Original article

Procedure to evaluate the competitiveness of travel agencies of Osde Viajes Cuba

Procedimiento para evaluar la competitividad en agencias de viajes de la Osde Viajes Cuba

Procedimento para avaliar a competitividade das agências de viagens da Osde Viajes Cuba

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ABSTRACT

In a global scenario characterized by a deep economic recession and tourism among the most affected sectors, the competitiveness of the sector will depend on the performance of the enterprises that interact in each of the destinations. From the analysis of the Cuban enterprise environment, it was possible to identify that in the Higher Organization of Enterprise Management Viajes Cuba there is a need for the evaluation of the competitiveness of travel agencies and it is evident that there is a shortage of research in this regard. In response, the present research proposes as general objective: to elaborate a procedure that allows the evaluation of competitiveness in the agencies that integrate this organization. The methodology applied consists of four phases that combine different tools, methods and techniques for obtaining and processing information. This led to the following results: the research analyzed is limited in terms of the development of the competitive study, the proposed indicators and their approach. The established procedure will reflect the competitive situation of the travel agency under study and its dimensions in order to influence the most affected ones, while the aspects that make it up were evaluated as very adequate, according to the experts' criteria.

Translated from the original in Spanish

RESUMEN

En un escenario global caracterizado por una profunda recesión económica y el turismo entre los sectores más afectados, la competitividad del sector dependerá del desempeño de las empresas que interactúan en cada uno de los destinos. A partir del análisis del entorno empresarial cubano, se pudo identificar que en la Organización Superior de Dirección Empresarial Viajes Cuba existe la necesidad de la evaluación de la competitividad de las agencias de viajes y se evidencia la escasez de investigaciones al respecto. En respuesta, la presente investigación propone como objetivo general: elaborar un procedimiento que permita la evaluación de la competitividad en las agencias que integran dicha organización. La metodología aplicada consta de cuatro fases que conjugan diferentes herramientas, métodos y técnicas para la obtención y procesamiento de la información. Ello permitió llegar a los siguientes resultados: las investigaciones analizadas se encuentran limitadas en cuanto al desarrollo del estudio competitivo, los indicadores propuestos y su enfoque. El procedimiento establecido reflejará la situación competitiva de la agencia de viajes objeto de estudio y de sus dimensiones para poder incidir en las más afectadas, mientras que los aspectos que lo conforman fueron evaluados como muy adecuados, según criterios de los expertos.

Palabras clave: agencia de viajes; competitividad; evaluación; indicadores; procedimiento.

RESUMO

Em um cenário global caracterizado por uma profunda recessão econômica e com o turismo entre os setores mais afetados, a competitividade do setor dependerá do desempenho das empresas que interagem em cada um dos destinos. A partir da análise do ambiente empresarial cubano, foi possível identificar que, na Organização Superior de Gestão Empresarial Viajes Cuba, existe a necessidade de avaliar a competitividade das agências de viagens e há uma carência de pesquisas sobre o assunto. Em resposta, esta pesquisa propõe como objetivo geral: elaborar um procedimento que permita a avaliação da competitividade nas agências que compõem essa organização. A metodologia aplicada consiste em quatro fases que combinam diferentes ferramentas, métodos e técnicas para obter e processar informações. Isso levou aos seguintes resultados: a pesquisa analisada é limitada em

termos do desenvolvimento do estudo de competitividade, dos indicadores propostos e de sua abordagem. O procedimento estabelecido refletirá a situação competitiva da agência de viagens em estudo e suas dimensões para poder influenciar as mais afetadas, enquanto os aspectos que o compõem foram avaliados como muito adequados, de acordo com os critérios dos especialistas.

Palavras-chave: agência de viagens; competitividade; avaliação; indicadores; procedimento.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism in Cuba has played a leading role in the functioning of its economy, as well as in the international panorama. Authors such as Moreno Gil et al. (2020) have enunciated the diversity of criteria on the tourism phenomenon present in the open web, as well as the importance of conducting research linked to each of the elements of tourism management. This country has not been oblivious in recent years by the negative effects of the health crisis and economic prejudice, which have been numerous (Hernández Flores et al., 2021).

In this context, the term competitiveness has been introduced which, according to González and Mendieta (2009), when referring to competitiveness, alludes to one of the most commonly used concepts in economic theory in recent decades, but at the same time also one of the most controversial. Internationally, competitiveness is studied from two dimensions: the competitiveness of the destination and the competitiveness of organizations (Cabrera Martínez et al., 2011; Salazar Duque & Espinoza Muñoz, 2022).

The first of these dimensions, according to Gutiérrez and Reyes (2017), is when competitiveness is seen as the capacity of a destination to create and integrate products with added value, allowing it to sustain local resources and preserve its place in the market with respect to its competitors. Ortiz Martínez (2020) highlights it as a key element for comparison between destinations. While Porter (1985), quoted in Parra and Frías (2021), introduces a novel concept that was in line with his theories of founding competitiveness on the basis of the enterprise sector as the axis of competitive development. Within this dimension, it is also stated that the competitiveness of a enterprise or organization would be given by the combination of the forces that drive competition in the market where they operate.

Following the idea put forward by Krugman (1997, p. 123) that "it is not nations that compete, but companies", that is, a country is made competitive by the performance of the enterprises that make up its productive apparatus (Cabrera Martínez et al., 2011). It can be affirmed that the competitiveness of the tourism sector will depend on the performance of the enterprises that interact in each destination. Thus, it is necessary to analyze the competitive evaluation of tourism sector companies for the correct implementation of future strategies aimed at improving their competencies.

In the specific case of Cuba, a review on the web shows that there is insufficient research in the destination country on the elements that affect the competitiveness of both the destination and the organizations (Cruz Bracho et al., 2021). At the same time, there is a lack of procedures or tools to evaluate each of the components that can define this level of competitiveness in order to make comparisons with other destinations in the region and, therefore, design strategies to improve the country's situation in the international market.

Based on this and on the Cuban government's strategy to deepen university-industry relations, especially as regards science and innovation, a research program called: Competitive and Sustainable Development of the Cuban Tourism Product, was developed by the Faculty of Tourism at the University of Havana. This project responds to the Sector Program defined by the Ministry of Tourism (Mintur) and its goals are to improve the sector's results in the short and medium term.

This research responds to one of the objectives of this research project, which is related to the design of procedures to evaluate the competitiveness of the destination and the organizations that make up the Cuban tourism system, since Cuba does not have access to international organizations that have their own tools for this evaluation, such as the one presented by the World Economic Forum, which evaluates the travel and tourism competitiveness index for different countries in the world.

The aforementioned proposal is one of the main tools at the international level to identify, systematize and measure the determining factors and variables that condition the competitiveness of tourism destinations, taking into account the organizations that comprise them. Since 2007, and on a biennial basis, the World Economic Forum publishes this index with the purpose of measuring the results of public policies for the sustainable development of the tourism sector. The data used for the corresponding calculations are obtained from two fundamental sources: An Executive Opinion Survey and the data sources of official organizations with databases.

Translated from the original in Spanish

Among the sub-indices and pillars that represent key aspects for determining the level of competitiveness of tourist destinations and that are included in this index is the Tourism Enabling Environment, which in turn is made up of the enterprise environment, safety and security, as well as the development of new information and communication technologies. In this enterprise environment, travel agencies are found as intermediaries in the tourism distribution process.

Although the literature does not provide definitions for specific competitiveness in this type of entity, the authors, based on a theoretical analysis of definitions provided by 20 authors, state that competitiveness in travel agencies can be defined as: the capacity to create tourism products and/or services, in accordance with their functions, using a level of resources equal to or lower than those of their competitors and developing lasting competitive advantages in the long term.

It is important to point out that in the case of Cuba, within the structures of the Mintur is the Superior Organization of Enterprise Management (Osde) Viajes Cuba, made up of the travel agencies (AA.VV.): Havanatur S.A., Cubatur S.A., Cubanacán S.A. and Ecotur S.A. (Hernández Flores et al., 2020). These are the main receptive travel agencies in the country, subordinated to the Mintur and through which the largest number of visitors to the island is generated.

In the first stage of this research project, the authors set out to design a procedure that would allow the evaluation of competitiveness in the Osde Viajes Cuba AA.VV.

Based on the above and on the fact that Osde does not have a methodological and functional structure that allows it and its member agencies to evaluate the main competitive aspects in a general way, the objective of this research is to design a procedure for the evaluation of the competitiveness of the travel agencies that make up Osde Viajes Cuba.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodological trajectory of the present research is an adaptation made from different proposals present on the web, but adjusted to the context of the present research (Table 1).

Table 1. Methodological trajectory of the research

Phases	Stages	Methods, techniques and tools
Phase: 1 Analysis of the main limitations of competitiveness in the AA.VV.	Stage 1: Identification of the researches of greatest interest for the research.	• Bibliographic analysis • Historical-logical
	Stage 2: Characterize the research of interest	• Bibliographic analysis • Historical-logical
	Stage 3: State the limitations of the research.	• Inductive-deductive • Analytical-synthetic
Phase 2: Identification of the main competitiveness evaluation tools	Stage 1: Characterize the tools used to assess competitiveness in the AA.VV.	• Bibliographic analysis • Statistical analysis
	Stage 2: select the tools to be used in the procedure.	• Interviews • Comparative analysis
Phase 3: Elaboration of the procedure	Description of the procedure	• Modeling • System approach • Comparative analysis
Phase 4: Expert validation		• Expert Consultation Method

Source: Own elaboration

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The proposed procedure is contextualized in accordance with the characteristics of the AA.VV. and in order to evaluate the competitiveness of these agencies. It is structured in four phases, five stages and nine steps, describing how its application should be carried out, as shown below:

Phase 1: Analysis of the main limitations of competitiveness in the AA.VV.

The theoretical study of competitiveness takes for granted its importance for the development of the enterprise sector due to its contribution to the productive and management improvement of any entity. In tourism, such improvement is vital for sustainability, so that competitive studies play a fundamental role.

Stage 1: Identification of the research of greatest interest to this research

In the bibliometric study carried out by Armstrong and Vázquez (2022), the presence of the topic of competitiveness in AA.VV. was found in 11 research studies, which separated by topics addressed in them, were summarized in two, which had a methodology for their study, which were taken as the methodological basis for the development of the procedure. These were: López (2001) and Bigné et al. (2008).

Stage 2: Characterization of the research of interest

- López (2001): This research has as its theme the study of the conditioning factors of the competitive advantage and results of the AA.VV. in Spain. In this study, the six main key factors that determine the success of AA.VV. in Spain were determined. It was also determined that the use of these factors does not make a significant difference between the different types of agencies (outbound, inbound and tour operators). The study showed that the competitive advantage of Spanish AA.VV. is based on the resource and capability approach rather than the structural approach.

- Bigné et al. (2008): The paper analyzes the effects of market orientation in a twofold way: on the one hand, it studies the effects of market orientation on performance and, on the other hand, it measures the effects of market orientation on basic indicators of competitiveness. In turn, the effects of the different dimensions of market orientation on various measures of enterprise performance have been considered. The results obtained in the sector of the AA.VV.

confirm the existence of an indirect relationship between market orientation and performance, through its contribution to the basic indicators of competitiveness. It has also been found that the dimensions of market orientation have different influences on performance, so that not all of them have a positive effect.

Stage 3: Present the limitations of the research

Table 2 shows the main research limitations detected by the author in the research of interest to him.

Table 2. Research limitations

Author	Limitations
López (2001)	Development of the competitive study based on a self-evaluative survey to the managers of the AA.VV. of study.
	The research focuses on the determination of key success factors for the AA.VV. rather than on the procedure for evaluating these factors in the agencies.
	Competitiveness is not defined in the AA.VV.
Bigné et al. (2008)	The proposed indicators are focused only on market orientation, thus leaving out of the evaluation fundamental aspects of the internal enterprise order that also determine the competitiveness of the AA.VV.
	Determines that market orientation has a positive effect on the AA.VV. but does not determine its competitiveness, thus demonstrating the need for more evaluation indicators.
	Competitiveness is not defined in the AA.VV.

Source: Own elaboration

Phase 2: Identification of the main tools for assessing competitiveness in the AA.VV.

Stage 1: Characterize the tools used to assess competitiveness in the AA.VV.

From the analysis of the empirical studies in the three proposals that complied with the greatest number of indicators under which the research was evaluated, and also contained proposals for indicators and methodologies for the study of competitiveness in the AA.VV., the following were used as the main evaluation tools: bibliographic analysis, application of the SWOT matrix, surveys and interviews with AA.VV. managers and consultation with experts.

Stage 2: Selecting the tools to be used in the procedure

After analyzing the main tools for analyzing competitiveness in AA.VV. in the bibliography consulted, and contrasting them with the limitations detected in each of them, it is necessary to select and use analysis tools that allow the development of a procedure that assumes the best of them and evolves towards overcoming the limitations detected as far as possible.

The tools selected from the bibliography consulted were: bibliographic analysis, the application of the SWOT matrix, surveys of the directors of the AA.VV., interviews with directors of the AA.VV. and consultation of experts. In addition, in order to contribute to the fulfillment of the objectives, the bibliometric analysis and the Synthetic Index study were carried out.
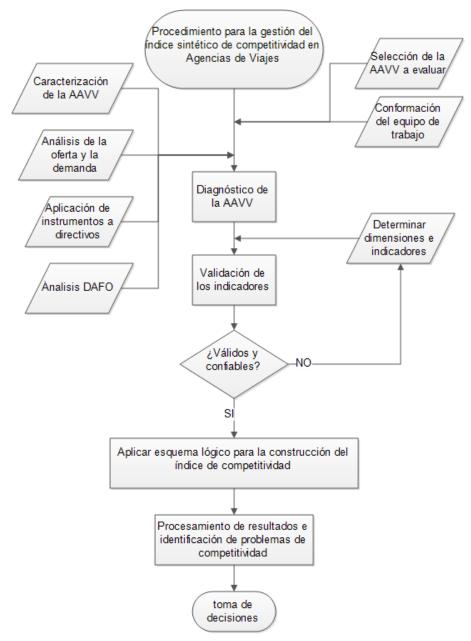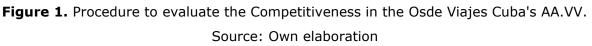
Phase 3: Elaboration of the procedure

For the development of the procedure, the starting point was the study of various methodologies proposed by different authors for analyzing competitiveness in tourism and, in particular, in AA.VV., which made it possible to identify aspects that are appropriate to the author's proposal. However, due to the organizational, operational and management characteristics of an AA.VV., it is necessary to design a procedure that responds to the complexity of its constituent elements and that are specified in the evaluation of competitiveness, while incorporating the best contributions of the referenced methodologies, in order to be able to carry out a design that is in line with the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the dimensions of competitiveness in this specific framework.

The objective of the procedure is to evaluate the competitiveness of the AA.VV. from a systemic approach, by integrating the complex dynamics of its own operation that lead to its competitiveness.

This will allow to obtain feedback that will lead, at the same time, to improve the performance of the agency in the present and in the future, through continuous improvement and the satisfaction of the needs and expectations of the clients.

Figure 1 below shows the procedure for assessing the competitiveness of Osde Viajes Cuba's receptive AA.VV.

Figure 1. Procedure to evaluate the Competitiveness in the Osde Viajes Cuba's AA.VV.

Source: Own elaboration

Preliminary phase

Step 1.1. Formation of the work team

It is constituted by a research team that will act permanently, led by the Faculty of Tourism of the University of Havana and Osde Viajes Cuba, who will be responsible for placing tourism professionals and specialists in charge of the work. The number of members of the team may be from 3 to 12 professionals, this number may vary depending on the experience in the analysis of its members.

Step 1.2. Selection of the AA.VV. to be evaluated

In this step, the agency to be evaluated is selected based on the interests of Osde Viajes Cuba, which reflect the interests of Mintur. In this sense, the selection of the agency to be evaluated will be in search of areas where its competitiveness can be improved so that such improvement is reflected in the development of tourism in the country. Due to the lack of this instrument at present, the recommendation is that it be applied to all agencies, not only Osde's, but to all those that operate as incoming agencies in the country. In this way, it will be possible to establish guidelines for the competitive development of the island's AA.VV. and evaluate the continuous improvement of their performance based on the development generated by competitiveness.

Diagnosis of the AA.VV.

Step 2.1. Characterization of AA.VV.

General information is compiled to provide a basic idea of the AA.VV. to be evaluated. Data is collected on the type of agency according to specialization, volume of operation, distribution channels, etc.

Step 2.2. Supply and demand analysis

Evaluation of the historical behavior of the demand, analysis of likes and preferences and the capacity of the supply to satisfy these demanded needs. This takes into account statistical analyses of tourist income, number of tourists and evaluation of service providers, etc.

Step 2.4. Application of instruments to managers

The stakeholder interview consists of selecting a group of people with whom to work in the research and applying a questionnaire of questions to them in order to identify the shortcomings in the evaluation of competitiveness.

Step 2.5. SWOT analysis to reinforce the results of the diagnosis.

With the participatory diagnostic technique through the SWOT matrix, it will be possible to determine the external and internal factors that influence the competitiveness of the evaluated agencies. The results will serve to establish the position of the community and relate the internal environment with the external one, by means of which the different elements that make it possible to diagnose on a scale of 1 to 3 are ranked in order.

Competitiveness assessment

Step 3.1. Selection of dimensions and indicators

For the selection and validation of dimensions and indicators, the following were taken into account:

- The dimensions and indicators proposed by authors for competitiveness in AA.VV. (Bigné Alcañiz et al., 2008; Loggiodice Lattuf, 2010; López Marín, 2001)
- Surveys applied to national and international specialists
- Performance indicators used at Osde Viajes Cuba

The procedure for this step consisted of listing all the indicators and dimensions proposed by authors and specialists, from which a total of 48 indicators and 7 dimensions were obtained. Of these, those with the highest frequency were chosen to integrate the procedure for a selection of 15 indicators and 5 dimensions. Subsequently, the selection was compared with the performance indicators of Osde Viajes Cuba and 5 more indicators were added for a total of 20 indicators in 5 dimensions.

Step 3.1.1. Description of dimensions and indicators

The description of the indicators included in each of the dimensions can be found in Annex 1. This description is composed of:

- Dimension: where the 5 dimensions selected for the study appear in the AA.VV.: Customer-market, Economic-financial, Image of the AA.VV., Human Resources and technology and innovation
- Indicators: where the 20 selected indicators are listed, grouped by dimensions
- Description: where a brief description of the main characteristics of the proposed indicator and its evaluation method is provided
- Evaluation scale: where a weighting is made according to the characteristics of the evaluation of the indicator in order to subsequently award points
- Points: in this column a distribution of points is made for each indicator according to the evaluation scale, which generally varies from 1 to 5 points

In this way, an evaluation of the indicators is obtained, weighted according to the characteristics of each indicator, but at the same time comparable among them so that they can later be synthesized in dimensional indexes and these in a general index that will respond to the competitiveness of the entity under study.

Step 3.2. Logical scheme for the calculation of the synthetic competitiveness indicator (ISC)

The proposed logical scheme was developed by partially analyzing a multi-criteria procedural model called Analytic Hierarchical Process (AHP) (Saaty, 1977) from which the ISC applied in this research is derived. This model facilitates the decomposition of the problem into a hierarchical and graphical structure, and ensures that both qualitative and quantitative aspects are incorporated into the evaluation process. It helps to reduce the damage in the decision-making process and minimizes the problems that prevent a correct choice from being made.

According to Mendoza et al. (2019), the hierarchical structure is a graphical representation of the problem as a hierarchy, with the objective at the top, the alternatives at the bottom rung, and the criteria at the intermediate level(s).

It is useful to use a chart called a hierarchy tree to illustrate the decision problem in terms of the overall goal or objective of the criteria and alternatives.

The proposed ISC measures a set of attributes through which the concept is deployed, which give rise to the indicators that most directly reflect the concept of interest, in this specific case that of competitiveness, and which are most accessible to the means available to measure them.

As proposed by Parra and Frías (2021) and adapted to the current research, the index is modeled under a multidimensional perspective that includes the various factors involved in the tourism performance of an AA.VV., as indicated in the concept. This idea is expressed in the diagram in figure 2.

Figure 2. Logical scheme for the construction of the Competitiveness Index

Source: Parra and Frías (2021)

Taking into account that competitiveness is broken down into dimensions (Dm), which are weighted according to the criterion that they do not all have the same importance for the analysis of the starting concept (Wmdm). These dimensions are then broken down into attributes, which for measurement purposes are converted into individual indicators or indices (Ikd), which are also weighted according to the same criterion that they do not have equal importance within the

dimension to which they belong. From this point on, the synthesis process begins. The individual indexes are used to obtain partial synthetic indexes or indicators by dimensions (Isp dm). The synthesis process ends with the integration of the partial indexes into a global synthetic index or indicator of competitiveness (IS gc). This entire process is carried out in the selected spatial units of analysis (U ei), which constitute the field of research (Parra Cárdenas & Frías Jiménez, 2021).

The steps defined by Domínguez Serrano et al. (2011) in the formation of synthetic indexes from the AHP were followed, which are:
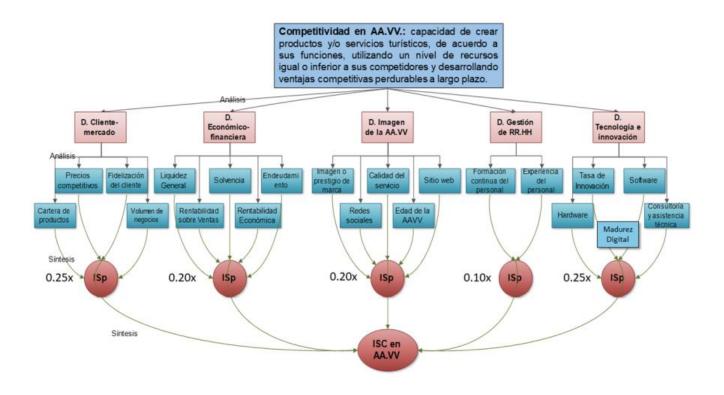
- Structure the analyzed problem in a hierarchical way, previously grouping the indicators of the initial system according to the conceptual dimension to which they belong.
- Compare in pairs all the elements of the hierarchy, independently, according to their importance with respect to the element at the top level on which they depend. To quantify the relative importance of each indicator, the analyst must use a pre-set rating scale, which can be defined by the analyst according to the nature of the indicators being compared, provided that the correspondence between the absolute starting values of each indicator and the values showing the intensity of the preference on the rating scale is clearly indicated to the user.
- Obtain the relative importance of the indicators of each dimension, using as weights the values of the components of the eigenvector associated with the dominant eigenvalue of the matrix defined, from the values of the comparisons made between the elements included in that group (Saaty, 1977).
- Obtain the synthetic indicator by the sum total of the products of the weights of each indicator and the higher hierarchical elements on which it depends.

To calculate the ISC (Fig. 3):

1. Parameterization of the proposed indicators based on the qualitative and quantitative information that can be extracted from the analysis of each one of them in the agencies where the study is carried out. This parameterization determines a value between 0 and 5 points for each indicator, thus eliminating the differentiation between the different scales of measurement that the indicators have in the agencies.
2. For the evaluation or assignment of weight to the dimensions and indicators, an analysis is also based on the APH procedure known as the matrix of paired comparisons, where the

numerical scale defined was from 0 to 3. This analysis is performed for each hierarchical level of the logical scheme, and was therefore carried out for each of the dimensions and the indicators that comprise them (Annex 2). In this way, partial synthetic indexes are obtained for each dimension.

3. The calculation of the ISC is the sum of the weighted values of its component dimensions.

Figure 3. Logical scheme for the construction of the Synthetic Competitiveness Index (ISC) in travel agencies

Source: Own elaboration

This analysis will reflect the competitive situation of the studied AA.VV., as well as the partial study of its dimensions in order to be able to influence the most affected ones. The final evaluation scale for the AA.VV., based on the ISC, is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Competitive evaluation of the AA.VV. based on the ISC

Value of ISC	Competitive evaluation of the AA.VV.
ISC ∈ [0; 1]	Very low competitiveness
ISC ∈ (1; 2]	Low competitiveness
ISC ∈ (2; 3]	Average competitiveness
ISC ∈ (3; 4]	High competitiveness
ISC ∈ (4; 5]	Very high competitiveness

Source: Own elaboration

Phase 4: Expert validation

Once the procedure had been drawn up, experts were consulted to check the level of acceptance of the procedure based on the experience of managers and specialists of the AA.VV. The Delphi method was applied and the results obtained consisted of ensuring the existence or not of agreement among the experts' criteria. To this end, the Delphi method was applied and the results obtained consisted of ascertaining whether or not there was concordance between the experts' criteria. The statistical results of the consultation allowed the author to consider the experts' criteria on the procedure for the evaluation of competitiveness in travel agencies.

In this research, out of 40 experts analyzed, 8 were selected, taking into account the competence coefficient from the data obtained in the survey applied. The processing and analysis of the information allows us to determine whether there is convergence or not in the experts' opinion.

Subsequently, the second round was carried out, in which the first survey was applied to the group of selected experts, with the aim of ascertaining their criteria and performing the statistical analysis of the responses in relation to the proposed procedure. The structure of the survey included a Likert-type response scale with the following value scales: very adequate, quite adequate, adequate, not very adequate and inadequate. For its statistical treatment, the expert consultation software version 1.0 proposed by Hurtado de Mendoza (2003), cited in Hernández Flores et al. (2020), was used. According to the above scale and when comparing the cut-off points and statistical values, the following results were obtained:

- From the analysis carried out by the experts on the eight elements to be evaluated, it was found that all were considered very adequate (VH) for 100%

- Regarding the relevance, pertinence and coherence of the proposed strategy, the results of the evaluations were: Very adequate for the relevance of the procedure in 87.5%, Very adequate for the pertinence of the procedure in 87.5% and Very adequate for the coherence of the procedure in 87.5%

In the context of the current health and economic crisis, the comparative analysis of research on the competitiveness of the companies that make up the tourism sector determined that the AA.VV. have a lower and deficient number of research on competitiveness than the rest of the enterprises, which is reflected in the decrease in the volume of sales and customer satisfaction of the AA.VV. of Osde Viajes Cuba.

The identification of the main limitations of research on competitiveness in the AA.VV. showed that the main problem lies in a lack of focus on the incorrect identification of the research needs of these companies.

The identification of the main tools for evaluating competitiveness in the AA.VV., based on a comparative analysis with the research and the objectives of the present study, made it possible to lay the foundations for a procedure that assumes the best of them and evolves towards overcoming the limitations detected as far as possible.

The development of the procedure provides Osde Viajes Cuba with a tool capable of evaluating the competitiveness of the AA.VV. from a systemic approach, as a way to obtain feedback that leads to improve the performance of the agency in the present and in the future, through continuous improvement and the satisfaction of the needs and expectations of the clients.

The identification of the main tools for assessing competitiveness in AA.VV made it possible to determine the phases and steps that confirm the procedure for assessing competitiveness in AA.VV.

The assessment of the experts and their qualification of the designed procedure as very adequate allow to conclude that the research carried out is inserted in an environment where it will find an excellent acceptance, reception and use by the interested actors and that its content can benefit them.

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Authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Authors' contribution:

Dariel Armstrong Zulueta, Yoan Hernández Flores and Yasser Vázquez Alfonso designed the study, analyzed the data and prepared the draft.

All the authors reviewed the writing of the manuscript and approve the version finally submitted.

ANNEXES

Annex 1. Dimensions and indicators of competitiveness in AA.VV.

Dimension	Weight	Indicator	Weight	Description	Evaluation	Points
D1. Customer-market dimension	0.25	I1. Competitive pricing	0.219	Evaluated from the determination of a general price competitiveness index: this consists of comparing the price of all the products offered in the agency with the average price of these products in the market. The general price competitiveness index is then determined.	Higher than average bid price: low competitiveness	1
					Price offered equal to the average: level of competitiveness will be equal to that of its competitors, so the price will not represent an advantage factor.	3
					Price offered below average: this level represents a competitive advantage for the AA.VV.	5
		I2. Customer loyalty	0.25	Measured by the level of client repeat enterprise in the AA.VV.	One visit: very low repeat enterprise	1
					Two visits: low repetition	2
					Three visits: average repetition	3

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					Four visits: high repetition	4
					Five visits: very high repeat enterprise	5
		I3. Product portfolio	0.281	evaluated on the basis of the availability of the products offered with respect to the total number of products in the agency's portfolio.	0 to 0.40 very low	1
					From 0.41 to 0.60 low	2
					From 0.61 to 0.70 average	3
					From 0.71 to 0.85 high	4
					0.86 to 1.00 very high	5
		I4. Turnover	0.25	Evaluated on the basis of the number of contracts and negotiations reached annually.	0 to 2 very low	1
					3 to 5 low	2
					From 6 to 8 average	3
					From 8 to 10 high	4
					Over 10 very high.	5
D2. Economic-financial dimension	0.20	I5. General Liquidity	0.241	It expresses the number of times that Current Assets cover Current Liabilities or the number of pesos of Current Assets that the enterprise has for each peso of Current Liabilities. General Liquidity: = Current Assets/ Short-term Liabilities	< 1.5 If less than 1, it indicates that the entity is in danger of default.	1
					>2 may mean that the enterprise has idle current assets and loses profitability on them.	3

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				=1.5 and 2: Correct; the value of this index must be above 1	5
	I6. Solvency	0.138	It shows the enterprise's total payment capacity; it measures the enterprise's capacity to pay all its debts, both short and long term, with its real assets. It expresses the number of times that Real Assets cover borrowings (Total Debt), that is, how many pesos of Real Assets the enterprise has to pay off one peso of Total Debt. It depends on the enterprise's profitability (the value of sales it owns) because it will not be able to pay its debts in the long term unless it has sufficient profits. Solvency Ratio = Real Assets/ Total Debts	Less than 2 times Danger of not being able to pay debts	1
				Greater than 2 times Danger of having idlers	3
				Equal to 2 times Correct	5
	I7. Indebtedness	0.207	Diagnoses the quantity and quality of debt. It allows to know to what extent sufficient profits are obtained to support the financial burden of indebtedness. The higher the indebtedness, the higher the risk (possibility of not being able to make timely payments	> 2 Over-indebtedness: faces limitations in accessing external sources due to the incremental risk involved in granting credit to a highly indebted enterprise.	1

			to its creditors). High risk is neither good nor bad; it depends on the enterprise's ability to repay the financing provided by others. However, high risk positions are generators of growth. Indebtedness: = External Financing (AF) / Own Financing (PF)	> 1.5 Caution: Loss of borrowing capacity; difficulty in obtaining further financing Excess debt (High Risk)	2
				< 0.50 Is capable of incurring more obligations. Excess of equity in the activity. Loses profitability (Low Risk)	3
				0.50 and 1.5 correct or favorable when the enterprise finances its investments with certain levels of indebtedness.	5
		I8. Return on sales	0.207	Profit obtained for each peso of sales, after deducting all expenses including taxes. The result is more advantageous to the extent that this margin is higher Profitability on Sales (PV) = Profit in Operations (sales - cost of sales - operating expenses) / Sales. For the effective development of this indicator, OSDE Viajes Cuba must carry out	RV < Average RV	1
				RV = Average RV	3
				VR > Average VR	5

				a historical analysis of the average Profitability on Sales of all its agencies.		
	I9. Economic Profitability (ER)	0.207	Expresses the return obtained for each peso invested in assets. It indicates the efficiency with which management has used its available resources to generate income. A value of the ratio ascending in time will be ideal. It expresses the percentage that the Earnings Before Interest and Taxes (E.B.T.I.) represents of the value of the Total Assets invested in the enterprise, or how many pesos of E.B.T.I. the enterprise generates for each peso of Assets invested. This index measures the enterprise's operational management, the yield extracted from the investment owned and operated by the enterprise through its asset management. It arises from the relationship between the profit margin and sales per each peso of assets. Economic Profitability = U.A.I.I. / Average Total Assets. For the effective development of this indicator, OSDE Viajes Cuba must carry out a	RE < Mean of RE	1
				RE = Average of RE	3
				ER > Average of ER	5

				historical analysis of the average Economic Profitability of all its agencies.	
D3. Image of the AA.VV.	0.20	I10. Brand image or prestige	0.208	According to the literature, this indicator is measured on the basis of surveys applied to tourists visiting the destination. The aim is for the tourist to identify distinctive elements of the AA.VV. such as: the name of the enterprise, the logo, the corporate color, the design of the contents generated by the enterprise to reach its target public, values that characterize the entity, etc. To take this indicator to the measurement scale, the starting point is the level of recognition of the brand by customers.	very low — 1; low — 2; half — 3; high — 4; very high — 5
		I11. Quality of service	0.208	Evaluated on the basis of the customer satisfaction surveys that are studied in all the AA.VV. These surveys collect both positive and negative opinions, which is why their measurement scale should be conditioned by the balance that may exist between these two trends of opinions. To calculate the index for this indicator, a quantification of the opinions generated by	less than -5: very low — 1; between -5 and -1: low — 2; between 0 and 2: average — 3; between 3 and 5: high — 4; greater than 5: very high — 5

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			tourists is proposed on a scale of -5 to 5, with negative values of -5 to -1 for opinions expressing discontent and dissatisfaction and values of 1 to 5 for positive opinions. In this way, the overall sum of opinions is adjusted to the following measurement scale		
	I12. Web site	0.167	We propose to analyze the quality and quantity of content using the Nublar tool. OSDE does not manage any of the agencies' websites because they are under repair. The proposed tool is recognized for its website data analysis.	0 < X < 2 very low	1
				2 < X < 4 low	2
				4 < X < 6 medium	3
				6 < X < 8 high	4
				8 < X < 10 very high	5
	I13. Social Networking	0.208	OSDE is only aware of the presence on Facebook and Twitter of the AA.VV. It only keeps track of their Facebook activity through the Enterprise Management analysis tool of said social network. This tool makes a detailed study of the activity of the agencies' pages and compares them with 30 other similar pages. For the competitive evaluation, the ranking provided by the tool is used as a reference.	Less than 15 very low	1
				10th to 15th low	2
				7th to 9th half	3
				4th to 6th high	4
				1st to 3rd very high	5

		I14. Age of the travel agency	0.208	This is an indicator that has a direct impact on the image of the AA.VV.. as a consolidated enterprise and the valuation that other companies in the sector may have of it.	0 < X < 2 newly created	1
					3 < X < 5 youth	2
					6 < X < 10 adult	3
					More than 10 seniors	5
D4. Human Resources Management	0.10	I15. Continuous staff training	0.50	In an interview with the Head of Human Resources of OSDE Viajes Cuba, she explained that continuous personnel training is a fundamental requirement for the development of the AA.VV. The scale proposed by the specialist for evaluating the indicator is based on personnel development courses in the AA.VV. The scale proposed by the specialist for the evaluation of the indicator is based on the staff development courses in the AA.VV.	0 to 1 low	1
					From 2 to 3 half	2
					4 to 5 high	3
					More than 5 very high	5
		I16. Staff experience	0.50	This indicator is based on the years of experience that the AA.VV. specialists and workers have in the sector and in carrying out their functions. Experienced personnel are better able to respond to the problems and challenges generated by the dynamism of tourism.	0 < X < 2 years very low	1
					2 < X < 4 years low	2
					4 < X < 6 years medium	3
					6 < X < 8 years high	4
					Over 8 years very high	5

D5. Technology and innovation	0.25	I17. Innovation Rate	0.20	The study of this rate reflects what percentage of the portfolio of products offered are innovations or newly created. This element is fundamental for the adaptation and renewal of the agency's products to the changes generated both in demand and in the environment (Putz, 2019). TI = (Number of innovations / number of products) x 100	0 to 5 % very low	1
					5 to 10 % low	2
					10 to 15 % average	3
					15 to 20 % high	4
		I18. Availability, mastery and use of software	0.20	Evaluated by the updating or installation of new computer software for the optimal use of information technologies. The proposed measurement scale is designed for a semi-annual or annual evaluation.	0 to 1 low	1
					2 low	2
					3 media	3
					4 high	4
					5 very high	5
		I19. Hardware acquisition	0.20	Measured based on the renewal of technological equipment used in the V.A.s and their branches. It includes the equipment of desktop computers, laptops, tablets, cell phones, post, monitors, etc. The acquisition and updating of technological devices directly influences the agency's productive performance, its commercial	No	1
					Yes	5

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				development and image, among others. The evaluation of this indicator will be carried out every 6 months or annually depending on the decision of the work team developing the competitive study. Acquisition of new hardware:		
		I20. Contracting of consulting and technical assistance	0.20	Consultancy and technical assistance go hand in hand with the implementation of new technologies; therefore, their evaluation will be carried out on a semi-annual or annual basis, depending on the decision of the work team. It will evaluate the repair of technical equipment, and advice for the implementation of new technologies. The measurement scale will answer the question: Are consultancies and technical assistance provided?	No	1
					Yes	5

Annex 2. Matrix of paired comparisons by dimension

D1

	I1	I2	I3	I4	Total	Weight
I1	0	2	3	2	7	**0.21875**
I2	2	0	3	3	8	**0.25**
I3	3	3	0	3	9	**0.28125**
I4	2	3	3	0	8	**0.25**
Total					32	

D2

	I5	I6	I7	I8	I9	Total	Weight
I5	0	3	2	1	1	7	**0.241379**
I6	3	0	2	1	1	4	**0.137931**
I7	2	2	0	2	2	6	**0.206897**
I8	1	1	2	0	3	6	**0.206897**
I9	1	1	2	3	0	6	**0.206897**
Total						29	

D3

	I10	I11	I12	I13	I14	Total	Weight
I10	0	2	2	3	3	10	**0.208333**
I11	2	0	2	3	3	10	**0.208333**
I12	2	2	0	1	3	8	**0.166667**
I13	3	3	1	0	3	10	**0.208333**
I14	3	3	1	3	0	10	**0.208333**
Total						48	

D4

	I15	I16	Total	Weight
I15	0	3	3	**0.5**
I16	3	0	3	**0.5**
Total			6	

D5

	I17	I18	I19	I20	I21	Total	Weight
I17	0	3	3	3	3	12	**0.2**
I18	3	0	3	3	3	12	**0.2**
I19	3	3	0	3	3	12	**0.2**
I20	3	3	3	0	3	12	**0.2**
I21	3	3	3	3	0	12	**0.2**
Total						60	

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