

RGC Ref. No.: UGC/FDS24/B15/21 (please insert ref. above)

**RESEARCH GRANTS COUNCIL
COMPETITIVE RESEARCH FUNDING SCHEMES FOR
THE LOCAL SELF-FINANCING DEGREE SECTOR**

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (FDS)

Completion Report
(for completed projects only)

<u>Submission Deadlines:</u> 1. Auditor's report with unspent balance, if any: within six months of the approved project completion date. 2. Completion report: within 12 months of the approved project completion date.
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Part A: The Project and Investigator(s)

1. Project Title

Destination Competitiveness in a Post-COVID-19 World

(後疫情世界之目的地競爭力)

2. Investigator(s) and Academic Department(s) / Unit(s) Involved

Research Team	Name / Post	Unit / Department / Institution
Principal Investigator	Dr XU Jing / Senior Lecturer	Division of Business and Hospitality Management (BHM) / School of Professional Education and Executive Development, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU SPEED)
Co-Investigator(s)	Dr HO Pamela Sau-ying / Lecturer	Division of Business and Hospitality Management (BHM) / College of Professional and Continuing Education, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
Co-Investigator(s)	Prof MCKERCHER Robert Douglas / Professor	University of Queensland, Australia

Research Team	Name / Post	Unit / Department / Institution
Co-Investigator(s)	Dr WUT Tai-ming / Senior Lecturer	Division of Business and Hospitality Management (BHM) / PolyU SPEED
Others	Ms AU Tracy Chui-sze / Research Assistant	General Office / PolyU SPEED

3. Project Duration

	Original	Revised	Date of RGC / Institution Approval (must be quoted)
Project Start Date	01/01/2022	N/A	N/A
Project Completion Date	31/12/2023	30/06/2024	05/07/2023
Duration (<i>in month</i>)	24	30	05/07/2023
Deadline for Submission of Completion Report	31/12/2024	30/06/2025	05/07/2023

4.4 Please attach photo(s) of acknowledgement of RGC-funded facilities / equipment.

N/A

Part B: The Final Report

5. Project Objectives

5.1 Objectives as per original application

1. *To ascertain whether tourists' perception of destination crisis preparedness can contribute to perceived destination competitiveness;*
2. *To examine whether tourists' perception of destination crisis sensitivity can affect perceived destination competitiveness;*
3. *To explore the moderating effect of tourists' risk tolerance in the relationships between perceived destination crisis preparedness/sensitivity and perceived destination competitiveness;*
4. *To investigate the moderating role of tourists' self-congruence/functional congruence with the destination in the relationships between perceived destination crisis preparedness/sensitivity and perceived destination competitiveness;*
5. *To explore what type of crisis information and how much information should be provided to satisfy future tourists' needs without providing too much information to scare them off.*

5.2 Revised objectives

Date of approval from the RGC: N/A

Reasons for the change:

- 1.
- 2.
3.

5.3 Realisation of the objectives

(Maximum 1 page; please state how and to what extent the project objectives have been achieved; give reasons for under-achievements and outline attempts to overcome problems, if any)

Objective 1: To ascertain whether tourists' perception of destination crisis preparedness can contribute to perceived destination competitiveness;

- Objective 1 was fully achieved.
- Based on the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the journal paper (Xu, B. J., Mckercher, B., & Ho, P. S. (accepted on 12 Feb 2024). Tourists' perceptions of the competitive destination. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13567667241236490>) has reported 22 destination appealing features that make a destination competitive and 18 safety-related features that make a destination competitive. According to the paper, crisis, disaster history, disaster management plans and communications (related to crisis/disaster preparedness as perceived by tourists), relate to perceived destination safety.
- Based on the experimental studies with different types of crises, destinations, and tourist source markets, the journal paper (Xu et al., 2025, under review) found that perceived destination crisis preparedness facilitated tourists to stay with the destination (travel decision as proxy of destination competitiveness at the tourist level) or curb their switching decisions. This can be considered to contribute to destination competitiveness from the tourist's perspective.

Objective 2: To examine whether tourists' perception of destination crisis sensitivity can affect perceived destination competitiveness;

- Objective 2 was fully achieved.
- Based on the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the journal paper (Xu, B. J., Mckercher, B., & Ho, P. S. (accepted on 12 Feb 2024). Tourists' perceptions of the competitive destination. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13567667241236490>) has reported 22 destination appealing features that make a destination competitive and 18 safety-related features that make a destination competitive. According to the paper, crisis, disaster history (related to perceived destination crisis sensitivity), disaster management plans and communications, relate to perceived destination safety.
- Based on the experimental studies, the journal paper (Xu et al., 2025, under review) found that perceived destination crisis sensitivity led tourists to switch the destination. This can be considered to decrease the destination competitiveness.

Objective 3: To explore the moderating effect of tourists' risk tolerance in the relationships between perceived destination crisis preparedness/sensitivity and perceived destination competitiveness;

- Objective 3 was fully achieved.
- Based on the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the journal paper (Xu, B. J., Mckercher, B., & Ho, P. S. (accepted on 12 Feb 2024). Tourists' perceptions of the competitive destination. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13567667241236490>) reported that tourists' perceived destination competitiveness was actually affected by whether tourists were risk averse or more tolerated with risks. Tourists' perceptions of destination safety (in

relation to perceived destination crisis preparedness/sensitivity) and thus destination competitiveness was influenced by this factor. Moreover, different types of competitive destinations were influenced by this factor and may attract different tourist segments in this regard.

- Based on the experimental studies, the journal paper (Xu et al., 2025, under review) indicated tourists with greater level of risk tolerance may not consider crisis preparedness/sensitivity to determine switching behavior (proxy of destination competitiveness) in selected contexts. However, tourists with lower level of risk tolerance (or risk-averse tourists) largely relate their perceptions of crisis to their travel decisions.

Objective 4: To investigate the moderating role of tourists' self-congruence/functional congruence with the destination in the relationships between perceived destination crisis preparedness/sensitivity and perceived destination competitiveness;

- Objective 4 was fully achieved.
- Based on the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the journal paper (Xu, B. J., Mckercher, B., & Ho, P. S. (accepted on 12 Feb 2024). Tourists' perceptions of the competitive destination. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13567667241236490>) reported that destination appealing factors are very important to tourists' perceptions of destination competitiveness. For example, whether experience features (whether tourists perceive novelty, self-actualisation, in-depth experiences, aspirational experiences, etc.) and hedonic features (whether tourists feel relaxed and fun, escapism, adventure and guaranteed experience) are highly related to tourists' congruence factor in relation to the destination. Quoted from the paper, "Today's destinations need to elevate safety and crisis management further to a strategic level to be perceived as competitive and sustainable (Altinay and Kozak, 2021; Duan et al., 2022), whilst embracing a number of appealing features that tourists may feel attractive or congruent with their self-images (Sirgy and Su, 2000)."
- Based on the experimental studies, the journal paper (Xu et al., 2025, under review) indicated tourists with greater level of destination congruence may need more destination safety/crisis information as conveyed by destinations. More specifically, for the higher level of destination congruence group, perceived destination crisis preparedness may increase tourists' travel decision to stay with the original destination (i.e., destination competitiveness for them).

Objective 5: To explore what type of crisis information and how much information should be provided to satisfy future tourists' needs without providing too much information to scare them off.

- Objective 5 was fully achieved.
- Quoted from the below conference publication, the crisis-related information include "These included 1) bilateral relationships (i.e., home country's embassy information and racism risk), 2) crime (e.g., street robbery and thefts, kidnapping, sexual assault, and harassment), 3) local history of crisis incidents (i.e., severity, frequency, and impacts), 4) local crisis prevention/precaution/response measures (i.e., quarantine, evacuation measures during crises, and facilities), 5) availability of local staff (i.e., local guides and government staff), 6) local communication channels (i.e., emergency hotlines and tourist information centers), 7) ongoing crisis-related information updates (i.e., affected time/area of ongoing local protests or natural disasters), and 8) relevant travel warnings and reminders (i.e., suitable medicines and

avoiding crowded areas).” These are the results from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

- Regarding how much information should be provided, quoted from the below conference publication, that “The importance of effective destination crisis communications or the distribution of crisis- and crisis preparedness-related information for travel decision-making was also emphasized by interviewees. Although such information raised some tourists’ concerns, they believed that it was essential for determining the safety of a destination.”
- Xu, J., Au, C. S., & Wut, T. M. (2023). Would tourists like to know whether a destination is preparing for a crisis? International Conference on Tourism Science (ICTS), 23-25 Mar 2023.

5.4 Summary of objectives addressed to date

Objectives (as per 5.1/5.2 above)	Addressed (please tick)	Percentage Achieved (please estimate)
1. To ascertain whether tourists’ perception of destination crisis preparedness can contribute to perceived destination competitiveness;	✓	100%
2. To examine whether tourists’ perception of destination crisis sensitivity can affect perceived destination competitiveness;	✓	100%
3. To explore the moderating effect of tourists’ risk tolerance in the relationships between perceived destination crisis preparedness/sensitivity and perceived destination competitiveness;	✓	100%

Objectives <i>(as per 5.1/5.2 above)</i>	Addressed <i>(please tick)</i>	Percentage Achieved <i>(please estimate)</i>
4. To investigate the moderating role of tourists' self-congruence/functional congruence with the destination in the relationships between perceived destination crisis preparedness/sensitivity and perceived destination competitiveness; and	✓	100%
5. To explore what type of crisis information and how much information should be provided to satisfy future tourists' needs without providing too much information to scare them off.	✓	100%

6. Research Outcome

6.1 Major findings and research outcome

(Maximum 1 page; please make reference to Part C where necessary)

We have found that tourists have become to be alert to travel risks and destination crises in a post-COVID-19 world. While they are considering whether the destination is attractive and can meet their utilitarian travel needs, they would also seek safety information in different ways. Many factors contribute to destination appeal, while other factors explain destination safety. In the domain of destination safety, its crisis history and nature of the crises related to destination crisis sensitivity and its readiness to respond to any given crisis related to destination crisis preparedness are our focuses and have been particularly emphasized in this project.

In our qualitative paper (Xu et al., 2025, under review), perceived crisis sensitivity and preparedness are embedded in the safety theme of disaster risk. Other safety thematic domains manifest as personal safety, public security, health considerations, political stability, and level of tourism development. Moreover, this paper also found tourists are diversified, with different travel purposes, motives, demographic backgrounds, past visitation history, and travel personalities, which are closely related to risk tolerance while traveling. Some are risk averse, while others are more thrill seekers, which can influence their perceptions of destination competitiveness and travel decisions. In our quantitative paper (Xu et al., 2025, under review), we have successfully conducted different experiments controlling different types of crises (natural disasters, communicative disease, and social unrest), different types of destinations (urban, resort island type, and remote but rich in natural and cultural resources), and different source markets (Chinese mainland and Hong Kong). The paper has unveiled the major effects of perceived destination crisis preparedness and sensitivity on travel decisions across different contexts, which can be considered as the proxy of perceived destination competitiveness from the tourist's perspective. The paper also found that risk tolerance and destination congruence are selective moderators in the relationships between perceived destination crisis preparedness/sensitivity and the dependent variable. It seemed that risk averse tourists care more about whether a destination is safe or crisis sensitive, and tourists who perceived a greater level of congruence, in the form of self-congruence and functional congruence, tended to favor more about crisis preparedness efforts in determining their travel decisions.

6.2 Potential for further development of the research and the proposed course of action

(Maximum half a page)

In another conceptual paper (Xu & Au, 2023), we also discussed our theoretical foundations in the realm of destination competitiveness. We have listed future research agendas, including residents as an indispensable stakeholder, an advanced integrated approach combining supply and demand sides, more theories to be adopted, focus more on less researched destination types and contexts, and a negative lens of studying competitiveness determinants and consequences. These help prepare the research design of other papers, and discussion of theories and concepts that are of vital importance in today's and future's tourism industry.

7. Layman's Summary

(Describe in layman's language the nature, significance and value of the research project, in no more than 200 words)

Few studies have discussed destination competitiveness from the demand/tourist side. Moreover, limited studies have discussed destination/tourism crisis management from the demand/tourist side. As a matter of fact, none of the studies, to the best of our knowledge, have attempted to fill the above research gaps at the same time. Our project was set to fill the above-mentioned gap. More specifically, our study attempted to study destination competitiveness, or in other words, how tourists consider a tourist destination competitive, attractive, and deserves their visit, in relation to their perceptions of whether the destination has paid attention and has done good job in crisis management, or crisis preparedness. We found destination safety and safety information very important in the eyes of tourists. We also found that tourists indeed care about a destination's safety records and crisis history/data in determining their perceptions and travel decisions. Moreover, these relationships and discussions depend on the nature of crises, destinations, as well as tourists themselves. Social unrest and disease are more influential crises than natural disasters which affect in a shorter term. Chinese Mainland tourists seemed not to have a high intention to switch destinations, as compared to their Hong Kong counterparts, when they found unsafe in a chosen destination. However, risk averse tourists are more concerned about a destination's crisis and safety risks in selected contexts. Destination congruent tourists also pay more attention to these information selectively.

Part C: Research Output**8. Peer-Reviewed Journal Publication(s) Arising Directly From This Research Project**

(Please attach a copy of the publication and/or the letter of acceptance if not yet submitted in the previous progress report(s). All listed publications must acknowledge RGC's funding support by quoting the specific grant reference.)

The Latest Status of Publications				Author(s) (denote the corresponding author with an asterisk*)	Title and Journal / Book (with the volume, pages and other necessary publishing details specified)	Submitted to RGC (indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)	Attached to this Report (Yes or No)	Acknowledged the Support of RGC (Yes or No)	Accessible from the Institutional Repository (Yes or No)
Year of Publication	Year of Acceptance (For paper accepted but not yet published)	Under Review	Under Preparation (optional)						
2023	2023			Xu, J. B.* and Au, T.	“Destination competitiveness since 2010: research themes, approaches, and agenda”, Tourism Review, Vol. 78 No. 3, pp. 665-696. https://doi.org/10.1108/TR-10-2022-0494	No	Yes (Attachment 1)	Yes	Yes
2023	2023			Xu, J. B. and Pratt, S.*	Has the outbreak of tourism research involving COVID-19 been cured by 2022? (International Marketing Journal of Culture and Tourism, August No.4, pp. 15-25)	No	Yes (Attachment 2)	Yes	No
2024	2024			Xu, J. B.* and McKercher, B. and Ho P. S-Y.	Tourists' perceptions of the competitive destination (Journal of Vacation Marketing)	No	Yes (Attachment 3)	Yes	Yes

The Latest Status of Publications				Author(s) (denote the corresponding author with an asterisk*)	Title and Journal / Book (with the volume, pages and other necessary publishing details specified)	Submitted to RGC (indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)	Attached to this Report (Yes or No)	Acknowledged the Support of RGC (Yes or No)	Accessible from the Institutional Repository (Yes or No)
Year of Publication	Year of Acceptance (For paper accepted but not yet published)	Under Review	Under Preparation (optional)						
2024	2024			Xu, J. B. and Yan L.	What theories can be used to study hospitality and tourism consumers in the post-pandemic era? (Consumer Behavior in Tourism and Hospitality)	No	Yes (Attachment 4)	Yes	No
2025 (under review)		Yes		Xu, J. B. * and McKercher, B. and Ho P. S-Y.	Switch to another destination or stay? A new lens of the dual role of perceived destination crisis preparedness and sensitivity (Journal of Travel Research)	No	Yes (Attachment 5)	Yes	No

9. Recognized International Conference(s) In Which Paper(s) Related To This Research Project Was / Were Delivered

(Please attach a copy of each conference abstract)

Month / Year / Place	Title	Conference Name	Submitted to RGC <i>(indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)</i>	Attached to this Report <i>(Yes or No)</i>	Acknowledged the Support of RGC <i>(Yes or No)</i>	Accessible from the Institutional Repository <i>(Yes or No)</i>
Mar/2023/Online, Japan	Would tourists like to know whether a destination is preparing for a crisis?	International Conference on Tourism Sciences	No	Yes	Yes (Attachment 6)	No
July/2023/Thailand	Does travel personality really affect travel behavior?	Asia Pacific Tourism Association Annual Conference	No	Yes	Yes (Attachment 7)	No

10. Whether Research Experience And New Knowledge Has Been Transferred / Has Contributed To Teaching And Learning

(Please elaborate)

The research experiences and data analysis skills have been used and shared in the subject

BHMS3198 Research Methods and BHMS4418 Applied Business Research,

which was taught by PI Dr XU Jing. For example,

What are the important considerations in organizing interviews have been taught.

This enhanced teaching quality with real research cases.

11. Student(s) Trained

(Please attach a copy of the title page of the thesis)

Name	Degree Registered for	Date of Registration	Date of Thesis Submission / Graduation

12. Other Impact

(e.g. award of patents or prizes, collaboration with other research institutions, technology transfer, teaching enhancement, etc.)

N/A

13. Statistics on Research Outputs

	Peer-reviewed Journal Publications	Conference Papers	Scholarly Books, Monographs and Chapters	Patents Awarded	Other Research Outputs (please specify)	
No. of outputs arising directly from this research project	5	2	0	0	Type	No.
					0	0

14. Public Access Of Completion Report

(Please specify the information, if any, that cannot be provided for public access and give the reasons.)

Information that Cannot Be Provided for Public Access	Reasons