validity of the scale items was subsequently refined and validated through the Delphi technique, utilising input from 12 experienced tourism industry experts and managers in the research area. This method is used carefully in this part to build the conceptual model and develop the hypotheses.

Following scale validation, empirical data will be collected during a quantitative phase using the refined instrument. Statistical analysis will proceed through stages: Cronbach's alpha will assess internal consistency reliability, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using SPSS will explore the data's factor structure, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS will validate the theoretical model and empirically test the hypotheses. This systematic approach ensures a rigorous examination of the factors affecting tourism enterprise competitiveness. Indeed, in Section 2 of this study, topic was explained in details all the method and data to indicate the results of the validity and

reliability of all factors by using the quantitative method in analysing data and obtained results (SEM model).

6 Discussion

This research paper is studied rigorously based on over 150 research articles both domestically and internationally. Furthermore, the article proposes a model based on the review of five relevant research papers, aiming to identify the factors influencing the competitiveness of tourism businesses: the case of three provinces, Dong Nai, Binh Thuan and Khanh Hoa in Vietnam. This is truly necessary because:

- a The tourism context is increasingly receiving strong attention and investment from the government and domestic-foreign enterprises. Tourism is seen as an important industry for building a sustainable economy, a green economy, and an economy rich in resources.
- b The economy context also shows that despite significant investment, the competitiveness of tourism businesses in Vietnam, as well as the characteristics of tourist destinations, are not attractive enough to attract customers. This indicates that businesses need to clearly and seriously identify the key factors affecting competitiveness and find ways to enhance those factors.
- c Many conceptual frameworks have pointed out the factors affecting the competitiveness of tourism businesses, but most of these studies have focused on other countries or even other regions, not on the three provinces: Dong Nai, Binh Thuan and Khanh Hoa.

This article presents several limitations, providing clear directions for future research:

- 1 Primarily, its focus was qualitative, concentrating on synthesising existing literature to construct a theoretical model and propose hypotheses without including empirical data analysis to confirm the model's validity and the measurement scale's reliability. Consequently, specific data and detailed results from primary data analysis are not presented.
- 2 Furthermore, the exposition of the detailed research methodology was constrained, consistent with the specific scope and objectives of this particular publication.

The authors will be addressing these limitations through subsequent empirical investigation and a more detailed methodological report will enhance the robustness of the findings in the next research.

Declarations

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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