DESTINATION IMAGE AND COMPETITIVENESS AS STRATEGIC ASSETS: A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF TOURISM RESEARCH

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Objetivo do estudo
Analisar a produção científica sobre destino turístico, imagem do destino e competitividade do destino entre 2000 e 2023, identificando tendências, relações conceituais e a evolução temática dessas variáveis estratégicas na literatura de turismo.

Relevância/originalidade
O estudo aprofunda a relação entre imagem e competitividade como ativos estratégicos dos destinos turísticos, oferecendo uma visão integrada do campo e identificando lacunas teóricas para futuras investigações.

Metodologia/abordagem
Pesquisa bibliométrica de abordagem mista, utilizando a base Scopus. Foram analisados 9.953 artigos publicados entre 2000 e 2023, combinando estatística descritiva e análise qualitativa de conteúdo.

Principais resultados
Os resultados evidenciam crescimento das publicações, forte interdependência entre imagem e competitividade e concentração da produção científica em países, autores e instituições de referência no estudo dos destinos turísticos.

Contribuições teóricas/metodológicas
Reforça modelos integrados de análise dos destinos turísticos, evidenciando a articulação entre imagem e competitividade e demonstrando o potencial da bibliometria para mapear tendências e oportunidades de pesquisa.

Contribuições sociais/para a gestão
Oferece subsídios para gestores públicos e agentes turísticos desenvolverem estratégias de posicionamento, marketing territorial e sustentabilidade, fortalecendo a atratividade, a competitividade e o desenvolvimento dos destinos.

Palavras-chave: Imagem destino, destino competitivo, destino turístico, ativos estratégicos, análise bibliométrica

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Study purpose
To analyse scientific production on tourism destination, destination image, and destination competitiveness between 2000 and 2023, identifying research trends, conceptual relationships, and the evolution of these strategic variables in tourism literature.

Relevance / originality
The study advances understanding of destination image and competitiveness as strategic assets, providing an integrated perspective on their interrelationships and revealing theoretical gaps and future research opportunities in tourism studies.

Methodology / approach
A mixed-method bibliometric study was conducted using the Scopus database. The analysis covered 9,953 journal articles published between 2000 and 2023, combining descriptive statistical and qualitative content analyses.

Main results
Findings reveal significant growth in publications, a strong interdependence between destination image and competitiveness, and the concentration of scientific production among leading countries, institutions, and researchers in tourism studies.

Theoretical / methodological contributions
The study reinforces integrated analytical models of tourism destinations, highlighting the relationship between image and competitiveness while demonstrating the value of bibliometric analysis for mapping research trends and identifying knowledge gaps.

Social / management contributions
The findings support public managers and tourism stakeholders in developing destination positioning, territorial branding, and sustainability strategies that enhance attractiveness, competitiveness, and long-term territorial development.

Keywords: destination image, destination competitiveness, tourism destination, strategic assets, bibliometric analysis

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1 Introduction

Tourism has been demonstrated to play a dynamic role in the development of destinations, driven by a wide range of variables. In this context, five variables are recurrent in the scientific literature on tourism: tourism destination, tourist image, destination competitiveness, destination quality, and tourist satisfaction (Pereira, 2024). These variables are considered recurring elements in the investigation of tourism destinations (Buhalis, 2000; Almeida, 2011; De Miranda, 2012; Emmendoerfer & Mediotte, 2022) and in their configuration (Pereira, 2024). In the relevant literature, these variables are considered important for tourist activity, as they influence the visitor experience and the quality of life of residents (see Araújo, 2023; Santana & Gosling, 2018).

In contrast to the earlier studies by Pereira (2024) and Pereira, Almeida and Almeida (2025), which addressed five interconnected variables (tourism destination, image, competitiveness, quality and tourist satisfaction), this article concentrates on a mere three of them: tourism destination, image and competitiveness. This delineation facilitates a more profound examination of the strategic interactions between these variables, thereby providing a distinct theoretical contribution to the understanding of the mechanisms that underpin the attractiveness and competitive positioning of sustainable tourism destinations.

The proposed bibliometric study is therefore valuable in that it adds the possibility of investigating the scientific landscape of academic publications, allowing the identification of thematic patterns and theoretical gaps that guide the advancement of the field. This is a widely used approach in the area (Atsız, Öğretmenoğlu & Akova, 2022; Toker & Emir, 2023; Cardoso et al., 2024). In accordance with this line of thought, the present article contributes to the theoretical and methodological deepening of the mechanisms that sustain the competitive positioning of sustainable tourism destinations. The competitiveness of a tourism destination is defined by its ability to add value to the visitor experience, whilst simultaneously valuing and preserving cultural and local resources. In this context, the objective is to enhance the quality of life of the local population and to ensure the sustainability of the territory (Veloso, 2017; Mazo et al., 2021; Almeida & Almeida, 2023; Azmi et al., 2023).

In the context of the global economy, digitalisation changes the parameters of competitiveness, going beyond the material offer and the types of services available, including the way in which the destination's image is projected to the public. From a strategic standpoint, the image serves a pivotal role in differentiating the market, thereby influencing the visitor experience and contributing to the establishment of expectations and loyalty. This image projection, conveyed through visual elements, stereotypes, and narratives, has the capacity to exert a direct influence on visitors' motivations for travel and their experience. Consequently, this dynamic can favour the development of the territorial brand associated with the destination (Santana & Gosling, 2018; Almeida, 2018; Almeida & Almeida, 2023; Araújo, 2023).

The quality of a destination is determined by a combination of material aspects and subjective perceptions expressed by tourists and residents, particularly in relation to the utilisation of tourist services available at the destination. As Postma and Schmuecker (2017), Utama and Trimurti (2021), Wang and Ye (2022), and Almeida and Almeida (2023) demonstrate, these elements contribute directly to visitor satisfaction. The assessment of tourism quality from a sustainability perspective seeks to promote economic balance while simultaneously valuing the cultural and ecological aspects of the territories. In this sense, tourist satisfaction is an important variable to consider when analysing the quality of a destination, as it is associated with long-term competitiveness. This competitiveness is rooted in the reputation established through the degree of satisfaction expressed by tourists, manifesting in positive

recommendations and repeat visits to the destination. These factors contribute to economic development and enhance the destination's attractiveness (Araújo, 2023; Azmi et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2023; Sahabuddin et al., 2024; Xia et al., 2024).

The central question that this study seeks to address is as follows: The present study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the extant literature on tourism, with a particular focus on the years between 2000 and 2023. The central question guiding this investigation is to ascertain the extent of scientific research published on tourism destinations, destination image, and destination competitiveness between 2000 and 2023.

The objective of this study is to analyse the landscape of scientific research and the interrelationships between tourism destination, destination image and destination competitiveness through a bibliometric analysis of publications indexed in the Scopus database between 2000 and 2023.

The contribution and importance of the bibliometric approach to the development of this study should be highlighted, especially in quantifying academic output and identifying spatial and temporal trends in tourism literature. The employment of qualitative analyses in conjunction enables a more profound comprehension of the relationships between the variables under investigation, in addition to the dynamics associated with competitiveness and the promotion of sustainable development of destinations. The integration of existing scientific output with a reflective approach to identified lacunae and prospective avenues for future research can serve to enhance the academic discourse, thereby contributing to the refinement of strategies that are oriented towards the sustainable development of tourism destinations on a global scale (Guedes & Borschiver, 2005; Costa & Oliveira, 2020; Dhingra et al., 2024).

The present study is divided into five sections. The presentation commences with an exposition of the subject matter, progressing to the theoretical framework. The ensuing sections are devoted to the exposition of the research methodology, the presentation of the results, and the discussion thereof. The final section of this study summarises the findings.

2 Literature review

2.1 Tourism destination

The concept of a tourism destination, extending beyond its geographical boundaries, encompasses the array of products and services it provides, as well as the marketing of its image. It is directly associated with the way it is promoted to stakeholders and local managers, and its capacity to cater to the needs of tourists and residents. These factors are found to be decisive for the consolidation of consistent tourist demand for that destination (Baggio, 2020).

Buhalis (2000) posits that, for a destination to realise its full competitiveness, it is essential that the cultural, heritage and natural factors of that destination are given due consideration and enhancement. In this sense, it is vital to consider both memorable experiences and the needs and expectations of tourists, as these are central to the issue at hand.

2.2 Competitiveness of tourism destinations

The competitiveness of tourism destinations is a widely discussed variable in scientific literature, due to the ability of destinations to promote their tourist attractions to tourists in a sustainable and attractive way for visitors. This competitiveness is driven by the way products and services are consumed, with visitor satisfaction being reflected in the choice of destination over competing alternatives. In this process, it is important to highlight the importance of presenting the lifestyle of the residents, which can contribute to a positive relational dynamic between the local community and visitors (Mazo et al., 2021; Ahn & Bessiere, 2022).

In a global context characterised by perpetual competition, the competitiveness of a tourism destination is contingent upon its capacity to foster attractiveness and innovation, thereby differentiating itself from competing destinations and adapting to market fluctuations.

Maintaining continuous economic growth necessitates the preservation of natural, cultural and local resources, ensuring sustainability and enhancing the attractiveness of the destination to visitors, with a focus on fostering long-term loyalty (Ahn & Bessiere, 2022; Azmi et al., 2023; Rodríguez et al., 2020; Sedlacek et al., 2022).

2.3. Destination image

The image of a tourism destination plays a strategic role in its promotion and positioning in the market (Almeida, 2011; Jeong & Kim, 2019; Almeida & Almeida, 2023; Ramadhani et al., 2024). This image exerts a direct influence on tourists' choices, shaping their motivations and expectations. The construction of the territory is derived from individual perceptions and the narrative promoted by local managers, with visual, cultural and symbolic elements characteristic of the territory being projected into the imagination of visitors. The projection of a positive destination image contributes to perceptions of quality and to the construction of emotional bonds between visitors and the destination. Such perceptions are reinforced by visual, cultural and symbolic elements associated with the territory and disseminated through narratives promoted by local managers. As a result, destination image can enhance visitor satisfaction, strengthen destination competitiveness and favour the development of a territorial brand (Phelps, 1986; Almeida, 2011; Almeida, 2018; Araújo, 2023; Almeida & Almeida, 2023).

Consequently, scientific literature underscores the interdependence between tourism destination, destination competitiveness, and destination image, highlighting their relevance as strategic assets for destination management and long-term positioning. This reinforces the need for an integrated approach to analyse the impact of these variables on the prosperity of destinations. To achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships between the variables under investigation, bibliometric analysis is a fundamental tool for monitoring research trends in different areas of knowledge. The knowledge thus generated contributes to the construction of a solid theoretical basis and to the design of management and sustainability strategies aligned with the demands of a global, competitive and sustainable tourism market (Kozak & Rimmington, 1999; Guedes & Borschiver, 2005; Almeida & Almeida, 2023; Ramadhani et al., 2024).

3. Research Methodology

The present study adopted a bibliometric approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies, encompassing descriptive statistics and content analysis, for the period between 2000 and 2023. This approach facilitated the identification of publication patterns and the assessment of researchers' productivity and impact, with relevant indicators including year, country, institutional affiliation, and journals. This strategy provided a specific perspective on the development of knowledge in the field of tourism. To comprehend the trends and challenges inherent in interpreting the relationship between the variables under study, qualitative analysis was incorporated (Marques, 2010; Costas, 2017; Costa & Oliveira, 2020; Wolfram, 2017). This approach was adopted to facilitate an understanding of academic production throughout the period analysed.

3.1. Data collection procedures

During the data collection procedure, specific inclusion criteria were applied, with regard to publications between the years 2000 and 2023. The year 2000 was selected as the initial point of reference due to its significance in the context of globalisation, a phenomenon that has been termed "Tourism Year 2000" in academic discourse (Boyer, 1999).

The search, conducted on the Scopus database, incorporated the following terms: The following terms are employed in this text: 'tourism destination', 'destination competitiveness', and 'destination image'. The selection of articles was restricted exclusively to those published in full-length form in academic journals. This methodological approach was adopted to ensure the quality and relevance of the sources analysed. Following the application of the filter's 'year' (2000-2023), 'type of document' (full article) and 'type of publication' (journal). The initial search retrieved 12,199 documents. After applying the filters related to publication year (2000–2023), document type (article), and source type (journal), a final sample of 9,953 articles was retained for analysis.

3.2 Data analysis procedures

The employment of bibliometric analysis, a methodical evaluation of the most significant scientific publications identified in the Scopus database, facilitated the measurement of the primary indicators of scientific productivity (Bardin, 1977). Moreover, through the implementation of content analysis, it was possible to identify patterns of relationship between the variables under study, as well as to verify theoretical connections and existing gaps in the tourism literature (Wolfram, 2017; Bardin, 1977). This mixed approach facilitates a more in-depth analysis of the connections between the theoretical and practical aspects of the variables investigated. This, in turn, contributes to a broader understanding of the phenomena analysed.

4. Results and discussions

4.1. Year Indicator

A historical analysis of scientific production reveals the evolution of academic interest in tourism destination, destination competitiveness, and destination image. Since 2000, scientific production on these themes has increased considerably, reflecting their consolidation as relevant research topics within tourism studies. As demonstrated by Pereira (2024), bibliometric analysis enables the identification of publication patterns, productive periods, and the evolution of scientific interest over time. This longitudinal perspective contributes to a broader understanding of how these variables have developed within tourism literature.

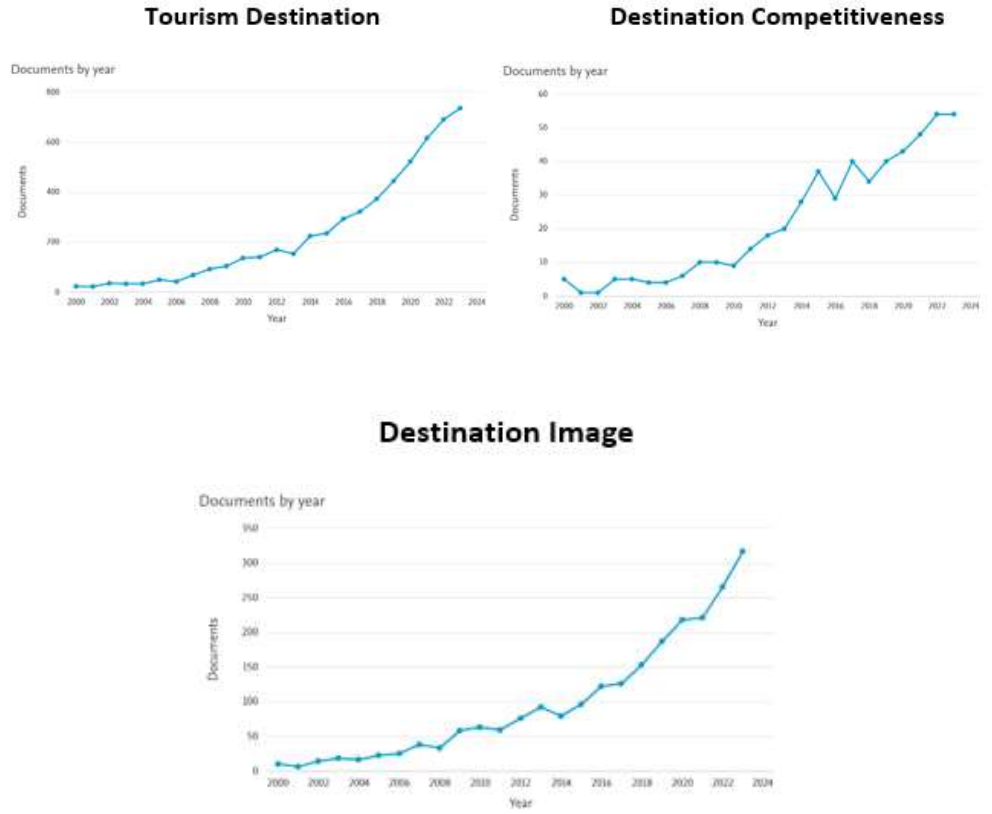


Figure 1. *Year Indicator* - Source: Pereira (2024, p.66).

Figure 1 illustrates the evolution of scientific production on tourism destination, destination competitiveness, and destination image between 2000 and 2023. As demonstrated by Pereira (2024), bibliometric analysis enables the identification of publication patterns and the evolution of scientific interest over time. The results show a substantial increase in publications across the three variables, reflecting their growing relevance within tourism research. Tourism destination presents the highest publication volume throughout the analysed period, followed by destination image, while destination competitiveness records a lower volume despite a consistent upward trend. The findings suggest that, although competitiveness is recognised as a strategic component of destination management, research on this topic remains less consolidated than studies focusing on tourism destinations and destination image. Nevertheless, the growth observed across all three variables reinforces their relevance as strategic assets for destination management and destination positioning. These results also highlight opportunities for future research, particularly regarding sustainability, innovation, and competitiveness in tourism destinations.

4.2. Country Indicator

The analysis of publications by countries enabled the identification of the nations with the highest levels of scientific production related to tourism destination, destination competitiveness, and destination image during the period under investigation. As shown in Figure 2, scientific output is concentrated primarily in China, the United States, Spain, and Portugal.

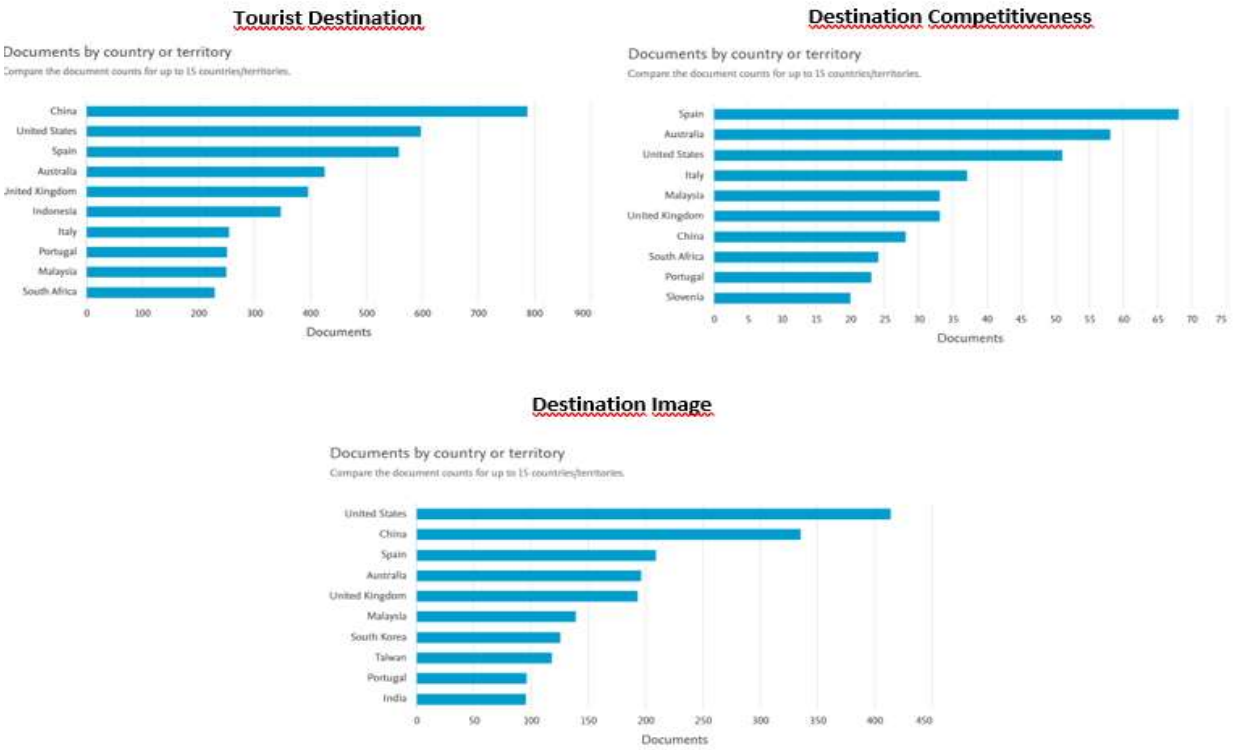


Figure 2. Country Indicator - Source: Pereira (2024, p.66).

This prominence may be associated with national efforts to strengthen tourism development, destination management, and tourism-related research, reflecting the growing importance of the sector within the country (Kozak & Rimmington, 1999; Wang et al., 2019). The United States leads scientific production in destination image research and occupies a prominent position in studies on tourism destinations. This result reflects the long-standing academic tradition of tourism research in the country and the importance attributed to destination marketing, management, and visitor behaviour (Kim, 2012; Sedlacek et al., 2022).

Spain stands out particularly in the destination competitiveness dimension while maintaining a strong presence in the destination and image categories. This performance reflects both the country's relevance in international tourism and the significant scholarly attention devoted to competitiveness and sustainable destination management (Pulido-Fernández et al., 2023; Araújo, 2023).

Portugal also demonstrates a significant presence across the three variables analysed, indicating a balanced and integrated research approach to tourism destinations, destination image, and competitiveness. This finding reflects the importance of tourism within the national economy and the growing academic interest in destination management, sustainability, and territorial development.

Overall, the results reveal that scientific production is concentrated in countries with strong tourism sectors and well-established research systems. The prominence of China, the United States, Spain, and Portugal suggest that destination image and competitiveness are increasingly recognised as strategic assets capable of supporting destination management, international positioning, and sustainable tourism development.

4.3. Author's Indicator

The analysis of the author indicator revealed the researchers who exerted the most significant influence on the variables under investigation regarding their scientific production (Figure 3).

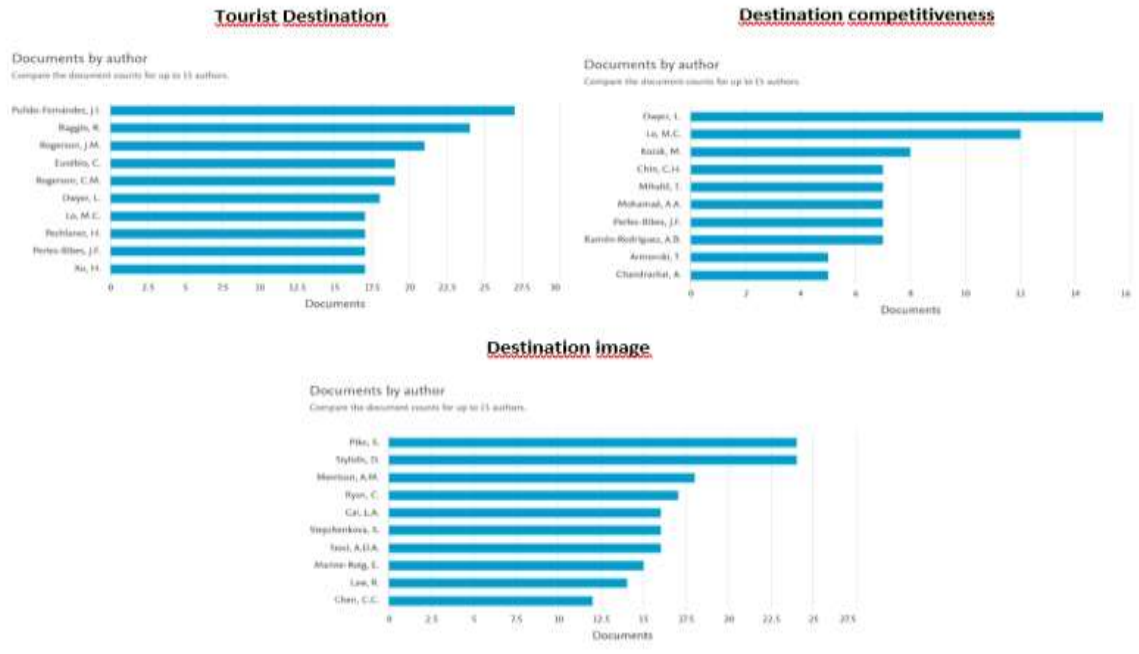


Figure 3. Publications by author - Source: Pereira (2024).

Among the most frequently cited are Pike, S., Stylidis, D., Baggio, R. and Rogerson, J.M., whose contributions are especially relevant in the fields of "image" and "destination

competitiveness". As Kozak and Rimmington (1999) demonstrate in their publications, there is a clear interrelationship between competitiveness, tourist satisfaction and visitor loyalty, with image playing a pivotal role in this relationship.

These researchers have played a pivotal role in formulating theoretical and methodological frameworks that have guided subsequent research, thereby consolidating the foundations for studying the dynamics of attracting and retaining tourists. About the "tourism destination" variable, the authors with the highest number of publications are Pulido-Fernández, J.I. (27), Baggio, R. (24) and Rogerson, J.M. (21), indicating academic leadership in the theoretical and applied approach to destinations.

In the "competitiveness" variable, the most productive researchers are Dwyer, L. (15), Lo, M.C. (12) and Kozak, M. (8), whose research has contributed to deepening the relationship between competitiveness, tourism development and territorial management.

In the "destination image" variable, Pike, S. and Stylidis, D. stand out with 24 publications each, followed by Morrison, A.M. with 18 publications. Their contributions have advanced the understanding of how destinations are perceived, represented, and evaluated by tourists. The prominence of these authors highlights the strategic role of destination image in influencing tourist behaviour and strengthening destination competitiveness, reinforcing the importance of both dimensions as strategic assets in tourism management.

Taken together, the results demonstrate the existence of specialised research communities dedicated to the study of tourism destinations, destination competitiveness, and destination image. The prominence of leading authors in these fields reflects the growing academic recognition of these variables as fundamental elements for destination management, positioning, and long-term competitiveness.

4.3. Affiliation Indicator

The analysis of institutional affiliations identifies the universities and research centres with the highest scientific output related to tourism destination, destination competitiveness, and destination image. As shown in Figure 4, the results reveal a geographically diverse distribution of institutions across Asia, Europe, North America, and Oceania.

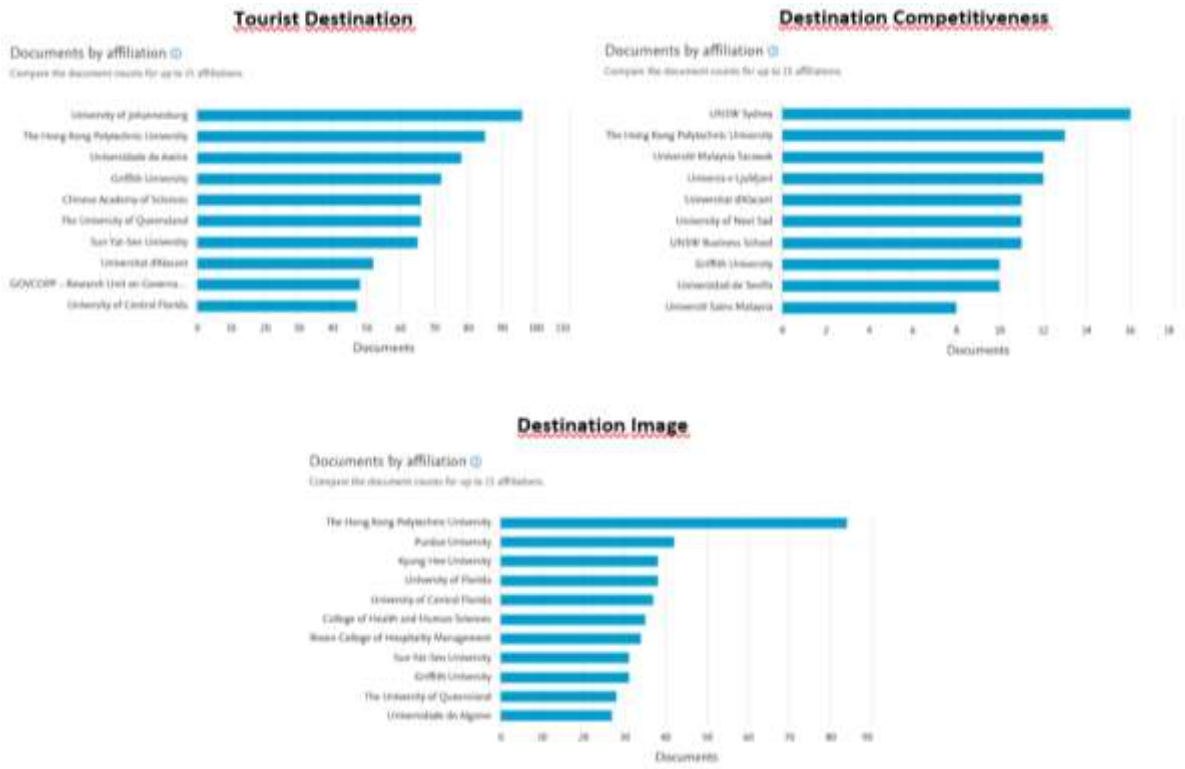


Figure 4. Institutional affiliations with the most scientific production - Source: Pereira (2024).

Bibliometric analysis also reveals the central role played by institutions such as The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and Purdue University, which act as important hubs for knowledge production and dissemination, fostering international research collaboration in tourism studies.

In the "tourism destination" variable, institutions such as the University of Johannesburg, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the University of Aveiro and Griffith University have the highest volumes of publications, indicating a consolidated presence in research into the characterisation and management of destinations.

In the context of "competitiveness", notable institutions such as UNSW Sydney, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) and Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II have emerged as leading contributors, reflecting growing scholarly interest in strategic and comparative approaches to assessing tourism destination competitiveness.

Regarding destination image, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Purdue University, and Kyung Hee University stand out as the most productive institutions. Their scientific contributions have been fundamental to advancing theoretical and empirical studies on destination perception, identity, and positioning, reinforcing the role of destination image as a strategic asset in tourism management.

The institutional landscape identified in this study reflects the internationalisation of tourism research and the growing academic interest in destination-related studies. The concentration of publications within leading universities further confirms the relevance of destination image and competitiveness as strategic assets in contemporary tourism management.

4.4. Main sources of publication

The analysis of publication sources enables the identification of the journals that concentrate the most relevant studies on the variables investigated (Table 2). The recurrent presence of journals such as Tourism Management, Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing, and Sustainability across different variables suggests a strong thematic connection between destination management, marketing, competitiveness, and sustainability. Furthermore, the diversity of journals represented highlights the multidisciplinary and international nature of tourism research.

Table 2. Main journals by variable and number of publications

Variable	Journal	Publications
Tourism Destination	Sustainability (Switzerland)	312
Tourism Destination	Tourism Management	190
Tourism Destination	African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure	120
Destination Competitiveness	Tourism Management	31
Destination Competitiveness	Current Issues in Tourism	20
Destination Competitiveness	Tourism Economics	19
Destination Image	Tourism Management	107
Destination Image	Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	94
Destination Image	Sustainability (Switzerland)	93

The data presented in Table 2 demonstrate that Tourism Management is the journal with the strongest presence across all three variables, consolidating its position as a leading reference in tourism research. The prominence of Sustainability in studies on tourism destinations and destination image further reflects the growing importance of sustainable development within the tourism literature. In addition, the presence of specialised journals, such as the African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure, indicates the expansion of regional perspectives and the diversification of geographical contexts in tourism research, corroborating the findings of Pereira (2024).

These findings suggest a close relationship between the thematic scope of journals and the research interests of scholars working in the field. The recurrence of journals such as Tourism Management and Sustainability indicates that these outlets play a central role in disseminating research on tourism destinations, destination image, and destination competitiveness. Their prominence contributes to the visibility and consolidation of theoretical and empirical approaches that support tourism planning, destination management, and strategic positioning. The concentration of publications in these journals also reinforces the growing

academic recognition of destination image and competitiveness as strategic assets within tourism research.

4.5. Relationships between the variables investigated

The integrated analysis of the three variables investigated (tourism destination, image and competitiveness) emphasises a complex and interdependent relational structure (Pereira, 2024; Pereira, Almeida & Almeida, 2025). Destination image occupies a strategic position, directly influencing the competitiveness variable (Buhalis, 2000; Almeida, 2011; Chen et al., 2020). Destinations that project a positive image tend to attract more visitors, while concomitantly raising expectations regarding the quality of the experience. This perception has been shown to reinforce the destination's competitiveness (Jeong & Kim, 2019) and to contribute to the development of emotional bonds, which can in turn be channelled into the development of a territorial brand (Almeida, 2018).

From a management perspective, these findings suggest the necessity for a holistic approach, in which investments in image are aligned with territorial competitiveness strategies. The correlation between these variables is conducive to the resilience of destinations in competitive environments, particularly in the context of the increasing emphasis on personalisation and sustainability in tourism practices (Almeida & Almeida, 2023; Pereira, Almeida & Almeida, 2025).

The bibliometric approach adopted in this study enabled the mapping of the scientific production landscape and the identification of patterns of interconnection between variables. However, it was the qualitative analysis that enabled the interpretation of the meanings of these relationships and their practical implications for the territorial planning of tourism destinations. It is evident that the integration of destination, image and competitiveness constitutes a strategic foundation for the sustainable development of tourism destinations (Pereira, 2024).

This interdependence is further reinforced by the findings of specialised literature. A plethora of studies have demonstrated a direct correlation between image and perception of quality (see, for example, Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; 2003; Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Pike & Ryan, 2004; Almeida, 2011). However, the impact of competitiveness on image perception is multifaceted, being influenced by a combination of tangible and intangible factors, including infrastructure, innovation and reputation (Oliver, 1999; Fornell et al., 1996; Kozak, 2001). The relationships indicate the necessity for integrated management strategies that are capable of aligning the various components of the tourist experience. Destinations that manage to

articulate these dimensions in a coherent way tend to consolidate their position in the global market, increasing their attractiveness and long-term sustainability (Pereira, 2024).

Although the present study focuses on three variables (tourism destination, destination image, and destination competitiveness), the conceptual model proposed by Pereira, Almeida and Almeida (2025) is presented as a broader theoretical framework that illustrates the relationships among destination-related variables (Figure 5). For the purposes of this study, particular attention is given to the interactions between destination image and destination competitiveness within the tourism destination context.

The concept of destination image functions as a strategic element in the context of competitiveness, exerting influence on factors such as attractiveness and territorial differentiation (Jeong & Kim, 2019; Almeida, 2018). In the context of tourism, competitiveness is understood to be associated with a destination's capacity to project a unified image and provide experiences that align with the expectations of visitors (Dwyer & Kim, 2003). Image is also a contributing factor in the development of the territorial brand, serving as a symbolic link between the destination and its audience (Almeida & Almeida, 2023). Accordingly, Pereira, Almeida and Almeida (2025) proposed a matrix of correlations between variables that influence the performance of tourism destinations (Figure 5).

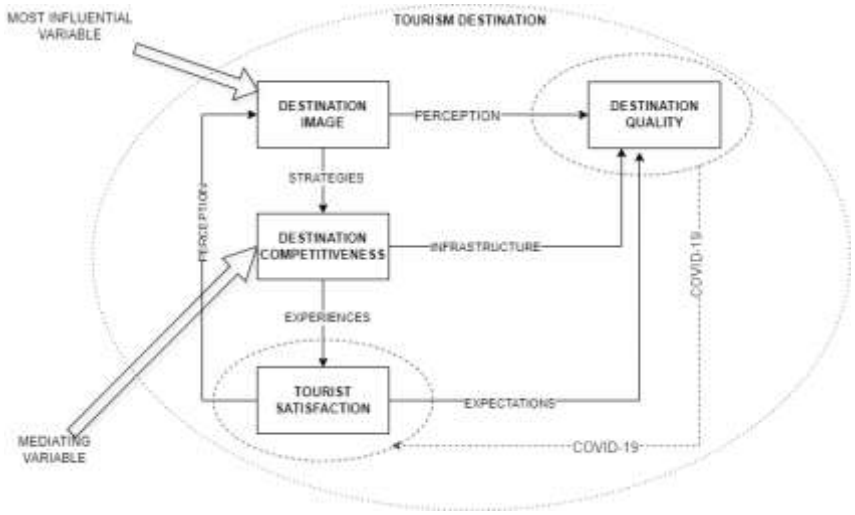


Figure 5. Model of Correlations between Variables - Source: Pereira, Almeida & Almeida (2025, p.16).

Despite the article's focus on tourism destination, destination competitiveness, and destination image, the findings highlight the strong theoretical interdependence among these variables. The results suggest that destination image and competitiveness function as

complementary strategic assets that contribute to destination attractiveness, positioning, and long-term sustainability.

5. Conclusion

This study utilised a bibliometric analysis of scientific publications between 2000 and 2023 to investigate three central variables in tourism literature (tourism destination, destination image and competitiveness). The objective of this analysis was to comprehend the interrelationships and implications for the sustainable development of destinations. Utilising a mixed approach (quantitative and qualitative), it was possible to map patterns of scientific production, identify authors and institutions of reference, and highlight relevant theoretical gaps.

The findings indicate that destination image occupies a strategic position in the relationship between destination attractiveness and competitiveness, exerting a direct influence on quality perceptions and visitor loyalty. The degree of competitiveness of a destination is contingent upon its capacity to project a unified image and provide experiences that align with tourists' expectations. The integrated analysis of these variables indicates a complex relational structure that necessitates holistic approaches to territorial management.

The primary theoretical contribution of this study lies in highlighting the interdependence between destination image, destination competitiveness and tourism destination, reinforcing the need for integrated analytical models that overcome fragmented approaches. The findings indicate that strategic management of image and competitiveness can generate positive impacts on the quality of life of local communities by promoting more sustainable and culturally valued destinations. From a pragmatic standpoint, insights from this study can be utilised by public managers and tourism agents to align their territorial marketing strategies with the factors influencing attractiveness and loyalty.

A key limitation is the exclusive use of the Scopus database, which may restrict the scope of the analysis by excluding other pertinent sources. For future research, we propose the integration of complementary databases (e.g. Web of Science and B-On), as well as the utilisation of advanced statistical models to explore causal relationships between variables. Furthermore, it would be pertinent to investigate new emerging variables such as digital reputation, immersive experience and perceived sustainability, thus broadening the analytical scope to contemporary smart tourism contexts.

The conclusion drawn from this analysis is that destination image and competitiveness function as strategic assets within tourism destinations, providing an important foundation for sustainable territorial development. By offering a critical and integrated reading of scientific production, the article contributes to the theoretical advancement of the area and to the formulation of more effective practices in the management of tourism destinations. The value of the system lies in its capacity to transform bibliometric data into strategic inputs for science, public policy and the global tourism market.

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