



Examining the Impact of Smart Tourism Governance Systems on Destination Competitiveness: A Moderated-mediation Model

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the connections between smart tourism governance systems (STGS) and destination competitiveness (DC). It suggests an intermediate mediation framework that investigates the role of tourist experience integration (TEI) as a mediating variable, and digital infrastructure maturity (DIM) as a moderating variable in this association. A sample of 241 tourism stakeholders and professionals from Jordan's tourism sector participated in the study. The results of the study show that there is a significant and positive correlation between STGS and DC. STGS boost the efficiency, coordination, and sustainability of destination management, and therefore, competitive positioning in global tourism markets. Another aspect of the study is the TEI being a mediator, which reveals the significance of crafting a successful linking of digital services, visitor engagement platforms, and on-site tourism experiences in transforming governance systems into competitive advantages. Moreover, the study unveils that DIM is a modulator, meaning that destinations that have advanced ICT infrastructure and smart service ecosystems are more influenced by the effects of governance systems on competitiveness. The research has significant implications to the policymakers and tourism authorities in Jordan. Understanding the importance of smart tourism governance has the potential to contribute to the establishment of sustainable destination development and enhance strategic tourism planning processes. Learning the mediating and moderating impacts of TEI and DIM underlines the significance of integrated digital ecosystems in tourism destinations, which should be supported by effective policies of smart cities and smart tourism.

Keywords: Smart Tourism, Governance System, Destination Competitiveness, Jordan

JEL Classifications: L83, Q58, O33, L25, L88

1. INTRODUCTION

The international tourism sector is at the junction of an existential crisis, flying at a frenzied pace of digital disruption, swifter global competition, and growing demands to produce sustainable and resilient destination development. Being the primary contributor to the world GDP of more than 10.4% and having over 330 million jobs worldwide (Zhang et al., 2026), tourism is not only an economic powerhouse but also a driving force of cross-cultural exchange, regional development, and socio-economic inclusion. Yet, the industry is also facing emerging pressures, such as overtourism, disjointed governance frameworks, inconsistent digitalization, and increased ecological limitations (Naguib

and Elsharnouby, 2025; Khan et al., 2021). Governments and destination authorities have responded by increasingly adopting STGS that utilise artificial intelligence, big data analytics, and integrated digital platforms to improve coordination, efficiency, and decision-making. In spite of such investments, there is a global paradox that has yet to be solved: why do smart governance systems not always translate into more competitiveness in destinations? This contradiction indicates a more profound theoretical issue within the literature on technological competence and experiential sustainability. On the one hand, smart governance is well-established as a tool to improve operational efficiency, transparency, and optimization of the services by using real-time data integration and digital coordination (Liu, 2025; Hamdy et

al., 2024). Contrarily, researchers warn that over-digitization can potentially erode the essence of pure tourism experiences, undermine the emotional experience, and cause tourists to hold fragmented perceptions of value (Amiri Sardari et al., 2024; Huang et al., 2026).

Simultaneously, the policies related to sustainability in tourism tend to clash with the short-term competitiveness goals, leading to a threefold conflict between the efficiency, experience, and sustainability results (Matyusupov et al., 2024; Khan and Basit, 2025). This tension has not been resolved but the indication is that technological adoption is not enough to explain DC without further transformational mechanisms and contextual dependencies. An analysis of the literature shows that previous studies have contributed significantly, though incomplete, to the knowledge on smart tourism systems. Early research dedicated to the adoption of ICT and digital infrastructure in the tourism distribution channels (Jameel et al., 2025; Abula and Aihemaiti, 2025). Future studies extended to smart destination ecosystems, governance innovation, and networks of stakeholder collaboration (Roy et al., 2025). More recent studies highlight platform-based tourism management, AI-enabled personalization, and data-driven destination strategies (Salem et al., 2026; Ku, 2025). However, dominant models remain overly linear, failing to capture the sequential mechanisms through which governance systems translate into competitiveness (Alkathiri et al., 2023; Mohammad Shafiee, 2022). Limited attention has been given to experience-based mediation processes, despite growing recognition that tourist perceptions drive destination success (Huang et al., 2026).

Contextual moderators such as infrastructure readiness and digital ecosystem maturity remain under-theorized (Alkhatib and Valeri, 2024; Jameel et al., 2025). Most empirical evidence originates from developed economies, leaving emerging destinations significantly underexplored despite their rapid digital transformation efforts (Arasli et al., 2021; Salem et al., 2026). This study is framed by Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT) (Teece et al., 1997) and Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) (Vargo and Lusch, 2008) in order to fill in these gaps. DCT offers a strategic perspective to comprehend the integration, restructuring and deployment of destinations to respond to the dynamism of the environment using digital and organizational resources. SDL augments this by highlighting the fact that value is not inherent in systems per se but is co-produced in interactions between stakeholders, platforms and tourists. Collectively, these theories rationalize the way in which STGS create competitive advantage not in a direct manner, but in a dynamic process of capability transformation and creation of experiential values. Under this theoretical framing, STGS signify the underlying strategic ability which allows destinations to organize siloed stakeholders, incorporate digital infrastructure, and promote policy responsiveness. Yet, their impact on DC is indirect, via a critical intermediate mechanism, which is the synthesis of tourist experiences. This construct indicates how well digital and physical tourism touchpoints are integrated into a coherent, meaningful, and personalized visitor experience. The introduction of such mechanism can be explained by the fact that in modern tourism markets, competitiveness is not only influenced by the efficiency of infrastructure but also the quality

of experiences, coherence and emotional appeal of the tourist experiences. The success of such transformation process, however, does not cut across destinations. It is dependent on the DIM that plays an important role as a boundary condition that determines the strength of the indirect relationship. Destinations that have well-developed ICT infrastructure, interoperable systems, and high digital penetration can more easily translate governance capabilities into integrated experiences and competitive outcomes.

Conversely, destinations that have disjointed or immature digital infrastructure experience implementation lapses, which deter effectiveness of the system and value creation. This moderating effect aligns with the previous studies that have highlighted the significance of technological preparedness in the success of digital transformation (Zhang et al., 2026; Khan et al., 2021). The proposed conceptual model of this research is based on the moderated mediation model, which is logically arranged in that STGS affect DC via TEI, and DIM moderates the indirect impact. The sequential logic is relevant to the operational actuality of tourism ecosystems: governance systems initially upgrade their coordination opportunities, which in turn make possible the experiential integration, culminating in enhanced competitiveness outcomes. There are three important theoretical contributions that this study makes. First, by shifting away from the traditional and direct-impact models, it contributes to the body of knowledge on tourism governance with a more dynamic moderated-mediation perspective explaining how competitiveness is created. Second, it combines DCT and SDL to fill the gap in technological governance and experiential value creation in tourism studies that had been there since time immemorial. Third, it presents DIM as a contextual boundary condition, which adds to the insight into the conditions and when STGS is most effective. Summing up, the study addresses the pressing demand of more multi-level, integrative accounts of digital transformation in the tourism sector. This theoretical progression and practical implications to policymakers aiming to make destinations more competitive in an ever more complex and digitally-driven global tourism environment by concentrating on an emerging economy setting like Jordan, where tourism represents about 14% of GDP and is experiencing a rapid process of smart policy reforms Alkhatib and Valeri (2024); Hamdy et al. (2024).

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This paper is based on DCT and SDL which are two complementary theoretical approaches which explain together how digital governance systems are transformed into high-level DC in highly dynamic and uncertain tourism settings. The theories are most applicable within the context of STGS, where success is not solely reliant on technological adoption, but also on the continual reorganization of organizational resources and co-generation of value among various stakeholders. Combined, they offer a powerful explanatory frame through which one can explain the difference in competitiveness outcomes among destinations as a result of similar investments in digital governance. According to DCT, in turbulent environments, the key to organizational success lies in the capacity to integrate, accumulate and restructure both internal and external resources to respond to changing conditions

at a very high rate (Teece et al., 1997). The theory highlights 3 fundamental capabilities: the ability to sense opportunities and threats, the ability to seize strategic opportunities and the ability to transform or reconfigure resources to keep up with the competition. This model views organizations as dynamic processes rather than fixed structures since they are constantly changing as a result of dynamism in the environment.

In tourism destinations, whose demand patterns are subject to change and technology is prone to disruptions, as well as destinations influenced by shifts in policy, dynamic capabilities play a key role in ensuring long-term competitiveness (Alkathieri et al., 2023; Liu, 2025). Previous studies have repeatedly confirmed the role of DCT in digital transformation situations, showing that organizations that are more adaptively endowed can more easily translate technological investments into performance benefits (Khan and Basit, 2025; Jameel et al., 2025). Simultaneously, SDL (Vargo and Lusch, 2008) reverses the analytical emphasis on tangible outputs to co-creation of value processes. SDL presupposes that value does not exist within products or systems, but is created in interactions among actors, such as firms, customers, and institutions. Operant resources (knowledge, skills, competencies), value co-creation, and service ecosystems are the key constructs of SDL (Matyusupov et al., 2024; Huang et al., 2026). In the tourism industries, SDL emphasizes that visitor experiences can be created in the form of continuous interactions amid tourists, service providers, digital platforms, and governance structures (Naguib and Elsharnouby, 2025; Jameel et al., 2025).

All types of interactions are determined by factors like digital infrastructure, institutional support, and technological readiness, which have a strong influence on the effectiveness of these interactions and thus the perception of value and behavioral implications (Mohammad Shafiee, 2022). Combined, DCT and SDL can be used to give a strong theoretical basis of how STGS impact DC. According to the DCT lens, STGS can be viewed as a strategic competence that allows destinations to discern the needs of the tourists, organize the resources, and restructure the service delivery systems using digital technologies like AI, big data analytics, and integrated platforms. Nonetheless, the abilities to sense and seize are not enough without transforming them into experiential value creation (Arasli et al., 2021; Salem et al., 2026). This is where SDL comes in as it articulates how the governance-based coordination needs to transform into the co-created tourist experiences via interactional and relational processes (Phan et al., 2026). In this research, the process of transformation is theorized by TEL, which indicates the level of fragmented tourism services integration into a continuity, consistent and significant visitor experience. This construct is well aligned with SDL focus on value co-creation and experiential results since it encapsulates the transformation of digital governance mechanisms into lived tourist experiences (Zhang et al., 2026).

Previous research has demonstrated that integrated tourist experiences have a huge positive impact on satisfaction, loyalty, and DC through decreased cognitive fragmentation and perceived value coherence (Amiri Sardari et al., 2024). Nonetheless, this transformation is not effective in all contexts. The moderating

role of environmental and infrastructural conditions is critical in determining the manner in which dynamic capabilities are implemented, and the process of value co-creation is carried out. Specifically, DIM identifies the degree to which smart governance systems can be successfully operationalised and transformed into integrated experiences (Abula and Aihemaiti, 2025; Roy et al., 2025). In a DCT sense, infrastructure maturity improves the efficiency of the destination with respect to its capacity to reconfigure resources, and in an SDL sense, it promotes the quality and continuity of interactional touchpoints across service ecosystems. The positive correlation between ICT readiness and infrastructure development conditions the success of digital tourism initiatives and smart destination strategies as proven by prior empirical evidence (Liu, 2025; Alkhatib and Valeri, 2024). Combining these two theoretical lenses, this paper will posit that STGS impact DC in a series of capability activation and value co-creation. First, STGS allow sensing and coordination functions that enhance efficiency of systems. Second, the capabilities enable integration of tourist experiences by promoting increased interactional alignment among stakeholders. Lastly, integrated experiences mean increased DC in attractiveness, market positioning and economic performance. This step-by-step reasoning is indicative of the theoretical premise that competences need to be converted into experience value before producing competitive results. Moreover, DIM enhances this process by facilitating easier resource coordination and more efficient co-creation processes, which leads to the increased indirect effect of STGS on competitiveness. This condition of the boundary is crucial to the explanation of why smart governance systems lead to various results at different locations with different technological preparedness. In general, the combination of DCT, and SDL offers a holistic theoretical basis in this research. It not only describes the way in which STGS create competitive advantage but also the circumstances and experiential processes that mediate such a change, thus providing a more sensitive and context-relevant account of the digital transformation of tourism ecosystems.

2.1. Smart Tourism Governance Systems and Destination Competitiveness

With the growing digitisation of tourism ecosystems, destinations are being pressured to move beyond conventional administrative coordination to the more intelligent, adaptive governance forms that are able to adjust to the dynamic market environment as well as changing tourist demands. Based on DCT, STGS allow locations to feel how the environment is changing, reorganize distributed resources, and become more strategic in uncertain and complex environments (Khan and Basit, 2025; Huang et al., 2026). This dynamic nature is especially vital in tourism, with service fragmentation, demand variability and inconsistency in experiences usually undermining destination performance and market positioning (Naguib and Elsharnouby, 2025). Nonetheless, a development of capacity is not enough, there must be a transfer of such into value outcomes in the lived experience of the tourists (Jameel et al., 2025). In the SDL perspective, value is not inbuilt in governance structures but is co-produced through interactions in service ecosystems, with tourists actively interpreting and evaluating integrated service experiences (Hamdy et al., 2024). In this regard, STGS complement DC through better coordinations between stakeholders, lessening

the informational asymmetries, and facilitating the smooth service delivery across tourism touchpoints (Phan et al., 2026; Mohammad Shafiee, 2022). These processes enhance the aspects of mental clarity and emotional involvement of tourists, which are crucial antecedents of desirable behavioral reactions in the form of loyalty and revisit intention (Matyusupov et al., 2024). This argument is supported by previous studies that indicate that digitally empowered governance and coordination systems can greatly contribute to the outcomes of tourism by enhancing service integration and the quality of experiences (García-Maroto et al., 2026). Properly installed governance systems in destination operations generate systematic avenues that transform efficiency in operations into perceived value and competitive advantage.

H₁: STGS are positively related to DC.

2.2. Smart Tourism Governance Systems and Tourist Experience Integration

The growing complexity of service ecosystems in modern tourist settings necessitates forms of governance that not only facilitate coordination of stakeholders but also facilitate the smooth liaison of fragmented service experiences into coherent visitor experiences. Regarding the DCT framework, STGS are more advanced functions that enable destinations to combine heterogeneous resources, coordinate institutional actors, and constantly change service forms as tourist demands and technological upheaval change (Alkhatheeri et al., 2023). This adaptive orchestration is crucial in the tourism context where service delivery inconsistencies tend to derail the entire visitor experience and undermine the perceived destination value (Alkhatib and Valeri, 2024). In line with this perspective SDL highlights that value is co-produced in interdependent relationships with various actors in a service ecosystem with experiential continuity playing a key role in perceived outcomes (Khan et al., 2021). Based on this, when systems of governance increase coordination between digital platforms, transport, hospitality providers and cultural attractions, they minimize experiential fragmentation and provide a more cohesive interpretive framework to tourists (Zhang et al., 2026). This fusion enhances the ease in cognitive processing and reinforces emotional connections, which are vital in the formation of positive assessments of tourism experiences (García-Maroto et al., 2026; Ferreira and Perks, 2025). Empirical data suggests that digitally-coordinated destination systems boost alignment of service delivery processes to a great extent, resulting in more organized and meaningful tourist experiences (Purnomo and Purwandari, 2025). Likewise, integrated governance systems enhance the flow of communication and mitigate uncertainty at the points of touch between the services, enhancing the perceived coherence in the tourist experience (Abula and Aihemaiti, 2025). Previous studies also indicate that this type of system-level integration increase experience consistency and the perception of the destination in general (Huang et al., 2026; Mohammad Shafiee, 2022).

H₂: STGS are positively related to TEI.

2.3. Tourist Experience Integration and Destination Competitiveness

Destinations are becoming more competitive in their success based on the effectiveness with which fragmented service experiences can

be converted to coherent, emotionally meaningful and cognitively fluent visitor experiences in highly competitive tourism markets. In the context of SDL value is not created by individual services but it arises when several interactions in a service ecosystem are combined, and tourists proactively perceive and assess the experience as a whole (Roy et al., 2025). By aligning the tourism services across digital platforms, physical infrastructures, and human experiences, tourists find it easier to determine continuity and meaning in their experience, which enhances their overall evaluative judgement of the destination (Purnomo and Purwandari, 2025). In terms of DCT, destinations that effectively coordinate integrated experiences are more adaptive as they align various stakeholders and redesign service delivery processes to live up to shifting visitor expectations (Zameer et al., 2024). The integration decrease inconsistencies in the operations and lower the level of disruption of destinations in service touchpoints, enabling them to respond better to the pressures of the market (Nadee et al., 2024). This greater coordination boosts cognitive ease and emotional satisfaction of the tourists, which are key processes that shape behavioral intentions, including loyalty and advocacy in a positive manner (Jameel et al., 2025). Coherent and well-integrated experiences are a recurring theme in empirical tourism studies, which suggest that experiences of this nature play a crucial role in boosting visitor satisfaction and destination attachment (Amiri Sardari et al., 2024). As an example, integrated service design has been found to enhance perceptual value and raise revisit intention due to decreased fragmentation in the tourist experience (Huang et al., 2026). Likewise, a smooth coordination of tourism services also leads to a better emotional appeal and enhanced destination image (Arasli et al., 2021; Nadee et al., 2024).

H₃: TEI is positively related to DC.

2.4. Mediating Role of Tourist Experience Integration

Although there has been an increment in investment in digital forms of governance, institutional coordination in the form of market-level competitiveness is not uniform across tourism destinations, which shows that direct structural enhancements do not suffice to account for performance outcomes. Regarding DCT, organizational capabilities only bring value when changed into lower-order processes that influence user perceptions and reactions to external behavior in dynamic settings (Khan et al., 2021). This implies that governance systems cannot just be internal coordination systems but must be integrated into externally perceived service systems to bring about significant competitive results (Alkhatib and Valeri, 2024). Value creation within SDL framework is done at an experiential and interactional level as opposed to system-level configurations. Based on this, tourists do not judge governance structures per se; they base their judgment on quality, coherence, and emotional appeal of their entire travel experience (Mohammad Shafiee, 2022). As digital governance systems enhance the alignment within the service providers and decrease fragmentation across tourism touchpoints, they increase continuity of the tourism journey, which intensifies the formation of perceived value and development of behavioral intentions. This experience coherence transforms into the process whereby institutional capabilities are converted into destination level performance benefits (Liu, 2025; Hamdy et al., 2024). This

reasoning is supported by empirical tourism research, which shows that digitally facilitated coordination has a stronger positive impact on destination performance, in terms of better experience design and service integration than a direct impact on competitiveness (Jameel et al., 2025; Arasli et al., 2021; Khan and Basit, 2025). All these findings suggest that the process of experiential integration is an important process of transformation between system level governance and market level success.

H₄: TEI mediates the relationship between STGS and DC.

2.5. Moderating Role of Digital Infrastructure Maturity

The success of digital transformation projects in tourism is now being realized to not just be reflected in the availability of sophisticated governance systems but also the facilitating technological environments under which the systems run. As a DCT, the strategic coordination mechanisms will be valued based on how well the supporting infrastructures enable the organizations to sense, seize, and reconfigure the resources in highly dynamic settings (Nadee et al., 2024). Weak or fragmented infrastructural foundations imply that even a well-designed system of governance cannot implement its plans due to constraints in coordinated results across the stakeholders (Matyusupov et al., 2024). Simultaneously, SDL underlines the importance of value co-creation, which is conditioned by the quality of interactional platforms that unite the actors in a service ecosystem. Digital infrastructure, in this case, is an enabling condition that dictates how efficient, fast, and consistent tourism stakeholders and tourist interactions become (Zhang et al., 2026; Naguib and Elsharnouby, 2025). With mature infrastructure that is interoperable, coordination through governance is better translated to organized service delivery and harmonized visitor experiences. On the other hand, poor infrastructure brings about information discontinuities and a weaker ability to align with experiences, thus limiting the efficiency of governance mechanisms (Arasli et al., 2021). According to previous tourism studies, technological preparedness is an important factor in determining the success of digital governance programs in destinations by improving system integration and data sharing and interoperability of services across destinations (Huang et al., 2026). Likewise, research notes that destinations that have more vibrant ICT ecosystems can better translate digital investments into valuable experiential outputs and better performance metrics (Nadee et al., 2024; Roy et al., 2025). These results imply that infrastructure situations are very important in defining the effectiveness of governance systems on experiential integration processes.

H₅: DIM moderates the relationship between STGS and TEI, such that the relationship is stronger when DIM is high.

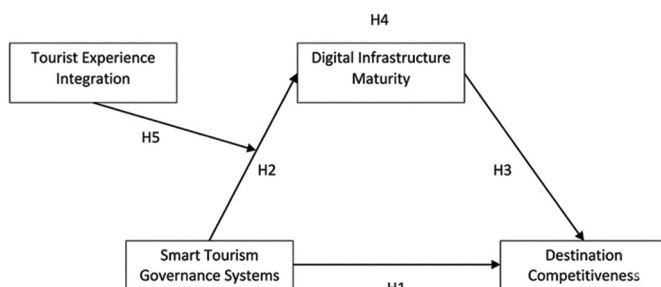
The study hypotheses were shown in Figure 1.

3. METHODOLOGY

The survey questionnaire was used to gather information on the study by asking 241 respondents (representing various tourism organizations and destination management units) to complete it (final sample with incomplete and redundant forms removed). The survey form was first floated on 350 respondents working in the tourism and hospitality industry in Jordan. The authors relied on their personal contacts and social media to get the potential respondents of the main study. Only those who are 18 years and older and work full-time in an organization which deals with tourism were selected to engage in the study. The study questionnaire was created based on the existing scales. The 7-point Likert scale was used to collect all answers to the questions. A priori test was performed to ascertain the adequacy of the sample which was many times higher than the required value.

We have decided to restrict our sample to the tourism industry and the decision is multi-folded. To begin with, the tourism industry is already experiencing a high rate of digital transformation, propelled by smart destination programs, AI-supported service applications, and combined governmental frameworks. This can also be seen through the more recent world tourism reports, including the Mohammad Shafiee (2022) outlook, which points out that more than 60% of destination authorities are now actively investing in smart tourism technologies, in order to improve competitiveness and sustainability. According to another industry report, almost 3 years after the accelerated adoption of digital, a high percentage of tourism organizations in developing destinations are increasingly using data-driven governance and other digital coordination tools to deliver services (Hamdy et al., 2024). As such, it is no wonder that this environment has also brought STGS to a critical strategic factor that impacts DC. Second, the decision to venture in tourism industry was also driven by issues of access. One of the authors is teaching and consulting at one of the most prominent universities in Jordan that deals with tourism and hospitality management, and every year the university hosts a substantial amount of seasoned professionals in the tourism industry, who attend executive education and industry training programs. Alumni of these programs are already working in various managerial positions in tourism boards, hotels, travel agencies and destination management organizations in Jordan. They could be approached via the social media and people who shared contacts with the authors in their networks.

Figure 1: Conceptual model



3.1. Measures

We also evaluated STGS with a 4-item scale based on the existing digital governance and smart destination literatures (Amiri Sardari et al., 2024; Nadee et al., 2024). Likewise, the scale of TEI was measured with a 2-item scale that was used in prior tourism service coordination research (Paliwal et al., 2024; Ding et al., 2026). The authors used a 10-item scale that was created by Alkhatib and Valeri (2024) to measure DIM and was recently used in studies of digital ecosystems (Arasli et al., 2021). The size of DC was measured

with a 5-item scale designed by (Arasli et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2026). Age, technological experience, gender, and educational qualification were the control variables used by the authors. This is in line with earlier research on tourism and digital transformation (Huang et al., 2026; Zameer et al., 2024). Another methodological research activity that we conducted was that of reliability of scales, which was pre-tested/face validity with 18 respondents (Roy et al., 2025). In the first data collection stage, we collected data on demographic details and the independent variables. Mediating and moderating variables were then measured after a one-week lag, and then another gap of a week followed after which we measured responses on the dependent variable questionnaire (Alkhatheeri et al., 2023). To provide consistency, we gave each respondent a distinct identification number, their email address and contact details were taken so as to send them soft reminders to submit the forms within the stipulated time in all the three phases. The temporal lag has been viewed as one of the methods of choice to minimize common method bias in the literature (Jameel et al., 2025).

The selection of the Jordan context: Jordan has been significantly investing in smart tourism transformation and digital destination governance projects and is thus a suitable context to investigate the role of STGS in DC. The nation has gone a long way in the development of digital tourism, especially with the national modernisation strategies on tourism meant to enhance service integration, and visitor experience. It is worth noting that the post-pandemic recovery process has increased the pace of introduction of digital platforms into tourism services, such as online booking systems, smart destination marketing and integrated visitor management tools. According to recent reports by the World Bank, tourism has a contribution towards the GDP of Jordan of about 14%, which makes it an important sector in determining the strategies that can be used by the country to develop its economy (Liu, 2025). Besides, a report on the regional tourism policy indicates that more than half of tourism organizations in Jordan are progressively engaging digital governance and smart service technologies to boost competitiveness (Arasli et al., 2021). Curiously, there is a lack of empirical studies based on STGS and DC in the Jordanian context. This is the reason why Jordan was chosen as the empirical location of this research, especially since it has an emerging digital tourism ecosystem and policy focus on developing its smart destination.

4. FINDINGS

We conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) with AMOS version 28 (Hair et al., 2011), and tested hypotheses with the

most recent version of Hayes Process Macro (Hayes et al., 2017). The results of convergent validity and internal reliability have been provided in the tables. As shown in the previous section, we removed the common method bias by time lapsing 1 week between the various phases of data collection (Matyusupov et al., 2024). This is in line with current studies that indicate that temporal separation should be more than three days (Naguib and Elsharnouby, 2025). We also performed single factor test of Harman to determine whether there was any common method variance and found that a single constrained factor did not explain more than 50% of the total variance. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics, mean, standard deviation, intercoder and reliability measures. The values of Cronbach alpha and composite reliability (CR) were consistent with other researchers (Kline, 1999) (Table 2). The average variance extracted (AVE) assisted us to evaluate the convergent validity which exceeded 0.5. In the case of the discriminant validity, we adhered to maximum shared variance (MSV) average variance extracted; the square root of AVE is larger than inter-construct correlations. We have reported the goodness of fit indicators results in Table 3. All our hypotheses were supported (Tables 4a and b, 5-7). STGS were positively related to DC ($\beta = 0.11$, $P < 0.01$) (Table 4a and b). On the same note, STGS positively correlated with TEI as well ($\beta = 0.27$, $P < 0.001$). Furthermore, TEI was positively related to DC ($\beta = 0.22$, $P < 0.001$). We were able to recognize the moderating (Table 5) as well as the mediating effect (refer to Tables 6 and 7) of DIM and TEI respectively.

5. DISCUSSION

This paper aimed to explore the mechanism of how STGS are translated into DC using experiential and capability-based process based on DCT and SDL. Overall, the results present good empirical evidence of a multi-layered process wherein the governance systems impact on competitiveness either directly or indirectly via tourist experience integration, but are dependent on DIM. All the findings support the thesis that competitiveness in modern tourism is no longer a structural phenomenon but a phenomenon based on experience, digitally mediated, and dependent on capabilities. First, there is a statistically significant and positive relationship between STGS and DC. The result agrees with previous studies that digitally empowered governance frameworks can positively affect destination-level performance through better coordination, transparency, and responsiveness in the tourism ecosystem (Zameer et al., 2024; Roy et al., 2025). On the same note, Hamdy et al. (2024) hold that smart tourism ecosystems enhance competitive positioning based on digital

Table 1: Descriptive statistics, reliability estimates, and intercorrelations

| Variables | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|-----------------|-------|-------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---|
| STGS | 5.01 | 1.41 | (0.911) | | | | | | |
| TEI | 4.88 | 1.12 | 0.561** | (0.804) | | | | | |
| DIM | 5.09 | 1.06 | 0.608** | 0.702** | (0.921) | | | | |
| DC | 4.46 | 1.19 | 0.334** | 0.418** | 0.312** | (0.819) | | | |
| Work experience | 17.52 | 9.74 | 0.041 | 0.055 | 0.087 | 0.028 | 1 | | |
| Gender | 2.41 | 0.962 | 0.119 | 0.031 | -0.029 | 0.037 | 0.102 | 1 | |
| Age | 38.21 | 10.11 | 0.092 | 0.076 | 0.114 | 0.061 | 0.861** | 0.168** | 1 |

Reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) are reported on the diagonal. $P < 0.01$

service architectures. But, we add to this literature by empirically showing that governance systems alone are not sufficient but are enablers of competitiveness, not its full determinants. This partially opposes the previous literature that believed that a direct relationship between governance and performance was more appropriate without articulating the process of experiential transformation (Purnomo and Purwandari, 2025; Ding et al., 2026). Second, the correlation between STGS and TEI is also highly justified. This finding has been consistent with previous research that has highlighted that smart tourism technologies promote service coordination and minimize fragmentation throughout

the tourist travels (Abula and Aihemaiti, 2025; Khan and Basit, 2025). A similar observation is made by Arasli et al. (2021) who emphasize that digital coordination enhances real-time alignment of services and enhances visitor journey continuity.

Our results build on these views by showing empirically that the governance systems have not only enhanced operational efficiency but have actively organized experiential sense of coherence, thus influencing the manner in which the tourist cognitively and emotionally process destination experiences. Third, the positive correlation of TEI and DC supports the idea that experiential continuity is one of the fundamental contributors to competitive advantage. This is consistent with SDL which assumes that value is co-created by means of integrated service ecosystem as opposed to individual service experiences (Alkhatib and Valeri, 2024; Mohammad Shafiee, 2022). This relationship is also supported by empirical research in the area of tourism that indicates that integrated experiences lead to higher satisfaction, loyalty, and revisit intention (Khan et al., 2021; Naguib and Elsharnouby, 2025). Zhang et al. (2026) also state that the key aspect of destination differentiation in digitally mature markets is seamless experience design. The outcome of our results reinforces this argument, placing the integration of experience as a direct competitiveness mechanism, but not as a by-product. Fourth, the mediation analysis indicates that tourist experience integration plays a significant role in relaying the impact of STGS on DC. This supports the sequential logic of DCT in which the higher-level abilities need to be converted into lower-level functioning and experience processes to drive performance results (Ding et al., 2026; Liu, 2025). This observation aligns with the previous mediation-based research in the area of smart tourism that reveals that digital systems positively influence it in the form of experience design and service integration (Jameel et al., 2025; Amiri Sardari et al., 2024). Nonetheless, this literature is advanced by our study by empirically locating experience integration as the pivotal change mechanism between our governance systems and competitiveness, hence filling a major conceptual gap in existing literature. Fifth, the moderating role of DIM shows that the STGS experience integration relationship is much stronger in the case of high infrastructure conditions. This confirms earlier claims that ICT preparedness is a boundary condition that plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of digital ecosystems (Matyusupov et al., 2024; Purnomo and Purwandari, 2025).

Alkatheeri et al. (2023) also highlight that the scalability of smart tourism projects is constrained by the infrastructure. Our results build on this body of literature by demonstrating that infrastructure does not just facilitate implementation, but it positively contributes to the impact of governance mechanisms in creating experiential integration. This provides a twist to previous literature which

Table 2: Validity analysis (CR, AVE, MSV)

| Construct | CR | AVE | MSV | STGS | TEI | DIM | DC |
|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| STGS | 0.918 | 0.721 | 0.428 | 0.849 | | | |
| TEI | 0.786 | 0.648 | 0.519 | 0.486 | 0.805 | | |
| DIM | 0.912 | 0.552 | 0.519 | 0.371 | 0.658 | 0.743 | |
| DC | 0.832 | 0.561 | 0.233 | 0.369 | 0.486 | 0.371 | 0.749 |

Table 3: Model fit indices

| Fit index | Value | Threshold | Interpretation |
|-----------|---------|-----------|----------------|
| CMIN | 218.417 | — | — |
| DF | 144 | — | — |
| CMIN/DF | 1.516 | 1–3 | Excellent |
| CFI | 0.971 | >0.95 | Excellent |
| SRMR | 0.038 | <0.08 | Excellent |
| RMSEA | 0.045 | <0.06 | Excellent |
| PClose | 0.692 | >0.05 | Excellent |

Table 4: Regression results of mediation (n=241)

| (a) Mediator Variable Model (DIM) | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------|------|-------|---------|
| Predictor | Beta | SE | t | P-value |
| Constant | 4.9120 | 0.35 | 13.91 | 0.0000 |
| STGS | 0.3095 | 0.05 | 5.88 | 0.0000 |
| DIM | 0.6521 | 0.07 | 8.99 | 0.0000 |
| STGS×DIM | 0.1184 | 0.03 | 3.41 | 0.0008 |
| Age | -0.0061 | 0.01 | -0.49 | 0.6250 |
| Gender | 0.0478 | 0.12 | 0.40 | 0.6880 |
| Work Experience | 0.0036 | 0.01 | 0.31 | 0.7580 |
| R ² | 0.4623 | | | |
| F | 27.9184*** | | | |
| (b) Dependent variable model (DC) | | | | |
| Predictor | Beta | SE | t | P-value |
| Constant | 2.9345 | 0.49 | 5.98 | 0.0000 |
| STGS | 0.1427 | 0.05 | 2.79 | 0.0058 |
| TEI | 0.2639 | 0.05 | 4.86 | 0.0000 |
| Age | 0.0094 | 0.01 | 0.68 | 0.4950 |
| Gender | 0.0365 | 0.13 | 0.28 | 0.7820 |
| Work Experience | -0.0012 | 0.01 | -0.46 | 0.6430 |
| R ² | 0.1736 | | | |
| F | 8.2147*** | | | |

***P<0.001, *P<0.01, P<0.05

Table 5: Conditional effect of DIM as moderator on the relationship between STGS and TEI

| DIM level | Effect | SE | t | P-value | BootLLCI | BootULCI |
|-------------|--------|--------|--------|---------|----------|----------|
| DIM (-1 SD) | 0.1843 | 0.0692 | 2.6621 | 0.0083 | 0.0486 | 0.3267 |
| DIM (Mean) | 0.3095 | 0.0614 | 5.0412 | 0.0000 | 0.1882 | 0.4289 |
| DIM (+1 SD) | 0.4287 | 0.0728 | 5.8894 | 0.0000 | 0.2861 | 0.5734 |

Table 6: Direct effect of STGS on DC

| Effect | SE | t | P-value | BootLLCI | BootULCI |
|--------|--------|--------|---------|----------|----------|
| 0.1496 | 0.0584 | 2.5623 | 0.0109 | 0.0358 | 0.2647 |

N=241, BootLLCI: Bootstrapping lower limit confidence interval,
BootULCI: Bootstrapping upper-level confidence interval

Table 7: Indirect effect of STGS on DC via TEI

| TEI level | Effect | BootSE | BootLLCI | BootULCI |
|-------------|--------|--------|----------|----------|
| TEI (-1 SD) | 0.0512 | 0.0256 | 0.0068 | 0.1084 |
| TEI (Mean) | 0.0798 | 0.0291 | 0.0315 | 0.1456 |
| TEI (+1 SD) | 0.1086 | 0.0362 | 0.0427 | 0.1869 |

n=241, BootLLCI: Bootstrapping lower limit confidence interval,
BootULCI: Bootstrapping upper-level confidence interval

considered infrastructure to be a background condition as opposed to interacting moderator. On the whole, the results point to a steady trend: STGS improve DC in a well-organized process that implies the integration of experience and is reinforced in high-DIM conditions. Although previous research has investigated pieces of this relationship separately, there are very few which have combined governance systems, experiential mechanisms, and infrastructural boundaries, into one comprehensive explanatory framework. This paper will offer a more holistic approach to studying the construction of competitiveness in smart tourism ecosystems by using DCT and SDL together. Overall, the findings confirm and expand upon the existing literature and address inconsistencies in previous findings by showing that governance effects are indirect and experience-driven and contingent on contexts.

5.1. Theoretical Contributions

The study contributes immensely to the theoretical understanding on how STGS improve DC using experiential and contextual processes, by incorporating both DCT and SDL. First, the study, in a DCT perspective, expands the theory by illustrating empirically that governance systems are higher-order capabilities that are not directly involved in the creation of competitiveness but rather work via organized transformation mechanisms. In particular, STGS allow destinations to be sensitive to changes in the environment, organize stakeholders, and re-architect service systems, but this functionality can only produce competitive advantage when converted into tourist experience integration. This moves DCT by elucidating the micro-foundational channel of how dynamic capabilities are realised in tourism ecosystems. Second, SDL-wise, the research enhances the thesis that value is co-created with the integrated experiential networks and not institutional structures. The study empirically supports the key assumption of SDL that value is generated through interactional and experiential processes that occur between service ecosystems by demonstrating the integration of tourist experience as a key process. This shifts away the focus on the implementation of technology and moves towards experiential orchestration which extends SDL implementations in smart tourism situations. Third, the study adds to the intersection of the two theories by theorizing and testing a sequential governance- experience- performance logic that is mediated by DIM. This combined framework is a connection between structural (DCT) and experiential (SDL) approaches, which provides a more detailed explanation of the development of competitiveness in digitally transformed tourism destinations.

5.2. Practical Implications

The results have a number of practical implications to policy makers and destination managers. First, it is not enough to invest in STGS but authorities should make sure that these systems are properly integrated into service design procedures that would improve the integration of experience among tourists. This necessitates liaisons between tourism boards, providers of hospitality, transport, and digital platforms to provide smooth visitor experiences. Second, destination managers must concentrate on experience-based governance approaches that are aimed at minimizing fragmentation at tourist touchpoints. This encompasses inbuilt booking systems, real time information exchange and harmonized service delivery systems that work to increase experiential coherence. Third, the paper emphasizes the significance of DIM as one of the most important enablers. The policymakers of developing tourist locations need to invest in ICT infrastructure, data interoperability and integration of platforms to ensure that the effects of governance systems are maximized. The absence of such infrastructure will mean that even a sophisticated system of governance can not be translated into competitiveness. Lastly, tourism organizations ought to not focus on technology but think in terms of value co-creation, so that digital transformation projects can be directly linked to the quality of visitor experience instead of being focused on operational efficiency in general.

6. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This paper finds that STGS in the promotion of DC has a major but indirect role to play. Instead of creating competitiveness, the STGS work via the critical mechanism of tourist experience integration, where the governance capabilities are converted into the results of perceived values and behavior. Digital infrastructure maturity further enhances this process as an important enabling condition in the successful operation of a system. This combination of DCT and SDL shows that technological development or institutional coordination is not the only determinant of competitiveness in contemporary tourism but rather the coordination of integrated tourist experiences. These results point to the fact that destinations should not only move towards digital adoption but experience-based governance models should be supported with the help of strong infrastructure ecosystems. All in all, the research has offered a well-rounded and empirically supported framework of study that contributes to theoretical knowledge and provides a pragmatic informational flow on how to build competitive, digitally enabled and experience-based tourism destinations in the modern global context.

Although it has additions, this study has a number of limitations. To begin with, the limitation of cross-sectional research design is the inability to establish causation between the variables of smart governance systems, experience integration and competitiveness. The future studies need to embrace longitudinal designs in order to identify the changes in tourism ecosystems with time. Second, the research is based on the single-country situation, which can decrease generalizability. Comparative research between developed and developing tourism destinations would help to reveal more contextual differences. Third, self-reported measures

were used to collect data and this can be subject to perceptual bias. Further research may include objective metrics of performance or multi-source data, e.g., platform analytics or tourist behavioral monitoring. Fourth, although DIM was studied as a moderator, future studies can investigate other boundary conditions like cultural intelligence, sustainability orientation, or AI readiness. Lastly, the model can also be expanded in future research by including other mediators like tourist trust, perceived authenticity, or emotional engagement in order to further unpack the psychological processes behind experience-based competitiveness.

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