

кешенді дамыту бойынша ғылыми зерттеулерді жүзеге асыруы үшін қызығушылық тудыруы мүмкін.

*Зерттеу нәтижесі* – Қазақстанның ауылдық аймақтарының инфрақұрылыммен қамтамасыз етілуін салыстырмалы талдау дестинацияның көлікпен жету көрсеткішін қамтамасыз етудегі бар проблемаларды, коммуналдық және әлеуметтік инфрақұрылыммен қамтамасыз етудің төмен деңгейін анықтауға мүмкіндік берді, бұл ауылдық аумақтардың туристік бағыттар ретінде тартымсыздығын және потенциалды туристер тарапынан сұраныстың төмендігін анықтайды.

*Түйін сөздер*: инфрақұрылым, туризм, ауылдық аумақтар, көлік, тұрғын үй, абаттандыру, медициналық қызмет көрсету.

*Алғыс*: Зерттеу Қазақстан Республикасы Білім және Ғылым Министрлігі Ғылым комитетінің бағдарламалық-нысаналы қаржыландыру шеңберінде жүргізілді («Қазақстан экономикасы мен қоғамының теңгерімді аумақтық даму тұжырымдамасы мен механизмдерін әзірлеу»).

#### ОБ АВТОРАХ

**Тлеубердинова Айжан Тохтаровна** – доктор экономических наук, главный научный сотрудник, Институт экономики Комитета науки Министерства образования и науки Республики Казахстан, Алматы, Республика Казахстан, e-mail: tat404@mail.ru, ORCID ID: 0000-0001-8762-5932\*

**Кулик Ксения Викторовна** – докторант 2 курса ОП Экономика, Университет Туран, Алматы, Республика Казахстан, e-mail: kulxevi2020@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-3736-2078

**Кулик Вероника Борисовна** – кандидат технических наук, доцент, Университет Туран, Алматы, Республика Казахстан, e-mail: kulvebori2018@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0000-0003-2248-1119

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#### EXAMINING THE ROLE OF ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COUNTRY IMAGE AND INTENTION TO VISIT REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

**S. E. Abdrakhmanova<sup>1</sup>, M. M. Nurpeisova<sup>1\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Narxoz University, Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan

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#### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of the research* is to analyze the impact of electronic word of mouth as a moderator between country image and intention to visit Republic of Kazakhstan.

*Methodology*. This research is qualitative study. 48 foreign citizens who have never been to the Republic of Kazakhstan participated in the survey. The questions were conducted in English. The data was coded using Atlas.ti software.

*Originality / value of the research*. Understanding the country image of The Republic of Kazakhstan through the eyes of foreign citizens will help to determine the features and characteristics of the parties for the development of tourism in the country and reveal an understanding of exist gaps in the development of this industry.

*Findings* of this research actively demonstrates that Republic of Kazakhstan is not well covered in the world market and the relevant authorized bodies should pay attention and take measures to promote the coun-

try's image in the world market. The authors confirm moderator effect of electronic word of Mouth on country image and intention to visit the Republic of Kazakhstan.

*Keywords:* country image, intention to visit, Republic of Kazakhstan, tourism.

## INTRODUCTION

In the first quarter of 2020 the global indicators of inbound tourism were inferior to the data of the previous year by only 28,6 %. In the second quarter, when the most stringent quarantine restrictions were introduced around the world up to a full lockdown, the global flow of foreign tourists dropped by 18.4 times. In the Republic of Kazakhstan, in the same period, the decrease was 16.7 times. In general, in 2020, according to the World Tourism Organization, the global flow of foreign tourists decreased by 3.6 times [1].

The Republic of Kazakhstan has all the prerequisites for the development of tourism: a favorable geographical position which is relative proximity to the main destination markets – Europe and Asia, a vast territory, rich cultural and historical heritage, living traditions, hospitality, excellent gastronomy, and relatively low cost of resources [2]. The mass media are called upon to play an important role in shaping the image of the country since communication has become a system-forming element. Electronic word of mouth allows countries at the stage of their development to build the image of their country and destinations [3]. UNWTO defines that tourism comprises activities of people traveling and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business, and other purposes [4].

The systematic approach to information resource in the process of forming the image strategy of the country that can bring success, while it is important to combine the efforts of all channels of mass communication: television, radio, print and internet resources. Previous research suggests that the consumer tends to evaluate a particular product negatively or positively [5].

Kazakhstan actively promotes tourism destinations using modern communication tools: from traditional methods – magazines, television, outdoor advertising to digital channels, social networks, and various tourist Internet resources. Nowadays, important to actively promote the Republic of Kazakhstan as a tourist destination. We can see successful experiences of our neighbor countries and how through massive advertising on television and online media, through anchor events they achieved a quick result.

In 2017, Kazakhstan held the Winter Universiade in Almaty and the EXPO-2017 exhibition in Nur-Sultan [6]. These events gave a significant impetus to the development of tourism industry. National Company "Kazakh Tourism" since then has been established. For 1.5 years, significant work was done, key events were held, several info tours, blog tours and expeditions were organized with the participation of over 30 travel bloggers from different countries, a huge bank of 3000 photos and 5 hours of video was collected, the country tourism portal was re-launched Kazakhstan travel and much more [7].

Many factors influence the intention to visit the country. The country's image is one such factor [8]. Many of previous studies noted the image of the country is a "halo" for its consumers and affects some factors of the product, but not the product itself [9]. When consumers have more experience with goods of the country, on the other hand, country image functions as a composite construct, in which consumers' opinions about the product attributes influence country image [10]. According to MacKay and Fesenmaier, the image of the country is appraised a lead point in tourists' expenditure and decision-making procedure [11]. However, Alvarez and Campo argued the country's image affects the intention to visit the country for the first time and return to the country again [12]. Meanwhile, Chen and Tsai propose tourists are said to use the country's image as shown for their expectations and idea of the first visit and comparison with previous experiences [13].

According to S. W. Litvin and R. E. Goldsmith, electronic word of mouth is one of the factors when consumers choose a product and draw conclusion about it [14]. B. Pan believes that this factor is especially important in the field of hospitality and tourism since it is considered intangible, and it should be difficult to be assessed before it is used [15]. By digitizing electronic word of mouth, consumer's reviews are spreading across social media at unprecedented rate. Electronic word of mouth can be classified as free advertising for a product that will lead to success and increase productivity, but at the same time, negative reviews can seriously damage the image [16]. M. Sotiriadis determines that social media, blogs, reviews, and electronic word of mouth are increasingly used in tourism industry [17].

Plans to take an action may include plans to make positive appeals, give advice and purchase a product or service as well as a business trip or / or visit to the state [18]. According to S. Baloglu and M. Mangaloglu, consumer's intentions differ depending on the type of their behavior [19].

## MAIN PART

**Methodology.** The current study is qualitative research. The data were collected via survey and coded using Atlas.ti Software. Survey questions were based on country image of Kazakhstan, their intention to visit the country, and what they know about Kazakhstan. The questions were conducted in English language. 48 respondents of this research are foreign citizens and representatives of the following continents: America, Europe, Asia, Africa. All respondents are both female (79,2 %) and male (20,8 %) with age between 18-24 (52,1 %) and 25-39 (47,9 %). The most represented countries in this research included Spain, USA (10,4 %), France (7,9 %), Lebanon (6,3 %) and other countries with (4,2 %) and (2,1 %). In terms of education, majority of the respondents have graduate degrees (47,9 %), undergraduate degrees (39,6 %), and college degrees (12,5 %). The sample were represented different occupations: management (10,4 %), business and financial (25 %), computer (4,2 %), architecture (18,7 %), social sciences (2,1 %), arts (4,2 %), education (10,4 %), legal occupations (2,1 %), healthcare practitioners (4,2 %), healthcare support (2,1 %), food preparations (4,2 %), office support (2,1 %), and others (10,4 %). Marital status of respondents both married (18,8 %) and single (81,3 %) with different levels of income: less than 100\$ (10,4 %), 100-200\$ (4,2 %), 200-500\$ (14,6 %), 500-1000\$ (27,1 %), and income over 1000\$ (43,8 %) per month. 21 respondents are European, 11 are Asians, 6 are African ethnicity, 2 are American, 3 are from Middle East, and 5 others. The survey included 12 questions and 1 open question where they asked to indicate their level of agreement (1-5; 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree).

### *Survey questions:*

1. I have a positive idea of Kazakhstan
2. I consider Kazakhstan as politically/economically stable country
3. I consider Kazakhstan as a modern country
4. Bilateral relations between my country and Kazakhstan are friendly
5. I associate Kazakhstan with other "STAN" countries
6. I predict that I should travel to Kazakhstan in the future
7. I would visit Kazakhstan rather than any other tourist destinations
8. I am willing to visit Kazakhstan in the future
9. I often read other tourists' online travel reviews to know what destinations make good impressions on others
10. To make sure I choose the right destination, I often read other tourists' online travel reviews
11. I often consult other tourists' online travel reviews in order to help to choose an attractive destination
12. If I do not read tourists' online travel reviews when I travel to a destination, I worry about my decision

### *Open question:*

What do you know about Kazakhstan?

**Findings.** The geographical position of Kazakhstan, connecting East and West, its rapid economic development, political stability give hope that soon the republic will turn into one of the most visited countries in the world by tourists, because, along with the above, the main tourist product is the hospitality of the Kazakh people, their originality and peacefulness. Furthermore, creating a positive and attractive country image of Kazakhstan as a country of tourism in the minds of potential tourists, carrying out activities to promote the tourism potential of Kazakhstan in the global tourism market, along with assisting Kazakh tourism service providers in entering international tourism markets are the main priorities that need to be addressed shortly. The presence of natural and even the creation of a tourist infrastructure does not guarantee the country, city, and any other territorial entity popularity among tourists. Very often, the decisive factor for the development of inbound tourism is the image formed by the external audience about this territory.

Survey of the current research were divided into 3 main factors: electronic word of mouth, country image

and intention to visit the Republic of Kazakhstan by foreign citizens. Analyzing collected data, the authors revealed the fact that the Republic of Kazakhstan has a good image among them. Most of the respondents (69 %) consider Kazakhstan to be among the developed and modern countries, and only few people either could not answer the question or have stereotypical ideas (6 %), and the rest of them are neutral (25 %). The following figure 1. demonstrates proportion of 48 respondents regarding country image of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

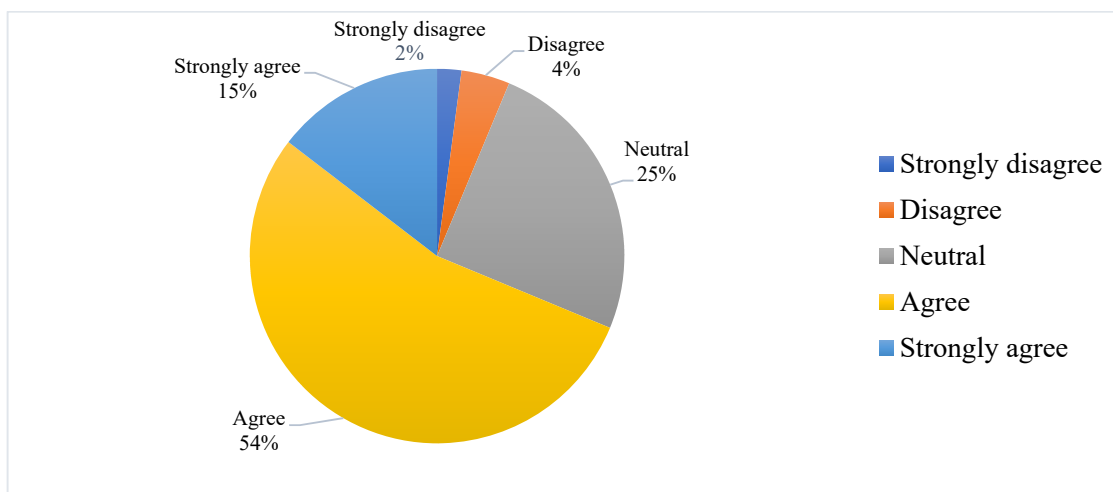


Figure 1 – Proportion of the answers regarding the image of Kazakhstan

Note – The chart shows the percentage of respondents who answered the question regarding the image of the Republic of Kazakhstan according to the five-point scale. Compiled by the authors based on data collected through the survey

Respondents from the neighboring countries of Central Asia and Russia noted that they have much in common with our country, while the respondents from distant countries have no idea about Kazakhstan at all. However, figure 2 demonstrates the intention of the interviewed potential tourists to visit Kazakhstan.

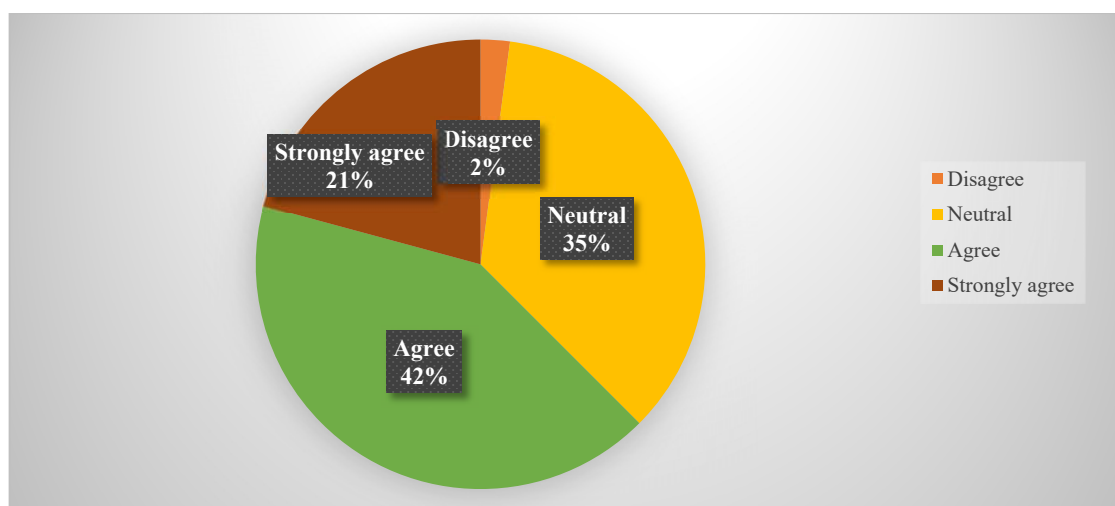


Figure 2 – Proportion of the answers regarding intention to visit the country

Note – The chart represents percentage of respondents who intend to visit the Republic of Kazakhstan. Compiled by the authors based on survey

Even though 6 % of the respondents noted their disagreement with the positive image of Kazakhstan, but even so they would choose it for their future destination. Moreover, respondents were able to answer one open-ended question aiming to understand in more detail what foreign citizens associate Kazakhstan with. The answers to this open – ended question were coded using the Atlas.ti Software (Figure 3).

Despite the fact that 6 % of the respondents answered that they do not have a positive vision of the image of Kazakhstan, they still have basic knowledge about the country and intend to visit it in the future.

Respondents from the countries of the former Soviet Union are more familiar with Kazakhstan, they note the language of communication in the country, traditions, natural resources, and oil. Respondents from more distant countries (respondents from Europe and America) mark the geographical position of the country on the world map.

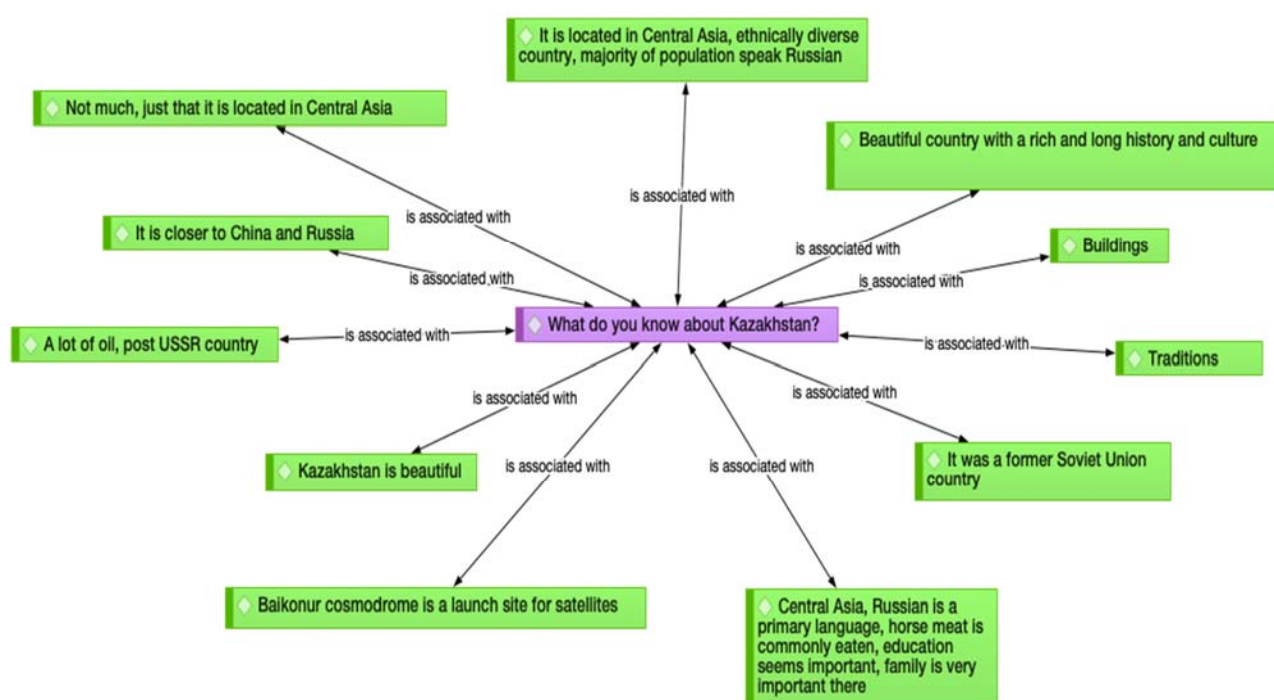


Figure 3 – Answers of the respondents for open – ended question about Kazakhstan

Note – Compiled by the authors using Atlas.ti Software for coding

The fact that the location of Kazakhstan and the presence of natural resources pleases, but it can also be concluded that popular tourist sites, holy places, high mountains, numerous rivers, forests, rare animals and culture are not so much consecrated by word of mouth. None of the respondents mentioned the slogan of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the capital city, our endless steppes or at least one tourist distance. Besides, few respondents noted that they do not know much information about Kazakhstan, which is actively demonstrates that the country is not well covered in the world market and the relevant authorized bodies should pay attention and take measures to promote the country's image in the world market via electronic word of mouth in order to in order for tourists to want to visit our country.

## CONCLUSION

Word of mouth has always been the most important factor in choosing the destinations for tourists to travel. Most travelers now rely entirely on online platforms to plan and book their trips. The rise in the use of social media and travel blogs has exacerbated this trend, reducing the influence of institutional and traditional communication channels on destination selection. This is a cost-effective marketing opportunity for lesser-known



destinations to build a strong travel brand and image among consumers in target markets and global segments. In The Republic of Kazakhstan social networks are poorly used as important tools for promoting tourism. Word of mouth can be an excellent service for Kazakhstan and will help attract a large number of foreign tourists. The most important thing is to "catch" one foreigner, show that Kazakhstan is developing country and then he will tell his friends and acquaintances. Tourists are generally ready share their opinion about hotels and tours – more than half willingly leave reviews and share their impressions, only a quarter do not report anything on the Internet. At the same time, customer reviews are a significant factor when choosing a vacation spot. In conclusion, we recommend that business representatives and destination management organizations to be present on various social networks, depending on the potential audience, to be active and interact with their audience, including through various campaigns, while calling for interaction through prompts to share photos and encouragement. For limitations of this study the authors consider single case of Kazakhstan and limited amount of the respondents. For the future research the authors plan to consider the cases of Central Asian countries using benchmarking. Practical implication for this study can be further relations between local authorities, companies, and businesses to create marketing strategies to improve the country's image on the world stage. The results of this study can be used in further works in the field of tourism of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The main theoretical positions and conclusions of the study are proposed for use by the governing bodies of tourism and services to optimize the regulatory framework, including when developing a concept, strategic plans, and programs national development of tourism services.

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**МЕМЛЕКЕТТІҢ ӨЗІ ТУРАЛЫ ҰСЫНЫС ПЕН ҚАЗАҚСТАН РЕСПУБЛИКАСЫНА  
САПАР МАҚСАТЫ АРАСЫНДАҒЫ ӨЗАРА ІС-ҚИМЫЛДЫ АЙҚЫНДАУ МӘСЕЛЕСІНДЕ  
ЭЛЕКТРОНДЫҚ «ҰЗЫНҚҰЛАҚ» РАДИОНЫҢ МАҢЫЗДЫЛЫҒЫН ТАЛДАУ**

**С. Е. Әбдрахманова<sup>1</sup>, М. М. Нұрпейісова<sup>1\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Нархоз Университеті, Алматы, Қазақстан Республикасы

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**АНДАТПА**

*Зерттеу мақсаты* – мемлекеттің өзі туралы идеяның және Қазақстан Республикасына сапарарасындағы байланыстырушы буын ретінде электронды «ұзынқұлақ» радиосының әсерін зерттеу.

*Әдіснамасы.* Бұл зерттеу сапалы талдау болып табылады. Зерттеуге қатысушылар – Қазақстан Республикасына ешқашан келмеген 48 шетелдік азамат. Зерттеу сауалнамалары Қазақстан Республикасына қатысты болады, респонденттерге тән ерекшеліктер, олардың елге келу ниеттері, олардың Қазақстан туралы не біледі және олар өз демалысын өткізу үшін алдағы бағыт ретінде Қазақстан Республикасын тандай ма деген түсінік негізінде құрылды. Сауалнамалар ағылшын тілінде жүргізілді. Алынған деректерді талдау үшін Atlas.ti. бағдарламасы қолданылды.

*Зерттеудің бірегейлігі / ерекшелігі.* Шетелдік азаматтардың көзімен Қазақстан Республикасы туралы түсінік елдегі туризмді дамыту аспектілерінің ерекшеліктері мен сипаттамаларын анықтауға және осы саланы дамытуда кемшіліктердің болуы туралы өзара түсіністікті анықтауға мүмкіндік береді.

*Зерттеу нәтижелері* Қазақстан Республикасының әлемдік нарықта жеткілікті түрде жақсы ұсынылмағанын айқын көрсетеді және тиісті уәкілетті органдар бұған назар аударуға және елдің әлемдік нарықтағы имиджін ілгерілету жөнінде шаралар қабылдауға тиіс.

*Түйін сөздер:* мемлекеттің имиджі, келу мақсаты, Қазақстан Республикасы, туризм.



**АНАЛИЗ ЗНАЧИМОСТИ ЭЛЕКТРОННОГО САРАФАННОГО РАДИО  
В ОПРЕДЕЛЕНИИ ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЯ МЕЖДУ ПРЕДСТАВЛЕНИЕМ О  
ГОСУДАРСТВЕ И ЦЕЛЮ ВИЗИТА В РЕСПУБЛИКУ КАЗАХСТАН**

**С. Е. Абдрахманова<sup>1</sup>, М. М. Нурпеисова<sup>1\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Университет Нархоз, Алматы, Республика Казахстан

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**АННОТАЦИЯ**

*Целью данного исследования – является изучение воздействия электронного сарафанного радио в качестве связующего звена между представлением о самом государстве и с целью визита Республики Казахстан.*

*Методология.* Данное исследование является качественным исследованием. Участники исследования – 48 иностранных граждан, которые ни разу не посещали Республику Казахстан. Опросы исследования были сформированы на основе представления о Республике Казахстан, характерных особенностей респондентов, их намерения посетить страну, что им известно о данной стране и предпочтут ли они Республику Казахстан в качестве предстоящего направления для проведения своего отпуска. Опросы проводились на английском языке. Для кодирования полученных данных была применена программы Atlas.ti.

*Оригинальность / ценность исследования.* Представление о Республике Казахстан глазами иностранных граждан позволит определить особенности и характеристики аспектов развития туризма в стране и выявить взаимопонимание о наличии недостатков в развитии данной отрасли.

*Результаты исследования* наглядно свидетельствуют о том, что Республика Казахстан недостаточно хорошо представлена на мировом рынке, соответствующие уполномоченные органы должны обратить на это внимание и принять меры по продвижению имиджа страны на мировом рынке.

*Ключевые слова:* имидж страны, цель посещения, Республика Казахстан, туризм.

**ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

**Abdrakhmanova Saniya Erzhanovna** – PhD Student, Narxoz University, Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan, e-mail: saniya.abdarkhmanova@narxoz.kz

**Nurpeisova Makpal Muratbekovna** – candidate of economic sciences, professor, Narxoz University, Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan, e-mail: makpal.nurpeisova@narxoz.kz\*