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## Identification and Ranking of Factors Affecting the Tourism Industry in Afghanistan

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# Identification and Ranking of Factors Affecting the Tourism Industry in Afghanistan

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## Abstract

*Tourism is a key driver of economic, cultural, and social development worldwide. Afghanistan, endowed with rich historical, natural, and cultural resources, holds substantial potential for tourism growth. However, persistent security challenges, infrastructural gaps, and institutional fragilities impede sector development. This study employs a rigorous mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analyses, to identify and prioritize critical factors influencing tourism development in Afghanistan. Findings reveal that security is the fundamental prerequisite for sustainable tourism, supporting all other developmental aspects. Alongside, improvements in transport infrastructure, destination management, targeted marketing, and enhancement of financial and communication systems are essential for creating positive tourist experiences and fostering sector resilience. The study recommends that policymakers prioritize securing tourists' physical and financial safety, invest strategically in infrastructure and institutional capacity, and advance diplomatic relations and visa facilitation. Moreover, active local community involvement in resource preservation and service quality enhancement is vital to converting Afghanistan's latent tourism potential into concrete socio-economic benefits.*

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, Factors Affecting Tourism, Tourism Development, Tourism Industry

## 1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, the tourism industry is recognized as one of the driving forces of the global economy and a catalyst for social, cultural, and political transformation in many countries. With its multifaceted capacities, this industry has not only contributed significantly to the gross domestic product (GDP) of both developed and developing nations but has also emerged as a key strategy for poverty alleviation, sustainable employment generation, strengthening social capital, and enhancing intercultural interactions (Garg, 2025; Mihajlovic & Colovic, 2021). In this context, the roles of governments, local institutions, and the private sector are critical in developing tourism infrastructure, preserving cultural and natural heritage, and enhancing the quality of tourism services.

Furthermore, advancements in communication and transportation technologies, improved accessibility to tourist destinations, and the diversification of travel experiences have provided new opportunities for the expansion of the tourism sector (Lisovska et al., 2025; Al-Sharif et al., 2024). Given the positive impacts of tourism on

economic growth and social cohesion, many countries have placed it at the centre of their development policies and have sought to leverage their competitive advantages to gain a stronger position in the global tourism market.

Nevertheless, the realization of tourism's full potential is not possible without the existence of appropriate structural, institutional, and managerial conditions (Rahman et al., 2024). The tourism industry functions as a complex and interactive system in which multiple components—such as security, physical and digital infrastructure, accommodation and transportation services, skilled human resources, supportive government policies, marketing systems, public awareness, and the capacity to attract domestic and foreign investment—operate synergistically. Any deficiency or inefficiency in one of these elements can lead to the failure of the entire system to achieve its developmental goals (Soeswoyo et al., 2019; Kurdashvili & Meskhia, 2016). Therefore, sustainable tourism development requires a systematic and integrated approach that identifies key influencing factors and proposes targeted policies tailored to the economic, social, and cultural contexts of each country.

Afghanistan, with its rich historical and civilizational background, vast climatic and cultural diversity, and pristine natural landscapes, possesses exceptional potential for the development of its tourism industry. The presence of unique historical monuments such as the Buddhas of Bamiyan, remnants of ancient civilizations in Herat, Ghazni, and Balkh, natural attractions like the Wakhan Corridor, Band-e Amir, and the Pamirs, and the diversity of cultures make Afghanistan a potentially attractive destination at both regional and international levels (Stanikzai & Hamdard, 2024; Mazloun Yar & Yasoori, 2023).

However, the current reality shows that these capacities have never been systematically or sustainably utilized due to a range of structural and environmental challenges—including political insecurity, poor infrastructure, the absence of a comprehensive tourism education system, lack of legal and institutional frameworks, and limited communication and marketing capabilities (Franklin et al., 2024; Stanikzai & Hamdard, 2024). This situation has resulted in Afghanistan capturing only a minimal share of the global tourism market and missing valuable opportunities for job creation, income generation, cultural diplomacy, and diversification of its national economy.

Hence, there is an urgent need for a scientific and comprehensive analysis to identify and prioritize the key factors that can enhance the tourism industry in Afghanistan. This study aims to systematically and evidence-based explore the multiple dimensions of this issue and identify and rank the most influential components that can contribute to the sector's development, utilising well-established analytical tools. In line with the study's objectives, the following fundamental research questions are posed:

1. What are the key factors influencing the enhancement of the tourism industry in Afghanistan?
2. How can these factors be prioritized based on their impact and strategic importance?

Structurally, this paper is organized into six sections. Section 2 presents the theoretical framework, while Section 3 reviews the related literature. Section four outlines the research methodology. Section five estimates the econometric model and examines the findings, and section six concludes the study and offers recommendations based on the results.

## **2. Literature Review**

Pagliara (2025) conducted a mixed-methods study aimed at identifying the key factors contributing to the success of tourism destinations. The findings revealed that destination awareness, attractiveness, accommodation facilities, and access to amenities significantly enhance destination performance. Tunjungsari et al. (2024) explored the determinants of

tourism development in Indonesia, concluding that environmental sustainability and stakeholder collaboration—especially in high-priority tourism areas—are crucial. Hiep Nguyen et al. (2024) used both qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine the factors influencing destination choice among tourists in Ho Chi Minh City. Their results highlighted that the destination image exerts the strongest direct effect on tourists' decision-making, while travel motivations and information sources also have substantial indirect effects. Jamini et al. (2024) conducted a study aimed at identifying the challenges and strategies for developing tourism in selected rural settlements across the provinces of Kurdistan, Kermanshah, and Hamedan. The results indicated that the most significant challenges, in order of severity, include weak promotional activities, limited tourism accommodations, poor local management, inadequate transport infrastructure, administrative constraints, a lack of knowledge and financial capacity, weak marketing, limited destination diversity, cultural and security issues, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure.

Arumugam et al. (2023) investigated the growth of cultural and heritage tourism and the role of World Heritage Sites in promoting it. Their study found that brand value, destination reputation, and tourist experience are essential drivers of heritage tourism success. Soleimani et al. (2023) investigated the factors that influence the creation of memorable tourist experiences in rural destinations of Razavi Khorasan Province. Their findings revealed eight factors contributing to positive, memorable experiences, with "authenticity and credibility" being the most influential. Conversely, two factors contributed to negative experiences, with "poor environmental management" being the most significant. Rheeders (2022) identified five critical factors affecting tourism development through a comprehensive literature review and expert consultations in academia and industry: natural resources and strategic location, safety and security, accommodation facilities, historical and cultural resources, and transport infrastructure. Askari and Hasani (2022) conducted an applied descriptive-analytical study using the DEMATEL and ANP techniques to identify the key factors affecting tourism in Nishapur County. Their results revealed that socio-demographic factors and tourism attractions were the most significant influences on the region's tourism development.

Khan et al. (2020) examined the role of the tourism industry in global development and its relationship with global economic growth. They highlighted both positive and negative factors affecting tourism, such as culture, peace, security, infrastructure, visa facilities, natural beauty, public attitudes, tourist numbers, population, education, income, commodity prices, and hotel costs. Asadi et al. (2020) conducted a study to identify and analyze the components of children's tourism development from the perspective of cultural, infrastructural, and visual characteristics of the destination. The findings indicated that five variables played a critical role in children's tourism development: the physical appearance of the destination, socio-cultural variables, technological facilities, social events, and physical infrastructure. Imani and Razavi (2020) employed a future studies approach to investigate the drivers shaping the future of sustainable tourism. Their findings indicated that key factors, such as improved security, unique and diverse tourist attractions, effective marketing efforts, transportation development, private sector investment, participation, and social cohesion, were of paramount importance. Proper attention to and control of these elements could ensure sustainable tourism development.

Fakhar Hosseini and Issazadeh Roshan (2019) used a hybrid MCDM approach to examine the factors contributing to competitiveness in Iran's tourism industry. Their findings highlighted the importance of improving tourism destination quality, supportive policies and legislation, and enhancing the performance of human resources in boosting tourism competitiveness. Yusendra and Paramitasari (2018) analyzed domestic tourist satisfaction in Indonesia, identifying natural beauty as the most influential factor, followed by artificial attractions, cost, and cleanliness of amenities and the environment. Marwat et al. (2018) used panel data methods to identify the factors influencing foreign tourism demand. Their study concluded that elements related to the business

environment and infrastructure (e.g., air, land, and sea transportation), security (e.g., terrorism-related costs, police services, crime rates), cultural and natural resources (e.g., cultural heritage, national parks), and price competitiveness indicators (e.g., ticket taxes, purchasing power parity, energy prices, taxation) had significant impacts on attracting international tourists. Enhancing these factors could lead to increased international tourism inflows.

Barkauskas et al. (2015) conducted a study on macro-environmental factors influencing the development of rural tourism. Their results underscored the importance of economic (e.g., average GDP, investment, government spending), social (e.g., demography, migration, traditions), natural (e.g., environment, geography, climate), political/legal (e.g., political stability, strategic development policies, tourism regulations), and technological (e.g., ICT, innovation) variables. Khalesi Ardakani (2014) applied multi-criteria decision-making techniques to rank tourism development factors in Yazd, Iran. The study revealed that geographic location, transportation, accessibility, and awareness of historical attractions were the most critical contributors.

Assaf and Josiassen (2012) aimed to identify and rank the determinants of tourism performance. Negative factors included crime rate, high fuel prices, hotel price indices, stringent visa policies, corruption, unemployment, expensive flights, and the prevalence of diseases such as AIDS. On the positive side, strict environmental protection laws, a service-oriented public mindset, high GDP per capita, quality air services, a dense airline network, export-oriented creative industries, and well-trained tourism personnel were key enablers.

A systematic review of both domestic and international tourism literature reveals that most prior studies have been either regionally confined or conducted within countries possessing advanced tourism infrastructures. Consequently, their findings and conceptual frameworks lack generalizability to fragile, transitional countries such as Afghanistan. Addressing this gap, the present study adopts a problem-oriented and localised approach to identify and prioritise a comprehensive set of key factors influencing the enhancement of the tourism industry at the national level within a context marked by structural limitations, institutional weaknesses, and security complexities. The scholarly contribution of this research lies not only in filling a significant conceptual void in the extant literature but also in its methodological innovation through the simultaneous application of mixed methods (integrating qualitative and quantitative data) alongside multi-criteria decision-making techniques to analyze and rank the factors. This methodological synergy enables the derivation of strategic, context-specific, and robust findings that provide a scientifically grounded basis for the formulation of sustainable tourism development policies in Afghanistan and other countries facing similar conditions.

### **3. Empirical Evidence**

#### *3.1 The Concept of Tourism*

Tourism, as a comprehensive and multi-dimensional domain, has been extensively examined in international academic research from both theoretical and practical perspectives. According to the definition provided by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), tourism encompasses a set of activities undertaken by individuals who travel to destinations outside their usual environment for specific purposes such as leisure, business, or personal affairs. These trips must last less than one year and must not involve employment or permanent residence at the destination. This definition—which emphasizes three key features: temporariness, voluntariness, and non-involvement in local employment—is widely used in global policy frameworks and statistical systems (Sihombing et al., 2024).

However, recent research suggests that defining tourism solely in statistical terms is insufficient. More specialized theoretical frameworks are needed. From an economic

perspective, tourism is considered a subset of the service sector, playing a significant role in economic growth through direct consumption, value-added generation, increased foreign exchange earnings, and the stimulation of investment (Aida et al., 2024). From a sociological standpoint, tourism is seen as a modern and representational act that facilitates experiential engagement, escape from daily routines, and the redefinition of individual and collective identities (Jason Zhou, 2024). Therefore, no single definition can fully capture the theoretical and functional dimensions of tourism unless approached through a holistic analytical lens that considers the interaction between human agency, institutional structures, and economic flows.

Given its extensive potential, tourism can play a crucial role in job creation, income diversification, infrastructure development, the preservation of cultural and natural heritage, and the enhancement of social capital (Aminuddin & Jamal, 2024). In developing countries, tourism serves as a vital instrument for poverty alleviation. However, the effective utilization of these capacities requires comprehensive planning, targeted policy-making, and the development of related infrastructure. This entails training a skilled workforce, leveraging advanced technologies, and fostering collaboration among public, private, and local community sectors. Additionally, adherence to the principles of sustainable and responsible tourism contributes to the preservation of resources for future generations, the satisfaction of tourists and host communities, and the strengthening of intercultural exchanges (Murtyana, 2025).

Tourism is not merely an economic industry; it also serves as a platform for cultural exchange and mutual learning. It can contribute to reducing social tensions, promoting peace, and enhancing national cohesion. In this regard, the development of tourism must take into account the unique cultural, geographical, and local characteristics of each region. Global best practices demonstrate that uniform policy approaches and disregard for local diversity can reduce the efficiency of tourism development and, in some cases, result in the degradation of natural and cultural resources (Oyenka & Agon, 2025). Therefore, participatory and community-based approaches should be prioritized, placing local capacities at the forefront of development strategies.

Ultimately, sustainable tourism can play a crucial role in achieving inclusive and equitable sustainable development. By accurately identifying the capacities and constraints of each region and formulating flexible policies tailored to local conditions, tourism can be transformed into a sustainable competitive advantage—one that not only drives economic growth but also contributes to cultural, social, and environmental empowerment. Within this framework, the active participation of local communities and the enhancement of place attachment are key success factors in the implementation of tourism development strategies.

### *3.2 Factors Affecting the Tourism Industry*

The tourism industry, as one of the primary drivers of the global economy, has in recent years surpassed its traditional role as a recreational activity and has been increasingly recognised as a vital contributor to economic development, cultural exchange, and the enhancement of international relations (Garg, 2025). A review of theoretical and empirical literature indicates that the development of this industry is strongly influenced by a set of multi-dimensional factors operating at both macro and micro levels (He et al., 2024). For a deeper understanding of the mechanisms influencing tourism, these factors are typically analyzed across economic, political, cultural, infrastructural, technological, and environmental dimensions (Machado et al., 2024). In this context, recognizing the interconnections among these dimensions and their impact on the behaviour of various tourism stakeholders plays a crucial role in formulating effective policies and strategies for the sustainable development of the tourism sector.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that indicators such as per capita income, price stability, exchange rates, and the level of public investment have a direct impact on the

supply and demand of tourism services (Wahidin et al., 2022). An increase in real income enhances tourists' financial capability, particularly among the middle class, and strengthens travel motivation (Struwig & Du Preez, 2024). Conversely, the depreciation of a country's currency can boost inbound tourism by increasing the purchasing power of foreign tourists (Tung & Thang, 2022). Furthermore, tourism itself can contribute to sustainable economic growth through job creation, stimulation of domestic demand, and the expansion of related industries (Vazquez et al., 2021). Overall, it can be concluded that there is a reciprocal and reinforcing relationship between macroeconomic indicators and tourism development: economic improvement stimulates tourism, and tourism growth, in turn, enhances economic performance.

In addition to economic factors, political stability and the quality of governance significantly influence tourists' decision-making processes. Based on the principles of New Institutionalism, political stability and good governance function as mediating factors in creating a predictable, secure, and trustworthy environment for tourists. The existence of transparent, accountable institutions operating under the rule of law reduces tourists' perceived uncertainty, improves destination image, and enhances competitiveness in international markets (Gaberli et al., 2022; Al-Tal & Elheddad, 2023). Furthermore, effective institutional frameworks facilitate the attraction of private investment into the tourism sector by ensuring the predictability of returns and protecting property rights (Ibitoye & Kleynhans, 2024). In addition, according to risk management theories in tourism, political stability plays a direct role in shaping destination safety—one of the key determinants of tourists' decisions. In the absence of such stability, even the most culturally or naturally attractive destinations may be excluded from consideration (Talukder & Lina, 2025). Therefore, good governance and political stability are not only prerequisites for tourism development but are also foundational to achieving sustainability, destination resilience, and social cohesion between host communities and visitors.

Cultural and social factors, particularly the unique tangible and intangible heritage of local communities, play a key role in creating competitive advantages for tourism destinations. Culture, rituals, language, art, and local lifestyles are recognized as core components of cultural tourism experiences, which appeal to culturally motivated travellers (Gocer et al., 2024). These experiences not only enhance tourist satisfaction but also serve as a tool for the economic empowerment of host communities through the development of creative industries (Sapkota, 2024). However, if the economic exploitation of local culture occurs without considering its social and cultural capacities, it may lead to identity loss and cultural degradation (Luo, 2022). Therefore, tourism policy-making must strike a delicate balance between preserving cultural heritage and promoting economic interests. Achieving this balance requires a comprehensive approach that simultaneously supports sustainable development and cultural authenticity—particularly through intelligent cultural resource management and active community participation in decision-making processes.

To fully realize the economic and cultural benefits of tourism, the existence of adequate physical infrastructure—such as transport networks, standard accommodations, urban public services, and health facilities—is essential. These elements form the primary foundation upon which tourist experiences are shaped and enhanced, ensuring their satisfaction (Farhadi Uonaki & Imani Khoshkhoo, 2022). In the absence of such infrastructure, even the most attractive natural and cultural sites may fail to attract tourists due to limited accessibility and low service quality (Andrei Corbos et al., 2024). From the perspective of spatial development theories, infrastructure is not only a means of enhancing destination performance but also a key tool for redistributing economic benefits and ensuring equitable access to development opportunities (Voinova & Chuvatkin, 2025). In this regard, countries that have successfully attracted international tourists have often adopted coordinated and sustainable approaches that integrate infrastructural development with environmental, social, and cultural considerations (Amit Pachauri, 2024). Accordingly, investment in tourism infrastructure is not merely a

technical requirement but a strategic component of broader plans for achieving sustainability, spatial justice, and enhanced tourism quality.

Environmental factors play a dual role in the development and enhancement of tourism, simultaneously offering both opportunities and risks. On the one hand, pristine nature, biodiversity, favourable climate, and scenic landscapes are among the most important tourist attractions, contributing to enhanced visitor experiences, increased return intentions, and stronger destination branding. On the other hand, when tourism pressure exceeds the environmental carrying capacity of destinations, it may result in adverse consequences such as ecosystem degradation, natural resource pollution, soil erosion, and biodiversity loss—threatening not only environmental sustainability but also the long-term competitiveness of tourism (Tsytko, 2024; Baloch et al., 2022). Therefore, the environmental effects of tourism are highly dependent on how the sector is managed and governed. Intelligent and sustainable use of environmental capacities is essential for turning them into long-term competitive advantages.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Scope of the Study

Afghanistan, a mountainous country in the heart of Asia, possesses vast potential for the development of the tourism industry due to its climatic, geographical, and cultural diversity. Its strategic location at the crossroads of major civilizations in Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East has made it one of the region's most significant historical and cultural hubs. With an area of approximately 652,000 square kilometres and an average elevation exceeding 2,500 meters above sea level, Afghanistan encompasses a diverse range of climates, including mountainous, temperate, and arid zones. Geographically, it lies between 29° and 38° north latitude and 60° to 75° east longitude. This climatic diversity allows for the experience of four distinct seasons, characterised by hot and dry conditions in the southwest and cold, mountainous climates in the north and central regions. Such geographical and climatic variation, coupled with the country's rich natural, historical, and cultural attractions, creates significant opportunities for national tourism development (Azimi, 2012).

With a history spanning several millennia and a unique geographical position, Afghanistan is one of the region's richest countries in terms of cultural and natural heritage. It hosts a wide array of ancient monuments, each representing a distinct era of great Asian civilizations. Among these, the remnants of the Bamiyan Buddhas—once the tallest standing Buddha statues in the world—hold special significance. Other notable heritage sites include the Minaret of Jam, the ancient city of Balkh—known as the “Mother of Cities,” the Citadel of Ghazni, the historic fortresses of Herat, and numerous shrines and ancient mosques scattered across the country, all reflecting the rich cultural diversity of this land (Naemi, 2019).

Moreover, Afghanistan's natural landscape offers a breathtaking display of ecological diversity. Pristine high-altitude lakes such as Band-e Amir—Afghanistan's first national park, composed of six crystal-clear lakes with stunning hues—stand as a testament to the country's natural wonders. The towering Baba, Hindu Kush, and Pamir mountain ranges, thermal springs, virgin forests of Nuristan, lush valleys of Panjshir and Kunar, and elevated plateaus in the central and northeastern regions make Afghanistan an unexplored paradise for nature lovers and adventure tourists. This mesmerizing intersection of history and nature provides a valuable foundation for a flourishing tourism industry—one that, under prudent policy-making, could evolve into a cornerstone of the country's economic, cultural, and social development (Safi et al., 2024).

Accordingly, this study encompasses the entire geographical territory of Afghanistan as its scope of analysis. It aims to identify and prioritise the key factors contributing to the advancement of the tourism industry in the country based on expert perspectives.



## 4.2 Materials and Methods

This study is classified as applied research in terms of its objective, and it employs a mixed-methods approach (qualitative-quantitative) from a methodological perspective. The underlying logic of the research is inductive, and it adopts an exploratory strategy to identify and prioritize the key factors influencing the development of the tourism industry in Afghanistan.

In the qualitative phase of the study, semi-structured interviews were employed to identify the key factors influencing the development of the tourism industry. Participants in this phase included ten experts in the field of tourism and policy-making managers, who were selected purposefully through snowball sampling. The selection was based on criteria such as expertise, professional experience, and comprehensive knowledge of Afghanistan's tourism industry. In this study, the snowball sampling process began with the identification of three key informants who were selected based on academic criteria, including relevant research background, executive experience in the tourism sector, and operational involvement in high-level policy-making. These initial participants then purposefully referred other individuals with similar or complementary expertise. To ensure diversity within the sample, efforts were made to include individuals from a range of professional domains, educational levels, and geographic regions. This approach not only enhanced the external validity of the research but also significantly enriched the qualitative data. Furthermore, the principle of theoretical saturation was adopted as the threshold for concluding the sampling process.

In the quantitative phase, a structured questionnaire with closed-ended questions based on a five-point Likert scale was used to rank the identified factors. The statistical population in this phase consisted of seventeen tourism professionals, also selected via snowball sampling. The data obtained from the questionnaires were used for analysis and prioritization of the factors.

To ensure the validity of the research instruments, the content validity of the interview protocol was reviewed and confirmed by tourism experts. For the reliability of qualitative data, a double-coding method was employed by two independent analysts. The high level of inter-coder agreement confirmed the trustworthiness of the data. Additionally, the reliability of the questionnaire was assessed through Cronbach's alpha coefficient, with results presented in Table 1 indicating acceptable internal consistency.

To evaluate the significance and prioritize the identified factors, a multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM) method was applied using TOPSIS software. This technique, by comparing the alternatives based on their distance from the positive ideal solution, ensures the precision and reliability of the quantitative analysis and provides robust findings to support tourism policy-making.

**Table 1**  
Results of Cronbah's Alpha for Reliability Assessment

Index	Number of Questions	Sample Size	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient
Security and Political Dimension	6	17	0.88
Tourism Industry Dimension	11	17	0.82
Destination Dimension	9	17	0.85
All	26	17	0.86

Source: Authors' Findings

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Demographic Information

The demographic composition of the study participants was intentionally designed to encompass a diverse and specialized range of perspectives across both the interview and questionnaire phases. In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 experts, including 5 executive managers in the tourism sector, 2 university faculty members, and 3 policymakers and practitioners in the field. These participants were aged between 20 and 50 years and held academic qualifications ranging from bachelor's and master's degrees to doctorates. This diversity in age, educational background, and professional role enabled the collection of rich, multilayered qualitative data.

In the quantitative phase, efforts were made to maintain this structural diversity by gathering data from 17 respondents, comprising 9 tourism sector managers, 3 university faculty members, and 5 active policymakers and practitioners. The respondents' academic levels similarly spanned from undergraduate to doctoral degrees, with an age distribution comparable to that of the interviewees. This balanced sampling framework enhances the generalizability of the findings and strengthens the reliability of the research results. By incorporating managerial, academic, and policy-oriented perspectives, the study achieved a more comprehensive analysis of the tourism sector's conditions and challenges.

**Table 2**

*Demographic Information*

Demographic of Characteristics of Interview Participants							
Age	Frequency	Education	Frequency	Job	Frequency	Area of Expertise	Average Work Experience (Years)
20 – 30	2	Bachelor's	1	Tourism Managers	5	Cultural and Heritage Resource Management; Conservation, Restoration, and Planning of Historic Sites; Cultural Tourism Management	8
30 – 40	4	Master's	5	Professors	2	Field of Tourism	10
40 – 50	4	PHD	4	Tourism Practitioners and Policymakers	3	Tourism Project Experts and Managers	12
Demographic of Characteristics of Questionnaire Respondents							
Age	Frequency	Education	Frequency	Job	Frequency	Area of Expertise	Average Work Experience (Years)
20 – 30	5	Bachelor's	4	Tourism Managers	9	Cultural and Heritage Resource Management; Conservation, Restoration, and Planning	9

30						of Historic Sites; Cultural Tourism Management		
-	8	Master's	9	Professors	3	Field of Tourism	9	
40				Tourism Practitioners and Policymakers		Tourism Project Experts and Managers		
40	4	PHD	4		5		11	
-								
50								

Source: Authors' Findings

## 5.2 Identifying Factors Affecting Tourism Development in Afghanistan

In Table 3, the results of the systematic identification and analysis of the factors influencing the promotion of the tourism industry in Afghanistan are presented. This Table presents empirical analyses based on field data, processed using advanced statistical methods, aimed at identifying and explaining the impact of various components on the country's sustainable tourism development. The results obtained from this analysis are structured and examined in three main categories: first, factors related to security and political frameworks that provide the foundation of trust and stability for tourism development; second, components related to the tourism industry, including policy-making, investments, and institutional capacities; and third, factors related to the tourism destination, which impact the quality of services, local infrastructure, and tourist experiences.

**Table 3**

Critical Factors Influencing the Advancement of Tourism in Afghanistan

Main Components	Critical Factors Influencing the Advancement of Tourism in Afghanistan	Conceptual Code
Security and Political Dimension	Personal and Financial Security	✓ No tourist will travel without basic safety.
		✓ Investors are scared due to insecurity.
	Economic Policies	✓ Tourism is ignored in economic planning.
		✓ There are no targeted support programs.
	Political Relations with Other Countries	✓ The lack of foreign ties blocks tourism.
	Environmental Laws and Regulations	✓ Eco lows hinder infrastructure projects.
	Policy-makers' Belief in the Benefits of Tourism	✓ Decision makers don't take tourism seriously.
		✓ They see tourism as a luxury, not a necessity.
Tourism Industry Dimension	Regulation and Oversight of Tourism Activities	✓ Tourism runs without proper oversight.
		✓ Standards are ignored, no accountability.
	Destination Management	✓ We lack structured destination management systems.
		✓ No one coordinates how to brand or operate a site.

Destination Dimension	Institutional Coordination and Collaboration	✓ Each ministry has its fragmented agenda.
	Development of Strategic Tourism Plans	✓ Agencies operate in silos, not in synergy.
	Media and Public Communication Activities	✓ There's no long-term tourism strategy.
	Skilled Human Resources	✓ Tourism is rarely featured in national media.
	Transportation Systems	✓ We need language and hospitality skills urgently.
	Accommodation Facilities and Hotels	✓ Tourists can't reach key sites easily.
	Healthcare Centers and Medical Services	✓ Good hotels are scarce outside major cities.
	Telecommunication and Internet Facilities	✓ There's no health coverage for tourists.
	Banking Services and Financial Infrastructure	✓ The Internet is weak and often unavailable.
	Cost of Services	✓ There's no friendly financial infrastructure.
	Natural Attractions	✓ Prices are inconsistent and unregulated.
	Historical Attractions	✓ We have untouched nature, but access and promotion are lacking.
	Traditional Customs and Cultural Heritage of Local Communities	✓ Heritage sites exist but are poorly maintained.
	Organization of Festivals and Cultural Events	✓ Local culture should be turned into a tourism product.
	Hosting of Sports Competitions	✓ Festivals could attract tourists but lack planning.
	Man-Made (Artificial) Attractions	✓ Traditional sports are engaging but underpromoted.
	Culture of Hospitality	✓ Nature alone isn't enough; tourists want entertainment.
	Residents' Awareness of the Importance of Tourism	✓ Hosting tourists needs more professionalism.
	Instruction in International Languages	✓ Locals don't see tourism as an income source.
		✓ Lack of language skills hinders communication.

Source: Authors' Findings

As shown in Table (3), one of the key and fundamental factors in enhancing the tourism industry in Afghanistan is the components related to the security and political sector, which play a central role in providing institutional and social foundations for the growth of this industry. The physical and financial security of tourists, as a primary prerequisite, creates a foundation for a sustainable and satisfying travel experience, injecting a sense of assurance and tranquillity into their journey. This factor, by establishing stability in the destination, also facilitates the attraction of both domestic and foreign investments in the tourism industry. Furthermore, economic policies designed to support tourism

development can create a favourable ecosystem for the growth of small and medium-sized tourism enterprises through financial incentives, tax exemptions, and reduced bureaucracy. In addition, fostering political relations with countries around the world through facilitating visa issuance, expanding cultural and international interactions, and enhancing Afghanistan's international image helps establish sustainable inbound tourism flows. Environmental laws and regulations, as a complementary part of this structure, contribute to the long-term sustainability and attractiveness of tourism destinations by protecting natural and cultural resources. Moreover, policymakers' belief in the economic, cultural, and social potential of tourism plays a crucial role in shaping policies, securing resources, and solidifying tourism's position in the country's development plans. Finally, structured control and monitoring of tourism activities ensure the quality, authenticity, and sustainability of this industry in the face of potential executive challenges and anomalies. Therefore, security and political factors, both individually and in an internal and complementary connection with each other, form an essential and indispensable framework for the effective and sustainable development of tourism in Afghanistan.

In addition to the security and political factors that form the structural foundations for tourism development, the analysis of factors related to the tourism industry, as shown in Table (3), unveils the operational and executive dimensions of this process and demonstrates how the quality, coordination, and integration of the components of this industry can ensure the dynamism and competitiveness of Afghanistan's tourism sector. In this regard, destination management plays a central role in organising resources, defining the destination's identity, and directing tourism flows, thereby creating a coherent and purposeful experience for tourists. This is achieved through coordination and collaboration between various government and private institutions, particularly in policy-making, service delivery, and supervision, which enhances efficiency and reduces redundancy. In this context, the development of strategic tourism plans plays a crucial role in outlining a long-term vision, setting investment priorities, and aligning executive actions. Media activities, by promoting the country's potential, reshaping its image, and motivating potential tourists, create a meaningful link between the destination and target markets. These efforts take shape when skilled human resources in the tourism sector, equipped with knowledge, expertise, and a professional mindset, can offer high-quality and creative services. Physical infrastructure is also an indispensable part of an interconnected system of elements that together enable the development of the tourism industry. The existence of a safe and efficient transportation system, whether by land or air, facilitates access to the destination and promotes a balanced distribution of tourists across different regions. Suitable accommodation facilities, ranging from standard hotels to local lodgings, play a crucial role in enhancing the travel experience and ensuring tourist satisfaction. Health and medical centres ensure the safety and well-being of tourists, thereby increasing their sense of psychological security during the trip.

Furthermore, easy access to the internet, telecommunications services, and appropriate facilities for receiving banking services, such as money transfers, electronic payments, and the use of international credit cards, have become essential expectations for tourists in the digital age of tourism. Ultimately, the reasonable cost of tourism services not only influences tourists' decision-making but also serves as an indicator of efficiency, transparency, and fairness in service delivery. Therefore, effective coordination between these components will guarantee the sustainability and competitiveness of the tourism industry both nationally and internationally.

In addition to the security and political factors, as well as the tourism industry that form the structural and operational foundations of this industry's development, another fundamental dimension identified in this research is the tourism destination sector, which encompasses the nature, identity, and intrinsic attractions of travel, thereby giving meaning to the tourism experience. As shown in Table (3), this dimension consists of a set of natural, historical, cultural, and social components that, through interaction and synergy with each other, create the conditions for the attractiveness and distinctiveness

of the destination. Natural attractions, such as mountains, lakes, and pristine landscapes, alongside historical monuments and authentic architecture, provide a tangible foundation for showcasing the country's historical and aesthetic identity. These elements are not only visually significant but also play a central role in conveying a sense of authenticity and historical continuity to tourists. Simultaneously, the cultural and ritual expressions of the local people, including traditional attire, music, and social customs, enable tourists to engage with the living and dynamic aspects of the region's culture, thereby providing a deeper understanding of local lifestyles. Local festivals and sporting events also serve as dynamic, time-bound attractions with two main functions: on the one hand, they enrich the tourist experience, and on the other, they provide a platform for social and intercultural interaction between tourists and the host community. In addition to natural and cultural attractions, constructed spaces such as parks, museums, recreational centres, and other artificial attractions diversify the tourism options, catering to the various tastes of visitors. Moreover, the hospitality culture of the local inhabitants, which is reflected in their daily behaviour and interactions with tourists, is a vital factor in enhancing tourist satisfaction and fostering loyalty. This socio-cultural element, beyond official services, plays a significant role in the emotional and human experience of tourism. The local community's awareness of the importance and benefits of tourism is also a key component, facilitating the active participation of residents in the preservation of resources and enhancement of service quality. Ultimately, the teaching of international languages, particularly in destination communities, plays a vital role in enhancing communication and intercultural interaction, thereby significantly contributing to a more enriching tourism experience.

### *5.3 Ranking the Factors Influencing the Development of Afghanistan's Tourism Industry*

In Table (4), the results of ranking the factors influencing the enhancement of tourism in Afghanistan are presented. This Table shows that various factors, with differing levels of importance, have been prioritized in three key areas: security and politics, tourism industry infrastructure, and destination characteristics.

**Table 4**

*Ranking the Factors Influencing the Development of Afghanistan's Tourism Industry*

No	Factors	Score	Rank
1	Personal and Financial Security	0.984	1
2	Economic Policies	0.428	13
3	Political Relations with Other Countries	0.804	5
4	Environmental Laws and Regulations	0.375	16
5	Policy-makers' Belief in the Benefits of Tourism	0.360	17
6	Regulation and Oversight of Tourism Activities	0.440	12
7	Destination Management	0.842	3
8	Institutional Coordination and Collaboration	0.533	9
9	Development of Strategic Tourism Plans	0.822	4
10	Media and Public Communication Activities	0.692	7
11	Skilled Human Resources	0.392	15
12	Transportation Systems	0.861	2
13	Accommodation Facilities and Hotels	0.517	10
14	Healthcare Centers and Medical Services	0.355	18
15	Telecommunication and Internet Facilities	0.126	26
16	Banking Services and Financial Infrastructure	0.236	22
17	Cost of Services	0.219	23
18	Natural Attractions	0.701	6
19	Historical Attractions	0.680	8
20	Traditional Customs and Cultural Heritage of Local Communities	0.403	14
21	Organization of Festivals and Cultural Events	0.482	11

22	Hosting of Sports Competitions	0.333	19
23	Man-Made (Artificial) Attractions	0.325	20
24	Culture of Hospitality	0.268	21
25	Residents' Awareness of the Importance of Tourism	0.218	24
26	Instruction in International Languages	0.196	25

Source: Authors' Findings

The results of ranking the factors influencing the enhancement of Afghanistan's tourism industry, based on the data from Table (4), provide a clear reflection of the country's structural, institutional, and environmental realities within the tourism sector. As the data indicate, at the top of these priorities is the safety and financial security of tourists, which has received the highest score, with a significant margin over other factors. This highlights that in the fragile context of Afghanistan, security is not only a prerequisite for tourism development but also its existential condition. The existing theoretical literature on tourism emphasises this reality, asserting that in the absence of political and security stability, even the richest cultural and natural attractions will fail to attract and retain tourists. Therefore, it can be concluded that security is the driving force behind the transformation of tourism in Afghanistan.

In the second tier of priorities, factors with structural, managerial, and diplomatic dimensions, such as transportation infrastructure, integrated destination management, comprehensive tourism strategies, and foreign political relations, emerge as key pillars for the development of the tourism industry in Afghanistan. These factors, by creating connections between high-level policy-making and the micro-level experiences of tourists, facilitate the realization of integrated and sustainable development. According to tourism development literature, without proper infrastructure, a cohesive management system, and a clear strategic vision, the tourism process will remain stalled at the planning stage and lose its ability to progress to operational and competitive levels. Furthermore, constructive political relations with other countries play a crucial role in facilitating international interactions, gaining the trust of foreign tourists, and enhancing the destination's image. Therefore, targeted investment in these areas is an essential prerequisite for transitioning Afghanistan's tourism industry from its current limited potential to an active, competitive, and revenue-generating phase.

The third level of this analysis pertains to intermediary factors that play a facilitative and qualitative role in the tourism process. These include natural and historical attractions, media activities, accommodation and healthcare facilities, and institutional interactions. While Afghanistan boasts considerable climatic diversity and a rich historical heritage, the relatively moderate scores for these factors suggest weaknesses in purposeful utilization, professional marketing, and local community involvement. This situation suggests that the country's potential cultural and natural assets have not yet been fully leveraged as actual assets.

At the far end of the spectrum are factors that may initially appear less significant but, in practice, form the foundation for the tourist's interaction with the destination environment. These include international language education, banking and internet facilities, hospitality culture, and public awareness of the importance of tourism. The shortcomings in these factors in Afghanistan not only hinder the facilitation of communication between tourists and the host community but also weaken the overall destination image at the international level.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This research was conducted to identify and prioritise the factors that influence the enhancement of the tourism industry in Afghanistan, providing a systematic analysis of the political, managerial, infrastructural, and cultural dimensions to foster sustainable development in this sector. The results of this study suggest that enhancing tourism in Afghanistan requires a systematic and multi-dimensional approach in which security plays a fundamental role and serves as the foundation for development. Without political

and security stability, other efforts in the tourism sector will be futile. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Khan et al. (2020) and Rheeders (2022) on tourism development in countries ..., which also identifies security, infrastructure, and tourism diplomacy as three essential pillars of development.

Furthermore, managerial and structural factors, such as transportation infrastructure, destination management, and strategic tourism planning, are presented as the main pillars of development. Strengthening these factors will transform the country's cultural and natural potentials into competitive advantages. At the intermediate level, focusing on enhancing service quality, targeted marketing, and institutional collaboration can enrich the tourist experience. Additionally, elements such as hospitality culture, public awareness, international language education, and the development of communication and banking infrastructure, while seemingly less significant, play an undeniable infrastructural role in shaping a positive experience for tourists. Therefore, the future of Afghanistan's tourism industry hinges on the coordinated and synergistic interaction of all these elements, as well as the continuous commitment of the government, private sector, and local community to a sustainable and purposeful development model.

Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that policymakers and tourism industry officials focus initially on strengthening the physical and financial security of tourists, as this is the primary prerequisite for attracting and retaining tourists in Afghanistan. Additionally, steps should be taken to improve infrastructure, develop a secure and efficient transportation system, enhance destination management, and create comprehensive tourism strategies. In parallel, strengthening diplomatic relations and facilitating visa issuance, particularly internationally, can significantly assist in attracting foreign tourists. Furthermore, strengthening targeted marketing programs, leveraging the country's cultural and natural resources, and actively involving the local community in resource conservation and quality service enhancement can turn potential capacities into practical achievements. Finally, strengthening digital infrastructure, particularly in banking and internet services, and promoting a culture of hospitality within the local community are other essential measures that can significantly improve the tourist experience and facilitate interactions between tourists and hosts.

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