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Marketing aspects in tourism development

The marketing analysis of Vietnam tourism industry
for long term development

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Thesis abstract

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The objectives of this paper are to identify the shortcomings that have been hindering the development of Vietnam tourism and seeking for the solution for these shortcomings in the aspects of marketing. Vietnam is a country lying in the peninsula of South Asia and holds great potentials of nature, culture and human power for tourism growth. Despite much effort on marketing campaigns, Vietnam tourism is still lagging behind other giant tourism industries in Asia region.

The thesis applied both qualitative and quantitative research methods, consisting of the data collected from the official statistics of the organizations namely World Travel and Tourism Councils, World Tourism Organization, Pacific Asia Travel Association, General Statistics Office of Vietnam; and an in-depth interview with Mr. Adam Bray, who is a travel journalist, writer and Indochina expertise.

From the study, the writer suggests that Vietnam tourism should focus on four aspects of marketing, including branding Vietnam's tourism image, designing effective advertisement to raise brand awareness, applying marketing into ICT, and developing tour offerings and focusing on niche market.

Keywords: marketing, tourism, Vietnam

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APEC	Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GSO	General Statistics Office of Vietnam
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
PATA	Pacific Asia Travel Association
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNTWO	World Tourism Organization
VNAT	Vietnam National Administration of Tourism
WEF	World Economic Forum
WTTC	World Travel & Tourism Council

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Thesis purpose

Today traveling became an essential demand and a dispensable part of modern life. Tourism is one of the most significant industries all over the world. It plays a key role in fostering the global economic growth and brings about developments of other sectors such as property, investment, hospitality, transport, recreation and service. Tourism industry is the great generator of a vast amount of jobs across national and regional economies, approximately contributing 6-7% of worldwide employment, both direct and indirect jobs (World Tourism Organization). For its enormous benefits, many countries recently have placed much more efforts on the sustainable development of this “smokeless industry.” To Vietnam, as seen from practicality, tourism industry affirmed an important position in national economy with every passing day. Vietnam has sufficient tourism resources like natural beauty and cultural values as neighboring countries. However, the number of international visitors to Vietnam is still much lower than other countries in Asia area. Many tourism experts and economists evaluated the contribution of tourism to Vietnamese economy has not been worthy of advantages and potential Vietnam possesses. From this issue, a search for an appropriate strategy for Vietnam tourism has been debating on media and economic references and drawn wide attention of various stakeholders like policy makers, investors, professionals and others who are interested in sustainable tourism in recent years. The role of marketing for sustainable tourism development becomes more essential and pressing than ever. This study will present the analysis of Vietnam tourism, and the recommendations on several marketing aspects, including branding, advertising, internet-based communication, product development and niche market focus. All these aspects are in-depth analyzed and studied in attempt on improving the current Vietnam tourism environment and facilitating long term development.

1.2 Research questions

The study is focused to answer the questions as follows:

- Why Vietnam has enormous natural and cultural resources much more than other Asia's tourism industries, its tourism was still lagging behind them?
- What is the image appropriate for Vietnam tourism's brand?
- Which elements in the tourism advertisement should be modified and focused to produce an effective advertising that is worth to its budget?
- With abundant benefits from Internet, what can Vietnam do to market the tourism?
- What are the tour segments that Vietnam tourism should focus on to make the most of its tourism potentials and advantages?

1.3 Research methods

In the study, the qualitative and quantitative research methods are applied. The quantitative method is involved in collecting data from the credible sources of VNAT, GSO, UNTWO, WTTC, PATA. Since then, the data are compared, analyzed and integrated into the figures in order to create a clearly view for readers, about the issues related to economic growth, tourism growth rate, number of international visitors and forecast.

The qualitative method is applied in an in-depth interview with Mr. Adam Bray via email about several aspects of Vietnam tourism. Mr. Bray is American travel writer and journalist working with news media CNN, CNNGo, The Economist and BBC. He is an expert on Indochina history, culture, geography and tourism. His works were published in no less than 20 books and trustworthy travel guide magazines

such as ThingsAsian Press, Vietnam Pathfinder, National Geographic, Oryx (Qatar Airlines). With his travel experience and deep knowledge on Vietnamese cultures and tourism, Mr. Bray provides a frank and useful interview on Vietnam tourism that came out one of the information source for this study. The detailed interview is listed in the Appendix at the end of this thesis.

All the information, data and statistics are carefully collected, analyzed and applied to this study from the trusted sources to gain the highest credibility and preciseness of this study.

1.4 Thesis structure

The thesis is divided into nine parts presenting the content as follows:

Part 1: Introduce about the study including the objectives, research methodologies, and a structure for easy accessibility

Part 2: Present the general context of tourism in the world in term of the number of international arrivals, revenues, market shares amongst the regions in the crisis period and the overview of promotion activities for the recovery in 2010. There is a small part introducing about the goals which was set out in the government's development policy for the period 2001 – 2010.

Part 3: Give short facts of Vietnam to prove its tourism advantages. Then, there is a presentation on the positive and negative side of the current Vietnam tourism's situation and an optimistic forecast for its growth in future

Part 4: This is purely about academic theory of marketing and tourism. It introduces about the principal role of marketing in business as well as in tourism industry.

Part 5: Study about branding theory and the elements to build Vietnam's brand by two step: seeking the image and symbol for Vietnam tourism and develop the visual types with core values to communicate to the prospects

Part 6: Discuss on the advertising with its definition, categorization and detailed presentation in building an effective advertising clips for Vietnam tourism through steps of setting objectives, message design, message performance and media selection.

Part 7: About the Internet-based marketing's role. Firstly, there is an introduction on its benefits to tourism business. Secondly, it discusses on the Internet using as a communication tool.

Part 8: Presents the importance of developing the existing product line and concentrating on niche markets for two purposes of well exploiting the tourism potentials and approaching various segment and niche markets

Part 9: Conclusion of the learning outcomes from the whole study

2 GENERAL CONTEXT OF TOURISM IN 2010

2.1 Overview of worldwide tourism since the crisis year of 2008

In recognition of its profound economic power, many regions and countries have placed great efforts on tourism's sustainable development into wide ranges. Tourism became one of the important industries whose contribution to GDP and employment and growth rate are all at high level in the 2000s. In 2009, total world's international tourist arrivals was 880 million; however, it went down by 4.2% due to global economic crisis since late 2008, and tourism receipts dropped by 5.7% compared to the previous year. Among the world's regions, Asia's tourism seemed less being affected than others. It reduced by only 2% of international arrivals whilst other regions suffered loss around 5-6%.

Figure 1: International tourism arrivals, recipes and market share in 2009



Source: Kester J. 2009

As shown in the figure 1, there are totally 880 million international tourist arrivals and USD 852 billion recorded in the whole world in 2009. The profit number in 2009 is 0.7% less than in 2008. Europe took the lead in both the number of arrivals and turnover with 460 million international arrivals, occupying more than half of total market share. Asia and the Pacific region followed at the second place with 21% of the world's international arrivals and seized nearly a quarter of total tourism income. American countries came third with 141 million international tourists and generated USD 165 billion. Finally, Middle East and Africa had nearly the same market share in arrivals. These two regions had totally 99 million international tourists and reached USD 29 billion, much less than other regions. The year of 2009 was the bad year for most of countries and economic areas. The decrease of tourism industry was also inevitable due to high unemployment rate and crude oil price caused by the global downturn since the end of 2008. All the travel agencies and Tourism Boards put more efforts to improve business situations by designing economical tour packages and giving more special offer to attract travelers. In Asia, there were many promotion launched in 2009 to stimulate travel demands for both domestic and international tourism. For example, Vietnam launched "Impressive Vietnam" campaign; Hong Kong concentrated on green tourism with "Hong Kong Nature Kaleidoscope" and applied a visa-free agreement with Russia; China issued travel coupons or Australia launched marketing campaign "No leave no life" on March 2009, according to the report of the 22nd Joint Meeting of the UNWTO Commission for East Asia and the Pacific and the UNWTO Commission for South Asia held in Hanoi, Vietnam's capital in May 2010.

In 2010, alongside the improved global economy, the world witnessed the strong rebound of worldwide tourism industries beyond expectation. International arrivals of the whole world climbed up by 6.7% and increased 58 million against 2009, reached 935 million arrivals and 22 million more than the pre-crisis peak level of 2008 (913 million at that time). Being the first region to recover and having the highest growth rate with 204 million international visitors last year, 181 million higher than 2009, Asia was praised for its strong capacity of resiliency alike the

previous situations such as the Asia's financial crisis in 1997 – 1998, SARS outbreak in 2003 or tsunami in 2004.

Table 1: International tourism 2010 and forecast 2011

	International tourism 2010			Forecast
	Arrivals	Market share	Growth rate	2011
World	936	100%	6.7%	4-5%
Europe	473	51%	3.2%	2-4%
Asia and the Pacific	204	22%	12.6%	7-9%
Americas	150	16%	7.7%	4-6%
Africa	49	5%	6.4%	4-7%
Middle East	60	6%	13.9%	7-10%

Source: Data collected from UNWTO

2.2 Vietnam's tourism strategy from 2001 to 2010

From 1990s, Vietnam carried out reforming the whole country with many renovation policies to expand markets and open to foreign trade. At the end of the 1990s, Vietnam began to get noticed by international public as an emerging market with high growth speed. Alongside receiving considerable flows of foreign investment, Vietnam welcomed international visitors much more since then. At that time Vietnamese Government signed a decision on approval of "Vietnam Tourism Development Strategy 2001–2010" in order to enhance national tourism industry in accordance with the world's trend.

The main objectives of Vietnam tourism marketing strategy:

- Effectively taking advantage of nature, ecology, historical and cultural traditions; mobilizing human resource, courting international co-operation and support to develop tourism as the spearhead economic sector contributing to the country's industrialization and modernization.

- Strive to reach 3–3.5 million international arrivals to Vietnam, 15–16 million domestic arrivals with USD 2 billion of revenue in 2005
- Strive to reach 5.5–6 million international arrivals, 25–26 million domestic arrivals, USD 4–4.5 billion of revenue in 2010

(Information System of Strategy, Plan and Project)

In brief, tourism is one of the most lucrative and fast-growing industries in the world. It has been increasing continually in term of the number of international arrivals and tourist expenditure. In realization of the tourism's potentials in many aspects, Vietnam had proposed a strategic plan for the period of 2001–2010 with great efforts to develop the tourism and got remarkable achievements which are mainly contributed by the national tourism resources and advertising campaigns.

3 VIETNAM TOURISM FACTS

3.1 Basic facts

Vietnam locates on the peninsula of South Asia, contiguous to China, Laos, Cambodia, Gulf of Thailand, and Gulf of Tonkin. Vietnam is a tropical country with diverse topography consisting of densely mountains, hills, forests, rivers, seas, two great deltas and plateau, waterfalls. Hills and mountains make up three quarters of the surface area and a long coastline stretches 3,444 kilometers from North to South. The climate varies amongst the regions. The average temperature is around 22°C to 27°C with high rain volume and humidity, suitable for traveling all around the year. Vietnam's natural richness is a valuable resource for the development of economy and tourism.

Vietnam accounts no less than 54 ethnics mainly living in remote areas, having their own languages and cultural identity. Additionally, in the colonial time of

China, France and America, Vietnam acquired their cultural quintessence that partly comprises a diversified culture of Vietnam. Vietnamese culture was dramatically influenced from Chinese and French, seen through the architecture of temples, churches and housing. With the long-lasting history, Vietnam has more than seven thousand heritages related to history, culture marking the periods of establishing, protecting and developing the country in the past.

The following information is the basic facts of Vietnam and the most popular destinations within Vietnam are shown on the figure 2.

Official name	The Socialist Republic of Vietnam
Independence	2 nd September 1945 (from France)
Capital	Ha Noi
Political party	Communist
Region	East Asia and Pacific
Location	in Southeastern Asia, bordering the Gulf of Thailand, Gulf of Tonkin, East Sea and China, Laos, and Cambodia
Total area	331,210 sq km
Land area	329,560 sq km
Coastline	3,444 sq km
Terrain	low, flat delta in south and north; central highlands; hilly, mountainous in far north and northwest
Climate	tropical in south; monsoonal in north with hot, rainy season (May to September) and warm, dry season (October to March)
Major tourist destinations	Ho Chi Minh, Ha Noi, NhaTrang, Da Nang, Hoi An, Hue, Ha Long Bay, Tay Nguyen, Me Kong Delta, Mui Ne, PhanThiet, Sapa, Da Lat

Religion	Buddhist 9.3%, Catholic 6.7%, HoaHao 1.5%, Cao Dai 1.1%, Protestant 0.5%, Muslim 0.1%, none 80.8%
Language	Vietnamese, French, Chinese, English, and Khmer, some other dialects
Time zone	GMT/UTC +7
Internet country code	.vn
Monetary	dong (VND)

Figure 2: Map of Vietnam



Source: CIA, Worldbank

The world heritages in Vietnam recognized by UNESCO include:

Tangible heritages:

- Central Sector of the Imperial Citadel of Thang Long – Ha Noi (2010)
- Complex of Hue Monuments (1993)
- Hoi An Ancient Town (1999)
- My Son Sanctuary (1999)
- Ha Long Bay (1994) and currently in the 28 candidate finalist of New7Wonders of Nature campaign
- PhongNha – Ke Bang National Park (2003)
- Temple of Literature stelae – Ha Noi (2010)

Intangible heritages:

- The Cultural Space of Gong in the Central Highlands (2005)
- NhaNhac (the Royal Refined music) of Hue (2003)
- Quan ho BacNinh folk songs (2009)
- CaTru singing (2009)

(UNESCO, New7Wonders)

Vietnam is also appraised by international community as a peaceful country with stable politics and constant economic growth. This is a safe place for travelling and business establishment.

3.2 The current situation of Vietnam tourism industry

3.2.1 Achievements of Vietnam tourism

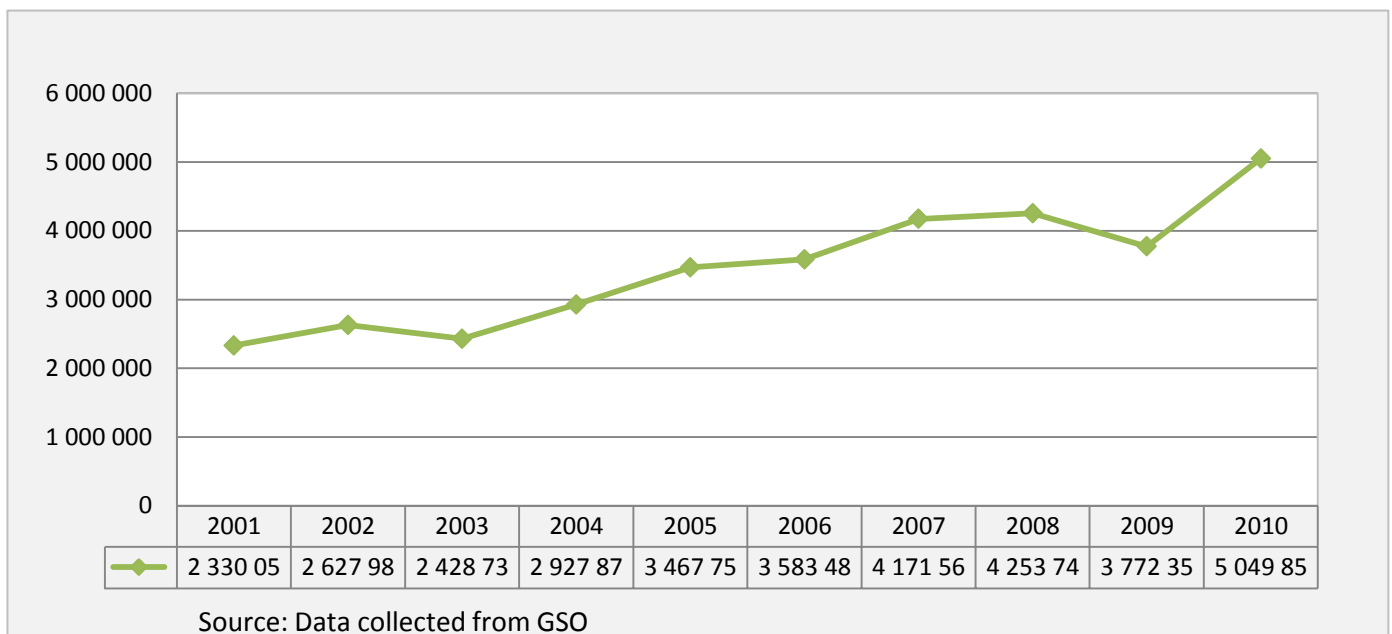
Upon on the proposed objectives, Vietnamese government appointed leadership levels and ministries to put the strategy in force. The investment from government, internal and external entrepreneurs into infrastructure, tourism technology and facilities, tourism destination and business management system has changed the complexion of tourism step by step. It scored the successively remarkable performances by year-over-year reaped profit and outstanding contributions to economic growth, poverty reduction, social security assurance, historical and cultural preservation, and environment conservation as well.

Tourist segments are expanded and varied from East and South Asia, Europe, North America and other continents. For supplying to the strongly increasing travel demand, Vietnam has focused on developing infrastructure and hospitality sector to facilitate transportation and accommodation. In 2008, Vietnam had 8,556 accommodations with total 170,551 rooms in which there were 4,283 five-star-standard hotels, totally 109,198 rooms. At that time, the tourism had more than 600 international and 10,000 domestic travel companies. Vietnam actively joined in cooperation of organizations; international and regional co-operation mechanism about tourism such as ASEAN, APEC, ASEM, UNWTO, PATA. (Foreign Trade Summit, 2008) Thus, the tourism relationships with other countries are stepped up and intensified e.g. “Passion Indochine” with Laos and Cambodia, collaboration commitments with Thailand, Sichuan, Myanmar, and Egypt. Moreover, Vietnam frequently participates in many tourism exhibitions and fairs along with implementing the promotion activities in order to further the tourism industry.

Ten years ago, the international visitors to Vietnam was as half as those to Philippines and equal to one fortieth of Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. At present, the distance has been shortened year by year and surpass over Philippines. The recent tourism’s growth rate is about 20% on average annually. In 1994, there were only 1 million international arrivals to Vietnam, until 2006, this number was raised to approximately 3.6 million, then continued up to more than 5 million last year 2010. As illustrated in figure 3, the number of international arrivals

to Vietnam had been spiraling upward particularly fast from 2001 to 2010, except an unavoidable drop in 2009 because of the global economic recession. However, Vietnam's recovery competence was rather impressive when the foreign tourists jumped sharply in last 2010, relatively 34% up compared to the previous crisis years.

Figure 3: The development of international arrivals to Vietnam in last decade



According to the report of World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) (April 2011), Vietnam ranked 47th, 54th and 12th respectively in terms of the overall tourism development, the sector's contribution to the national economy, and the long-term (10-year) tourist growth. In 2010, the tourism contributed 3.9% of the national GDP and about 3% of the labor force, nearly 1,397 million labors working directly in tourism. Moreover, the indirect contribution was valued at about USD 12.5 billion, accounting for 12.4% of GDP with over 4.5 million indirect labors. The revenue from international tourists was estimated at USD 4.58 billion, gaining 6.7% of the total national export in 2010. It is expected by VNAT to reach USD 15.9 billion within next 10 years. And thanks to the tourism's dramatic expansion, hotel sector rose by 27.8% with the additional 10,447 rooms (STR Global Construction Pipeline Report, TravelWeekly 2011). Vietnamese economy as a whole and tourism

industry in particular is the promising markets for foreign and domestic investors recently.

Owing to the stable politics, temperate climate, natural richness, amazing beauty of beach cities and antique architecture, Vietnam was honored to be chosen as the destination of many large scale and prevalent events such as Miss Earth 2007, Miss Universe 2008, Miss Earth 2010, APEC Summit 2006. In April 2011, the forth International Fireworks Competition 2011, which took place annually on the banks of Han River at Da Nang beach city, attracted a fairly great number of external and internal visitors.

At the moment, Vietnam is the destination favored by lots of international tourists, especially tourists from Australia, Japan, Singapore and Thailand. This is the result from a survey, by PATA and Visa International Company and largely announced in mid-November 2010, on 7000 people at more than 10 countries and territories. In the beginning of May 2011, TripAdvisor© – World's most trusted travel advice™ reported Traveler's Choice Destinations Awards ranked by worldwide travelers. The results were that two tourist destinations at Vietnam, Ha Long Bay and Hoi An Antique Town, listed in "Top 25 Destinations in Asia". Additionally, Vietnam was introduced in a publication named "50 Tours of a Lifetime" that recommends "a 14-day-excursion" with "action-packed with quintessential Vietnamese experiences". This is the sixth publication released by National Geographic, a famous travel magazine. It was said that Lonely Planet recently added Sapa, a mountainous province situated in the northern Vietnam, amongst the world's best tourist attractions like the Grand Canyon in the US, Mount Cook in New Zealand, Lake District in England or Torres de Paine in Chile in its list of "Top 10 places to walk" (Lookatvietnam.com, May 2011).

In general, Vietnam harvested a large profit from this thriving industry thanks to the efforts of tourism improvement and a soaring economy which has partly attracted domestic and foreign investments in multi aspects. Apart from frequently launched marketing campaigns to introduce and enhance Vietnam tourism, the efforts and

cooperation from travel agencies in attempt of creating new tour packages and continuously upgrading competence staff and service quality, in order to meet traveler's higher demands and keep pace with new tourism trends in region and the world, contributed for the optimistic results.

3.2.2 Estimation and forecast for Vietnam tourism

The following figures are estimations at tourism industry's contribution to economy of the world and Vietnam in 2011 and forecast for 2021, as far as GDP, employment, visitor export, spending and capital investment are concerned.

Table 2: The estimation and forecast for worldwide tourism industry's contributions

	2011	2021
Direct contribution to GDP	1,850	2,861
Total contribution to GDP	5,991.9	9,226.9
Direct contribution to employment (thousand jobs)	99,048	120,427
Total contribution to employment (thousand jobs)	258,592	323,826
Visitor exports	1,163	1,789
Domestic spending	2,637	4,128
Leisure spending	2,963	4,604
Business spending	899	1,402
Capital investment	651	1,124

Source: Data collected from WTTC (February 2011), unit: USD billion, 2011 constant prices and exchange rates

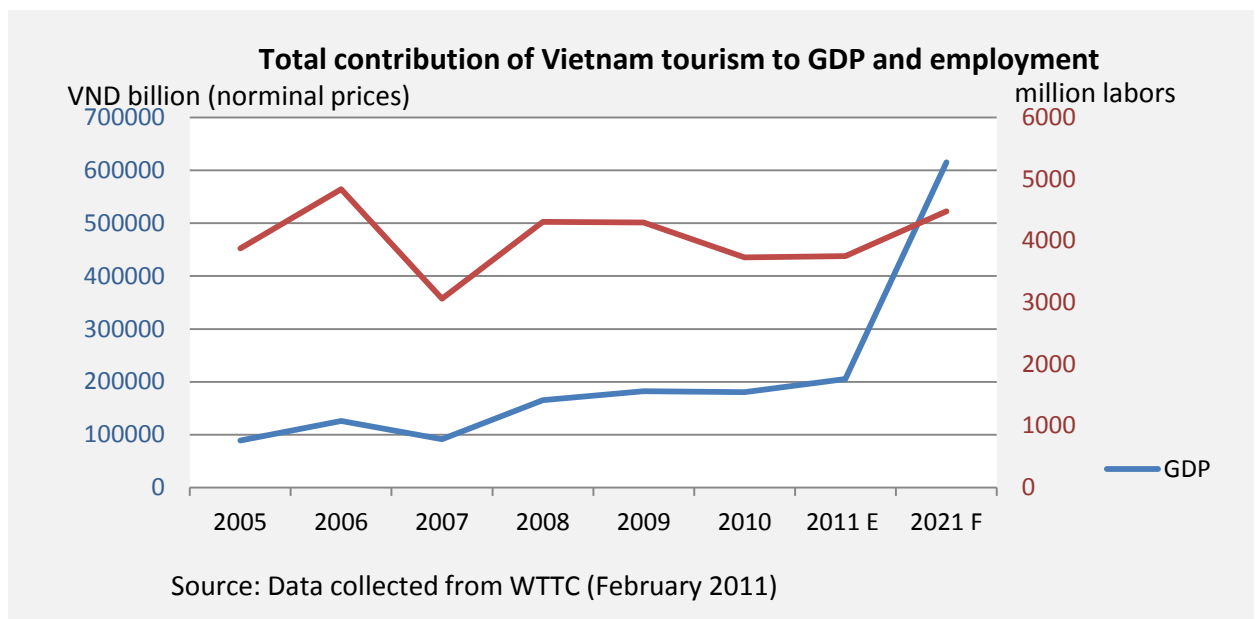
Despite having to cope with economic challenges in 2011 like oil price escalation, travel industry is still expected to be the fastest growing one in the world. As reported in table 2, worldwide tourism industry's direct contribution to global GDP went up by 3.3%, to USD 1,770 billion in the recovery year 2010. This number is

forecasted to be further by 4.5% to USD 1850 billion with 3 million more jobs for direct workforce during 2011; and expected to double by 2021. Especially in respect of capital investment, it is hoped to get a rise of approximately 42% in 2021 over 2011. Tourism is said to be the category generating the fourth largest export capability globally after fuels, chemicals and automotive products. This is also the substantial source of foreign exchange income and the number one export category for most of developing countries in the world. In 2011, the exports by international visitors are hoped to reach USD 1,163 billion for the whole world. Moreover, it is estimated that worldwide international arrivals will reach 1.6 billion by 2020.

As a whole, worldwide tourism has an optimistic prediction in the first ten years of new millennium. Particularly, emerging countries are hoped for its dramatic growth and powerful capability of fostering both international and domestic travel. Another forecast announced by PATA (March 2011), among Asian sub-regions, Southeast Asia would be the fastest growing one with over 8%, subsequently South Asia at about 7.5% and Northeast Asia with over 7% per annum.

Figure 4 below reveals an estimation of a continued rise in total Vietnam tourism contribution to GDP in 2011, reaching USD 10.37 billion. It is also forecasted to triple in next 10 years. In aspect of employment, there is only a very slight increase in 2011. Besides, this organization also estimates that Vietnam tourism can get invested by USD 4.59 billion at the end of 2011. It seems that after a successful recovery year 2010, Vietnam tourism would step a bit slowly forward than the previous years, though it's believed to continue expanding by WTTC experts. By 2021, Vietnam is forecasted to serve total 6,585,000 international tourist arrivals (WTTC, February 2011).

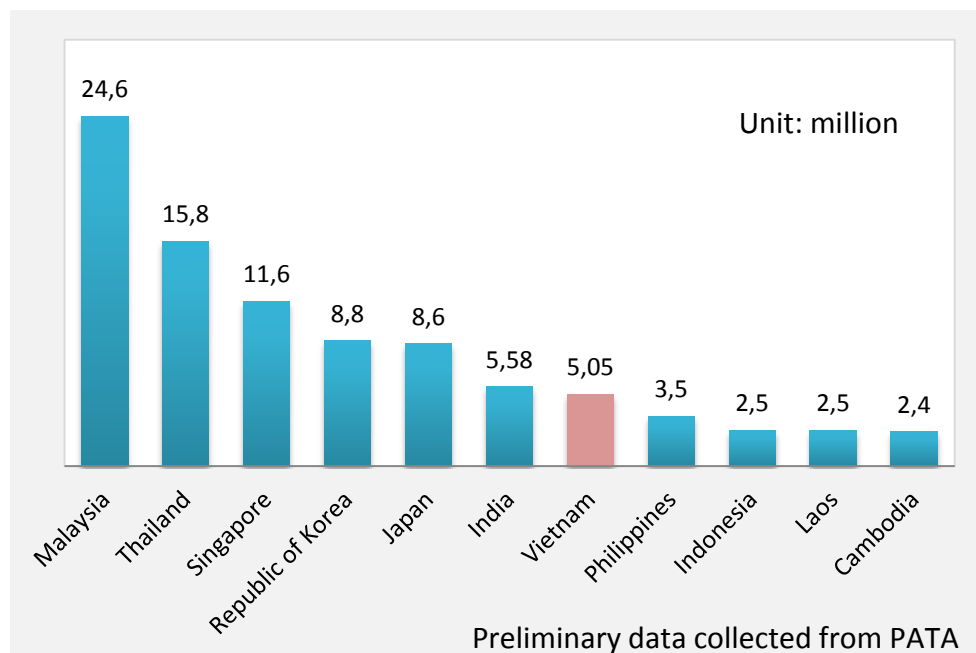
Figure 4: The total contribution of Vietnam tourism to GDP and employment from 2005 to 2010 actual, 2011 estimated and 2021 forecasted



3.2.3 Limitations in Vietnam tourism

On account of Government's new policies and every united efforts in many areas including the first tourism marketing strategy, Vietnam tourism has stepped towards a greater height and got optimistic results in these past 10 years. Vietnam currently has the international tourist number higher than some nations; but it's still so far behind Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand – the most famous countries Asia tourism. As visible in the chart below, Vietnam's quantity of foreign visitors is still very humble when placed next to others.

Figure 5: Total number of international visitors by countries in 2010



In the attempt of developing the tourism, Vietnamese Government aimed at preservation and rebuilding policies, infrastructure construction, transport upgrading, hospitality investment in general. Furthermore, there are the efforts on professionally training tourism and hospitality staff, creating new tour packages, and promotion campaign every year consisting of television advertisement, sales promotion, participation in tourism fairs, etc. Nonetheless, such development strategy is evaluated to be incoherent, unmethodical and versatile. There are undurable elements, both in macro and micro-environment. Here are some common disadvantages in Vietnam tourism:

- Insufficient infrastructure
- Monotonous, low quality and less competitive services and tour packages
- Unexploited and undiscovered natural and geographic advantages
- Separate performance in strategic development and lack of co-operation amongst regions, areas, Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Sport and travel agencies
- Unmanageable hygienic state
- Tourist scamming

In the researcher's point of view, the marketing strategy in period of 2001-2010 fundamentally was lack of profession and consistency amongst campaigns and should be modified to get better outcome for next coming years as expected. To date, tourism is a lucrative business for both private entrepreneur and a national economy; hence, it should be put in a good development strategy with vigorous support from marketing activities. In the scope of thesis, the writer will focus on the marketing issues that partly help the strategic development of Vietnam tourism, including branding, advertising, Internet-based marketing, and product development.

4 MARKETING AND TOURISM

4.1 Basic theory of marketing

One of the very first definition of marketing by Kotler (2000, 4) is "a societal process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating, offering, and exchanging products and services of value freely with others." Marketing is described as the intermediary in the process of bringing product or service from the business to the customer. Customer information having been gathered by the marketing department will be transferred to the business in order to, consequently, design a product or service that meets customer's wants and expectations. Once the product or service has been created, the marketing department will determine how to communicate about their differences and benefits to the customers (Moore & Pareek 2006, 8). The most discreet and succinct description about marketing, in the writer's view, is by Meldrum and McDonald (2007, 3) as "the way in which an organization matches its human, financial and physical resources with the wants and needs of its customers."

Primarily only big companies with profound capital use marketing but today marketing is applied widely in most categories, from FMCG to services, or in business groups such as law, medical, finance, construction, politics and so forth. Marketing also plays a vital role in the non-profit or governmental organizations like charity funds, national museums, hospitals, schools or police department. Each day we can see abundance of marketing forms packed into our daily life by various ways, times and places: advertising on television at home, big billboards at bus-waiting station or while being in traffic jam, on radio when seeking for morning news, logos or messages on household objects we use, corporate website full of information or banners on the internet and numerous events, promotions easily caught up in every places. Along with the changing economic and competitive environment, to date, marketing has been applied widely in much more effective and sophisticated ways than ever. Instead of executing every sole promotion, there is a trend for entrepreneurs to practice the Integrated Marketing Communication by mix up several communication tools to deliver a powerful and consistent message as well as to create relationship marketing to customers.

The two most essential goals of marketing is indicated firstly, to attract new customers and secondly, to retain customers. It is the performance of building and maintaining customer loyalty by incessantly satisfying customer needs and wants (Moore & Pareek 2006, 9). In other words, the creation of value and satisfaction for customers is the main point of modern marketing devising and implementing, emphasized by Kotler (2000, 6).

Significantly, marketing is much more than a separate function in business; it is a philosophy to drive the entire organization forward and require the efforts of the whole organization from management levels to logistic staff.

4.2 Marketing concept in tourism

Tourism is primarily about human activity which involves travel from an originating area to a destination for pleasure or business purpose. The concept embraces

cultural, economic and social exchange processes. These elements are inextricably bound together in a mesh of activity which we refer to as travel and tourism (Lumsdon 1997, 1). This industry consists of hospitality, attractions and events, transport, travel organizers' and intermediaries' sector and lastly, destination organization sector (Middleton, Fyall, Morgan&Ranchhod 2009, 11). Today tourism is one of the fastest growing and most competitive industries in the world. Every countries and destinations strive to attract more tourists and begin to pay attention to marketing their places. However, tourism needs marketing vigorously than other products because audiences in this sector have a great deal of choices and complicated variety of motivations for travel and the diversity of this industry (Raju 2009, 116).

Tourism is similar to other business sectors which firstly need a good product or service, and then secondly an effective marketing campaign is run to communicate product or service features and information to consumer. Besides that, it needs to continually innovate and develop product to keep it competitive against competitors. As the globalization and high competitiveness in tourism industry, the aspects of tourism product creativity and communication effectiveness are vital elements to attract tourists and to gain repeated visits. Lumsdon (1997, 25) stated that "Tourism marketing is the managerial process of anticipating and satisfying existing and potential visitor wants more effectively than competitive suppliers or destinations. The management of exchange is driven by profit, community gain, or both; either way long term success depends on a satisfactory interaction between customer and supplier. It also means securing environmental and social needs as well as core consumer satisfaction. They can no longer be regarded as mutually exclusive." He concluded that tourism marketing encompasses destination marketing to existing and potential visitors through a variety of intermediaries, following a market plan and using marketing management tools accordingly. Marketing for tourism requires a mix of various marketing tools due to its complicated nature of both service and products. In other words, it contains both intangible and tangible values of service and product.

Similar to other sectors in economy, the final goals of long-term tourism marketing plan are not apart from appealing to travelers, occupying a position in traveler mind, and selling as much vacations as possible by means of ordinary marketing communications such as branding, internet marketing, advertising, sales promotions, exhibition fairs, etc. Aside from these common techniques, tourism marketing requires collaboration among levels of authorities and leaderships as well as citizenship awareness in order to create a tourism development.

5 BRANDING

The brand has been defined in many ways over the years and becoming an effective tool in marketing. A brand is “a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller’s good or service as distinct from those of other sellers”, according to American Marketing Association, it is any label that carries meaning and associations. Kotler (2003, 8) emphasized that a great brand works more than a merely symbol: “It lends coloration and resonance to a product or service.” Branding is the combination of the whole marketing mix, leading to a brand image in which a set of messages is conveyed to the consumer and must be regarded as the focus of the marketing effort (Blythe 2000, 124). Applying this marketing approach to realm of tourism and destination, destination brand is completely defined as follows:

- Visual designs e.g. a name, symbol, logo, word, graphic identify and differentiate the destination
- Convey the promise of a memorable travel experience in the destination
- Consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of destination experience

(Kerr 2006, cited by RohanLaksiri 2009, 20)

Similar to product and service branding, destination branding is a long-term strategy whereby it actively obtains competitive identity by positioning internationally as a good place for foreign direct investment, commerce, immigration and traveling. For the benefits reaped from diverse areas, destination branding is strongly focused amongst countries to promote their countries, cities or tourist. To date, people have many tourist destination choices but less time for decision making. Despite the multiplicity of destinations all over the world, only a few have reference position in the prospective tourist's mind or "awareness set". The concept of destination branding dates back to the 1970s and understood to be a competitive tool in gaining the prospect's mind over the competitors (Woodside, Sherrell & Lysonski 1977, 1989, cited by Kozak & Andreu 2006, 73). With numerous nature- and culture-based potentials, Vietnam still has less foreign tourists than China, Malaysia and Thailand. It is due to the fact that Vietnam has not yet built a successful tourism brand as well as distinctive country's image to communicate to the world. Branding is an integral part in long term strategy for Vietnam tourism development with the basic tasks including: building brand image and awareness, core values, united and clear message.

5.1 Positioning country's image and core values

For a strong tourism brand, firstly, it is to create a well-defined and unique brand personality; then continues with consistent and appropriate advertising and careful brand guardianship (Davies 2003). Sharing this point of view, Kotler and Keller (2006, 272) listed brand positioning establishment as the first step in the four step process of strategic brand management, and followed by a brand marketing plan and implementation. They all stressed that shaping a brand image is the basic, significant and preferential thing in building a brand. Two nations with such similarities still could have different level of tourist attractiveness, almost depending on tourist's perception about country's image or tourist destination. Lack of an appropriate image leads to hinder the development strategy of Vietnam tourism in last decade. Tim Russell (Vietnamnet, March 2011), Managing Director of 'Come & Go Vietnam' travel agency in Vietnam, made an assessment on

Vietnam tourism's image: "Vietnam is a friendly, joyful country, where the prices are reasonable. However, the images Vietnam introduced to the world have not reflected these things yet." Significantly, branding is not advertising, it should be done before pouring a big sum of money into advertising campaigns. Vietnam did the way round when spending tourism budget into broadcasting television advertisement on expensive channels like CNN, BBC that did not bring much results to Vietnam tourism due to lack of a distinct image and clear message to distinguish itself from competitions. For most of tourist, Vietnam's image is so obscure. It seems that foreigners still remember and know most about Vietnam as a resilient country in war time than a vibrant and charming destination today. Vietnam's current promotions are not powerful enough to fade away strong impression on Vietnam's war and introduce pretty landscapes as well as build a new portray for Vietnam. It should be back to the very first step: figure out a distinct symbols and images that have recall ability in foreigner's mind and then develop them into a tourism icon to appeal more tourists. A deeply memorable, exclusive and inspiring symbol linked to a destination should be created and leveraged. Actually Vietnam does not have grandiose architectural works or notable icon to be differentiated from others like the Great Wall in China or the Eiffel Tower in France. However, the country's image can originate from existing nature, culture and history like exotic landscape, long-lasting culture and tradition, local spirit and value, which might reflect the energy, possibility and pride of the nation (Mendiratta, CNN Task Group). Looking at some case studies from developed-tourism countries, they all have a cleverly created and communicated images and messages for branding tourism and the whole country. Additionally, a brand should try to own a word in prospect's mind (RiesA&Ries L. 2002, 22). If a visible image is what consumer can see and identify a company's product or service, a word is somewhat a perception about that company's brand. In other word, it is the core values the company would like to offer to customers. For example, a word of Mercedes is 'prestige'; Volvo is 'safety'; or Thailand is 'exotic, fun'. They are in combination to create a brand equity, which is the added value attached to product or service. It is defined as "...the dimensions that distinguish brand knowledge and affect consumer response are the awareness of the brand

(in terms of brand recall and recognition) and the favorability, strength, an uniqueness of the brand associations in consumer memory” and an emotional relationship should be established with the customer by ensuring an accordance between the customer’s need and the brand’s values and features (Keller 1993, Hankinson & Cowking 1993, cited by Rohan Laksiri 2009, 19)

Japan is a good example of destination branding due to the distinctively traditional culture. Kimono, Japanese-architecture temples, festivals, cherry blossom or Mt. Fuji are the images exclusively associated with this “Land of the Rising Sun”. Japan is always attempting in preservation and bringing into play the traditional heritages. Japanese are carefully educated about their traditions, customs and etiquettes at schools, for example, they learn about Japanese gastronomy, complicated Kimono dressing worn frequently in Japanese festivals. The image of colorful Kimono demonstrating around streets in Japan in well-organized traditional festivals is really impressive to foreigners who once witnessed. And it seems to be one of Japan’s most characterized images. Vietnam has specific traditions from its rich culture of which however has not been really made use well. And the conventional Vietnamese-cachet festivals are not largely and creatively promoted to the world. Besides, there are several ancient ceremonies, arts and entertainments are slowly falling into oblivion through years because of the lack of awareness and preservation from youth generation. Even Vietnamese traditional costume – Ao Dai seems less favored by the youth and faded away rapidly in most festivals nowadays. Last year Vietnamese was called upon to wear Ao Dai in New Year days again in order to raise the cultural awareness amongst youth community. Besides, it will be more effective by organizing community activities involved in culture preservation frequently and encouraging the youth’s participations. These cultural activities firstly can help raise Vietnamese’s awareness of ethical traditions, especially youngster and children; secondly, it will emphasize an interesting Vietnam’s image in eyes of foreigners. Additionally, for the long term tourism development, Vietnam should intensify education of traditional heritages in schools including Vietnamese cuisine cooking, old aged kinds of arts, entertainments, musical instruments, handicrafts or else they will be

vanished away in the near future. Another thing, whereas Japan designed February 23rd as Mount Fuji Day because they love their “iconic peak” and was trying to get Mt. Fuji listed in natural heritage (Ishida 2011), Vietnam seems not know how to promote the natural favors, for instance, Ha Long Bay. In fact, Ha Long Bay was recognized as the World Natural Heritage by UNESCO in 1994 and was in the 28 candidate shortlist of World’s New Seven Wonders of Nature in 2009. This beautiful bay always is the must-visit destination of most and able to become a unique tourism icon for Vietnam.

Another success in country’s image promotion is Singapore whose culture is described as a melting pot since cultural influence from China, Malaysia and India. Instead of using culture to promote tourism, Singapore has positioned itself as a ‘shopping paradise’. Thousands of shopping centers operates all over Singapore and launches sales promos around the years. That attracts thousands of Asian shopaholics to flock to this destination every year or even each season for shopping only. Otherwise, Singapore is also well known for its cleanliness in the world. A survey in 1998 among a board selection of travelers and tourist agents from United States, Japan, India , Germany, Australia, United Kingdom and Sweden by Malaysian Tourism Promotion Board, Singapore was seen as “clean, modern and safe” (Davies 2003), that is Singapore’s positioning in people’s mind. Even though Vietnamese cuisines are favored by foreign visitors and proposed to be a competitive advantage for Vietnam tourism by Kotler (The SaiGon Times 2011), hygiene issues on streets and at vendors are highly concerned. It proves that a country is capable of creating a positive image out to the world at large as well as to become an appeal to tourists by human-made and citizen’s awareness.

The last case study is Thailand, successfully creating a brand image of “exotic, fun, and friendly people”. The word “exotic” and “fun” imply tourist activities in Thailand with distinctive entertainment arousing tourist’s curiosity. Moreover, its former slogan “Thailand - The Land of the Smiles” was so successful thanks to the local’s supports. Especially, sellers and photographers here never ask with insistence or force them buy something with a very high price. Conversely, buying

something in Vietnam sometimes could frustrate and tire tourist out of refusing when seller follows tourist and begging them to buy souvenir. Scamming, annoyance and poor customer service in small trade or street vendors are hindrance to tourism growth and to tourist to approach local culture.

The differentiation is the critical thing to emphasize image of a country into the prospect's mind. Vietnam does not lack of advantages and distinctions to develop tourism brand personality and build differentiations to other countries. First of all, it is wildness and variety of Vietnam's nature. Beside the currently famous tourist destinations, Vietnam still has other unexploited potentials yet. With diversified topography, Vietnam possesses seas, mountains, wildly tropical forests, and especially the weather suitable for travelling in the whole year. Secondly, it is about culture. Vietnam has diversified culture due to many ethnics living in Vietnam and long-lasting quintessence in Vietnamese culture and belief. It will be a waste that Vietnam did not introduce and marketing enough the image of their 7 natural and cultural heritages that was recognized by UNESCO to elevate them to tourism icon. The most important thing is safety. The security and safety issues, which are most concerned in travel destination choice, are affirmed by the images of President Dmitry Medvedev or Bill Clinton spontaneously strolling through Old Quarter in Vietnam's capital and talking with the friendly locals. The variety and contrast in life rhythms amongst regions and cities within Vietnam can be promoted as the tourist appeal. Whereas many energetic cities emerged as the economic hub, there are rural regions that still maintain the tranquility or even not get impacted by science technology. As suggested by Adam Bray, Vietnam can base on many unique things like cuisine, French architecture legacy, Champa culture, unique wildlife or hill tribe cultures to build the tourism brand. Unfortunately, these characters of local culture and the recognized natural heritages are not promoted to communicate a positive Vietnam's image out to the world. Significantly, Vietnam is the world's second coffee exporter after Brazil, the world's second rice exporter after Thailand and among the world's top exporters in agriculture, aquaculture, forestry, and other things. These economic efforts are not promoted properly and wasted in marketing aspect. Although there is no direct

relation between these ranks and tourism, they are partly creating a positive image of a country. And the country's image always influences tourist choice to some extent. A proper and creative positioning is a necessary task for Vietnam tourism at this time for further development.

Beside the high evaluation and compliments for a changing Vietnam in many aspects, there have been shortcomings for a long time that diminish Vietnam's image and affect tourism operation e.g. scamming the tourists. The shortcoming, if not solved timely, might cause image crisis for a long term. Hence, in addition to brand and core values creating, the country needs to take positive actions to change reality. In other words, changing actual reality is the parallel action to the efforts on building or changing a destination's image (Beriatos&Gospodini 2004, cited by Avraham&Ketter 2006, 117).

5.2 Visual designs

If image and core values of a brand are considered as the soul of the brand, logo and slogan is the outside appearance of that brand. Logo and slogan - which are created, written and design in a special shape, font, color with special effects, borders or decorations - are indispensably visual design of brand. They support brand recall and identification in consumer mind. It is necessary to keep a fixed set of logo and slogan through a long time to embed them into consumer mind. They are the basics needed to be done firstly associated with image positioning in branding process. As Kotler, Haider and Rein (1993) describes that a good slogan might be used through many years and campaigns; especially it can reflect vision and spirit of a destination as well as creates enthusiasm and momentum. In addition to slogan's dependence on target market and marketing campaign's goal, the slogan must be at least in accordance with reality (cited by Avraham&Ketter 2006, 121). Last ten years of the first tourism's marketing strategy, Vietnam National Administration of Tourism did change slogan and logo totally three times: "Welcome to Vietnam", "Vietnam – Destination for the new millennium" and "Vietnam – The hidden charm" since late 2005 (figure 5–1). Those slogans are

generally unfocusedly used, compared to neighboring countries with “Amazing Thailand”, “Uniquely Singapore”, “Your Singapore” (2011), “Malaysia, Truly Asia”, “Infinitely Yours Seoul”, “Incredible India”, “Visit Indonesia” and “Wonderful Indonesia” (2011), which are emphasized through many campaigns. The inconsistency of Vietnam tourism’s slogan affects to tourism branding at a certain extent. In observing other countries, especially Malaysia, they had used “Truly Asia” for a long time and only add more subheading following the main slogan in accordance with purpose and theme of each campaign, without completely change into another one. That force people to memorize and trust the brand much more than competitors. Actually, the slogans of vicinity countries are nothing special, but they accompanied with creative and consistent advertising campaigns that help them get into target’s mind easier.

In addition, Vietnam tourism’s logo is considered to be vague. Despite the good idea of symbolizing the lotus, it is hard for foreigner to realize that it is a stylized lotus and why it is a lotus. And for sure that very few foreigners know about the deep meaning of lotus in spiritual and cultural life in Vietnam, because of lack of culture promotion. Compared to Australia tourism’s logo, they are using a very simple and familiar symbol: kangaroo. Everybody in the world knows Australia is a famous land with kangaroo. Vietnam should push more in introduction Vietnam’s culture into international public or another solution is changing into something familiar to traveler, like the symbols and images mentioned above.

Five years ago Vietnam began to officially use the slogan “Vietnam – The hidden charm”. It was good at that time. However, Vietnam is getting more and more tourists in recent years, they need to have another slogan synchronic with new strategy. Late 2010, the tourism administrators opened a contest in search for a new slogan and logo for the next strategic period 2011 – 2015 and to get citizens and companies involved in national tourism development. They finally found a new one “Vietnam – A different Orient” designed by an Australian-invested branding company (TuoiTre News, January 2011). Nonetheless, this slogan was not favored and accepted from a part of locals. They were debating in online forums

and news channels that there is a difference in meaning translation between Vietnamese and English of this slogan (figure 7). And the colorful star symbol could cause being mistaken with African countries (Vietnamnet, April 2011). This slogan though won the first prize but not yet got approved to replace “Vietnam – The hidden charm” for many reasons. It is time to have a flashy slogan and striking logo then enclosed with a salient promotion campaign conveying a clear message or else Vietnam tourism will still only be a “hidden” land to tourist. Besides, Vietnam should create logo and slogan for each regions and cities in Vietnam to introduce their distinctive characteristics. Every single region, province and city has its own geography, cultural and traditional characteristics which should be expressed and emphasized through their own logo and slogan. For example, Ho Chi Minh City is a glaring one which is vibrant and a melting pot of culture due to the migrations from other locals; but it has failed to market unique things it can offer to tourists (Adam Bray). In other countries, each cities and provinces are usually promoted with separate symbol and image based on their own strengths in order to show the dramatic diversification and differences.

Figure 6: The official Vietnam tourism’s slogan and logo since 2005



Source: VNAT

Figure 7: The nominated slogan and logo for the period 2011 - 2015



Source: Tuoitre News

In conclusion, branding for Vietnam at large and tourism in particular is the integral activities for the strategic tourism development. A destination brand provides tourist with trust, quality assurance and helps distinguish a destination from its competitors. Tourism image and icon can originate from existed things a country owns and requires advertising and promotion activities to gain brand awareness.

6 ADVERTISING

6.1 Advertising as a marketing tool

Advertising is one of the five main promotion activities accompanied with personal selling, sales promotion, public relations and direct marketing, that all constitutes a company's 'marketing communications mix', also known as 'promotion mix'. Because of the changing environment, fragmented mass media and highly advanced technology, marketers have been searching for new promotion methods as well as integrating them as a whole marketing mix to strongly get consumer's attention and enhance a consistent and compelling message. Advertising is an intermediate bridge between supply and demand, or between producer and consumer, and to switch a "mere commodity" into a "desirable brand" (Kornberger 2010, 65). McCabe (2009, 208) defines advertising as a "specific form of marketing communication which is concerned with bringing information about an organisation, its products and services, or any other messages to the attention of

the market.” It is any paid-for communication in media aimed at the public. Traditional media comprises television, radio, print newspaper and magazine, film and poster sites; and modern media is based on Internet and digital technology e.g. website and application. Advertising is acknowledged to be a good way to create awareness, provide information, drive sales growth, remind the markets about the organization, and also position the brand. Based on advertising objectives, Kotler and Keller (2006, 569) classifies advertising into: informative, persuasive, reminder, and reinforcement advertising. To determine the functions and purpose of an advertising campaign is the very first and basic step to create an advertisement. Concur with this view, Shimp (2007, 246–248) outlines a more detailed categorization of advertising functions as follows:

Informing. Due to capability of reaching mass audiences at a relatively low cost per exposure, advertising is one of the most significant communications to publicize brands by introducing new brand or distinct features of existing brands, increasing brand awareness, and communicating positive brand images.

Influencing. Advertising creates primary demand – the demand for an entire product category, and more frequently, attempts to build secondary demand – the demand for a company’s brand. It provides prospects with reasons and emotional appeal for trying one brand over another.

Reminding. Advertising keeps a brand fresh and makes it more salient in consumer mind. In other words, consumer will recall to or consider a brand when they have purchase need. Moreover, advertising can lead to brand switching by reminding consumer of availability of a brand that they have not purchased before.

Adding value. Advertising adds value to brands by influencing perception. Under effective advertising’s impact, brand is affixed a personality and can generate more sales volume, according to a claim by an advertising practitioner: “Advertising builds brands. Brands build business. Let the discounted cash flow!”

Assisting other company efforts. Advertising supports and enhances the effectiveness of other marketing communications. For instance, it attracts attention to a promotional program or makes a product package identified.

Kotler, Wong, Saunders and Armstrong (2005, 762) say an effective advertising can result in responses from target audiences; including *perceptual response* i.e. consumer develops or alters specific opinions or feelings about the product or brand and *behavioral response* e.g. consumer buys product for trial or increase the amount. To get these positive responses, an advertisement needs to be processed through other important decisions, that follow the objective setting mentioned above, comprising of: budget setting, strategy development, and advertising evaluation (Kotler et al. 2005, 763–777).

In scope of this thesis, the step of developing strategy will be discussed next with two integral phases: advertising message design and media selection. Because the content of advertising must be creative to attract people and generate the expected responses. Plus, despite a well-created content, the conveyed message may fail to provoke responses unless it is seen by right audience, at right time and places. Moreover, this is one of the visible matters in Vietnam tourism marketing that, to some extent, restricts the flow of tourism information, brand positioning and traveler appeal to Vietnam.

Advertising is subdivided into specific forms in dependence upon media selection: ambient advertising, press advertising, television advertising, radio advertising, outdoor advertising, transport and outside transport advertising (Blythe 2000, 30). Due to the fragmented mass media, advertising at different channels or places could reach different kinds of audiences and at different moments. Television advertising are watched mostly in the evening after work or at dinner time; while outdoor advertising could draw attentions at crowded places; or transport advertising can exploit empty spaces inside and outside means of transport, or at stations, and is unavoidably seen; different types of magazines or newspapers can reach more targeted markets. Among them, television advertising is known as the

most powerful advertising medium because of its wide reach and thus low cost per exposure. In respect of brand building, TV ad has two important strengths as vividly demonstration of product attributes and dramatically portraying of user and usage imagery and brand personality (Kotler& Keller 2006, 271). Furthermore, Blythe agrees on TV ad's effectiveness due to the widespread ownership, despite the highly competitive context of media. He also emphasizes two brilliant advantages of TV ad: realism – TV ads are possible to show the product in use in a realistic scenario and receptivity; and receptivity – they are often seen as entertainment as many are produced to high standard and interesting in their own way (2000, 66–67).

With these features, TV ad is completely suitable to Vietnam tourism promotion that can combine beautiful sights and sound effects to present Vietnam tourism to the worldwide travelers. However, in respect of extensiveness and variety tourism industry, tourism advertising commercials is more difficult to produce than other FMCG sector.

6.2 The executed commercials of Vietnam tourism

In 2007 Vietnam broadcasted a television commercial on the international channel CNN for the first time which cost nearly USD 300,000 and run within three continual months. It was aired twice daily on CNN Asia showing montages from Ha Long Bay, City of Ho Chi Minh , Hoi An and Hue. It is believed that that campaign brought 4.2 million foreign tourists to Vietnam in 2008, but there were no tools to measure this effectiveness (LookatVietnam, 2010). Then, in late April 2009, due to the fact that the world's economic recession lowered travelling demand, Vietnamese Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism launched another commercial on the global BBC television channel with the payment of USD 204,000 for total 320 broadcasts of 30-second-spotfeaturing image of Ha Long Bay. This campaign was aired in 20 weeks from May to July 2009 in which there was 8 weeks in Asia and the Pacific, 6 weeks in Europe, and 6 weeks in America, totally 200 countries across the globe twice daily at prime times. Apart from

television advertisements, Vietnamese Ministry also advertised on taxis at London streets (VOVnews, 2009). At the same year, Vietnam advertised on CNN channel to draw more tourists from Japan. To support tourism promotion package “Vietnam – Your destination”, Vietnam launched a clip on CNN in the third and fourth quarter of 2010. This commercial cost about USD 270,000 making up 12% of 2010’s tourism promotion budget (Vietnamnet, July 2010). This year 2011, Vietnam was ordering BBC to completely produce and aired a new 15-second-commercial promoting Vietnam as a tourism destination in July. It would be broadcasted 260 times, three times per day in three months focusing on coastal tourism and introducing various beaches from North to South of Vietnam. This TVC aims at travelers from France, England, Holland, Northern Europe and especially Russia. Meanwhile, four documentary films about Vietnam were officially broadcasted on Discovery Channel at Asia and the Pacific. (Thanhniem, June 2011).

6.2.1 Message design

In general valuation of Vietnam advertisements, the commercials expression was verbose and less subtlety. The promotion video clips were like images united carelessly that made a feeling of unfocused and pell-mell, according to The World & Vietnam Report (December 2008). Each commercial of Vietnam tourism lasted about 30 seconds with a voice-over to sing the praises of the country’s beautiful scenes and cultures; and had nearly the same format and content though they were produced in different periods and for different purposes. They all presented the similar puppetry, daily life at outdoor market and afloat market, beaches, highlands, ethnic minority, food and images of the Vietnamese. It is a waste of money to repeat the same content over several advertisements without a key point and cannot speak up creatively the differentiation of Vietnam tourism against competitors. Moreover, Vietnam is known to be rich in cultural tradition and natural landscapes, particularly beaches; however, they were not exploited to be advertised in ads. Since tourism is a multi-faceted, the fleeting 30 seconds is surely not long enough for Vietnam to present these all respects thoroughly; and

also for audience to go through a process of pay attention – grasp information – feel it – then, remember it and take action. From observing other countries, the average duration for tourism commercial takes at least two minutes to display major destinations as well as to be able to build a compelling plot with high convincingness. Furthermore, Vietnam's commercials just simply introduced landscapes, traditional entertainment or local dishes which might be viewed as the same as other Asian countries in foreigner's eyes. Besides beautiful landscape and unique culture, it is better to show what travelers would get when they made a holiday to somewhere. In other words, it is fundamentally to find out what is the other purposes or motivations to decide someplace for holiday whereas there are many choices floating around and they are all nearly the same. In scope of tourism segmentation approaches, McCabe (2009, 175) indicates to link motivations to benefits sought from the experience. That is to say the approach of benefit segmentation is based on the reasons for a trip. Moreover, as stated by Kotler et al. (2005, 803), the purpose of advertising is to get attention and response from target audience. To reach this purpose, no matter what forms of advertising are, they should have a general message to communicate to customer. And the customer will react to the advertisements only if they believe benefits that the advertised product or service can bring to them. Hence, identifying benefits to target audiences is a key step in message strategy to create advertising appeal which must be meaningful, believable and distinctive (Kotler et al., 2005).

One of the strongest motivations of all individual travel is simply to satisfy a need for pleasure. The romance and pleasure of the trip can be the elements to make the trip to be a fine medium through which additional pleasure, appreciation and romance are experienced. Thus, the aspect of pleasure found in a trip needs emphasizing in the formulation of marketing campaigns and advertising clips (Goeldner & Ritchie 2003, 266). Researching on TVCs of other countries in region, Malaysia and Singapore Tourism Board has employed this kind of appeal to build promotion clips. In Malaysia's advertisements, the ads were divided into different themes: romance, family moment, memories revision, relationship improvement, namely 'Boss to Dad' featuring about a businessman dad who gets rid of busy job

to spend leisure time with his son, 'Husband to Friend' regarding a married couple who travels to Malaysia to revise their date-memories and has a fresh feeling toward each other, 'Made in Malaysia' talking about a couple beginning their relationship at Malaysia then this time they're back to Malaysia to enjoy the trip with a new family member - their son. The TVCs were built cleverly upon a simple plot based on these themes and stroke on audience's psychology and emotion and make them believe that they would get benefits or they would also be like that if they make a trip to Malaysia. Similarly, a tourism campaign of Singapore launched in March 2004 was very successful and won a golden award from PATA, notified by Channel NewsAsia. This advertising campaign built two main commercials upon romance theme, talking a story of two young people meeting up by chance and experience Singapore together, and family theme, spinning around enjoyment of a mother and her daughter and enlightening entertainment activities at Singapore. While most of Asian countries have similar landscape and cultures, the distinction is created upon these benefits or stories each country can make up to attract tourists. Furthermore, because of the expensive cost and cluttered environment of advertising world, nowadays TVC not only provides information but also should have entertainment values to be rewarding to consumer.

In addition to benefit segmentation as above, Malaysia created commercials particularly for market segmentations with different languages, designs, character casts, etc. In targeting the countries of West Asia in 2008, Malaysia launched the 'Made in Malaysia' commercial in Arabic language. Likewise, to draw Japanese tourists, Malaysia made a Japanese anime-styled commercial which featured the animated Malaysian girl introducing about Malaysia in Japanese language. By this way, it helps target audiences easily get Malaysia tourism information and have familiar feeling towards Malaysia.

In brief, Vietnam tourism should invest more in production of tourism commercials with different video clips including aspects of culture and tradition, relaxation, luxury, adventurous and sport activities, nature discovery or UNESCO heritages. Owing to the fact that tourism is the largess industry and people have different

purpose to travel, this advertisement division can help introduce completely, clearly and creatively what Vietnam possesses to the world's travelers.

6.2.2 Message performance

The impact of advertising depends not only on the message content but also on the way it is expressed. It should be harmonious combination of style, tone, words and format to execute the message (Kotler et al., 804). Because of the nature of tourism advertising, it should be less statement voice and more sound effects, for example a song composed for only country tourism or the sound of a country's traditional instrument, along with beautiful scenes to give a space for audience to focus on the images on screen. A marketing journal on the effect of music background in ads released in October 1993 also underlined the prominent feature of music in advertising. Audiences can transfer their feeling of the background music to the advertised product because they are in pair in the ad. Additionally, music can help support product evaluations and message reception due to its attention-gaining value and music-message congruency (Kellaris, D. Cox and Dena Cox, 1993). As an illustration, Uniquely Singapore campaign was much more known with the song Uniquely You which was composed for Singapore tourism promotion only in 2004 and spread over YouTube. Another example on employing music effect should be referred to Malaysia whose nice song "Ordinary Day" written especially for a tourism commercial of theirs with beautiful melody and memorable lyrics or using the traditional Malaysian musical theme mix in the eco-tourism commercial in 2007.

Furthermore, a suitable style, memorable and attention-drawing words should be used to intensify effectiveness of the ads. It is also related to the matter of consistency in slogan and message as mentioned in previous part. There is a less emphasis and extreme confusion on Vietnam tourism message in the commercials. Despite the slogan Vietnam – The Hidden Charm officially used until today, the four commercials had different messages: "Vietnam – The hidden charm" in 2007, "Charming Vietnam" in 2009, and "Vietnam – Your Destination" in

2010. For instance, Hong Kong tourism's slogan – "Hong Kong: Live it. Love it!" – was intensively stressed in its commercial by using lots of words, whose format are similar to the slogan, such as Feel it, See it, Wear it, Taste it, Win it, Rock it, Swing as if the invitations to worldwide tourists to come and experience it. Or Malaysia accentuated the slogan "Malaysia – Truly Asia" in each commercial of 2011 by clinging to the word 'Asia' at taglines to depict Malaysia's notable tourism aspects as well as to highly support for Malaysia's message, for instance: Malaysia – Your Blissful Escape Asia, Your Glitz & Glamour Asia, Your Multi-Cultural Asia, and Your Nature Adventure Asia. (All tourism commercials mentioned in this part are available on Youtube Channel)

On the whole, the very first steps to have an effective advertising commercial are to design a message strategy which firstly, is in harmony with the whole tourism message; secondly, is designed based on segmentations including benefit or motivation segmentations and apposite to target markets; thirdly, has creative message execution with music background, information display or other technology effects.

6.2.3 Media selection

Another matter of Vietnam tourism is related to media selection which is also the important stage in advertising production. To a certain extent, the decision upon the media to carry the message will influence advertising budget and determine a campaign's success. There are some protest opinions against launching tourism commercials on CNN and BBC channels of Vietnam in recent years for the reasons that these channel's audiences are mainly interested in politics – economics issues rather than culture – travel whereas Thailand and Malaysia chose to advertise on sport channel ESPN, Star Sports (Datviet News, 2009). Additionally, the broadcast on CNN in 2009, which was said to target potential tourists from the Republic of Korea, Japan and China, was not effective because tourists from these markets mostly did not see English channel, according to Luxurytravelvietnam.com. Also in 2009, apart from advertising on BBC television

channel, Vietnam spent a sum of money to advertising on 27 taxis in London within 6 months with the image of Vietnamese lady in traditional costume standing on Ha Long Bay and the slogan Charming Vietnam (VOVNews, 2009). This might be a good way to grab people's attention; however, it is also a waste of money since there are totally 10.000 taxies in London. Actually, to explain for that media selection is due to the lack of promotion budget. Each year Thailand spends about USD 100 million, Malaysia USD 118 million, or Singapore USD 70 million into tourism promotion; whereas Vietnam tourism's budget is about more than USD 1,75 million in 2011. In 2008, the advertising budget of Malaysia tourism made up 46% of the total, calculated upon Malaysia's local daily The New Straits Times (August 2008). It showed how significant advertising is to Malaysia's marketing activities to boost up tourism brand and sales. Therefore, besides the need of designing and producing much better commercials, Vietnam should pay more attention to media selection to get a higher effectiveness.

In conclusion, promoting tourism thorough video clips are very best way to introduce beauties of country to the world in which it can combine sight and sound effects creatively. Although television advertising is a good marketing channel to introduce products and reach a large amount of audiences, it seems to be hardly measureable on reach and frequency rate, especially when the target market is abroad. Recently, television costs has been soaring up along with audiences has more choices in term of both television channel and media entertainment thanks for advanced technologic science, marketers has been revising to shift their media selection on other channels to get more and right audiences. For this reason, to date, internet marketing, or online marketing, has become more prevalent and widely applied in many sector generally and tourism industry in particular.

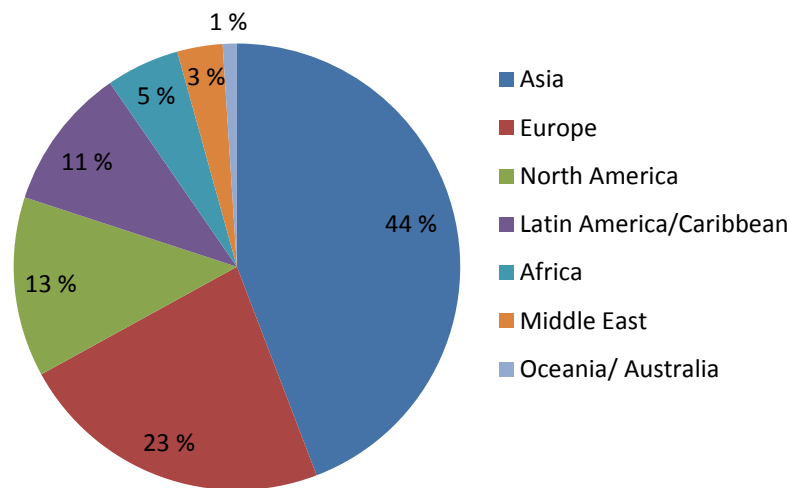
7 INTERNET MARKETING

7.1 Internet's benefits for tourism communication

Information technology has brought new convenience to people and plenty of opportunities and challenges to business. One of these conveniences is the appearance and growth of the Internet and now becomes a popular mean of communication globally. There were 1.97 billion internet users worldwide in 2010. This number kept increasing to approximately 2,095,006,005 users spreading over regions in the world by the end of March 2011, as presented in figure 8. Asia is leading the world's Internet usage with 44%; European internet users account for 23% and America areas, both North and Latin America included, constitute 24% of the world's Internet usage (Internet World Stats, 2011). They are also the main tourism markets in the world, in term of inbound and outbound travel, as mentioned in previous parts. Two decades ago, firms had kept wondering which cost-effective way is to approach a large number of customers, both domestic and abroad, in a short time until the ubiquitousness of Internet since mid-1990s. Internet has become a central part of everyday life at a speedy pace and surprisingly, then rapidly changed consumer habits. However, the commercial use of Internet only possibly grows in accordance with the parallel development of technological products. The integration of Internet and high-tech products led to the age of information and communications technology (ICT in short) like nowadays. The powerful influence of ICT on nearly every aspect of marketing, for both product and service, is undeniable. Further, when the decisive role of traditional communication tools has declined recently due to the increasing clutter environment of mass media, marketers began to make use of online marketing which can communicate to target audiences in a short time, at large-scale, low cost and by effective ways. Internet marketing is summarized as "the effective promotion of goods and services through the medium of an interactive computerized information channel and the enhancement of existing customer information for the purpose of refining an integrated marketing strategy", by Meldrum and McDonald (2007, 58). Tourism is a unique business and one of the industries that got influenced from Internet most. Back in past decades, most tourism products were sold directly through travel agencies: flight ticket, destination choice, vacation package, accommodation booking and car rental. The purchase process are handled through travel agents and cost varied fees. As

the e-commercial tools appeared, everything seems to be much easier for travelers and beneficial to travel firms and national tourist organizations.

Figure 8: Internet users by regions by March 31, 2011



Source: Data collected from Internet World Stats

The initial benefits of Internet and technology growth is to travel companies for the increase in effective communication and improvement in operation process such as distribution, booking, tour management, targeted segment approaching and so forth. E-commerce gives firms a new distribution channel and savings from labor cost. To customers, the widespread adoption of the Internet and useful search engines make it easier for them to select a good deal over a wide selection of tour operators or make a comparison about accommodation price and flight fares in several simple steps (Middleton, Fyall, Morgan&Ranchhod 2009, 250). Even, travelers now can handle trip preparations themselves through websites without paying fee to agencies. Especially, for tourism boards, this is surely a low cost and effective platform to communicate their destination's brand personality to the world. Since the convenience, opportunities and also competitiveness arise from Internet, the tourism and hospitality organizations and entrepreneurs pay an enormous attention on Internet marketing which will bring about profitability and

brand reputation if being executed thoroughly. This is also a necessity to Vietnam tourism case. There are many debates spinning around the expenditure of Vietnam tourism's marketing budget. Instead of using Internet as a strategic marketing tool, they have been pouring a big proportion of their limited budget into mass advertising on the expensive international broadcasts. Along with identifying tourism demands in key markets and improving service quality, Vietnam should take more advantage of the Internet to improve the effectiveness of promotion campaigns, suggested by Gaël de La Porte duTheil – President of Interface Tourism Group, a leading Tourism PR and Marketing Group for Southern Europe, Russia and Arabia (Tourism Information Technology Center, January 2010). Plus, Vietnam's official information website does not fit for purpose because of its being outdated, weak accessibility, not user-friendly (Adam Bray). According to Google's statistics, more than 98% of people perform information searching before making a tour purchase. Since 2010 to the first months of 2011, there were averagely 600,000 – 800,000 searches for resorts at Vietnam through Internet and more than 1 million in the peak season. And the need for hotel findings reached 2–3 million times per month. Exceptionally, searching for holiday tours accounted the highest rate of 5–7 million per month (Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism of Lao Cai province, April 2011). These giant numbers partly stresses out the need of information through Internet and potentials of Internet marketing for tourism.

7.2 Rebuilding the official tourism site

The official tourism website is the official tourist information channel of a nation. Hence, it needs to be focused and updated frequently to assure the exact and timely information source for tourist and to be a platform for tourism board to communicate with prospective tourists.

7.2.1 User-friendly content and design

The main purposes of tourism board's website are as an information source and a marketing channel for the tourism of the whole country. In addition to lay out

design, usability also contributes to the website's success. Website is meant to be a pull rather than push medium for the reason that customer has to seek for information and make a comparison among a multitude of travel-related sites on the Internet. Thus, communication features are considered to be vital to a site's success, as outlined by Middleton et al. (2009, 262). Currently, Vietnam's tourism information system on Internet is constituting of three main types of sources: the official website of Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT); the official websites of each provincial administration, some provinces or cities have their own tourist websites and some shares with the site of Department of Commerce; and the enterprise websites of tour operators, hotels, etc.

The official tourism website of Vietnam www.vietnamtourism.com was established in 1997. From this website, there are three addresses linked to www.vietnamtourism.gov.vn containing information of tourist boards, Governmental Decisions; tourism development strategies, statistics, tourism bulletin; www.dulichvn.gov.vn with news in tourism and hospitality industry, Vietnamese culture, travel guide and some upcoming events and festivals, www.vietnamtourism-info.com named Tourism Information Technology Center having similar contents as the previous site. These sites are not in English as default and even though they have sufficiently basic contents for tourist such as culture, weather, news, promotion, events etc., they are complicated, confusing and generally not user-friendly. They might be kind of old-fashioned, tedious and uninspiring due to lack of interactive features, spectacular gallery and exciting content. Viewing the tourism sites of some countries as reference, the first impression to users is from stunning pictures with a brand identity throughout the site. Then, the necessary information is arranged in a logic order that is completely not embarrassing to users and let them focus on beautiful pictures before seeking information. One of the 25 immutable rules of successful tourism is the necessary "wow" appeal in photography that could evoke viewer's emotion and inspire them with a journey. Photography should play a key role and creatively illustrated in brochure, public relations efforts and especially on the web (University of

Wisconsin–Extension, April 2004). Despite of Vietnam’s pride for heritages and nature, there are few images shown off on the site.

As the primary function of tourism websites is information source and brand communication to user. Hence, the basic issues on content should be of importance, including information about countries, regions and tourism categorization and any travel-related tourism that is useful to user. However, for the purpose of marketing, most sites are building contents about place branding attractively rather than simply informing. Vietnam’s culture shares commons with other Asian countries that are rich in culture, history and religion. So the stories, history, legends or myths around a place can be told to foreign tourists to create a mysterious value for that place. What’s more, in realm of destination branding, a story of a place can be uniquely told for branding and memorizing in tourist’s mind. In introduction about tourist place, the detailed information on temperature, local festivals, etc. should be carefully posted, especially the location on map and transport guide that are still lack on Vietnam’s site. Such guides will be very helpful to backpackers because lots of confuses about transport timetable inside Vietnam’s cities were asked in the travel forum Virtual Tourist. Moreover, Vietnam is now on the way to become a global tourist destination, it is necessary to set more languages on the site, apart from the current Vietnamese, English, Chinese, Japanese and French setting, for better communication with different tourist nationalities. Most of other tourism sites has more than 10 languages and also automatically detects the user’s location, then display the appropriate language.

7.2.2 Enhancing supporting features

At present, Vietnam’s official tourism site is still missing an advanced support function to users. Instead of finding a list of hotels and services by a modest search box, it is better to present them on a full and detailed categorization that can help users find exactly and easily which accommodation fits them. For example, in the official Australia tourism site, they created a page called Come Walkabout Planner for “exploring Australia in spectacular ways with journey tools”.

Basically, this is an improved categorization system in an interactive ways, including Australia tourism category by destination, display of location on map, picture, suggestion of different travel routes with activities suitable to trip lengths, and especially the 'download this journey' button and tourist even can view this planner program from mobile application. This kind of support functions as 'trip planner' is becoming popular and important on tourist sites that help users in planning and give recommendations suitable to users' needs. Alongside with the helpfulness, it shows a good customer service and, to some extent, encourages users' decision making.

The tourism site will be more useful with the provision of detailed brochure that user can download them for travel use. Some sites supply a full collection of brochure categorized in different aspects. In the Paris travel guide site, there is a collection of online publications with topics: Paris city map-guide, Paris For You, Good Food Guide, Paris Shopping Book, Visiting Paris, Accommodation in Paris, Paris - an accessible city and "Districts of Paris" Collection. All of them are available in many languages, updated every two years and free for download (Official website of the Convention and Visitors Bureau – Paris info). Another largely applied tactic for Internet marketing is e-newsletter, also known as e-bulletin, which is periodic publication distributed by email and used to communicate with readers. Its content may comprise of corporate, product or service announcement, press release, and coupons (Webopedia). E-newsletter subscription is now used largely in tourism; for example, Canada's official tourism site encourages people to subscribe for monthly e-newsletter which keeps traveler up-to-date with events happening in Canada. Apart from the usefulness, a well-designed periodical e-newsletter might evoke the travel passion and inspire for a trip. Plus, thanks to Internet convenience, business now can reduce the printing and publishing cost for such marketing materials. At present there are several brochures about Vietnam travel sold on the official site. But for sure, few travelers are willing to pay for that kind of brochure because of multitude of travel guide uploaded and for free use on the Internet. What's more, some tourism board sites also provide business kit for tour operators. For example, when Australia Tourism

Board launched the campaign, it also offers “the largest ever range of free tools for the industry to use” consisting of campaign logo and tagline, ad template, digital postcards and wallpaper, artwork for poster and flyer, newsletter template and image gallery. Additionally, it supplies an accessible resource with tutorials and guides e.g. Tourism e-kit, Making a splash – guide to working with media, or Image Selection Advice. Those supports to local tour operators, on one hand, can help them get more tour purchase by marketing improvement. On the other hand, it gets the local tour operators involved in the nation’s unanimous campaign so the tourism brand is promoted comprehensively. Due to the lack of these supports, Vietnam tourism is still in the situation that the travel companies promote Vietnam’s tourism brand in different positioning themselves to sell tour packages. Plus, market research is very expensive to small and medium tour enterprises; Vietnam Tourism Board should provide a detailed market reports instead of simple statistics of international arrivals each month. With the in-depth travel data, each tour provider can build a marketing plan and tailor travel products that meet different segments and niches.

The technology growth has been opening an era of information and communications technology which is advantageous and expedient to business in many industries. Since the birth of the Iphone and Ipad, the mobile phone manufacturers have been more competitive in the race to invent the latest smart-phones and tablet computers. The large adoption of new high-tech means of communications also brings to many business and marketing promise. Business begins to build the mobile applications (‘app’ in short) which are software developed for small low-power handheld devices. Such applications help raise the accessibility and convenience to consumers. Recently this technology has been even applied in tourism and hospitality industry. Singapore Tourism Board jointly with American Express, Singapore Airlines, and StarHub launched the “YourSingapore Guide” app to “help visitors explore Singapore on the go by enabling visitors to access the latest and most essential information about Singapore such as attractions, shopping deals, dining options, and events, all at their fingertips”. Visitors can enjoy tools like location-based service, attractive

privileges provided through the partners and share their holiday experiences via social media, as presented by Singapore Tourism Board (25 August 2011). Also catching up this trend, Australia launched “There’s nothing like Australia” app which is available in Korean, Japanese, Chinese and English and it has the function similar to Singapore’s one, stressing on the sharing and searching features.

7.2.3 User-generated content

One of the online activities that has the power to draw people’s attention is related to user-generated content in specifically ‘blogs’ (short for ‘web-logs’). It is a webpage consisting of a series of entries arranged in reverse chronological order, frequently updated with new information about particular topics in a particular point of view (SOA, 2000). It is also viewed as the very first form of interaction and sharing activity online. To travel sector, many tourist blogs and forum for sharing travel experiences has risen more and more. These kinds of information are thought to be more credible due to the trip reviews, rating systems for places and accommodations, recommendations and tips are shared by real travelers. To marketers, it is an informal communication means and has impact in areas of branding, relationship management and cost reduction (McCabe 2009, 271). Moreover, there is a great development of social networking pages that has ability to connect people from all around the world and thus, sharing is much easier through such extensive connection network. It seems to be no distances nowadays thanks to these online communities like Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Myspace and so on. Cite Facebook as example, currently there are more than 750 million active users, average users has 130 friends and more than 30 billion pieces of content including web links, news stories, blog posts, notes, photos, etc. shared each month. Plus, every month more than 250 million people engage with Facebook on external websites. Since social plugins launched, more than 2.5 million websites have integrated with Facebook (Facebook Statistics, last accessed on 12 September 2011). Those huge numbers partly points out the power of social media and online community in user habits and marketing

activities. In realization of this advantage, almost countries integrated this function into their official tourist guide sites or create contest based on the idea of sharing. This is the out-dated shortcoming to Vietnam tourism marketing and surprisingly, there is no button linked to any social networking found on the official site. When searching in Facebook with the key word 'Vietnam tourism', it lists out several pages with that name but nothing is the official and corporate page of the tourist board.

In Canada's official tourism website, there is a part 'Canada Keep Exploring' whose purposes are to get Canadians engaged in their national tourism promotion by encouraging them to tell what they did last summer and recommend for the international visitors (<http://au.canada.travel/>). It links to the Canada Tourism Commission's official Facebook page which has supports and participations in reviewing holidays from nearly 75 thousand Canadians and international travelers. The same as Canada, there is the invitation for joining Facebook community to get exclusive travel giveaways, deals and much more on French Government tourist guide site (<http://us.franceguide.com/>). This page is frequently updated with photos and comments and gets more than 14 thousand page view for the first year. Another example, Australia is build a complete sharing and interactive page for travelers to share thoughts and photos from their holidays. It is also related to its ongoing campaign 'There's nothing like Australia'. People are encouraged to tell everyone what unique thing they think nowhere else except Australia has, from their own experience. All the photos are hung on Australia's map interactively in eye-catching design. Until now it have had 3498 experiences shared on the page nothinglikeaustralia.com since its release in March 2010. And Finland has the same success on tourism promotion with the campaign 'I wish I was in Finland' in Facebook community with 23,555 'like' (the Facebook's unique function for users to express their feeling of enjoy and liking). This page is especially promoted and most crowded in summer, the tourist season of most European countries. Especially, the information on Facebook is easily approached than on traditional website due to updating features. Hence, this is a best place to update upcoming events and festivals to remind people or to launch new campaign.

More creatively, some countries exploit the spread-over phenomenon of Internet to run promotion programs by organizing web-based contests or competitions. Tourism promotions based on website or social community is related to relationship and brand awareness building, and usually aimed at target markets. Sometimes, it is to draw tourists in off-season too. For example, at present Australia tourism is running a competition to promote its adventure tourism aimed at the youth segment in United Kingdom, Ireland and Dutch with a pretty big prize (Australia Working Holiday on Facebook, last accessed on 12 September 2011). Or to promote eco-tourism, Malaysia runs a small questionnaire in which people joins to answer can luckily win a cool Malaysia Tourism Goodies for only India market (Tourism Malaysia on Facebook, last accessed on 12 September 2011).

In short, the development of social networking and spreading speed on the Internet is a suitable channel to perform marketing campaign effectively. Vietnam tourism needs to carry out such competitions and contests to spread over brand awareness. This activity, firstly, can aim at a target market abroad, or secondly, can aim at domestic market in order to get them involved in national tourism. Alongside with rebuild and re-decorate the website design and content, integrating some new applications, features and interesting user-generated content will surely help to attract more people surf in the website and to raise brand awareness amongst Vietnamese youths and foreign travelers. Furthermore, as mentioned in the previous part on the large expenditure into mass advertising on international channels such as BBC, CNN, podcasting on social media like Youtube seems to be forgotten in Vietnam tourism case. A statistics shows that there was more than 13 million hours of video were uploaded during 2010 and over 3 billion videos are viewed a day (Youtube Statistics, last accessed on 12 September 2011). With the wonderful advantages of Internet and social media discussed throughout this part, they are also a cheap and even free media channel to introduce Vietnam tourism images.

7.2.4 Affiliate marketing

As website is used as advertising channel and displaying advertising on other websites, in forms of banners or pop-ups, is ubiquitous in most websites. But sometimes it can cause intrusion to customers and reduce brand quality if the advertised brands (the brands on banner) are not qualified and trusted. Affiliate marketing is another subtle and targeted online marketing. This is about placing a link on a business' website rewarding other affiliates for visitors; and these affiliates also put that site's link on their own sites. For instance, the affiliate networks between the low-cost airlines EasyJet and companies offering hotel, car rental, etc. Along with financial service, retail, mobile phone, travel sector spends much on affiliate marketing (Middleton et al. 2009, 263). There should be something in common amongst the company, affiliate partners and user's interest. This online marketing strategy involved in revenue sharing between online advertisers and online publishers based on performance measures e.g. click onto the link (American Association Marketing). However, it needs to clarify that affiliate marketing differs from banner advertising, especially on the case of Vietnam site where abundant of advertising banners appear on VNAT's site. It should limit the affiliate network with trusted tour providers, qualified hotels and other travel-related companies. To small travel agencies, this is a key strategic marketing by creating a partner network that helps cost-saving on marketing budget. Affiliate marketing only works well when the affiliate is a reliable business and has the same target segments or niche. Trusted partners can offer "flexible and speedy value-added products and services" and networking gives business opportunities to outsource the non-specialized functions (Buhalis& O'Connor 2006, 206).

Creating a collaborative destination site is a dynamic level of affiliate marketing that can share marketing burdens and growth a whole destination. A very good example is on AITO, an organization representing over 150 members of Britain's specialist tour operators. Those members are independent companies majoring in particular destinations and holiday types with the common aim of providing the highest level of customer satisfaction on choice, quality and service. Through AITO portal, customers can search completely for travel ideas, destination choice,

entertainment and accommodation without confusion and much time-consuming for searching around the Internet, according to Middleton et al. (2009, 254).

7.3 Commercial websites

To tourism and hospitality enterprises e.g. tour operator, accommodation provider, the main purpose of website is more significant for business operation. After customers make a choice of destination for their holiday, it jumps to the stage of selecting vacation provider, accommodation, transport service, so forth. Specifically, website is a competitive tool for small and medium tour firms and hoteliers due to the competitiveness in Vietnam's tourism and hospitality environment nowadays. Here are common objectives that should be outlined by tour companies for their websites, recommended by Susan Sweeney (2008, 3–4)

- Advertising travel-related products, services and destinations
- Selling vacation packages and travel-related products
- Providing customer service and support
- Providing destination, travel-related product and corporate information
- Establishing brand identity and awareness

Apart from the issues mentioned above for a tourism site as far as design, content, advanced features or applications and commerce tools are concerned, enterprise websites principally needs to take notice on several must-have criteria on commercial sites such as: price transparency, online specials, diversified tourism offerings, simple purchase stages. The price transparency and diversified offerings gives users more choices and comparison between tour providers. The online specials is meant to be an added-value to Internet users that encourages them to make transaction directly online and get some special offer only valid for online transactions. For example, when people buy a tour package directly on the site, they can get a discount or coupon on buying travel-related products like accommodation, vehicle rental. The purchase process is also kept simple, quick and trustworthy that can encourage people to perform transactions directly online.

Online transaction means a lot to business due to the better management process, cost reduction in terms of material and manpower and ability of approaching far-away customer. After building a good commercial site, business has to find a path to promote their sites. The key communications for tourism site should comprise of traditional mass media such as travel magazine, newspaper, billboards and television; distribution of brochures and specific magazines; online media like advertising on Search Engine e.g. Google Adwords; Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and link exchange amongst a wide range of travel sites. The most common way for user to find information is through search engine on Internet, for instance, the active search tool on Google, Yahoo, Bing and AOL. According from Google's statistical tool, in the most recent 5 years, the need of searching travel information online at Vietnam rose more than 32 times. Averagely there were more than 5 million searches about travel in Vietnamese and even more than 8 million in the peak season. Due to the personalization and interaction, online advertising is clearly a cost-saving and more targeted advertising for entrepreneurs. Another thing is that the tourism and hospitality websites should have promotion programs accordance with the current campaign of the national tourist board to get destinations branded comprehensively and strongly. The simplest action is to promote Vietnam tourism in the same brand identity such as logo, slogan and marketing-related artworks. Moreover, to get new customers and have repeated visits, it needs to have some elements like coupons, special offers and tailored tours for travelers, especially in the off-season. It's good for tourism and hospitality entrepreneurs establish a network of partners in order to offer more services and promotions to tourists. Finally, to small business, website could be used as an effective tool for market research and customer database collection.

7.4 Information and feedback

Beside the huge benefits from Internet marketing, there are of course several issues that tourism marketer needs to take notice. Firstly, the problem with user-generated content is equally the lack of control, and the presentation of information coming from a wide range of diversified perspectives might not be

filtered thoroughly. It may damage the trustworthiness of travel agency or destination. Secondly, if the customer's online information and comments are well-processed, they would be a source of research and database to develop the tourism. For example, on the traveler forum named Thetravelforum.org, several members, who had just been back from a holiday in Vietnam, was complaining about the service quality of a tour operator in Ha Long Bay. So a system of information management should be built to process feedback and comment and to solve problems timely. For example, VNAT can establish advanced information management system in the official site and encourage travelers to give their feedback and comments in all aspect of tourism industry. The purpose is to collect feedback as customer research and to solve problems or dissatisfaction.

In conclusion for this part, while Vietnam tourism industry has not yet exploit maximum the power of Internet, many tourism organizations in the regional neighboring countries like Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia... are using largely it as an effective communication tools. Online marketing can be directed as providing information, raising brand awareness, calling to action e.g. making a purchase or requesting information. The Internet and communication technology gives more opportunities to promote a destination and reach targeted segments and niche. Alongside with rebuilding Vietnam's official tourism site, it should keep it up-to-date with interesting information and promotion program to attract tourist and gain repeated visit. Because the official tourism site should be the main source of all tourism news and guide. Plus, it needs to well serve not only for travelers but also for local enterprises in tourism and hospitality industry. Besides, the tourism and hospitality entrepreneurs should notice on building their sites not only for commercial purpose and promoting their own brands, but also for marketing the whole Vietnam's tourism brand. Finally, taking care of information and feedback on Internet is of extremely importance to Vietnam's tourism. The rampancy and coverage of information on Internet is both the good and the bad for business; so dissatisfaction and problems of customers should be eased timely to avoid the bad word-of-mouth to the whole tourism brand.

8 TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND NICHE FOCUS

Product innovation encompasses a range of activities of developing products, including product improvement, entirely new product development, and extensions so as to increase the current number of product lines. The product development requires a process of identifying, creating and delivering new values or benefits to the customers. The key elements contributing to product success are, on one hand, the development of a unique superior product that gives customer better quality, new features and higher value in use; and a well-defined product concept prior to development. On the other hand, due to increasing market fragmentation, it is better for companies to concentrate on smaller segments and niche of special interest rather than mass market. New products will succeed only when it can offer unique benefits and differences for customers (Kotler, Wong, Saunders & Armstrong (2005, 582–586). Similar to other business sectors, tourism products are the core for a destination's tourism operation. The industry needs to keep developing and delivering various attractions and activities to make up a diversified tourism products that meet all tourist's needs and expectations.

Figure 8–1: Vietnam's rank in Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2008–2011 compared to some Asian countries

	2008	2009	2011
Singapore	16	10	10
Malaysia	32	32	35
Thailand	42	39	41
Philippines	81	86	94
Vietnam	96	89	80
Indonesia	80	81	74

Source: Data collected from World Economic Forum

According to the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index presented by World Economic Forum (2009, 2011), Vietnam continuously raised in ranking from 96th in 2008 to 89th in 2009, and jumped to 80th over 139 countries. This is a proper result from much efforts of tourism improvement in last years. However, Vietnam has been still lagging from the direct competitors like Malaysia or Thailand, as viewed in the figure 8–1, though Vietnam has more the world's natural heritage wonders than competitors and culture and nature as rich as theirs. What's more, Vietnam has only 15% of repeated visitors; it is too few compared to the giant competitor Thailand. One of the reasons for this disappointed result is of the monotonous and low quality tourism products (Ha NoiMoi, September 2011). Searching around the tour products on the websites of three popular tour operators in Vietnam (Saigontourist Travel Service, Fiditour and Vietnam ANZ Travel), the holiday programs are mainly about beach and island holiday, heritages sightseeing, cultural and historical sites, biodiversity tourism (trekking, cycling tour, adventurous and sport tours (motorbike tours, diving) and luxury tour (resort relax, golf, cruise tour); and concentrated on the most popular destinations. Vietnam tourism's advantage is the nature-based beauties lying the country length and a long lasting cultural and historical background. However, stunning natural beauty or common cultural sightseeing are not the only factors that creates tourism success. To inspire tourists to lengthen their stays and return more in the future, VN tourism needs the creativity and up-to-dating to innovate and develop tourism products in order to continuously offer tourists new experiences and surprising exploration about Vietnam. The growing concerns over the global issues such as climate change, global warming, oil price increase, economic downturn have changed traveling styles, trends and attitudes. These changing values lead to a demand for new tourism products and provide a driving force for the development of new types of tourism. Beside the prevalence and resilience of traditional tour packages that is the combination of tour sightseeing and relaxation through many destinations at a country, there is a trend of "new tourism" arisen and affirmed to continue growing. It is called responsible tourism, also known as sustainable, green, alternative or soft tourism. Reisinger predicted that the new types of tourism, consisting of cultural tourism; health, wellness and spa; nature-based;

educational; wildlife; geo-; genealogic; gastronomic or food and wine; photographic; volunteer; virtual; experiential; space; ethical or moral; community; and para tourism, would have a growth potential and affects the global tourism in this decade. The tourism industry is transforming itself from focusing on the mass market to aiming at diversifying products and catering to individual tourist's needs (2009, 13). Supplementing to the current mass tourism market, tailoring new segment and especially focusing on niche market can help Vietnam diversify and expand tourism product line and tourist profiles.

8.1 Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions tourism

MICE is abbreviation for Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions. It is a particular type of tourism for a large group, usually a business or organization, brought to particular place for a combined purpose of meeting or conference attendance and travel. The tourist group of MICE is usually in large quantity with higher expenditure than other normal tourist groups. Thus, this tourism type is becoming promoted and extremely beneficial to tourism industry. Asia is still the major destination of foreign direct investment (FDI) and the increase of multinational companies in this region; that leads to the increase in business travel within and to Asia in recent and forthcoming years. As reported by PATA's Issues & Trends (2011), Asia accounts for 11% of total meetings worldwide. More Asian destinations are seeking for MICE industry opportunities due to much higher expenditure from MICE visitors that is between three and seven times the expenditure of leisure visitors.

Vietnam is also one of the Asian countries gaining high FDI in last 4 years, from US\$ 2 billion in 2006 rising to US\$ 8 billion in 2010 (Data World Bank). Plus, the improvement and investment in hospitality sector, and especially the assured security and stable politics context, partly provides high quality facilities and conditions to speed up MICE segment in Vietnam. However, Vietnam is facing to some challenges that are significant reasons preventing the development of this lucrative segment, such as low infrastructure causing heavy traffic jam, shortage of

art and congress centers. Broadly speaking, MICE is not only about meetings of enterprise and politic issues, but also the large-scale and international art performances. Currently Vietnam just invests in the hospitality sector serving for business and politics meetings. It is recommended to direct real estate projects to construct art performance center whose capacity is enough for international performance and well-equipped.

8.2 Spiritual tourism

Spiritual tourism refers to many tourism categories that help tourist find healthiness and inner balance for both body and soul. It can consist of religious tourism, spa tourism and healthiness tourism. These new tourism segments are adopted most strongly by China and India, which are said to be the cradle of Buddhism religion and contemplation act. The increasing stress in business environment and the trend of “back-to-nature” provides a great growth potential for spiritual tourism in Asia due to the concept of natural meditation and soul indulgence. At present Thailand is the world’s most popular spa destination with nearly 4 million international arrivals for spa treatment in 2009. China and Indonesia are other Asia’s key spa destination that welcomed 3.3 billion and 2.5 billion international visitors respectively in 2009. Vietnam and Cambodia are two emerging spa industry and predicted to explosively grow, especially Vietnam thanks to the arisen professional spa services in many hotels and resorts along the famous beaches (Chitakasem, Jan 2011).

Religious tourism (also known as faith or pilgrimage travel) is a form of travel combining pilgrimage, learning about a religion and contemplation act. In Asia, this kind of tour plays a key role in the tourism industries of Myanmar, India, China, Tibet, Bhutan and Nepal. This tour aims at travelers who would like to know much more about a religion, express belief, do worship and experience the tranquil and modest life at cloister in order for inner balance and stress reduction. Vietnam is a country with high religious belief and respects the spiritual life. According to the statistics, Buddhism makes up 80–90% of the whole Vietnam’s population and

there are totally 14,775 pagodas and temples. Vietnam's pagoda architectures are diversely constructed and influenced through spatial and historical elements and differentiated by aboriginal cultures. Besides, Buddhism festivals are worshiped and organized in a solemn manner that creates a cultural characteristic specifically in Vietnamese spiritual life. Currently the pilgrimage tour are mainly aimed at domestic tourists or just inserted as a part of tour packages without carefully designed for a specific niche of international tourists. Hence, there is much development space for this potential product in near future.

Spiritual tourism in Vietnam seems to be still new to the world but is becoming approached due to many elements of tranquility and peace. A travel agency specializing in women's travel named Wanderlust and Lipstick in USA has organized "A spiritual voyage to Vietnam with Psychic Ainslie MacLeod" this autumn. The tour is designed for participants to "experience the wonders of Vietnam while empowered through a series of experiential workshops based on Ainslie's latest book: *The Transformation: Discover the key to living a life of deeper purpose and meaning*" to overcome fears, blocks and limiting beliefs. About the domestic tour operator, Haivenu is one of few companies offering the kind of healthiness tour like "Vietnam Healing Arts". It entails "Buddhist mediation, Vietnamese herbal and processes, ancient village, garden houses, (...) cycling, (...) highly regarded spa resort, Traditional Vietnamese Medicine Museum, Mekong River cruise, ancient Khmer pagoda". Emphatically, with the advantages of the long-lastingly traditional therapy and herbalism, Buddhism's prevalence and belief, tranquility and natural beauty, and evolving spa industry, the industry can intensify and promote the spiritual tourism market further.

8.3 Volunteer tourism

Volunteer tourism refers to any type of holiday in which the tourist participates in voluntary works in the destination and does not receive financial compensation, and even must provide financial contribution, in some cases. It is sometimes known as "voluntourism", which is defined as "The conscious, seamlessly

integrated combination of voluntary service to a destination and the best, traditional elements of travel – arts, culture, geography, history and recreation – in that destination.” Several types of volunteer activities comprises wildlife and nature conservation, community projects, working with children, and other special interests in healthcare, arts, social outreach, education, science and research (SNV Netherlands, VolunTourism.org). Most of charity institutions and volunteer organization, that organize and offer volunteer trip arrangement volunteers, charge volunteers a fee in order to cover their year-round coordinating and operational costs or to raise funds to contribute materials and other resources to the overseas project. Hence, in most cases, part of volunteer abroad means commitment to fundraising (International Volunteer Programs Association).

Even though Vietnamese economy is growing at an optimistic rate and appraised by the world for its fast development during two last decades, several rural regions in Vietnam are still in poverty and backward situation. Besides, the war traumatic victims, orphanages, the disabled, and other social issues are in need as well as in shortage of social helps. Thus, Vietnam is always the voluntourism destination highly recommended and helped in many volunteer projects and organizations that are found on the Internet. Actually, this combination of volunteer and tourism has been applied in some tour operators in Vietnam. However, in these tours, tourists spend most of their time for city traveling. Charity and orphanage sightseeing and fundraising are just a small part in the tour activities. Administrator of Vietnam tourism or local tour operator can largely apply this tourism type by providing and arranging volunteer tour for travelers and especially youth packagers, in which travelers can participate in an actual volunteer works, spend some days at local homestay, be encouraged to buy handicraft souvenirs. At the same time of volunteering, travelers can still enjoy the wild beauty at rural regions and experience local culture. Instead of the provision of normal relaxation tours, the supplement of this kind of sustainable tourism will diversify tourist choices and help develop community as well. It is a different way for tourist to actually experience the local culture.

8.4 Eco tourism

Eco tourism, included in nature-based tourism, accounts for 20–40% of international tourists, thanks to many urban dwellers looking for authentic and natural experiences (SNV Netherlands). The International Ecotourism Society delineates the principles of eco-tourism as minimizing impact on environment, establishing environmental and natural awareness, providing positive experience for both visitors and hosts, providing direct financial benefits to conservation and local people, and raising sensitivity to the political, environmental, social issues of host countries.

The ecological and geographical features which are advantageous for eco-tourism appear from North to South of Vietnam with extensive coastline, large amount of forest and mountain, multitude of rare and special species of plants and animals. Besides, the four out of 30 National Parks are recognized as ASEAN's Heritage and one as World's Heritage by UNESCO, and several other recognitions for their importance to the world's environment. Presently eco-tours are essential segment of Vietnam tourism thanks to the global tourism trend and natural advantages in Vietnam. Nonetheless, there are few conservation policies for these areas. For example, the last Javan Rhino in Vietnam was killed by poachers in the park in 2010 and a handful of elephants are killed every year. Besides, the government has proposed building several hydroelectric dams which will further degrade the park. Hence, Vietnam should set some priorities for nature conservation to truly develop this segment in the future (Adam Bray, 2011).

8.5 Culinary tourism

Local cuisine experience is indispensable to traveling and a must-have activity in every tour. The culture of eating and drinking at a place reflects local culture and nature environment and also plays a key role in tourism development of that place. Those developed tourism countries usually concentrate on national image building through the brands of national business and cuisines by setting up food brands

largely overseas. Culinary tourism (also known as food or gastronomy tour) is about unique and memorable experience of local cuisine, not only at acclaimed and high-profile restaurants but also at a roadside café, and can be divided into urban and rural experiences (Tourism Queensland, 2003).

Philip Kotler used to suggest Vietnam should become the kitchen of the world due to the distinctiveness and diversification in Vietnamese cuisine that is favored by the majority of foreigners (Saigon Times Online, July 2011). Presently Vietnamese gastronomy has been promoted at World Food Day (hosted by Vietnam last year), Gastronomy Programs in large hotels or Food Fairs. For the most part, food tours in Vietnam is currently organized for cooking lover and food writer with major activities of tasting Vietnamese typical dishes, sight-seeing outdoor markets to learn about different ingredients, attending cooking class with famous chef cooks. It is viewed as urban or city experience, mentioned above. For the development of food tour, it is necessary to expand travel routes to remote regions. Tourists can taste very distinctive local dishes and ingredients of each place. Besides, several other activities might be added e.g. farm visiting, recipe exchange with farmers and local people, joining in vegetable planting and picking for rural experience. Besides food aspect in culinary tourism, Vietnam also can develop this tour into other products like coffee or tea. A tour to tea gardens in highland regions can be a combination of learning about tea planting and producing procedures, Vietnamese culture of tea brewery, tasting and indispensably, enjoying exotic scenery in highlands.

This niche market of food tourism can be presented as a tool of destination marketing, as in Mexico and Thailand cases. Mexican gastronomy tours was launched in 2009 and strongly promoted by Mexican government by a bundle of activities such as accrediting a chef and restaurateur to be Mexico's official Cuisine Ambassadors, designing "culinary routes" through each states and introducing to the world about the revolving life around the food in Mexico (Medoza M. 2010). Or the expansion of Thaifoods restaurant, which was totally 9,500 restaurants in 2005 and mushroomed into 20,000 in 2008 all over the world.

Bringing Thailand food to overseas is not only a business act but also a bridge to bring the nation image beyond border. For this purpose, Thailand's government assigned a policy in which the owners of overseas Thaifoods restaurant are provided a low-interested loan with flexible terms, supported with cooking tools, ingredients, and professional chef trained (Dung T. 2005)

In conclusion, tourism is not only lucrative itself but also beneficial to other industries in an economy. Significantly, for developing countries, tourism also contributes to community and sustainable development. The diversification of tourism business is an effective approach to maximize opportunities and make most of potentials. In addition to the innovation of existing tour packages for mass market, seeking and fulfilling niche market is a useful and practical act for Vietnam tourism development.

9 CONCLUSION

The thesis concentrated on evaluating Vietnam tourism situation after the strategic marketing plan in the period of 2001 – 2010; learning the reasons of shortcomings in the tourism's development and giving the recommendations for a strategic development in the future based on qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Tourism is an important sector of a country's economy. Tourism speaks up the natural beauty, cultural identity and distinctions amongst nations and ethnics. Tourism is the combination of many elements of culture, geography and people. It is also responsible for connecting economies, politics and external relations. Tourism plays a significantly role since its enormous distribution to the national economy in term of GDP, direct and indirect employment, to culture and nature preservation and sustainable development.

The first development strategy of Vietnam tourism (2001 – 2010) did finish and succeed, to some extent, with the results of reaching more than 5 million

international visitors in 2010 and the constantly high growth rate in through the decade. These results can be leveraged to step forwards in the future. However, there was no in-depth research for the exact reasons of these results, apart from many marketing efforts from Vietnam tourism board. It is said that this growth is just the temporary success due to the saturation in the big tourism markets like Thailand. Moreover, the repeated visits are very low compared to other countries. From the general Vietnam tourism's context, Vietnam needs to concern about marketing performance and society's awareness that require a comprehensive and deep change in order to further both tourism and the whole country's economy in the future. After the study, there are four aspects in marketing of Vietnam tourism that needs to be improved as concluded in the figure below:

Figure 9: The conclusion of the study



- Branding works as the core concept of marketing. Anything without its own brand is considered to be a commodity, which has no difference from others. To date since the increasing competitiveness and higher realization of marketing's importance, the world's countries have noticed on building a brand for their country. A country brand and a tourist destination brand have a close and mutual supporting relationship. Hence, Vietnam should promote positive images, values and competitive advantage in all aspects to enhance the national image in international public. At the same time, Vietnam should build a visual designs associated with its brand whose functions is as brand recall and recognition. These image and visual types accompanied with advertising campaigns will communicate the core values of Vietnam tourism to the prospective travelers.

- Advertising works as a mean of communication to convey the Vietnam tourism's image and core values to people around the world. Amongst the marketing tools, advertising are used largely, despite fragmented and clutter advertising environment. And if executed creatively with a key message, advertising might bring the results beyond expectations due to its high ability to provoke emotion and create awareness.

- Internet works as the most effective communication channel to date thanks to the features of interaction, connection, integration, easy accessibility and less expensiveness. Marketing based on Internet can carry many tasks at the same time such as: communicate the brand, providing information, market research (feedback system and online survey), and expanding partnership network.

- Product development and niche focus are two important tasks in order to develop tourism in long term. Expanding tourist products on both mass and niche markets will help Vietnam approach various segments, and get more tourist expenditure. Tourism, similar to other businesses, needs to design and innovate products and services to meet the prospect's increasing and changing demands.

Alongside the improvement on marketing issues, Vietnam tourism needs to raise the society's awareness on the importance of national tourism development. Marketing can promote Vietnam tourism and attract more international visitors to Vietnam; however, for a long term and stable development, Vietnam tourism also pays attention to quality. Tourism quality is also expressed through customer service quality, trading quality and security assurance for tourists.

With all the comprehensive marketing efforts, society's awareness, innovative operation, cultural and natural preservation, Vietnam with its enormous tourism resources will have opportunity to become an ideal, exotic and favorite destination for tourists all over the world.

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APPENDIX

The interview questions with Mr. Adam Bray:

1. What do you think about Vietnam tourism industry?

Vietnam has a good start on its tourism industry. Vietnam is a country rich in natural resources with a vast diversity of culture and natural landscape. Though at times slow, the transportation network is nonetheless convenient, and Vietnam has the most advanced telecommunications network in the region. Vietnam has been a popular destination over the past decade, but it has had difficulty grabbing repeat visitors due to their frustrations with scams and a sense that they've seen enough of the highlights on their first visit. Vietnam has unmatched potential for future tourism development, but this is slowed down by an inefficient and often corrupt tourism administration.

2. Do you think Vietnam has enough conditions to develop the tourism further and has the competitive ability to other advanced tourist destinations in Asian region such as Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, etc.?

Of all the destinations in Southeast Asia, I think Vietnam has the greatest potential for further development of its tourism industry. This stems from the amazing diversity of culture, landscape and a richness of national history. I think that the government is doing more to slow things down that facilitate development, however.

3. What is your opinion about Vietnam tourism marketing campaigns recently (e.g. Year of National Tourism, Sea Festivals in Nha Trang)? Do you think they are communicated well and strongly enough to attract tourists?

Unfortunately, these campaigns have been a complete failure. Vietnam's focus, while asserting that it wants to attract foreigner tourists, has actually been directed internally, almost entirely. The government has made no attempt to reach out to foreign tourists with these festivals, other than print a few stories in government

newspapers. There are no printed brochures, no schedules of events, no memos distributed to hotels or tour companies, no signs in English advertising the festivals at these destinations, no websites for the events, and no social media campaigns related to them.

The festivals and 'marketing campaigns' themselves are very poorly executed. The individual events are never organized until the the last minute. Most of them never even happen. Often local residents are barred from attending. Many of the events are held exclusively for the pleasure of government officials and sponsors. Foreign media are rarely if ever invited, and at times even they are barred from attending when they do try to go on their own.

4. Which aspects do you think Vietnam should improve to draw more tourists, expand tourism markets and especially, to have repeated visits?

Repeat visits occur when tourists enjoy their first visit and either leave with a sense that there is a lot left to see, or that they can re-create all the fun and relaxation that they had (hopefully) on their last visit. To make this happen, the tourism industry needs to pay attention to the needs of the tourists. They need to actually ask what tourists like and don't like about their trips. So far this doesn't happen. The Tourism Administration treats tourists like a mysterious black box that can't be understood. They need to be taking opinion surveys to begin with.

Also, the Administration of Tourism needs to be taking a two-sided approach. On the one hand they need to emphasize the uniqueness of each city and destination within Vietnam. Vietnam has done this with the big things like Ha Long Bay and Hoi An. However, other cities--Saigon being a glaring example--have failed to market anything unique that they can offer for tourists. The other thing the Tourism Administration needs to market is fun and leisure activities. They've done this to some extent with the recent push for 5-star resorts and golf courses. While this does attract a limited number of big spenders, they have entirely ignored a diversity of other more affordable activities such as adventure sports, walking tours

and theme parks.

5. As the creator of muinebeach.net blog with full of useful guide and necessary information, what is your evaluation on the tourism information system of Vietnam? Which communication channels Vietnam should aim in order to provide tourist information as well as to promote Vietnam tourism?

Vietnam's 'official' tourism information system is almost nonexistent. The National Administration of Tourism has a website but it is difficult to find, outdated, and its not user-friendly. The government does not utilize any form of social media (Facebook, twitter, etc) and in fact Facebook is blocked by the government. As mentioned, there aren't even any signs in English that are ever posted at tourism destinations to alert tourists to special events.

The National Administration of Tourism has printed a guidebook to Vietnam, which itself is decent, but its nonetheless not objective since businesses pay to be listed. The sale of foreign-published guidebooks is banned in Vietnam (because the sections on history, politics and geography are uncensored), so there aren't any alternate sources of information available.

All of these things need to change if Vietnam wants to get serious about disseminating information about the tourism industry.

6. As a travel journalist and writer specializing in Vietnamese culture, which image/symbol/cultural characteristics Vietnam should use to promote the tourism brand and to make it differentiated from other competitors in Asia?

Vietnam has a wealth of cultural symbols and institutions to draw from and most have been neglected. This includes the country's vast selection of cuisine, the French colonial architecture legacy, pristine beaches and amazing geological features, the Cham/Champa culture, unique wildlife, and hill tribe cultures. Any and all of these should be expanded upon.

7. Currently Vietnam's tour packages are mainly about heritage and sea tourism. What do you think about Vietnam should place more effort in other tourism products to diversify the tour package choices e.g. Vietnam's minority cultures, food and wine tourism or eco-tourism?

Minority cultures, local cuisines and eco-tourism are indeed the three main areas in which tourism should be expanded. These are also key areas where local residents should be involved and can benefit. Further, the ability for local communities to generate an income in these areas will also stimulate a desire to preserve these precious resources. So far many of the government's tourism programs do little to benefit local communities. Guides in minority areas are generally Vietnam, rather than locals, who come from Saigon or Hanoi. Likewise, many of the hotels restaurants and other venues in these areas are government-owned or owned by people from outside the area that are government-affiliated. Entrance fees to parks, temples and heritage sites almost never go to the local community or even to develop and protect the sites themselves. These funds need to be redirected to more productive areas.

8. Beside the natural condition and diversified wild life in remote regions of Vietnam, what does Vietnam should focus on to develop the eco-tourism that is the tourism trend nowadays due to climate change?

Despite a lot of the hype about future consequences of climate change for Vietnam, I don't believe Vietnam has seen many effects yet. Vietnam has some great national parks but not much is being done to protect them. Cat Tien for example, which the government has been pushing for UNESCO recognition, is a real mess. The last Javan Rhino in Vietnam was killed by poachers in the park in 2010. A handful of elephants in and around the park are killed every year and are nearly gone now. This year the government has proposed building several hydroelectric dams which will further degrade the park. Vietnam can't develop ecotourism and meanwhile destroy the same sites it wants

to promote. Vietnam has to set some priorities.

Beyond that there are so many places that could be utilized for tourism around the country, which have been ignored. There are numerous cave systems, mountain ranges, hot springs, waterfalls and pristine beaches. Vietnam has yet to develop independent hiking and trekking--largely due to the communist fear of having foreigners wander too far in the countryside on their own as well as the requirement for everyone to register with the police each night. Vietnam should look to countries like New Zealand or even its communist neighbor, China, for ways to develop independent wilderness trekking/tramping activities. A perfect place to start is the area around the newly-discovered Long Wall of Quang Ngai in central Vietnam.