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Evaluating Tourism Competitiveness and Destination Attractiveness: An Expert Survey

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Abstract

General Background: Tourism competitiveness is commonly assessed through composite indices and theoretical weighting systems that evaluate destination performance at the macro level.**Specific Background:** Despite the widespread use of such approaches, the relative importance of competitiveness indicators is often determined without direct validation from practitioners and tourism experts. **Knowledge Gap:** Limited studies have employed expert-based empirical evidence to establish indicator weights and simultaneously compare destination attractiveness across multiple tourism dimensions. **Aims:** This study aims to derive expert-validated weight coefficients for macro-level tourism competitiveness indicators and to assess the comparative attractiveness of thirteen destinations using a common survey dataset. **Results:** Based on responses from 117 participants, the six competitiveness indicators received relatively similar importance ratings, with normalized weights ranging from 0.162 to 0.173. Tourism infrastructure development and regional attractiveness obtained the highest ratings. The destination analysis showed that Turkey and Italy achieved the highest composite scores, while Uzbekistan ranked sixth overall and third in pilgrimage tourism attractiveness, outperforming other Central Asian destinations in the composite ranking. **Novelty:** The study introduces a survey-based approach for deriving competitiveness indicator weights and provides a multidimensional comparison of destination attractiveness across thirteen destinations. **Implications:** The findings support the use of empirically grounded weighting schemes in tourism competitiveness assessment and highlight the strategic importance of cultural and pilgrimage tourism development, particularly for Uzbekistan.

Keywords: Tourism Competitiveness, Destination Attractiveness, Expert Survey, Indicator Weighting, Pilgrimage Tourism

Key Findings Highlights

Tourism infrastructure and regional attractiveness received the highest importance ratings among the six evaluated indicators.

Uzbekistan achieved the third-highest score in pilgrimage tourism among the thirteen assessed destinations.

Expert perceptions revealed differences between destination appeal rankings and international tourism competitiveness indices.

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1. Introduction

Assessments of tourism competitiveness at the macro level typically rely either on composite international indices, such as the World Economic Forum's Travel & Tourism Development Index (TTDI), or on author-assigned weight coefficients derived from a review of theoretical literature. Both approaches have a common limitation: the relative importance attached to individual indicators is rarely validated against the judgement of practitioners and experts who observe destination competitiveness directly. This article addresses that gap using primary survey data collected from 117 respondents, who rated (a) the relative importance of six macro-level competitiveness indicators and (b) the comparative attractiveness of thirteen destinations across four distinct dimensions of appeal.

The aim of this study is to derive expert-validated weight coefficients for macro-level tourism competitiveness indicators and to position Uzbekistan's comparative destination attractiveness against global and regional benchmarks using this same primary dataset. The objectives are: (1) to compute descriptive statistics and normalized importance weights for the six surveyed macro-level indicators; (2) to compute comparative attractiveness scores and rankings for thirteen destinations across ecological, historical-cultural, tourism-recreational, and pilgrimage tourism dimensions; (3) to examine Uzbekistan's relative position, with particular attention to any divergence between expert-perceived attractiveness and Uzbekistan's position in international composite indices such as the TTDI; and (4) to discuss implications for the weighting schemes used in macro- and meso-level competitiveness models.

2. Literature Review

Expert elicitation methods occupy a well-established place in competitiveness research. Saaty's (1980) Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) formalized the derivation of indicator weights from pairwise expert comparisons, while the simpler approach of converting mean Likert-scale importance ratings into normalized weights — applied in this study — offers a more easily administered alternative suited to larger, less specialized respondent pools. The theoretical destination-competitiveness models of Ritchie and Crouch (1999, 2003) and Dwyer and Kim (2003) both identify resource endowment, infrastructure, and destination management as core competitiveness determinants, while Porter's (1990) national competitiveness framework similarly emphasizes factor conditions and institutional environment — all six indicators surveyed in this study map directly onto constructs identified in this literature.

Survey-based comparative destination-attractiveness research has a parallel tradition in tourist-satisfaction and image studies, including Vavra's (1992) and Pizam and Milman's (1993) work on perceived destination quality. The four-dimensional structure used in the present survey — ecological, historical-cultural, tourism-recreational, and pilgrimage attractiveness — reflects an attempt to disaggregate destination appeal into components that are each separately relevant to different market segments, an approach consistent with destination image segmentation research but rarely applied comparatively across thirteen destinations spanning Europe, the Gulf, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia simultaneously, which is the specific contribution of this study's dataset.

3. Methodology

The data were collected via a structured online questionnaire completed by 117 respondents. The instrument comprised two parts. Part 1 asked respondents to rate the relative significance of six indicators proposed for inclusion in an integral macro-level tourism competitiveness index — sustainability of tourist demand, development of tourism infrastructure, tourism resources potential, institutional environment, price competitiveness, and attractiveness of the region/territory — on a 5-point scale (1 = low importance, 5 = high importance). Part 2 asked respondents to rate thirteen destinations (Spain, China, Italy, the United Arab Emirates, Georgia, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Armenia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan) on the same 5-point scale across four separate dimensions: ecological attractiveness, historical-cultural appeal, tourism-recreational appeal, and pilgrimage tourism attractiveness. All 117 respondents provided complete ratings for every item analyzed in this article (n = 117 for each indicator and each destination–dimension pair).

For Part 1, the mean and standard deviation were computed for each of the six indicators, and a normalized weight coefficient was derived for each indicator as its mean score divided by the sum of all six mean scores, so that the resulting weights sum to unity — a direct, survey-grounded analogue to the AHP-derived weighting procedure used in the author's earlier meso-level (МТРИ) model. For Part 2, the mean attractiveness score was computed for each destination within each of the four dimensions; a composite score was then calculated for each destination as the unweighted mean of its four dimension-level scores, and destinations were ranked by this composite score. Limitations of the dataset include its cross-sectional, single-wave design and the absence of respondent-level demographic or professional-background variables in the available data, which precludes subgroup analysis by respondent expertise or nationality; these limitations are addressed in the concluding section.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Weighting of macro-level competitiveness indicators

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and derived weights for the six surveyed macro-level indicators. The overall pattern is one of relatively flat perceived importance: mean scores range narrowly from 3.38 (sustainability of tourist demand) to 3.60 (development of tourism infrastructure), yielding normalized weights that cluster between 0.162 and 0.173

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rather than showing the sharp differentiation sometimes assumed in single-author weighting schemes. Development of tourism infrastructure and the general attractiveness of the region/territory were rated marginally most important, while institutional environment and demand sustainability were rated marginally least important — though all six indicators were rated, on average, above the scale midpoint, indicating that respondents regarded none of the six as dispensable.

Table 1

Importance ratings and derived weights of macro-level competitiveness indicators (N = 117)

Macro-level indicator	Mean (1–5)	SD	Rank	Normalized weight
Development of tourism infrastructure	3.60	1.18	1	0.173
Attractiveness of the region/territory	3.56	1.22	2	0.171
Tourism resources potential	3.47	1.20	3	0.167
Price competitiveness	3.46	1.18	4	0.166
Institutional environment	3.39	1.20	5	0.162
Sustainability of tourist demand	3.38	1.28	6	0.162

Table 1.
Source: computed by the author from primary survey data (N = 117).

This near-uniform weighting profile has a direct methodological implication for the author's earlier meso-level model (МТРИ), in which component weights were assigned by the author (R = 0.25, I = 0.20, M = 0.15, Mkt = 0.15, H = 0.15, Inn = 0.10) with a more pronounced differentiation, particularly favoring the resource-base component. The present survey result does not invalidate that earlier scheme, since it surveys a different (macro-level) indicator set, but it does suggest that future refinements of the meso-level weighting scheme could be usefully informed by similarly structured expert surveys rather than relying solely on author judgement, and that any such survey-based recalibration should be tested for sensitivity, given how narrowly the macro-level weights cluster here.

4.2. Comparative destination attractiveness

Table 2

Comparative attractiveness of thirteen destinations across four dimensions (N = 117, mean scores 1–5)

Rank	Destination	Ecological	Historical-cultural	Tourism-recreational	Pilgrimage	Composite
1	Turkey	3.74	3.94	3.78	3.74	3.80
2	Italy	3.75	4.04	3.86	3.54	3.80
3	Spain	3.69	3.83	3.70	3.50	3.68
4	China	3.57	3.75	3.68	3.41	3.60
5	Azerbaijan	3.62	3.56	3.55	3.58	3.58
6	**Uzbekistan**	3.50	3.67	3.44	3.55	**3.54**
7	United Arab Emirates	3.38	3.24	3.62	3.43	3.42
8	Georgia	3.42	3.37	3.27	3.18	3.31
9	Kazakhstan	3.27	3.33	3.21	3.31	3.28
10	Kyrgyzstan	3.20	3.19	3.15	3.20	3.18
11	Tajikistan	3.12	3.23	3.08	3.21	3.16
12	Iran	2.90	3.27	3.04	3.22	3.11
13	Armenia	2.67	2.70	2.71	2.66	2.68

Table 2.
Source: computed by the author from primary survey data (N = 117).

Turkey and Italy occupy the top two positions on the composite measure (3.80 each, a statistically negligible difference), followed by Spain (3.68), China (3.60), and Azerbaijan (3.58). Uzbekistan ranks 6th of 13 destinations overall, with a composite score of 3.54 — placing it in the upper half of the sample and, notably, ahead of every other Central Asian destination surveyed: Kazakhstan ranks 9th (3.28), Kyrgyzstan 10th (3.18), and Tajikistan 11th (3.16). Armenia and Iran occupy the lowest two positions (2.68 and 3.11, respectively), among the destinations included in this particular respondent pool.

Disaggregating by dimension reveals a distinctive profile for Uzbekistan: it ranks 5th of 13 in historical-cultural appeal (3.67) and 3rd of 13 in pilgrimage tourism attractiveness (3.55) — its strongest relative position of the four dimensions — while ranking comparatively lower in tourism-recreational appeal (7th, 3.44) and ecological attractiveness (6th, 3.50). This pattern is consistent with Uzbekistan's resource base, which is concentrated in UNESCO-listed historic and religious

heritage sites (Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva) rather than in natural-recreational or coastal/ecological assets, and offers an empirically grounded rationale for prioritizing pilgrimage and cultural-heritage tourism segments in destination marketing rather than attempting to compete broadly across all four dimensions simultaneously.

A further point of discussion concerns the relationship between this survey's findings and the WEF TTDI 2024 ranking discussed in the author's prior comparative research, in which Kazakhstan (52nd of 119 economies) ranked considerably higher than Uzbekistan (78th of 119). The present survey instead places Uzbekistan ahead of Kazakhstan on every one of the four attractiveness dimensions measured here, and on the composite score. This divergence is not necessarily contradictory: the TTDI is a broad composite of enabling environment, policy, infrastructure, and resource indicators weighted toward institutional and economic factors, whereas the present survey measures perceived resource-based and cultural attractiveness in isolation from policy and infrastructure performance. Read together, the two findings suggest that Uzbekistan's comparative disadvantage at the macro level operates primarily through institutional and infrastructure channels rather than through a deficit in underlying tourism-resource attractiveness, which respondents in this survey rate as comparatively strong — a nuance that a single composite macro index cannot, by construction, reveal.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study derived expert-validated weight coefficients for six macro-level tourism competitiveness indicators and comparatively assessed thirteen destinations across four attractiveness dimensions using an original 117-respondent survey. Three findings stand out. First, the surveyed experts perceive the six macro-level indicators as having relatively similar importance (normalized weights ranging from 0.162 to 0.173), cautioning against overly sharp a priori weight differentiation in future macro-level index construction. Second, Uzbekistan ranks 6th of 13 destinations overall and, more strikingly, 3rd of 13 in pilgrimage tourism attractiveness — its strongest dimension and a position ahead of every other Central Asian destination surveyed. Third, this resource-based attractiveness advantage coexists with a comparatively weaker macro-level (TTDI) position, suggesting that Uzbekistan's principal competitiveness gap lies in institutional and infrastructure factors rather than in underlying destination appeal.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed: (1) macro-level competitiveness indices should consider near-equal indicator weighting as a more empirically defensible default than sharply differentiated author-assigned weights, pending further expert-survey validation; (2) Uzbekistan's tourism-marketing strategy should prioritize pilgrimage and cultural-heritage tourism segments, where its comparative position is strongest, while explicitly targeting infrastructure and institutional-environment improvements to close the gap implied by its weaker macro-index position; (3) future surveys should collect respondent-level professional and demographic data to permit subgroup analysis (e.g., by respondent expertise, nationality, or sector); and (4) the apparent divergence between expert-perceived resource attractiveness and composite macro-index rankings warrants further research using larger and stratified expert samples, ideally replicated longitudinally to track whether infrastructure and institutional reforms close this gap over time.

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