

COMPETITIVENESS AND ATTRACTIVENESS OF TOURISM REGIONS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Mahmudov J.I.^{1*}, Ahmadova S.E.², Kazimova S.T.³, Jabrayilova F.A.³

¹Mingachevir State University, Azerbaijan
21, D. Aliyeva Street, Mingachevir, AZ4500

²Nakhchivan State University, Azerbaijan
University Campus, Nakhchivan, AZ7012

³Institute of Geography, Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan
117, H. Javid Ave., Baku, AZ1073

*Corresponding author: ceyhun.mahmudov@mdu.edu.az

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Summary. Tourism competitiveness and destination attractiveness are central to how countries position themselves in the global travel market, yet research on both has grown quickly and unevenly. This article reviews 109 Scopus-indexed documents published between 2003 and 2026, combining a quantitative profile of the literature with a thematic synthesis. The corpus expands sharply after 2015 and is markedly unbalanced: measurement and frameworks (33.0 per cent) and determinants (32.1 per cent) dominate, analytical methods account for 24.8 per cent, and demand-side perception research for only 10.1 per cent. The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index remains the default benchmark, but its equal weighting, data demands and uneven predictive validity have pushed the field toward alternative and hybrid measures. No technique dominates: data envelopment analysis, TOPSIS, PLS path modelling and game-theoretic weighting compensate for one another's weaknesses. Infrastructure, information and communication technology readiness and environmental quality are the most stable determinants, with effects conditioned by income level. An illustration matching the 2024 Travel & Tourism Development Index with UN Tourism data for twenty-one leading destinations finds moderate correlation with arrivals ($r = 0.59$) but stronger correlation with receipts ($r = 0.72$): measured competitiveness tracks the value of tourism more closely than its volume.

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Introduction

Few sectors reveal a country's development choices as plainly as tourism: whether visitors arrive and return depends on roads and airports, hotels and health services, digital networks, and the natural and cultural assets that draw people. These ingredients are unevenly distributed and slow to change, so the useful question is rarely how a destination performs in one year, but how it performs against its peers over time.

Two constructs organise this research. Competitiveness describes a destination's capacity to deliver value that outperforms rivals without eroding the resource base supporting it (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Enright & Newton, 2004); attractiveness describes the pull it exerts on prospective visitors, shaped by perceived resources, image and the match between what a place offers and what segments want (Formica & Uysal, 2006). The space between them, where destinations are attractive yet uncompetitive or competitive yet under-visited, has driven much of the empirical work (Cracolici & Nijkamp, 2009), and panel designs expose what rankings conceal: the drivers of competitiveness do not carry equal weight everywhere (Hanafiah & Ali, 2024; Magrini & Grassini, 2019). Reviewing 109 Scopus-indexed documents published between 2003 and 2026, this article asks how the field has grown, how the constructs are measured, which methods and determinants recur, and whether measured competitiveness tracks realised performance.

2. Theoretical background

The conceptual scaffolding of the field was built in the early 2000s. The models of Ritchie and Crouch, of Dwyer and Kim, and of Heath share a layered logic in which resources sit beneath supporting factors and

management, which interact with demand conditions and the wider environment (Azzopardi & Nash, 2017). Dwyer and Kim (2003) paired determinants with indicators that later work could operationalise, and Enright and Newton (2004) pushed toward quantification through managers' ratings.

Attractiveness enters from the demand side. Formica and Uysal (2006) framed it as the relationship between what a destination supplies and what visitors seek, so a well-endowed place can still fail to attract if its offer misaligns with market preferences. Cracolici and Nijkamp (2009) showed for southern Italy that the two constructs, though correlated, respond to different levers, evident potential coexisting with weak rankings. The distinction matters for measurement: indices built only on supply-side data capture one construct better than the other, which is why several authors argue for frameworks keeping both in view (Mior Shariffuddin et al., 2023).

3. Materials and methods

The article follows a systematic quantitative review design, quantifying the structure of a fast-growing literature and synthesising work too heterogeneous for meta-analytic pooling (Mior Shariffuddin et al., 2023). The literature was identified through Scopus, combining "tourism competitiveness" and "destination attractiveness" with "cross-country", "panel", "composite indicator" and "index", complemented by backward citation tracking. Documents were eligible if published in English between 2003 and 2026 and addressing the measurement of the two constructs, comparative or panel methodology, or determinants in multi-country settings; firm-level studies were excluded. The corpus comprises 109 documents, the earliest Dwyer and Kim (2003), each coded to one primary theme by principal contribution: measurement and frameworks, analytical methods, determinants, or demand-side perceptions.

A deliberately simple empirical illustration complements the synthesis. Competitiveness is proxied by the overall score of the Travel & Tourism Development Index (TTDI) 2024, successor to the TTCI (World Economic Forum, 2024), and performance by international arrivals and receipts in 2023 (UN Tourism, 2024). Of the thirty top-ranked economies, comparable arrivals were unavailable for nine, leaving twenty-one that received some 679 million arrivals, about half the world total. The methods are correlations and bivariate regressions of log performance on the score; no causal claim is made.

4. Results

4.1. The Research landscape

The corpus documents a field that barely existed at the turn of the century and grew in two waves (Figure 1): a climb after 2015, with the diffusion of composite-indicator critique and of DEA- and PLS-based techniques, and a surge from 2023, in post-pandemic recovery and the move from the TTCI to its successor. Almost three quarters of it (73.4 per cent) appeared in 2016 or later. Publication is dispersed across 82 outlets, while thematic attention is similarly uneven, with measurement, frameworks, and determinants dominating the corpus and demand-side perception research declining to just one of the 44 publications produced during 2021–2026 (Table 1).

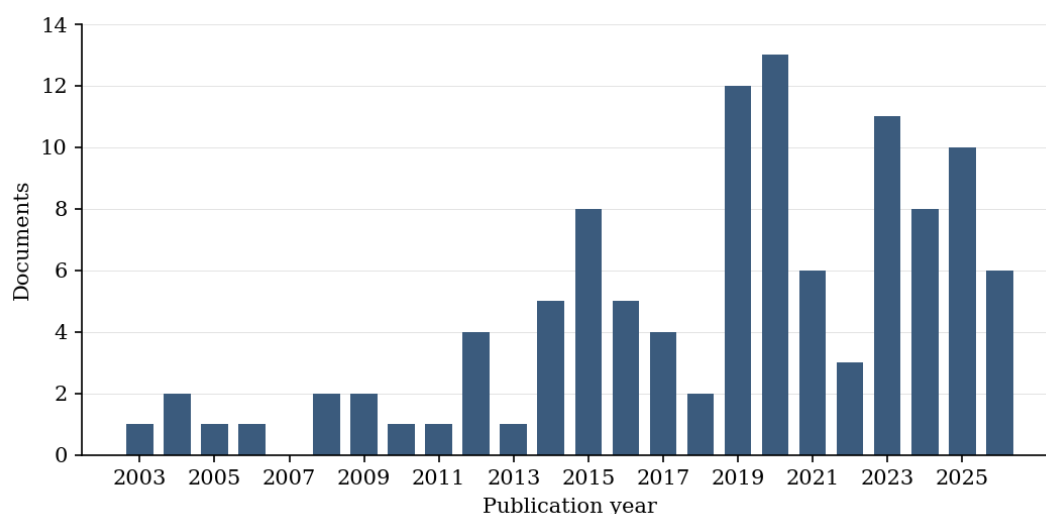


Fig. 1. Annual distribution of the reviewed documents, 2003-2026 (n = 109).

Table 1

Thematic distribution of the reviewed documents (n = 109)

Primary theme	Documents	Share of corpus (%)
Measurement and frameworks	36	33.0
Determinants	35	32.1
Analytical methods	27	24.8
Demand-side perceptions	11	10.1
Total	109	100.0

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the reviewed corpus

4.2. Measuring competitiveness: The TTCI and its limitations

Measurement begins with the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index, which groups roughly ninety variables into fourteen pillars spanning infrastructure, cultural and natural resources, information and communication technology (ICT) readiness, environmental sustainability, health, human resources and price (Martinez et al., 2019). Three criticisms recur. Aggregation: combining variables measured in different units, some duplicating information, can distort the composite (Martinez et al., 2019). Weighting: pillars are treated as equally important, yet rankings shift sharply under alternative schemes, most in the tiers where policy attention concentrates (Gómez-Vega & Picazo-Tadeo, 2019). Predictive validity, the most damaging, is contested: Hiyab et al. (2023) found the index's power over African arrivals weak and in places negative, and Hanafiah and Zulkifly (2019) found the competitiveness-performance link more conditional than its design implies, while Hanafiah and Ali (2024) showed that it tracks performance more reliably in low-income countries, where basic conditions still bind, than in high-income ones, whose rankings are stable but loosely tied to outcomes. None of this retires the index, but it explains why researchers treat it as a point of departure rather than a verdict.

4.3. Alternative measurement and comparative methods

Alternatives have moved along two lines: reducing the data burden and improving weighting. Principal component analysis builds composites from fewer variables while retaining most of the underlying variation, which matters for the many countries where full index data are unavailable (Pérez León et al., 2022); data envelopment analysis (DEA) derives weights endogenously, scoring destinations against an efficiency frontier rather than imposing weights from outside (Omran et al., 2020); and multi-criteria and participatory schemes make the weighting step explicit and more sensitive to context.

Each comparative instrument has a characteristic blind spot. DEA suits multiple inputs and outputs with no agreed price for combining them, but with many indicators it loses discrimination and can leave relevant dimensions unweighted (Gómez-Vega & Picazo-Tadeo, 2019), while TOPSIS, ranking destinations by distance from ideal and anti-ideal profiles, is intuitive but wholly dependent on externally supplied weights - a complementarity explaining the appeal of hybrid DEA-TOPSIS designs (Lin et al., 2023). Partial least squares path modelling is the workhorse for questions of structure and evolution, accommodating formative constructs, small samples and multicollinearity (Magrini & Grassini, 2019), while game-theoretic weighting curbs the zero-weight objection and systemic models locate leverage points for policy. No method dominates; the choice should follow the research question and the data.

4.4. Determinants of competitiveness and attractiveness

A consistent set of determinants surfaces, though their relative weight shifts with income level. Infrastructure is the most reliable predictor: transport, accommodation and health services drive arrivals and repeat visitation, and longitudinal analyses spanning a decade or more confirm that these effects persist rather than fade (Magrini & Grassini, 2019), while core natural and cultural resources furnish the enduring appeal that infrastructure then makes accessible. Digital readiness has moved from a peripheral concern to a central one, strengthening competitiveness through information flow, reservation and payment systems and communication with visitors, but its gains are distributional: ICT amplifies the tourism-growth relationship only where the enabling infrastructure and skills are present (Jayaraman & Makun, 2020).

Environmental factors simultaneously attract visitors and support long-term viability, with their effects on tourism demand and competitiveness shaped by sustainability indicators, environmental regulation, green policies, governance quality, institutional and human-resource conditions, stakeholder cooperation (Enright &

Newton, 2004), and transport-related environmental externalities associated with growing economic and trade activity (Gachayev et al., 2026).

4.5. Demand-side dynamics

Travellers' perceptions convert competitive conditions into visits, satisfaction and return, yet this is the part of the field that panel studies integrate least well. Andrades-Caldito et al. (2014) showed for Andalusia that visitors' assessments of infrastructure and service quality shape satisfaction, length of stay and spending, outcomes supply-side indices predict only indirectly, while motivations condition how visitors read competitiveness, so the same attributes register differently across segments (Ban et al., 2025). A destination competes not on its attributes as measured, but on how they are perceived. More recently, digital information environments have added another layer to this demand-side mechanism, as the credibility of online reviews and tourists' cognitive processing of social-media information can shape sustainable tourism choices (Eminov et al., 2026).

4.6. Empirical illustration: Competitiveness scores and tourism performance

Table 2 presents the dataset. The twenty-one economies span the top of the 2024 ranking, from the United States (5.24) to Cyprus (4.37), mean 4.75 (SD 0.28), while performance varies far more widely: arrivals from 3.9 to 100.0 million (mean 32.3 million) and receipts from US\$3.2 to US\$189.1 billion (mean US\$42.7 billion). Nineteen are high-income economies, mirroring the index's upper tier.

Table 2

Competitiveness scores and tourism performance of the sampled economies (n = 21)

Economy	TTDI 2024 score	Arrivals 2023 (million)	Receipts 2023 (US\$ billion)
United States	5.24	66.48	189.1
Spain	5.18	85.17	92.2
Japan	5.09	25.07	38.6
France	5.07	100.00	71.2
Australia	5.00	7.19	46.1
Germany	5.00	34.80	37.4
United Kingdom	4.96	37.22	73.4
Italy	4.90	57.25	55.9
Canada	4.81	18.34	38.5
Portugal	4.78	26.54	27.4
Korea, Rep.	4.74	11.03	15.3
Austria	4.65	30.91	24.7
Netherlands	4.64	20.30	20.7
United Arab Emirates	4.62	28.15	51.9
Sweden	4.57	7.53	9.9
Greece	4.52	32.74	22.3
Ireland	4.44	6.30	7.5
Brazil	4.41	5.91	6.9
Poland	4.40	18.99	15.0
Türkiye	4.39	55.16	49.5
Cyprus	4.37	3.85	3.2

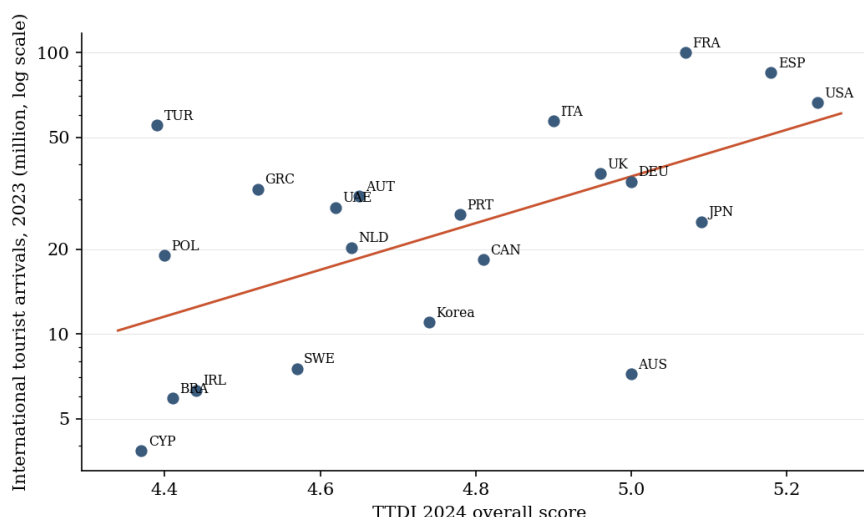
Sources: World Economic Forum (2024); UN Tourism (2024)

The association is positive and significant on every metric, but its strength depends on which side of performance is examined (Table 3). The score correlates moderately with arrivals and markedly more strongly with receipts, and the bivariate regressions tell the same story: a one-point higher score implies 1.91 log-points more arrivals but explains only a third of their variation, whereas for receipts the coefficient is 2.74 and the explained share rises to 0.62. A 0.1-point advantage thus implies roughly 21 per cent more arrivals but about 32 per cent higher receipts (Figure 2).

Table 3

Association between the TTDI 2024 score and tourism performance (n = 21)

Statistic	log arrivals 2023	log receipts 2023
Pearson r	0.59 (p = 0.005)	0.72 (p < 0.001)
Spearman rho	0.56 (p = 0.009)	0.75 (p < 0.001)
OLS slope on TTDI score	1.91	2.74
t-statistic	3.08 (p = 0.006)	5.60 (p < 0.001)
R ²	0.33	0.62
Implied effect of +0.1 score	+21%	+32%

Note: bivariate OLS of the natural logarithm of each performance measure on the overall TTDI score.**Fig. 2.** TTDI 2024 score and international tourist arrivals, 2023 (n = 21; fitted line from the regression of log arrivals on the score).

Türkiye's low score despite high arrivals and Australia's higher score despite fewer visitors but substantial receipts suggest that the index better captures tourism value creation than visitor volume, helping reconcile mixed evidence on its predictive validity (Hiyab et al., 2023).

5. Discussion

The measurement debate is inherently theoretical because weighting choices reflect competing definitions of competitiveness, making transparent and stress-tested index construction essential (Gómez-Vega & Picazo-Tadeo, 2019). Competitiveness is also development-dependent: infrastructure and connectivity remain critical in lower-income destinations, while advanced economies increasingly rely on experience quality, sustainability, and digital capabilities (Hanafiah & Ali, 2024; Jayaraman & Makun, 2020), although existing frameworks still underrepresent demand-side mechanisms linking competitiveness to visits and loyalty (Andrades-Caldito et al., 2014; Ban et al., 2025).

Future research should integrate supply- and demand-side measures (Mior Shariffuddin et al., 2023), develop dynamic and predictive indices, examine environmental–digital interactions, and employ transparent hybrid approaches (Lin et al., 2023). These conclusions remain limited by English-language Scopus coverage, single-author coding, the absence of statistical pooling, and a cross-sectional illustration that indicates association rather than causation.

6. Conclusions

Infrastructure, ICT readiness and environmental quality are the most stable drivers of destination competitiveness, though their force depends on a country's level of development. The TTDI remains the common reference, but its aggregation, equal weighting and uneven predictive power have pushed researchers toward alternative measures and toward methods that compensate for one another's limits. The demand side still waits to be written into competitiveness models, even though perceptions and motivations are what turn competitive potential into performance. The agenda therefore calls for frameworks holding supply and demand together, indices that are dynamic rather than fixed, and a practice plural in its tools and transparent about its assumptions.

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КОНКУРЕНТОСПОСОБНОСТЬ И ПРИВЛЕКАТЕЛЬНОСТЬ ТУРИСТИЧЕСКИХ РЕГИОНОВ: СИСТЕМАТИЧЕСКИЙ ОБЗОР МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫХ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЙ

Махмудов Дж.И.^{1*}, Ахмедова С.Э.², Казимова С.Т.³, Джабраилова Ф.А.³

¹Мингячевирский государственный университет, Азербайджан
AZ4500, Мингячевир, ул. Д. Алиевой, 21

²Нахчыванский государственный университет, Азербайджан
AZ7012, Нахчыван, Университетский городок

³Институт географии Министерства науки и образования Азербайджанской Республики, Азербайджан
AZ1073, Баку, пр. Г. Джавида, 117

*Автор, отвечающий за переписку: seyhun.mahmudov@mdu.edu.az

Резюме. Конкурентоспособность туризма и привлекательность туристских дестинаций являются ключевыми факторами позиционирования стран на мировом туристском рынке. Вместе с тем научные исследования по обоим направлениям развивались быстро и неравномерными темпами. В статье рассматриваются 109 документов, индексируемых в базе данных Scopus и опубликованных в период с 2003 по 2026 год, с объединением количественной характеристики научной литературы и тематического синтеза. Исследовательский корпус резко расширился после 2015 года и характеризуется выраженной структурной несбалансированностью:

исследования, посвящённые измерению и концептуальным основам (33,0%), а также определяющим факторам (32,1%), занимают доминирующее положение; на аналитические методы приходится 24,8%, тогда как на исследования восприятия со стороны спроса — лишь 10,1%. Индекс конкурентоспособности путешествий и туризма остаётся основным сравнительным ориентиром. Однако использование равных весов показателей, высокие требования к данным и неоднородная прогностическая валидность данного индекса способствовали переходу к альтернативным и гибридным методам оценки. Ни один метод не занимает доминирующего положения: анализ среды функционирования (DEA), TOPSIS, моделирование путей методом частичных наименьших квадратов (PLS) и взвешивание на основе теории игр взаимно компенсируют недостатки друг друга. Инфраструктура, уровень готовности к использованию информационно-коммуникационных технологий и качество окружающей среды выступают наиболее устойчивыми определяющими факторами, влияние которых зависит от уровня доходов. Иллюстративный анализ, основанный на сопоставлении Индекса развития путешествий и туризма за 2024 год с данными ООН Туризм по 21 ведущей туристской дестинации, выявил умеренную корреляцию с количеством туристских прибытий ($r = 0,59$) и более сильную корреляцию с доходами от туризма ($r = 0,72$). Это свидетельствует о том, что измеряемая конкурентоспособность в большей степени связана с экономической ценностью туризма, чем с его объёмом.

Ключевые слова: конкурентоспособность туризма, привлекательность туристических дестинаций, систематический обзор литературы, комплексные показатели, результативность туризма

TURİZM REGIONLARININ RƏQABƏTQABİLİYYƏTLİLİYİ VƏ CƏLBƏDİCİLİYİ: BEYNƏLXALQ TƏDQİQATLARIN SİSTEMATİK İCMALI

Mahmudov C.İ.^{1*}, Əhmədova S.Ə.², Kazımova S.T.³, Cəbraylova F.Ə.³

¹Mingəçevir Dövlət Universiteti, Azərbaycan
AZ4500, Mingəçevir, D. Əliyeva küç. 21

²Naxçıvan Dövlət Universiteti, Azərbaycan
AZ7012, Naxçıvan, Universitet şəhərciyi

³Azərbaycan Respublikası Elm və Təhsil Nazirliyi, Coğrafiya İnstitutu, Azərbaycan
AZ1073, Bakı, H. Cavid pr. 117

*Məsul müəllif: ceyhun.mahmudov@mdu.edu.az

Xülasə. Turizmin rəqabətqabiliyyətliliyi və turizm destinasiyalarının cəlbediciliyi ölkələrin global turizm bazarında mövqelərini müəyyənləşdirməsində əsas amillərdir. Bununla belə, hər iki istiqamət üzrə elmi tədqiqatlar sürətlə və qeyri-bərabər şəkildə inkişaf etmişdir. Məqalədə 2003–2026-cı illər ərzində dərc edilmiş və Scopus bazasında indeksləşdirilmiş 109 sənəd nəzərdən keçirilmiş, elmi ədəbiyyatın kəmiyyət xarakteristikası tematik sintezlə birləşdirilmişdir. Tədqiqat korpusu 2015-ci ildən sonra kəskin şəkildə genişlənmiş və nəzərəcarpacaq dərəcədə qeyri-bərabər struktur nümayiş etdirmişdir: ölçmə və konseptual çərçivələr (33,0%) və müəyyənədiçilər (32,1%) üstünlük təşkil etmiş, analitik metodların payı 24,8%, tələb tərəfinin qavrayışına dair tədqiqatların payı isə cəmi 10,1% olmuşdur. Səyahət və Turizmin Rəqabətqabiliyyətliliyi İndeksi əsas müqayisə meyarı olaraq qalır. Lakin bu indeksdə göstəricilərə bərabər çəki verilməsi, məlumatlara yüksək tələbat və proqnozlaşdırma etibarlılığının qeyri-bərabər olması tədqiqat sahəsini alternativ və hibrid qiymətləndirmə üsullarına yönəltdirmişdir. Heç bir metod üstün mövqe tutmur: verilənlərin əhatə təhlili (DEA), TOPSIS, qismən ən kiçik kvadratlar əsasında yol modelləşdirilməsi (PLS) və oyun nəzəriyyəsinə əsaslanan çəkiləndirmə metodları bir-birinin zəif tərəflərini kompensasiya edir. İnfrastruktur, informasiya və kommunikasiya texnologiyalarına hazırlıq səviyyəsi və ətraf mühitin keyfiyyəti ən sabit müəyyənədiçilər amilləridir və onların təsiri gəlir səviyyəsindən asılı olaraq dəyişir. 2024-cü il Səyahət və Turizmin İnkişafı İndeksinin 21 aparıcı turizm destinasiyası üzrə BMT Turizminin məlumatları ilə uyğunlaşdırılması əsasında aparılan nümunəvi təhlil turist gəlişlərinin sayı ilə orta səviyyəli korrelyasiya ($r = 0,59$), turizm gəlirləri ilə isə daha güclü korrelyasiya ($r = 0,72$) aşkar etmişdir. Bu, ölçülən rəqabətqabiliyyətliliyin turizmin həcmindən daha çox onun yaratdığı iqtisadi dəyərlə əlaqəli olduğunu göstərir.

Açar sözlər: turizmin rəqabət qabiliyyəti, turizm destinasiyalarının cəlbediciliyi, ədəbiyyatın sistematik icmalı, kompleks göstəricilər, turizm fəaliyyətinin nəticələri