

Marketing Research of the Territory's Image: on the Example of the Issyk-Kul Region of Kyrgyzstan

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ABSTRACT

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This article discusses the process of determining a favorable image and development of a territory (region), as well as its practical development and further functioning. The image of a region is a spontaneously formed and/or artificially created image of a region that is steadily entrenched in the mass consciousness, under the influence of a set of emotional, rational characteristics, beliefs and feelings of people who arise about the characteristics of a given territory. Image is one of the determining factors of the perception of the territory. The image of the territory allows local authorities effectively to interact with various target groups: the population, tourists, investors, etc.

A positive image of the territory is an important element of ensuring socio-economic stability.

This article is devoted to the study of the image of the Issyk-Kul region of Kyrgyzstan. Issyk-Kul region is a region located in the central part of Kyrgyzstan. It got its name from Lake Issyk-Kul, which is one of the largest mountain lakes in the world. The region is known for its unique nature, picturesque mountain landscapes, clean air and diverse types of vegetation.

Keywords: Territorial marketing. Regional marketing. The image of the territory. The strategy of the territory's image. The brand of the territory. The image of the regional territory.

1. Introduction

At the present stage of development of territorial entities (regions), image is becoming one of the important resources of the economy and the main factors of the competitiveness of the territory. The strategy of creating a favorable image is developed for a long period and is based on research of marketing data to determine the image of the territory and long-term government programs for the development of the territory or region. This is necessary to determine the main directions of socio-economic development and the formation of competitive advantages of the territory.

The formation of a favorable and positive image will orient local governments to specify the main competitive advantages and attractive sides of the territory in order to attract investors, which will contribute to solving the social and economic problems of the region, economic growth, creating additional jobs and ultimately improving the material standard of living of the local population. As a result, in accordance with the latest state programs of the Kyrgyz Republic for the development of regions, there is currently an urgent need to determine the image of the territory using methods and tools of territorial marketing.

The main purpose of the study is to identify and form a positive image of the territory, for further development of practical and methodological recommendations to state and municipal authorities on the creation of a strategy for the formation of the image of the territory.

The first foreign studies on territory marketing appeared in the 1990s. In 1993, the book "Territory Marketing: Attracting Investment, Industry and Tourism to Cities, states and Countries" by Philip Kotler, Christer Asplund, Donald Haider and Irwin Rein was published. (Kotler F. et al 2005) This book is a classic guide to territorial marketing. In Russia, one of the first about A.P. Pankrukhin started talking about the marketing of territories and territorial image. He notes that approaches to regional marketing are in many ways similar to the marketing of the country, but must take into account the specifics of the level. In his book "Marketing of Territories" (first edition in 2002), Pankrukhin A.P. defines marketing of the region as a certain technology of research and management, a philosophy that requires the orientation of the entire system of government to the needs of target groups of consumers of goods and services in the region. (Pankrukhin A.P, 2010) . The systematization of scientific views on the theory of regional marketing highlights the marketing specifics of the orientation of regional management activities.

I. S. Vazhenina gives a similar interpretation, revealing at the same time the signs of the territory: "the image of the territory is a set of beliefs and feelings of people that arise about the natural-climatic, historical, ethnographic, socio-economic, political, moral-psychological and other features of this territory" (Vazhenina I. S., 2006).

As V. Kirdin notes, "the image of the region is a symbolically expressed idea of the originality and specificity of the territory, its reputation formed in public opinion" (Kirdin V, 2006). At the same time, in our opinion, the author collides in one definition both different concepts and different approaches to territorial image. Firstly, despite the fact that image and reputation are closely related and influence each other, it is necessary to distinguish between these concepts. Thus, reputation, unlike image, is formed over a fairly long period and is less controlled. It includes value beliefs and a stable opinion about the territory, which is formed on the basis of information received and personal experience.

In addition to these approaches to the formation of the image of the territory, there is also a geopolitical one. Within the framework of this concept, D. Zamyatin considers the territorial image as a set of images (geocultural, geopolitical, etc.) that are in a certain relationship with each other. (Zamyatin D, 2000)

Thus, the image of the territory is a very diverse, sometimes artificially created image that develops in the minds of people.

2. Materials and methods

The following types of image of the territory are distinguished.

- External (defined by attributes such as, for example, the coat of arms, flag, cultural traditions of the place, etc.);
- Internal (perception of the territory by local residents);
- geographical (natural features of the territory);
- Cultural (material and spiritual values of the place);
- Ethnic (representation of the people inhabiting the territory);
- Historical (associations about the history of the territory's development);
- Positive (based on the competitive advantages of the place);
- Weakly expressed (little known to target audiences);
- Overly traditional (does not create an idea of the territory as modernly developed);
- Contradictory (causes both positive and negative associations at the same time);

- Negative (causes associations only with the disadvantages of the territory);
- Overly attractive (the territory causes only positive emotions of the target audience, however, there is a problem of ensuring the stay of too large a flow of consumers) (Sazonov S. B. & Weisbein K. D., 2016).

A favorable image allows regions to effectively compete with each other for investments, resources, human capital, and lobby for their political and economic interests.

The Issyk-Kul region of the Kyrgyz Republic in the territory of which the biosphere reserve is located was chosen as the object of research in this article. Issyk-Kul region is the easternmost region of Kyrgyzstan. The administrative center is the Karakol city. The region takes its name from Issyk-Kul lake ("warm lake"), the second largest salt lake in the world, which never freezes, despite its height in the Tien Shan Mountains. The highest mountains of the country are located in the Issyk-Kul region: the famous Khan Tengri peak and the highest point of Kyrgyzstan, Victory Peak, are located here. (Issyk-Kul region, 2024).

The region borders with Kazakhstan from the north and northeast, China from the east and south-east, Naryn region from the west and southwest, and Chui region of Kyrgyzstan from the northwest.

Issyk-Kul region has 5 districts of Ak-Suu, Jeti-Oguz, Issyk-Kul, Ton, Tup, and 3 cities of Cholpon-Ata, Karakol, Balykchy.

The favorable climate of the region is directly related to the high-altitude location of the surrounding mountains. The mountain ranges surrounding the valley do not allow cold air masses to pass through, which is why the year-round ice-free mountain lake gives the valley an additional softening, cool air, distinguishing the atmosphere of the valley from the climate of other valleys in the Tenir-Too mountain system. The average July temperature is approaching 18°C. The winter is mild, on the southern and northern shores of the lake the average January temperature is about -2 ° C, in the western part -4 ° C, in the east up to -10 ° C. The average annual temperature is 67°C, the highest temperature is 27-0 ° C, the lowest is from -12°C to -18°C.

Issyk-Kul region is known for its unique nature, picturesque mountain landscapes, clean air and diverse landscape. The region attracts tourists from all over the world thanks to its mountain lakes, ski resorts, thermal springs, as well as opportunities for outdoor activities such as hiking, cycling, horse riding and other types of ECOtourism. Balneological resorts, sanatoriums "Jeti-Oguz", "Zhergalan", "Ak-Suu", "Cholpon-Ata", "Blue Issyk-Kul", "Tamga", "Kyrgyz Seaside", etc. have been built and continue to operate on the basis of many thermal and mineral springs with medicinal properties.

At the same time, in the post-Soviet period, due to globalization, the growth of foreign travel to other countries in the country, political and economic crises in the republic, the demand for local attractions decreased, service deteriorated, etc. The population of the Republic began to travel to the UAE, Turkey, and Mediterranean cruises. Only in recent years, due to European sanctions and price increases in the tourist service, the situation with tourists from Russia and Kazakhstan has improved significantly.

In this work, we conducted marketing research to determine the image of the Issyk-Kul region. The following tasks were set and the survey and semantic differential methods were used:

1. The "Image of the regional territory" is revealed: associations, stereotypes, values, rational and emotional characteristics of the Issyk-Kul region;
2. The image of the Issyk-Kul region was assessed using the semantic differential method.

Table 1 shows the plan and methodology for conducting a marketing study of the image of the Issyk-Kul region.

Table 1 Plan and methodology of marketing research of the image of the Issyk-Kul region

The research stage	The content of the stage	
	1	2
1. Development of the research concept		

Problems	The insufficiently known image of the Issyk-Kul region for the development of tourism;
	The presence of a negative image of the region for both the local population and tourists.
Goals	Assessment of the image of the Issyk-Kul region. To identify the "Image of the regional territory": Associations, stereotypes, values, rational and emotional characteristics of the Issyk-Kul region.
Working hypothesis	Insufficient effectiveness of the organization of systemic marketing activities, communication policy in terms of promotion of the Issyk-Kul region.
2. Selection of information sources	
Secondary information	Statistical data on the Issyk-Kul region.
Primary information	The results of the online survey.
Selection	1000 people
3. Collecting information	
The collection of secondary information was carried out within the framework of the author's desk research. The primary data was collected as part of an online survey (Google forms).	
4. Field stage	
Field research procedures were implemented from 5.02 to 15.02. 2024.	
5. Analysis of information, development of conclusions and recommendations	
The primary research information received from the respondents has been processed, summarized and statistically processed. The received assessments, conclusions and recommendations are aimed at improving the image of the Issyk-Kul region.	

To identify the image of the Issyk-Kul region and determine the associativity, stereotypes, value, rational and emotional characteristics of the region in the eyes of the population, an online survey was conducted among the population of the Kyrgyz Republic in the period from 5.02 to 15.02. 2024. Over 1,000 people participated in the survey. The online questionnaire consisted of 12 questions. The opinions of the respondents are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The results of the marketing research of the image Issyk-Kul region

№	Question/Answers	Total answer, people.	Answers%
1	Age	1004	
	16-25		28,7
	26-44		34,1
	45-60		22,4
	60+		14,8
2	Gender	1004	
	Male		39
	Female		61
3	Type of activity	1004	
	Study		20,1
	Work		50,2
	In business		11,9
	Other		17,8
4	Do you live in the Issyk-Kul region?	1004	
	Yes		70,1
	No		29,9
5	What associations do you have when you mention the Issyk-Kul region	1004	
	Issyk – Kul lake		87,5
	Jailoo Karkyra		53,5
	Jailoo Kyrchyn		47,1
	Cholpon–Ata city		54,1
	The Rukh Ordo Ethno-complex		53,9

6	Which of the sights of Issyk-Kul region have you visited	1004	
	Issyk – Kul lake	1004	75,8
	Karakol city		66,7
	Cholpon–Ata city		70,6
	Jailoo Kyrchyn		32,1
	Jeti-Oguz		55,7
	The Rukh Ordo Ethno-complex		44,3

The first question was answered by 1004 participants, where 16-25 years old made up 28.7%, 26-44% made up 34.1%, from 45-60% made up 22.4%, 60 and more than 14.8% of respondents.

Out of 1004 respondents, 61% of women and 39% of men participated in the online survey.

20.1% of students participated in the online survey, 50.2% of respondents work, 11.9% in business, 17.8% other.

When asked if you live in the Issyk-Kul region, 70.1% of respondents are residents of the Issyk-Kul region, 29.9% of respondents who do not live in the Issyk-Kul region.

The fifth question, what associations you have when mentioning the Issyk-Kul region, was open, 1004 respondents answered the questions. There were many very interesting answers, where 87.5% answered Issyk-Kul lakes, 53.5% jailoo Karkyra, 47.1 jailoo Kyrchyn, 54, 1% of respondents answered Cholpon-Ata, 53.9% Rukh Ordo ethno-complex and other attractions of Issyk-Kul region.

The sixth question: "Which of the attractions of the Issyk-Kul region have you visited" was answered by 1004 respondents, the question was also open. The answers to the sixth question were as follows: 75.8% of respondents answered Issyk-Kul Lake, 66.7% Kara-Kol city, 70.6% Cholpon-Ata city, jailoo Kirchyn 32.1%, Jeti-Oguz 55.7%, Rukh-Ordo 44.3%, etc.

992 respondents answered the seventh question "Rate the sights of Issyk-Kul region on a 5-point scale", of which 78.1% gave 5 points, 14.9% gave 4 points, 4.9% gave 3 points, 1.1% 2 points, 0.9% 1 point.

The eighth question is: "What positive characteristics do you think the Issyk-Kul region has?" It was open, 993 respondents answered, of which 83.1% answered natural features, 52.8% answered social features, 54.3% answered economic features.

The ninth question: "What influenced the formation of a negative image of the Issyk-Kul region" was also open, 1004 respondents answered, 66% of them answered environmental problems, 51.5% dissatisfaction with tourists' service, 25.2% answered crime, 15.6% answered undeveloped infrastructure.

The tenth open question: "Which of the following tourist "Magnets" attract you to the Issyk-Kul region" was answered by 1004 respondents, of whom 66.9% answered nature, climate and their features, 64.5% rest, 23.8% answered events and events, 32.3% answered traditions and customs, 44.3% answered attractions, 26.1% answered gastronomy and 19.9% answered architectural structures.

The eleventh question: "Please write suggestions, ideas to improve the image of the Issyk-Kul region" was open, 1004 respondents answered it, the answers were different, see Table 3. The answers mainly concerned issues of tourism development, environmental issues and infrastructure development of the Issyk-Kul region.

Table 3. Respondents' opinion on improving the image of the Issyk-Kul region

Opinion on infrastructure improvement	Opinion on environmental issues	Opinion on tourism development
Pay more attention to the infrastructure of the region	Garbage collection, waste recycling plants	Improve the condition of holiday homes
Infrastructure improvement	To teach the population to clean up the garbage left behind on vacation	Improve recreation areas
Roads, no sidewalks, no parks for recreation	Conservation of ecology Issyk - Kul	Everything is expensive
Improving infrastructure and building new buildings, improving and creating good conditions for tourists	Our lake Issyk -Kul is heavily polluted. It is necessary to carry out strict control over the cleaning of the coast and	The Issyk-Kul region should be made a resort area.
	beaches. To fine, to force to clean up after themselves, every vacationer.	Set reasonable prices for citizens, work on security
Improve the infrastructure	Landscaping	Ensure safety, reduce prices during the holiday season
Development of infrastructure for outdoor activities, including bike paths, hiking trails and water sports on the lake.	We must protect the environment. Development of information campaigns to maintain cleanliness and order in coastal areas and tourist sites	To improve the service of tourists. Reduce prices, improve living conditions
Road repairs	Establishing partnerships with environmental organizations to support environmental conservation projects.	Creation of tourist routes that emphasize the beauty of the nature of the Issyk-Kul region and its unique attractions.
		Organizing cultural events and festivals to draw attention to the history, traditions and art of the region.
		Promoting local products and culinary traditions through food festivals and restaurant events.
		Promoting sustainable tourism and the introduction of environmentally friendly practices for nature conservation.

		Interaction with international travel agencies to increase the flow of foreign visitors.
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3. Discussion

Depending on the qualitative characteristics, the image of the territory can be either positive or negative (with a variety of contents in both cases). At the same time, it should be remembered that there can be no absolute "minus" or unconditional "plus". It is always about the predominance of positive or negative characteristics.

According to the results of the online survey, it was revealed that the "Image of the regional territory": associations, stereotypes, values, rational and emotional characteristics of the regional territory of the Issyk-Kul region turned out to be mixed, as the survey results showed 50-50%.

The image of the Issyk-Kul region is mainly associated with its natural beauty and opportunities for tourism. Attractions and tourist places can be listed: Issyk Kul Lake; Tien Shan Mountains Victory Peak; Karakol city; Cholpon Ata City; Barskoon Waterfall; Jergalan resort; Kapriz Ski base; Jailoo Karkyra; Jeti Oguz; Jailoo Kirchyn; Ethnic complex Rukh-Ordo and many others.

However, there are also negative aspects of the image of the Issyk-Kul region, such as undeveloped infrastructure, environmental problems, and poor quality of tourist services. This conclusion should become an orientation for local governments, the local population and the entire Kyrgyz society for further action and be used in the development of a further strategy. It is necessary to make certain adjustments to the action plan to improve the negative image of the Issyk-Kul region to a positive image.

For the next study of the image of the Issyk-Kul region, the semantic differential method was used. Semantic differential is a method of constructing individual or group semantic spaces. The coordinates of an object in semantic space are its estimates according to a number of bipolar graded (three-, five-, seven-point) rating scales, the opposite poles of which are set using verbal antonyms. These scales are selected from a variety of trial scales by factor analysis methods. The semantic differential method was introduced into psychological research by Charles E. Osgood ((Charles E., 1952) in 1952.

To assess the image of the Issyk-Kul region using the semantic differential method, ten key characteristics were taken, reflecting the factor of possible activity of respondents in relation to the image of the Issyk-Kul region, which was expressed in assessments of the attractiveness of the region, in the assessment of respondents in terms of living standards, wages, safety, creation and business, as well as the prospects of living in in a given region with a family and ten opposite characteristics (antonyms), respondents should evaluate the characteristics of the region on a seven-point scale from -3 to +3, where -3,-2,-1 are negative characteristics +1,+2,+3 are positive characteristics, 0 is neutral.(The method of semantic differential in a sociological study, 2024). Respondents can put the following values of the characteristics of the region, where 1,-1 is weakly expressed; 2, -2 is moderately expressed; 3,-3 is strongly expressed. Table 4 below shows the characteristics of the region to assess the image of the Issyk-Kul region.

Table 4 Characteristics of the region for image assessment by the semantic differential method

Polar statements	Aggregated assessment of respondents	Polar statements
	-1,1 is weakly expressed; -2,2 expressed on average; -3,3 is expressed strongly	
An ugly region	-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	A beautiful region
A sparsely populated region	-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	A crowded region
Frozen region	-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	A developing region

A region with no attractions	-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	A region with attractions
A region with an undeveloped infrastructure	-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	A region with a developed infrastructure
The unsafe region	-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	Safe region
A region with low wages	-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	A region with decent wages
A region where there is no business opportunity	-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	A region where there is a business opportunity
A repulsive region	-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	An attractive region
The region where you don't want to live with your family	-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3	The region where you want to live with your family

More than 100 respondents participated in the semantic differential in assessing the image of the Issyk-Kul region. As can be seen from Table 5, the positive assessments of the current image of the Issyk-Kul region should include the statements "Beautiful region", the majority of respondents gave a score of 3 + 2.6 points. The second place of positive assessments of the Issyk-Kul region includes the statements "Attracting region", the average score of respondents is +2.2, "Region with sights" +2.2, the statements "Developing region" +2, "Region where there is an opportunity for business", the average score of respondents is +1.9, "Region where you want to live with your family" The average score of the respondents is +1.4. Among the negative assessments of the current image of the Issyk-Kul region, it is necessary to include the statements "A region where it is unsafe", the average score of respondents is 0.2.

Table 5 Assessment of the image of the Issyk-Kul region by the semantic differential method

Polar statements	Aggregated assessment of respondents 1,-1 is weakly expressed; 2,-2 expressed on average; 3,-3 is expressed strongly	Polar statements
An ugly region	+2,6	A beautiful region
A sparsely populated region	+1	A crowded region
Frozen region	+2	A developing region
A region with no attractions	+2,2	A region with attractions
A region with an undeveloped infrastructure	+0,7	A region with a developed infrastructure
The unsafe region	-0,2	Safe region
A region with low wages	+0,3	A region with decent wages
A region where there is no business opportunity	+1,9	A region where there is a business opportunity
A repulsive region	+2,2	An attractive region

The region where you don't want to live with your family	+1,4	The region where you want to live with your family
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4. Key issues.

The analysis of the marketing research of determining the image of the territory on the example of the IssykKul region as a region of priority for living, doing business and tourism development allowed us to formulate the following conclusions:

- Currently, there is a spontaneously formed image of the Issyk-Kul region, which needs a targeted correction of certain indicators and an active position of municipal and public administration bodies in relation to the formation of an updated regional image.
- State and municipal government bodies do not fully understand and do not use the concepts of "image, brand and reputation" when creating long-term promising areas of the Issyk-Kul region development strategy, which should be recognized as one of the main indicators of the region, based on the exclusive features of the region that need to be studied, developed and actively promoted.
- The developed Strategy for the Development of the Issyk-Kul region does not include modern concepts of image, brand and reputation, and a unified plan for their promotion has not been drawn up, which should be based on the exclusive features of this region.
- In the developed state programs of regional development and the National Development Program of the Kyrgyz Republic until 2040, regions are not considered as separate objects with exclusive features in terms of natural, climatic, ethnographic, historical and natural potential for the formation of competitive advantages and sustainable economic development (National program for the development of regions of the Kyrgyz Republic until 2040, 2020).

5. The result

The authors believe that in order to achieve these goals, the following measures should be taken:

- For more effective formation of competitive advantages and a positive image, and as a result of achieving economic sustainability of the region, it is necessary to conduct large-scale information and education among the population, business environment and entrepreneurship of the region on the concepts of "image, brand and reputation" and actively involve municipal, state and public authorities, educational organizations in this process.
- To create a positive image, territorial governments need to compile a list of the exclusive features of the region and develop a priority action plan or Roadmap for their improvement and improvement of potential opportunities, which will create additional jobs, improve self-employment of the population or apply environmental technologies.
- For the successful functioning of resort areas, tourist clusters, and the revival of balneological resorts, it is necessary to carry out measures for extensive training of maintenance and administrative personnel on certification and standardization of tourist services and resort services. In this regard, it is necessary to develop appropriate methodological approaches and amend the regulatory and legislative framework to include international requirements for standardization and certification of services, hospitality, the use of environmental technologies and industries, and environmental protection measures.

6. Conclusion

Thus, in order to improve potential opportunities and create competitive advantages, attractiveness of the region and achieve sustainable development of territories, state and territorial government bodies need to apply a systematic approach and make changes to the developed state and national programs, taking into account international requirements for marketing territories, to create a positive image of territories or region.

To develop methodological recommendations for the formation of a positive image of the territories.

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