

*Using the Web Quality Index (WQI) Assessment Model to Analyze
Kazakhstani National Tourism Portals*

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ABSTRACT

Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO) in the tourism industry play a crucial role in promoting, marketing, and disseminating the destination image and its brand via different communication channels. One of them is the usage of Official Destination Websites (ODWs). Various methodological assessment tools have been proposed by different scholars to assess the overall quality of destination websites. In the context of Kazakhstan, no comprehensive methodological tool so far has been used to assess the destination websites. Hence, this paper presents a quantitative study by applying the Web Quality Index (WQI) assessment tool for eight Kazakhstani and eight international ODWs. Using a total of 127 indicators grouped into twelve parameters, the objective of the paper is to assess the overall quality of destination websites according to a derived index score and identify their strengths and weaknesses. Alongside that, interviews have been conducted with two Kazakhstani tourism stakeholders, namely Kazakh Tourism JSC and Nur-Sultan Convention & Visitors Bureau. The results show that Kazakhstani ODWs struggle in almost all parameters, unlike the international ODWs, in particular those about communicative, relational, and persuasive aspects. Among the weakest parameters for Kazakhstani ODWs include “interactivity”, “mobile communication” and “marketing”. Most Kazakhstani websites encountered specific problems related to technical and functional issues with mobile applications, commercial systems, or interactive resources. This research can be considered as a pioneer of destination website studies in Kazakhstan, which would help tourism organizations as well as managers to pinpoint the problems that destination websites encounter and confront them with viable policy recommendations.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DMO - Destination Marketing Organization. It refers to an agency, institution, or organization that promotes a tourist destination in a country.

ODW - Official Destination Website. It refers to a website that is managed, marketed, and promoted by a destination marketing organization.

WQI - Web Quality Index. It refers to an assessment system that evaluates destination websites via different indicators with its own weighting system for each parameter to derive a web quality index score, which shows the overall grade for a website.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become a driving force for economic growth in many developing and developed states (Kotler, Haider & Rein, 1993). According to the World Bank, around 1.2 billion tourist arrivals were reported all around the world during 2015 (The World Bank, n.d.). It was also forecasted that we would witness a global increase of tourist arrivals reaching around 1.8 billion in 2030 (UNWTO, 2011, p.15). Tourism provides not only cash inflow for an economy but also generates employment opportunities and foreign direct investments to regional communities (Lemma, 2014; Manzo, 2019). Tourism is a highly competitive sector where the various tourism products and services of different destinations compete with one another and are regarded as one of the most researched themes on the Internet (Law, Bai & Leung, 2008).

With the emergence of the Internet in the mid-90s and the following fast-paced changes in IT, many scholars have stressed the importance of the Internet for tourism entrepreneurship (Burger et al., 1997; Clyde & Landfried, 1995). The Internet changed the whole landscape of the tourism industry, and it has become both a platform for marketing and commercial activities as well as an interlinking communication channel for suppliers and consumers (Dorren & Frew, 1997; Buhalis, 2003; Lehto, Kim & Morrison, 2006; Ho & Lee, 2007; Buhalis & Law, 2008). It is also crucial to understand that the number of Internet users worldwide has risen from a meager 6% in 2000 towards almost 60% in 2019, showing the exponential increase in the importance of the Internet market (Internet World Stats, n.d.). As a consequence, an opportunity opened up for official promotion bodies (or DMOs - Destination Marketing Organizations) to use the Internet as a platform as well as a channel to promote tourism products and services of destinations via touristic websites (Blain, Levy & Ritchie, 2005; Gretzel et al., 2006).

DMOs usually have their own official destination websites (ODW) that contain different elements of travel information and resources, ranging from visa information to interconnected online booking systems. Thus, the quality of ODWs developed by DMOs, in terms of appeal, informational abundance, usefulness, and other quality characteristics,

is of utmost importance for both customers, suppliers, and tourism organizations (Choi, Lehto & O'Leary, 2007). Since information is disseminated to the public via ODWs, this information needs to be evaluated continuously with useful performance measurements to understand whether the relevant information is conveyed correctly. Hence, ODWs are seen by DMOs as both tools and crucial platforms to conduct business as well as to form positive images. The value of ODWs does not only lie on the selling of their tourism products and services but also in understanding their strengths and weaknesses via website assessment techniques.

The objective of this particular research paper is to assess the quality of eight Kazakhstani and eight international ODWs according to a Web Quality Index assessment system consisting of 12 parameters and 127 indicators. Alongside the quantitative analysis, we have conducted two semi-structured interviews with stakeholders of the tourism industry in Kazakhstan, namely Kazakh Tourism JSC National Company and Nur-Sultan Convention & Visitors Bureau. These interviews give us an idea of how ODWs in Kazakhstan are marketed, developed, and maintained. Furthermore, it provides us some interesting insights into how the internal workings of DMOs work. For this qualitative component, we prepared twelve interview questions.

In the context of Kazakhstan, an analysis of ODWs, more specifically that of city destination websites, has never been conducted. As official destination websites exist in Kazakhstan, we fill a necessary research gap as well as provide valuable recommendations to Kazakhstani DMOs. Hence, this research paper can be considered as a pioneer of the assessment of tourism websites in the Kazakhstani context. Such a study does not only complement the current research related to tourism in Kazakhstan but also paves the way for potential research areas, such as the performance assessments of hotels in hospitality studies. Our specific research study can provide clear-cut practical recommendations for public administrators, tourism managers, and government officials on how to improve destination websites based on identified weaknesses and strengths in comparison with international destination websites.

In the next section, we will provide an extensive literature review on the role of the Internet, destinations, DMO websites, and the evolution of website analysis in the tourism industry. After that, a detailed explanation of the methodology will be provided.

The methodology consists of both quantitative (WQI assessment system) and qualitative approaches (twelve-question interview script). The final sections analyze and discuss the research findings as well as the key conclusions with possible recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Role of the Internet for Tourism Destinations

According to Pike (2012, p. 24), a destination is defined as a specially designed location where resources for touristic purposes exist. Destinations have been understood as a mixture of various tourism products that are interdependent with each other (Pearce, 1992; Hu and Ritchie, 1993; Buhalis, 2000; Berc, 2009) consisting of tourist products that compete with other tourist products (Bieger, 1998: p. 7). Others looked at destinations from a supply perspective within a web of systems (Tamma, 2002; Brunetti, 2002). The UNWTO (2007) explains destinations as an area with geographical boundaries that aims to retain a specific tourism-attractive image involving various stakeholders.

Tourism goes hand in hand with technological developments around the world (Poon, 1993; Sheldon, 1997). E-commerce and the usage of the Internet have had huge impacts on the tourism planning process (Palmer & McCole, 2000), especially for tourism sectors such as travel agencies, tourism operators (Brey et al., 2007; Choi, Lehto & Morrison, 2007) and tourism organizations such as DMOs (Doolin, Burgess & Cooper, 2002; Lee, Cai & O'Leary, 2006). The wide range of tourism products and services available in a competitive environment makes the Internet a crucial marketing tool and platform for destinations to promote its products and services (Pollock, 1995; Sharma & Dogra, 2011). Therefore, the Internet plays a vital role in promoting DMOs destination websites.

With the usage of the Internet by many tourists and different destinations competing with one another, the Internet challenged destinations to adapt to modern developments and consumer changes (WTO, 2007; Žanna & Xuedong, 2016), and traditional marketing approaches were replaced (Tarlow, 2003). Moreover, the Internet itself also provides an additional incentive for suppliers to reach out to new online markets allowing interested customers to make purchases and bookings at home much faster (Kim et al., 2009). Dion and Woodside (2010) also asserted that the usage of

websites and the availability of the Internet allowed for better information access to tourism products and services, primarily via the creation of official tourism websites. Nevertheless, since not all official tourism websites are of the same quality and design, visitors judge websites based on their first impression, and often this can directly affect their purchase intentions (Law and Hsu, 2006; Kim and Fesenmaier, 2008).

Adopting information technologies helps tourism and hospitality industries to minimize costs and time while upgrading the quality of service provision via customer feedback (Law, Leung & Buhalis, 2009). Sometimes before visiting a destination, tourists already might have an established image with expectations that would often be difficult to modify (Buhalis, 2000; Buhalis & Law, 2008; Hyde, 2008). According to Archdale (1995), tourists do not merely want to arrive at destinations to stay or purchase tour packages but to enjoy their experiences practically. Tourism websites provide here all the necessary “stimuli” for potential tourists to visit those destinations and check and purchase their tourism products and services in advance.

The Role of DMO for Destinations

DMOs¹ are defined as tourism organizations that (1) enable tourism development and (2) coordinate tourism products and services for destinations via marketing, management, and promotion tools, while also considering new consumer and marketing trends (Morrison, Bruen & Anderson, 1997; Lu & Lu, 2002; Dore & Crouch, 2003; WTO 2004; Blain, Levy & Ritchie 2005; Choi, Lehto & Morrison, 2007; Choi, Lehto & O’Leary, 2007; Elbe, Hallen & Axelsson, 2009; Li & Wang, 2010; Wang, 2011; Lee & Gretzel, 2012; Luna-Nevarez & Hyman, 2012; Sartori, Mottironi & Corigliano, 2012; Santos, Cavia & Parera, 2014; Žanna & Xuedong, 2016). Other scholars also noted that DMOs have multi-dimensional responsibilities that go beyond marketing and management, such as in coordinating stakeholders’ strategies and their relationships (Gartrell, 1988; Heath and Wall, 1992; Kaspar, Laesser & Senn, 1995; Getz, Anderson & Sheehan, 1998; Minguzzi & Presenza, 2004; MacKay & Smith, 2006; L’Etang, Falkheimer & Lugo, 2007; Pike, 2012; Žanna & Xuedong, 2016). DMOs also optimize

¹ DMOs can also be named differently, such as the national tourist office or visitors’ bureau (Mckercher & Ritchie, 1997).

tourism products and services through its impact on the market by enhancing long-term development goals for local tourism companies. To achieve these outcomes, they use different outlets of communication channels, starting from traditional tools to social media networks (Gretzel et al., 2006; Fernandez-Cavia & Lopez, 2013; Pike & Page, 2014; WTO, 1999).

The organizational structure and funding of DMOs may vary depending on the context and the scale of tourism development (Presenza, Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005). DMOs can be a government department or in a quasi-public enterprise cooperating alongside private companies (Bennett, 1999; Prideaux & Cooper, 2003; Franch & Martini, 2002; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Presenza, Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005; Tian, Huang & Busby, 2011). Structurally, they are designed as public non-profit organizations that geographically may work at state, regional or local levels (Rita, 2000; Gretzel, 2006; Choi, Lehto & O'Leary, 2007; Li & Wang, 2010). Their funding may come from different sources such as public funds, taxations, government loans, commissions related to sales, commercial activities, or sponsorships from specific beneficiaries (Sheehan & Ritchie, 1997; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Franch & Martini, 2002; Morrison, 2013).

The modern tourism market is rapid, dynamic, and continuously changing. Since tourists have specific expectations and interests, DMOs also need to be able to capture tourists expectations and interests within the market trends (Ho & Lee, 2007; Lončarić, Bašan & Marković, 2013), while taking into account to update their websites (Huang, Chou & Lin, 2010; Fernandez-Poyatos, Aguirregoitia & Boix, 2011). Destination websites serve not only as a tool to provide information but also as a commercial and promotional tool for the destination (Inversini, Cantoni & De Petro, 2014, p. 565).

The Role of DMO Websites

Each DMO in a city, region or country has its own specific destination website that is called an ODW (Official Destination Website), and all DMOs understand the necessity to update their ODWs frequently and evaluate effectively (Han & Mills, 2006; Kim & Fesenmaier, 2008; Luna-Nevarez & Hyman, 2012). The usage of their ODWs is of utmost importance for DMOs as a point of reference in planning trips as well as in the decision-making process to create and maintain a destination (Morrison, 2013). ODWs

are the DMOs backbone of tourism marketing, branding, and promotion of their destination.

ODWs vary across countries, regions, and cities in how they present their destination image, objectives, and in their website features (Žanna & Xuedong, 2016). The customers' perception and understanding of ODWs also influence DMOs (Garcia, 2001; Žanna & Xuedong, 2016). Tourists often choose ODWs that are state-supported, such as city conventions or visitor bureaus (Pan & Fesenmaier, 2003; Bastida & Huan, 2014; Žanna & Xuedong, 2016), over private ones or social media outlets (Žanna & Xuedong, 2016). DMOs can customize the ODWs content according to the destination image matched to the interests of tourists (Doolin, Burgess & Cooper, 2002). Features such as a website's interactivity resources (Huertas, Rovira & Fernandez-Cavia, 2011; Oh & Sundar, 2015), provision of the quality of information (Choi, Lehto & O'Leary, 2007) and the easiness of use are some of elements ODWs contain (Dickinger & Stangl, 2013).

How DMOs develop destination-based websites is very important, as effective websites have to be able to (1) capture attention and interest; (2) leave a good first visual impression; (3) have abundance in the provision of information about the destination; and (4) create an emotionally attaching impression to visitors via textual and graphical elements (Park & Gretzel, 2007). People often develop their first perception of websites within a few seconds when they have entered a website by looking at the multimedia content or general website design (Kim, Hwang & Fesenmaier, 2005; Lindgaard et al., 2006). Visitors may also quickly decide to leave for potentially better-designed websites if the website is not trustworthy enough in the first few seconds (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2008). As a result, the low level of trust from visitors damages the reputation and consequently, the overall impression of ODWs (Baggio, 2003). Close to half of the visitors who could not match their expectations and interests with the destination information provided on the website are likely to reconsider their purchase intentions (Manning, McCarthy & Souza, 1998). If the first impression is successful and visitors stay longer at the website, then it is highly likely that visitors become interested in entering secondary links and may have a better overall assessment of websites (Lindgaard et al., 2006). This is called the *halo effect* (Tetlock, 1983). The *halo effect* may also be triggered by exciting and visually appealing multimedia content, including images,

videos, and other graphical elements (Lim, Benbasat & Ward, 2000; Han & Mills, 2006), and as a result, visitors experience the uniqueness of destination websites. These are the reasons why websites need to be appropriately developed, assessed adequately, and continuously monitored while being made distinctively different from the rest (Luna-Nevarez & Hyman, 2012).

In conclusion, ODWs serve as a channel of communication (Mich, Franch & Gaio, 2003), as a platform for marketing purposes as well as for information exchange (Choi, Lehto & O'Leary, 2007; Miguez-Gonzalez, 2011; Lee & Gretzel, 2012). As a result, ODWs promote not only their products and services faster in a more cost-efficient way but also generate information about visitor's interests and expectations, giving them a market research tool (Rita, 2000; Luna-Nevarez & Hyman, 2012).

The Evolution of Website Analysis

The first assessment of websites began in the 1990s with the digitization of information. This research used methodological tools to look at specific elements, such as quality of websites' accessibility, visibility, and web positioning (Fernandez-Cavia et al., 2014). Murphy, Forrest, Wotring, and Brymer (1996) and Yeung (1998) were the pioneers to evaluate tourism and hospitality websites. Yeung (1998) based his research on a framework that evaluated the performance of websites according to their usefulness. Later, other scholars such as Evans and King (1999), as well as Sterne (2003), looked at the assessment of websites from a different perspective by incorporating quantitative approaches such as network statistics and log evaluation frameworks.

By the beginning of the 2000s, researchers started to incorporate various indicators and procedures of methodological assessment tools in different sectors, including the tourism industry (Codina, 2000). For tourism websites specifically, the usage of methodological assessment tools began more than fifteen years ago, according to reviewed literature works from 1996 to 2009 by Law, Qi & Buhalis (2010). There have been numerous scholars who have evaluated tourism websites, and each of them have applied their methodologies to study different aspects and problems (Buhalis & Spada, 2000; Law & Leung, 2002; Nysveen, Methlie & Pedersen, 2003; Kline, Morrison & John, 2004; Kim & Fesenmaier, 2005; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2006; Schmidt, Cantalops &

dos Santos, 2008; Dion & Woodside, 2010; Canals, 2010; Rocha, 2011, 2012; Ip, Law & Lee, 2011; Fernandez-Cavia et al., 2014).

We can categorize website evaluations into two categories: quantitative and qualitative analyses. Quantitative studies, in general, develop indices or scores to generate an overall picture of the website's performance. While some scholars looked at comparative studies in web page measurements of different elements (Faba Perez et al., 2005), others emphasized rather numerical values such as traffic data (Suh et al., 2004; Cox and Dale, 2002). For qualitative studies, different scholars evaluated different aspects of websites. For instance, Liang and Lai (2002) studied functional elements of websites via a consumer-based approach. Heldal, Sjøvold, and Heldal (2004) stated that a website's effective performance depended on three primary website functions related to usability, branding section, and the interaction between a person and the computer. Law, Qi & Buhalis (2010) divided the approaches into five different methods of counting, automated, numerical, mathematical, judgmental, and combined techniques, while Corigliano & Baggio (2006) into two: automatic and heuristic method.

Even today, the field of assessment of tourism websites is a developing research area that has not yet found a universal consensus for a methodological assessment tool (Law, Qi & Buhalis, 2010). In other words, there are no qualitative or quantitative assessment systems that are comprehensive to cover all crucial aspects of a website, as each study attempts to use its own evaluation tool of measuring different elements of websites' quality attributes. Hence, making assessment systems challenging to compare with one another, as the scope and the focus of research are different for each scholar. However, Law, Qi & Buhalis (2010) suggested using existing evaluation tools and, if necessary, modifying them rather than creating other assessment models.

The evaluation of websites in the context of the tourism industry is crucial for tourism industry organizations, as many people have access to information technology and the Internet via different communication devices, such as via mobile phones or a computer. Analyzing tourism portals are valuable for tourism managers and tourism stakeholders, as they can use the identified weaknesses and strengths not only to improve their websites but also make the tourism industry as one of the main sectors of the

economy. As a result, tourism industries in Kazakhstan could finance tourism research studies on a grander scale and eventually increase the tourism industry's research base.

METHODOLOGY

In this research, we have conducted a quantitative study of the official destination websites (ODWs) from Nur-Sultan, Almaty, Aktobe, Turkestan, Kostanay, Akmola region, Mangystau region, and East Kazakhstan region. All eight Kazakhstani websites were available through the website “Kazakhstan.Travel”. This national tourism portal is developed and maintained by the “Kazakh Tourism JSC” National Company, which was created by the Ministry of Culture and Sport of the Republic of Kazakhstan. As this national tourism portal officially represents Kazakhstan for tourism marketing purposes as well as a brand, we have chosen it as the most reliable source. Together with our analysis of the eight Kazakhstani ODWs, we applied the same assessment method to evaluate eight international ODWs: Paris, Singapore, London, Dubai, New York, Hong Kong, Macao, Kuala Lumpur. These international ODWs are considered to be leaders of international tourist arrivals, according to Euromonitor International Report 2019. The URL links to both Kazakhstani and International ODWs are provided in the appendix. In order to be more objective in our analysis as well as to analyze the content and functions of websites, this study evaluated each destination individually using the Web Quality Index (WQI) assessment system and conducted a content analysis. The authors’ objective was to assess the quality of ODWs and identify their strengths and weaknesses.

Following the quantitative analysis of Kazakhstani and International ODWs, we prepared a twelve-question interview script based on the results and conducted semi-structured interviews with two DMO representatives from Nur-Sultan City: “Kazakh Tourism JSC” National Company and “Nur-Sultan Convention and Visitors Bureau”. Interview scripts and their answers are provided in the appendix with English translations. Such qualitative research was necessary to get a deeper understanding of the internal processes of how Kazakhstani DMOs are created, marketed, and maintained. During the analysis of the interview data, we have categorized the interviewee’s answers into simplified codes to have a more comprehensive and basic overview. The coding handbook is also available in the appendix.

The WQI assessment system ² was used as the primary tool in the evaluation of official destination websites, which was created by the CODETUR research group project (Online Communication for Destination Brands). This assessment system was based on the recommendations provided by UNWTO and compilations of different web assessment systems (Codina, 2004; Park & Gretzel, 2007; Li & Wang 2010; Luna-Nevarez & Hyman, 2012). In general, the WQI is a combined method that contains features such as counting technique and qualitative assessment of indicators, such as the graphic design of websites and how effectively a website persuades a potential tourist. Furthermore, the WQI system evaluates the extent of user-friendliness, accessibility, and positioning of official destination websites.

The WQI assessment system comprises 12 parameters, and overall, it includes 127 indicators. Descriptions of parameters are as follows:

- A. Homepage** (14 indicators) - this first parameter evaluates the impression of visitors to a website. The focus of this parameter is on the design and aesthetic look of the homepage of a website. There are 14 indicators associated with this parameter, and they assess variables such as the number of languages, a forecast of weather, or sections like FAQ and an option of registration.
- B. Content Amount and Quality** (17 indicators) - this parameter shows the adequacy of information and the extent of the website's suitability to visitors. Indicators assess information such as directions, events, commercial information, weather, and contact details of the DMO.
- C. Information Architecture** (11 indicators) – this parameter evaluates how websites are structured and organized. Indicators assess the significance of tabs, clarity of links, and their suitability on the website, or the existence of a search engine.
- D. Usability and Accessibility** (19 indicators) - this parameter evaluates user-friendliness to all visitors, including those who have sensory difficulties. Indicators assess the suitability of URL, how websites are up-to-date, the size of icons, readability, compatibility with different browsers, and provision of information about accessibility regulations.

² A link to the complete analysis template of the WQI assessment system can be found on the CODETUR website: https://marcasturísticas.org/wp-content/uploads/plantilla_marzo2013_versionweb.pdf

- E. Web Positioning** (6 indicators) - here, the website's page rank and traffic rank is assessed. Additionally, it checks the existence of keywords in the URL and in the title.
- F. Marketing** (8 indicators) - destination websites play an essential role in attracting tourists. In this parameter, the booking and commercial systems are assessed. For example, websites can offer the booking of accommodations and purchase of tickets for different events, etc.
- G. Languages** (6 indicators) - in this section, the variety of languages is essential. Having only an English version of the website is not enough. This parameter assesses whether the website has non-official languages other than English, which are popular in the world.
- H. Branding** (13 indicators) - this parameter assesses the manner that the information and image of the destination are conveyed and managed. Indicators such as logo and its coherence with the overall design of the website are evaluated. Furthermore, the description of the goals and values of websites as a destination brand as well as their emotional and functional elements are assessed.
- I. Discourse Analysis** (8 indicators) - this parameter examines the convincing capacity of websites. In other words, the rhetorical and argumentative procedures in terms of structure or strategies are considered.
- J. Interactivity** (12 indicators) - in this section, the two-way communication between visitors and website content is evaluated. Also, communication between website users and website managers and others are considered.
- K. Social Web** (8 indicators) - this parameter checks the presence of 2.0 tools in websites. Additionally, functions like ratings of different content, availability of user comment platforms, journey planner, and participation in social media (links, photos, videos) are also assessed.
- L. Mobile Communication** (5 indicators) - in this parameter, the existence of a mobile version of the websites is assessed. Moreover, the number of operating systems of a website and its functionality should be checked.

All twelve parameters can be divided into four assessment aspects: technical (information architecture, web positioning, and usability and accessibility), communicative (homepage, languages, content amount and quality), relational (interactivity, social web, and mobile communication) and persuasive (discourse analysis,

branding, and marketing). Furthermore, the WQI system is based on a model that rates each parameter after calculating all indicators and deriving an average grade for websites using all parameters. Below in table I, the scales of indicators are shown.

0-1-2-3	0-1-2	0-1	E	NC
Bad – Regular – Good – Very good No – Few –Enough – A lot No – Partially – Yes Extra Low - Medium- High- Very High	Bad – Regular – Good No – Few – A lot No – Partially – Yes Low – Medium – High	No – Yes	Error	Not the case

Table I: Indicator Scale from the WQI Assessment System (Source: WQI Analysis Grid 2013; see in the appendix)

Each indicator in a parameter is given a weighting score that shows its importance within a parameter and which are used to calculate a score for parameters. For example, the process of deriving a score of the “web positioning” parameter for the ODW of Nur-Sultan is shown below. All parameters from “homepage” to “mobile communication” are labeled by letters from A to L, respectively, in the WQI assessment system grid. Inside parameters, as an example in the “web positioning” parameter presented below in Table II that is labeled as E, we labeled indicators as E1, E2, and so on to represent the indicator questions related to this parameter.

E.							
web positioning							
indicator number	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	Score
weight	3	2	2	10	4	2	40
Welcome to Nur-Sultan	2	2	1	1	0	0	0,55

Table II: Web Positioning Parameter (Source: compiled by authors)

For example, for indicators E1 and E2 following questions are asked:

- **E1. Presence of keywords in URL.** At the URL of the pages, are the keywords “tourism”, “tour”, “visit”, or similar, and “destination/territory name”? Rate: 0-1-2
- **E2. Presence of keywords in the titles.** At the titles of the pages, are the keywords “tourism”, “tour”, “visit”, or similar, and “destination/territory name”? Rate: 0-1-2

After acquiring numbers for all indicators for each parameter, we multiply each indicator by its predetermined weight and divide the total amount by 40, which represents the maximum score that this parameter can get. The formula would be written in the following way: $\frac{2*3+2*2+1*2+1*10+0*4+0*2}{40} = 0,55$.

Similar procedures are used for all other parameters. Finally, we calculate the average score of all parameters combined, which gives us a total grade for a website. The total grade for a website is understood at the end as the Web Quality Index score. In other words, the WQI score represents the overall quality of the website.

A content analysis, which is the application of this assessment system, was carried out on eight Kazakhstani and eight international official destination websites between 5 November and 25 December 2019. We chose specifically this period in order to minimize the risk of finding significant changes before the start of 2020. Interviews were conducted in February 2020.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Tables 1 and 2, as well as Figures 1, 2, and 3, present our quantitative results from our analysis of ODWs. The summarized qualitative results from our interviews are shared in the appendix.

A.	B.	C.	D.	E.	F.	G.	H.	I.	J.	K.	L.	Overall	
Content amount													
Usability													
Home and page quality			Information and architecture			Web positioning			Discourse analysis			Social Mobile web comm.	
Mangystau	0,2	0,13	0,34	0,53	0,4	0	0,32	0,27	0,28	0,06	0	0	0,21
Aktobe	0,58	0,47	0,48	0,58	0,45	0,06	0,37	0,38	0,19	0,06	0	0	0,3
East Kazakhstan	0,76	0,44	0,5	0,63	0,33	0,16	0,4	0,62	0,54	0,25	0,14	0,19	0,41
Nur-Sultan	0,74	0,54	0,83	0,74	0,55	0,16	0,49	0,55	0,35	0,19	0,48	0,46	0,5
Kostanay	0,91	0,65	0,72	0,74	0,45	0,18	0,49	0,53	0,38	0,34	0,2	0,46	0,5
Akmola	0,73	0,56	0,78	0,66	0,58	0,35	0,56	0,73	0,44	0,31	0,71	0	0,53
Turkestan	0,89	0,67	0,74	0,67	0,33	0,11	0,65	0,68	0,35	0,41	0,38	0,5	0,54
Almaty	0,84	0,72	0,69	0,76	0,55	0,3	0,6	0,66	0,69	0,29	0,51	0	0,55
Average	0,72	0,53	0,66	0,68	0,49	0,15	0,5	0,56	0,43	0,23	0,35	0,21	0,44

Table 1: WQI results for Kazakhstani ODWs (Source: compiled by authors)

A.	B.	C.	D.	E.	F.	G.	H.	I.	J.	K.	L.	Overall	
Content amount													
Usability													
Home and page quality			Information and architecture			Web positioning			Discourse analysis			Social Mobile web comm.	
Kuala Lumpur	0,34	0,62	0,55	0,5	0,57	0,03	0,38	0,7	0,28	0,21	0,61	0,37	0,43
Hong Kong	0,89	0,97	0,83	0,92	0,95	0,16	0,94	0,68	0,6	0,41	0,79	0,53	0,72
Macao	0,84	0,89	0,88	0,93	0,85	0,08	0,86	0,75	0,72	0,58	0,81	0,93	0,76
New York	0,96	0,94	0,87	0,91	0,9	0,76	0,78	0,84	0,85	0,44	0,94	0,13	0,77
London	0,7	0,96	0,93	0,88	0,95	0,85	0,65	0,49	0,88	0,42	0,97	0,93	0,8
Paris	0,9	0,96	0,9	0,96	0,93	0,88	0,87	0,93	0,81	0,46	0,97	0,23	0,81
Singapore	0,86	0,89	0,89	0,96	0,93	0,44	0,87	0,95	1	0,47	0,97	0,93	0,84
Dubai	0,84	0,85	0,88	0,93	0,93	0,76	1	0,8	0,91	0,55	1	0,84	0,86
Average	0,79	0,88	0,84	0,87	0,87	0,49	0,79	0,76	0,76	0,44	0,88	0,61	0,75

Table 2: WQI Results for International ODWs (Source: compiled by authors)

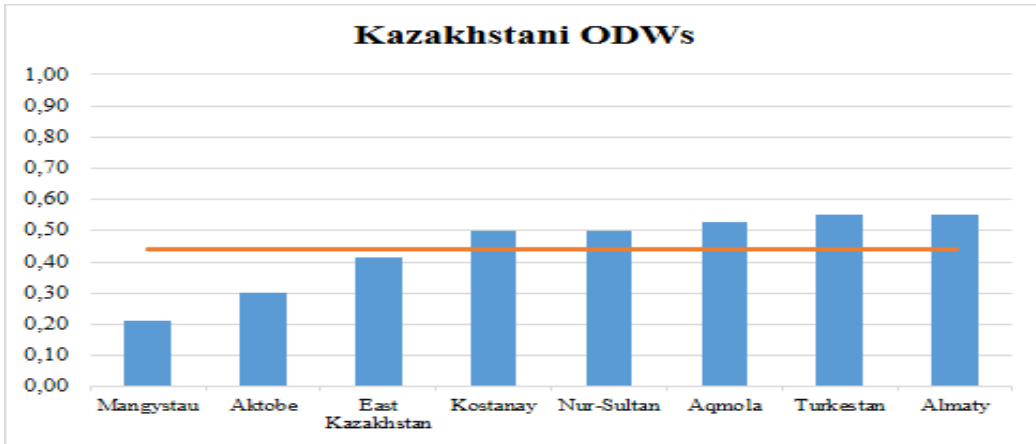


Figure 1: The Average WQI Score for Kazakhstani ODWs (Source: compiled by authors)

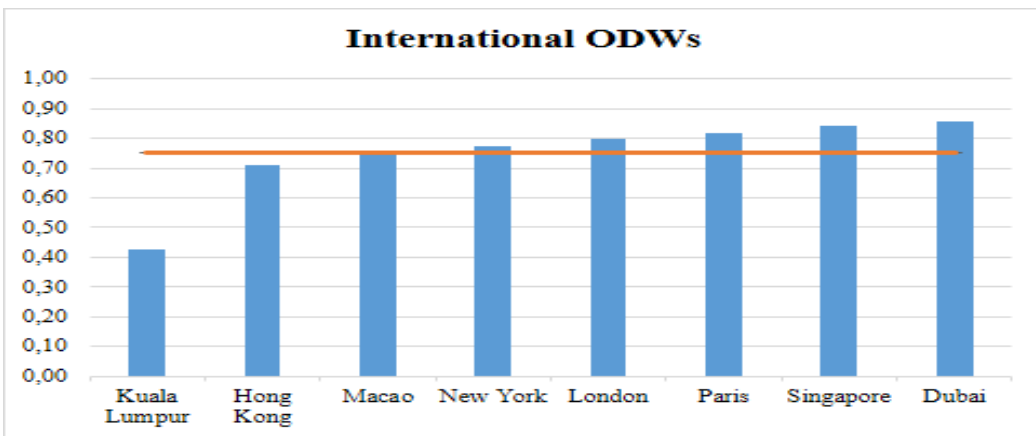


Figure 2: The Average WQI Score for International ODWs (Source: compiled by authors)

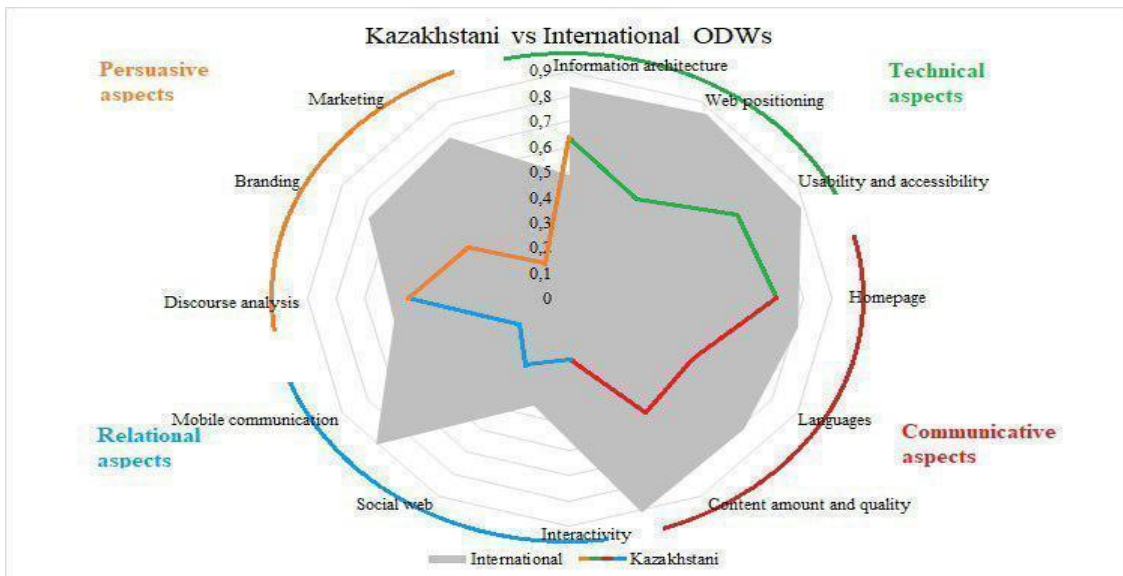


Figure 3: Comparison between Kazakhstani (multi-color) and International ODWs (grey color) in four aspects within a radar graph (Source: compiled by authors)

We can observe that international ODWs on average top Kazakhstani counterparts in almost all twelve parameters by a large margin, in particular regarding “content amount and quality”, “web positioning”, “languages”, “branding”, “discourse analysis” and “social web” parameters. This is especially evident if we look at it from the four aspects, as seen in figure 3. Here, Kazakhstani ODWs lag immensely in all three aspects except for technical aspects. However, both international and Kazakhstani ODWs have low scores in “marketing” and “interactivity” parameters, meaning that both have weak commercialized booking and purchase systems as well as non-functioning interactive resources. Kazakhstani ODWs compete on the same level as their international counterparts in the “homepage” parameter and score relatively high with an average value score of 0.72. Besides, the “homepage” parameter is considered as the highest average value score among all parameters for Kazakhstani ODWs, followed only by parameters of “usability and accessibility” and “information architecture”. In general, all Kazakhstani ODWs are, to a certain degree, user-friendly and meet more than half of all nineteen indicators in the “usability and accessibility” parameter. Moreover, all Kazakhstani websites have rather a weakly convincing capacity to attract visitors in terms of rhetorical and argumentative features within the “discourse analysis” parameter as well as weak and non-functioning interactivity resources. In table 1 and figure 1, we can see how Kazakhstani ODWs of Kostanay, Nur-Sultan, Akmola, Turkestan, and Almaty scored above the Kazakhstani WQI average score of 0.44. The highest WQI score attained Almaty, followed by Turkestan, Akmola, Kostanay, and Nur-Sultan. The weakest Kazakhstani ODW is Mangystau with a score of 0.21, and the weakest parameters for Kazakhstani ODWs were “interactivity”, “mobile communication”, and “marketing”.

In comparison to the Kazakhstani ODWs, the international WQI average score of all twelve parameters combined is 0.75. Five ODWs of Macao, New York, London, Paris, Singapore, and Dubai scored above their international average 0.75 WQI score. The highest WQI score received the ODW of Dubai with 0.86. Just slightly worse than Dubai scored the ODW of Singapore. Only Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur scored below average WQI values. In terms of individual results of parameters, five parameters scored above 0.80 points with the highest average scoring parameters being both “content amount and quality” as well as “social web” at 0.88 followed by “usability and accessibility” and “web positioning” parameters. The lowest scoring parameters for

international ODWs were “marketing” and “interactivity”. In all parameters of international ODWs, Kuala Lumpur scored the lowest with 0.43 WQI score. In figure 3, we can see how international ODW’s score reasonably well in almost all parameters except for “marketing”, “interactivity”, and “mobile communication” parameters.

DISCUSSION SECTION

The analysis of Kazakhstani and international ODWs enabled us to assess their strengths and weaknesses as well as identify some drawbacks and positive aspects.

Kazakhstani ODWs

In terms of institutional contacts, for five out of eight Kazakhstani ODWs of Kostanay, Mangystau, Akmola, Aktobe, and Almaty, finding institutional contacts was a difficult task, especially in recognizing the responsible DMO for ODWs. The same can also be said about the provision of non-official languages and search engine options on the homepages of each website. Here, all ODWs except for Almaty had only one non-official language of English, and half of all Kazakhstani ODWs were not equipped with a search engine function. It was also interesting to find out that all ODWs showed some dysfunctional or broken booking and payment system. For instance, for the ODW of East Kazakhstan, the booking and payment systems only worked for tours but not for hotels or restaurants. The ODW also did not have valid security certification (https) as of February 2020.

All ODWs also showed problems with the loading of individual sections or lacked sufficient information. Half of all Kazakhstani websites, in particular with Akmola, Kostanay, Nur-Sultan, and Aktobe, had outdated information within different sections, such as with the events section. For instance, in Akmola's ODW, the section on “hunting tourism” or “for investors” could not be accessed, and the “weather forecast” section was incomplete and outdated. In another example, there was a total absence of information in the section on “trip planner” for ODW of Almaty. The same problem also faced East Kazakhstan ODW with sections regarding “media”, “for partners”, “gastronomy”, or “FAQ”. In another case with ODW of Mangystau, an official logo or introductory presentation about the destination was absent on the homepage section, and as of March 2020, the website has been updated several times as same as the ODW of Akmola.

Out of eight ODWs, seven of them, namely Akmola, Kostanay, Nur-Sultan, Aktobe, East Kazakhstan, Turkestan, and Mangystau, showed a significant number of cases in mistranslations from Russian to Kazakh or from Russian to English. For

instance, in the case of Akmola, the sitemap was not wholly translated when switching the languages from Russian to English. In another example with Kostanay's ODW, downloadable items such as brochures, magazines, or bus routes about the destination were only provided in the Russian language. Speaking of the availability of download options for visitors, all ODWs except for Kostanay, East Kazakhstan, Almaty and Turkestan showed a total absence of downloading functions. ODWs that provided the option to download focused mainly on infographics, seasonal guidebooks, or information about the destination and its historical aspect. One good example would be the ODW of East Kazakhstan.

Another striking problem of Kazakhstani ODWs was also the case with 2.0 application tools and links to micro-blogging platforms. Often here, the links would not work, or 2.0 icons would simply be absent on the homepages. These problems were found in ODWs of Turkestan, East Kazakhstan, Nur-Sultan, Aktobe, and Mangystau, with mostly Twitter and Tumblr applications. For instance, for the ODW of Nur-Sultan, a link from the website to YouTube videos is not provided despite videos being present on YouTube by the DMO channel. Half also showed signs of an incomplete, not functioning, or absence of interactive maps, particularly with 3D virtual tours. This problem was evident with ODWs of Akmola, Nur-Sultan, East Kazakhstan, and Mangystau. For example, in the case of East Kazakhstan's ODW, the Tripadvisor link redirects visitors to another link than initially intended.

Lastly, only three ODWs of Kostanay, Turkestan, and East Kazakhstan provided a platform for user comments as well as the possibility to register into the website. In comparison, only two ODWs of Akmola and East Kazakhstan provide an option for a human chat line with visitors.

International ODWs

All international ODWs had a functioning as well as integrated booking and payment system, in particular the ODW of Paris. Only Macao, Kuala Lumpur, and Hong Kong did not have a functioning booking and payment systems. The New York City's ODW also had a well-integrated booking system through *booking.com* as same as the Paris ODW. It might also be interesting to note down that Dubai's ODW allowed

booking hotels, events, and airline tickets but not restaurants. However, it was obligatory to register first before proceeding to the booking procedure. It was also interesting to find out that for ODWs of Dubai, New York City, and Singapore, the booking of airline tickets was not possible.

In terms of the provision of non-official languages in their homepages, only six international ODW of Hong Kong, Macao, Paris, Dubai, London, and Singapore provided more than four non-official languages. For instance, Hong Kong's ODW allowed visitors to choose from at least 19 and Paris ODW from 10 non-official languages. Unlike for Kazakhstani ODWs, in terms of institutional contacts, it was easy to locate the responsible DMO for all international ODWs.

The provision of mobile apps and the download options of maps, brochures, guidebooks, and other items also play a crucial role in promoting their ODWs via different outlets. All ODWs except for New York City and Paris had functioning mobile app versions that could be downloaded via Android or IOS applications. In all ODWs, visitors had various download options ranging from event guidebooks towards cuisine brochures. For instance, visitors to Hong Kong's ODW could download hiking and cycling guidebooks. In other cases, Macao's and Singapore's ODWs provided the download option of church maps, hotels, leaflets, or a brochure on gastronomy. Sometimes certain items had technical issues and could not be downloaded. This was the case for the ODW of Paris and Kuala Lumpur, in particular concerning travel guidebooks.

The usage of 2.0 applications such as Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook, and video platforms of YouTube is essential for visitors, which provides them with the option to share and post about their experiences. All websites did not miss this opportunity, and all of them provided 2.0 icons with their appropriate links. However, some websites such as New York City's ODW did not have any icons with links to their YouTube channel, even though videos on YouTube existed under their ODW channel.

Most international websites had some form of functioning and interactive resources. For instance, ODWs of New York City, Paris, Dubai, and Singapore allowed visitors to customize their trips. In the case of London and Hong Kong, their trip planner

was neither user-oriented nor interactive but provided some form of information. Only Kuala Lumpur and Macao did not provide any trip planner functions. In terms of interactive applications, all websites except for Kuala Lumpur provided simple and easy to use interactive maps of their destination. If we take London's ODW as an example, it allows visitors to use an online webcam in a real-time mode for different locations in London.

Most websites did not have any significant problems with outdated information, missing links, or technical issues. Only Kuala Lumpur's ODW experienced both issues with outdated information and individual sections, such as the "event" section not properly opening up. The same technical issue also faced the website of London with specific sections. In New York City's ODW the official videos about the destinations lacked translations into non-official languages, where even subtitles were not provided. New York City's ODW also had some issues within individual sections regarding the font size and background readjustment, as sometimes the visual order between texts and pictures did not adjust correctly.

Analysis of the Interview results

By analyzing interviewee answers, we can make some general conclusions about the current and future developments of the Kazakhstani official destination websites.

Firstly, it was stated that most Kazakhstani ODWs, in general, do not possess or follow any specific guidelines, standards, or regulations that would define how ODWs are designed and created. However, there is a slight difference in their answers in terms of the specifications of ODW developers. For instance, Nur-Sultan Convention & Visitors Bureau stated that sometimes specific guidelines or standards depend on the client's preferences and whether a specific "blueprint" exists that ODWs can follow and adopt. Thus, different tourism organizations and stakeholders might have their own so-called "brand book" of specifications. On the other hand, Kazakh Tourism JSC mentions the inevitable impact of modern trends and tools in the digital marketing and business sphere that may or may not directly impact the way Kazakhstani ODWs operate. A weak government control alongside weak legislative regulations in the tourism sector could also be one of the reasons why many Kazakhstani ODWs do not have a specification or a

“brand book” that they could refer to (Korablev, 2013; Kapiki, Rakhmetulina & Nurgalieva, 2014; Smykova, 2014; Baidildina, 2016).

Secondly, in terms of which international or domestic standards Kazakhstani ODWs follow, both concluded that most Kazakhstani ODWs might not explicitly follow neither domestic nor international standards but may self-develop their strategies, plans or instructions at their convenience. However, Kazakh Tourism JSC mentioned that most Kazakhstani ODWs follow certain domestic state programs, such as the strategic plan of development of the tourism industry for 2019-2025. Hence, Kazakh Tourism JSC does not deny the fact that the government is heavily involved in developing standards for tourism websites. However, even if such domestic regulations are just strategies or instructions, once again, it was agreed that it is dependent on the preferences of website owners.

Next, both mention that government support for the creation, maintenance, and marketing of Kazakhstani ODWs is crucial. While Kazakh Tourism JSC refers to the state’s role with the funding allocation of the state program 2019-2025 for digital promotion, Nur-Sultan Convention & Visitors Bureau goes even further than that stating that the state also aids with technical and promotional support via municipal mayors and sub-government related communication channels. State support is considered to be one of the main components allowing the tourism industry in Kazakhstan to flourish, in particular from the perspective of public-private partnerships being exemplified as one of the ways for effective usage of state support (Smykova, 2014). Besides, it is worth mentioning that there is a lack of business integration with the destination websites of Kazakhstan. Although there exists some information regarding gastronomy, accommodation, and tour guides, a significant number of private organizations that are involved in tourism development are not included or mentioned in Kazakhstani ODWs. Thus, the public-private partnership initiatives can play an essential role in integrating private organizations with destination websites.

Both were also convinced that most Kazakhstani ODWs are updated frequently and regularly. Since modern tourism markets are changing rapidly with new trends reappearing, upgrading destination websites should not be underestimated, and websites need to capture all available market opportunities as well as meet the interests of potential tourists (Ho & Lee, 2007; Huang, Chou & Lin, 2010; Fernández-Poyatos et al., 2011;

Lončarić, Bašan, & Marković, 2013). Without that, Kazakhstani ODWs will not be able to compete with their international counterparts.

Both had different answers regarding the issue of disproportionate provision of information about accommodation in Kazakhstani websites. For instance, Kazakh Tourism JSC assured us that as of the year 2020, an E-Qonaq platform will be implemented and is in due process, meaning that a unified platform for the entire Kazakhstani ODWs did not exist before that. Nur-Sultan Convention & Visitors Bureau though, did not provide any specific answers to this question and regarded this issue as dependent on the website owner's preferences.

Their answers also differed concerning the importance of an accessibility section for disabled users in Kazakhstani ODWs. While Kazakh Tourism JSC strongly believed that all Kazakhstani ODWs should be accessible to everyone, Nur-Sultan Convention & Visitors Bureau regarded this issue to be dependent on the website owner's preference. The same similar stance shared the Nur-Sultan Convention & Visitors Bureau in the following question regarding the importance of user comments and feedback section in Kazakhstani ODWs as well as about the dysfunctioning and poorly operating booking and commercial systems. Here, contrastingly Kazakh Tourism JSC provided a rather specific answer agreeing on the importance of user comments and feedback section for Kazakhstani ODWs by stating the important role of "I-MAS" software and assured the planned introduction of a communication window for all national tourism portals as of 2020 with an additional module of the commercial platform for the main Kazakhstani national tourism portal "*kazakhstan.travel*". The need for citizen participation in the creation of ODWs has been stressed several times by various scholars and companies, such as Biko2 company (2008, p.18) and scholars Fernández-Cavia, Vinyals-Mirabent & López-Pérez (2013), who analyzed Spanish destination websites of autonomous communities. Among Kazakhstani ODWs, we can trace a similar pattern in the parameter of "interactivity", which scored on average a score of 0.23. It is relatively low compared to international websites that scored with 0.44. Thus, it is apparent that in Kazakhstani ODWs the participation of tourists is at a weak level, as tourism portals do not provide any channels for communication. Also, the lack of user participation was not due to technical aspects since the "usability and accessibility" parameter is quite high (0.66) for Kazakhstani ODWs.

In the following question, both concluded that collaboration with online tour agencies such as LonelyPlanet or Tripadvisor did not succeed in the past due to various reasons. Two main reasons were identified. Firstly, disinterest by international online tour agencies. Secondly, the high cost of partnership agreements. Kazakh Tourism JSC tackled this question with a more positive outlook assuring that the partnership with online tour agencies, in particular with LonelyPlanet, is planned for the year 2020 with major Kazakhstani ODWs.

In terms of questions 10 and 11, it was mentioned that most Kazakhstani ODWs possessed some kind of analytical system that could keep track of profiles of website users. Here, analytical tools can generate data that would allow Kazakhstani ODWs to understand the origin of visitors, their number of page views, and duration of stay at the website.

Last but not least, Nur-Sultan Convention & Visitors Bureau was willing to share with us the three main problems and their solutions that Kazakhstani ODWs still to date face. The first problem they referred to concerned the “visual” aesthetic look that most tourism websites in Kazakhstan lacked. They propose to work on the design of tourism websites in a way that would leave a good “first impression” to potential tourists (Law and Hsu, 2006; Kim and Fesenmaier, 2008). Surprisingly, for Kazakhstani ODWs the overall score in their “homepage” parameter is comparably as high as the international ones, showing that Kazakhstani ODWs do understand the importance of the homepage design and thus do not neglect it. The second problem concerned the “functional” aspects of websites. Here, they touch upon the functionality issues, such as accessibility options for disabled people, the booking and commercial system, and the lack of communication channels to reach out to online operators. These functional aspects would give tourism websites as well as potential tourists additional trust and “space” to find an interest in the destination. Lastly, most tourism websites in Kazakhstan simply lack sufficient and appealing content. Nur-Sultan Convention & Visitors Bureau here illustrated the problem of how the lack of quality content in texts, photos, or videos shuns away the interest of potential tourists. In conclusion, we can say that Kazakhstani ODWs have to work on these three principles to create an appealing and well-functioning tourism website that would leave a good impression about the destination to potential tourists.

In conclusion, there are two general patterns to note down. On the one hand, Nur-Sultan Convention & Visitors Bureau attempted to provide honest answers to all twelve questions and based their answers to specific questions according to their “*welcometonur-sultan.kz*” website. They also shared their opinion regarding the last question. Nur-Sultan Convention & Visitors Bureau gave us an interesting viewpoint, as according to them, most functions of ODWs in terms of marketing and development features depend on the owner's preferences. Hence, by their understanding, tourism websites in Kazakhstan work partially independent from government interference. Here, exceptions would only be in terms of the directions or “protocols” that tourism websites in Kazakhstan follow with strategies, plans, or guidelines. On the other hand, Kazakh Tourism JSC tried to present a state's agenda. So in order not to worsen its own and the reputation of the government, it tried to leave some more complex questions unanswered, partially answered or provided answers that were not entirely related to the content of the question. This is understandable from their point of view, as they are the main body that represents the tourism brand of Kazakhstan abroad. Unlike Nur-Sultan Convention & Visitors Bureau, Kazakh Tourism JSC based their answers on the main national tourism portal website “*kazakhstan.travel*”.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We prepared the following list of recommendations that we have derived from our quantitative and qualitative research findings. Kazakhstani ODWs should improve in all twelve parameters according to the WQI assessment system. However, as a first step, Kazakhstani ODWs should focus on the following main aspects:

1. A single standard or guideline for the creation of destination websites of DMOs should be set up except for the website's design that could be left upon the website owner's preferences.
2. ODWs should aspire to improve the traffic ranking of their web page. For example, if to write down the name of a destination, the ODWs have to appear in the top five lists of links in Google, Yandex, and other search engines.
3. Each ODW in Kazakhstan should provide content in at least two to three non-official languages, several functioning mobile application apps via Android and IOS software, and fix specific technical issues. For instance, what concerns missing links to 2.0 applications, unloadable sections of websites, lack of provision of information, and the issue with outdated information.
4. Kazakhstani ODWs have to be more user-oriented. A single digital module for user comments and feedback should be created applicable to all destination websites.
5. Booking and commercial systems should be modified and centralized to connect tourists and local tourism services conveniently. Notably, it can be facilitated through a closer partnership with local SMEs from business sectors engaging in services with restaurants, hotels, and tour guides. We recommend integrating a single centralized platform, in particular, the planned E-Qonaq program into all Kazakhstani ODWs in order to have a standard accommodation system.
6. In order to increase the accessibility level of websites for people with disabilities, a separate functional section with the necessary information should be created.
7. The functionality of interactivity apps of 2.0 applications such as virtual 3D maps or webcams should be updated, and their technical problems removed.
8. Finally, the analytical systems should be used more effectively for marketing purposes and as a way to understand the profiles of website visitors. Such data should be available to the public via e-gov portals and monthly updates.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the evaluation of 16 destination websites (8 Kazakhstani and 8 international) reveal that international websites on average show better results than Kazakhstanis in all 12 parameters according to the WQI assessment system, in particular within the “content amount and quality”, “web positioning”, “languages”, “branding”, “discourse analysis”, and “social web” parameters. The only parameter where Kazakhstani ODWs compete with international ODWs was the “homepage” parameter. Among the weakest features of Kazakhstani websites were the “interactivity”, “mobile communication”, and “marketing” parameters. Kazakhstani ODWs need to improve in their communicative, relational, and persuasive aspects immensely rather than in technical aspects. Among all Kazakhstani ODWs, only five destination websites of Kostanay, Nur-Sultan, Almaty, Turkestan, and Akmola did exceptionally well. The top three highest WQI scoring destination websites were Almaty, Turkestan and Akmola. Most Kazakhstani ODWs encountered the following issues: no booking and payment system; incomplete and outdated information: functionality difficulties with 2.0 applications; no mobile applications; inexistent platforms for user comments and major translation problems with non-official languages.

The research findings from the WQI assessment tool allowed us to assess the overall quality of tourism websites, and pinpoint not only comparative differences in terms of their strengths and weaknesses but also identify in which parameters Kazakhstani destination websites can improve. The WQI assessment tool is also a flexible methodological instrument that can be developed and adapted in line with new changes, demands, and developments of the tourism industry. With that said, in similar studies in the future, we could see indicators being recorrected, added, and even its weighting system modified. It is worth mentioning that the data compiled in our research findings should be reviewed in relative terms alongside the context of the destination and goals of the DMOs. Overall, it can be considered as a useful evaluation tool for online communication managers of tourism destinations in Kazakhstan.

From our interviews with two tourism stakeholders, namely Kazakh Tourism JSC and Nur-Sultan Convention & Visitors Bureau, we were able to receive some valuable

information and new insights into the development of tourism in Kazakhstan. First and foremost, we found out that most Kazakhstani ODWs do not follow any specific guidelines or standards, be it of domestic or international origin. Hence, the maintenance, creation, and management of ODWs in Kazakhstan are dependent a lot on the owner's preferences. In this regard, most web functions and features, such as the provision of accommodation information, importance of accessibility section for disabled users, and a platform for user comments and feedback, depend on the owner's decision-making. Secondly, most destination websites in Kazakhstan receive technical and promotional government support via specific state programs. Thirdly, most ODWs do not yet possess an integrated and well-functioning booking and commercial system. However, a major commercial platform for all ODWs is planned to be implemented as of 2020. We also found out that travel service websites such as TripAdvisor or LonelyPlanet do not cooperate with Kazakhstani ODWs due to the lack of interest and high partnership costs. Fourthly, for most Kazakhstani destination websites, analytical systems of tracking profiles of website users are present. Moreover, according to Nur-Sultan Convention & Visitors Bureau, a website's visual, functional, and content aspects are considered as the main problems that Kazakhstani destination websites should work on in the future.

As such kind of study has never been done before in the context of Kazakhstan, this research paper can be considered as the first pioneering work to research a new field that has been left untapped by scholars. It would serve its purpose to drive existing Kazakhstani destination websites to upgrade themselves and give an incentive for the government, local tourism organizations, and businesses to consider opening up other national tourism portals for other potentially tourism-attractive destinations in the country.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations to this study. Firstly, this research is limited to only city destination websites. Furthermore, some city destinations in Kazakhstan, such as Taraz, Pavlodar, Karaganda, and Semey, do not possess any ODWs, which might limit the sample size, and to an extent, the level of generalizability of research findings.

Secondly, official tourist destination portals are continuously and dynamically changing. As a result, new features are added to websites, and consequently, the methodological assessment system requires necessary updates in order to adapt to new web developments. Hence, our analysis and its validity might be outdated over time if significant changes were to be detected with official destination websites. Therefore, monitoring websites are crucial in order to keep up with recent changes.

Thirdly, the analysis of ODWs is solely based on how well the websites suit the criteria for each indicator, which may not tell us the actual goals of DMO promoters to potential website visitors. In that regard, our research findings might simply show the “first impression” of a destination with a focus on the message rather than on user perception. No one should judge a destination only by the website that DMOs provide.

Last but not least, the WQI assessment system is a laborious tool that should be used by tourism experts and especially by trained professionals, who know precisely how to apply the WQI system properly. Often when methodological assessment tools are applied, some terminologies might be misinterpreted by those people who had no experience working in the tourism industry before. As a result, this may distort and affect the findings of the results and the data drastically.

FUTURE RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT

Despite the shortcomings mentioned above of our study limitations, the WQI assessment tool was comprehensive, easily applicable, and reproducible. The applied methodological assessment tool that was created explicitly by the CODETUR project back in 2013 for city destination websites could also be used in other relevant pertaining sectors. Such benchmarking studies like ours are essential for tourism websites because it brings valuable data and spurs the need for comparative research with best practices (Bhutta & Huq, 1999; Johnson & Misic, 1999). The so-called “gauging technique” applied in our paper, that is, studying how well a process or a policy would fit into an ideal or standard, would allow tourism organizations and managers to use the research findings in order to improve and upgrade specific policy programs (Shields & Tajalli, 2006).

For future research development studies in this field, it might also be interesting to look at the analysis of the tourism sites web traffic data, average website visitors, pageview rates as well as the duration of visitors’ stay. Such studies could give us a more in-depth insight into untapped fields of research studies, and the data obtained could be used effectively for various marketing purposes.

Furthermore, since one of our study limitations concerned the coverage of only eight Kazakhstani city destination websites, future development studies could uncover other existing and newly created Kazakhstani ODWs. Thus, by that also generating new and useful data for not only research purposes but also increasing the social awareness of the existence of Kazakhstani ODWs and the necessity for the tourism industry to play a significant role in the economy of a country.

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APPENDIX

Part A. URL links to Kazakhstani and International ODWs

Kazakhstani ODWs

DESTINATIONS	URL
Mangystau	https://visitmangystau.kz/
Aktobe	http://www.visitaktobe.kz/
East Kazakhstan	https://toureast.kz/
Nur-Sultan	https://www.welcometonur-sultan.com/
Kostanay	http://visitkostanay.kz/
Akmola	https://www.visitaqmola.kz/
Turkestan	http://turkestantour.kz/
Almaty	https://visitalmaty.kz/

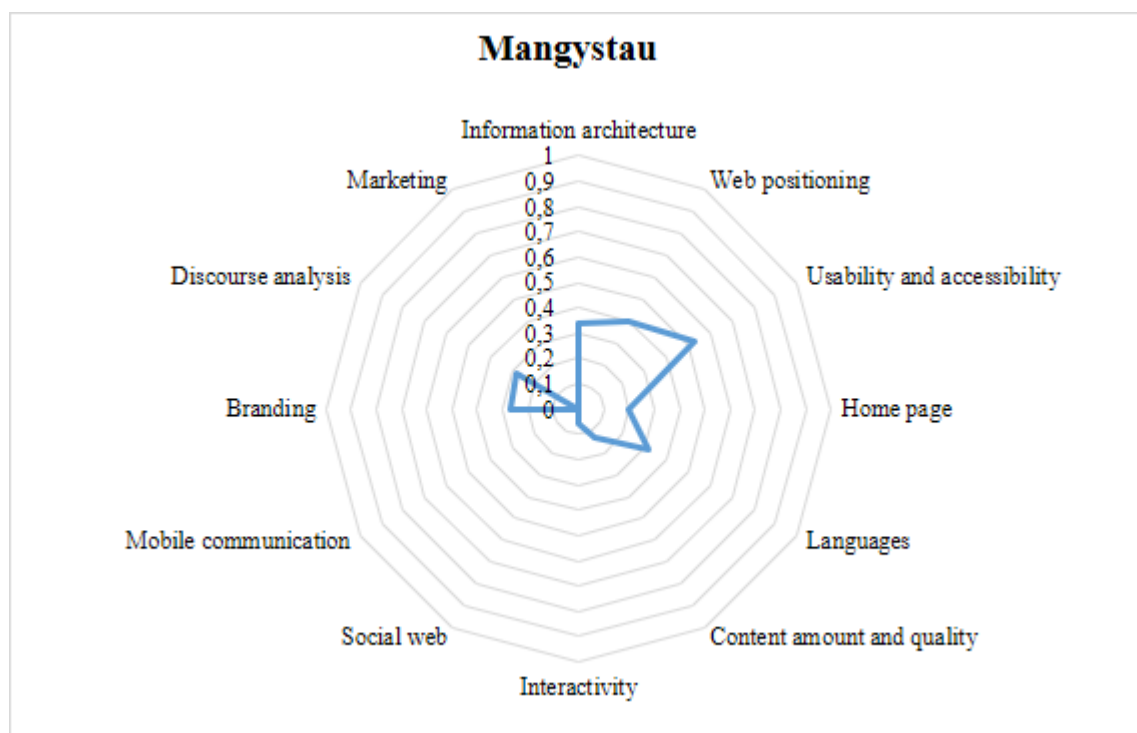
International ODWs

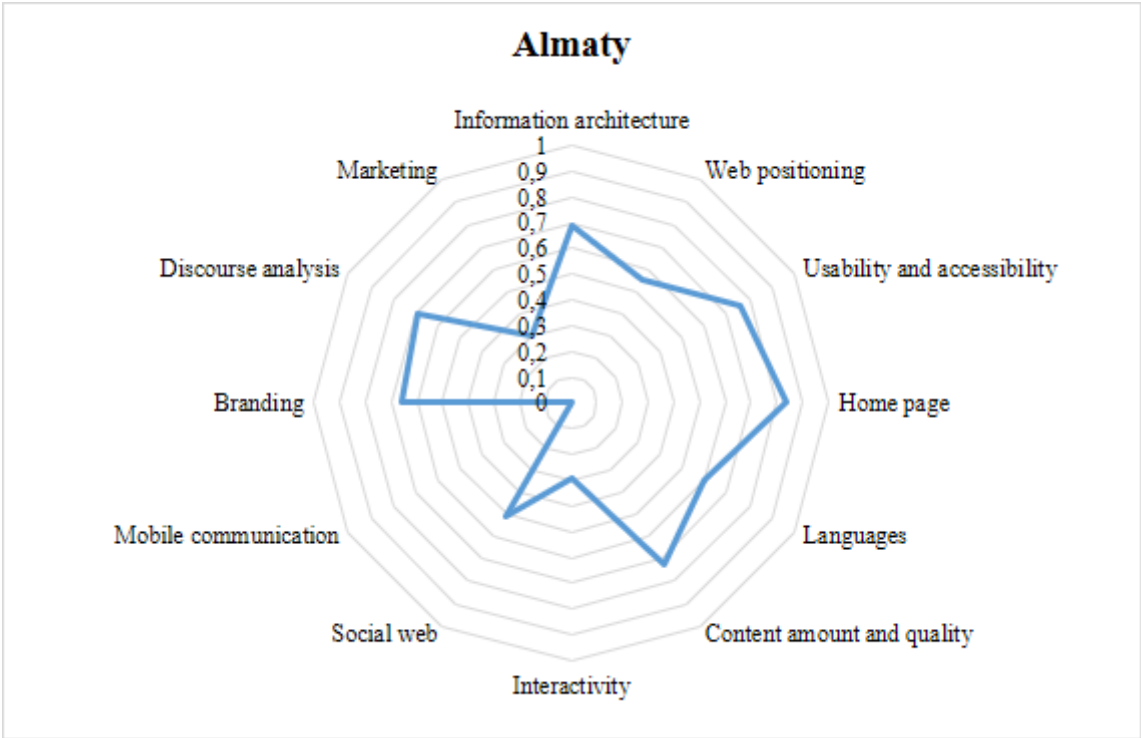
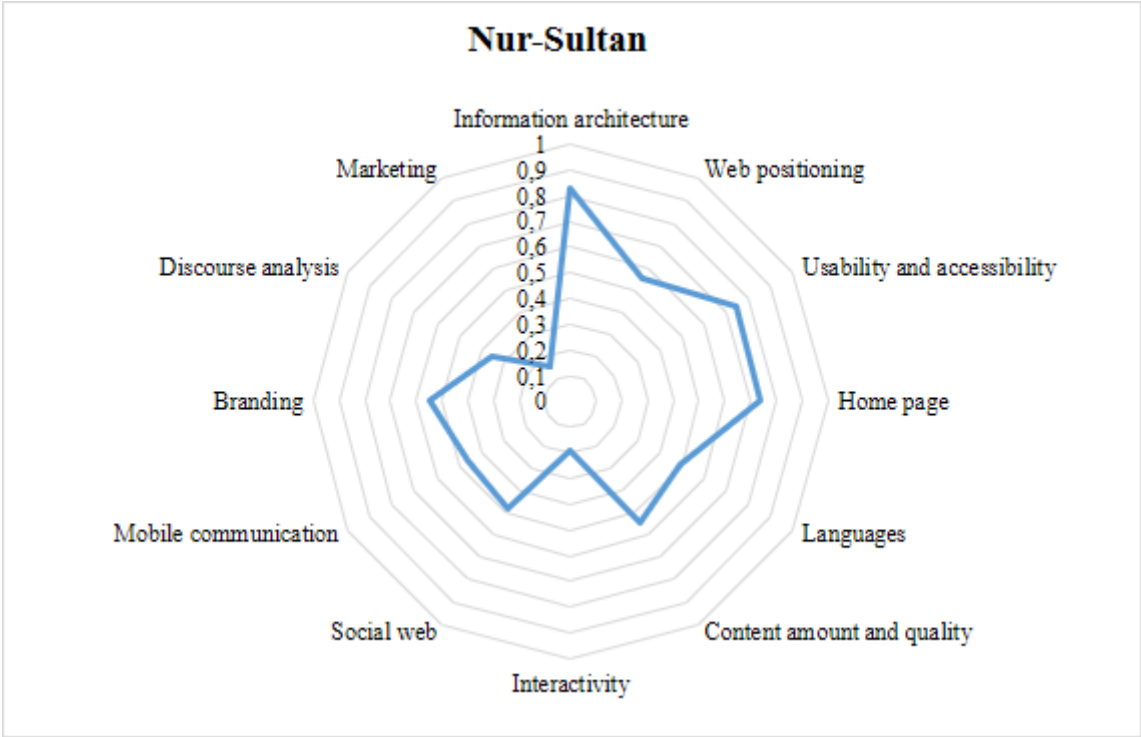
DESTINATIONS	URL
Kuala Lumpur	http://www.visitkl.gov.my/
Hong Kong	https://www.discoverhongkong.com/
Macao	https://www.visitmacao.com.au/
New York	https://www.nycgo.com/

London	https://www.visitlondon.com/
Paris	https://www.parisinfo.com/
Singapore	https://www.visitsingapore.com/en/
Dubai	https://www.visitdubai.com/

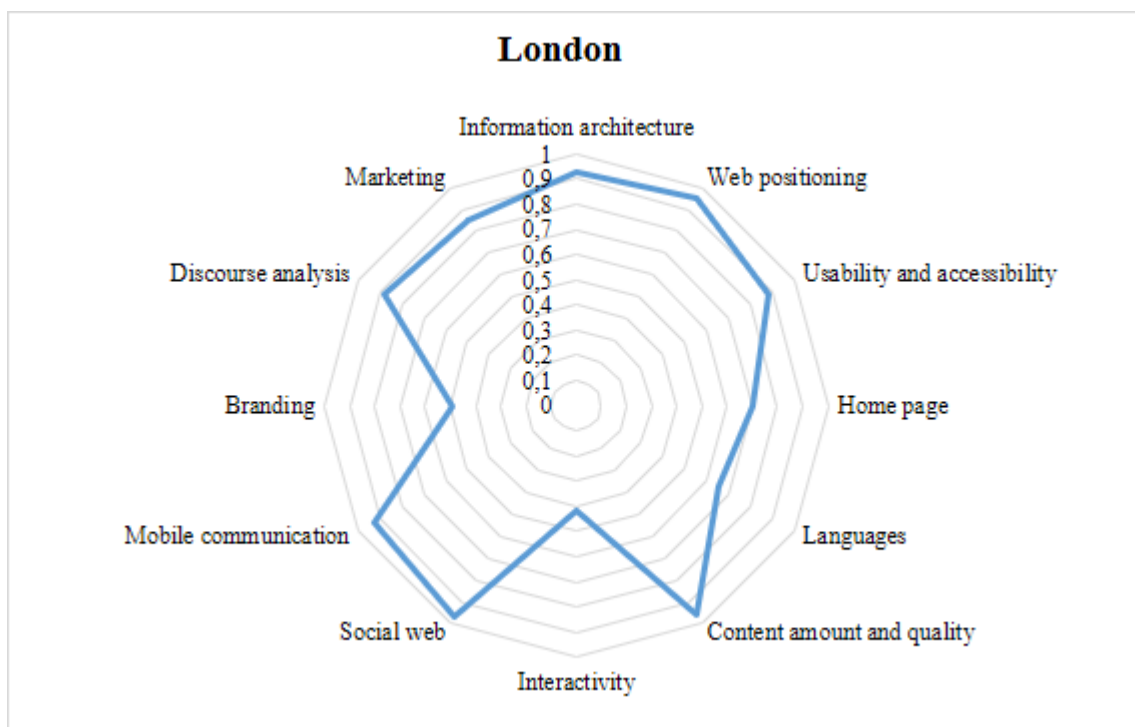
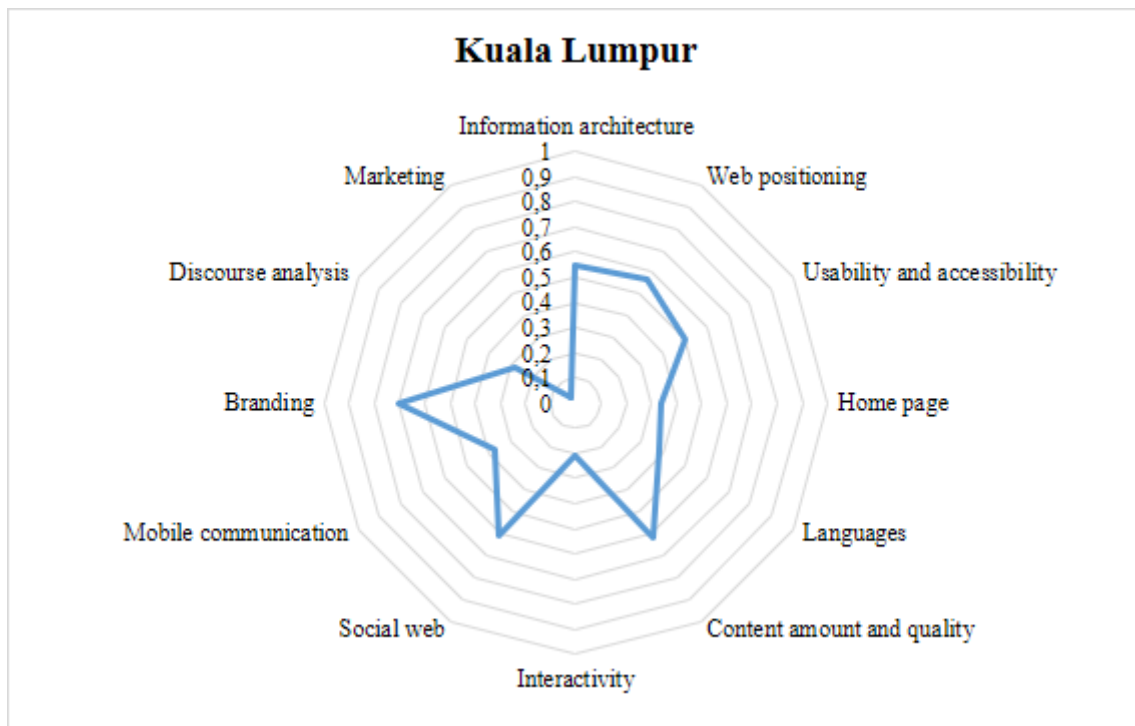
Part B. Graphs of Kazakhstani and International ODWs (the lowest; the average; the highest WQI scores)

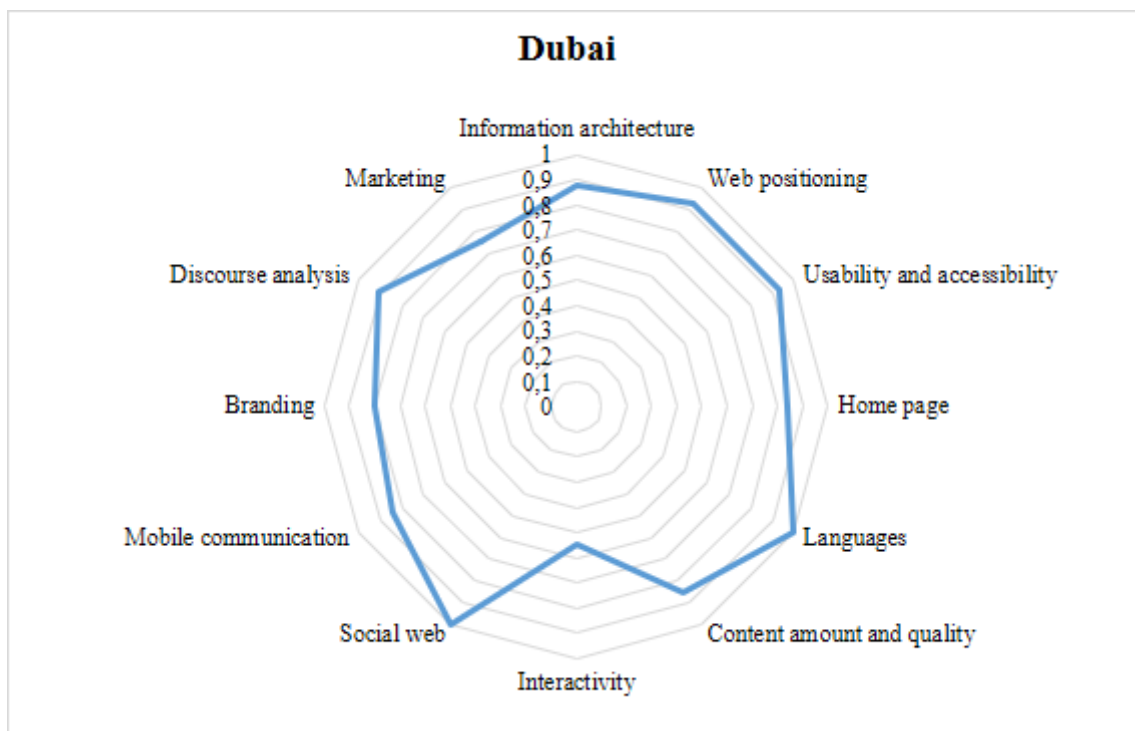
Kazakhstani ODWs (Source: compiled by authors)





International ODWs (Source: compiled by authors)





Part C. Interview Questions

Russian Version

1. Существуют ли специальные стандарты либо инструкции по разработке и поддержке официальных туристических сайтов? (по дизайну сайта, информационной структуре, секции, инструменты, финансовая и техническая поддержка, и т. д.).
2. Если да, вы следуете международным стандартам или национальным? Насколько строго они соблюдаются? Существует ли документ, в котором описываются все стандарты и процедуры в деталях?
3. В какой степени государство помогает в разработке и поддержке Казахстанских официальных туристических вебсайтов? В какой мере в этом участвуют акиматы? (IT специалисты из государственных органов либо частные специалисты, бюджет, информация, и т. д.). Какую поддержку оказывает государство? (финансовая, техническая, поддержка в управлении, и другие виды поддержки).

4. Как часто обновляются веб сайты? (информация о событиях, улиц, туристических гидов, достопримечательности; а также на других платформах, как Инстаграм, Фейсбук, и т. д.).
5. Почему в некоторых Казахстанских веб сайтах отсутствует информация о местах проживания/отелей?
6. Почему во всех Казахстанских сайтах отсутствует секция для людей с ограниченными возможностями. Важна ли отдельная информация и секция для людей с ограниченными возможностями?
7. Почему не все Казахстанские веб сайты поддерживают функцию для комментариев? Насколько вам важны комментарии и обратная связь?
8. Почему в основном Казахстанских веб сайтах отсутствует онлайн бронирование и коммерческая система?
9. Почему Казахстанские веб сайты не сотрудничают с известными туристическими веб сайтами такими как “Tripadvisor” или “Lonely Planet”?
10. Отслеживаются ли пользователи Казахстанскими веб сайтами? Если да, публикуются ли о них данные в государственных отчетах, либо в исследовательских работах?
11. Какие Казахстанские веб сайты отслеживают местоположение и происхождение туристов, которые посетили веб сайт? Если такие есть, расскажите об этом подробнее пожалуйста. Если нет, как вы думаете, важно ли использовать эту функцию и будет ли это применяться в будущем?
12. По вашему мнению, какие три главные проблемы до сих пор остаются у официальных Казахстанских туристических веб сайтах? Какие бы вы дали рекомендации?

English Version

1. Is there a specific guideline or standards for developing and maintaining an official tourism website? (in terms of website design, informational structure, provision of sections, tools, financial and technical support, etc.)
2. If yes, do you follow international standards or own (national) and how are they followed? Is there a document that describes these standards in detail?
3. How far the government supports the Kazakhstani websites and to what extent does the collaboration involve local as well as municipal akimats? (IT specialists from government or private, budgeting, information wise, etc) Additionally, what does this support consist of primarily? (is it financial, technical, managerial or other forms of support).
4. How frequently are websites updated? (information about events, roads, tour guides, places; also, in other platforms such as mobile apps, Instagram, etc.)
5. Some Kazakhstani websites do have information about accommodation/hotels and some do not. Why is that so?
6. Sections for support for disabled people who use the official tourist websites are generally not included. Some foreign websites have specific sections on their webpage that are dedicated for disabled people. Do you think such a specific section is necessary?
7. Not all Kazakhstani websites have a section for user comments. Firstly, do you think feedback and comments are important and why so?
8. The booking and commercial system are generally not included in Kazakhstani websites. Why is that the case?
9. Why do Kazakhstani websites not collaborate with well-known tourism websites such as Tripadvisor and Lonely Planet? Is there any specific reason for that?
10. Do tourism websites in Kazakhstan keep track of the profiles of website users? If that is the case, are there studies done on that or governmental reports published about them?

11. Are there any Kazakhstani tourism websites that target specific tourists according to their origin or preferences? If yes, could you please elaborate on that. If no, do you think this is actually important and could possibly be implemented?

12. From your point of view, what are the three main problems that Kazakhstani official tourist websites still to date face and what would be recommended to improve these problems?

Part D. Answers to Interview Questions

Answers from Kazakh Tourism JSC (Original Version in Russian language)

1. Строго установленных стандартов по разработке и поддержке туристических сайтов нет, как со стороны нашего государства, так и международных организаций. Однако существуют так называемые «законы» маркетинга и бизнеса. Таким образом, бурный рост цифровых технологий стал причиной для появления интернет-маркетинга или так называемого цифрового маркетинга. Так, для разработки национального туристического портала Kazakhstan Travel были взяты за основу современные тренды и инструменты именно цифрового маркетинга, которые иногда значительно отличаются от стандартов традиционного маркетинга.

2. Что касается документов, в 2019 году был утвержден стратегический план – «Государственная программа развития туристской отрасли РК на 2019-2025 годы», который одной из задач ставит формирование эффективной системы продвижения туристского потенциала страны на внутреннем и международном рынках. В рамках реализации данной задачи была разработана концепция Е-туризм- это уникальное цифровое решение призванное создать благоприятные условия как для туриста так и для государства и представителей туристического бизнеса. Ныне существующий национальный туристический портал Kazakhstan.travel в процессе модернизации планируется трансформировать в единое онлайн окно Е-туризм. Также ежегодно, маркетологами компании Kazakh Tourism создается документ – техническая спецификация по portalу Kazakhstan.travel, которая как раз и содержит четкие инструкции и критерии по структуре, дизайну, информационному наполнению,

переводу, продвижению и тд. Согласно этим критериям затем и производятся работы по разработке или модернизации портала.

3. Государство оказывает финансовую поддержку по реализации данных проектов. Например, в рамках Государственной программой развития туристической отрасли РК до 2025 года предусмотрено выделение бюджетных средств на цифровое продвижение.

4. Проводится ежедневный мониторинг портала и официальных страниц в социальных сетях. На сегодняшний день, национальный портал имеет функцию, когда представители туристического бизнеса могут размещать информацию о своих услугах и мероприятиях. Таким образом, портал постоянно дополняется и обновляется. На ежедневной основе производятся публикации в социальных сетях. Используются приемы ситуативного маркетинга, в зависимости от туристического сезона или возможных масштабных мероприятий и тд.

5. В рамках реализации вышеупомянутого проекта Е-туризм, в прошлом году была разработана платформа E-Qонаq - это система учета и передачи данных из мест размещений, будь то отели, хостелы и гостевые дома. Данная платформа также позволяет вести актуальный реестр мест размещений, который вскоре будет доступен для пользователей платформы; На 2020 год запланировано внедрение данной платформы на портал Kazakhstan.travel. Таким образом, с этого года вся информация будет доступна в открытом доступе.

6. Мы твердо убеждены, что туризм должен быть доступен для всех. Поэтому при разработке сайта были изучены и учтены факторы, с какими трудностями сталкиваются люди с ограниченными возможностями при организации путешествия.

К примеру, национальный портал Kazakhstan.travel располагает функцией чтения вслух. Также все популярные веб-браузеры (Google Chrome, Mozilla FireFox, Opera, Internet Explorer) снабжены функцией уменьшения или увеличения масштаба отображаемой страницы. Функция масштабирования позволяет пользователям увеличивать или уменьшать шрифт и картинки просматриваемой в браузере страницы. Это может быть полезно для людей с ослабленным зрением.

Как правило, организацией подобных путешествий занимаются туристические агентства и компании, ориентирующиеся именно на людей с ограниченными возможностями, которые могут обеспечить для них все комфортные условия.

7. Это многим известный факт, что обратная связь от аудитории – это эффективный инструмент улучшения своих услуг. Поэтому для нас очень важно проводить мониторинг и обратную связь в социальных сетях с пользователями, отвечать на их комментарии и вопросы. Также, стоит отметить что НК «Kazakh Tourism» использует системное обеспечение «I-Mas», которое позволяет отслеживать упоминание о Казахстане в различных онлайн источниках, что позволяет осуществлять своевременное реагирование и репутационный менеджмент.

С 2020 года также планируется внедрение коммуникационного окна на национальный туристический портал, где пользователи могут получить ответы на интересующие вопросы.

8. В 2020 году запланировано внедрение дополнительного модуля коммерческой платформы на национальный портал Kazakhstan.travel, это позволит туристам не только получить необходимую информацию о местах размещения, авиабилетах и других туристических услугах, но также и забронировать их.

9. На 2020 год, в рамках модернизации национального туристического портала планируется интеграция с крупными международными онлайн тур агентствами на базе партнерских программ. Что касается «Tripadvisor», то на портале планируется внедрение ссылки на данную платформу. Также планируется проведение рекламной кампании в партнерствами с крупными брендами международных СМИ, в том числе LonelyPlanet.

10. Национальный туристический портал Kazakhstan.travel имеет свою систему аналитики по охвату и посетителям портала. Система аналитики дает информацию о стране проживания пользователей, источнике трафика, а также с какого устройства был произведен вход и тд. Статистические данные могут быть предоставлены по запросу. К примеру, неоднократно к нам поступали запросы от студентов отечественных ВУЗов, уполномоченных органов и представителей индустрии, данные были своевременно им предоставлены. Также полезная информация может быть опубликована на нашем официальном телеграмм канале

@sayahattime, созданного для информационной поддержки представителей тур. индустрии.

Answers from Kazakh Tourism JSC (Translated Version into English language)

1. There are **no strict standards and regulations in developing and maintenance of ODW-s , neither by the state nor by international organizations.** However, there are kind of rules in marketing and business. Thereby, it leads to a rapid increase in digital technologies and the emergence of internet-marketing or so-called digital marketing. Thus, modern trends and tools, especially digital marketing, were taken as a basis for the creation of the national tourist portal “Kazakhstan Travel”, which at times differ from rules of traditional marketing.
2. As for documents, in 2019, the **strategic plan “State program for the development of the tourism industry for 2019-2025”** was approved, which is aimed to form an effective system for promoting the country’s tourism potential in local and international markets. For implementing this task, the conception of E-Tourism was created, which is a unique digital solution that is invoked to create favorable conditions for tourists as well as the country, and representatives of touristic businesses. Portal Kazakhstan.Travel, which currently exists, is in a process of modernization and it is planned to transform it into a common online-page of E-Tourism. Besides, marketing specialists of Kazakh Tourism annually prepare a document of specification for portal Kazakhstan.Travel. It comprises concrete instructions and criteria for the portal’s structure, design, content, translation, promotion, etc. **The work for the development and modernization of the portal is conducted by these criteria.**
3. The **state provides financial support for the implementation of these projects.** For example, under the State Program for the Development of the Tourism Industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2025, **budget funds are allocated for digital promotion.**
4. The portal and official pages on social networks are **monitored daily.** Today, the national portal has a function when representatives of the tourism business can post information about their services or events. Thus, **the portal is constantly updated.**

Publications are made on social networks on a daily basis. The techniques of situational marketing are used, depending on the tourist season or possible large-scale events, etc.

5. As a part of the E-tourism project that was mentioned before, last year there was developed the E-Qonaq platform - it is a system for recording and transmitting data from placements like hotels, hostels or guest houses. This platform also allows you to observe an up-to-date catalog of places, which will soon be available to users of the platform; For 2020, it is planned to introduce this platform to the Kazakhstan.travel portal. Thus, all information will be available in the public domain from this year.

6. We strongly believe that tourism should be accessible to all. Therefore, while developing the website we have investigated and considered such aspects as what kind of difficulties people with disabilities may face during their trip. For example, the national portal Kazakhstan.travel has the function of reading aloud. Also, all popular web browsers (Google Chrome, Mozilla FireFox, Opera, Internet Explorer) are equipped with a function to reduce or enlarge the scale of the displayed page. The zoom function allows users to increase or decrease the font and images of the page viewed in the browser. This may be useful for people with visual impairments.

As a rule, travel agencies and companies that focus on people with disabilities, and can provide them with all comfortable conditions are involved in organizing such trips.

7. It is a well-known fact that feedback from the audience is an effective tool to improve the level of service. Thus, it is very important for us to monitor and conduct feedback in social networks with users, and to answer their comments and questions. Also, it is worth noting that the “Kazakh Tourism” JSC uses the “I-Mas” software, which allows to track mentions about Kazakhstan in various online sources, which allows for timely response and reputation management. From the start of the year 2020, it is also planned to introduce a communication window on the national tourism portal, where users can receive answers to their questions.

8. In 2020, it is planned to introduce an additional module of the commercial platform in the national portal Kazakhstan.travel. It will allow tourists not only to get necessary information about places of accommodation, air tickets, and other travel services but also to book them.

9. For 2020, to modernize the national portal, it is [planned to integrate it](#) with major international online tour agencies. [As for Tripadvisor, it is expected to add links](#) to this platform. [It is also planned to conduct an advertising campaign in partnership with major international media brands, including LonelyPlanet.](#)

10-11. The national tourism portal Kazakhstan.travel **has its analytical system in terms of coverage and visits to the portal**. The analytical system provides information about the country of residence of users, the source of traffic, as well as from which device the login or entrance was made, etc. Data is available upon request. For example, we repeatedly received requests from students of local universities, authorized bodies, and industry representatives. Data was provided on time.

Additionally, useful information can be published in our official telegram channel @sayahattime, which is created for informational support of tourism industry representatives.

12. [No answer.](#)

Answers from Nur-Sultan Convention Bureau (Original Version in Russian language)

1. Специального единого стандарта или инструкции по разработке и поддержке официальных туристических сайтов нет. Каждая организация, прежде чем создать сайт, пишет техническое задание для разработчиков. Различие от других сайтов именно туристических сайтов в основном выражается в дизайне и в функционале. Все зависит от того, что хочет Заказчик. Если есть бренд бук, то при разработке дизайна сайта, будут отталкиваться от него.

2. Как выше отписал, стандартов нет. Но бывают указания, стратегия, планы, которые надо учитывать. В этом году например план ориентирован на реализацию трех основных направлений. Первое – личностное развитие. Второе – национальная идентичность и международное позиционирование. Третье – развитие государства, гражданского общества и местного сообщества. Следуя второму варианту, в этом году планируется редизайн сайта

3. Государство(акимат) выделяет бюджет подведомственным организациям. По требованию предоставляют необходимую информацию для заполнения контента, помогают с продвижением через свои каналы.

4. Календарь мероприятий на сайте обновляется ежедневно. Также публикуются статьи, например про различные достопримечательности. В социальных сетях аналогично, посты про город, различные опросники, конкурсы и т.д.

5. За весь Казнет не могу ответить, думаю следует обратиться непосредственно к владельцам таких сайтов.

6. Не во всех, но во многих. Это также к владельцам этих сайтов, вероятно забыли включить в техническое задание, возможно не хотят выделять дополнительный бюджет на это, в общем причин может быть много. Но это очень важный вопрос, ибо все должны иметь равные права.

7. Это тоже зависит от "хотелок" владельца сайта. К примеру некоторые хотят, чтобы их не спамили в комментариях, некоторые таким образом борются с негативом, кому-то комментирование в принципе не нужен, ибо назначение сайта не предназначено для этого. Ведь бывают интернет магазины, информационные сайты, блоги, одностраничные сайты и т.д.

8. Ответ выше

9. Сотрудничество с такими гигантами очень затратно, не многие могут себе позволить закупать рекламу у них. А на бартерной, добровольной основе сотрудничать с "нами" им особо не интересно.

10. На большинство сайтов установлены различные счетчики, для того, чтобы оценивать эффективность продвижения, для анализа. В основном нигде это не публикуется, если не в открытых источниках находятся. Эти данные с открытых источников и используют в исследовательских работах и в отчетах.

11. Насчет каких веб-сайтов сказать не могу, но различные маркетинговые инструменты дают понимание, откуда пользователь зашел на сайт, сколько провел время на сайте, интересы, движения курсором на сайте и т.д.

12.

- **Визуальная часть.** Большинство сайтов визуально выглядят очень плохо. Каждый пользователь в основном оценивает глазами, если не зацепить первые пару секунд, пользователь покидает веб-ресурс. Следовательно, было бы неплохо, если будут "подтягивать" дизайн.
- **Функциональная часть.** Отсутствие режима для слабовидящих, отсутствие возможности покупки билета, бронирования, банально кликнуть на номер и позвонить, онлайн операторов. Список можно продолжать очень долго. Надо делать сайт не для себя, а для людей
- **Контент.** Проблемы с текстами, фото, видео. Очень мало качественной информации для туристов. Отсутствие переводов на различные языки, на казахском языке для внутреннего рынка также проблематично найти ресурсы.

Answers from Nur-Sultan Convention Bureau (Translated Version into English Language)

1. There are **no specific standards or instructions for maintenance and development of destination websites**. Before website creation, organizations prepare a specification (technical task) for developers. The difference between destination websites is mainly in its design and functionality. **It depends on Client's preferences. If there is a "brand book", the design of the website will be created according to it.**

2. As it was mentioned before, there are **no specific standards. But there can be instructions, strategies, and plans, which should be taken into account.** For example, this year, we have a plan that has three priorities. Firstly, it is self-development. Secondly, national identification and international positioning. Thirdly, is a development of the state, civil society and local community. According to the second option, it is planned to redesign the website (welcometonur-sultan.com).

3. The state (akimat) funds the budget of subordinate organizations. Upon request, it provides required information for filling the content in a website and helps with promotion through its channels and connections.

4. The calendar of events is updated on a daily basis. Articles about different sites are published. In social media information about cities, different surveys, and competitions are also published.

5. Can't answer on behalf of all KazNet, but I think that you should contact the website's owner directly.

6. Not in all, but in most of them. Regarding this issue you also should ask directly from the website's owner. Possibly, they have forgotten to include this section in specification or technical task. Or the budget was not sufficient enough to create such a function and section on the website. Or owners did not want to provide funding for such things. Overall, there can be many reasons. However, this is a very important question as everyone should have equal rights.

7. It also depends on "preferences" of the owner. For example, some of them don't want to receive spams in the comment section, or for others it is a way to struggle with negative opinions. For some owners the comment section is just not needed as the website may have a different aim. For instance, there might be online-shops, informational websites, blogs, websites with one page, etc.

8. Answered above

9. Collaboration with such giants is very expensive, not every website can afford to buy advertisements from them. On a barter basis or voluntarily they will not cooperate with us because they are not interested in our destination.

10. Most websites have different numerators in order to assess effectiveness for analysis. Overall, such data is not published, maybe it is available in open data. Such data is used in research projects and reports.

11. Can't say about particular websites, but **there are different marketing tools**, which help to identify from where a user visited the website, how much time spent, interests, scrolls within the website, etc.

12.

- **Visual part.** Most websites visually look very bad. Each user, mostly, assess the website by its first impression. If it doesn't catch their attention during the first five seconds, users leave the website. Hence, it would be beneficial to improve the website's design.
- **Functional part.** Absence of special mode for visually impaired, lack of possibility to buy and book tickets for events, or basically availability to click on contact details and to call, or absence of online operators.
- **Content.** Problems with texts, photos, and video. Lack of quality content for tourists. Absence of translations to many languages, even in Kazakh language for the local market, and also it is difficult to find resources.

Part E. Code Book

Coding of Interview Answers (Source: compiled by authors)

Question #	Question in brief	Possible answers
1	Specific guidelines and standards for ODWs	present/ not present/ depends on owner's preference
2	Adoption or transfer of international or domestic standards	international/ domestic/ both/ none
3	Government support for ODWs	present/ not present/ depends on owner's preference
4	Frequent and regular updates of ODWs	present/ not present/ depends on owner's preference
5	Provision of information about accommodation section	present/ not present/ depends on owner's preference
6	Importance of an accessibility section for disabled users	important/ not important/ depends on owner's preference
7	Importance of user comments and feedback	important/ not important/ depends on owner's preference
8	An integrated as well as functioning booking	present/ not present/ depends on owner's

	and commercial system	preference
9	Collaboration with TripAdvisor or LonelyPlanet	present/ not present/ depends on owner's preference
10	Usage of a system tracking profiles of website users	present/ not present/ depends on owner's preference
11		
12	Provision of three main problems of ODWs and their recommendations	provided/ not provided

Codebook (Source: compiled by authors)

Code	Definition	Color used to identify
present	Use this code for questions 1,3,4,5, 9, 10 and 11 if the data provides evidence of the existence of elements questioned	Red
not present	Use this code for questions 1,3,4,5, 9, 10 and 11 if the data does not provide evidence of the existence of elements questioned	Blue
depends on owner's preference	Use this code for questions 1,3,4,5, 9, 10 and 11 if the data explicitly states that the answer depends on website owner's preference	Green
international	Use this code only for question 2 if the data provides evidence of only international standards used	Black
domestic	Use this code only for question 2 if the data provides evidence of only domestic standards used	Yellow
both	Use this code only for question 2 if the data provides evidence of both domestic and international standards used	Brown

none	Use this code only for question 2 if the data provides evidence of neither domestic nor international standards used	Blue
important	Use this code only for question 6,7 and 8 if the data provides evidence of importance for elements questioned	Red
not important	Use this code only for question 6,7 and 8 if the data does not provide any evidence of importance for elements questioned	Blue
provided	Use this code only for question 12 if the interviewee provides his or her viewpoint	Red
not provided	Use this code only for question 12 if the interviewee does not provide his or her viewpoint	Blue

Part F.

Coding Answers from Kazakh Tourism JSC (Source: compiled by authors)

Question #	Questions in brief	Answers from Kazakh Tourism JSC
1	Specific guidelines and standards for ODWs	not present (no strict guidelines and regulations neither by state nor by int. org)
2	Adoption or transfer of international or domestic standards	domestic (state program of tourism development for 2019 - 2025)
3	Government support for ODWs	present (financial support through budget fund allocation under the state program of tourism development for 2019 - 2025)
4	Frequent and regular updates of ODWs	present
5	Provision of information about accommodation section	not present (planned E-Qonaq platform and in implementation as of 2020)
6	Importance of an accessibility section for disabled users in ODWs	important

7	Importance of user comments and feedback	important (usage of I-MAS software; planned installation of communication windows for national tourism portals as of 2020)
8	An integrated as well as functioning booking and commercial system	not present (commercial platform is in the process of implementation as of 2020)
9	Collaboration with TripAdvisor or LonelyPlanet	not present (but planned and in process of implementation as of 2020, in particular creating partnerships with LonelyPlanet)
10	Usage of a system tracking profiles of website users	present (existence of analytical system in Kazakhstan.travel; data provided upon request only)
11		
12	Provision of three main problems of ODWs and their recommendations	not provided

Coding Answers from Nur-Sultan Convention & Visitors Bureau (Source: compiled by authors)

Question #	Questions in brief	Answers from Nur-Sultan Convention & Visitors Bureau
1	Specific guidelines and standards for ODWs	not present (depends also on client's preference and whether a "brand book" or specification exists for developers)
2	Adoption or transfer of international or domestic standards	not present (but strategies, instructions or plans can be self-developed or adopted)
3	Government support for ODWs	present (akimat and/or state funds budget + promotional and technical support)
4	Frequent and regular updates of ODWs	present (updates on daily basis: calendar of events and publishing of various documents)
5	Provision of information about accommodation section	depends on owner's preference (no specific answer provided)
6	Importance of an accessibility section for disabled users in ODWs	depends on owner's preference (many reasons: specification, website owner's interest, budget allocation, etc.)
7	Importance of user comments and feedback	depends on owner's preference (many reasons: specification, website owner's interest, budget allocation, etc.)
8	An integrated as well as functioning booking and commercial system	depends on owner's preference (many reasons: specification, website owner's interest, budget allocation, etc.)

9	Collaboration with TripAdvisor or LonelyPlanet	not present (reasons: expensive + lack of interest)
10	Usage of a system tracking profiles of website users	present (present in most ODWs via marketing tools or different numerators to assess effectiveness for analysis)
11		
12	Provision of three main problems of ODWs and their recommendations	provided (three main problems: visual part, functional part and content)