

The perception of CIS countries by the Russian community in the context of geopolitical crisis: Fombrun-RI Country Reputation Index as a tool for reputational research

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In 2022, the total number of visits by Russian residents to Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan between July and September 2022 accounted for over 2 million times [5], which was significantly higher than the figures for the similar period since 2018. Taking this into account, it became necessary to determine and compare perceptions of CIS countries from Russians' point of view within the context of the geopolitical crisis in the region of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and decolonization trends of the past 15-20 years. However, the absence of similar research ventures in the region created the necessity to develop and test a tool for a reputation assessment that would be tailored to the peculiarities of local cultures and context. This research attempts to contribute to the solution of this task.

The Fombrun-RI Country Reputation Index (CRI) was used as a foundation for the research. The review of scientific papers on the similar topic for the period from 2005 to 2021 [1, 2, 3, 4] revealed that, depending on a society whose perception had been measured, the tool was exposed to various modifications: the statements used in the model were either adapted to cultural context, omitted or expanded with new ones. Concurrently, there had been no works that would attempt to adapt CRI to meet the peculiarities of the CIS region, particularly Russia, prior to this research. Thus, there was a scientific problem of determining and applying a relevant approach to measure the CIS countries' reputation. Given that this problem could constrain prospective research in this field, which has increased in demand due to the current geopolitical situation, the author attempts to adapt and test the tool in the work.

The empirical part of this work consisted of a convergent study design, which included in-depth interviews and surveys. While qualitative and quantitative data were gathered concurrently, the results of both approaches were integrated at the analysis stage. The obtained results were analyzed with the means of the descriptive statistics method and axial coding for quantitative and qualitative parts respectively.

As a result, the model was expanded with two groups of questions that referred to the past experience of visiting the countries and the intention to support them through tourism or products consumption. The developed tool allowed to determine the reputational profiles of Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, as well as compare the way they were perceived. For instance, findings revealed that both Armenia and Georgia were perceived generally more appealing than Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, due to the fact that Russians were more willing to make their first visit to Armenia and Georgia. Nevertheless, people that had already visited Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan returned to these countries more frequently than those who had visited Armenia and Georgia. Besides that, Armenia and Georgia generally overlapped in their reputational profiles, yet differed in perceived likeability towards Russian people. Particularly, the attitude of Georgians towards Russians was evaluated by respondents as more negative than that of Armenians. Moreover, Armenia was perceived as more appealing for tourism, while Georgia - for the consumption of goods. At the same time, Uzbekistan was not seen

as much preferable for tourism as Armenia and Georgia, notwithstanding the equally high figures for cultural and physical appeal. Unlike Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan was treated as more compelling for both tourism and products consumption, in spite of being assessed as the lowest in terms of cultural appeal among all four countries. Talking solely about Georgia, findings showed that Russians have a controversial perception of it: despite a tense attitude towards the country, Georgia was evaluated by Russians as a superior in numerous criteria and had the highest rates of the intention to support the country both through tourism and products consumption. Concerning other findings, the business community and ordinary residents shared similar evaluations of all 4 countries, yet differently interpreted these evaluations when asked about the intention to support these countries. Moreover, the most essential criterion for the reputation profile of a country appeared to be perceived tranquility and stability in the country.

To summarize, it is possible to contend that the CRI model modified and implemented in this research is applicable for the CIS region, given the results received. It also appeared feasible to group countries by their reputational profiles and cluster characteristics based on the results obtained on more or less crucial in the certain geopolitical context. Future research could make further contributions by either conducting the factor analysis on the features provided by the model, or carrying out the cluster analysis on a series of CIS countries to illustrate preferences in the CIS countries by the Russian society, or by developing a regression model to assess the correlation between reputation profiles and other phenomena.

References

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