



Social Media Plan for Quy Nhon City

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| <p>Abstract:</p> <p>This thesis looks into the case of Quy Nhon city, a small coastal city in the central of Vietnam. Despite several attractions and raw nature beauties, plus the richness in culture and local cuisine, the city still struggles to boost its tourism reputation among domestic and international travelers. The reason for this is due to the lack of a formal social media plan to offer official and correct information for tourists' trip planning process. Therefore, the aim of the thesis is to establish a social media plan for Quy Nhon, using the most popular channels like Facebook, Instagram and website. Accordingly, the research question is formulated as: What is the new suggested social media plan for Quy Nhon city? To answer this question, the relevant theoretical knowledge about social media characteristics in Web 2.0 era, place branding, the application of social media in place branding and marketing plan were reviewed. Furthermore, the thesis's empirical data were collected by quantitative method's interview. There were 8 interviews carried out in total, 1 in-depth interview with the Director of the City's Tourism Department and 7 individual interviews with selected subjects. These subjects are chosen for their suitable traits with the research and the author: from 20 to 27 years old, living in Metropolitan area including Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa, being occasional or frequent traveler, active social media user and use those channels to make travel destination decisions. All interviews were recorded with the interviewees' consent and kept anonymous for ethical consideration of the research. The data from the interviews got transcribed, translated if necessary, and then analyzed to answer the research question. The final result was achieved, with a detail social media plan created via Facebook, Instagram and website. Taking the respondents' opinions into account, the channels were developed based on market analysis, social media component implementation, resources accessibility and allocation, and last but not least monitor and measurement. Limitations like age group, geo-location of the studied subjects and the choice of only 3 channels in the vastly dimension of social media provide opportunities for future researches to fill in the gap.</p> | |
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CONTENTS

| | | |
|----------|--|-----------|
| 1 | Introduction..... | 5 |
| 1.1 | Research background | 6 |
| 1.2 | Research aim and research question..... | 7 |
| 1.3 | Structure of the thesis | 7 |
| 2 | Theoretical framework..... | 8 |
| 2.1 | The explosion of Web 2.0 and Social media | 8 |
| 2.1.1 | <i>The features of Web 2.0.....</i> | <i>8</i> |
| 2.1.2 | <i>Social media</i> | <i>10</i> |
| 2.2 | Place Branding | 17 |
| 2.3 | Use of social media in place branding..... | 19 |
| 2.4 | Marketing Plan: An Overview | 22 |
| 3 | Methodology | 24 |
| 3.1 | Data collection method | 25 |
| 3.2 | Interview guide | 27 |
| 3.3 | Responses and Analysis | 29 |
| 4 | The social media plan..... | 37 |
| 4.1 | Facebook..... | 37 |
| 4.2 | Instagram..... | 41 |
| 4.3 | Official website | 45 |
| 4.4 | Combined Content Agenda | 47 |
| 5 | Discussion and Conclusion | 48 |
| 5.1 | Final words | 49 |
| | References | 51 |
| | Appendices | 56 |
| | Interview Questions for the Director of Quy Nhon City's Tourism department | 56 |
| | Interview Questions for the selected candidates..... | 57 |

Figures

| | |
|--|----|
| Figure 1. The Evolution of Marketing Communication (Armano, 2009) | 12 |
| Figure 2. Social Media Zones (Tuten & Solomon, 2013) | 13 |
| Figure 3. Social Media Zones and Exemplar Platforms (Tuten & Solomon, 2013) | 16 |
| Figure 4. Social Media Place Promotion Framework (Cleave et al, 2016)..... | 21 |
| Figure 5. City Guides feature on Facebook (Techcrunch.com, 2017) | 39 |
| Figure 6. Official Instagram accounts of New York and Helsinki (Instagram, 2019) ... | 44 |
| Figure 7. An example of a content agenda made for Quy Nhon city in January 2020 .. | 47 |

Currency Exchange Rate

1 Euro = 27025.71 Vietnam Dong (VND) (XE Currency Converter, 2018)

1 INTRODUCTION

According to Buhalis and Law (2008), Schmallegger and Carson (2008), as cited by Neuhofer et al. (2012), "as in many other industries, the arrival of the Internet with its multiple purposes inherent as source of information, user-generated content and platform for interaction, has played a particularly critical role in changing the tourism industry". The back to back advent of Web 2.0 and social media has led to many "drastic changes for the tourism industry" since it has turned the internet into a magical multipurpose instrument for users' social networking and collaborating activities (Sigala, 2009). The concepts of Web 2.0 and social media are not new (Fuchs, 2014). However, their recent proliferation has steered businesses towards "service-related" sections with the highest acceleration (Sigala et al., 2012). In fact, the latest researches find the usage of social media in the tourism industry and its prospect as "enormous" (Neuhofer et al., 2012). It plays "a key role in tourism and hospitality", paving the way for a significant transformation in the way tourists "search, find and co-create information" about travel destinations and experiences (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017). Since tourism industry has been largely dependent on destination image and familiarity, reviews, information dissemination, and positive word-of-mouth from travelers, it should be the first in line to harvest the advantages that social media brought about so far via several channels (Zeng, 2013). Among various current platforms, the most used social media in tourism industry include Facebook, Instagram, TripAdvisor, YouTube, and Twitter, according to McCarthy et al. (2010), Ayeh et al. (2012) and Sigala et al. (2012) (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017).

In this technology era, travelers are a few clicks from the information window to any kind of destination they are interested in. The destination choice-sets model by Crompton (1992), Sirakaya and Woodside (2005), Um and Crompton (1990) described the selection for a travel destination as a "funnel-like process" in which travelers shorten their list by their "awareness set" (Hahm and Severt, 2018). Thus, a destination needs to make into the short list before it can become the potential ultimate travel destination. This is when destination branding and image promoting come in handy with the support of the aforementioned well-known travel social media outlets like Facebook, TripAdvisor, Instagram, and YouTube.

1.1 Research background

This thesis looks into the case of Quy Nhon (or Qui Nhon), a small coastal city and the capital of Binh Dinh province in the central of Vietnam with the area of 286 km² and the population of 280 535 residents (Department of Population, 2009). Being granted with a 42 km long “terrific beach-blessed” curvy coastline on the east side and a great number of mountains and hills on the west side, Quy Nhon city owed its major economic activities to forestry, agriculture and fishery in the past (Lonely Planet, 2016). However, the formation of Phu Tai Industrial Area and Nhon Hoi Economic Zone (Nhon Hoi EZ) a decade ago has gradually transferred the city economy into industrial-bound. Quy Nhon can be said to reach its peak within the past 3 years which have witnessed a remarkable economic shift towards the tourism and service sector thanks to many international and domestic investments in tourism destinations. According to Binh Dinh Department of Tourism (2017), “in recent years, the number of tourists to Quy Nhon has increased more than 20% per year, higher than the average growth of 17% in the southern coastal area and 15% nationally. In summer 2016, Binh Dinh welcomed 3.2 million visitors. In the first six months of 2017, the province served more than 1.9 million tourists, a year-on-year rise of 19%, with total revenue of VND 990 billion, up 38% year on year”. In spite of the seemingly positive aforementioned numbers, Quy Nhon still has not gained much popularity among the international travelers compared to its counterparts in the same region like Da Nang, Nha Trang, Phan Thiet, and Phu Quoc island. Perhaps that is why it is ranked third out of top nine places “to get off the tourist trail in South East Asia” by Rough Guides (2016), a leading travel guidebook and publisher in the UK.

The city owns a diverse topography, from mountains (Den Cao mountain), primitive forests (Cu Mong area) to beaches (central beach, Bai Xep beach, Bai Bau beach,...), rivers, lagoon (Thi Nai lagoon), lakes and peninsula (Phuong Mai peninsula), islands (Nhon Li, Nhon Chau island) (Binh Dinh Tourism Department, 2017). This has presented merits for exploration and exploitation of the natural resources for more tourist attractions. In addition, being a tropical city itself, Quy Nhon has humid warm weather with the sun always shining and the average temperature around 24,5°C. The rain season lasts shortly from November to mid-January. Recent investments have contributed to the city’s top infrastructure and attractions like Nhon Hoi bridge as “the longest oversea bridge in South

East Asia” connecting Quy Nhon with Nhon Hoi EZ and the highest Buddha statue in South East Asia at Linh Phong pagoda (Lonely Planet, 2016). Furthermore, the top local charms also include historical and cultural spots, not to mention the exquisite original Vietnamese central-region cuisine and the locals’ hospitality.

Despite these exotic natural charms and wild local beauty, Quy Nhon is still competing to claim its position in the top destination list of Vietnamese and especially international travelers. With the current traditional marketing plan, no official source of travel information or guides about the city is available. There are several scattering informal and unofficial information and guide-related Facebook pages and websites, which bear no foreigner friendliness as well with only content in Vietnamese, which has led to the inefficient promotion of the city image. Therefore, it is high time adoption of the right social media strategy be introduced to focus the right resources on the right outcomes.

1.2 Research aim and research question

This thesis aims to create a social media plan for Quy Nhon city. It is hoped to boost the tourism image of the city and raise the awareness about its reputation among domestic and international travelers. By investigating the current travel interest and destination selecting behavior of the target group, it is expected that a social media plan is designed accordingly with Facebook, Instagram and official website as the main online platforms.

Hence, for this specific research problem, the thesis’s research question can be formulated as: What is the new suggested social media plan for Quy Nhon city?

1.3 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured into four sections following the IMRD model, including Introduction, Methodology, Results, and Discussion. Specifically, it starts by introducing the research scope of marketing and social media in destination branding, then the specific context of Quy Nhon city, from which the research problem, research aim, and research question are identified. Then, a review of knowledge about Web 2.0 and social media as a marketing tool in the tourism industry with four of its essential zones will provide in-

depth insight into the fundamental role social media platforms play in destination branding. After that, the thesis presents its research method, a qualitative approach conducted via interviews to set the light on the new social media tactics Quy Nhon city will adopt to boost its tourism image and reputation. Finally, the thesis concludes by introducing a new social media strategy involving highlighted platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and official website. Further discussion is made on the paper's limitations and possible implications or references in the future local tourism.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The term “Web 2.0” was coined by O’Reilly (2006) as “a set of economic, social, and technological trends that collectively form the basis for the next generation of the Internet – a more mature, distinctive medium characterized by user participation, openness, and network efforts”. It is referred to as one of the revolutions in the big data and digital era, enabling interactive possibilities in “an environment characterized by user control, freedom, and dialogue” (O’Reilly, 2005). Being equipped with new applications and characteristics, Web 2.0 has evolved from the simple hardware-required one-way communication of Web 1.0 into a more complex interactive social system allowing users to access the web without any physical constraint. This went on to be a part of the “defining characteristics” of social media, according to Tuten and Solomon (2013). Some of Web 2.0’s “most important distinguish features” that bear a significant relation to social media infrastructure are discussed as below (Tuten & Solomon, 2013).

2.1 The explosion of Web 2.0 and Social media

2.1.1 The features of Web 2.0

User Participation, User-Generated Content (UGC) and Crowdsourcing

One of Web 2.0’s major distinctions from Web 1.0 is the function of enhancing its users’ role, as mentioned by Tuten and Solomon (2013) in their book “Social Media Marketing”. The multi-way interactive system allows any web participant to search, share and

contribute information to the big cloud of data. This might be the explanation why “traditional sources of information have been replaced by social media” since people started to turn to User-Generated Content (UGC) as a new way to acquire information (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017). This phenomenon gave way to the introduction of the “Crowdsourcing” concept, which means “to harness the collective knowledge of a crowd to solve problems and complete tasks” (Tuten & Solomon, 2013). The effect of crowdsourcing is markedly noticeable on dictionary publishers. As the Internet and Web 2.0 started to bloom, guide books like Travel Life or Lonely Planet found themselves lagged behind since rather than thumbing their way through a hundred-page book, people can now find out about their next destination by just a couple of touches or clicks. Tuten and Solomon (2013) called information communication in the Web 2.0 era a “horizontal revolution” since it is neither one to one, one to many, mass nor vertically directed but rather “multi-directional” and “flows across” every participant. “This shift is critical to what it means to communicate using social media” (Tuten & Solomon, 2013).

User-Defined Content

When the content is generated by users, it, thereby, certainly is defined by users themselves. Sites seeing through this mechanism have switched from traditionally ready-made content to UGC-based features (Tuten & Solomon, 2013). An important core concept forming these features is “Folksonomy”, a selective categorization of sites labeled with “freely chosen keywords”, also known as “tags” (O’Reilly, 2005). Tagging is referred to, by O’Reilly (2005), as a social media activity when users classify content based on their specific folksonomy. This leads to the formation of a “tag cloud”, where the audiences can “search and retrieve” specific insider content as well as catch up with the recently popular tags (Tuten & Solomon, 2013). Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook are some of the most frequent tag-using social media platforms.

Network Effects

As a result of the multi-way interactive system, one user has a domino-resembling impact on another user upon his/her activities on the web. According to Tuten and Solomon (2013), this is referred to as a “network effect” by economists. This can be related to when

Facebook suggests a user to add somebody to his/her social connection based on the “mutual friends” they both have.

In addition, the network effect also enables companies to balance out the result of crowdsourcing (Tuten & Solomon, 2013). Particularly, companies take benefit from crowdsourcing via public collective knowledge consultation. However, while some knowledge contributions might be correct and valid, some might not be. This is where the network effect intervenes and guarantees the legitimacy of the crowdsourced average knowledge.

2.1.2 Social media

An overview – the evolution and undeniable value as a marketing tool

As complex as how they work due to “the sheer quantity of channels and vehicles” with the constant advent of new applications, social media bears no fixed definition but rather are defined accordingly based on individual views (Tuten & Solomon, 2013). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) referred social media to “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User-Generated Content”. Meanwhile, Tuten and Solomon (2013) wrote about them in their book as “the online means of communication, conveyance, collaboration, and cultivation among interconnected and interdependent networks of people, communities, and organizations enhanced by technological capabilities and mobility”.

The first time a social media outlet made an entrance dated back to 1997 when a site called “Six Degrees” was introduced online, allowing users to create a profile and add friends with each other (Hale, 2015). In the same article, Hale (2015) also enclosed the introduction of Six Degrees with the beginning of “the blogging and instant messaging era”. Then came the Internet boom in 2000, which was best illustrated by roughly 100 million people worldwide with Internet accessibility. With the new exciting invention, net participants frequently engaged in online social activities like making new friends, sending messages in chat forums and blogging. However, “the first social media surge” did not appear until 2003 when Myspace had its prime time as one of the first proper social media profile websites. Another social media site pioneer is LinkedIn, which still operates until up to date. Unlike a “general social networking site” as Myspace, LinkedIn

specifically focused, and still does, on professional connection for jobs seeking, business networking and socializing (Hale, 2015). 2004 witnessed the birth of what would later be the giant guy of social media, Facebook which has set the standard for any social site coming out afterward. Today, it has over 1,2 billion users over the world, claiming the first position on the list of social media networks with the most users (Statistics Brain Research Institute, 2012). Inspired by the contemporary popularity of text messaging and social networking, Twitter, was founded in 2006, as “a service that had the unique distinction of allowing users to send ‘tweets’ of 140 characters or less”, has claimed for itself 500 million users until now and become one of the top social media channels (Hale, 2015). Half a decade later, the rest of the big names in social media that most people are familiar with today joined the rolling wave, namely Flickr, Tumblr, Instagram, Pinterest, Spotify, Snapchat and many more. This is when social media sites were not for the sole purpose of networking and socializing anymore. It also became a widespread “must-use tool in a business’s marketing campaign” (Kress, 2010). Businesses started to establish their own profiles on social media channels and utilize them for customer communicating, product promoting and image building. In fact, it has played an essential role in business marketing and become “one of the ways in which internet marketers and website owners would boost the visibility of their websites” (Hale, 2015).

During the period of social media’s existence, marketers have consecutively made the most use out of them because (1) their efficiency is undeniable compared to other marketing methods as for cost and return in investment, (2) the content is easily adjustable and designed for targeted customers, (3) they are a multifunctional tool for customer attraction, customer relationship management, product and service promotion, and business branding (Tuten & Solomon, 2013). Since social media, companies and organizations have steered from traditional marketing tools towards social media ones for better efficiency and updates. Figure 1 below demonstrates this shift throughout the stages of marketing communication.

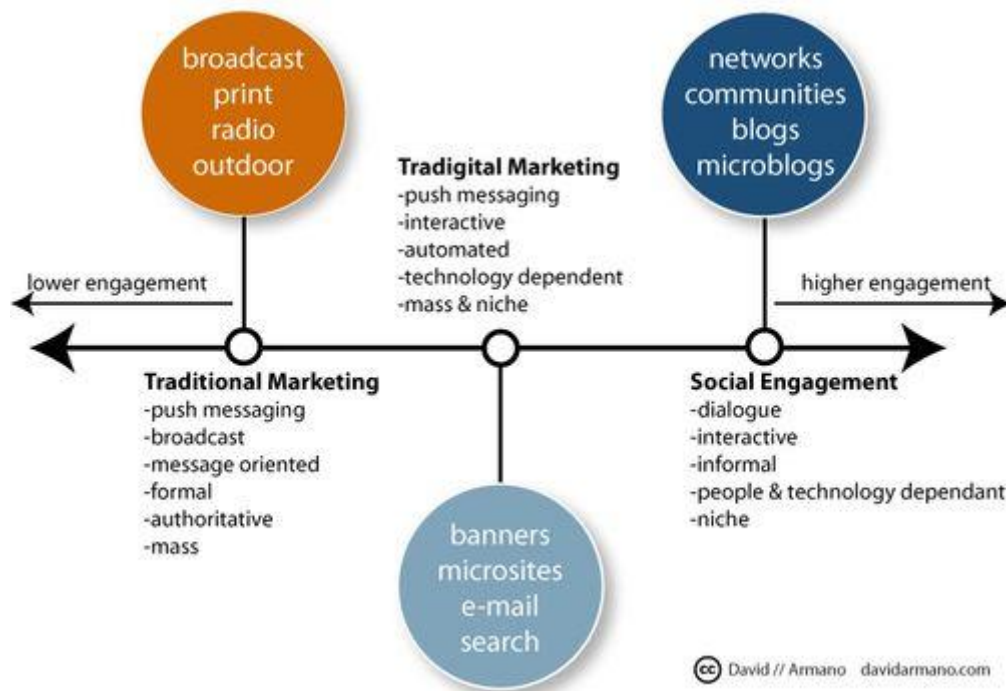


Figure 1. The Evolution of Marketing Communication (Armano, 2009, page 20)

Tuten and Solomon (2013) stated that with the proliferation of social media marketing, businesses realized they can accomplish more objectives, given fewer boundaries. The modern marketing objectives like promotion and branding, customer service, relationship management, retailing and e-commerce, and market research are well served just by employing the right social media tools. In the context of tourism, recent studies have estimated the adoption of “microblogs” like Twitter, “consumer reviews and rating websites” like TripAdvisor, Yelp, Facebook, and found them relatedly effective for “tourism related services” (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Ayeh et al., 2012; Fotis et al., 2012; Sigala et al., 2012; Hudson & Thal, 2013; Chung & Koo, 2015; Gohil, 2015; as cited by Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017). Nevertheless, Zeng (2013) argued that “the importance of online marketing has not been fully recognized in tourism management”. Proofs from Nielsen (2009), the “go-to information source for Chinese travelers”, showed an approximation of only “1.55 percent of the total destination media expenditure was spent on Internet advertising in 2008” (Zeng, 2013). In 2010, the percentage of Asia-Pacific located tourism companies active on social media was only 28 percent (Abacus, 2010). Zeng (2013) additionally mentioned in the same article that the tourism industry is encountering some obstacles in giving social media a push, “such as developing a clear and measurable

strategy, demonstrating the viable return of investment and integrating social media into business processes”, referencing from Gonzalo (2012). Tourism companies, therefore, are suggested to have an in-depth insight into the social media zones and platforms to make the right utilization and application.

Social media zones and platforms

To unravel the complexity of social media and the vast number of their vehicles or channels, Michael Solomon and Tracy Tuten (2013) divided the social media dimension into four zones as illustrated as Figure 2 below: (1) Social Community, (2) Social Publishing, (3) Social Entertainment and (4) Social Commerce. As can be seen from the figure, each zone has its own specialized focuses and some aspects might “overlap two or even more zones” (Tuten & Solomon, 2013).



Figure 2. Social Media Zones (Tuten & Solomon, 2013, page 12)

- Zone 1: Social community

According to Tuten and Solomon (2013), Social Community zone includes social media channels that are meant for relationship and network building based on mutual interest of participants. Many familiar social media platforms belong to this zone, including *social*

networking sites (SNS), message boards, forums, and wikis. These platforms share a common characteristic which takes “individual contribution” to a community, dialogue, and content co-creation as their core.

SNS was referred to, by Tuten and Solomon (2013), as “online hosts” allowing users to build and develop profiles, connect and socialize with other users. A user can claim their “social identity” via his/her profile by providing general basic information and more importantly a profile picture called “avatar” in order to ensure the recognition possibility from other acquainted users. Besides, SNS participants also need to maintain a “social presence” by being active among their connections by messages, status updates, and chat.

Forums can be said to be one of the oldest forms of social media, where people gather online at a specific thread address and discuss certain topics (Ryan & Jones, 2009). Yahoo Groups and Google Groups are two well-known forums back in the day.

Wikis are “collaborative online workspaces” allowing members to co-create “useful and shared resources” (Tuten & Solomon, 2013). They can be about anything, providing somebody willing to contribute the knowledge about that anything. They are one of the typical examples of the concept “Crowdsourcing” mentioned earlier in this paper.

- Zone 2: Social Publishing

Social Publishing outlets benefit their users with the “dissemination of content” (Tuten & Solomon, 2013). The core of this zone lies on the share of content to audiences in the community solely for the sake of personal wish, the need for sharing and being listened to by others. However, in the context of business, companies have realized the pros of these channels on product promoting, image building and customer drawing. Sites residing in the second zone are *blogs, micro-sharing sites, and media sharing sites.*

Blogs are frequently updated websites containing pictures, texts, audio and video. The content of blogs can only be edited by their creators or hosts. They can serve from individual to organizational purposes, so blogs’ content tremendously varies. The famous sites that can be used to build a blog are WordPress, Wix, Tumblr, and Posterous. Among

various platforms in Zone 2, blogs have acquired the most attention from travellers. Travel blogs not only offer a good peak of what tourist destinations look like but also deliver honest reviews of travel experiences around the world. This accounts for why blogs have become such a popular information source that travellers turn to when planning for their next trips.

Micro-sharing sites operate almost in the same way as blogs but with a limit to the content input. The most related micro-sharing site millions of people worldwide are using today is Twitter, with the limit of 140 characters for each post.

Media sharing sites, again, work just as similarly as blogs. However, instead of the variation of content ranged from text, graphics, video to audio, media sharing sites feature only “video, audio, photos and presentation of documents rather than text or a mix of media” (Tuten & Solomon, 2013). These include a range of popular social media names like YouTube, Vimeo, Flickr, iTunes, SlideShare and many more.

- Zone 3: Social Entertainment

Social Entertainment zone vehicles provide their participants with play and enjoyment opportunities. These include “gaming sites, socially enabled console games, alternate reality games (ARGs), virtual worlds and entertainment communities” such as Zynga, Second Life, Come2Play, etc. (Tuten & Solomon, 2013). Some social network sites like Facebook, however, are also enclosed with gaming function allowing their users to play and challenge friends in their connection and even make new friends via the games. Businesses also get involved in this zone by collaborating with the famous gaming brands to get their name, products or services advertised via game screens.

- Zone 4: Social Commerce

The fourth zone is where companies and organizations can get upfront benefits from since it involves directly the online selling and buying process via their websites. This is where E-commerce developed from. To be specific, social commerce platforms include

“reviews and ratings, deal sites and deal aggregators, social shopping markets and social storefronts” (Tuten & Solomon, 2013).

Furthermore, businesses are able to connect their e-commerce sites to a social network site via applications like Facebook Connect and Share applications. In detail, Tuten and Solomon (2013) explained that Facebook users can log in to any of Facebook’s partner sites with their Facebook account and share an article, a song or a video, etc. from the partner sites on their Facebook feeds.

Figure 3 below describes the four social media zones and their separate dominant platforms.



Figure 3. Social Media Zones and Exemplar Platforms (Tuten & Solomon, 2013, page 16)

As can be seen from the wide range of various channels within four aforementioned social media zones, travelers in the Web 2.0 era obviously have more tools and accessibility to seek for the wanted tourist information, to satisfy the need for saving and sharing their journeys, and to contribute their own content to the “big web”. According to eMarketer (2010), “three out of the top ten online travel information sources used by US adults were social media sites”. This came as no surprise since (1) the content on social media platforms nowadays is greatly “search engine friendly” (Yoo and Gretzel, 2017) so trip planners can get to the right information as their wish, (2) the fast-paced development of

mobile technologies like smart phones, 4G network and high speed Wi-Fi everywhere has opened the door for travelers to actively access social media for data sources, sharing experiences and connecting with others. This is why Yoo and Gretzel (2017) believe that social media has developed to become “a fertile venue for travelers” when it comes to not only making and sharing their travel experiences, but also for others to scout tourism information and plan their next trip. Therefore, this implies that tourist destinations need to take advantage of this trend and step up their game on branding themselves via social media if they want to increase their popularity and attract more visitors.

2.2 Place Branding

According to Fyall & Leask (2007), as cited by Neuhofer et al. (2012), “destinations are considered as the core of the travel and tourism industry”. A destination brand relates to “a defined geographical region that is understood by its tourists as a unique entity, with a political and legislative framework for tourism marketing and planning” (Buhalis, 2000, as cited by Risitano, 2006).

According to Anholt (2007), Boisen, Terlouw, and van Gorp (2011), Cleave and Arku (2015), as cited by Cleave et al. (2016), “place marketing and branding” play a vital role in presenting local attractions. Place branding was referred to as a process where “the identity of a place is sought, identified, extracted, and orchestrated to further load the place brand with positive associations” (Boisen et al., 2011). It highlights a place’s positive values which strongly connect with visitors’ emotion. The ultimate aim of this process is to enhance the image of a destination in visitors’ mind so that they can give good reviews either online or traditional word-of-mouth, about the destination. This is why marketing and branding of a place is essential for its tourism development (Cleave et al., 2016). Cleave (2016) also discussed “for the brand to enter into and resonate within the collective consciousness of the target audience, it must be communicated to them”. The brand of a place, in simpler words, is the impression left in the visitors’ mind based on the visual, verbal and behavioral expression of that place. Besides, place branding can impact on a place’s brand with the relation between communication and the local characteristics. For example, the better social media applications and visually attractive websites a city has, the more inviting its brand image in the mind of travelers. Somewhat, it does not matter how great looking and valuable the infrastructure of a place is if it does not

have the right communication method towards its target audiences. This accounts for the vital role of communication channels a place should have to promote its values and resources effectively.

Kavaratzis (2004) introduced a conceptual framework for brand communication. It suggested that a place can communicate with its audiences via three different methods: primary, secondary, and tertiary.

Primary communication

Kavaratzis (2004) referred primary communication to the “communicative efforts” to maintain and enhance a destination’s landscape, infrastructure, urban designs, “the effectiveness of the municipality’s local government, and the behavior of the municipality based on its actions” (Cleave, 2016). This means it is how the city actively presents itself via the general outlooks, destination attractions, local authority’s policies and the locals’ lifestyle. It can be said to be the true essence of a place.

Secondary communication

Secondary communication acts as “the formal, intentional communication that most commonly takes place through well-known marketing practices” (Kavaratzis, 2004). In other words, the second communication is all distinct marketing tactics and media platforms a city employs to raise the awareness of its profile and expectation in the audiences’ mind. It depends what methods and channels cities choose to promote their essence (their primary communication) that audiences might favor one than others. A place’s secondary communication works as a tool to attract visitors’ attention to its primary communication.

Tertiary communication

Last but not least, tertiary communication is reviews and feedbacks from visitors, which “is not controllable by those undertaking the promotion” (Kavaratzis, 2004). So logically, tertiary communication is the result of primary and secondary communication. Cleave (2016) suggested “if primary and secondary communications are viewed as how the

municipality's brand image is communicated, then tertiary communication is how the image was consumed, and thus determines how the brand is perceived by a target audience". This is why tourist destination should invest in primary and secondary communication in order to gain a good result in tertiary communication from visitors and travelers themselves. Because once negative words-of-mouth and reputation are already created by visitors, it is difficult to rewind and improve the primary and secondary communication for the hope of a better outcome of tertiary communication.

2.3 Use of social media in place branding

"Social media have been influential in place branding and well adopted" by many municipalities (Sevin, 2013). So, it is obvious that the prevalent impact of social media on place branding cannot be overlooked. Solis (2011) stressed that a place need to "engage" in social media dimension or "die". Not engaging in social media, a place will lose the ability of self-promotion and "foster positive discussion" (Cleave et al., 2016). As online communication is at its peak for the time being, cities that refused to catch up with this communicative method are likely to lose the advantages to reach their target customers. Not only that, even the lack of creativity and visual presentation online can lead a city to lose touch with its present audiences.

The number of cities that choose to adapt to this popular communication method has increased a great deal since it got introduced to the big web. One of the reasons for this resort is that social media bear their users a relatively low cost, compared to other traditional marketing channels when it comes to the tremendous efficiency they bring about. Another reason is that social media platforms have grown to become the most relevant market since 70% of net users are active social media participants (Pew Research Center, 2013). Also, communication via social media allows cities to deliver their messages via a wider range of content formats like video and audio, besides the traditional text and image. This in turn stimulates the creativity flow of municipal authorities and stakeholders for their place branding projects.

Because of this necessity for engagement, places need to build "a strong virtual presence" (Cleave et al, 2016). Kavaratzis (2005) also mentioned the enormous opportunities that social media introduce to the secondary and tertiary communication method. This is why

investments in virtual facilities of a city can contribute substantially to the allure, engagement and retainment towards the target travelers. In the process of place branding, these investments count as an element in the secondary communication method. This digital communication happens between “the branding campaigns and the target audiences as well as among the individual users interested in the place” (Cleave et al, 2016). The key of this communication process is the message or content that city authorities wish to convey to their audiences. As aforementioned in the previous section about Web 2.0, before the advent of Web 2.0, the traditional message flow was solely a one-way direction, from the message senders to the receivers. However, after it was introduced to the world, along with one of its distinct features – User Participation and User-Generated Content (UGC), Web 2.0 has transformed the online communication flow into not only a two-way but a multi-way interacting network. This implies that by employing social media on place branding, cities not only allow themselves to directly convey the needed messages to their target audiences but also are able to receive the messages from the audiences themselves. Or furthermore, they can even see the public messages among audiences to each other. This multi-way interaction therefore has brought about some major changes in how a city brands itself, using the new platforms nowadays. As can be seen from figure 3 above in the section about social media, the most used platforms are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and websites. This is why place branding campaigns utilize these channels to publish their official messages or content. Similarly, social media users also make use of these channels to collect information about a city and do their research before deciding on a trip. For example, travelers find their next destination via formal (by cities) and informal (by other experienced travelers) information about a place like visual presence of the official city website or Facebook account or reviews about a city by other people who have been there. So if someone has never been to a city, his/her impression about that city is likely to be based on other people’s personal experience there. Therefore, a reputation or tourism image of a place is affected by the online words-of-mouth, which is the tertiary communication from Kavaratzis’s theory. In other words, cities can actively drive the conversation in social media channels via secondary communication and partly affect their image in the audiences’ eyes. Vice versa, the audiences who already visited a place also have the same power in influencing the image of that place via tertiary communication by giving online feedback and reviews on their social media platforms. Therefore, according to Cleave et al (2016), we can see “a shift from the promotion of place through

active (re)development of the urban landscape (“primary communication”) to an emphasis on direct engagement (“secondary communication”) and subsequent interactions and conversations that ensue (“tertiary communication”). Alongside with the multi-way interaction online, these three communication methods also affect and interconnect with each other. Figure 4 below by Cleave et al in 2016 demonstrates this interconnection.

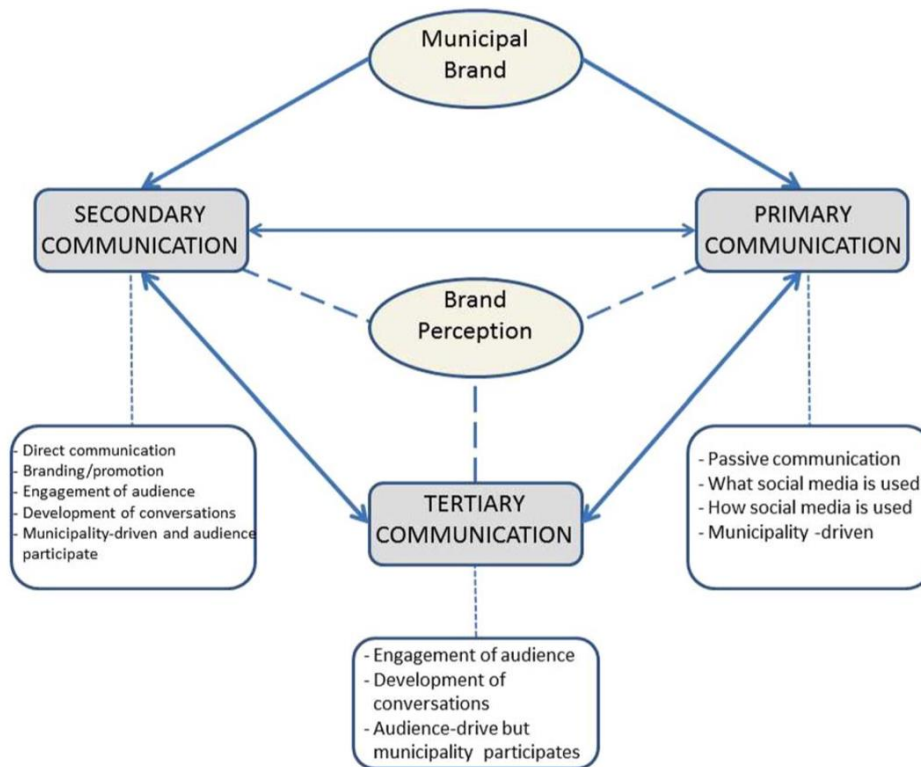


Figure 4. Social Media Place Promotion Framework (Cleave et al, 2016, page 5)

In the context of place branding in general, primary communication represents for the natural landscape and physical infrastructure of a city. But from the social media perspective in place branding particularly from figure 4, primary communication also includes the “virtual identity of the locale”, which is the online profile of a municipality and the means of social media it employs (Cleave et al, 2016). This communication method is considered passive because cities can only make influence and adjustment on their social media facilities and strategies, but not on the conversations with and among their audiences. The communicating direction at this phase is one-sided and municipality-driven.

It is at the secondary communication phase that municipalities generate promotion campaigns and deliver messages directly to the target audiences. This is when city authorities need to conceive quality content, then convey it in a professional and appropriate manner so that they can effectively “engage the public and create conversations and user-generated content” (Cleave et al, 2016). This, by result, goes on to shape the brand image of the city itself.

Tertiary communication witnesses the conversation flow originating from the audiences themselves in the form of feedbacks, reviews, and word-of-mouth. Unlike traditional communicating method, in which the message flow is a one-way direction, communication in social media dimension has transformed to be two-way. Therefore, cities now not only can receive their audiences’ messages but also can join along in the conversation, interacting with the audiences to develop their brand reputation. “Indeed, external conversations become internal to the municipality, so tertiary communication becomes much more about the level and quality of the conversation created” (Cleave et al, 2016).

This can be said to result from the interconnectivity among the three communication methods. However, alongside the greater opportunities this direct interaction with the audiences brings about also comes the greater risks it might propose. Therefore, city authorities need to identify the right level of interaction. “Too much control can deflate conversations and interferes with meaningful dialogue; while too little could allow for hijacking of conversations along tangential or unrelated topics, or worse towards hostile or negative conversations that bring embarrassment or damaged perceptions” (Cleave et al, 2016). Due to these potential risks, municipality authority needs to make careful and clever decisions when it comes to social media plan. To be specific, the administrators of the city’s social media channels need to have a good vision and insight into what a marketing plan is and how to build a good one. Therefore, in the next section, an overall knowledge of marketing plan will be looked into as a framework for the resulting plan of this thesis.

2.4 Marketing Plan: An Overview

There are several different marketing plans for different businesses and organizations. It depends on the characteristics of the business itself that a suitable marketing plan will be customized accordingly. However, according to Rush (2015), generally a “sophisticated

marketing plan” should include 3 main parts no matter how different each plan might be from another in detail:

1. SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis.
2. Marketing mix decisions.
3. Taking action.

While Stevens et al (2003) went in detail very much and outlined the marketing planning process with the various following steps:

1. Preface.
2. Executive summary.
3. Competitive and environmental assessment (or SWOT analysis).
4. The mission statement.
5. Goals and objectives.
6. Driving forces.
7. Strategies and tactics.
8. Program plans.
9. Recommendations.
10. The vision.
11. Slogan.
12. Issues.
13. Measurements and results.
14. Budget.
15. The appendix.

“When applicable, definitions and samples of each section or component of a strategic marketing plan will be provided” (Stevens et al, 2003). These formulas are generic and unnecessarily applicable to every marketing plan. Therefore, the planners are entitled to fill in their business or adjust the content of a sample model to suit their individual case. As for the marketing plan scope of this thesis, it pivots more into the social media direction in particular. So, relevant marketing plans in this field were investigated since they are likely to be more suitable models to follow and apply. For example, Baron (2004), as a media researcher himself, believed a media plan is put together as follow:

1. Pre-planning Meeting.
2. Deciding which media to use.
3. Planning each medium.

4. Judgement calls (involving 5 tradeoffs: reach, frequency, advertising times, advertisement size, and geographic coverage).
5. Fine-tuning the plan.

Last but not least, another social media plan model was looked into and also the one model that is most suitable with the case of Quy Nhon city. So the resulting plan will take into account the steps of this model as a theoretical framework, the social media plan model by Shelley & Dunlop (2009):

1. Identify goals and objectives.
2. Conduct market analysis (for example: look at trends, needs, competition, and best practices).
3. Implement social media program components, including integration with traditional campaigns (if any).
4. Access and allocate resources (identify how to use each platform in the plan given the available internal and external resources).
5. Monitor and measure.

Since step 1 was already done in the Research Background section of this thesis, the author will create the resulting social media plan based on step 2, 3, 4 and 5 of this model, by choosing the right data collection method.

3 METHODOLOGY

In this research, the author opted for qualitative method because of its suitability and effectiveness in the process of data collection and analysis for the answer of the research question: a new social media plan for Quy Nhon. Qualitative research is “characterized by its aims, which relates to understanding some aspect of social life, and its methods which (in general) generate words, rather than numbers, as data for analysis” (Judith, G. & Nouria, B. 2016). Since the aim of the thesis is to create a social media plan for a tourism city, which calls for in-depth insight into what platforms are most suitable to use, how content should be customized to reach and connect with more audiences, etc.; it requires a word-generating method based on opinions, ideas, knowledge of the studied participants. This is why a qualitative method is employed as a tool to achieve the final result. Additionally, in their book *Business Research Methods*, Bryman & Bell (2011) also distinguish qualitative method from quantitative method with some characteristics below:

- **Point of view of researcher vs. point of view of participants:** Qualitative research takes the studied subjects' point of view as "the point of orientation". The findings and result are based mostly on these subjects' opinions and feelings. Meanwhile, for quantitative research, the researcher plays the key role (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This feature of qualitative method makes it applicable to this thesis since the author's intention is to draw a detailed social media plan for Quy Nhon city by consulting several relevant participants' ideas and opinions about the use of social media channels in place branding.
- **Researcher is distant vs. researcher is close:** Quantitative researchers bear little, or in some cases, no relation with their surveyed candidates "in research based on postal questionnaire" (Bryman & Bell, 2011). On the other hand, qualitative researchers tend to choose people with close relationship to them as studied subjects, for the sole purpose that they can truly see the relevant topic from the subjects' perspective. In this thesis's case, the author chose qualitative method not only because of this purpose but also because of the convenience it offers when choosing friends and acquaintances to interview.
- **Generalization and contextual understanding:** "Quantitative researchers want their findings to be generalizable to the relevant studied sample whereas qualitative researcher seeks an understanding of behaviors, values, beliefs, and so on in terms of the studied context" (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This trait also makes qualitative method the right match for this thesis since the research aim is to generate a social media plan using, besides the investigated opinions, theoretical sources by experts and professionals in the context of social media and place branding.

As a qualitative research, this thesis gains its material from literature review of secondary data like physical and online books, journals, articles, papers about social media and place branding. Besides, its empirical data comes from qualitative interviews with a number of related subjects.

3.1 Data collection method

Secondary data

As mentioned above, secondary data was collected via several books, reports, articles, and reliable online sources from professionals and experts about web 2.0's overview, the dimension of social media, its application in place branding and the information about Quy Nhon city itself. Mostly, the thesis has its theoretical framework based on the research of prestigious authors in the field like Tuten & Solomon, Cleave, Kavaratzis and Shelly & Dunlop.

Primary data

The primary data was collected from frequent travelers including Vietnamese and international travelers. The diversity has a purpose of categorizing ideas from different targets, which represent different traveler groups. The author targeted on candidates who noticeably are occasional to frequent travelers, with the age from 20 to 27. Thereby, being a student herself, the author can easily access to this population sample. First, the subjects need to meet the standards of the desired sample, which are residing in the Metropolitan area Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa, from 20 to 27 years old, being occasional or frequent traveler, active social media user and use those channels to make travel destination decisions. Then, as soon as the author make sure the subjects satisfy these traits, she reached out to them, presented the studied field then invited whether they would be fond of becoming an interviewee. Only with the person's consent, the researcher would continue the next step of the process.

Besides these candidates, there will be primary materials coming from the municipality's authority, the Director of the city's Tourism Department, Mr. A. This helps to gain in-depth opinions from the other flow of the inbound and outbound flow since the above candidates are just considered from the view of a traveler or a customer, but the director himself will provide professional ideas and opinions on the practicality of the plan from the view of a city insider.

Interview was used as an instrument to conduct the research empirical analysis among the main data collecting tactics of qualitative research, according to Bryman & Bell (2011): Observation, Interview and Focus group. According to Bryman & Bell (2011), choosing this data collection option helps to examine the attendees' feelings and point of views on social media applications to build a tourism city image and survey their preferred attractions or features the city should improve on. As for the interview with the Director, the data collected is valued as professional opinions and ideas. Thus, more insight into the aspect can be gained via this form of data collection. Furthermore, Bryman

& Bell (2011) stated that the choice of interview also offers the researcher the convenience of collecting data in a freer manner, meaning there is no need to devote a great amount of daily time to immerse into the subjects' life and activities, as in Observation method. There is also no need for the hard task of arranging the perfect time slot to fit with the schedule of all the subjects as in Focus Group. Therefore, Interview is the best match with the aim of this thesis and the author, making it the right choice to collect data for the creation of Quy Nhon city's social media plan.

3.2 Interview guide

Qualitative Interview comprises 2 kinds of structure: Unstructured and Semi-structured Interview (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In Unstructured Interview, the interviewer can only ask one question or refer to a topic to which the participants can freely response. Whereas, Semi-structured Interviewer is led by a set of outlined questions, also known as an interview guide but the respondents feel free to reply and even expand their answer flexibly. Since the author already had in mind what detailed aspect of a social media plan and place branding needed to be explored from the attendees' perspectives, she decided to employ Semi-structured Interview.

The interview guide questions are created based on the content of the continuing steps (2, 3, 4, and 5) from the theoretical sample model: market analyzing, implementing social media program components, accessing and allocating resources, monitoring and measuring. The ultimate purpose is to get in-depth opinions and feelings of the target group and city authority about the suitable social media plan and how Quy Nhon can use these platforms to build an attractive online profile and promote itself successfully.

- **Market Analyzing:** Questions in this part are intended to determine the segmented customer group, their online travel behavior, the ongoing social media trends in tourism and the city's needs for the competition with its counterparts. This will give the researcher more practical knowledge to create and adjust the social media profile of Quy Nhon.
- **Implementing social media program components:** Questions here were customized to find out which social media channels should be prioritized to make the most use and efficiency out of them: Facebook, Instagram or Twitter or YouTube, the kind of content the audiences want to see, what time is the high-traffic time

online so the social media posts can be seen the most by the audiences, how to add humor in the content appropriately to make the profile more attractive. The researcher will base on this to build the detailed content and daily timeline for each post.

- Accessing and allocating resources: the aim of this section's questions is to determine what promotion campaign is powerful and appropriate in conveying the wanted content and messages to the right target audiences, how to integrate a traditional campaign with an online one effectively.
- Monitoring and measuring: these questions are meant to measure how much content is enough daily, weekly or monthly and to monitor the online conversation flow between the city and its audiences, how to response to both positive and negative comments so that Quy Nhon can build a good reputation based on these social media behaviors.

After the interview guide was made, the author went on to determine the number of interviews that should take place to collect enough data. Bryman & Bell (2011) accompanied qualitative approach with its ultimate goal to produce "in-depth analysis", so unlike quantitative data, the trait of being representative does not play a big role. That is why the number of interviews is not a huge matter provided the research can still offer relevant, valuable, and rich data. The interview with the Director of Quy Nhon's Tourism Department, Mr. A was arranged and took place in October 2018, when the author had the chance to flew to Quy Nhon and took this opportunity to interview Mr. A in person. As for other interviews, there were 7 candidates contacted during 10 days, from 10th November to 20th November 2019 via several ways like in-person meeting, Skype and Facetime video call. The author had to organize these interviews in different means since not all 7 participants were able to physically meet up because of their packed agenda. Nevertheless, the video call interviews still give similar qualities and needed information as an in-person interview, so it does not make any significant difference. The attendees' facial expressions, tone and emotions can still be well observed by the author. In turn, the interviewees can also hear the interviewer's questions loud and clear, so the comprehension process carried out as smoothly and effectively as it happens in person. These selected candidates are university students with the age range from 20 to 27 years old, residing in Metropolitan region including Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa, being active social media users and making travel decisions based on a place's online image independently.

They are from Vietnam and Finland for the sole reason that the author has more convenient reach to these 2 nationality groups.

When carrying on the interviews, for ethical consideration, the interviewer asked the candidates' consent if it would be fine with them that she had the interviews on record, and taking notes at the same time. All of the interviewees allowed that since they were also told that the purpose of the recording was solely for the author's convenience to re-access the data source, and that their identity would be ethically held anonymous for the sake of their personal privacy. Then, the author went on to transcribe the interview records and analyzed the generating data to come up with the social media plan.

3.3 Responses and Analysis

The responses from the interviews are presented in this section following the order of the interview guide. There are 4 aforementioned parts of the interview guide which are supported by relevant opinions from the participants as follow:

1. **Market Analyzing:** This part finds out the popularity of Quy Nhon city among the interviewees, their social media behavior when it comes to travelling, and the current tourism situation of Quy Nhon compared to its counterparts.
 - "...I've heard of Quy Nhon but never been there...It seems like a rather small city...nothing much to do..." (I:1)
 - "I don't know about it." (I:2)
 - "...I wanted to go last summer...but I couldn't find any official pages with useful information to plan my journey...so we chose Nha Trang instead." (I:4)
 - "I believe Quy Nhon is on its way to a high position in Vietnam's destination list, slowly but surely...Before we did not rely much on tourism for the economic development of the city, but now since we realized how much our city has to offer...and more investment projects are coming like FLC group...more financial ability to enhance the infrastructure and build more attractions and hospitality facilities like Avani, Anantara, FLC resorts and hotels...make it as great as other beach cities in the same central region like Nha Trang, Hoi An, Da Nang – the more common spots that tourists flood to." (Mr. A)

- “I chose a city as my next holiday destination based on references from my friends, family and colleges...where they have already visited and would recommend...” (I:3)
- “...for me which places are on trend lately...if I see a city appearing quite often in my Instagram feed from people I follow...I would be interested.” (I:5)
- “I follow a lot of bloggers and vloggers...so they are likely the inspiration for my decision where to travel next...” (I:6)
- “Facebook, Instagram and YouTube would be my go-tos when I want to see photos and reviews of a place...these channels are useful if you want to dig in and see more of the city, especially Instagram...” (I:4)
- “...I am not active on Facebook but more on Instagram...I can read the reviews and see pictures...I also watch YouTube vlog about a city, if any, to feel more experimental myself...” (I:1)
- “I prefer an official website so I can go and do my research when planning a trip...it feels more secure when you know it’s the information published by the city itself...there’s no confusion.” (I:2)
- “...Instagram more...sometimes Facebook...” (I:3)
- “...it’s nicer to see a city has an official Facebook page or website...I can find the right and trustful information there.” (I:7)
- “I have to admit, at the moment, the city is focusing more on the appearance development first, the physical profile rather than the online profile...we thought if we want to promote the city, then there need to be something, some good attractions to be promoted about...and we are working on these attractions first...so no official online marketing channel was initially made by the city yet...but surely we will get to it of course...it’s just the matter of time.” (Mr. A)
- “As for competition with other tourist cities in Vietnam...Quy Nhon has grown to be known as a favorite hidden gem or off the tourist radar destination for a lot of visitors...because of the raw nature, good coastal line giving beautiful beaches with clearer water, the tranquil pace with no tourist crowds, the local’s hospitality and well-loved cuisine without the

inflated prices like other hot cities right now...I think if we play our game right, we have a very good chance in the tourism scene in Vietnam..."

(Mr. A)

- "...popular cities in the same category of beach destination, like Nha Trang, Hoi An, Da Nang and Phu Quoc island are packed with domestic and foreigner tours daily...it becomes a worn path already...people tend to seek something new and exotic...that's why Quy Nhon, even without any loudsy profile, has gained quite an amount of this traveller group in this recent year...it fits well with the current trend also...people, especial young people, prefer to broaden their exploration to stranger and newer places...they like to do it themselves, without any crowded tour or tour guide alongside...only older people go on tour nowadays, I find..." (Mr. A)
- "...We want to attract all kind of visitors of course...but we plan to aim for the younger people...because firstly, as I mentioned, the first travelers that found out about Quy Nhon and spread their positive word-of-mouth to make it more popular are many young adult visitors...apparently that's the group with the taste matching with Quy Nhon's traits...so we certainly will take advantage of that and make them the main targets..." (Mr. A)
- "Secondly, we are still in the very first stages of the tourism game, so of course we still have to focus on the Vietnamese traveler group more...then we will spread our strategically reach to the foreigner group...because imagine if we can't raise the national awareness first properly, how can we do it international-wise?...of course during the whole process, we try to make it as foreigner friendly as possible...with information in English...staffs with good English skills..." (Mr. A)

From the interviewees and Mr. A's responses, it can be said Quy Nhon's reputation is, even though on the growing process, still kept in the dark for many people. The main reason is because the city authorities are putting their focus on investments and enhancements of Quy Nhon's physical infrastructure and attractions first, also known as the primary communication, according to Kavartzis (2006). Therefore, there has not been any secondary communication via official social media channels made by the city yet, so it is harder for tourists to seek information to plan their trip.

Furthermore, Mr. A gave a lot of insightful information on Quy Nhon's market competition analysis. In the category of beach destinations in the central of Vietnam, several other cities are in their primetime with tourists flooding there on a daily basis. This is not happening to Quy Nhon right now, making it a lovely peaceful getaway from big cities and other crowded touristy cities. With other appealing characteristics like non-inflated prices, raw nature, lots of beaches with clear water, exquisite and fresh culinary, rich culture and no tourist crowd, Quy Nhon is said to have a good chance if the city plays its secondary communication right. Firstly, it will aim at younger Vietnamese people as the target group, since this is the group that has discovered and boosted its reputation so far. Then in the long run, other groups will be gradually taken into focus like families, older generation of Vietnamese and foreigner travelers. Fortunately, this makes the data from other participants even more relevant and valuable since they happen to belong in the same priority target group: young adults.

When being asked about social media channels, all of the participants said that they are active more on Instagram and Facebook when traveling and some prefer a website of the city for reliable information. They also mostly take reference about their next destination from close people around like family and friends, via what they have posted online. Some of them like to get inspired by influencers on Instagram as well. That is why the resulting plan of this thesis will include 3 channels: Facebook, Instagram and an official website, with content targeting on young people, especially Vietnamese, but still foreigner friendly with the language in English.

2. **Implementing social media program components:** this part helps the author learn about the social media patterns and preferences of the studied subjects, their favored contents, their most active time online and the city authority, Mr. A's practical take on social media in place branding. Based on these data, the channels will be planned accordingly.

- "...I checked my phone the first thing when I wake up...but I have more time to be really interactive at night...around 9pm." (I:2)
- "In the morning, I have a quick look...and at night, I am freer so I can be more active then...before bed..." (I:3)

- “...morning, around 8, on my way to work or school...and also nighttime of course...” (I:6)
- “...when I just wake in the morning...and in the evening...” (I:7)
- “As for content, if I am a newcomer, I certainly like to see all the basics first like what to see, what to eat, how to get around, how to get help in emergencies...” (I:1)
- “...be more creative and apply content into a new trend...that is fun.” (I:2)
- “...of course, besides all the necessary information, posts about local customs or festivals will be interesting...” (I:4)
- “...I’d like to immerge in the culture...some routines of the locals are nice to know...what’s a daily life of a local like, any local...like how he/she starts the day, what he/she eats during the day and usually do when hanging out with friends...just the little routine things are different or similar to me.” (I:5)
- “I am more of a visual person...I like to see photos from different angles of every corner of the city...” (I:6)
- “...sales or promotion programs of the locals’ stores on special occasions are also fun and useful for me...” (I:7)
- “I like to see new content from a channel 1 or 2 times maximum...” (I:2)
- “...once a day is enough...” (I:3)
- “...once or twice but not so close to each other of course...” (I:5)
- “... maximum twice a day... more than 2 times, it feels like you are trying too hard and more like spams...” (I:7)
- “For older generations like mine, social media is such a foreign thing we are still learning its ways...That is why we need a younger team to consult us and execute the social media plan of Quy Nhon...since social media is a must-have card to step up the tourism game...I am most familiar with platforms like Facebook and info sites...they are easier to use than other platforms, at least for me...” (Mr. A)
- “...like I said before, we have not proceeded to the virtual profile online yet, but more on physical attractions profile...that is why we did not use any social media tool to do the promotion of Quy Nhon...however there are several Facebook pages that set up by Quy Nhon people separately, for their own

love...offering tourist information and tips, also news around the city locals and food spots...they are unofficial and scattering all over Facebook...so the information could be incorrect at times...then again I guess those are the ones that has helped visitors more or less on trip planning...” (Mr. A)

- “The Tourism board of the city reckons that its profile on social media are going to be built via Facebook, an official website ran by the city and Instagram...for Instagram is also a major platform nowadays...” (Mr. A)
- “...we plan to employ a team of social media gurus to plan carefully and administrate these channels...for example, a monthly agenda of related-content daily post on Facebook and Instagram...come up with a viral hashtag for only the city itself...design the formal website in a visual appealing way with useful information for our visitors-to-be and fun articles involving around Quy Nhon and its people...” (Mr. A)

The data above indicate that all participants are most active online in the morning, usually after waking up, and at night, before bedtime. However, they have more time to actually interact more at night since it’s at the end of the day that people are freer and turn to some entertainment or news update. This means content posted at this timeframe is likely to be received and has higher engagement rate. The author also found out that new content is preferred to appear once or twice a day. And according to the receiving records, creative content with personalized trendy hashtag is appreciated besides essential basics like “what to see, where to eat, how to get around...”. Also, alongside the outgoing messages, the city’s content needs to empower visualization since “consumers continue to have an appetite for imagery” (Leap & Teague, 2019). The relating comments from the attendees also supports the words of Cleave et al. (2016) in the theoretical section of this thesis: “Municipalities may damage their brand if they are perceived as antiquated or lacking in creativity, thereby contributing to negative images and reputations among consumers”. This process of content building requires an agenda made for daily post one or two months in advance for a smooth operation, which will be discussed in detail in the resulting plan in section 4.

3. **Accessing and allocating resources:** this part seeks the data on the right promotional campaigns to launch online and offline at the same time (traditional marketing campaigns) for integration purpose.

- “To make the city profile more popular on social media, I think frequent engagement is an essential...” (I:1)
- “...for me, it would be collaboration with famous people like celebrities, vloggers or bloggers...” (I:2)
- “...mini games or contests with prizes will trigger me...” (I:5)
- “...maybe start out a hashtag of its own...” (I:7)
- “Some traditional offline campaigns I like...free walking tour or photography tour...” (I:3)
- “A food tour around the city could be interesting.” (I:4)
- “For integrating online and offline promotional campaigns, we can host free trips around the city lead by local volunteers...contact some businesses like restaurants, shops, hotels or resorts for sponsorship of game prizes...for the ones that agree to sponsor, it’s a great way to promote their business as well...” (Mr. A)

From the above supporting comments, the author sees many ideas on online activities Quy Nhon city can do to grow its virtual profile’s popularity. Frequent engagement is one of them. This verifies section 2.3’s theory above by Cleave et al. (2016): “Engagement with target audiences on social media platforms is now considered necessary for the survival of a strong municipal place brand”. Other elements are projects like influencer collaboration, mini games, contests and viral hashtag. Integrating with these online activities, free walking photograph and food tours were also recommended.

4. **Monitoring and measuring:** this part gives data on the post-visit stage of a traveler and the follow-up stage of the municipality, how to still engage and manage the conversation flow with visitors and track how well the plan is working.
- “After traveling to a place, I will have a sum-up review if it’s really good or really bad...because during the trip, I always post something online, which is kinda a serie of mini reviews already.” (I:2)
 - “I post photos frequently when I travel, and tell how I feel about which at the same time...that’s my kind of review...” (I:4)
 - “...I do write travelling reviews.” (I:5)

- “I have an online album where I have been...I surely write about a place after the trip...” (I:6)
- “If I personally go to a city’s page to write review there, then I will expect to be directly responded nicely and respectfully even if it’s a good or bad review soon enough.” (I:3)
- “...I like to know that my comments or feedbacks are acknowledged...a like to a comment is a way for me to know that...or nice reply to the feedback I give...” (I:5)
- “...of course, I’d like to see the response as soon as possible...with polite and reasonable words even if it’s a negative feedback from me...” (I:7)
- “The way a city responds to its audiences is, for sure, one of those make-or-break elements for its reputation.” (I:1)
- “...it is very important that past visitors and potential visitors get responded in the right manner...otherwise, either you lose someone who could become a frequent visitor or someone who could be your next visitor...not to mention their negative word-of-mouth after the bad experience.” (I:2)
- “...if people have a good experience...then good reputation...bad experiences surely give the city a bad name...no matter how much you invest on the infrastructures and attractions.” (I:6)
- “We certainly can always track the result if the social media plan is working well or not...to make needed adjustment...there are some tools like Google Trends, Google Analytic and from the likes and followers on Facebook and Instagram...” (Mr. A)
- “...something else we need to check and measure is the post frequency and engagement level...since online audiences are the potential travelers to our city...” (Mr. A)
- “That’s measurement for online activities, meanwhile at the same time, we also need to monitor the physical tendency of the city during and after applying the plan...since we want to keep and preserve the good traits of Quy Nhon...no unreasonable price increase...keep a clean environment and clear ocean as it has always been...make sure no damage is intentionally made to attractions...both tourists and the locals have to comply and share a hand on this...” (Mr. A)

- “Carefully keeping track of the situation will give good results, I believe, not only for the branding of the city, but also for the locals as well...more travelers, more income source...it’s a free promotion for their businesses too...The plan will also create more jobs since we will need more people to join our social media team...the local economy is hoped to improve as a result...the cultural values of Quy Nhon and its people are discovered and hopefully spread by visitors...”
(Mr. A)

It is suggested from the receiving comments that the city has to keep engaging with the visitors, not only before and during the trip, but also afterwards for the purpose of converting them into frequent visitors and spreading positive word-of-mouth to potential travelers in the future. Since most of the participants shared that they do write reviews during and/or after the trip, it is vital for the city to have a professional responding behavior towards every conversation, both good and bad. The posting frequency, replying speed and engagement level should be monitored and kept track of. After the plan is launched, the administrating team can check its successful level by using popular tools like Google Trends and Google Analytics for further modifications.

4 THE SOCIAL MEDIA PLAN

After evaluating and analyzing all the data from the researched participants and professional opinions from Mr. A, the Director of Quy Nhon city’s Tourism Department, in this section, the author went on to create a social media plan via 3 main platforms Facebook, Instagram and an official website as below.

4.1 Facebook

Setting up the page

The very first step in building a Facebook profile, no matter for individual or business purposes, is coming up with a name that is easy for the audiences to remember. Especially in the time when people use searching tools like Google for nearly everything, let alone trip planning or information search about a city, something common and similar with the likely search keywords like “Visit Quy Nhon” or “Explore Quy Nhon” would be a good option. The Facebook page link of the city will be likely to show up at high position on

search engine result pages. With this reason, the author decided on Visit Quy Nhon as the name of the city's Facebook page. Next, introduction about the city need to be well thought out and correctly filled in the "About" section including address, phone number and linked with other social media channels like Instagram and the website for optimal promotion of Quy Nhon city's online profiles. Importantly, it should mention this is the official Facebook page of Quy Nhon ran by the city authority so that audiences feel safe and sure about the provided information. Then, the visualization of profile and cover photos has to be taken into account. A logo or picture can be customized to suit with the name and traits of a tropical beach city.

Spreading the page

The next phase after setting up is to make sure the page reaches its target audiences. This can be done organically by the administrating team first. They can inform their families, friends, acquaintances about it, then ask them to spread the words. They can make a post about this on their social media channels so everyone can see and share widely. Besides, traditional promotion method can be done like publishing the news on a small article of the local paper. But then, a more effective way is to run advertisement about the page, on the same platform Facebook, and on the biggest search engine nowadays Google. It might take time to reach the desired number of "Followers" and "Likes", but it guarantees to approach to a much wider scope of audiences.

Content Creation

Taking into consideration the ideas and comments above from the interviewees, content on Facebook will be published once a day in the morning, around 8am to 9am. Since a day in Vietnam starts earlier than in Western countries, people usually have to be at work or school at 8am, so the content will be posted according to Vietnam's time zone. Besides, since Facebook is mainly where people go to for information, news and mostly reviews, new content here only needs to appear once a day. The specific content depends on each month: what is going on around the city: festival, book market, fair, cultural exchange events...; what holidays are coming: Christmas, new year, lunar new year, Valentines...; how to make food of the month: Chung cake, Tet cake, pork sausage... for holiday season; the list goes on. Events about these occasions can be organized and added on Facebook page under "Events" section, so people can show their interest, share with their friends, join and check in at happening location. Apart from that, occasional mini games can be hosted on Facebook to get boost interaction from the audiences. It can be a quiz

about a historical fact of Quy Nhon city and the prize can be vouchers from a restaurant or coffee shop in town. A separate weekly content section can be generated, for example “Fun fact”, providing fun facts about Quy Nhon that even the locals might not know about. A specific content agenda is made below in section 4.4, combined with content for Instagram and the website.

Utilization of Facebook features

- **City Guides:** this is the new feature Facebook just launched recently. It shows the users suggestions on places to visit, things to do in a city. These suggestions mostly are from places the users’ Facebook friends have been to. Facebook gets these data via other features like “check-in” and “location services”. Figure 5 below demonstrates what this feature looks like on Facebook mobile app.

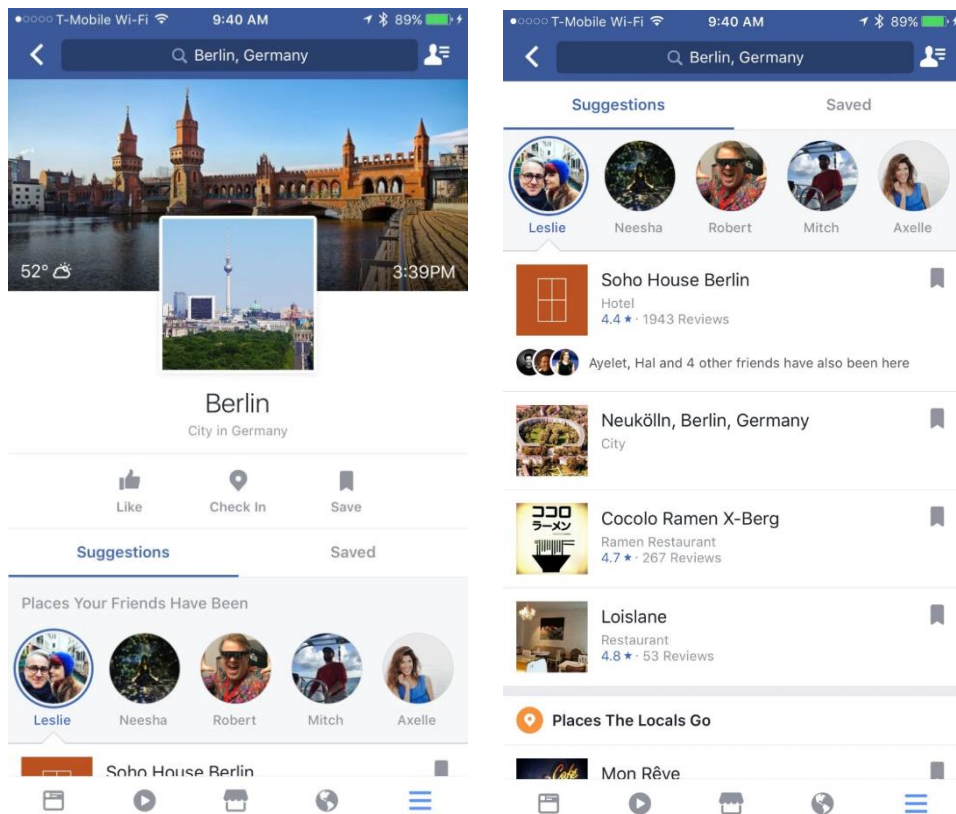


Figure 5. City Guides feature on Facebook (Techcrunch.com, 2017)

Restaurants, coffee shops, hotels, resorts and bars... can encourage their customers to check in and write reviews about the service to gain higher position on the list, hence reach more potential customers.

- Short-cut buttons like “Learn more” in the profile page can be made use of to link from Facebook to another social media channel, in this case, it is used to linked

with the website address. When the audiences click on it, they are lead to the home page of the city's website. This is a good way to direct more online traffic to other platforms of the city. Visitors can find out about the other platforms of Quy Nhon and engage in the conversations there.

- Check-in is one of the most effective features for current and future visitors to share where they have come as well as to discover new places based on the share from their network of friends. As mentioned in the City Guides part, in the first stage of the plan launch, city can suggest local customer service businesses to encourage their customers to check in so Facebook is able to collect data and create auto suggestions from that. This can be done through small promotion campaign like “check in for 10% discount” or “check in for one free side dish”.
- Hashtags like #visitQuyNhon #myQuyNhon can be initially added on every post on Facebook and Instagram to get people aware of it and build the habit of adding it into their posts when they share something about the city online. This is an example of a “tag cloud”, where the audiences can “search and retrieve” specific insider content as well as catch up with the recently popular tags, according to Tuten & Solomon (2013).
- Reviews are the great source tourists resort to when making traveling decisions. It affects directly to the reputation of the city in the tertiary communication stage (Cleave, 2016). This is why the more positive reviews a place can gain, the more popular it is likely to become. Of course, if a 5 star service is delivered, then customers would not mind giving back a 5 star review. Sometimes, they just need a little incentive. The fastest and easiest way is to directly but politely ask them to kindly leave some feedback words on Facebook. In exchange, a “thank you for visiting” note and a small souvenir are given to them. Of course in some cases, there's always the odd. Bad experiences can happen, resulting in negative reviews so the administrating team has to know how to handle and respond to those. That's what the next part will discuss in detail.

Engaging and Responding

The city needs to keep a frequent level of engagement to its audiences to get the same engagement in return. Regular posts with open questions will create opportunities for audiences to reply, which is the window the administrating team should make full use of to keep the conversation alive. Liking the audiences' comments and occasionally replying

to the most-liked comments are ways to make sure they know that their opinions are heard and appreciated.

Personal direct messages and reviews have to be responded in the shortest time to keep a professional manner. Messenger Chatbot is a great tool on Facebook to leverage the organic customer service delivered by the team as it is quick, automatic and efficient. Chatbot enables the audiences to get their answer for basic questions almost instantly, saving their time and patience for the customer support staffs.

The customer service team will be trained to handle and respond to obstructive messages and reviews: carefully listening to the reviewers, then first of all, always say “thank you” for their feedback, and say “sorry” that they have to experience that, if they are right and the city truly has something to improve, then needed correction will be applied as soon as possible. However, in the case of misunderstanding or likewise, the support staffs can still defend the reputation of the city by starting out with, again, thanking them for their stay, and sorry for the incidents that happened, then explaining this side of the disagreement in an as respectful and humble way as possible, and finishing by thanking them again for the honest reviews. By no means, negative messages should be answered by Chatbot. They must be taken care of by professional well-trained team because in the social media dimension, it is not a few specific bad review givers that the city has to respond to, it is the whole world observing every conversation, especially the bad ones.

4.2 Instagram

As for the setting up on Instagram, it should be done accordingly to Facebook for between-channels synchronization. Therefore, the account name is also VisitQuyNhon. The profile picture and the introduction are the same ones with Facebook’s. Although, the introduction information needs to be shortened to fit in with the limit of 150 characters in Instagram’s “Bio” section. It can be simply written as “The official account of Quy Nhon city. Tag @VisitQuyNhon or #visitQuyNhon to share with us and be featured”. The official website address is added to the “Website” section for the same spreading effect as on the Facebook plan.

To popularize about the Instagram channel, firstly the channel thread and account name is already mentioned on the Facebook profile’s introduction page. At the same time, the

equivalent way can be done as when promoting Facebook, the city can run advertisement right on Instagram to increase brand awareness and follower number.

The written content on Instagram does not have to be always the same as Facebook since this channel focuses on the visual attraction. Therefore, the photos have to be carefully selected and edited in a harmonized way as a whole, from the shade of colors, contrast level, brightness and exposure and saturation. All the pictures should have the same tone to create an amplified visual effect.

Instagram shares some mutual features with Facebook like short-cut buttons, check-in and hashtag. More than that, it is also developed with its own unique features like Stories, IGTV, photography editing tools and filters. That is why the city need to exploit these facilities to make the best content out of them.

- Short-cut buttons like “Book now” in the news feed or “Swipe up” in the Stories section present enormous opportunities to call for and directly lead audiences to the landing page that the city desires to, like a booking page of a hotel or resort in town, reservation page of a restaurant, and “swipe up” to read the new posts on the city’s website.
- Check-in based on geography locations enables audiences to find out the exact site where the picture is taken. So the administrating team needs to bear in mind to use this features whenever possible. Besides, the same utilization as on Facebook can be carried out: encourage customers or visitors to check in with a small incentive. This will helps expand the scope of influenced audiences.
- Hashtag feature on Instagram specifically bear these functions, according to Fantanti & Suyadnya (2015): “the media grouping for tourist content, searching media of travel content, expand the posting of tourism, and promotion of tourism products”. This is why in everyday post content, the same hashtags must be added, wisely as the same ones as Facebook’s: #visitQuyNhon #myQuyNhon and some others like #visitasia #southeastasia to widen the scope of influenced audiences as well. For example, someone is looking for a destination in South East Asia to visit, he/she will likely to click on or type in the hashtag #southeastasia in the explore section for inspirations and happens to discover Quy Nhon’s channel thanks to the same hashtag added on a post.
- Stories section allows users to share one or many photos, short videos or plain text messages, not on the main photo feed, but on the separate Stories section on top

of news feed. These shared contents only exist within 24 hours from the posted time, so it is more like a Snapchat add-in version of Instagram. This feature helps the city to deliver informal temporary messages to its audiences as well as being an opportunity for the city to get creative with its contents. The city can share casual and interesting photos or videos that are not meant for the main photo feed. The admin team can do so by sharing stunning pictures about every corner of Quy Nhon to trigger its audiences' interest. New attractions or facilities in town can also be promoted via Stories, simply by getting recorded directly on site. For example, a small video can be produced to introduce about the newly renovated airport with modern-look architecture, automatic facilities and services. Thereby, the audiences feel more experimental and connected to the brand of the city. Additionally, more unique contents can be made via Stories like sharing a trip of a admin team to Ky Co beach with the title "A day to Ky Co with Phuong". Shots from the trip can be recorded in timing order and divided into small sections to fit in with the time limit of each Stories slideshow. Seeing this, the audiences are likely to get inspired and gain trust towards the image of the city. Afterwards, it is possible to track the reach and engagement level of the stories based on the number of people have seen them, the emoji reaction and direct messages coming in.

- IGTV is one of the newest feature on Instagram which enables longer videos and clips from the creators. The content ideas can be the same as Stories' but IGTV suits more with clips that are too long for Stories. If the clips are above 1 minute, they are recommended to be posted on IGTV instead of Stories (Instagram, 2019). However, when using IGTV, the admin team needs to take into account some important knowledge to create the best material quality and online experience of the audiences like lighting and sound, resolution and frame rate choices.
- Photography editing tools are the essence of Instagram when it was first launched, besides the sharing network. Users can share their photos, in raw quality or with a little retouch action from Instagram filters and editing tools including adjustments of the levels of brightness, exposure, contrast, warmth, saturation, etc. The city team has to make the right use of these tools to produce stunning photos suitable with the general aesthetic, by getting inspired and references from cities that

has been successfully branded. Figure 6 below illustrates the Instagram feeds of Helsinki and New York city and the differences in their photography tone.

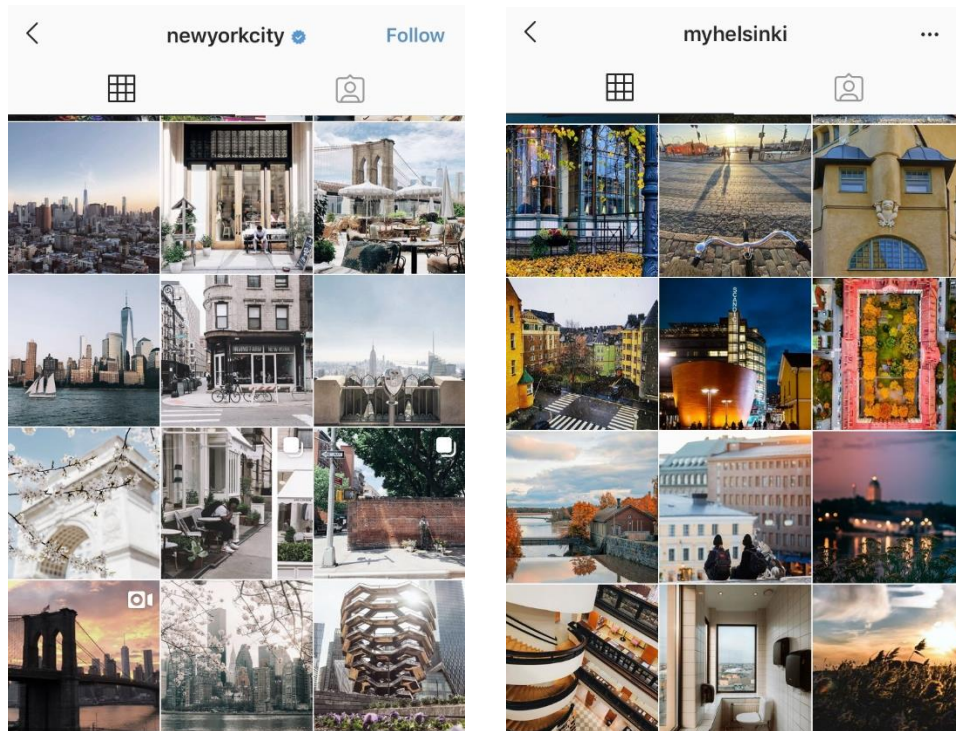


Figure 6. Official Instagram accounts of New York and Helsinki (Instagram, 2019)

As can be seen, the tone of New York city’s feed is colder than the one of Helsinki’s feed with more faded color hue and colder tones like blue, grey and beige. Meanwhile, Helsinki feed is more vibrant with higher saturation and contrast level, hence, hotter shades like red, orange and yellow. Despite the differences, both feeds still present amazing shots of the cities from different locations and angles, showcasing unique architecture and nature of each place. Based on the traits of Quy Nhon city being a tropical beach city with mostly sunny weather and colorful houses as well as food vendors, the author suggested that its photography tone should be vibrant with medium high to high saturation level in order to highlight the liveliness in different shades of the city: blue for the clear sky and ocean water, orange and pink for sunsets and sunrises scene, yellow for the sunlight and flowers, etc.

4.3 Official website

The official tourism website of Quy Nhon city can be designed by many online website builders like WordPress, Wix or Squarespace... Seeing that Wix is voted the best web builder in 2019 (Techradar.com, 2019), the author decided to choose it as the platform to create the official website from scratch. The address of the website is named accordingly to Facebook and Instagram accounts, so it could be visitquynhon.com or visitquynhon.vn. Since this is the channel audiences turn to for correct official news and guides about the city, the contents have to be well written and as informative as possible. Below are the suggested content sections for the website:

1. Essentials:

- About Quy Nhon: introduce about the city's general characteristics like location, highlighted historical values, area, population number, weather and living cost.
- Getting to Quy Nhon: mention different ways to travel to Quy Nhon. It takes a 2-hour flight away from Hanoi in the north, the capital of Vietnam and only a 45-minute flight away from Ho Chi Minh city in the south. Visitors can also reach Quy Nhon by buses and trains from different cities throughout the country.
- Getting around Quy Nhon: the most popular mean of transportation is scooters and motorbikes. There are also buses to go to further suburb areas outside of the cities. Taxies and motorbike taxies are available as well.

2. Discoveries:

- What to do and see: mention the activities travelers can do during their trip, for example, touring through popular tourist attractions like Cham ruins, Han Mac Tu's tomb, Quang Trung museum, Quang Trung temple, Linh Phong pagoda with the highest Buddha statue in South East Asia, Trung Luong beach, Ky Co island, the Wind tunnel, Queen's beach, Nhon Hoi bridge as the longest bridge in South East Asia.
- What to eat: take the audiences into the cuisine world of the central of Vietnam, represented by Quy Nhon city itself, introduce the popular dishes and where to best have them. Some distinctive dishes should be named like Fish noodle soup – a specialty of the central coastal cities like Quy Nhon, Banh

Xeo – a kind of so-called crepe topped with either shrimps or beef, Grilled pork noodle salad, eel soup, a variety of fresh seafood cooked in different ways and certainly Pho – the national dish of Vietnamese people from North to South, a rice noodle soup with either beef or chicken sided with some herbs and spicy sauce for personal preference.

- Where to stay: recommend some popular spots like Hoang Yen hotel, Seagull hotel, Avani resort, FLC resort, or local homestays for experiences of a more local life.
3. Events and Festivals: introduce and describe a number of big festivals and holidays like Tet holiday (a Vietnamese name version for Lunar New Year holiday), Christmas, National Independence Day,... As for events, a blog post should be made monthly to inform what seasonal events are coming up that month, for example, Christmas street market, Light and Water show, New year's countdown, Tet flower market and Tet pagodas trips,... could be listed out during the months of December and January.
 4. Trip ideas: make suggestions on tour itineraries based on different traveler's interests
 - For the historians: this tour takes travelers through the historical destinations with rich local cultural values, going from Cham ruins, Quang Trung temple, Quang Trung museum to Tran Hung Dao's statue, Queen's beach and Han Mac Tu's tomb...
 - For the foodies: this tour is for food lovers to try on different specialties from the local-recommended restaurants and food stalls in town.
 - For the beach bodies: this tour is suitable for ocean lovers to enjoy the sun and sand at different beach locations, from the newly discovered beach on Ky Co island, picturesque sunsets on Trung Luong beach to some night time fun on the downtown beach's bar – Surf Bar.
 - For the shopaholics: this tour is designed for visitors who love to shop during their trips, from local handmade souvenirs like lacquered paintings, postcards, seashell lamps, jewelries, coconut bowls to the local designed stores with a lot of goodies like silk and linen scarfs, straw hats, pearl necklaces and earrings...

- Contact information: give out contact information of the city authority office like email, phone number and address. In addition, hotlines like local police's, emergency health service's must be available in case of unfortunate incidents.

Apart from the aforementioned standard contents, weekly blog posts will be created with the materials basing on the seasonal events and happenings within the city. A combined content agenda is made below as an example of how it should be done.

4.4 Combined Content Agenda

| January 2020 | | | | | | Calendarpedia Your source for calendars |
|--|--|--|---|--|--|---|
| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
| 29 | 30 | 31 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| | | | New Year Day 8AM Facebook Happy New year post 9AM Instagram Happy New year photo 2PM Website Blog post: New Year Day traditions with Quy Nhon locals 9PM Instagram New Year Day party photo | 8AM Facebook Tet is coming post 7AM Instagram Sunrise on the beach photo 9PM Instagram A busy side of Quy Nhon on holiday season photo | 8AM Facebook Morning routine of a local post 7AM Instagram Children getting ready for school photo 9PM Instagram Ha Thanh river photo | 8AM Facebook Farmers market post 7AM Instagram Early farmer market photo 9PM Instagram What's for dinner photo |
| 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
| 8AM Facebook Local approved restaurants post 9AM Instagram A popular restaurant in town photo 9PM Instagram Quy Nhon's night lights photo | 8AM Facebook Favourite jogging route along the beach post 9AM Instagram Queen's beach photo 9PM Instagram Martial arts festival reminder photo | 8AM Facebook A chat with an international visitor post 9AM Instagram International visitor's photo of Quy Nhon 9PM Instagram Wrapping up the day with the international visitor photo | 8AM Facebook Martial arts festival post 9AM Instagram Martial arts festival photo 2PM Website Blog post: Events and festivals to visit to get hyped for Tet holiday 9PM Instagram Music show photo | 8AM Facebook Alternations to plastic post 9AM Instagram Grass straws made by a local store photo 9PM Instagram A night walk in the central park photo | 8AM Facebook A tour through the local zoo post 9AM Instagram Zoo animals photo 9PM Instagram Peaceful moment at Thi Nai lagoon photo | 8AM Facebook Tet related mini game teaser post 9AM Instagram Mini game teaser photo 9PM Instagram Nhon Hoi bridge photo |
| 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 |
| 8AM Facebook Mini game post release 9AM Instagram Mini game release photo 9PM Instagram Anantara resort at night photo | 8AM Facebook Best new cafes in town post 9AM Instagram A local cafe photo 9PM Instagram Phuong Mai peninsula photo | 8AM Facebook Fruits and decorations for Tet preparation post 9AM Instagram A fruit vendor photo 9PM Instagram Fishing boats photo | 8AM Facebook Flower market post 9AM Instagram Trung Luong beach under the sun photo 2PM Website Blog post: What to know about Vietnamese Tet's customs and traditions 9PM Instagram Flower market photo | 8AM Facebook The streets are getting festively lit post 9AM Instagram Morning at the local library photo 9PM Instagram A cosy festive filled coffee shop corner photo | 8AM Facebook Walking route through the downtown area post 9AM Instagram Walking tour photo 9PM Instagram Light and Water show reminder photo | 8AM Facebook Light and Water show post 9AM Instagram Ky Co island photo 9PM Instagram Light and Water show photo |
| 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 |
| 8AM Facebook Mini game result post 9AM Instagram Mini game result photo 9PM Instagram Firework event reminder photo | 8AM Facebook Local fishery traditions post 9AM Instagram Offshore fishing boats photo 9PM Instagram Live music performance photo | 8AM Facebook Quy Nhon in spring colours post 9AM Instagram Cherry blossoms photo 9PM Instagram Downtown restaurants photo | 8AM Facebook How a year end party is prepared post 9AM Instagram Year end party post 2PM Website Blog post: How to celebrate Tet holiday like a local 9PM Instagram Streets of Quy Nhon before Tet photo | 8AM Facebook Environmental awareness in holiday season post 9AM Instagram Botanical garden photo 9PM Instagram The liveliness of downtown neighborhood photo | 8AM Facebook Last day of the year of the pig post 9AM Instagram Last day of the year of the pig photo 9PM Instagram Firework event reminder photo 11:30PM Instagram Firework show photo | The first day of Tet 8AM Facebook Happy Tet post 9AM Instagram Happy Tet photo 9PM Instagram Family time for Tet photo |
| 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | 1 |
| The second day of Tet 8AM Facebook Pagodas and temples to visit post 9AM Instagram Linh Phong pagoda photo 9PM Instagram Lucky money - red envelope photo | The third day of Tet 8AM Facebook The last day of Tet post 9AM Instagram Apricot blossoms photo 9PM Instagram Night time atmosphere at the central square photo | 8AM Facebook Opening of the art show at the local museum post 9AM Instagram Chung cake photo 9PM Instagram Moonlight on the beach photo | 8AM Facebook 10 reasons to visit Quy Nhon this time of the year post 9AM Instagram Sunrise over the city photo 2PM Website Blog post: 10 reasons to visit Quy Nhon this time of the year 9PM Instagram Quy Nhon by night photo | 8AM Facebook Getting back to work and school post-Tet post 9AM Instagram Post-Tet school photo 9PM Instagram Surf Bar photo | 8AM Facebook Traffic rules compliance reminder post 9AM Instagram The city's busy streets from above photo 9PM Instagram Houses in Ngo May neighborhood photo | |

Figure 7. An example of a content agenda made for Quy Nhon city in January 2020

Figure 7 above showcases a content calendar the author combinedly made for Quy Nhon city's 3 channels, using calendar sample from Calendarpedia.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Quy Nhon has a special case when it comes to its current place branding strategy. The authority has been executing the primary communication by investing in the physical infrastructure, urban settings as well as distinct tourist attractions of the city. For example, the streets alongside the beach are being reconstructed into a walking only street, there are now more direct flights at cheaper price to and from different big cities in the North and South region, etc.

As for secondary communication phase, currently there is no noticeable social media promotion coming from the municipality itself. Despite that, the past year has witnessed a marked rise in the number of travelers to Quy Nhon, especially domestic young adults. This is the result of several repetitive and continuous minor pieces of the tertiary communication. The case is that it is a norm nowadays in Vietnam's travel scope that young independent travelers are likely to favor off-the-tourist-trail destinations than big popular cities. The reasons could be because most of the times, the cost is cheaper in these off the beaten track cities for young people and the travelers can experience new sceneries, new local cuisine, and customs. So it goes without saying, with all the potential and resources Quy Nhon has to offer, it was able to gain positive reviews and word-of-mouth from different independent travelers at different time points. These feedbacks slowly yet effectively went viral online via different social media channels, mostly on Facebook. More traveler groups, like families, older people and especially foreigners have been aware of the city reputation thanks to these positive words-of-mouth. That is how Quy Nhon has gained more visitors during the past year, mostly via primary and tertiary communication. Therefore, it is high time a secondary communication method be employed so that the city could accelerate even better on Vietnam's tourist destination list.

After collecting and analyzing the data from the studied subjects, the author has been able to have an in-depth look from their perspectives on the studied topic and was able to create the social media plan for Quy Nhon using Facebook, Instagram and website. The

marketing plan was based on the model by Shelly & Dunlop (2009) due to its applicability to the characters of this thesis.

For the market analyzing stage, the empirical data support the theory by Cleave et al. (2016): “for the brand to enter into and resonate within the collective consciousness of the target audience, it must be communicated to them”. It does not matter how well invested the infrastructure of a place is if it does not have the right communication method towards its target audiences. Or as Solis’s words (2011), a city must “engage or die”. Among 3 communication methods a city can use to connect with its audiences that Kavaratzis (2004) suggested, Quy Nhon only actively initiated the primary communication stage so far. Therefore, it lacks the popularity level in the tourism scene compared to other counterparts in Vietnam.

As for the implementation of social media elements, the responses from the interviewees prove Tuten & Solomon (2013)’s Web 2.0 valuable traits on social media like tagging, user generated content like reviews and network effects to be extremely applicable and effective. Furthermore, the most popular channels within 4 social media zones by Tuten & Solomon (2013) like Facebook and Instagram also appear to be efficient when it comes to making travel decisions.

When accessing and allocating resources for the social media plan, the author found the “social media place promotion framework” created by Cleave et al (2016) to be confirmed as for the interconnectivity among the 3 communication stages. The participants tend to fond of the integration between online and offline promotional campaigns.

Lastly, to keep track of the results and effectiveness of the plan, afterwards monitors and measurements are made. The related data, yet again advocates Cleave et al. (2016)’s words about the importance of “the level and quality of the conversation created” in the tertiary communication stage.

5.1 Final words

To conclude, the thesis can be said to successfully answer its research question and achieve its research aim by having generated the resulting social media plan for Quy Nhon city via Facebook, Instagram and official website. It might take time for the plan to be executed and take off in real life since the city need to recruit and train a social media

administrating team. After the plan gets going, further monitors and measurements are carried out to keep track of the results in order to make any modifications if needed.

Despite occasional hardships and challenges like the participants' unfamiliarity with some theoretical terms or the possible minor errors in the data translating process from Vietnamese to English, the answers to the research question was, at last, found.

Due to limitations of aspects such as the age group and geographical location of the studied population, there are possibilities for other future researches to fill in. The thesis has a quite small studied sample, 20 to 27-year-old university students living in Metropolitan area, with 2 nationality groups: Vietnamese and Finnish. Thus, it would be of great interest for future researchers to carry out on other age groups, geo-locations and nationalities. Lastly, the research only looked into 3 channels in the vastly dimension of social media so there is still room for other researches to prosper with many other channels to apply in the scope of place branding.

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APPENDICES

Interview Questions for the Director of Quy Nhon City's Tourism department

1. As the Director of the City Tourism department, what do you think about the current tourism development of Quy Nhon?
2. Could you please tell me what is the current marketing strategy towards the city's tourism image?
3. In your opinion, what makes Quy Nhon city distinctive from other tourism destinations in Vietnam?
4. What are some ongoing tourism trends lately?
5. What are the target tourist groups the city aims for?
6. Which group do you want to attract more: domestic or foreign travelers? And why?
7. What does the term "place branding" mean to you?
8. Are you yourself a fan of social media?
9. Which tools of social media have been utilized to attract more travelers to Quy Nhon?
10. What do you think about the power of social media in the development of the city reputation?
11. Do you think it might bring about some certain drawbacks besides all the merits?
12. If yes, what are they?
13. And what can be done to make up for these drawbacks?
14. How do you think the city stakeholders and residences themselves can help to act on city branding?
15. And what benefits might they get out of it?

Interview Questions for the selected candidates

1. Have you heard about and/or visited Quy Nhon city, Vietnam before?
2. What makes a city become your travel destination choice?
3. Which social media channels do you use for travelling purpose? (information seek for planning a trip, inspiration for your next destination, personal interest, etc.). And why?
4. In what timeframe during the day are you most active on social media?
5. What kind of content are you fond of on social media channels of a tourism city?
6. How often would you like to see the new content?
7. What kind of online activities do you think will make a city more popular on social media? (mini game, collaboration with influencers like vloggers, regular posts, etc.)
8. Do you often write a review online about a city after visiting?
9. How do you prefer getting response from a city?
10. How do think the response behavior will affect a city's reputation?