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A Bibliometric Analysis on Tourism Sustainable Competitiveness Research

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Abstract: The present bibliometric review of research intends to document and synthesize research trends in the domain of sustainable competitiveness over the past decade. Through bibliographical analysis of 1259 Scopus-indexed documents, the literature published from 2010 to 2020 has been identified. Publication output analysis, citation analysis, journal analysis, geographical distribution analysis, and co-occurrence keywords network analysis are utilised in this study to identify the trending research and future direction of this specific field of study using VOSviewer software and Harzing's Publish and Perish software. Findings revealed that the literature on both sustainability and competitiveness solely is in its growth stage. The most productive countries in this domain are the United States, China, and the United Kingdom. In the retrieved documents, the sustainable competitiveness indeed plays a pivotal part in the evolution of the tourism field and laid a solid foundation for future research. As this paper provides an understanding on the possible mutual reinforcing relationship between two concepts, a stronger linkage on sustainable competitiveness that may catalyse tourism development can offer reference for future research through in-depth analysis.

Keywords: bibliometric analysis; sustainability; competitiveness; sustainable competitiveness; tourism; VOSviewer; SDGs



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1. Introduction

Over the last decade, one of the major events in the policy area has been the emergence of concepts related to sustainability and inclusive growth. Such conceptual schemes aim to unite the fundamentals of sustainability and go beyond the usual boundaries of economic growth. Sustainable energy should also be widely encouraged to minimize depletion in future usage. Since 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been applied by the United Nations as a universal call to action. The world has seen progress at a good pace toward SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) with regard to the Sustainable Development Report [1]. Despite the tangible gains in many countries, progress on broader issues such as pollution, biodiversity, or climate change has been patchy. In ensuring low environmental impact, renewable energy sources like wind energy and hydropower should be used to minimise sustainability issues. Meanwhile, improving competitiveness remains a principal prerequisite for increasing global shared prosperity. Addressing the emerging challenges, multi-stakeholders' collaboration including governments, businesses, and society is needed. For instance, productivity should be ensured to achieve more pragmatic progress and enable countries to transition to more sustainable development models. However, the interconnection between sustainability and competitiveness remains uncertain, even though the number of studies on sustainability has surged significantly.

The tourism sector has played a vital role in the global quest for prosperity, and it has grown dramatically in terms of economic significance [2]. The World Travel and

Tourism Council [3] pointed out that the travel and tourism GDP contribution accounted for 10.4% (USD 9170 billion) of the global GDP in 2019, following by 5.5% of the global GDP (USD 4671 billion) in 2020. The total travel and tourism GDP loss in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic was nearly 18 times that during the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) in 2009. During the period from 2014–2019, the travel and tourism sectors supported 334 million jobs (10.6% of all jobs) and created one-fourth of all net new jobs globally. One of the prominent features of tourism is its capability to stimulate broad-based economic activity [4]. Noting the above-mentioned contribution from the tourism sector, the growing linkages that occur between the sustainable and competitiveness should be acknowledged. A stronger linkage may catalyse the multiplier effects on this labour-intensive industry in terms of employment opportunities and local poverty reduction. The adverse impact of the pandemic might be temporary, but managing tourism in a sustainable competitiveness manner is critical for long-term policy planning.

Multidimensional concepts, competitiveness, and sustainability are often measured separately. Competitive strategies are critically important to enhance nations' development and economic viability, especially those countries that are highly dependent on the tourism industry as one of their key income sources. Competitiveness relies heavily on the destination capability in creating and integrating value-added products that sustain its resources and market position [5,6]. It should be accentuated that competitiveness should always consider tourist arrivals and destination income in conjunction with the market share occupied in the global market. Meanwhile, competitiveness is also interpreted as the ability within a tourism destination to provide tourists with a satisfactory travel experience in a profitable manner. From the perspective of [7], destination competitiveness refers to the ability to deliver a high calibre of goods and services by emphasizing the needs of tourists.

Sustainability targets the practice of meeting current needs without jeopardising future generations' resources, thus promoting the well-being of people [8,9]. Economic, environmental, and social elements provide the three fundamental pillars of sustainability. The World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) defined sustainable tourism development as one that considers the current and future economic, social, and environment impacts, addressing the demand of tourists, the industry, the environment, and the host communities. Ref. [10] acknowledged the mutual reinforcing relationships among competitiveness and sustainable development. However, there is scant evidence of the interrelationship between competitiveness and sustainable development. Sustainable competitiveness refers to the strength of generating and sustaining national wealth while increasing the living standard of people in a competing economy. The interactions among sustainable competitiveness should be emphasized in the measurement and evaluation of elements.

The present study performed an exploratory analysis of the research topic on sustainable competitiveness in the tourism sector. An application of bibliometric analysis is adapted to the current study to facilitate an understanding of the structure of sustainable competitiveness, evolution of the research field, and trends in academics. The research questions (RQs) are addressed as follows. RQ1: What are the main trends in research on sustainable tourism and tourism competitiveness? This is mainly to allow a deeper understanding of the interconnection on sustainable competitiveness, especially in the tourism sector. RQ2: What are the current citation patterns of publication on sustainable competitiveness research? RQ3: Which country is most productive on the sustainable competitiveness research in tourism? RQ4: What is the funding agencies distribution of publications? RQ5: Which themes of sustainable competitiveness research is popularised among scholars? RQ6: What is the possible future research direction?

This paper is structured as follows: The introductory section introduces the main concept relating to sustainability and competitiveness, especially on SDGs. The emerging concept of sustainable competitiveness in tourism has been discussed in the Section 1. The Section 2 focuses on the body of methods and research protocols to be applied to scientific papers. Empirical evidence from bibliometric analysis is further described in the Section 3. While the Sections 1–3 provide a condensed review of the research concept, Section 4