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## INTRODUCTION

Tourism is becoming one of the most important and vital industries in global economy. In 2013, Travel & Tourism's total contribution to the global economy rose to 9.5% of global GDP (US \$7 trillion) growing faster than other significant sectors such as financial and business services, transport and manufacturing. In total, nearly 266 million jobs were supported by Travel & Tourism in 2013 - 1 in 11 of all jobs in the world. (WTO, 2014). International tourism is expected to grow further in the future.

In order to be competitive among destination markets, to attract more tourists and build sustainable tourism, many destination marketers use destination branding techniques. It is necessary to emphasize attractive attributes of a destination, e.g. national heritage, unique nature and culture. Many destination organizations have created logos or slogans to distinguish them from competitors, to emphasize their uniqueness and to promote destination. The brand can create a positive identity and image of a destination in the minds of potential customers. (Cai, 2002; Gnoth et al., 2007).

“Brand equity refers to the value of a brand which has a well-known brand name, based on the idea that the owner of a well-known brand name can generate more money from products with that brand name than from products with a less well known name, as consumers believe that a product with a well-known name provide more value than products with less well-known names” (Aaker (1991), Managing Brand Equity.)

One of the main approaches for examining branding is the concept of customer-based brand equity, the advantage of this concept is that it measures the customer perspective on the brand. Positive customer-based brand equity generates favorability and loyalty in the minds of customers. Some marketers state that the brands are one of the most valuable assets as company has because it can increase the financial value of a brand.

This paper identifies what is brand equity, how to measure the customer-based brand equity in tourist destination with the aim of future application of this measure in Kyrgyz republic.

First part of this study provides country's profile of the Kyrgyz Republic. Brief history of tourism since the country was a part of the USSR up to date is provided. The vital importance of tourism industry in developing countries such as Kyrgyz Republic is highlighted. Tourism plays a big role in stimulating economy and has a huge contribution in GDP and positive impacts, such as generation of jobs, increasing material well-being and standard of living. This country has many reasons to become a very popular tourist destination. Among the most attractive tourist destination attributes are unique nature, mountains, ski-base and cultural heritage, but because of the lack of investment and proper strategic marketing, tourism is growing very slowly and unsustainable.

In this study we investigate a technique to measure brand equity in KR and show how it can be employed to increase competitiveness of tourist destination. The study methodology and survey are based on Gartner's and Konecnik's (2006) study namely “Customer-based brand equity for a destination”. The case study as a tourist destination in their paper was Slovenia. Similar customer-based brand equity will be attempted to apply Kyrgyz Republic.

## I. KYRGYZ REPUBLIC AS A TOURIST DESTINATION

Kyrgyz Republic is a relatively new, landlocked and mountainous country, located in Central Asia. Its capital and largest city is Bishkek. KR have been a part of USSR and have attained sovereignty as a nation-state only after the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Country's history extends for over 2,000 years, comprising a variety of different cultures and empires. Country has been at the crossroads of several great civilizations, known as part of the Silk Road. Because of isolated geographical location country has preserved its ancient culture.<sup>1</sup>

It is farther from the sea than any other country, and all its rivers flow into lakes and seas. Over 80% of the country is occupied by Tian Shan mountains, by its nature country is very similar to Switzerland and referred to as "the Switzerland of Central Asia".<sup>2</sup>

Issyk-Kul Lake in the north-eastern Tian Shan is the largest lake in Kyrgyz Republic and the second largest mountain lake in the world after Titicaca. Peak Victory, at 7,439 m (24,406 ft), is the highest point and is considered by geologists to be the northernmost peak over 7,000 m (22,966 ft) in the world. Heavy snowfall in winter leads to spring floods which often cause serious damage downstream. The runoff from the mountains is also used for hydro-electricity.

The Kyrgyz economy was strongly affected during the breakdown of the Soviet Union, after which the country lost its vast market. Probably 98% of Kyrgyz exports went to other parts of the Soviet Union in 1990. Since 1998 economy has improved, but there are some weaknesses still remain in providing appropriate social safety net and securing adequate fiscal revenues.<sup>3</sup>

Agriculture is one of the developed sectors of the economy in Kyrgyz Republic. By the early 1990s, the private agricultural sector provided between one-third and one-half of some harvests. Kyrgyz Republic's terrain is mountainous, which accommodates livestock raising, the largest agricultural activity, so the resulting wool, meat and dairy products are main commodities. Main crops include wheat, sugar beets, potatoes, cotton, tobacco, vegetables, and fruit. Because of high prices of imported agrichemicals and petroleum, mostly farming is being done by hand and by horse, as it was generations ago. Agriculture is one of the main contributions to the industrial economy and nowadays one of the most attractive sectors for foreign investment.

Kyrgyz Republic has mineral resources such as coal, gold, uranium, antimony, and other valuable metals. Metallurgy also one of the perspective sectors in the economy and government attempts to attract foreign investments. But the country does not have mineral reserves such as petroleum and natural gas, so it needs to import gas and petroleum.

The government has actively encouraged foreign involvement in extracting and processing gold from the Kumtor Gold Mine and other regions. The country's plentiful water resources and mountainous terrain enable it to produce and export large quantities of hydroelectric energy.

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<sup>1</sup> Kyrgyz Republic: Economy globalEDGE: Your source for Global Business Knowledge". Globaledge.msu.edu. 20 December 1998. Retrieved 26 March 2013

<sup>2</sup> (Escobar, Pepe (26 March 2005). "The Tulip Revolution takes root". Asia Times Online.)

<sup>3</sup> ("Kyrgyz unrest plays into regional rivalry". Reuters. 8 April 2010).

The major exports are nonferrous metals and minerals, wooden goods and other agricultural products, electric energy and certain engineering goods. Imports include petroleum and natural gas, ferrous metals, chemicals, most machinery, wood and paper products, some foods and some construction materials.

The Kyrgyz people have been semi-nomadic herders, used to live in their traditional tents called yurts and tend sheep, horses and yaks. This nomadic tradition continues to function seasonally as some families from remote areas return to the high mountain pasture during the summer.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Brief history of tourism in KR***

Tourism was not considered as a priority industry and started to expand in Khrushchev era during the post-World War II “as a source of hard currency and as a means to demonstrate Soviet economic achievements, and a way to market the Soviet paradise”. National tourism aimed to “en- large...people’s belief of national self-consciousness and feelings of pride and devotion to their country” (Zhizhanova 2011:2).

Two main key government bureaus involved international tourism were “Intourist” and “Sputnik”. Intourist was operated hotels, transportation, recreation centres, guides, visas for foreign tourists. The committee for State Security (KGB) was considering and controlling tourists to travel within the USSR and meet Soviet citizens. Those soviet citizens who needed to travel abroad were checked through multiple screenings (Shevirin 2003).

Citizens allowed to travel mostly to socialist countries such as Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Poland, Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria. Travel to capitalist countries was very limited (Zhizhanova 2011).



Figure 1. An American early poster advertising the Soviet Union as a tourism destination

<sup>4</sup> ("Kyrgyz Republic – population". Library of Congress Country Studies).



Figure 2. An early Sputnik propaganda poster encouraging youth to engage in tourist activities

Tourism in Kyrgyz Republic has its source in 1945 when tourism and alpinism department under the Republic Committee of Physical Culture and Sports was based with the aims such as training instructors, creating good infrastructure and promoting alpinism and tourism. Soon in 1959 was established The Central Council for Tourism and Excursion, which created camp sites in several towns. Next step was creating the Republic and State Tourism Federations in 1977, which was responsible for developing mountain and water sports and speleological explorations. The number of people participated in tourism activities in Kirghiz SSR (previous name of KR) was exceeding one million by 1979 (Marechek1982).

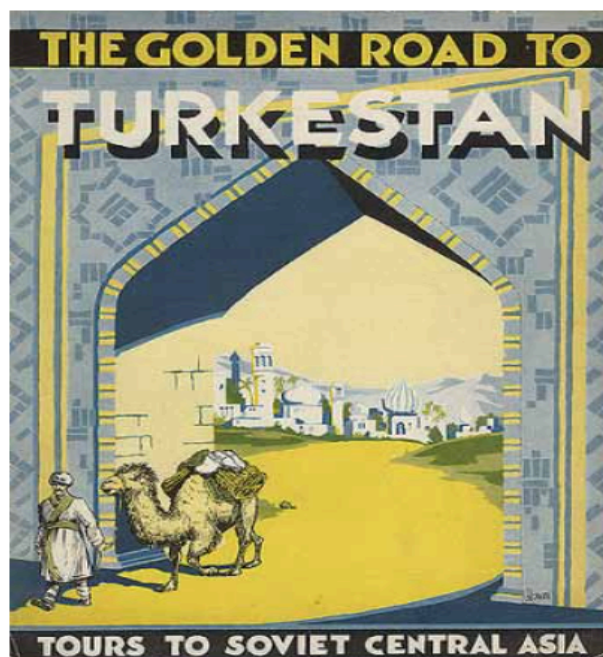


Figure 3. An Early Soviet Union – Travel Poster of Central Asia

One of the first academic research in tourism field was held by geographer Abdykadyrov (1984).<sup>5</sup> Although tourism was a prioritized sector, research on this topic was neglected and congruent body of research in KR was not developed even after independence. Research in KR has increased only in the past decade and there are only a few qualified researchers focusing in this field. After the collapse of the Soviet Union tourism industry in newly independent country was dramatically influenced.

The United Nations Investment Guide to the Silk Road (2009) which investigates the potential investment climate in Central Asia states that the new Silk Road Region “has a potential to become one of the world’s unique tourism destinations, and the distribution of interrelated tourism across the five countries makes it ideal for cross-border or regional investment opportunities” (UNC- TAD 2009:10). The number of tourists interested in Silk Road tourism in Central Asia is increasing every year.<sup>6</sup>

### *Tourism Nowadays*

Although Kyrgyz Republic’s mountains, lakes and rest of the country are an attractive tourist destination, the tourism industry is developing slowly because of the lack of investments.

One of the most popular tourist destination points in Kyrgyz Republic is Issyk Kul Lake. Numerous hotels, vacation resorts, boarding houses and sanatoriums are located along its Northern shore. Issyk Kul is an endorheic lake in the northern Tian Shan mountains. Although it is surrounded by snow-capped peaks, it never freezes. The lake is a Ramsar site of globally significant biodiversity (Ramsar Site RDB Code 2KG001). It was the site of an ancient metropolis 2,500 years ago, and archaeological excavations are ongoing.<sup>7</sup>

By long chains from west to east 88 massive mountain ranges of the massive mountain Tien Shan system stretch, in Russian it means “heavenly mountains”. Kyrgyz Republic mountains attract mountaineers and mountain lovers all over the world. The mountaineers who manage to conquer all the five 7000 meter peaks of Central Asia, three of which are located on the territory of Kyrgyz Republic, get the honorable title of “Snow Leopard”.<sup>8</sup>

*Skiing.* From recent times skiing infrastructure increasingly developed in Kyrgyz Republic because of the excellent conditions and mild climate for running ski-base. There are probably 6 ski-bases in Kyrgyz Republic. The best one is situated in the east part of the country, in the town, namely Karakol and was recognized as The best ski-resort in Central Asia and was included by Forbes in Top 10 Ski-resorts where you can go without visa. This ski-base was used as a training base for Olympic athletes during Soviet times.

The mountain-skiing base «Karakol» situated on slopes of mountains Tien-Shan. The base is located in the picturesque place, surrounded with coniferous wood. The mountain-skiing base "Karakol" is at height of 2300 meters above sea level that promotes the early beginning of a season and late end. In territory of complex are available: hotel, cottages "Chalet", restaurant, 5 lifts, billiards, a sauna, a conference hall, a helicopter platform. In winter time - hire of mountain-skiing equipment and snowmobiles. The region climate is soft, with an average winter temperature of -5 C, is caused by influence of nonfreezing Issyk-Kul lake. Winter is warm with a soft frost. Average winter temperature is - 5C. The ski season

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<sup>5</sup> (Mountain Tourism and Sustainability in Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan: A Research Review, 2014).

<sup>7</sup>Archaeologists discover remains of 2500-year-old advanced civilization in Russia"

<sup>8</sup> (Aksai travel-tourist agency)



lasts since November till May. The snow cover reaches a thickness 1, 5 - 2 m. The skiing area is differs in wide spacious descents on a virgin soil, and on specially prepared slopes. Extent of each descent is various from 400 m to 3,5 km. The majority of lines are passing through coniferous wood. Originally built during the Soviet period as a training centre for the Olympic team, it underwent renovation in 2004 (Kyrgyz diary info). This is a very popular tourist destination for Russians, Kazah, and every year the number of foreign travelers from Europe and USA is increasing. Especially one of the popular activities for Europe and USA citizens is heli-skiing and backcountry adventure in Tian-Shian mountains, which is an incredible experience, which is extremely popular and is able to put tourists within sight of several 5000+ meter peaks and massive glaciers (Silk Road Explore).

Recreational tourism. Recreational tourism was one of the most flourishing tourism sectors during Soviet times due to its balneal-climatic resort based on local sulphur hot springs. The basic curative factors are thermal waters, which are weakly and mildly mineralized, also waters of chloride-sodium-calcium composition. The main feature of these mineral waters is high content of radon and doesn't have any competition in the world. Minor investments in reconstruction from both local and foreign investors and poor level of infrastructure development have negative impact on recreational tourism.

Airport, accessibility and visa requirement. In order to simplify arrival to and increase tourism attractiveness of the country for foreign tourists, The Government of the Kyrgyz Republic allows citizens of specific countries/territories to visit Kyrgyz Republic for tourism or business purposes without having to obtain a visa. In February 2014 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced a proposal to abolish the visa-free regime for 44 countries whose citizens were added to the visa-free list in 2012.<sup>9</sup> Because of the lack of Low Cost Carriers to KR in the airline market, accessibility problem is subject for losing clientele, because tourists would rather go to another countries offering better service and value for the same price, such as Turkey and etc. Kyrgyz Republic will start issuing electronic visas in spring 2015. Electronic visas will be issued for stays up to 60 days with an option to extend the stay.

Disadvantages. Kyrgyz Republic is known for its two revolutions against the authorities in 2005 and 2010, unstable political situation and corruption. Also KR is considered as a country with low security for foreign traveller, police and security forces are poorly paid, poorly equipped, are often corrupt and police officers rarely speak English. Road conditions often make driving complicated and sometimes dangerous. Year round, safe driving is adversely impacted by a lack of street lighting, local driving patterns, and poor conditions of rural roads with regular livestock crossings.<sup>10</sup> Many travellers feel themselves vulnerable because of the relatively high rate of crime and feel unsatisfied with the service, roads, custom during entering the country and non-violent crimes such as pocketing, etc.

### ***Statistic data on tourism in Kyrgyz Republic***

Below some statistics on tourism in Kyrgyz Republic is provided. As we can see tourism is slowly growing and becoming more significant and perspective sector of economy. Each year the number of arrivals and contribution to GDP increases. As we can see common in all statistics that in 2010 tourism had considerable decline due to the second revolution which began in April 2010 with the ousting of Kyrgyz president.

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<sup>9</sup> "Visa Information". Timatic. IATA. Retrieved 17 December 2013., Visa Requirement, Consular Department of Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>10</sup> OSAC Country Council Information.

### *Kyrgyz Republic - International tourism, number of arrivals*

Since 1996 number of arrivals grows significantly. Source: World Development Indicators (WDI), April 2015

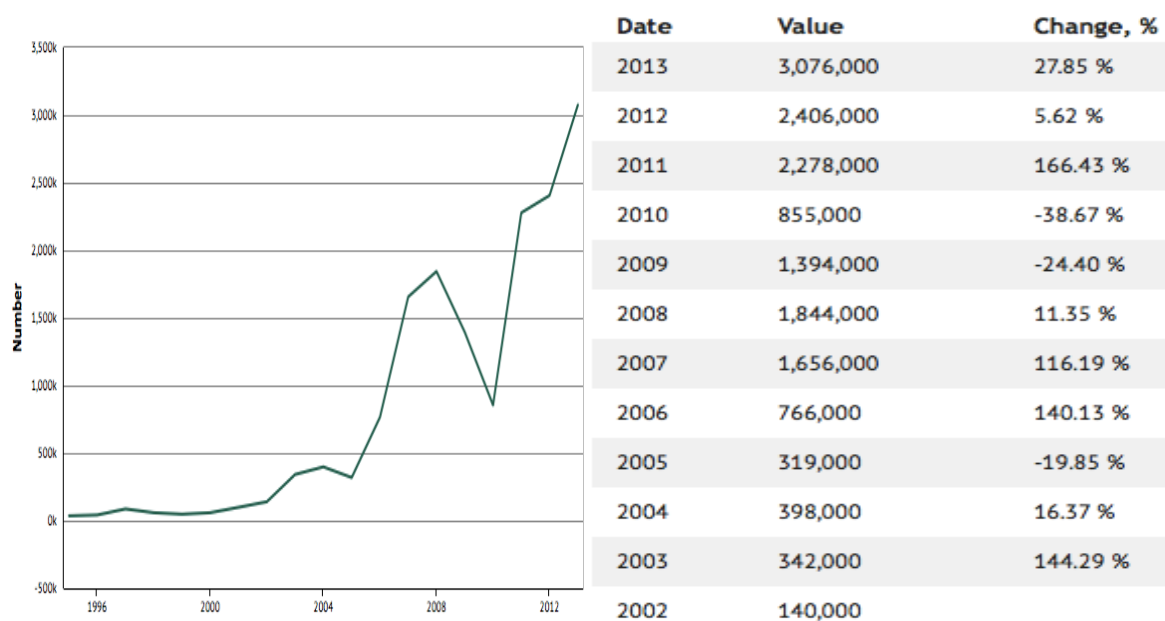


Figure 4. International tourism, number of arrivals

### *International tourism receipts*

International tourism receipts are expenditures by international inbound visitors, including payments to national carriers for international transport.

According to the table, the high rate of international tourism receipts was in 2007 and 2008, further in 2009 the rate had declined suddenly with the change -47,28% comparing with the 2008. This could be influenced by the world crisis in 2008. Source: World Development Indicators (WDI), April 2015

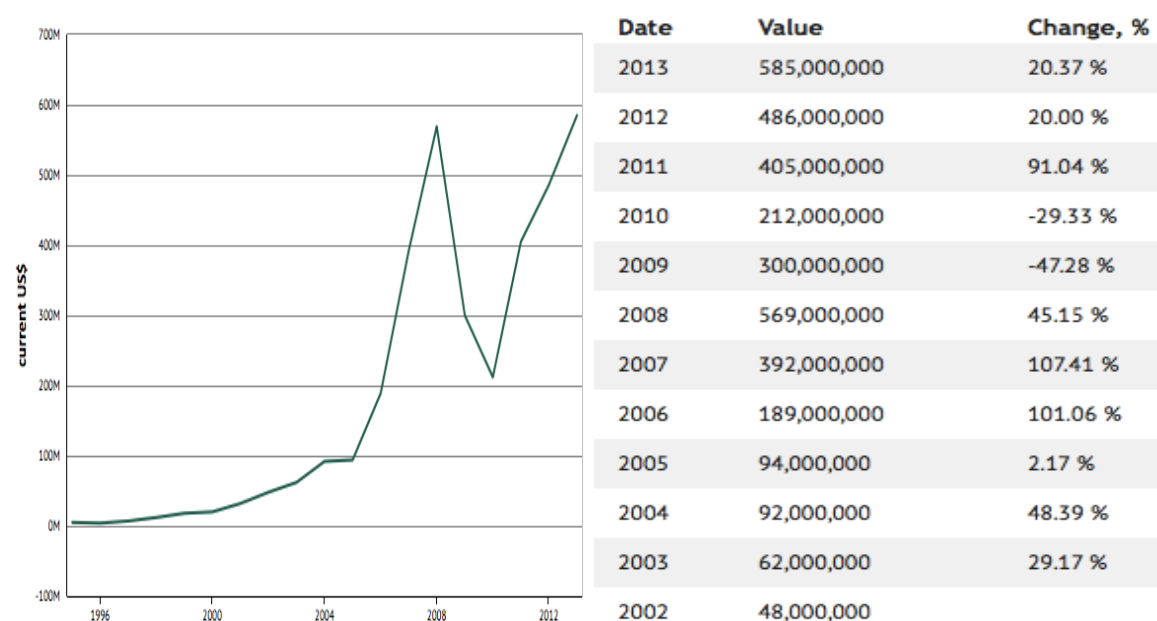


Figure 5. International tourism receipts

*International tourism receipts % of total exports.* Source: World Development Indicators (WDI), April 2015

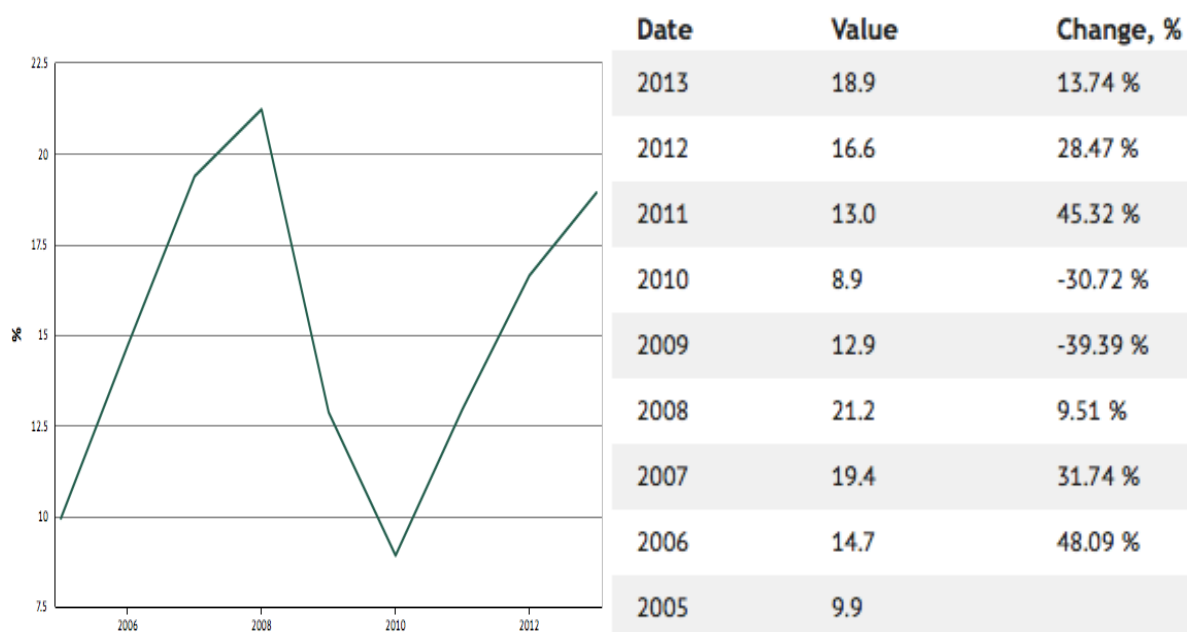


Figure 6. International tourism receipts % of total exports.

*International tourism, receipts for passenger transport items*

International tourism receipts for passenger transport items are expenditures by international inbound visitors for all services provided in the international transportation by resident carriers. Source: World Development Indicators (WDI), April 2015

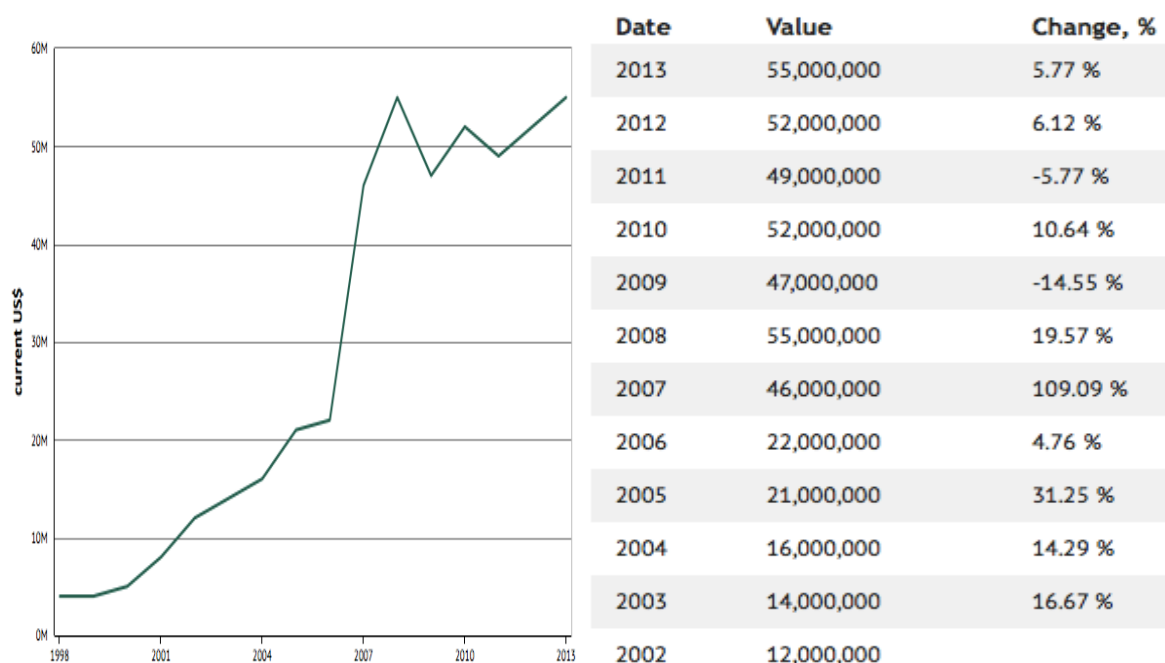


Figure 7. International tourism receipts for passenger transport

### Economic impact of tourism

According to Report “WTTC Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2014”, the direct contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP in 2013 was KGS5.7bn (1.6% of GDP). This was forecast to rise by 0.9% to KGS5.8bn in 2014. This primarily reflects the economic activity generated by industries such as hotels, travel agents, airlines and other passenger transportation services (excluding commuter services). But it also includes, for example, the activities of the restaurant and leisure industries directly supported by tourists. The direct contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP is expected to grow by 5.3% pa to KGS9.7bn (1.5% of GDP) by 2024. Source: WTTC Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2014

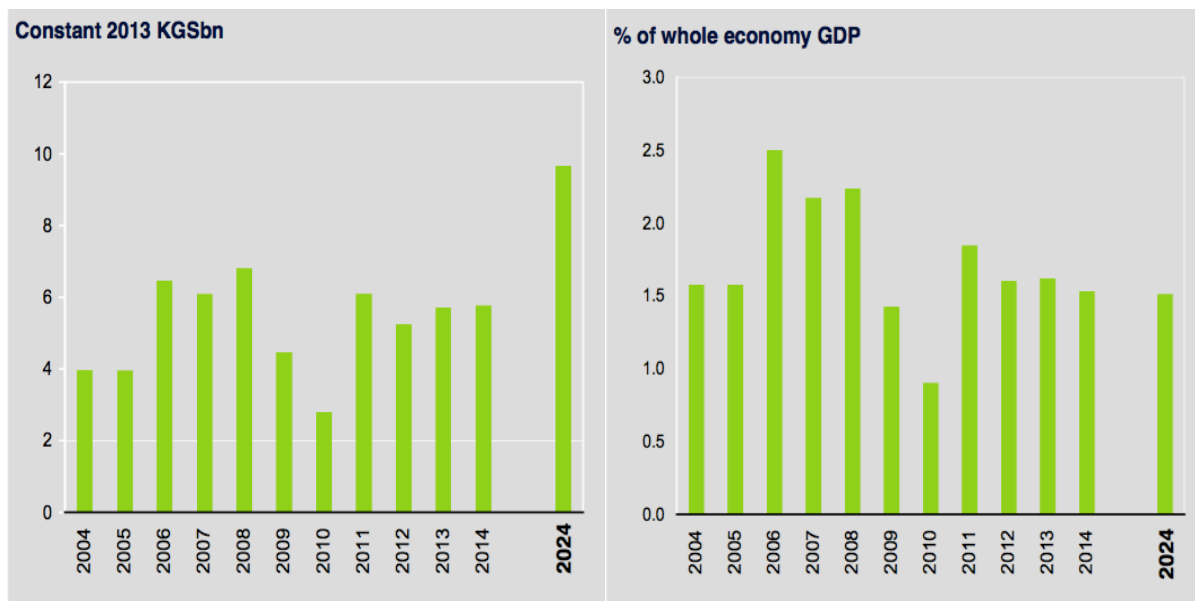


Figure 8. Direct contribution of Travel and tourism to GDP

The total contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP was KGS15.8bn in 2013 (4.5% of GDP) and was expected to grow by 0.7% to KGS15.9bn (4.2% of GDP) in 2014. It is forecast to rise by 5.5% pa to KGS27.2bn by 2024 (4.2% of GDP). Source: World Development Indicators (WDI), April 2015

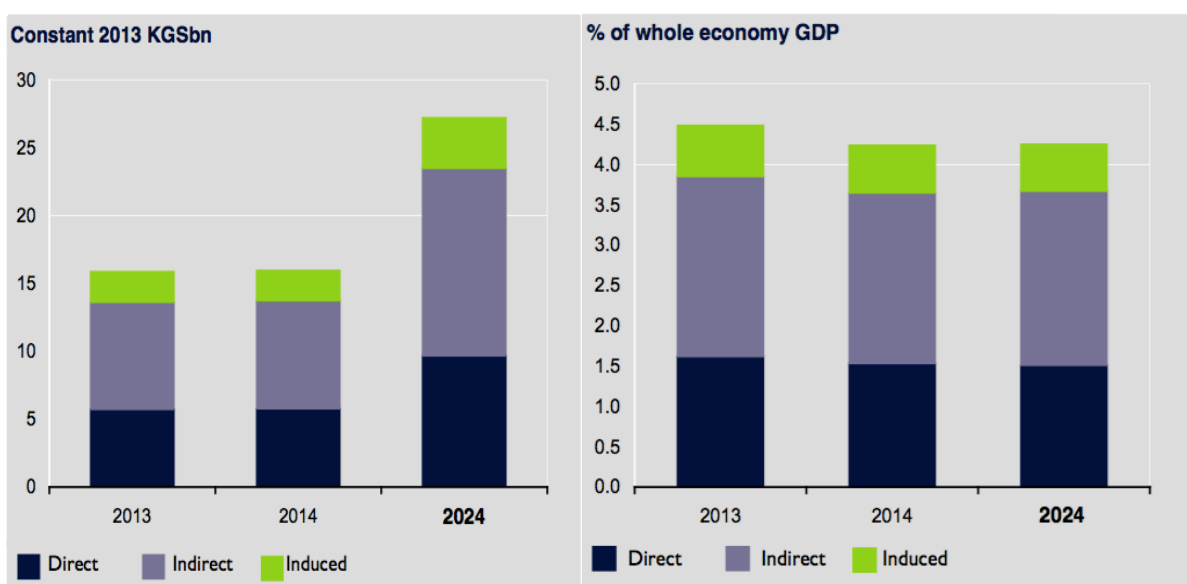


Figure 9. Total contribution of travel and tourism to GDP

The total contribution of Travel & Tourism includes its ‘wider impacts’ (ie the indirect and induced impacts) on the economy. The ‘indirect’ contribution includes the GDP and jobs supported by:

- Travel & Tourism investment spending – an important aspect of both current and future activity that includes investment activity such as the purchase of new aircraft and construction of new hotels;
- Government 'collective' spending, which helps Travel & Tourism activity in many different ways as it is made on behalf of the ‘community at large’ – eg tourism marketing and promotion, aviation, administration, security services, resort area security services, resort area sanitation services, etc;
- Domestic purchases of goods and services by the sectors dealing directly with tourists - including, for example, purchases of food and cleaning services by hotels, of fuel and catering services by airlines, and IT services by travel agents.

The ‘induced’ contribution measures the GDP and jobs supported by the spending of those who are directly or indirectly employed by the Travel & Tourism industry. (WTTC Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2014).

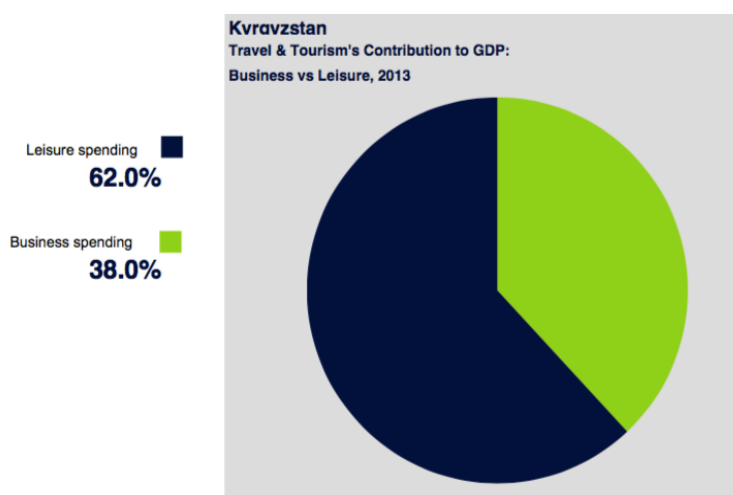


Figure 10. Leisure vs. business

Leisure travel spending (inbound and domestic) generated 62.0% of direct Travel & Tourism GDP in 2013 (KGS24.5bn) compared with 38.0% for business travel spending (KGS15.0bn).

Leisure travel spending was expected to grow by 4.9% in 2014 to KGS25.7bn, and rise by 5.5% pa to KGS43.7bn in 2024. Business travel spending is expected to grow by 1.6% in 2014 to KGS15.2bn, and rise by 4.1% pa to KGS22.8bn in 2024.

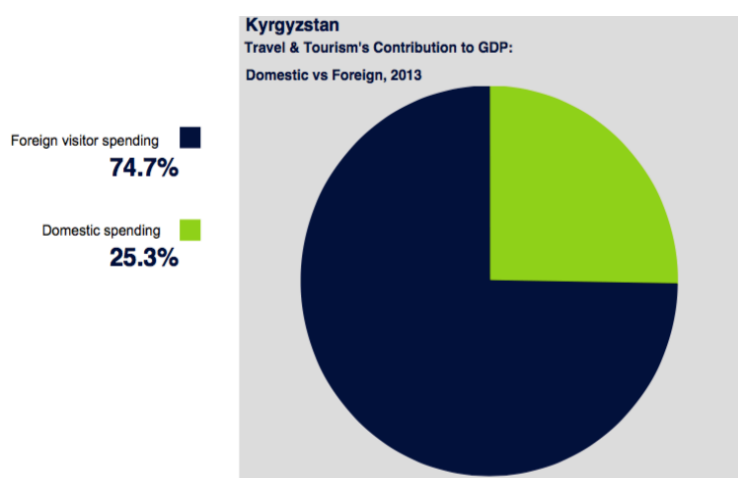


Figure 11. Foreign vs. domestic

Domestic travel spending generated 25.3% of direct Travel & Tourism GDP in 2013 compared with 74.7% for visitor exports (ie foreign visitor spending or international tourism receipts). Domestic travel spending is expected to grow by 7.1% in 2014 to KGS10.7bn, and rise by 6.5% pa to KGS20.1bn in 2024. Visitor exports are expected to grow by 2.5% in 2014 to KGS30.2bn, and rise by 4.4% pa to KGS46.3bn in 2024.

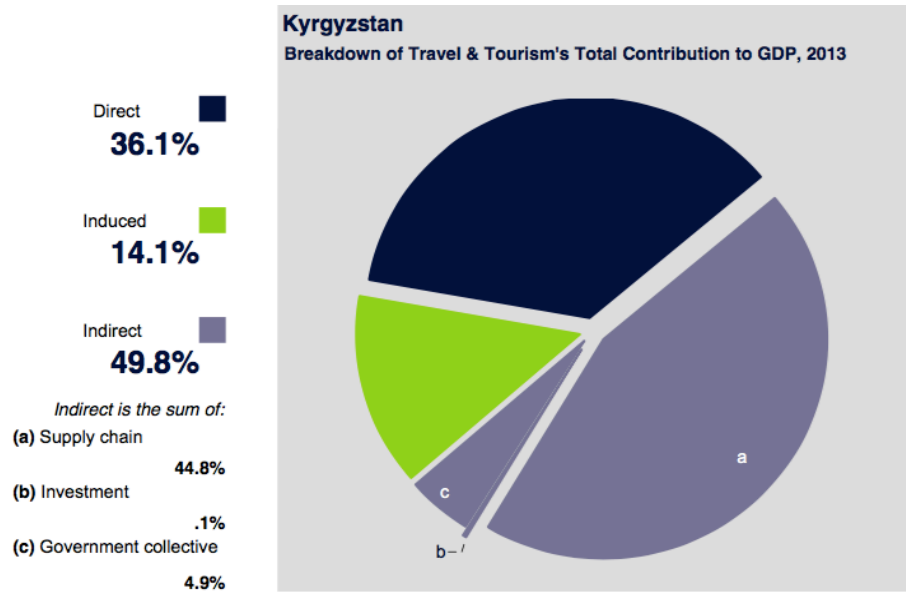


Figure 12. Breakdown of Travel and tourism total contribution to GDP.

The Travel & Tourism industry contributes to GDP and employment in many ways as detailed before. The total contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP is its direct contribution.

Each year the number of arrivals to KR increasing, the country is becoming more recognizable tourist destination around the world. Country is not rich in mineral resources, such as gas and petroleum and need import them. Other sectors of economy are not developed enough because of the lack of investments.

Given the weak economy and unemployment, tourism plays a big role in stimulating kyrgyz economy, and make significant contribution to GDP which has significant and positive direct, indirect and induced impacts. It plays a huge role in generating new jobs and in reducing unemployment and poverty, making the material-well-being better.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Brand equity and destination image

Branding has existed for centuries as a way of distinguishing the goods of one producer from those of another, while modern branding finds its origins in the 19th century (Room 1992).

David Aaker, established guru of Brand equity, who made big contribution and still works in this field defines Brand as “a distinguishing name and/or a symbol (such as a logo, trademark, or package design) intended to identify the goods or services of one seller, or group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from competitors who would attempt to provide products that appear to be identical“ (Aaker 1991, p 7).

He defines Brand Equity as “a set of brand assets or liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm’s customers” and provides a framework for Brand Equity Management. See Figure 13. (Aaker 1991, p 15).

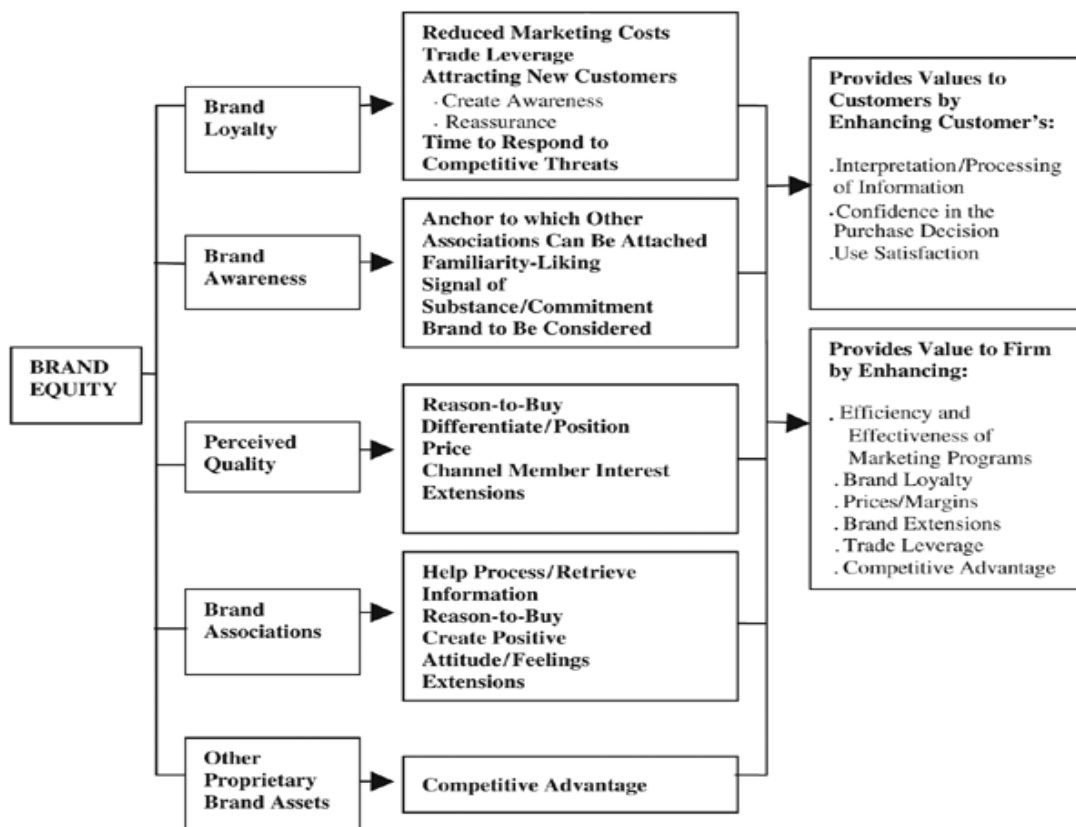


Figure 13. The Aaker’s Framework for Brand Equity Management

Aaker in his book distinguishes assets/liabilities and their concern to Brand Equity circumstantially. The most important ones are:

- The value of Brand Loyalty and how to create and maintain Brand Loyalty
- The nature and value of Brand Awareness
- The nature and dimensions of Perceived Quality
- The nature of brand associations, image, and positioning, and the value of these factors
- The characteristics and roles of effective names, symbols, and slogans
- The characteristics of successful brand extensions
- Strategies for brand revitalization

In recent years, as brands and branding have commanded more attention, marketing researchers, consultants, and academicians have created a complete vocabulary to describe various aspects of a brand's makeup and it is essential to review a summary of definitions, highlighted by (Upshaw, 1995, p 14) (See table 1):

Table 1. Summary of definitions

Brand "equity"	<u>The total accumulated value or worth of a brand; the tangible and intangible assets that the brand contributes to its corporate parent, both financially and in terms of selling leverage.</u>
Brand "identity"	Part of the brand's overall equity; the total perception of a brand in the marketplace, driven mostly by its positioning and personality
Brand "positioning"	What a brand stands for in the minds of customers and prospects, relative to its competition, in terms of benefits and promises.
Brand "personality"	The outward "face" of a brand; its tonal characteristics most closely associated with human traits.
Brand "essence"	The core or distillation of the brand identity.
Brand "character"	Having to do with the internal constitution of the brand, how it is seen in terms of its integrity, honesty, and trustworthiness
Brand "image"	Generally synonymous with either the brand's strategic personality or its reputation as a whole.
Brand "culture"	The system of values that surround a brand, much like the cultural aspects of a people or a country.

Source: Based on (Upshaw, 1995)



According to Upshaw, “Brand Identity refers to that part of the equity resulting from the perceived benefits offered by a brand that makes it attractive as the object of a possible purchase.

Brand identity is considered to be a product of the melding of a brand’s positioning and its personality, and is played out in the product/service performance, the brand name, its logo and graphic system, the brand’s marketing communication, and in other ways in which the brand comes into contact with its constituencies” (Upshaw, 1995, p15).

Figure 14 provides a graphical overview of Upshaw’s conceptualization of the relationship between Brand Equity, Valuation Equity, and Identity Equity. It also should be noted that Upshaw attaches a high degree of importance to the “Care of the Core” or “Brand Essence” in efforts to establish a Brand’s “Identity”. (see Figure 15) Source: Based on (Upshaw, 1995)

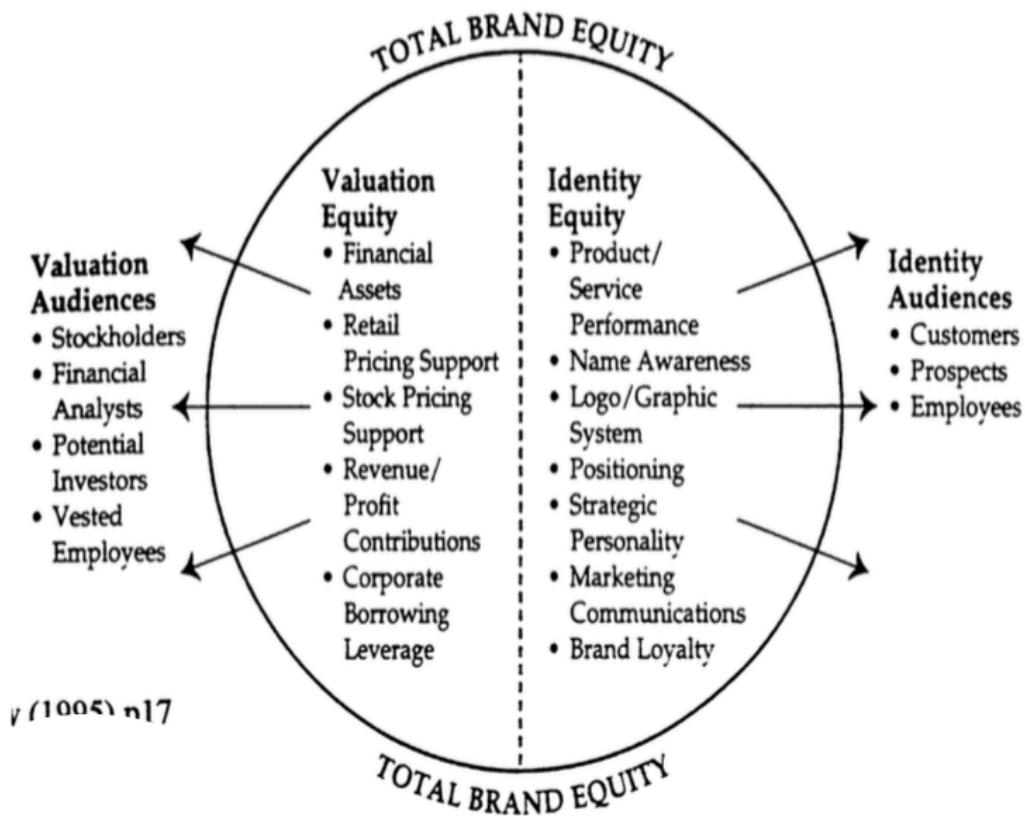


Figure 14. The Nature and Structure of Brand Equity



Figure 15. The Nature and Structure of Total Brand Identity

From the point of view of Kotler, “a brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods or services of one seller from among a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of the competitors. Thus, a brand identifies the seller or manufacturer. Under trademark law the seller is granted exclusive rights to the use of the brand name in perpetuity. This differs from other assets such as patents and copyrights that have expiration dates. If a company treats a brand only as a name, it misses the point of branding. The challenge in branding is to develop a deep set of meanings for the brand. Perhaps the most distinctive skill of professional marketers is their ability to create, maintain, protect, and enhance brands”. (Kotler 1994, 444–445)

According to Ritchie and Ritchie, 1998, “Brand Valuation refers to evaluating those factors that have a direct bearing on the worth of the brand, including its financial assets and intangible “goodwill”. The total accumulated value and worth of a brand is considered as “Brand Equity” – a term that is used extensively, both in theory and practice”. (Ritchie and Ritchie, 1998).

Destination branding is considered to be one of the newest research fields, researchers have been investigated this topic under label of destination image study for more than 30 years (Baloglu and McCleary 1999; Crompton 1979; Echtner and Ritchie 1993; Gallarza, Gil and Calderon 2002; Gartner 1986, 1989, 1993; Hunt 1975; Phelps 1986).

However, as Ritchie and Ritchie (1998) stated, it is necessary to commonly accept and develop a coherent framework for using branding theory for destinations. According to Cai (2002), the main disadvantage of previous destination image researches is in incapability to distinguish between the image and branding functions.”

Cai (2002) highlights that, research in destination branding area is in its infancy, comparing to the theme of product brands, which have many is merely in its infancy and distinguishes the difference: “image formation is not branding, albeit the former constitutes

the core of the latter. Image building is one step closer, but there still remains a critical missing link: the brand identity”.

Brent Ritchie et al (1998) argue that, researchers have tended to neglect the «Branding» function itself in developing and implementing Destination Marketing Plans even if Destination Marketing is a basic component of Tourism Destination Management (TDM). (J.R. Brent Ritchie and Robin J.B. Ritchie, 1998)

According to Park Jaworski et al.,(1986), we need to understand that the Branding is much extensive and far-reaching function than simply image and gives us more precise and generous framework on managing the total identity of a destination. (Park, Jaworski et al., 1986).

Ritchie and Ritchie propose the following definition: Based on Ritchie and Ritchie,1998, Destination Brand (DB) has been defined as a tool to achieve three different destination goals.

The first goal, as in any other marketing context, DB needs to address the traditional identification and differentiation functions of a brand. It could be “a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination”. (J.R. Brent Ritchie and Robin J.B. Ritchie, 1998).

Secondly, DB needs to convey the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination.

Finally, the third goal of a good DB should be to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience”. As opposed to traditional product branding, in the context of tourism destinations is especially important that a DB convey, either explicitly or implicitly, the promise of the essence of leisure travel – a memorable experience – and one that, if at all possible, is uniquely available at the destination in question. While product brands are also intended to convey a promise associated with satisfactory product usage, the promise is, usually, of a more functional nature in terms of either product performance or the quality of a particular service transaction. In tourism, for a destination to compete and succeed, it must offer a high quality “stream of product/service transactions” – or what is referred to as a “quality experience” (Otto and Ritchie, 1995).

Based on the foregoing discussions, we assert that the primary roles of a destination brand are to provide:

Table 2. Primary roles of a destination brand

Pre-Experience – Selection	Post-Experience – Recollection
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identification</li> <li>2. Differentiation</li> <li>3. Anticipation</li> <li>4. Expectation</li> <li>5. Reassurance</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Consolidation</li> <li>2. Reinforcement of memories</li> </ol>

Source: based on Ritchie and Ritchie,(1998)

In this regard, Table 2 attempts to “signify the “layered” functioning of a brand as it performs the pre-experience roles of selection and reassurance; i.e. creating awareness (identification), image/knowledge (differentiation), anticipation (preference/choice) and

expectation (desire) and The “post-experience” role of a destination brand, with the “Recollection” function, branding plays an important role in consolidating and reinforcing the memories of the destination experience, as the vehicle to bind or “chain” the many diverse “recall bits” into a memory of the experience.” (J.R. Brent Ritchie and Robin J.B. Ritchie, 1998)

J.R. Brent Ritchie and Robin J.B. Ritchie, 1998, also highlighted the secondary roles that a brand may play are:

- It is of use for a wide range of community development and promotion efforts, many of which are not the responsibility of a tourism DMO. In this regard, a destination brand can greatly increase the status of tourism within a community.

- To generate more profit from the sales of clothing and memorabilia supporting the destination name/logo, etc.

- To drive as a security/theft symbol for materials and equipment belonging to the destination.

In developing of tourism management researchers have tended to adapt and implement many theories, methodologies and approaches from marketing field, so tourism management is a marketing driven phenomenon. And there exist some challenges facing in this process of transference and adaptation has difficulties. (J.R. Brent Ritchie and Robin J.B. Ritchie, 1998).

Ritchie, 1975, investigated a significant number of difficulties in the field of research. “In this area, it has been argued that the nature and behavior and the context within which data are gathered are sufficiently different so as to present a number of conceptual and methodological difficulties.” (Ritchie, 1975).

#### *Defining the Entity Being Branded.*

J.R. Brent Ritchie et al, 1998, argue that, the main challenge faced in Destination Management Organization (DMO) seeking to market/brand a destination is to achieve agreement on what should be marketed. There are some destinations, where there is no common view on what the destination should offer or which ideal image should be promoted.

Among the main sources of dispute may occur between residents and tourism operators in the destination. Usually industry operators have more realistic perception about destination and are aware with the marketplace than residents. (J.R. Brent Ritchie and Robin J.B. Ritchie, 1998).

#### *Destination Residents are themselves Part of the Visitation Experience and Thus the Destination Brand*

Residents have a great impact on perception of a destination because hospitality of the host population plays a big role in contributing to the quality of the enjoyment of the visitation experience. The host population is immovable and the lack of control over the behavior's of the host population does not allow brand to capture for this kind of political and social shifts (J.R. Brent Ritchie and Robin J.B. Ritchie, 1998).

#### *Successful Destination Brands Seem to Have a Very Long Term Life Cycle*

Brent Ritchie et al stated, that there is much greater stability in branding of destination than destination experience. Among of those most successful destination brands have tended to reflect some insight that has been preserved for some time. The “I Love NY”, the “Virginia is for Lovers”, and the “Super Natural British Columbia” campaign market positioning have stood up well to the test of time (J.R. Brent Ritchie and Robin J.B. Ritchie, 1998).

## ***2.2 Measuring Customer-Based Brand Equity***

Commonly accepted theoretical conceptualization and the development of proper measurement instrument is discussed by academics and are proposed at either theoretical or empirical level by them, because there is no common agreement on how brand equity should be measured. (Yoo and Donthu 2001). However, there are some recognized approaches leading toward consensus on measurement such as analyses based on Aaker (1991) and Keller's (1993) categorization. They argue that a customer's assessment of a brand includes awareness, image, quality and loyalty dimensions.

David Aaker highlights "Brand Equity Ten" as a framework of a set of brand equity measures that could be applied across markets and products. "They are structured and motivated by the four dimensions of brand equity—loyalty, perceived quality, associations, and awareness"—that were developed in his book *Managing Brand Equity* (David Aaker, 1996).

### ***The Brand Equity Ten***

The Brand Equity Ten, ten sets of measures proposed by Aaker are reflected, grouped into five categories and summarized in Table 3. The first four categories represent customer perceptions of the brand along the four dimensions of brand equity—loyalty, perceived quality, associations, and awareness. The fifth includes two sets of market behavior measures that represent information obtained from market-based information rather than directly from customers (Aaker, 1996).

#### ***1) Loyalty***

According to Aaker, loyalty is the most important and significant dimension of brand equity. "A loyal customer base represents a barrier to entry, a basis for a price premium, time to respond to competitor innovations, and a bulwark against deleterious price competition." (David Aaker, 1996).

##### *Price premium*

The major index of loyalty is the amount a customer ready to pay for this brand rather than another similar brand offering similar value. A brand price premium can be obtained by "dollar metric", it means asking consumers how much more they would be willing to pay for the brand. For example, a consumer might be asked: "How much more would you pay to be able to buy Iphone instead of a Samsung? Awareness of brand's value help to organize and prioritize brand-building investments. Also it can used in crude estimate of brand value- the price premium associated with existing customers multiplied by unit sales. (David Aaker, 1996)

And of course there exist a disadvantage of price-premium, this measure is designed only with respect to competitors and even then it could be that an important competitor might be missed.

"One problem with price premium is that it is defined only with respect to a competitor or set of competitors. Thus, in a market with many competitors, several sets of price-premium measures will be needed, and, even then, an important emerging competitor might be missed." (David Aaker, 1996)

##### *Customer Satisfaction/Loyalty*

This measure can be adapted by focusing on the last use experience or simply the use experience of those existing customers who have used the product or service Satisfaction is a core dimension in service businesses such as car rental firms, hotels, or banks, where loyalty is often the cumulative result of the use experiences. Satisfaction can be an indicator of loyalty for a product class such as cosmetics or food in which the purchase and use represents

habitual behavior. A more direct loyalty measure can be found by asking intend-to-buy questions or by asking respondents to identify those brands that are acceptable.

- Would you buy the brand on the next opportunity?
- Is the brand the—only vs. one of two vs. one of three vs. one of more than three brands—that you buy and use?

A more intense level of loyalty would be represented by questions such as:

- Would you recommend the product or service to others?

The main limitation of satisfaction and loyalty measures lies in not involving noncustomers. Hence, the extent of brand equity beyond the customer base is not measured. (David Aaker, 1996)

## **2) Perceived Quality & Leadership Measures**

### *Perceived Quality*

Perceived quality is the core construct in the Total Research approach to measuring brand equity. Perceived quality is associated with price premiums, brand usage, stock return and other. Perceived quality can be measured with scales such as the following:

In comparison to alternative brands, this brand

- has: high quality vs. average quality vs. inferior quality
- is: the best vs. one of the best vs. one of the worst vs. the worst
- has: consistent quality vs. inconsistent quality (David Aaker, 1996)

### *Leadership/Popularity*

In order to attract enough customers to buy into the brand concept to make it the sales leader, it should deserve it. Leadership should follow the dynamics of customer acceptance and take into consideration that people want to be on the bandwagon and do not prefer to go against the flow. Leadership has not been well investigated and well documented, but it is not a simple construct and it shows market size, popularity and innovation.

Leadership can be measured by scales that ask whether the brand is:

- the leading brand vs. one of the leading brands vs. not one of the leading brands
- growing in popularity
- innovative, first with advances in product or service. (David Aaker, 1996)

## **3) Associations/Differentiation Measures**

Measurement of associations/differentiation can be built from three perspectives on the brand: the brand-as-product (value), the brand-as- person (brand personality) and the brand-as-organization (organizational associations).

### *Value*

The brand-as-product perspective propose the value of the brand and usually involves a functional benefit, which is basic to brands in most product classes. In order to be competitive among the market, the brand should be able to generate value.

Brand value can be measured by the following:

- whether the brand provides good value for the money
- whether there are reasons to buy this brand over competitors.

### *Brand Personality*

A second element of associations/differentiation, brand personality, is based on the brand-as-person perspective and provide emotional and self-expressive benefits.

It is also possible to develop measures that will reflect the existence of a strong personality but that are compact and not product specific. Candidate scales might include:

- This brand has a personality.
- This brand is interesting.

- I have a clear image of the type of person who would use the brand.

### *Organizational Associations*

The last perspective of associations/differentiation is the brand-as-organization and usually takes into consideration the organization(people, values, and programs). It plays a big role in demonstrating this organization represents more than products and services. Organizational associations should take care for customers, be oriented toward the community, be innovative and successful and strive for high quality. The disadvantage of this measure is not appropriate for all brands and might be misinterpreted.

More general scales that would apply over a broad set of product classes could include:

- This brand is made by an organization I would trust.
- I admire the brand X organization.
- The organization associated with this brand has credibility.

### **4) Awareness Measures**

Brand awareness is a very important and sometimes underestimated component of brand equity. It usually affects perceptions and attitudes and can serve as driver function of brand choice and loyalty. Brand awareness cause confidence and reflects salience of the brand in the minds of customers. There are several extents of brand awareness such as:

- “Recognition (Have you heard of the Nestle?)
- Recall (What brands of cars can you recall?)
- Top-of-Mind (the first-named brand in a recall task)
- Brand Dominance (the only brand recalled)
- Brand Knowledge (I know what the brand stands for)
- Brand Opinion (I have an opinion about the brand)
- Top-of-Mind (the first-named brand in a recall task)
- Brand Dominance (the only brand recalled)
- Brand Knowledge (I know what the brand stands for)
- Brand Opinion (I have an opinion about the brand)” ( Aaker, 1996).

### **5) Market Behavior**

The use of these first eight measures can be inconvenient, expensive, time consuming and sometimes even hard implemented and interpreted. One of the easiest measures might be loyalty, which can be obtained by using repeat purchase data from scanner panel sources.

It is not necessary to do surveys for the following measures such as market share, market price and distribution coverage. This measure provides a valid and sensitive reflection of the brand’s relationship with customers. Market share should increase when customers have positive association and prioritize that brand in their minds. In order to adapt this measure it is important to identify the product class and competitors.

#### *Market Price and Distribution Coverage*

This measure should be done by estimating the relative market price at which the brand is being sold. When market share increases because of reduced prices or price promotions this measure can be misleading. Market share and sales data are also sensitive to distribution coverage. For example, sales may have an impact when a brand obtains or loses a major market or expands across another geographic region. Distribution coverage could be measured by: the percentage of stores carrying the brand, or the percentage of people who have access to it. Many brands have big varieties and sizes of products with different channels and different competitors, with their duties, taxes and retail policies. Due to this creating price-level statistics in such markets can be complicated and data-gathering and

interpretation problem can arise.

### Measurement and Management

Reliable creating, obtaining and interpretation of these measures with valid results are the hallmarks of professional managers. These kinds of measures related to intangible assets such as brands, people and information technology are very sophisticated. But good management and development of such measures are able to show a missing ingredient for building and nurturing strong brands. Each of these measures has diagnostic value and it is not necessary and even cumbersome to use of so many measures. To do report it is convenient and sufficient to use a single one or at most four measures.

Table 3. Brand equity ten measures.

<p><b>Loyalty</b></p> <p><b>Price Premium</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For a 17-ounce package of chocolate chip cookies, Nabisco is priced at \$2.16—how much extra would you be willing to pay to obtain Pepperidge Farm instead of Nabisco? _____</li> <li>Brand Y would have to be _____ percent less than Brand X before I would switch brands.</li> <li>Trade-off questions such as: For a 16-ounce package of chocolate chip cookies, would you prefer Nabisco at \$2.16 or Pepperidge Farm at \$2.29?</li> </ul> <p><b>Satisfaction/Loyalty (among those who have used the brand)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I was—dissatisfied vs. satisfied vs. delighted—with the product or service during the my last use experience.</li> <li>I would buy the brand on the next opportunity.</li> <li>The brand is the—only vs. one of two vs. one of three vs. one of more than three brands—that I buy and use.</li> <li>I would recommend the product or service to others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are reasons to buy this brand over competitors.</li> </ul> <p><b>Personality</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This brand has a personality.</li> <li>This brand is interesting.</li> <li>I have a clear image of the type of person who would use the brand.</li> </ul> <p><b>Organization</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This brand is made by an organization I would trust.</li> <li>I admire the brand X organization.</li> <li>The organization associated with this brand has credibility.</li> </ul> <p><b>Differentiation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This brand is different from competing brands.</li> <li>This brand is basically the same as competing brands.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Perceived Quality/Leadership</b></p> <p><b>Perceived Quality</b></p> <p>In comparison to alternative brands, this brand</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>has: high quality vs. average quality vs. inferior quality</li> <li>is: the best vs. one of the best vs. one of the worst vs. the worst</li> <li>has: consistent quality vs. inconsistent quality</li> </ul> <p><b>Leadership</b></p> <p>In comparison with alternative brands, this brand is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the leading brand vs. one of the leading brands vs. not one of the leading brands</li> <li>growing in popularity</li> <li>innovative, first with advances in product or service</li> </ul>	<p><b>Awareness</b></p> <p><b>Brand Awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Name the brands in this product class.</li> <li>Have you heard of this brand?</li> <li>I know what this brand stands for.</li> <li>I have an opinion about this brand.</li> </ul> <p><b>Market Behavior</b></p> <p><b>Market Share</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Market share based on market surveys of usage or syndicated data</li> </ul> <p><b>Price and Distribution Indices</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relative market price—the average price at which the brand was sold during the month divided by the average price at which all brands in the product class were sold</li> <li>The percentage of stores carrying the brand or</li> <li>The percentage of people who have access to it</li> </ul>
<p><b>Associations/Differentiation</b></p> <p><b>Perceived Value</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This brand provides good value for the money.</li> </ul>	



Aaker also proposed that those financial measures such as sales, profit margins, cost and ROA are usually useful for measuring of brand performance, but they are not sufficient to provide a full picture and they are not reliable for long term measures. (David Aaker, 1996). There are some difficulties in obtaining more clear and balanced incentive structure, because of facing challenges such as design of reliable measures of brand strength that could contain both financial and brand asset measures. This would help in improving appropriate instruments for different kind of brands (David Aaker, 1996).

There are three accepted components of image: cognitive, affective, and conative (Gartner 1993). The cognitive component comprises awareness: what someone familiar with and have any opinion. The affective component is one’s feelings about this knowledge. The conative component is the action step: how one behaves on the information and what they feel about it (a destination). In the case of consumer products, most have tangible attributes, so images can be based on factual and measurable information. (Gartner, Konecnik, 2006). The process of creating responsible factors of brand value— dimensions of brand equity- is shown in Figure 16. Source: based on Gartner and Konecnik.

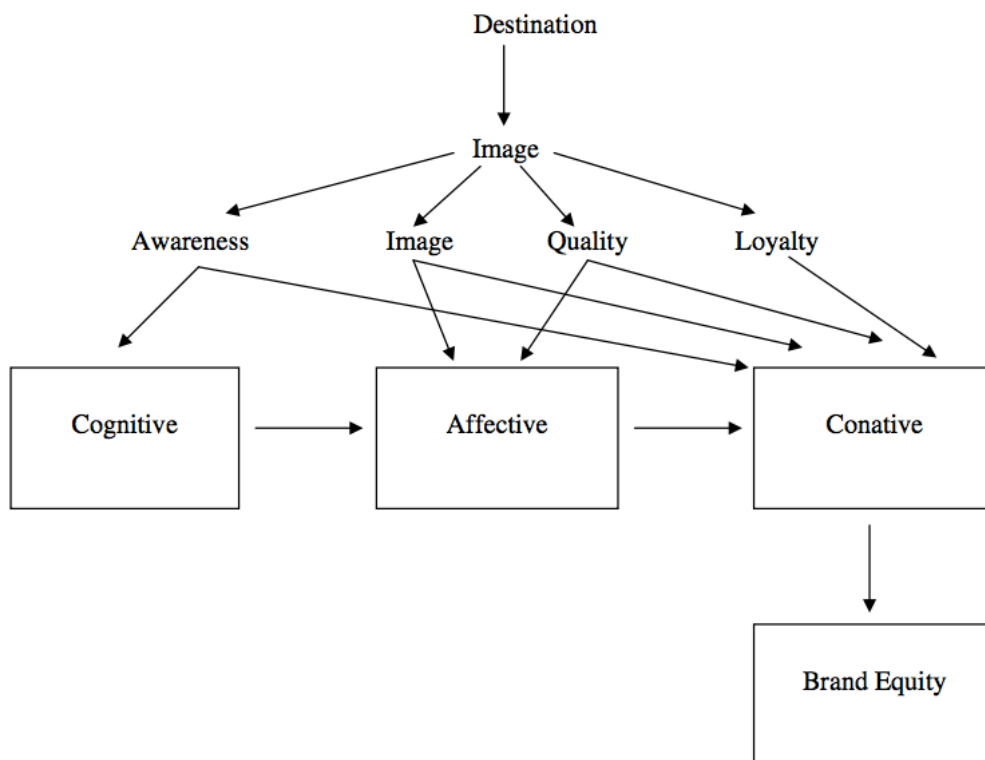


Figure 16. Creation of Brand Equity for a Destination Brand.

*Destination Awareness.* Many consumer behavior models propose that awareness is a main and necessary component. Awareness doesn’t necessarily lead to purchase, because this arises as a result in product curiosity (Fesenmaier, Vogt and Stewart 1993). “Awareness means that an image of the destination exists in the minds of potential tourists (Gartner 1993). When a destination aims to be popular, it must first reach awareness and then positive image (Milman and Pizam 1995).

*Destination Image.* There is no commonly accepted approach, but most of them have roots from marketing. (Gardner and Levy1955). The idea based on “acceptance of image’s

important role in tourist's destination behavior, regarding the evaluation and selection process, even though what is perceived is not always truly representative of what a place has to offer" is more acknowledged than other opinions (Gartner, Konecnik, 2006).

*Destination Quality.* Recently image investigations mostly based on empirical measurement of the concept, having combination of many attribute based variables. And only a few studies covered the topic of perceived quality within recent years. Drawing to these studies, quality is a vital element affecting consumer behavior (Gartner, Konecnik, 2006).

*Destination Loyalty.* Destination loyalty has not been well-researched area, though the loyalty concept has been investigated in the marketing properly. Oppermann (2000) stated that loyalty should be taking into consideration when examining destination brands very much. It has been suggested the main indicators of place loyalty are repeat visitation and intention to return (Gartner, Konecnik, 2006). Gitelson and Crompton (1984) argued that many destinations are staying popular because of repeat tourists. Opperman (2000) suggested that destination loyalty need longitudinally, lifelong visitation behavior investigation. In this regard behavioral loyalty can be used as a valid or reliable predictor of future destination choice" (Gartner, Konecnik, 2006). Attitudinal loyalty is a person's attitude (affective image component) towards a destination, which means their aspiration to visit, recommend and provide a positive word-of-mouth review. This aspect of loyalty considers extremely important because of vital role of recommendations (Bigne et al 2001).

Aaker (1991) considers brand loyalty as the core dimension, whereas Keller (1993) argue that image play more vital role from a customer's perspective. Both authors have adherents whose empirical investigations confirmed the importance of both dimensions. But scientific tourism literature tend to treat destination image as the main dimension. There are no studies where both dimensions were analyzed together or with another dimensions, first study where combination was applied was the paper of Gartner, Konecnik, 2006.

### III. MEASURING CUSTOMER-BASED BRAND-EQUITY

In future research Kyrgyz Republic will be investigated and measured, hence, our aim is to show how customer-based brand equity can be employed to increase competitiveness drawing on the Gartner's and Konecnik's (2006) study namely "Customer-based brand equity for a destination". Methodology and study instrument proposed in this paper will be conducted for our research. The authors have used Slovenia as a case study. Similar customer-based brand equity will be applied in Kyrgyz Republic.

Customer-based brand equity will be conducted based on survey proposed by Gartner and Konecnik (2006). This survey will allow us identify which elements are important by potential tourist in choosing a country for holidays and obtain visitor's opinion about a country as a tourism destination.

Drawing on the findings based on theoretical contributions from the brand equity area, mostly Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993), a conceptual model consisting of four dimensions (awareness, image, perceived quality, and loyalty) was proposed.

According to previous studies on CBBE for a destination, the destination image dimension plays a vital role in CBBE for a destination (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Pike, 2007).

The process as outlined in the next figure was followed by Gartner and Konecnik (2006) in their research study "Customer-based brand equity". Source: Gartner and Konecnik, (2006).

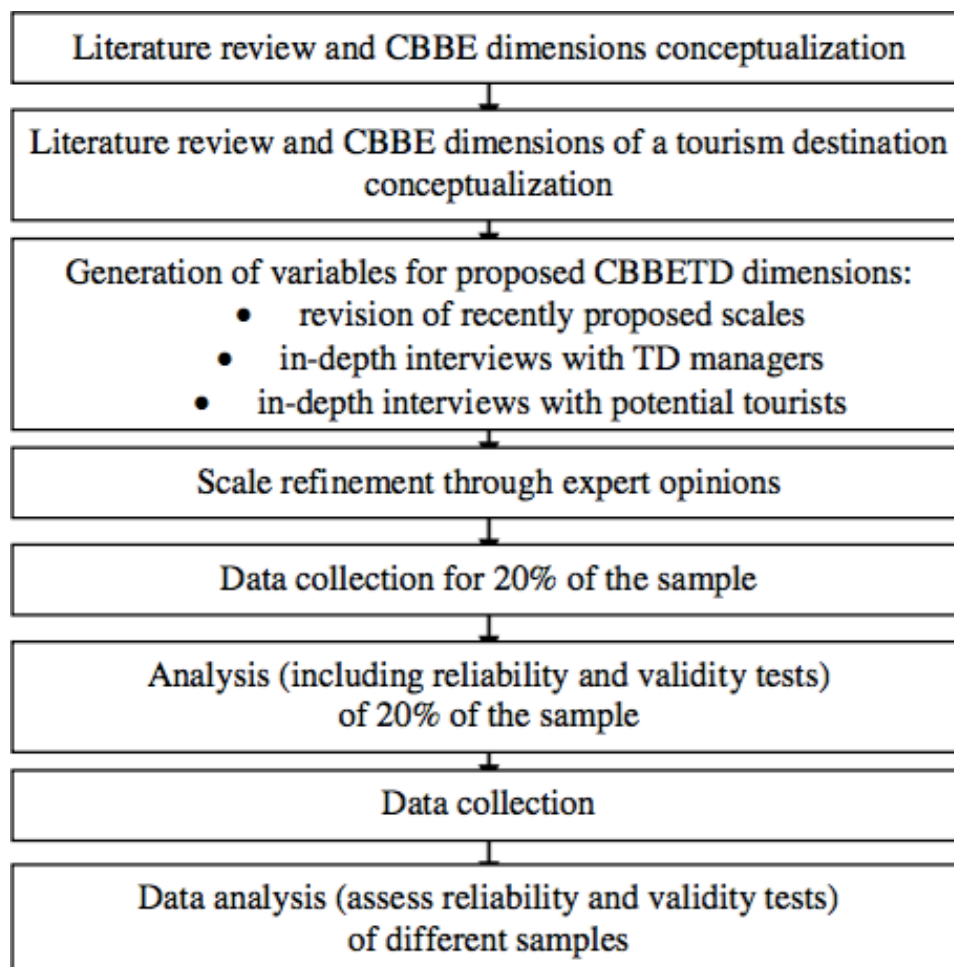


Figure 17. Scale Development

According to the authors, they had some complications due to the need of development a measurement instrument for the CBBETD concept and they paid special attention to developing a measurement for each dimension. Authors of the concept of the CBBETD for Slovenia suggest that organizations working in tourism marketing should take into consideration that customer's opinions of a destination include following four dimensions: quality, loyalty, image and awareness.

In order to increase destination awareness, its image, quality perceptions and loyalty dimensions, competent strategic marketing campaigns should be applied. Tourist's awareness and positive perceptions about tourist destinations depend on properly emphasized identity characteristics and generally leads to repeat visiting or at least recommendation to other potential customers.

#### Study methodology for future research.

The final CBBETD scale, proposed by Gartner and Konechik, comprises five awareness, 16 image, 10 quality, and 6 loyalty variables for investigating each of the four proposed dimensions.

Study Instrument. The study instrument is divided into four parts. At the beginning of the survey respondents have to answer a filter question first, because the aim of this investigation to obtain opinions of respondents who are minimally familiar with the investigated country. If respondents had not ever heard of the country, they will not be asked to continue answering. In order to avoid confusion of a country with other countries with similar names (Kazakhstan instead of Kyrgyzstan) an additional question on the country's geographical location will be provided.

The survey will only employ closed-ended questions. For each proposed dimension, a related set of variables will be utilized. The variables will be measured on a bipolar 5-point semantic differential Likert type scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. All scales included a neutral point of no agreement or disagreement with the statement. The use of semantic type scales is a common procedure in the social sciences to allow the use of nominal (or ordinal-level data to be treated as interval-level data) which can then be subjected to higher order analytical techniques.

Investigation will be conducted drawing the following steps:

- 1) First, indepth interviews with potential tourists from different countries will be conducted.
- 2) Second, further investigation should be conducted via a Delphi exercise using marketing and destination area experts.
- 3) Data will be collected by computer-assisted telephone interviewing method.
- 4) Individuals older than 18 years will be invited to participate.
- 5) Data Analysis. As the most reliable method of analysis of the proposed model CBBETD, structural equation modeling was selected. This method contains simultaneous estimation of multiple and interrelated dependence relationships (Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black 1998). As the first step to the structural equation modeling technique, exploratory factor analyses was used.
- 6) EQS software will be used for estimating confirmatory factor analysis as a measurement and structural model. Because the major goal was to esteem relationships among dimensions and among variables, higher-order confirmatory factor analysis should be implemented (Byrne, Baron, Larsson and Melin 1995).

7) Each of the proposed model's dimension will be conducted by exploratory factor analyses, by using principal axis factoring and the Oblimin rotation method. In the study of Gartner and Konechik, the image concept was extracted as multidimensional, quality and awareness dimensions were extracted as one-dimensional and loyalty was confirmed as another multidimensional dimension.

8) The relevance of exploratory factor analysis will be determined by verifying the correlation matrix of the CBBE variables.

9) Measurement Model. A confirmatory factor analysis will be conducted to affirm the detections of the exploratory factor analysis and to investigate the convergence of dimensions of the CBBETD.

Well-designed marketing strategic tools will be extremely important to attract customers to their destination and to create additional value for the destination by expanding their brand to other products associated with the destination.

Many authors highlighted that brand equity can be derived and increased by strengthening the dimensions of brand equity: brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand awareness / associations.

According to Keller, 2001, the brand can be established due to the proper identity, the appropriate brand meaning, the right brand responses and the appropriate brand relationships with customers by establishing six core brand values: brand salience, brand performance, brand imagery, brand judgments, brand feelings, and brand resonance

The brand is established through the proper identity, the appropriate brand meaning, the right brand responses, and the appropriate brand relationships with customers by establishing six core brand values: brand salience, brand performance, brand imagery, brand judgments, brand feelings, and brand resonance (Keller, 2001).

Pike, 2007, states, that the concept of CBBE for a destination may also be used for measuring the effectiveness of destination brand campaigns by DMO.

Keller (2002) distinguishes 4 categories of the "strong" brand's benefits: product-related effects, price-related effects, communication-related effects and channel-related effects and summarized as follows:

- *Improved perceptions of product performance*
- *Greater loyalty*
- *Less vulnerability to competitive marketing actions and marketing crises*
- *Larger margins*
- *More inelastic consumer response to price increases and more elastic consumer response to price decreases*
- *Greater trade cooperation and support*
- *Increased marketing communication effectiveness*
- *Licensing opportunities and additional brand extension opportunities*

## CONCLUSION

The assessing of the tourist destination from the customer's perspective is becoming important topic and attracting more and more attention of researchers and practitioners. Recent studies focused on exploring mostly the image concept.

First chapter of this study was dedicated to country profile and the role of tourism of Kyrgyz Republic. Tourism is an attractive alternative for achieving economic growth and stability in developing countries such as Kyrgyz Republic. It is necessary to develop proper marketing strategies for tourism development, to increase awareness, improve quality of the services, to satisfy customer's perception and to meet their expectations, in order to achieve customer's loyalty. This is a relatively young country and it had no time, opportunities and professional marketers in this field to develop image and to build good brand equity for the country. Last few years the tourism industry has been considered as one of the important sectors of economy, but in the past it was neglected very much. So the tourism as an industry and research area are now at the very beginning and should be considered seriously and organized properly.

Second part of the paper include literature review of several studies on brand equity based on Aaker (1996), Upshaw (1995), Keller (1993), Gartner and Konecnik (2006). Theoretical conceptualization of brand equity and measurement framework from different perspectives were proposed in this study. Customer-based brand equity for tourist destination and each of its dimensions, such as awareness, image, quality and loyalty have been investigated properly.

Measurement instrument for CBBETD evaluation developed in Gartner's and Konecnik's study was implemented for Slovenia. Drawing on this investigation, the similar CBBETD evaluation will be applied for Kyrgyz Republic. The process for scale development followed suggestions by Churchill (1979). Using the structural equation modeling technique allows one to combine the proposed dimensions of it into one model and to investigate their bindings and value holistically.

Gartner and Konecnik suggest, that according to obtained results, relationship between all four included dimensions exist and all dimensions are significant. They also highlighted that, future advancements for this model would be needed, such as increasing the number of awareness variables, adding additional measures of awareness such as top-of-mind and unaided re- call, if more popular and recognized destinations will be investigated.

Tourist destination marketers, responsible for promotion of a destination, should properly investigate the primary strategic aim of a destination branding. Proper marketing strategies should be focused on increasing tourist's destination awareness, appealing to their image or quality and strengthening their loyalty dimension. It is desirable to apply different marketing strategies toward different foreign markets, but it is necessary to prepare these marketing strategies in consideration of the destination's brand identity.

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## APPENDIX

### QUESTIONNAIRE

To start, I would like to thank you for taking 15 minutes to participate in this research.

We would like to evaluate, which elements are important by potential tourists in choosing a country for holidays.

Questions are intended to obtain your opinion about a country as a tourism destination. In this case please evaluate the country as tourist. You are kindly asked to express your opinion about two Central Asian countries. These questions ask about your PERSONAL OPINION, irrespective of your previous visitation in both countries. Because we are interested in your personal opinion, there are no right or wrong answers. In the last part, some general questions about your travel experience and personal data will be asked.

We assure you total anonymity for your answers. No individual responses will be released. All answers will be aggregated and only used for research purposes.

Thank you for your cooperation.

***PART 1 - This part of the questionnaire focuses on your opinion about Kyrgyz Republic. Kyrgyz Republic is a Central Asian country that borders on Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and China. Please, try to answer the following questions from a tourist point of view.***

Please, answer the following statements, focusing on Kyrgyz Republic as a tourism destination. Answer on a 5 point scale, where '1' means 'strongly disagree' and '5' means 'strongly agree'.

		1- strongly disagree 5-strongly agree				
1.1.1	I have heard of Kyrgyzstan	1	2	3	4	5
1.1.2	I can recognize the name of Kyrgyzstan among other destinations.	1	2	3	4	5
1.1.3	Some characteristics of Kyrgyz Republic come to my mind quickly.	1	2	3	4	5
1.1.4	I have difficulty in imagining Kyrgyz Republic in my mind.	1	2	3	4	5
1.1.5	I can recall the symbol or logo of Kyrgyz Republic as a tourism destination	1	2	3	4	5

(If Q 1.1.1 will be answered with '1' then the following questions about Kyrgyz Republic (Q 1) will not be asked).

Please, express the importance of the following sources of information in building your opinion about Kyrgyz Republic as a tourism destination. Answer on a 5 point scale, where '1' means 'strongly disagree' and '5' means 'strongly agree'.

The following sources of information have been important in building my opinion about Kyrgyz Republic as a tourism destination:

		1- strongly disagree 5-strongly agree				
1.2.1	Friends, relatives	1	2	3	4	5
1.2.2	Travel agents, tour operators	1	2	3	4	5
1.2.3	Advertisement (on TV, radio..	1	2	3	4	5
1.2.4	Books/movies/news	1	2	3	4	5
1.2.5	Internet	1	2	3	4	5
1.2.6	Previous visit	1	2	3	4	5

According to my opinion, Kyrgyz Republic offers:

		1- strongly disagree 5-strongly agree				
1.3.1	Beautiful nature	1	2	3	4	5
1.3.2	Beautiful mountains and lakes	1	2	3	4	5
1.3.3	Lovely towns and cities	1	2	3	4	5
1.3.4	Modern health resorts	1	2	3	4	5
1.3.5	Interesting historical attractions	1	2	3	4	5
1.3.6	Good skiing infrastructure	1	2	3	4	5
1.3.7	Good opportunities for recreation activities	1	2	3	4	5
1.3.8	Friendly people	1	2	3	4	5
1.3.9	Pleasant weather	1	2	3	4	5
1.3.10	Interesting cultural attractions	1	2	3	4	5
1.3.11	Political stability	1	2	3	4	5
1.3.12	Bad opportunities for adventures	1	2	3	4	5
1.3.13	Good accessibility	1	2	3	4	5
1.3.14	Relaxing atmosphere	1	2	3	4	5
1.3.15	Exciting atmosphere	1	2	3	4	5

Please, evaluate the following situations for Kyrgyz Republic. Answer on a 7 point scale, where '1' means 'very negative' and '7' means 'very positive'.

		1- very negative	7-very positive

1.4.1	Overall image of Kyrgyz Republic as a tourism destination	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.4.2	The general image of products, produced in Kyrgyz Republic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.4.3	Kyrgyz Republic's overall reputation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please, express your opinion, about the quality dimension in Kyrgyz Republic. Answer on a 5 point scale, where '1' means 'strongly disagree' and '5' means 'strongly agree'.

According to my opinion, Kyrgyz Republic offers:

		1-strongly disagree 5-strongly agree				
1.5.1	Unpolluted environment	1	2	3	4	5
1.5.2	High quality of accommodations	1	2	3	4	5
1.5.3	High quality of infrastructure	1	2	3	4	5
1.5.4	High level of cleanliness	1	2	3	4	5
1.5.5	High level of personal safety	1	2	3	4	5
1.5.6	Appealing local food (cuisine)	1	2	3	4	5
1.5.7	Low prices for tourism services	1	2	3	4	5
1.5.8	Low quality of services	1	2	3	4	5
1.5.9	Ease of communication (low problems with communication)	1	2	3	4	5
1.5.10	Good value for money	1	2	3	4	5

Please, evaluate the overall quality level of Kyrgyz Republic as a tourism destination. Answer on a 10 point scale, where '1' means 'extremely low quality' and '10' means 'extremely high quality'.

		1-extremely low quality 10- extremely high quality									
1.6.1	Overall quality level of Kyrgyz Republic as a tourism destination	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

How many times have you visited Kyrgyz Republic in the past?

1.7.1	Never	1	2	3-5 times	6 or more times
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(If Q 1.7.1 will be answered with ‘Never’ then questions Q 1.7.2, Q 1.8.1- 1.8.7 will not be asked. Instead of this, questions Q 1.9.1-1.9.4 will be asked).

When have you last visited Kyrgyz Republic?

1.7.2	This year	Last year	2-5 years ago	6-10 years ago	More than 10 years ago
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Please, answer the following statements, expressing your loyalty of Kyrgyz Republic as a tourism destination. Answer on a 5 point scale, where ‘1’ means ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘5’ means ‘strongly agree’.

		1-strongly disagree 5-strongly agree				
1.8.1	Kyrgyz Republic is one of the preferred destinations I want to visit.	1	2	3	4	5
1.8.2	Kyrgyz Republic provides more benefits than other similar European destinations.	1	2	3	4	5
1.8.3	I would like to visit Kyrgyz Republic in future.	1	2	3	4	5
1.8.4	I intend to recommend Kyrgyz Republic to my friends.	1	2	3	4	5
1.8.5	When I have a need for vacation/traveling abroad, I visit only Kyrgyz Republic.	1	2	3	4	5
1.8.6	I have grown to like Kyrgyz Republic more so than other destinations.	1	2	3	4	5
1.8.7	I intend to continue visiting Kyrgyz Republic in the future.	1	2	3	4	5

Please, answer the following statements, expressing your loyalty of Kyrgyz Republic as a tourism destination. Answer on a 5 point scale, where ‘1’ means ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘5’ means ‘strongly agree’.

		1-strongly disagree 5-strongly agree				
1.9.1	Kyrgyz Republic is one of the preferred destinations I want to visit.	1	2	3	4	5
1.9.2	Kyrgyz Republic provides more benefits than other similar European destinations.	1	2	3	4	5
1.9.3	I would like to visit Kyrgyz Republic in future.	1	2	3	4	5
1.9.4	I intend to recommend Kyrgyz Republic to my friends.	1	2	3	4	5

**Part 2. This part of the questionnaire focuses on your opinion about Kazakhstan, your neighboring country. Please, express your opinion about Kazakhstan as a tourism destination.**

Please, answer the following statements, focusing on Kazakhstan as a tourism destination. Answer on a 5 point scale, where ‘1’ means ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘5’ means ‘strongly agree’.

		1- strongly disagree 5-strongly agree				
2.1.1	I have heard of Kazakhstan	1	2	3	4	5
2.1.2	I can recognize the name of Kazakhstan among other destinations.	1	2	3	4	5
2.1.3	Some characteristics of Kazakhstan come to my mind quickly.	1	2	3	4	5
2.1.4	I have difficulty in imagining Kazakhstan in my mind.	1	2	3	4	5
2.1.5	I can recall the symbol or logo of Kazakhstan as a tourism destination	1	2	3	4	5

(If Q 1.1.1 will be answered with ‘1’ then the following questions about Kazakhstan (Q 1) will not be asked).

Please, express the importance of the following sources of information in building your opinion about Kazakhstan as a tourism destination. Answer on a 5 point scale, where ‘1’ means ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘5’ means ‘strongly agree’.

The following sources of information have been important in building my opinion about Kazakhstan as a tourism destination:

		1- strongly disagree 5-strongly agree				
2.2.1	Friends, relatives	1	2	3	4	5
2.2.2	Travel agents, tour operators	1	2	3	4	5
2.2.3	Advertisement (on TV, radio..	1	2	3	4	5
2.2.4	Books/movies/news	1	2	3	4	5
2.2.5	Internet	1	2	3	4	5
2.2.6	Previous visit	1	2	3	4	5

According to my opinion, Kazakhstan offers:

		1- strongly disagree 5-strongly agree				
2.3.1	Beautiful nature	1	2	3	4	5
2.3.2	Beautiful mountains and lakes	1	2	3	4	5

2.3.3	Lovely towns and cities	1	2	3	4	5
2.3.4	Modern health resorts	1	2	3	4	5
2.3.5	Interesting historical attractions	1	2	3	4	5
2.3.6	Good skiing infrastructure	1	2	3	4	5
2.3.7	Good opportunities for recreation activities	1	2	3	4	5
2.3.8	Friendly people	1	2	3	4	5
2.3.9	Pleasant weather	1	2	3	4	5
2.3.10	Interesting cultural attractions	1	2	3	4	5
2.3.11	Political stability	1	2	3	4	5
2.3.12	Bad opportunities for adventures	1	2	3	4	5
2.3.13	Good accessibility	1	2	3	4	5
2.3.14	Relaxing atmosphere	1	2	3	4	5
2.3.15	Exciting atmosphere	1	2	3	4	5

Please, evaluate the following situations for Kazakhstan. Answer on a 7 point scale, where ‘1’ means ‘very negative’ and ‘7’ means ‘very positive’.

		1- very negative			7-very positive			
2.4.1	Overall image of Kazakhstan as a tourism destination	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2.4.2	The general image of products, produced in Kazakhstan	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2.4.3	Kazakhstan’s overall reputation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please, express your opinion, about the quality dimension in Kazakhstan. Answer on a 5 point scale, where ‘1’ means ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘5’ means ‘strongly agree’.

According to my opinion, Kazakhstan offers:

		1-strongly disagree 5-strongly agree				
2.5.1	Unpolluted environment	1	2	3	4	5
2.5.2	High quality of accommodations	1	2	3	4	5
2.5.3	High quality of infrastructure	1	2	3	4	5
2.5.4	High level of cleanliness	1	2	3	4	5

2.5.5	High level of personal safety	1	2	3	4	5
2.5.6	Appealing local food (cuisine)	1	2	3	4	5
2.5.7	Low prices for tourism services	1	2	3	4	5
2.5.8	Low quality of services	1	2	3	4	5
2.5.9	Ease of communication (low problems with communication)	1	2	3	4	5
2.5.10	Good value for money	1	2	3	4	5

Please, evaluate the overall quality level of Kazakhstan as a tourism destination. Answer on a 10 point scale, where ‘1’ means ‘extremely low quality’ and ‘10’ means ‘extremely high quality’.

		1-extremely low quality 10- extremely high quality									
2.6.1	Overall quality level of Kazakhstan as a tourism destination	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

How many times have you visited Kazakhstan in the past?

2.7.1	Never	1	2	3-5 times	6 or more times
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(If Q 1.7.1 will be answered with ‘Never’ then questions Q 1.7.2, Q 1.8.1- 1.8.7 will not be asked. Instead of this, questions Q 1.9.1-1.9.4 will be asked).

When have you last visited Kazakhstan?

2.7.2	This year	Last year	2-5 years ago	6-10 years ago	More than 10 years ago
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Please, answer the following statements, expressing your loyalty of Kazakhstan as a tourism destination. Answer on a 5 point scale, where ‘1’ means ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘5’ means ‘strongly agree’.

		1-strongly disagree 5-strongly agree				
2.8.1	Kazakhstan is one of the preferred destinations I want to visit.	1	2	3	4	5
2.8.2	Kazakhstan provides more benefits than other similar European destinations.	1	2	3	4	5
2.8.3	I would like to visit Kazakhstan in future.	1	2	3	4	5

2.8.4	I intend to recommend Kazakhstan to my friends.	1	2	3	4	5
2.8.5	When I have a need for vacation/traveling abroad, I visit only Kazakhstan.	1	2	3	4	5
2.8.6	I have grown to like Kazakhstan more so than other destinations.	1	2	3	4	5
2.8.7	I intend to continue visiting Kazakhstan in the future.	1	2	3	4	5

Please, answer the following statements, expressing your loyalty of Kazakhstan as a tourism destination. Answer on a 5 point scale, where '1' means 'strongly disagree' and '5' means 'strongly agree'.

		1-strongly disagree 5-strongly agree				
2.9.1	Kazakhstan is one of the preferred destinations I want to visit.	1	2	3	4	5
2.9.2	Kazakhstan provides more benefits than other similar European destinations.	1	2	3	4	5
2.9.3	I would like to visit Kazakhstan in future.	1	2	3	4	5
2.9.4	I intend to recommend Kazakhstan to my friends.	1	2	3	4	5

**Part 3 In the following questions Kyrgyz Republic and Kazakhstan are compared.**

In the following 4 questions Kyrgyz Republic and Kazakhstan are compared.

Please choose only one answer, which is according to your opinion the most appropriate.

(If Q 1 OR Q 2 has not been asked, then the questions Q 3.1-3.4 will not be asked).

3.1	Which country is safer to visit?	1. Kyrgyz republic is much safer than Kazakhstan 2. Kyrgyz republic is safer than Kazakhstan 3. Kyrgyz republic is as safe as Kazakhstan 4. Kazakhstan is safer than Kyrgyz republic 5. Kazakhstan is much safer than Kyrgyz republic
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3.2	Which country provides you with better quality of accommodation?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Kazakhstan has much higher quality of accommodation than Kyrgyz Republic</li> <li>2. Kazakhstan has much higher quality of accommodation than Kyrgyz Republic</li> <li>3. Kazakhstan has the same quality of accommodation as Kyrgyz Republic</li> <li>4. Kyrgyz Republic has higher quality of accommodation than Kazakhstan</li> <li>5. Kyrgyz Republic has much higher quality of accommodation than Kazakhstan</li> </ol>
	Which country offers better beaches?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Kyrgyz Republic offers much better beaches than Kazakhstan</li> <li>2. Kyrgyz Republic offers better beaches than Kazakhstan</li> <li>3. Kyrgyz Republic offers the same beaches as Kazakhstan</li> <li>4. Kazakhstan offers the same beaches as Kyrgyz Republic</li> <li>5. Kazakhstan offers much better beaches than Kyrgyz Republic</li> </ol>
	Which country offers better level of cleanliness?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Kazakhstan has much higher level of cleanliness than Kyrgyz Republic</li> <li>2. Kazakhstan has higher level of cleanliness than Kyrgyz Republic</li> <li>3. Kazakhstan has the same level of cleanliness as Kyrgyz Republic</li> <li>4. Kyrgyz Republic has higher level of cleanliness than Kazakhstan</li> <li>5. Kyrgyz Republic has much higher level of cleanliness than Kazakhstan</li> </ol>

***PART 4 - In this section we would like to know some information about your travel experience and personal data***

Please, answer the following two statements. Answer on a 5 point scale, where '1' means 'strongly disagree' and '5' means 'strongly agree'.

		1-strongly agree 5-strongly disagree				
4.1	The general image of products, produced in	1	2	3	4	5

	country, influences my opinion about a country as a tourism destination.					
4.2	Overall country reputation influences my opinion about a country as a tourism destination.	1	2	3	4	5

Who do you prefer to travel with?

4.3	Alone	With partner	With family	With friends
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How are your holidays organized (on average)?

4.4	I organize my vacation individually	I book my vacation my travel agency	Combination 1+2
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How many holidays do you make an average per year? By holidays I mean those with at least 4 overnight stay.

4.5	0	Less than 1	1	2-3	4 or more
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Where are you travelling mostly?

4.6	Within your country	Abroad	Within your country+abroad
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What is your primary purpose of travel?

4.7	Holidays	Business	Holiday+business	Business and holidays
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4.8. Please write your Education

4.9. Employment status

4.9	Employed	Self-employed	Student/scholar	Retired	Housewife	Unemployed
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4.10

Age

4.11	18-24 years	25-34 years	35-44 years	45-54 years	55-64 years	65 year or
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						more
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Sex

4.12	M	F
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