

UDC 796.5:659(045)  
MPHTI: 15.21.51  
DOI 10.56525/CRUY2171

**IS THERE NEED FOR  
TWITTER-BASED PR  
FOR KAZAKH CULTURAL  
SPORT TOURISM?**

**PULATOVA Z.T.**

Caspian University of Technology  
and Engineering named after Sh.Yessenov,  
Aktau, Kazakhstan  
E-mail: zamira1.pulatova@yu.edu.kz

**Abstract.** Artefacts of nomadic customs and traditions remain at the heart of Kazakh culture. After Kazakhstan gained its independence, its authorities attempted to further develop Kazakh ethnic traditions [1]. According to the Kazakhstan Ministry of Sports and Tourism, there are approximately 250,952 athletes who play ethnic sports. A good example of such, alongside Western-style horse races, are games dating back to Kazakh nomadism such as kokpar; its rules are very basic, centering around horsemen grabbing the carcass of a headless goat and scoring a goal.

This research investigates whether there is a need for Twitter-based PR to promote Kazakh traditional sports as one of the ways to attract more tourists to Kazakhstan. The research objective was achieved through mixing qualitative and quantitative research methods. The grounded theory and thematic analysis were the key qualitative approaches, as well as semi-structured interviews. Public relation theories such as Grunig and Hunt's four models and Jefkin's transfer process were applied to this study, which was connected to Edward Said's Orientalism concept. An online survey was conducted in the research to help verify the hypothesis.

**Keywords:** Twitter; kokpar; cultural sport tourism; Kazakhstan; ethnosports; traditional sports.

'The purpose of professional public relations is to create understanding'. John Egan

**Introduction.** As we live in a multicultural world and public relations businesses function within the intercultural mediation [2], there is no way to escape interaction with other cultures and experience differences. Whilst the main purpose of public relations is communications management, it is also concerned with maintaining desirable relationships regardless of cultural differences. Tench and Yeomans highlighted that: 'public relation practitioners are required to perform like intercultural interpreters' [2].

Social media has reinvented public relations tactics, which demands that practitioners examine the different perspectives of the current situation [3]. The travel market has also changed within the current era of web-based communications. Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan are seeking to build their own national identities within the global political community and with international businesses. In Kazakhstan, tourism is stimulated via legislation and is considered on an equal basis with financial instruments [3].

However, the country has not received what might be considered a desirable number of tourists. According to the World Economic Forum "Travel and Tourism: Competitiveness 2017", among 139 countries, Kazakhstan is ranked 81st. On the other hand, the development of the tourism industry is one of the main priorities of the country's '2050 development plan' [4].

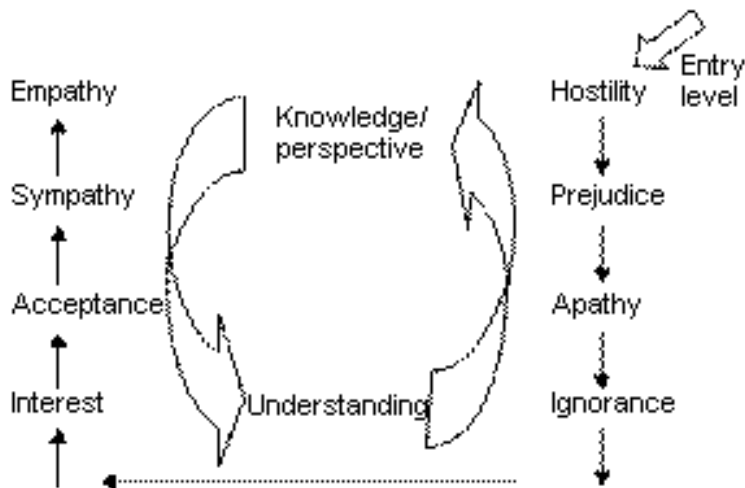
**Materials and methods of research.** The purpose of this chapter is to critically evaluate those academic studies relevant to this subject matter. Cultural sports PR has not received much academic attention, with any related research remaining rather limited and isolated. Hence, this literature review will of necessity draw on interpretations from diverse sources that may be

applicable to the focus of the research. This study will focus on a microblogging service – namely, Twitter.

Although RUNET<sup>1</sup> is dominant in terms of social media usage in Kazakhstan, the use of Facebook and Twitter is also growing fast [5]. As Twitter is rich in both national and international content and indeed is closely linked with the other sources of information, I found it appropriate to focus on Twitter for the purposes of discussion. Even though Facebook is more popular than Twitter in Kazakhstan, many organisations and public use them both [5]. Another reason for choosing Twitter is that tweets are short, and it is convenient to find relevant content using hashtags, which aids any textual analysis.

It will then examine the relations between sport public relations and social media more closely moving on to cultural sport tourism.

**Relevant concepts and theories. Public Relations Transfer Process. Frank Jefkins** [6] proposed the public relations ‘transfer model’ to reduce unfavourable development in the organisation. Hopwood et al. [7] demonstrated that if used professionally, the PR transfer process model could change negative situations into positive ones. This model has the power to alter the public’s emotional dimensions from "ignorance to knowledge, hostility to sympathy, and prejudice to acceptance, apathy to interest" [6].



**Figure 1. Public Relations transfer process (adopted from Jefkins, 1994, in Egan et.al. p. 11)**

The first stage of the transfer process, ‘knowledge’, is about understanding the crucial objective of PR. In the second phase, PR tactics and strategies are used to alter the situation from hostility to sympathy among an organisations' stakeholders [6], considering that sympathy is the best position by which to change prejudice to acceptance by creating the interest which initiates the move from apathy [6]. Sport organisations can use these four stages of the transfer model to set up a philanthropic approach to the public that reduces any negative attitude [7]. However, perfection cannot be fully achieved, many companies will experience one of those stages: ignorance, hostility, prejudice, or apathy. Regarding this study there is a need to identify the stage Kazakh in which cultural sport tourism is situated. Jefkin's transfer process is useful to this research project for how it aids in determining this.

**Twitter.** The ‘microblogging’ service Twitter has become one of the most popular social network sites of the contemporary world. Twitter has 313 million active users each month, 82% of whom are active online mobile users, and 1 billion unique visits to the site with dynamic tweets [8]. The social nature of Twitter allows co-workers, family and friends to connect with short messages (maximum 140 characters) quickly and share updates about their lives [9].

As mentioned in the methodology, three case studies are fundamental to this research. These cases open significant themes that PR consultants should consider when doing Kazakh cultural

<sup>1</sup> Russian internet, most popular SNS are vKontakte, Odnaklassniki and mail.ru

sports tourism. The national sports association of the Republic of Kazakhstan is chosen because of its importance as the organisation that promotes the game both domestically and internationally. The World Nomad Games is an example of how nomadic culture and kokpar can attract more tourists. The Top Gear episode is of interest because it gives an indication of the public's perception of kokpar because mass media covered this episode and it had wide-spread twitter coverage.

Among the multiple functions of public relations, this study discusses tools that would help to establish awareness and maintain relationships with the relevant public regarding the Kazakh traditional game kokpar.

**Results of research.** The national sports association of the Republic of Kazakhstan is chosen because of its importance as the organisation that promotes the game both domestically and internationally. The World Nomad Games is an example of how nomadic culture and kokpar can attract more tourists. The Top Gear episode is of interest because it gives an indication of the public's perception of kokpar because mass media covered this episode and it had wide-spread twitter coverage.

Among the multiple functions of public relations, this study discusses tools that would help to establish awareness and maintain relationships with the relevant public regarding the Kazakh traditional game kokpar.

According to Jefkin's [6] transfer theory, most of the time the public are ignorant of any particular subject. Considering the research questions focus on the promotion of cultural sport, in particular kokpar, to a wider international audience, it is important to identify the general awareness of the public regarding kokpar and its association with Kazakhstan.

One of the main obstacles with Kazakh cultural sports is that many people are not aware of them. Furthermore, Western conceptions of the country itself still consider Kazakhstan as 'exotic' and known for the 'oil dictator, Borat' [9]. However, Kazakhstan has been promoting tourism in the interest of diversity through foreign investment. According to reports, there is a perceptible increase in the commercial sector because of EXPO-2017 being held in Kazakhstan. It was estimated that more than 2 million individuals visited. The number was determined by observation cameras as of 37 days before the end of the exhibition, on August 4th. Concerning the visits to the global structures themselves, the number of visitors surpassed 15 million.

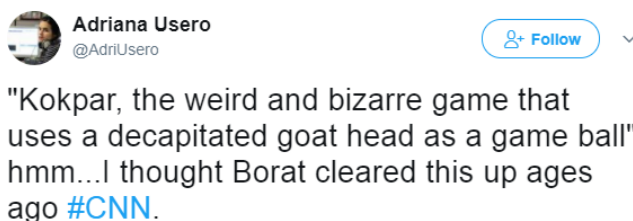
Even though Kazakhstan is trying to make itself known to the world, most of the public are not particularly familiar with the country. For example, in his article regarding kokpar 'A Kingdom for a Horse' writer Will Boast argued: 'Despite these gestures toward a more global profile, Kazakhstan remains, for many, a huge blank on the map somewhere between Russia and China, essentially a hinterland' [11]. Another example is taken from an interview from the BBC regarding the Top Gear visit to Kazakhstan. Matt LeBlanc said: "Before that trip, I had no idea Kazakhstan was real...I thought it was one of those made-up places like Timbuktu or Guernsey." [10].

Boast [11] argues that with the aim of 'correcting' its global anonymity, Kazakhstan is trying to create an identity via promotion of its nomadic origin. As Boast [11] claims, the 'signifiers of a nomadic past are everywhere' in Kazakhstan from building designs to the shop snacks made from dried milk. Nonetheless, Boast admits that nowhere has he seen the interplay between the modern and ancient nomadic culture, which was spread by Genghis Khan. Therefore, the Kazakh kokpar is becoming modernised and more professional.

Kokpar is the most popular and spectator-friendly Central Asian game. The competition events are held at both the national and international levels. Kazakhstan's national sports association [12] stated that their purpose is to bring ethno-sports types to life, to promote them and increase their visibility within the international arena. However, Hermans [12] points out that it is difficult to find out where and when kokpar will be played. Hermans [12] argues that the reason for this is that these things tend to be informally organised and are not well-advertised. That is, Jefkin's negative stage - 'ignorance'; Egan et al. [13] explained that this usually occurs when new services or products are introduced to the market. Due to limited understanding of the product, there is a need to address public ignorance on the subject. This may take two or more years depending on the complexity of the service or product. Even though there are sections of public

who want to know about games events, the kokpar association's PR tools are currently not reaching potentially interested parties and tourists. The rest of the public are not properly informed and are at the stage of ignorance.

Said [14] defines Orientalism as “cumulative and corporate identity” closely linked to travel books, books of exploration, fantasy, and exotic descriptions, the overall result of which was a “sort of consensus” which took for granted “certain types of statements’ which seemed for the Orientalist correct”. For example, after Top Gear’s visit to Kazakhstan was released, the Sun reported that the local game was ‘straight out of Borat’, and this idea was also tweeted by a Twitter user named Adriana.



The prejudice in Jefkin's theory means that the public hold an opinion without considering the available information. For example, thinks that:

**WB:** ‘I think journalists who cover Central Asian culture will often take only a surface look at kokpar. They would not try to understand the cultural, historical, and political aspects of the game but only see it as something strange and other, something "Oriental". The aim of journalists is to go beyond the mere spectacle of the match’.

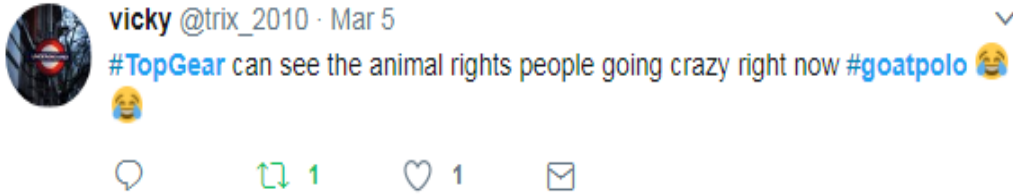
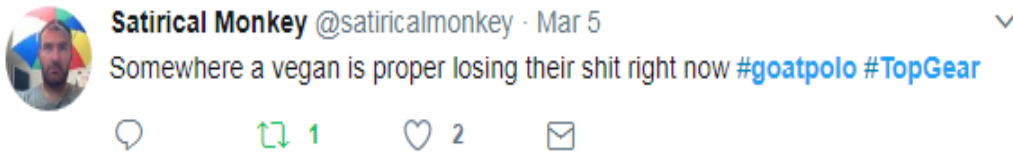
Moloney stated that the ‘Media have the right – the necessity in a democracy – to maintain diversity, openness, to investigate, to attempt balance and objectivity’ [15]. He doubts whether journalists are giving a sufficiently objective, diverse and balanced examination.

**WB:** ‘Kokpar is something most western readers and viewers will have little knowledge of, but it is not strange and different to Kazakhs. It is important for outsiders, especially journalists, to realise this, to try to understand something from the inside out, rather than sit in judgment of it. For example, Top Gear to be particularly culturally aware—it is pure entertainment—but optimistically they would try to pause and understand rather than simply react’.

That is why it is not surprising that public relations spend a long time dealing with journalists rather than any other stakeholders, as journalists can easily damage a reputation [16]. In this situation, Egan [13] explains that it is not easy to convert such people because this attitude can remain for an extended period, regardless of any facts to the contrary. Egan argues that prejudice is regularly exhibited in the tourism sector. However, Egan had explained that travellers have started taking holidays in countries, such as Russia and China, which they were once ‘deeply prejudiced’ against [13].

**WB:** ‘Tourists are drawn to new, unfamiliar sight and experiences, and perhaps kokpar can be one of them. But I would hate for the game to "sell out" and become just a tourist spectacle. I hope it maintains its integrity’.

**Animal welfare issues.** Jefkin’s [6] explained that hostility might occur from any misunderstandings, especially those based on fear that might make the public feel threatened. As the game includes animals and is usually played in rural areas it is known as a ‘wild’ and ‘weird’ game [17]. For example, a number of Twitter users point out that vegetarian and animal rights people may get upset watching kokpar after it featured on Top Gear.



**Paul:** ‘People in the West are more aware of issues of animal welfare and cruelty to animals as witnessed in the popularity of such groups as PETA. These issues could lead to a negative view of Kokpar, whereas in Central Asia animal rights issues are not very prominent so people generally have a more positive view of the sport’.

Experts are not personally concerned with the use of a goat carcass for the game; they admit that special interest groups such as PETA<sup>2</sup> might well have concerns in this regard. The use of a real goat carcass makes kokpar attractive, but at the same time has led to criticism for this reason. For example, this may concern single-issue groups such as PETA.

However, Egan [13] argued that ‘no genuine threat’ can exist. The dislikes may remain, but it is realistic to achieve, and expect an ‘attitude of tolerance’ [13].

**Steve:** ‘I think people are interested in kokpar because it is something new to them, unknown, and it sounds exciting. Especially the fact that it is played with a dead goat appeals to young males 18-34, who are also the main travellers to Central Asia from abroad’.

The national sports association admits that the requirements of the international tournament are different. One of them is that of the goat carcass, was debated in the last Central Asian championship. For the next global tournament for the game, an artificial goat carcass will be used. Currently, this is being pre-tested in Kazakhstan, but because of its poor quality, it was not used for the games. This experiment will not be stopped, however, until a usable alternative to the real goat carcass can be found for kokpar players.

**Potentials.** Hopwood [18] argued that public relations practitioners usually forget about the apathetic (inactive) public, and they need to be motivated to progress information, especially considering that, the aim of public relations is to achieve understanding, the aim should be to transform unwilling members of the public to the ones who want to know and understand.

**JL:** There’s great potential, for using sports like kokpar to attract fresh interest and more visitors to Kazakhstan, those who are looking for an unusual experience in an exotic location.

Waddington [3] argued that if the aim of PR is to ‘establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding’ with the public, it is crucial to research who this public is, what they consider important, and how they think. Even though there is a debate regarding cost effectiveness and measurement of results in PR, ‘putting the public at the heart of public relations’ makes it valuable and trustworthy [3].

**BK:** "It is wrong to say that Borat may be used to attract tourists to Kazakhstan, because it is the mockery. Kazakhstan is nothing like in that movie; it is one of the developing countries with the modern cities and people. International arena is against Kokpar because they insist to not use a goat for a game

---

<sup>2</sup> People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, now there are nearly 6.5 million members of this group. <https://www.peta.org/about-peta/>

The duty of public relations managers includes avoiding actions that can harm relationships as well as repairing and minimising damage to the same [2].

On the other hand, the Kazakh people do not care much about any issue with the goat carcass. For example, The New York Times quoted from a local player's explanation of kokpar: "It's a kind of cruel game playing with a dead sheep, but in our country, it is normal" [19]. The association's website editor said that:

BK: Kokpar is Kazakh's national inheritance and will be preserved and developed. There is a possibility of using an artificial goat carcass in the future tournaments, but whether the game will remain as interesting as with a real goat is questionable.

The game is considered a sign of a nomadic past, and the use of the goat carcass can be explained from various different theories beginning from Genghis Khan's times. That is what makes this game so attractive and challenging to those who play it. Not everyone can play kokpar, because the weight of the animal should be at least 66 pounds (30 kilograms) [19].

From the perspective of PETA or other members of the public who think that kokpar is a 'weird', 'cruel' game, there is need for Jefkin's shift through knowledge of the nomadic culture to understand the game's origins. One of the experts hold an opinion that:

PB: 'Cultural sport tourism' in Kazakhstan may have niche appeal alongside Kazakhstan marketing itself as an extreme sports destination, but I don't think it would appeal to a mass audience.

However, [19]. predicted that the kokpar games event in 'EXPO 2017' is going to be the 'star attraction'. That is a reasonable prediction because the 'World Nomad Games 2016' was interesting within the international arena and was very successful.

**Conclusion.** As mentioned above, many people are not aware of the game kokpar. Those who have heard about the game think that it is a 'weird', 'strange' game and are against the use of a goat carcass. Consequently, as Said [14] argued those words used to describe Orient and that is relevant to the Jefkin's 'ignorance', 'hostility' and 'prejudice' stages from which the Western publics and overall international audience needs to be shifted. As there are more positive stages: 'knowledge', 'sympathy' and 'acceptance' that can be achieved if put public relations effort.

Based on these concerns, organisers are debating whether to use an artificial goat, if only to gain approval within the international arena.

Experts hold different ideas about the game's tourism potential. Some of them hate the idea that kokpar will sell itself as a tourist attraction. There is also the idea that nomadic lifestyle is disappearing and the game kokpar will become more modernized and creates interest within the Central Asian continent rather than with Western audiences. On the other hand, a tour agency website (Caravanistan) editor thinks that kokpar attracts 18–34-year-old males from Western countries.

Although the current study is based on a small sample of participants, the findings suggest that, in general, it seems that individuals are aware (82%) of kokpar as a game as they could differentiate kokpar from similar horse-based games included in the survey question. On the other hand, this may well be because 67% of participants are from Kazakhstan, and it was noticeable that a very low percentage of respondents from other countries showed a similar awareness. One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is the groups most interested in kokpar were predominantly males aged between 18 and 35.

This investigation has examined the Grunig and Hunt's four models features, and determined that the website and Twitter use by the Kazakh national sports association is extremely poor. This is supported by the challenges and opportunities the national sport association of Kazakhstan are confronting in the new media-oriented world, and suggests they should take prompt action to promote kokpar online to both the domestic and wider world.

To build an alluring brand picture, where the best promotion of kokpar will be by establishing close relationships with potential tourists, through emotive bonds and online networking. Because of the speed and reach of correspondence, expedited by new media, the national sports association

of Kazakhstan should now deal with all phases of Jefkin's transfer process. This would help to ensure that more tourists are aware of the kokpar and would make the game much more attractive by creating a proper understanding of its nature. The national sports association of kokpar could profit by translating its website and social media accounts into English and Russian, to ensure that international tourists can also access the organisation's information.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Brummell, P. (2012) Kazakhstan. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. England: Bradt Travel Guide Ltd. 112 p.
- [2] Tench, R. & Yeomans, L. (2014) Exploring Public Relations. 3rd edition. UK: Pearson Education Ltd. 80 p.
- [3] Waddington, S. (2015) Chartered Public Relations. Lessons from Expert Practitioners. UK: Kogan Page. 9-12p.
- [4] Cornelissen, J. (2017) Corporate Communication: A Guide to Theory and Practice. London: SAGE 62 p.
- [5] Kemp, (2017), The Conversation, Available at: <https://theconversation.com/profiles/katharine-kemp-402096>
- [6] Jefkins, F. (1988). Public Relations Techniques. Oxford: Heinemann Publishing Limited
- [7] Hopwood, M., Skinner, J. and Kitchin, P. (2011) Sport Public Relations and Communication. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New York: Routledge
- [8] Twitter (2017) About the company. [online] Available at: <https://about.twitter.com/company>, [Accessed, June 20, 2017].
- [9] Scott, D., M. (2015) The New Rules of Marketing & PR: How to Use Social Media, Online Video, Mobile Applications, Blogs, News Releases, & Viral Marketing to Reach Buyers Directly. 5th edition. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- [10] Power, E. (2017) 'Top Gear series 24: Under Matt LeBlanc the petrolheads are back, with a lot more miles left on the clock than anyone expected - all the action from episode one', The Telegraph, Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/tv/2017/03/05/top-gear-series-24-did-matt-leblanc-take-sneaky-jab-grand-tour/> [Accessed: 5 July, 2017]
- [11] Boast, 2017, online. <https://www.vqronline.org/reporting-articles/2017/07/kingdom-horse>
- [12] O'Reilly, T. (2005) What Is Web 2.0 Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software, Available at: <http://www.oreilly.com/pub/a/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html?page=1>, [Accessed: 20, June, 2017]
- [13] L'Etang, J. (2007) Public relations: concepts, practice and critique. London: SAGE.11,12p
- [14] Said E. (2002) Reflections on Exile and Other Essays. Harvard University Press – 617p.
- [15] Jenkins, H. (2006). Convergence culture: where old and new media collide. New York: New York University Press.-202
- [16] Moloney, K. (2006). Rethinking public relations. London: Routledge.
- [17] Williams, V. (2015) Weird Sports and Wacky Games around the World: From Buzkashi to Zorbing..., California: Greenwood Publishing , 32p.
- [18] Hopwood, M., Skinner, J. and Kitchin, P. (2011) Sport Public Relations and Communication. 2nd edition. New York: Routledge, 11p.
- [19] Perlez, J. (2013) 'Nostalgia Burns Bright in a City Renewed', The New York Times, 26 September, p. 6.
- [20] Boyd, d. (2010) Social network sites as networked publics: affordances, dynamics, and implications. In: Papacharissi Z (ed.) A Networked Self: Identity, Community and Culture on Social Network Sites. New York: Routledge, pp. 39–58.

**Пулатова З.Т.**

*Ш.Есенов атындағы Каспий технологиялар және инжиниринг университеті  
Ақтау қ., Қазақстан*

### **ҚАЗАҚСТАНДЫҚ МӘДЕНИ-СПОРТТЫҚТУРИЗМ ҮШІН TWITTER-ГЕ НЕГІЗДЕЛГЕН PR ҚАЖЕТ ПЕ?**

**Аңдатпа.** Көшпелі әдет-ғұрып пен салт-дәстүр, артефактілер қазақ мәдениетінің өзегін қалайды. Қазақстан тәуелсіздік алғаннан кейін мемлекетіміз этникалық дәстүрлерімізді одан әрі дамытуға күш жұмсап келеді [1]. ҚР Спорт және туризм министрлігінің мәліметінше, этникалық спорт түрлерімен айналысатын шамамен 250 952 спортшы бар. Мұның жақсы мысалы, Батыс стиліндегі ат жарыстарымен қатар, көкпар сияқты қазақ көшпенділігінен бастау алатын ойындар; оның ережелері өте қарапайым, шабандоздар бассыз ешкінің ұшасын ұстап алып, гол соғуына бағытталған.

Бұл зерттеу Қазақстанға туристерді көптеп тартудың бір жолы ретінде қазақстандық дәстүрлі спорт түрлерін ілгерілету үшін Twitter-ге негізделген PR-дың қажеттілігі бар-жоғын зерттейді. Зерттеу мақсатына сапалы және сандық зерттеу әдістерін араластыру арқылы қол жеткізілді. Негізделген теория мен тақырыптық талдау негізгі сапалық тәсілдер, сондай-ақ жартылай құрылымдық сұхбаттар болды. Бұл зерттеуге Груниг пен Ханттың төрт моделі және Джеффкинстің трансферлік процесі сияқты қоғаммен байланыс теориялары қолданылды. Бұл Эдвард Саидтың Шығыстану тұжырымдамасымен байланысты болды. Зерттеу гипотезаны тексеруге көмектесу үшін онлайн сауалнама жүргізді.

**Кілт сөздер:** Твиттер; көкпар; мәдени-спорттық туризм; Қазақстан; этносport; дәстүрлі спорт түрлері.

**Пулатова З.Т.**

*Каспийский университет технологий и инжиниринга имени Ш.Есенова  
г. Актау, Казахстан*

### **ЕСТЬ ЛИ НЕОБХОДИМОСТЬ В PR НА ОСНОВЕ TWITTER ДЛЯ КАЗАХСТАНСКОГО КУЛЬТУРНОГО СПОРТИВНОГО ТУРИЗМА?**

**Аннотация.** Артефакты кочевых обычаев и традиций остаются основой казахской культуры. После обретения Казахстаном независимости его власти предприняли попытку дальнейшего развития казахских этнических традиций [1]. По данным Министерства спорта и туризма Казахстана, в стране насчитывается около 250 952 спортсменов, которые занимаются этническими видами спорта. Хорошим примером этого, наряду с западными скачками, являются игры, восходящие к казахскому кочевничеству, такие как кокпар; их правила очень просты и заключаются в том, что всадники хватают тушу обезглавленного козла и забивают гол.

В данном исследовании рассматривается вопрос о том, есть ли необходимость в PR на основе Twitter для продвижения казахских традиционных видов спорта как одного из способов привлечения большего количества туристов в Казахстан. Цель исследования была достигнута путем сочетания качественных и количественных методов исследования. Ключевыми качественными подходами были обоснованная теория и тематический анализ, а также полу структурированные интервью. В этом исследовании, связанном с концепцией ориентализма Эдварда Саида, были применены теории связей с общественностью, такие как четыре модели Грунига и Ханта и процесс перевода Джеффкинса. В ходе исследования был проведен онлайн-опрос, который помог проверить гипотезу.

**Ключевые слова:** Твиттер; кокпар; культурно-спортивный туризм; Казахстан; этносport; традиционные виды спорта.