

The Impact of Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Factors on Tourism Performance: The Case of Silk Road Countries

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Nowadays, tourism industry has gained a momentum in balancing countries' balance of payments, contributing to GDP, and employment. These contributions of the industry to local economies made it a critical sector and a source of foreign currency in many countries of the World. As a result, obtaining and sustaining competition factors become critically important. By the similar vein, it can be indicated that tourism performance of countries will be greatly influenced by competition factors.

In certain studies different models had been used to classify competitive factors in tourism industry (Hassan, 2000; Dwyer and Kim, 2003). In this study, we use World Economic Forum's (WEF) classification of Travel and Tourism Competitiveness factors to examine resources that are expected to influence Silk Road countries' tourism performance. We conceptualized the tourism performance by two variables: international tourist arrivals and tourism receipts. WEF's classification of competitive factors consists of three sub-indexes and 14 factors that measure these sub-indexes, which are reported below:

- **T&T regulatory framework**

(Policy rules and regulations, Environmental sustainability, Safety and security, Health and hygiene, Prioritization of Travel & Tourism)

- **T&T business environment and infrastructure**

(Air transport infrastructure, Ground transport infrastructure, Tourism infrastructure, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure, Price competitiveness in the T&T industry)

- **T&T human, cultural, and natural resources**

(Human resources, Education and training, Availability of qualified labour, Affinity for Travel & Tourism, Natural resources, Cultural Resources)

Methodology

In this study, we aim to investigate the impact of Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Factors on the tourism performance of Silk Road Countries. As a promising project, the Silk Road project is gaining a critical importance for countries in the region. The list of Silk Road Countries consists of 28 countries: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, China, Croatia, DPR Korea, Egypt, Georgia, Greece, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. We used the data for 23 countries and excluded 5 countries because of lack of data. Countries that are excluded from the list are DPR Korea, Iran, Iraq, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

In order to perform multiple regression analyses to investigate the relationship between competitive factors and country performances, we used the data of The World Economic Forum's "The Travel and Tourism (T&T) Competitiveness Index" for the years between 2008 - 2011.

Findings

Performance of two-separate multiple regression analyses postulated for the first analysis that The Silk Road Countries' tourist arrivals as a performance variable is influenced by three competitive factors, namely, *air transport infrastructure, ground transport infrastructure, and cultural resources*. For the second analysis, findings revealed that tourism receipts of the Silk Road Countries are influenced by five competitive factors: *Air transport infrastructure, ground transport infrastructure, environmental sustainability, health-hygiene, and cultural resources*.

Keywords: Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index, Strategic Marketing, Silk Road Countries, Tourism Performance.