IMPACT OF E-TECHNOLOGY
ON DESTINATION BRAND AWARENESS

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Abstract. Brand awareness is the strength of the brand's presence in the mind of the target audience and is an integral part of the Consumer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model. In combination with the Brand Image, Quality, and Loyalty, Brand Awareness contributes to the overall destination competitiveness.

For addressing the intent, from the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) of the World Economic Forum are selected pillars that evaluate online and digital performance of the destination and is assessed their relationship with the destination brand awareness. According to the conducted analysis is determined that e-technology, such as "Internet use for business-to-consumer transactions" is the major pillar from applicable TTCI sub-indexes which establishes destination brand awareness; therefore improving performance of this sub-index will have positive effect on the performance of the brand awareness.

It has been also determined that Georgia as a tourism destination performs significantly poorly in this pillar compared to direct regional competitors. In addition, findings indicate that Croatia is the strongest performer in the region and therefore is appropriate for Georgian tourism stakeholders to closer assess models and systems used by the Croatian tourism sector.

Keywords: Destination, Internet, Brand Awareness, Tourism, Competitiveness, Georgia

Introduction

In 2016, Travel and Tourism directly contributed US$2.3 trillion and 109 million jobs worldwide. Taking its wider indirect impacts, the sector contributed US$7.6 trillion to the global economy and supported 292 million jobs. This was equal to 10.2% of the world's GDP, and approximately 1 in 10 of all jobs (WTTC, 2017). This is a result of the extraordinary growth of the international tourism for the last six decades. Role of tourism is critical in Georgia as well as in neighboring markets.

Decision making in tourism is increasingly influenced by on-line sources and on-line business to business and business to consumer communications and marketing. Fast and reliable digital connectivity is one tool to enable business expansion, encourage investment and to reach potential markets and opinion formers; countries with fast broadband connections have a competitive advantage which is becoming more important as social media and internet access takes a prominent role for promoters as well as in generating tourist awareness, branding, influencing decision making and purchases (Dupeyras, 2013).

It is interesting to know what role does branding and the concept of brand equity plays in establishing competitive advantage for destination and its broader competitiveness. By assessing brand equity of destination is possible to evaluate effectiveness of destination promotion and marketing, and efficiency of country tourism strategy.

Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index

The most recognized and comprehensive competitive ranking system in the field of tourism is the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) of the World Economic Forum WEF, 2017) (WEF, 2019). Initially compiled in 2007, TTCI measures "the set of factors and policies that enable the sustainable development of the Travel & Tourism sector, which in turn, contributes to the development and competitiveness of a country". Most of the data set for the TTCI is statistical data from international organizations, with the remaining third based on survey data from the World Economic Forum's annual Executive Opinion Survey. The methodology is based on 14 pillars. Overview of those pillars and Georgia's overall performance according to TTCI 2019 is provided in the Figure1. Results are self-explanatory and locates country ranking in comparison with other destinations

According to the TTCI 2019, Georgia is ranked as the 68th economy out of 136 (WEF 2019). This is slight improvement from 2017 result, where Georgia was 70st economy out of 141.
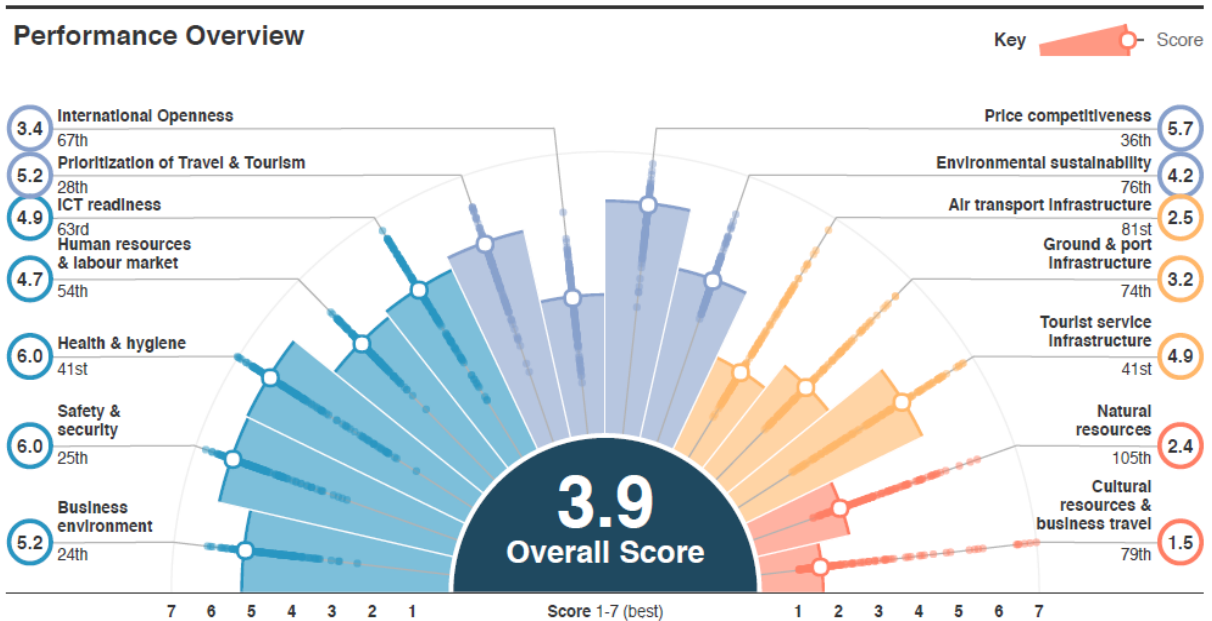
Figure 1. TTCI 2019 Performance Overview of Georgia

Bloom Consulting Country Brand Ranking

Another assessment system which can be used to assess destination competitiveness and tis electronic performance is the Bloom Consulting Country Brand Ranking (Bloom Consulting, 2017). Boom Consulting analyzes the success of 193 unique Country and Territories Brands, as well as their relative performance as compared to others. Moreover, Boom consulting collaborates with the World Economic Forum to measure the National Brand Appeal of Countries from a tourism perspective.

The Country Brand Ranking developed by the Bloom Consulting uses algorithm, comprised by key variables, such as: the economic performance of a country's tourism sector, and its online and digital performance.

Online Performance and Effect of New Technologies

Innovations and new technologies are revolutionizing the tourism industry. For example, the study by Boston Consulting Group estimates that 95% of people use digital resources to organize a trip. Travelers use an average 19 websites and mobile applications—not only for booking, but also searching for information, making plans and sharing experiences of the trip. Internet is increasingly seen as a necessity during a trip: a Trip advisor survey found that 74% of the respondents mentioned "free wi-fi" as the main benefit when deciding about accommodation.

Global benchmarking survey TRAVELSAT, conducted in 2011 and based on data from more than

15 000 international tourists from more than 30 market and visiting a destination for the first time and identified that availability of information on the web is the third most important influencer on the decision process (TCI Research, 2011).

Customer-based Brand Equity

Destination branding is one of the major tools used to differentiate a country's tourism offering. This acknowledges branding as a powerful part of the marketing mix of a country to improved its competitiveness and promote distinctiveness, resulting in increased attractiveness of tourists.

Issue of destination branding is multiple times referenced in the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) of the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2017) and in the Bloom Consulting Country Brand Ranking (Bloom Consulting, 2017) and both systems specify that strong destination brand is prerequisite for destination competitiveness.

It has been also sufficiently indicated that strength of the destination brand depends on availability and content of the online information about the destination. More and more tourists are using online sources to decide where to travel and what to see.

Destination Brand Equity

A destination is understood as an experience supplier and is referred as "a brand name of a place that binds the different product and services provided by a destination together" (Jin, Weber, & Bauer, 2009).

Branding emerged as a means to represent differentiation in competitive market where similar products or services are offered. "A brand is a distinguishing name and/or symbol (such as a logo, trademark, or package design) intended to identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods from those of competitors" (Aaker, 1991).

Destination branding is more complex than the just product names and symbols (Pike S. , 2005). It is assumed that tourists see a destination as a product and the concept of brand can be applied to tangible as well as to intangible elements (Murphy, 1998). There are multiple definitions of destination branding, most comprehensive is following: "The marketing activities that support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates a destination; that convey the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; that serve to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience, all with the intent purpose of creating and image that influences consumers' decision to visit the destination in question, as opposed to an alternative one" (Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005).

Customer-based Brand Equity Models for Tourism Destination

Different elements form the overall destination attractiveness and destination brand. Considering that leading force for building destination brand is a consumer, Aaker (Aaker, 1991) and Keller (Keller, 1993) developed consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) model, which supports destination professionals a tool to assess how successfully the brand has been positioned in the minds of consumers.

The CBBA methodology initially was applied to destinations in 2006 and identified the following brand dimensions: awareness, image, quality, and loyalty (Konecnik, 2006). It was tested on Slovenia tourism destination from the point of view of Croatian and German tourists.

Brand Awareness of Destination

Aaker (Aaker, 1996) mentioned that Brand awareness is the strength of the brand's presence in the mind of the target audience. In relation to tourism Brand awareness is interpreted as "what someone knows about a destination" (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). If a customer recognizes a certain brand name, the brand has higher chance of being selected (Tam, 2008). Awareness is an image of the destination in the tourist's minds and is developed beforehand and during the travel into the destination. Brand awareness is an integral part of the brand equity and is seen as a

main component of a brand in tourism (Kim & Kim, 2005).

Brand awareness has been assessed in many instances through direct experience that a tourist has had with a place (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). Brand awareness results in brand equity by creating a brand node in consumer's memory, providing sense of familiarity, and acting as an indication of trust. Brand awareness is the result of consumer's interaction to a brand (Alba, 1987).

Brand Image of Destination

Brand image is emotional perceptions about the brand. In tourism studies brand image is defined as an individual's perception and set of impressions of a place. A destination's image can be developed based on the understanding of a region's characteristics (Jalilvand, 2012) and defined as the expression of knowledge, impressions, and emotional thoughts an individual has of a particular place (Sun, 2013).

In measuring the brand image have been various approaches. Aaker (Aaker, 1992) proposed the brand associations and suggested that brand associations ultimately define the brand's positioning. Keller (Keller, 1993) proposed that brand image is personal expression or self-esteem, later added category of experiential attributes. The brand attitudes are closely interconnected with the overall perceived quality of a brand and still there is no commonly accepted measure for the destination brand image.

Brand Quality of Destination

Brand quality frequently is understood as the concept of the perceived quality by customers relative to alternatives (Aaker, 1991).

In tourism studies, quality is often operationalized as popularity (Lee & Back, Attendee-based brand equity, 2008). Boo et al (Boo, Busser, & Baloglu, 2009) compared brand quality to brand performance, since it is related to how destination meets tourists' functional needs. Destination Brand Quality infers that tourist was treated fairly and honestly.

Frequently brand quality is operationalized through the customer's expectation of the quality considering the expenses. For instance, in the studies by Chen and Tsai (Chen & Tsai, 2007) and Echtner (Echtner, 1993) quality is measured in regards to the extent the price is reasonable for procured services.

Brand Loyalty of Destination

The concept of brand is defined as the commitment to re-buy a product or service in the future. Researchers have incorporated loyalty into their analyses of tourism products. Success in the tourism depends not on the first purchase but on

repurchase. "No brand can survive over time without some degree of loyalty" (Sun, 2013).

In tourism, loyalty is frequently investigated in terms of behavioral loyalty, which means repeat visits, and attitudinal loyalty, which is positive feelings towards a destination leading to recommendation (Pike S. , Customer-based brand quity for destinations: Practical DMO performance measures., 2007), (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007)(Boo, Busser, & Baloglu, 2009). It is believed that while a tourist might not visit the destination again, he or she may stay loyal in attitude and provide positive word-of-mouth review.

Due to the importance of loyalty for long-term tourism development, multiple studies look into causal relationships between loyalty and its antecedents. Loyalty is dependent on the following constructs: novelty seeking,pull and push motivation, image, expectations, awareness, quality, experience, positive and negative emotions and satisfaction (Chen & Tsai, 2007).

Factors Influencing Destination Brand Awareness

There are many factors framing visitor's destination brand awareness and different models can be developed on those factors. As a result of literature review the following model was developed to
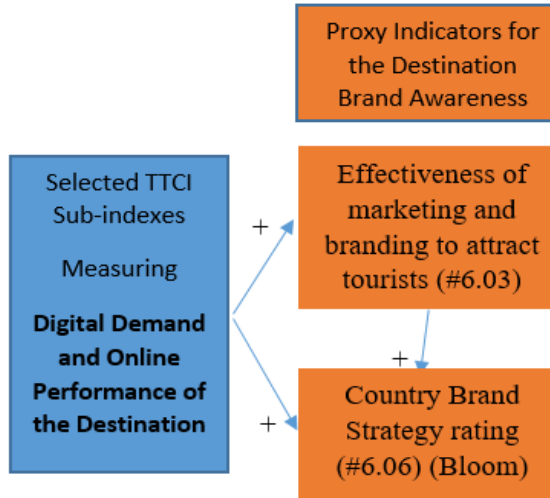

Figure 2. The Model Demonstrating Relationship between Digital Demand and Online Performance of the Destination with the Brand Awareness Proxy Indicators.

Variable #6.03 - Effectiveness of marketing and branding to attract tourists.

This variable is included in the World Economic Forum's Executive Opinion Survey (Browne, 2014)

demonstrate relationship between the factors referenced in this study.

The pathway relation of dimensions on Figure 2 are as follows:

- Digital Demand and Online Performance of the Destination influences Destination Brand Awareness;

- Effectiveness of marketing and branding to attract tourists has positive relationship with the Country Brand Strategy rating;

- Effectiveness of marketing and branding to attract tourists and the Country Brand Strategy rating have positive effects on the Attractiveness of the Destination and consequently on Competitiveness of the Destination.

This study is targeting first two relationships. Therefore, is proposed to identify sub-indexes from the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) of the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2017) interpreting digital demand and online performance of the destination and after assess strength of their relationships with the brand awareness proxy variables.

In this study the destination brand awareness is represented by the following proxy variables: a) Effectiveness of marketing and branding to attract tourists (TTCI index #6.03); and b) Country Brand Strategy rating (TTCI index #6.06). and measures responses on the questions "How effective is your country's marketing and branding campaigns at attracting tourists? (1 - not effective at all, 7 - extremely effective).

The Executive Opinion Survey 2015 captured the opinions of over 14,000 business leaders in 144 economies between February and June 2015. The country averages for 2015 is combined with the 2014 averages to produce the country scores.

Argument for using this variable as a proxy for the destination brand awareness is that to have effective marketing and branding to attract tourists, respective country should establish strong brand awareness of its destination.

Variable #6.06 Country Brand Strategy rating

This variable evaluates the accuracy of the strategy of NTO by a formula that compares the most popular brand tags for a specific country to the brand tags most heavily promoted by that country's NTO. (Bloom Consulting, 2017)

Argument for using these variables as a proxy for destination brand awareness is that to have effective marketing and branding to attract tourists, respective country should build strong country brand, including through increasing its brand awareness. Same time, these variables measure performance effectiveness of national tourism organization, which in case of Georgia is the Georgian National Tourism Agency

(GNTA). Therefore, by looking closer to those variable, is possible to evaluate related performance of the GNTA.

Variables Effecting Destination Brand Awareness

Tourism brand awareness is interpreted as "what someone knows about a destination" (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). Destination brand awareness is influenced by the information available online about the destination. As highlighted in the earlier chapters, today, tourists are identifying where to travel based on online searches; therefor, online information accessible to travelers, is significant influencer on their preferences and consecutive decisions.

Following sub-indexes were identified from the TTCI ranking (Tables 1) as once that are accessible online to tourists, prior to the visit of the destination and which might be obtained to assess attractiveness, safety, and accessibility of the destination.

Table 1. List of TTCI Sub-indexes Measuring Online and Digital Performance of the Destination

Sub-index
2.02 Reliability of police services
2.04 Index of terrorism incidence
4.04 Treatment of customers
5.01 ICT use for business-to-business transactions
5.02 Internet use for business-to-consumer transactions
5.03 Individuals using the internet
5.04 Broadband internet subscribers
7.01 Visa requirements
8.02 Hotel price index
8.03 Purchasing power parity
9.07 Threatened species
10.06 Number of operating airlines
12.02 Quality of tourism infrastructure
12.03 Presence of major car rental companies
13.01 Number of World Heritage natural sites
13.04 Natural tourism digital demand
14.01 Number of World Heritage cultural sites
14.02 Oral and intangible cultural heritage expressions
14.05 Cultural and entertainment tourism digital demand

Results

Stepwise regression was first proposed by Efroymson (Efroymson, 1960). This is an automatic procedure for statistical model selection in cases where there is a large number of potential explanatory variables, and no underlying theory on which to base the model selection. The procedure is used primarily in regression analysis, though the basic approach is applicable in many forms of model selection. This is a variation on forward selection. At each stage in the process, after a new variable is added, a test is made to check if some variables can be deleted without appreciably increasing the residual sum of squares. The procedure terminates when the measure is maximized, or when the available improvement falls below some critical value.

Having identified dependent (sub-indexes #6.03, #6.06) and independent variables (other TTCI sub-indexes) we should analyze strength of their relationships. The relationship was assessed by the step-wise linear regression method and Table 2 and 3 demonstrates results of the test:

Table 2. Step-wise Regression Model for Dependent Variable: #6.03 Effectiveness of Marketing and Branding to Attract Tourists

Coefficients[a]						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.107	.247		.432	.666
	Quality of tourism infrastructure, 1-7	.865	.048	.792	18.090	.000
2	(Constant)	-.050	.241		-.207	.836
	Quality of tourism infrastructure, 1-7	.850	.046	.778	18.401	.000
	Threatened species	.033	.008	.171	4.037	.000
3	(Constant)	-.354	.232		-1.524	.129
	Quality of tourism infrastructure, 1-7	.734	.048	.671	15.196	.000
	Threatened species	.042	.008	.219	5.401	.000
	Reliability of police services, 1-7	.183	.034	.241	5.387	.000
4	(Constant)	-.421	.229		-1.838	.068
	Quality of tourism infrastructure, 1-7	.698	.049	.639	14.261	.000
	Threatened species	.037	.008	.192	4.704	.000
	Reliability of police services, 1-7	.206	.034	.270	6.002	.000
	Visa requirements	.006	.002	.121	2.873	.005
a. Dependent Variable: Effectiveness of marketing and branding to attract tourists, 1-7						

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.792[a]	.627	.625	.55617
2	.810[b]	.656	.652	.53556
3	.837[c]	.701	.696	.50063
4	.844[d]	.713	.707	.49147
a. Predictors: (Constant), Quality of tourism infrastructure, 1-7				
b. Predictors: (Constant), Quality of tourism infrastructure, 1-7, Threatened species				
c. Predictors: (Constant), Quality of tourism infrastructure, 1-7, Threatened species, Reliability of police services, 1-7				
d. Predictors: (Constant), Quality of tourism infrastructure, 1-7, Threatened species, Reliability of police services, 1-7, Visa requirements				

The model identifies four variables as the most critical for interpreting the dependent variable #6.03 Effectiveness of marketing and branding to attract tourists. These are: #12.02 Quality of tourism infrastructure, 1-7, #9.07 Threatened species, #2.02 Reliability of police services, 1-7, and #7.01 Visa requirements. It seems strange to see variable #9.07 in the list; however, during conducting other tests, similar importance was indicated by stringency and enforcement of environmental regulations, indicating that environmental protection plays critical role in determining destination attractiveness.

Table 3. Step-wise Regression Model for Dependent Variable: #6.06 Country Brand Strategy Rating

Coefficients[a]						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	47.528	4.561		10.421	.000
	Internet use for business-to-consumer transactions, 1-7	5.548	.941	.389	5.893	.000
2	(Constant)	46.027	4.502		10.223	.000
	Internet use for business-to-consumer transactions, 1-7	4.349	1.009	.305	4.310	.000
	Presence of major car rental companies, 1-7 (best)	1.322	.448	.209	2.950	.004
3	(Constant)	48.298	4.595		10.512	.000
	Internet use for business-to-consumer transactions, 1-7	3.618	1.060	.254	3.413	.001
	Presence of major car rental companies, 1-7 (best)	1.280	.445	.202	2.877	.004
	Cultural and entertainment tourism digital demand	.074	.035	.144	2.086	.038
a. Dependent Variable: Country brand strategy rating						

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.389[a]	.151	.147	10.25446
2	.433[b]	.188	.179	10.05780
3	.453[c]	.206	.193	9.97199
a. Predictors: (Constant), Internet use for business-to-consumer transactions, 1-7				
b. Predictors: (Constant), Internet use for business-to-consumer transactions, 1-7, Presence of major car rental companies, 1-7 (best)				
c. Predictors: (Constant), Internet use for business-to-consumer transactions, 1-7, Presence of major car rental companies, 1-7 (best), Cultural and entertainment tourism digital demand				

It was expected that variable #5.02 Internet use for business-to-consumer transactions was critical in predicting Country brand strategy rating. Appearance of additional two variables #12.03 Presence of major car rental companies and #14.05 Cultural and entertainment tourism digital demand was not expected to be more important than others for predicting Country brand strategy rating.

Regression Analysis of Combined Variables

As a final step was assessed dependence of dependent variables and all seven independent variables identified in the earlier sections. Assessment results are presented in the Table 4 and 5:

Table 4. Regression Model for Dependent Variable: #6.03 Effectiveness of Marketing and Branding to Attract Tourists

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.218	.210		-1.036	.301
	Internet use for business-to-consumer transactions, 1-7	-.049	.052	-.046	-.953	.341
	Presence of major car rental companies, 1-7 (best)	-.003	.017	-.006	-.152	.879
	Cultural and entertainment tourism digital demand	.000	.002	.006	.167	.868
	Quality of tourism infrastructure, 1-7	.678	.042	.632	15.989	.000
	Threatened species	.029	.007	.148	4.256	.000
	Reliability of police services, 1-7	.256	.035	.321	7.427	.000
	Visa requirements	.005	.002	.119	3.388	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Effectiveness of marketing and branding to attract tourists, 1-7

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.854[a]	.730	.723	.49665

a. Predictors: (Constant), Visa requirements, Cultural and entertainment tourism digital demand, Presence of major car rental companies, 1-7 (best), Threatened species, Reliability of police services, 1-7, Quality of tourism infrastructure, 1-7, Internet use for business-to-consumer transactions, 1-7

Table 5. Regression Model for Dependent Variable: #6.06 Country Brand Strategy Rating

Coefficients[a]						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	45.810	5.059		9.055	.000
	5.02. Internet use for business-to-consumer transactions, 1-7	3.441	1.236	.216	2.784	.006
	12.03. Presence of major car rental companies, 1-7 (best)	1.961	.403	.304	4.866	.000
	14.05. Cultural and entertainment tourism digital demand	.112	.041	.166	2.736	.007
	12.02. Quality of tourism infrastructure, 1-7	-.896	1.000	-.058	-.896	.371
	9.07. Threatened species	.066	.162	.023	.407	.684
	2.02. Reliability of police services, 1-7	.428	.813	.037	.526	.599
	7.01. Visa requirements	-.004	.037	-.006	-.098	.922
a. Dependent Variable: Country brand strategy rating						

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.545[a]	.297	.278	11.67192
a. Predictors: (Constant), Visa requirements, Cultural and entertainment tourism digital demand, Presence of major car rental companies, 1-7 (best), Threatened species, Reliability of police services, 1-7, Quality of tourism infrastructure, 1-7, Internet use for business-to-consumer transactions, 1-7				

Merger of those seven variables had small impact on explaining results on the dependent variable #6.03 Effectiveness of marketing and branding to attract tourists; however, it changed level of R Square from 0.206 to 0.297 for dependent variable #6.06 Country brand strategy rating. It is proposed to use all seven independent variables in selected final model.

As a conclusion, in regards to Georgia, country can improve its destination brand awareness by 1. Promoting Internet use for business-to-consumer transactions; 2. Attracting additional major car rental companies; and 3. Improving quality of its tourism infrastructure.

Those seven indicators are selected as a key factors determining destination brand awareness.

5.02. Internet use for business-to-consumer transactions, 1-7
12.03. Presence of major car rental companies, 1-7 (best)
14.05. Cultural and entertainment tourism digital demand
12.02. Quality of tourism infrastructure, 1-7
9.07. Threatened species
2.02. Reliability of police services, 1-7
7.01. Visa requirements

Limitations

This research has multiple limitations. First and most important is assumption that destination brand awareness is possible to approximate with the sub-indexes Effectiveness of marketing and branding to attract tourists and Country brand strategy rating. None of those two variables are directly measuring brand awareness and are considered as a proxy indicators. Their performance can be effected by multiple other factors in addition to the destination brand awareness. However, relationships identified within this work are interesting and can be considered during improving destination attractiveness and its brand awareness.

Information used in the development of the model and in the testing relationships consists of data collected from multiple sources and from periods ranging from 2015 to 2017. This data has different levels of reliability and accuracy.

Another limitation which should be highlighted is usage of stepwise regression analysis in shortlisting variables from the larger group. The principal drawbacks of stepwise multiple regression includes bias in parameter estimation, inconsistencies among model selection algorithms, an inherent problem of multiple hypothesis testing, and an inappropriate focus or reliance on a single best model. However, during selection of individual variables, were used pre judgment that each and every variable was somehow related to the subject of the study; therefore any selected variable was possible source.

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