

LAB UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Faculty of Business Administration

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**THE RELATION BETWEEN DIGITAL MARKETING
AND THE TOURISM INDUSTRY IN VIETNAM**

Bachelor's Thesis 2020

ABSTRACT

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The Relation Between Digital Marketing and The Tourism Industry In Vietnam

LAB University of Applied Sciences, Lappeenranta

International Business

Bachelor's Thesis 2020

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The primary objective of the study is to figure out the key potentials of the tourism industry in Vietnam and which aspects of digital marketing affect the industry the most. The research will give more information to the people who intend to do a tourism startup in Vietnam. This study is not only a good reference to help people understand typical types of tourism in Vietnam but also a great chance to discuss the impact of digital marketing on the industry.

This research will study more about food, local, and eco-tourism, especially in infamous areas because those places are mysterious for all tourists with different natural scenes, cultures, customs, minorities, etc. Regarding the study, digital marketing plays an important role when bringing rural areas of Vietnam as well as improving the Vietnamese tourism image to everyone in the world. Based on the findings, the research could dig deeper into the situation and figure out some optimal solutions to boost the development of the nation branding into a higher level.

Keywords: digital marketing, Vietnam tourism, marketing in tourism

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
WTTC	World Travel & Tourism Council
WTA	World Travel Awards
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
TTCI	Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index
WEF	World Economic Forum
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
PDR	People's Democratic Republic
TIES	International Ecotourism Society
EA	Ecotourism Australia Limited
IUCN	International Union of Conservation of Nature
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
SEO	Search Engine Optimization
PPC	Pay Per Click
SEM	Search Engine Marketing
ESRT	Environmentally and Socially Responsible Tourism
VNAT	Vietnam National Administration of Tourism
TITC	Tourism Information Technology Center

1 Introduction

1.1 Thesis objectives

The purpose of the thesis is to research how the digital transformation has been grown strongly in recent years, particularly digital marketing, and how it affects the tourism industry in Vietnam. Besides that, the importance of digitalization is undeniable, when it helps identify user's behaviors, customers' preferences, databases, etc. It can help people to explore many new things that they have not known before, and this is why digital marketing is a main key success factor in tourism where people want to set foot on an undiscovered destination. Moreover, there is a huge connection between the digital marketing and tourism industry with a significant increase in booking apps and websites, travel vloggers, food reviews, etc.

The truth is that technology and the internet are the most vital things for every business in the world now. Therefore, none of the businesses can fulfill without the touch of the digitalization. Currently, more people are into travel between countries and continents whenever they want to, they can just do it with a couple of touches on their phone. Be back in the 1950s, people would have taken 90 minutes to do the process of reservation manually, and the ticket even cost much more expensive than today. Nevertheless, that period is already gone, so we can tell the customers to call our travel agency and book for a tour or flight tickets, etc. All the necessary information will be shown up on the website and social media platforms, what they need is to click to the "Reserve" button.

Frankly speaking, the coverage of the Internet and technology in Vietnam is not the same within the whole country. There are 64 million people percent of Internet user in Vietnam occupied 66% of the population, where most of them are urban residents. So, the remote areas' residents hardly approach the Internet which is a giant barrier to promote local tourism to everyone, especially international tourists. This thesis will study profoundly on the situation and find some optimal ways to deal with the problems as well as utilize the current advantages to leverage the development of the tourism industry.

1.2 Research issues and delimitation

In this study, there are four primary research questions to take into consideration. Both questions focus on the value of the tourism industry and the influences of digital marketing in Vietnam.

The first issue question is to figure out the situation of tourism in Vietnam. To jump further on other complicated factors affected the Vietnamese tourism industry, clarifying its pros and cons is a must. An in-depth analysis will be applied to understand the current level of the industry as well as determine a long-term strategy in the near future. This issue helps illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of the Vietnamese travel industry compared to the competitive neighbors' countries in ASEAN, especially Thailand and Malaysia.

The second issue focuses on the major products and businesses of the tourism industry in Vietnam. There are a variety of businesses that have been established to serve this money-making sector, however, the research will only determine and analyze three key tourism businesses that have a significant influence on the big picture. Additionally, these chosen businesses are also get significantly affected by digital marketing.

The third issue is about the digital marketing situation in Vietnam and the relation to the travel sector. This question will be analyzed by several statistics figures to identify the Internet and social media users within the country. Based on that, discussing the correlation between digital marketing and domestic tourism.

The fourth issue regarding how to develop the brand promotion of Vietnam's tourism internationally. In addition, the advantages and disadvantages of promoting progress will be clearly figured out. The study also finds out various solutions to improve the issue.

Regarding delimitation in the study, so what is included in the thesis?

- The definition and background information about general tourism and especially tourism in Vietnam
- The definition and background information about digital marketing in Vietnam.

- Major tourism businesses and products in Vietnam.
- How digital marketing develops in Vietnam? Problems and challenges.
- How digital marketing affects the tourism industry in Vietnam?

What is not included in the thesis?

- The tourism marketing of airlines, car rental, travel intermediaries, destination management.
- Digital marketing in financial, IT, and managerial aspects of a tourism organization.
- Types of digital marketing will be focused on the travel industry.
- The data collected in the thesis only illustrates the respondents from Finland, South Korea, America and Vietnam.

1.3 Research methods and data collection

To complete this thesis, quantitative and qualitative research methods are both used in the effort to acquire empirical data and information. Qualitative is defined as a method to illustrate the quality and characteristics of people and events thoroughly, without concern about measurements or amounts. This method is an interpretive methodology to clarify the phenomena in natural settings and collect the data from case study, literature reviews, life story, empirical materials, etc. Qualitative methods, on the other hand, are mainly concentrated on measurements and amounts of a group of people or situations. Numbers and statistical methods are used in this approach to determine the different aspects of an occurred event or to test a hypothesis. (Thomas 2003, p. 2.)

The qualitative method is used mostly in the theoretical part of the thesis by researching information via literature, books, websites, articles, etc. The data in the theory need to be deep, precise, and informative, in order to help readers understand clearly the definition of tourism, marketing, digital transformation, market volume, etc. Bilingual literature will be used in the thesis in both Vietnamese and English to increase the credibility of the data. While quantitative method will be applied in the empiricism when collecting and analyzing the data from people. A list of multiple-choice surveys will be compiled and sent to people

for the answers. The results of the answers will be reflected in true phenomena based on people's perspectives.

In terms of data collection, there are two types which are secondary and primary data. The primary data refers to the data collected for the first time by the author of the study by different methodologies such as interviews, surveys, questionnaires, observations, etc. While the secondary data is the data already collected from previous interviews and survey results of other researchers that are available to reuse. (Rabianski 2003.)

This study will use both types of data collection to convey the best credible information to the reader. The secondary data will be extracted from books, journals, academic articles, videos, and websites to serve the theoretical part. In the empirical part, interviews and surveys will be carried out to collect primary data.

2 Worldwide tourism at a glance

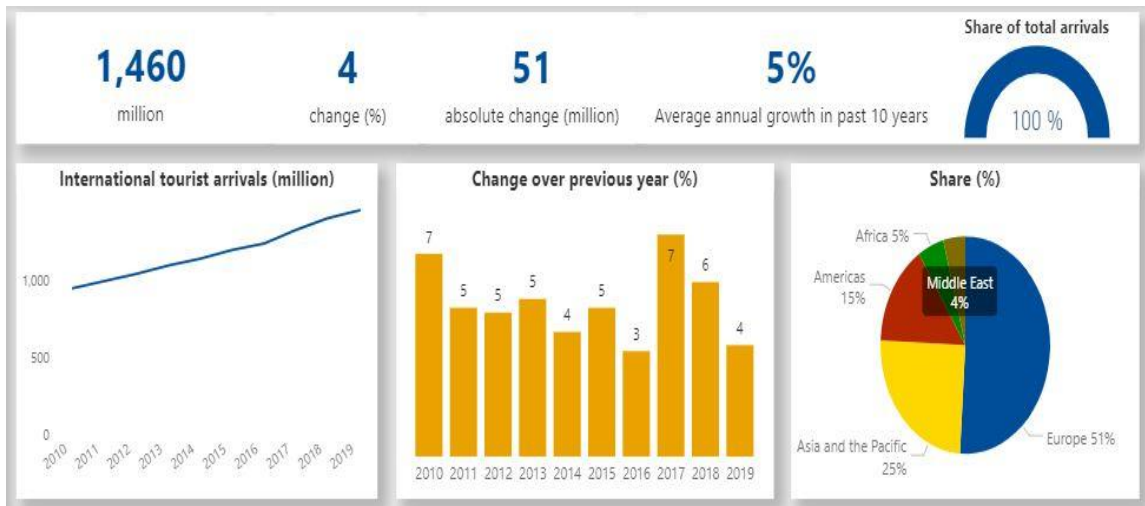
Tourism is one of the most developing industries all over the world recently at exponential rates. The smokeless business promises a giant economic potential by the drastic increase of amazing destinations. As reported by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), there are around 185 countries and 25 geographic regions in the world have been contributing to the prosperous development of the global tourism industry.



Source: WTTC

Figure 1: Travel & Tourism regional performance 2019

The industry had average growth at 3.5% in 2019 compared to the previous year, also reaching the ninth consecutive year of surging. Referring to figure 1, the green numbers highlighted when it surpasses the global Travel & Tourism GDP growth of 3.5%. There is a huge leap for those countries in Asia, especially the North-East Asia with the four major countries which are Korea, China, Japan, and Taiwan. Moreover, statistically speaking, the Travel and Tourism industry contributed US\$8.9 trillion to the world's GDP, which is 10.3% of the global GDP in 2019. This sector also helped the world to deal with 330 million jobs in the same year. (WWTC 2019 report.)



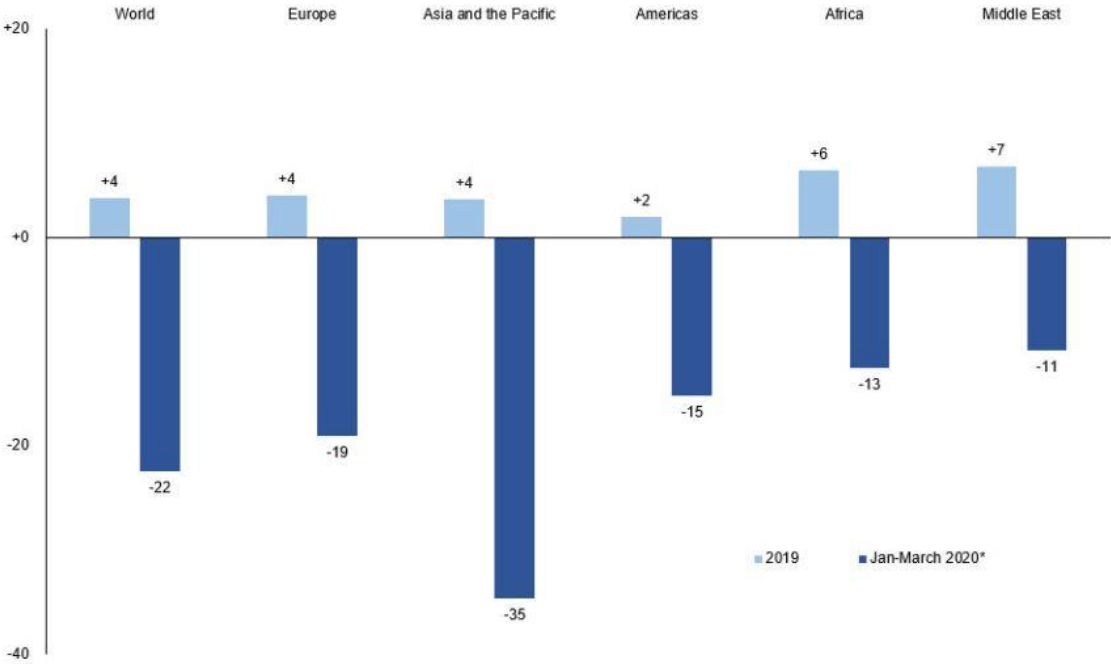
Source: United Nation World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

Figure 2: International Tourist Arrivals 2019

In terms of international tourist arrivals in 2019, there are approximately 1460 million people have traveled around the world. The number of tourists is increased by 4% which is 51 million travelers compared to the last year of 2018. Carefully explained, the orange numbers above the orange column stand for the changes in the percentage of current tourist arrivals compared to the previous year, it does not describe the drop in number. Therefore, there are two peaks of the development in tourist arrivals were 2010 and 2017 with the changes of 7% for each year. The two regions with the highest tourist arrivals percentage are Europe and Asia and the Pacific at 51% and 25% respectively in 2019. It is followed by the Americas, Africa, and the Middle East at 15%, 5%, and 4%, correspondently. (The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019.)

Despite the substantial growth of the tourism industry in recent years, the Covid-19 pandemic has wiped down everything with the most dramatic collapse ever. Most of the countries in the world have enacted restrictions for travelers to enter their own countries in order to contain the outbreak. A huge number of tourist attractions and entertainment places around the world such as castles, palaces, museums, amusement parks, theaters, etc. are closed. Obviously, the restriction creates a negative effect on the economy, especially the travel industry.

According to UNWTP (2020), international tourists decreased by 22% in the first quarter of 2020, and predictably fall by 60-80% until the end of the year. Approximately 67 million travelers decline compared to the same quarter last year causing the loss in exports at around US\$ 80 billion. (UNWTO.)



Source: UNWTO

Figure 3: International tourist arrivals, 2019 and Q1 2020 (% change)

Asia and the Pacific is the region suffering the most during the pandemic, with the noticeable decline in tourist arrivals at -35 percent. Although the Middle East has less impact on the virus than other continents, the countries also lost 11 percent of the arrivals. Some experts and economists suppose that there are three scenarios for the whole travel industry this year, these predictions are based on the re-opening of international borders.

- Scenario 1: International borders reduce the entry restriction in early July 2020. (-58%)
- Scenario 2: International borders reduce the entry restriction in early September 2020. (-70%)

- Scenario 3: International borders reduce the entry restriction in early December 2020. (-78%)

Under any of these scenarios, there is an inevitability in the loss of tourist arrivals, jobs, and export revenues referred to the tourism sector. This Covid-19 pandemic has been considered as the most terrible crisis that international tourism has been suffered since 1950. On the contrary, optimistically speaking, experts predict the recovery of worldwide tourism either in the last quarter of 2020, but mostly in 2021. After every crisis, the sharp climb in the economy is obvious, but how each country comes back is the matter. Africa and the Middle East are foreseen as the two fastest regions will recover in late 2020. While the Americas are the least positive continent due to the speedy surge in cases every day until now. Europe and Asia are still in a controversial discussion between experts, with half of them believe that these regions are able to recover by the end of this year. (UNWTO.)

3 The tourism industry in Vietnam

3.1 Basic facts

Vietnam, or the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, is an S-shaped country with an area of 331,689 km², located in Southeastern Asia, the eastern coast of the Indochinese Peninsula. The country shares the border Cambodia, Laos, and China. Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam, is the second most populated city, leave the lead for Ho Chi Minh city. Vietnam is considered as one of the most populous countries in the Asia Pacific region with approximately 95 million people in 2019. Despite witnessing uncountable wars and colonization, finally, the country was reunited in 1975 under the governor of the communist party. The country is divided into 58 provinces with 54 ethnic minorities; however, the official language of the whole country is Vietnamese. (H.Plecher.)



Source: Vietnam Guide

Figure 4: Map of Vietnam

Vietnam, fortunately, inherited the blessings of Mother Nature with over 3000 km of coastline with more than 125 beaches, spectacular forests, marvelous mountains, and caves as well as beautiful beaches. Most of the natural gifts have turned into famous tourist attractions such as Ha Long Bay, Phu Quoc Island, Da Nang beaches, etc. Thank these natural sceneries, the country has become one of the most destinations to visit in recent years among Southeast Asian countries. As claimed by the UNESCO's World Heritage, it is an honor for Vietnam to have eight places on the list divided into three categories.

- Cultural: Central Sector of the Imperial Citadel of Thang Long – Hanoi (2010), Citadel of the Ho Dynasty (2011), Complex of Hue Monuments (1993), Hoi An Ancient Town (1999), My Son Sanctuary (1999).
- Natural: Ha Long Bay (1994, 2000), Phong Nha – Ke Bang National Park (2003, 2015).
- Mixed: Trang An Landscape Complex (2014).

(UNESCO.)

Those breathtaking heritages have impressed a vast amount of both domestic and international tourists by their heroic history and irresistible attraction. Additionally, Son Doong Cave at Phong Nha – Ke Bang National Park was officially in 2009 and recognized by UNESCO as the world's largest cave passage in terms of diameter and continuity. The cave is currently measured at around 38.5 million cubic meters. There are another 300 caves and grottos inside the Son Doong, along with a 13-meter-long underground river, 2000 km² limestone area, 500-year-old trees, as well as thousands of spectacular stalactite and stalagmite formations.

Besides the tangible heritages, Vietnam also has many intangible cultural heritages recognized by UNESCO:

2008: Nha Nhac - Vietnamese court music, Space of gong culture.

2009: Quan Họ Bắc Ninh folk songs, Ca trù singing

2010: Glóng festival of Phù Đổng and Sóc temples

2012: Worship of Hùng kings in Phú Thọ

2013: Art of Đờn ca tài tử music and song in southern Vietnam

2014: Ví and Giặm folk songs of Nghệ Tĩnh

2015: Tugging rituals and games

2016: Practices related to the Vietnamese beliefs in the Mother Goddesses of the Three Realms

2017: The art of Bài Chòi in Central of Vietnam, Xoan singing of Phú Thọ province, Vietnam.

2019: Practices of Then by Tày, Nùng, thái ethnic groups in Vietnam.

(UNESCO.)

Vietnam is a peaceful country with stable politics and friendly people who are always welcome international tourists coming to the country. Thanks to Mother Earth's gifts along with the cultural essences, once visiting Vietnam, tourists will be seduced by its natural sceneries and culture values.

3.2 The situation of the Tourism Industry in Vietnam

Vietnam participated as a member of the United Nations World Tourism Organization UNWTO in 1981 and join the Asia Pacific Travel Association (PATA) in 1989. Vietnamese government has sanctioned many policies and development plans to drive the tourism industry of the country to a whole new level. International collaborations and agreements have been made between 800 organizations and over 50 countries. There is also an increase in quality accommodations, restaurants, and tourist attractions in order to meet the demands as well as expectations of the tourists. Additionally, stable currency and stable politics also play a huge role to facilitate the advantages of the industry. Thank the great reformation, Vietnam has become one of the world-famous destinations together with various attractions and rich cultural values that fascinate the international visitors. (Dao & Lan 2020.)

Indeed, Vietnam's tourism sector plays an essential role in the country's economic development with a huge contribution in recent years. In 2018, the revenue reached US\$26.75 billion, increased by 4.75 billion compared to 2017. Additionally, the market volume is aimed to increase to US\$45 billion which contributes 10% to the total GDP of the country. (Vietnam-Briefing 2019.)

Year	International tourists (Arrivals)	Growth rate of International Arrivals (%)	Domestic tourists (Arrivals)	Growth rate of domestic Arrivals (%)	Total Revenue (trillion VND)	Growth rate of Revenue (%)
2019	18,008,591	116.2	85,000,000	106.3	720	116.0
2018	15,497,791	119.9	80,000,000	128.8	637	117.7
2017	12,922,151	129.1	62,100,000	100.2	541	129.7
2016	10,012,735	126.8	62,000,000	108.1	417.27	117.5
2015	7,898,852	100.2	57,000,000	132.4	355.55	110.1
2014	7,887,013	104.0	38,500,000	110.0	322.86	111.4
2013	7,581,564	112.4	35,000,000	107.7	289.84	180.6
2012	6,744,158	113.9	32,500,000	108.3	160	123.1
2011	5,921,925	117.6	30,000,000	107.1	130	135.4
2010	5,304,712	133.3	28,000,000	112.0	96	141.2
2009	3,776,708	89.3	25,400,000	86.5	68	113.3
2008	4,230,235	-	29,350,000	-	60	-
Total	105,786,435	114.79	564,850,000	109.76	3,797.52	26.91

Source: Vietnam National Administration of Tourism

Figure 5: Statistics of Tourism in Vietnam during the period 2009 – 2019

After the noticeable economic crisis in 2008, Vietnam Tourism has come back with a non-stop continuity of climbing in terms of international arrivals and total revenue. Furthermore, Vietnam reached the peak record of the international tourist arrivals in 2017 at nearly 13 million, increasing 29% over the year of 2016. This was an amazing growth which is higher than the world tourist arrivals average ratio. (Vietnam National Administration of Tourism.)

Vietnam ranks 8th on the “Asia’s most visited countries” list according to the Nation Thailand (2018). This industry is one of the most delicious pieces of cake that everyone wants to eat. (The Nation Thailand 2018.)

Vietnam is also evaluated as one of the 10 countries with the greatest tourism growth in the world in 2019. Besides that, several awards have been achieved by the country such as “Asia’s leading destination”, “the best gold destination in the world 2019”, and “the world’s leading heritage destination in 2019”. It is undeniable to say that 2019 is the best year of Vietnam tourism, the year Vietnam shows to the world who they are. (World Travel Award.)

As stated in the Vietnam tourism report 2019, the tourism situation in Vietnam has a positive promising future by new developing destinations as well as hosting key events. Furthermore, the biggest Vietnamese conglomerate-Vingroup has declared the launch of a new airline which is Vinpearl Air. The huge investment will facilitate the transportation system for tourists both domestically and internationally. (FitchSolutions report 2019.)

Due to the miracle of Vietnam tourism development in 2019, there were more than 2500 international travel businesses established in the whole country, surged 21.9% over the previous year. The number of tour-guide also increased to 27,100 including 17,230 international tour guides, 9,146 domestic tour guides, and 724 tour guides working at the point. Experts predict that the tourism industry will require approximately 1 million direct workers in 2020, 1.6 million in 2025, and 2.25 million in 2030. (Dao & Lan 2020.)

In order to boost the smokeless industry to the top in the area, the Vietnam government also claimed the strategy on Vietnam's tourism development for the period 2011-2020, as well we the ambitious vision to 2030. The general objective is to bring tourism to become the key success sector in the economy by creating modern and exclusive destinations, high-tech infrastructure, develop tourism products, and improve regulations. Specifically speaking, the government wants to have at least 50 million international visitors and 160 million tourists, with the total revenue at US\$ 130-135 billion per year. Along with the development in the tourism industry, the issue of employment will also be solved easily by creating approximately 8.5 million jobs including 3 million direct jobs. (Decision 2473/QĐ-TTg 2011.)

Despite the mentioned advantages of the tourism industry in Vietnam, there remain problems that restrain the tourism development. For instance, the lack of high-quality infrastructure, shortage of skillful labor, security, high-tech applications, and hygiene. The low investment in airport infrastructure leading to overload working and capacity, as well as the stagnation in services. Despite the speedy growth of international tourist arrivals every year, there is limited action of renovation and refurbishment in the airport, especially two primary airports in Ha

Noi and Ho Chi Minh city. This is the major drawback that international visitors review about Vietnam, the airport infrastructure does not meet their satisfaction, sometimes creates frustration.

Human Resources is also considered as a huge weakness of Vietnam tourism. Although the number of tourism jobs has been climbing drastically, well-trained employees as well tourism educational system have not worked well enough to provide quality employees that satisfy the labor market.

In late 2019 and beginning of 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic is a controversial matter when it negatively affects the whole world's economy. Vietnam is not an exception to this virus, in the first quarter of 2020, there is a decline of 3,686.8 thousand visitors, which is 18.1% compared over the same period last year. Chinese and Korean tourists are the most popular visitors in Vietnam, however, the number in travelers has noticeably decreased from 31.9% to 26.1%, respectively. The European tourists are also dropped down by 664.3 thousand compared to the same time in 2019. Uncountable hotels, restaurants, and services have been closed during the pandemic time leading to the huge collapse in tourism industry revenue. (Le Kim Anh 2020.)

Finally, the application of technology in the Vietnam tourism industry is still limited compared to other regional countries. In the 4.0 era, the Internet and technology are the two strongest weapons for every business in order to promote the image of organizations to the whole world. Indeed, the tourism industry is vitally dependent on it. However, the quality of the booking system in Vietnam remains outdated, advertising videos and introduction footage about Vietnam tourism are still sparse. The government need to take some practical actions to improve the digitalization in tourism, this is the major key to stably compete with other countries.

3.3 Competitive advantages in relation to ASEAN countries

In 2019, the ASEAN has successfully attracted around 133 million international tourists who are interested in spectacular islands, beautiful beaches, magnificent caves and mountains, tropical weather, and rich cultures. The number of visitors

has been increased dramatically since 2016 at 116 million. The demand in tourism in ASEAN is predicted to increase around 4% every year during the period from 2018 – 2028, faster than the global economic growth. (WTTC 2018.)

As stated by the Vietnamese government in 2017, the major goal of the country in the future is to develop the tourism industry to become a leading destination in Southeast Asia. (No. 08-NQ/TW, 2017.)

No.	Country	Arrivals (million)	Share (%)
1	Thailand	32.53	28.04
2	Malaysia	26.76	22.49
3	Singapore	16.4	14.14
4	Indonesia	11.52	9, 93
5	Vietnam	10	8.62
6	Philippines	5.97	5.15
7	Cambodia	5.01	4.21
8	Laos	4.24	3.66
9	Myanmar	2.91	2.51
10	Brunei Darussalam	0.22	0.02

Source: Vu Chien Thang. Competitiveness analysis on Vietnam tourism in relation to ASEAN countries in the present report.

Figure 6: International tourist arrivals in ASEAN countries in 2016.

Figure 6 illustrates that among ASEAN nations, Vietnam ranks the 5th, occupied 8.62% in total of the region's international visitors. Although sitting in the 5th position, Vietnam is still far away from the regional leading country, Thailand, standing for 28.04% of the total share. Thailand is followed by Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia at 22.4%, 14.14%, and 9.93%, respectively. (Vu Chien Thang.)

According to the Asia Pacific Visitor Forecasts 2019-2023 full report, Vietnam is foreseen to become a leader in Asia Pacific Destinations regarding its average

growth rate in the next five years. Laos PDR will be in the second position with the average growth rate at 5.5% from 2018 to 2023. (Vu Chien Thang.)

As mentioned by the Seasia, the list of tourist arrivals in ASEAN countries in 2019 is as follows:

1. Thailand - 39,797,406 39.80 million
2. Malaysia - 20,1 million
3. Vietnam - 18 million
4. Singapore - 15.9 million
5. Indonesia - 13.62 million
6. Philippines - 8 million
7. Cambodia - 6.7 million
8. Myanmar - 4.3 million
9. Lao PDR - 3.4 million
10. Brunei Darussalam - 213 thousand

(Seasia 2020.)

There is a huge change in Vietnam tourism from 2017 to 2019 in terms of international tourist arrivals, from 10 million to 18 million. In the new up-to-date ranking list, Vietnam ranks 3rd which just follows Thailand and Malaysia. Despite the huge contrast in tourist arrivals between Vietnam and Malaysia in 2017, only two years after, Vietnam almost catches up with its neighbor at the difference of 2 million tourist arrivals. (Seasia 2020.)

Regarding tourism competitiveness, Vietnam has jumped four places from 67th in 2017 to 63rd in 2019, in the latest report of the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI). While, Thailand takes place at 31st, which is three ranks higher than in 2017. The comparison has been conducted every two years over 140 countries

by World Economic Forum (WEF) to evaluate the tourism competitiveness of each nation. (WEF 2019.)

Vietnam tourism benefits from the natural attractions and rich cultural heritage. In 2017, together with Indonesia, Vietnam is also the leading country having the highest UNESCO World Heritage among the ASEAN nations.

No.	Country	Number of Heritage
1	Indonesia	8
2	Vietnam	8
3	Philippines	6
4	Thailand	5
5	Malaysia	4
6	Laos	2
7	Cambodia	2
8	Singapore	1
9	Myanmar	1
10	Brunei Darussalam	0

Source: Vu Chien Thang. Competitiveness analysis on Vietnam tourism in relation to ASEAN countries in the present report.

Figure 7: UNESCO World Heritage in ASEAN countries in 2017

No.	Score	Country
1	Thailand	5.8
2	Singapore	5.4
3	Malaysia	4.7
4	Laos	3.5
5	Philippines	3.4
6	Indonesia	3.1
7	Cambodia	2.9
8	Vietnam	2.6

Source: Vu Chien Thang. Competitiveness analysis on Vietnam tourism in relation to ASEAN countries in the present report.

Figure 8: Tourism service infrastructure

Although Vietnam has a variety of advantages as mentioned earlier, however, the infrastructure problems within the country are extremely bad. Figure 8 is obvious evidence of inferior infrastructure in Vietnam, was sitting at the 8th position among eight ASEAN countries. (Vu Chien Thang.)

Overall, Vietnam is sitting in the top 4 countries among the ASEAN region that has a huge potential to develop in the near future. Besides the advantages the country has, improving the infrastructure, facilities, and services are the key elements to drive tourism to prosperity. Vietnam needs to perfect the weaknesses, invest more in eco-friendly tourism products along with local tourism to optimize the country's strengths. (Vu Chien Thang.)

4 Major tourism products and businesses in Vietnam

4.1 Culinary tourism

Besides the miraculous natural destinations as well as rich cultural values, Vietnam also attracts international tourists by its own unique cuisine. Vietnamese gastronomy has a distinctive taste with a variety of cooking methods. Foods are always kept a proper level of spicy, sour, sweet, and salty. Despite the influence of French and China cuisine in the past, Vietnamese foods never lost their exclusive. There is a diversity in Vietnamese culinary from the North to the South of the country, with different specialties. (Enchanting Travel.)

Because of the effect of China, in the Northern part, there is a kingdom of noodles and vermicelli, especially Pho (noodle soup) – one of the most famous foods in Vietnam. Apart from it, Bun Cha is also believed as a popular food there, which is made of grilled pork, vermicelli rice, fish sauce, and pickle. (Enchanting Travel.)

Moving down to the Central part, spicy foods are extremely popular here with the two most popular which is Cao Lau (thick noodles, herb, and unique broth) and Banh Khoai (rice flour and turmeric). Food is cooked elaborately and colorfully and served with many side-dishes in Hue, which is an Imperial city. Moreover, food decoration is highly essential in this royal city, with many different shapes such as Phoenix, Dragon, flowers, Swans, etc. (Enchanting Travel.)

While China affects the Northern part, France has a certain impact on the South of Vietnam due to colonization. Therefore, coffee shops are covered every corner on the street, together with the exclusive taste of Ca Phe Sua Da (Condensed milk with coffee). Most tourists review that Vietnamese coffee is way stronger than any other coffee in the world. In addition, Banh Mi, or Vietnamese sandwich is the most famous food in the South as well as the whole country. Banh Mi looks like a stuffed baguette with meat, coriander, cucumber, and pork cake. There are various versions of Banh Mi in Vietnam currently, so even the pickiest visitor can find their own type of Banh Mi. (Enchanting Travel.)

Furthermore, these foods above should be tried in the street-food-style restaurant with plastic chairs on the sidewalks or wrapping by the newspaper. It is not only cheaper than the fancy restaurant but also fresh and authentic. Visitors can eat and observe the daily routine of the locals around at the same time. What an unforgettable experience!

In 2019, Vietnam has been recognized as Asia's Leading Culinary Destination by the World Travel Awards (WTA). It is an honor of Vietnam to achieve the prize, this will help the country increase its reputation as well as a great motivation to develop food tourism in the future. According to Graham Cooke (2019), the founder of WTA, Vietnamese culinary has broken the national line and has become one of the "must-try" experiences. (World Travel Award.)

Along with the Chinese and French cuisines, Vietnamese food is one of the most three popular gastronomies in the world. Some of the traditional dishes such as Bun Cha, Pho, Nem, and Banh Mi has been reviewed as must-eat foods to try in Vietnam by international tourists and experts. (Tran Quoc Vuong.)

The Vice President of the Vietnam Association of Ethnology and Anthropology, Vuong Xuan Tinh suggested opening more culinary workshops in order to develop the traditional cuisine as well as promote the Vietnamese foods to other international chefs and experts.

Thanks to the success of Vietnamese cuisine, the number of food tourism services has been established to attract more international tourists. The key model of this business is to engage visitors to an actual cooking activity with the locals. Some travel agencies have been started a 3-day-cooking tour for visitors. During the tour, they will be guided on how to cook and present the food as local do, beginning with an early-morning-market shopping and ending by a gathering supper.

4.2 Local experience tourism

Recently, local experience tourism has become one of the top trending tourism in many different countries, especially in Asia. Thank cultural values as well as heroic history, Vietnam is also the leading country of local experience tourism.

According to the Tourismtiger, local experience tourism is described as tourists want to experience themselves like locals by immersing in the culture, tradition, language, and daily life. In spite of the fast-growing of luxurious resorts, high-quality hotels, and five-star restaurants, people are getting fed up with these cliché vacations, especially the young generations. There is a shifting trend into “real” aspect of the place they are coming to, visitors want to understand the language, the culture, they want to be a part of the community, not just a watcher. Indeed, due to the rapid increase in demand for the local experience, Vietnam cannot leave this opportunity aside. (Jb & Renée Macatulad.)

It has been noticed that there is a significant growth in peer-to-peer travel in Vietnam recently, which is one local will guide a tourist to experience to the destination they come to. In big cities like Ho Chi Minh city, Ha Noi, and Da Nang, there are many places to visit such as War Remnants Museum, Ben Thanh Market, Cu Chi Tunnels, Thang Long Imperial Citadel, Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, etc. With peer-to-peer travel, tourists have a chance to visit these popular places by motorbike with their companion instead of a cliché travel bus. They have a ton of time to talk about the history and how to buy stuff in the market, just like friends. They also can learn more about the Vietnamese language to communicate with locals where they visit. These activities help the tourists engage realistically with the local lives, instead of visiting through the presentation of tour guides. Apart from it, the locals will also provide accommodations where tourists can be a part of the community. They will learn how to prepare a Vietnamese home-made meal, understand the table manners, ride a motorbike to shop in the market, bargain with vendors, try on traditional and casual clothes, etc. Depending on the region they visit, tourists will have different experiences with the locals, and all of them are unique. (Jb & Renée Macatulad.)

Despite the potential of this sector in the tourism industry, Vietnam has just started developing the local experience tourism for recent years. There is no need for giant investment in this sphere as well as the bilingual and trilingual students has been increasing rapidly, so it is promising to see the exponential growth of this local experience tourism in the near future. In contrast, there is some dilemma that Vietnamese are dealing with to promote this sector. Digitalization and

technology are the first barriers, it is not a big problem in urban cities, however, the residents in rural areas do not have that luck to fully approach the technologies. Although there are many digital revolution and development in remote areas, people just barely understand how to use the Internet and digital devices, especially older people. The second problem is how to make the tourists feel comfortable in the local accommodation, companies need to prepare some backup plans if they could not survive there. Honestly, jet lag, culture shock, insomnia, allergy, etc. are the frequent issues happening to the visitors when participating in the local experience tourism.

4.3 Eco-tourism

According to the International Ecotourism Society (TIES), ecotourism is defined as traveling to natural destinations with high responsibility in order to conserve the environment, as well as sustain the well-being of the local people. TIES emphasize some key principles of ecotourism including minimizing physical, social, behavioral, and psychological influences but building environmental protection and providing positive experiences to visitors simultaneously. (TIES).

The Australian National Ecotourism also explains that ecotourism mainly focusses on sustainably discovering natural areas, by improving environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation, and conservation. (EA).

Regarding the ecotourism development in Vietnam, the country luckily has over 3,200km of coastline, thousands of islands along with unique cultural values, and a variety of ecosystems. Besides that, Vietnam is also a home of more than 14,624 play species belonging to around 300 families. The high biodiversity of the country is also reinforced by the various animal kinds with more than 11,217 species and sub-species, and the typical coral reefs ecosystem. Realizing the importance of ecotourism, the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism has cooperated with the International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) since 1999 to develop the strategy of ecotourism in Vietnam.

As the result of the collaborations, many local travel agencies have promoted ecotourism campaigns to engage international tourists in Vietnam. The tours are operated based on the unique environmental conditions of each region in Vietnam, which is separated into seven main parts as follows:

- Northeastern mountainous and coastal areas: limestone, wetlands, and corals reef are the main values. Ecotourism activities: adventure tours, scuba diving, and research tours.
- Northwest mountainous region – Hoang Lien Son: 38 rare species need to be protected in the area. Ecotourism activities: mountainous ecosystem study tours, zoology tours, and adventure tours.
- Red River Delta: four national parks (Ba Vi, Tam Dao, Xuan Thuy, and Cuc Phuong). Ecotourism activities: natural and cultural tours.
- North Central Coast: high biodiversity with several national parks (Ben En, Pu Mat, Vu Quang, Phong Nha- Ke Bang, Bach Ma) with huge primeval forests. Ecotourism activities: ecosystem research tours, adventure tours, and scuba diving.
- South Central Coast and Central Highlands: dipterocarp forest, mountainous, coral and wetland ecosystems. The only destination in Vietnam and Southeast Asia having rare species of grey cow, twisted horned ranch, birds, reptiles, and endemic plants. Ecotourism activities: ecosystem tours, adventure tours, scuba diving.
- South East: Cat Tien and Con Dao national parks, along with Can Gio biosphere reserve, especially the appearance of Javan rhinoceros in the Cat Tien ecosystem. Ecotourism activities: study tours and adventure tours.
- Mekong Delta: wetland and mangrove ecosystems. Ecotourism activities: river and garden tours.

(Le Minh 2016.)

On the contrary, there are various problems of ecotourism in Vietnam that need to tackle in order to sustainably develop this sector in tourism. Although the high potential of biodiversity, the Vietnamese government has not had yet a specific development plan in ecotourism for each region in the country. Besides that, there

is a limitation in investment for ecotourism. There are also shortages in human resource management, tourism activities, infrastructure, and promotion which are a huge barrier preventing Vietnamese ecotourism from developing. Furthermore, climate change and regional competition are the two most essential external issues that the government should take into account, in order to plan a long-term strategy to improve the image of Vietnam's ecotourism.

5 Digital marketing

5.1 What is digital marketing?

In order to understand clearly the term of digital marketing, the fundamental concept of marketing should be obtained in advance. In simple words, marketing is a process of clarifying the human and social demands, also creating values for customers. Marketing is one of the best tools to generate revenue and marketing success is defined by the profit level of a business organization in a long-term strategy (Kotler 2009.)

According to Chaffey and Ellis (2019), digital marketing is defined as the integration of digital media, data, and technology in marketing activities. Several names have been created before to define this term such as Internet marketing, e-marketing, web marketing. However, there is just a difference in the range of digital platforms to reach customers. In the organization, the term is not the most important thing but the relevance to its business. (Chaffey & Ellis 2019.)

Although digital marketing is just a descendant of traditional marketing, most companies apply it in their business. So, what is the difference between these types of marketing? While traditional marketing uses newspaper, leaflets, and TV, digital marketing approach customers broader and quicker by social media and websites. The scale-up ratio makes a huge difference in the speed of interacting with clients because of the range of internet users or much more than people who read newspapers and TV. Even though digital marketing has a variety of advantages, it does not mean that traditional marketing is obsolete. Old-school marketing can reach the older generation who knows nothing about the Internet

and social media. Depending on the target customers of a company, they will choose the best option of marketing for their own business.

Besides the differences between old-and-new marketing type, there remains a correlation, especially the effect of marketing mix on digital marketing. It provides coherent connections among the elements along with generates more opportunities for varying the mix. In terms of product, it can be customized and broadened for a digital environment. While the company can modify and come up with a new strategy for pricing models in the digital market. The place will be various due to the diversification of digital marketing's distribution channels. As a result of the advance in digital techniques, more extraordinary methods of promotion will be created on different platforms. Finally, people, process, and physical evidence are improved by the UX design or User Experience design and website apps with high personal data security along with optimal buying processes. (Chaffey & Ellis 2019.)

Ultimately, what are the major benefits that digital marketing brings to our world nowadays? Digital marketing improves the process of identifying, anticipating, and satisfying customer requirements profitably. People believe it is an expense of an organization, however, digital marketing is a wise investment for every company. Furthermore, digitalization also helps a company to achieve the four strategic directions which are marketing penetration, marketing development, product development, and diversification. Digital marketing plays an essential role in researching and understanding the markets as well as customers. It creates a huge competitive advantage in order to surpass other rivals in the competition. (Chaffey & Smith 2017.)

5.2 Digital marketing channels

There are several platforms to promote digital marketing, each of the channels has a unique structure, features, and tools to gain the audiences' attractions. The data below explains the functionalities of different marketing channels:

- Display advertising (Website): The marketing information will be present on the website of an organization. It encompasses a wide range of

advertisements such as ads, forums, contextual information, search engine ads, etc. This channel requires a deep comprehension of the target customers together with content marketing strategy. The better the strategy is, the more brand recognition the company achieves.

- **Email:** Email marketing is the best type of marketing that will save a company's budget. According to Sipralytics, there is 73% of the B2B marketers believe that email is the top tool to generate potential customers and increase the revenue effectively. Also, every \$1 spent on email marketing, the company can expect to gain \$42 of return on investment. However, compiling emails should be done delicately and ingeniously, as well as avoiding annoying information which has a negative influence on the leads and loyal customers.
- **Organic Search (SEO):** SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization. This is considered as the most important key success for every marketing department recently. SEO helps a company appear more in search results from keywords on many different social media platforms depend on which apps they use. Marketers also use SEO to increase the company's website rank, improve the conversion rate, and develop brand awareness. Psychologically speaking, customers tend to look for products or services of whom with a higher rank on the search results.
- **Paid Search Traffic (SEM & PPC):** SEM stands for Search Engine Marketing, and PPC stands for Pay-Per-Click, both of them are similar to SEO, but mainly conducted by paid advertising. It helps the company promote its brand effectively by arranging the website and posts' positions near the top of the search results. Advertisers will only pay for each time a user clicks on their ads. Based on the clicking data, the advertisers can easily understand the customers' behavior and demographics to improve future ads.
- **Social Media:** Due to fact that there are more than 3.8 billion users from various social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, LinkedIn, etc. The potential customers are huge in these virtual worlds if business know-how reaches them cleverly. These platforms are worth the time of every company in order to attract new customers,

cultivate relationships with leads, and reinforce interactions with your target market.

(IntroBooks.)

6 The impact of digital marketing on the tourism industry in Vietnam

6.1 Digital marketing in Vietnam

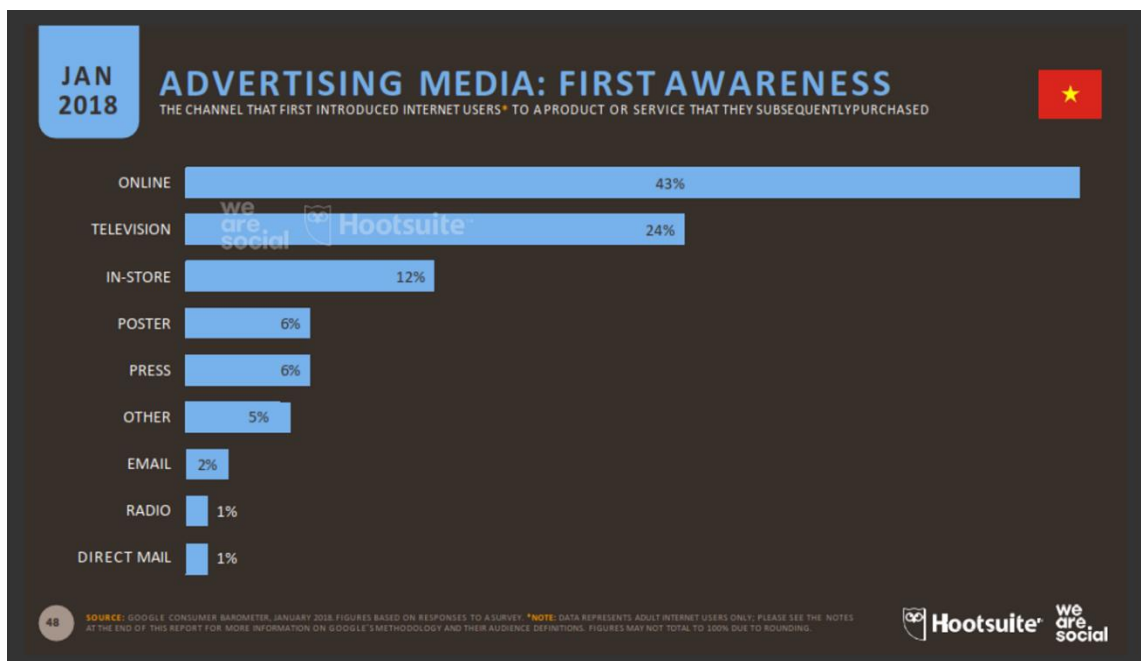
Vietnam is one of the countries that has a rapid growth in the number of Internet users in recent years. According to We are social (2018), the total population of Vietnam is 96.02 million with 35% are urban citizens. 67% of the population can use the Internet which is around 64 million users. Thank the development of smartphones and other modern technological devices with a wide range of prices, more people at different classes in Vietnam have a chance to approach the Internet. As a developing country, these numbers show that the huge potential of Vietnam in the digital marketing industry. In addition, the speedy growth in digitalization plays a key role in attracting more foreign investors to the S-shape country. (We are social report 2018.)



Source: We are social

Figure 9: Digital in Vietnam (1st quarter 2018)

The report also shows that Vietnamese people usually spend 6 hours and 52 minutes on surfing the internet every day, ranking 15th in the world according to the survey of countries with the number of users spending the most time on the Internet. Vietnamese spend 2 hours and 37 minutes on social media, 2 hours and 43 minutes on watching streams and videos, and 1 hour and 21 minutes on listening to online music. Besides that, the frequency of Internet use in Vietnam is quite high at 94% every day and only 6% per week. It means that people access the Internet every day via different devices. (We are social report 2018.)

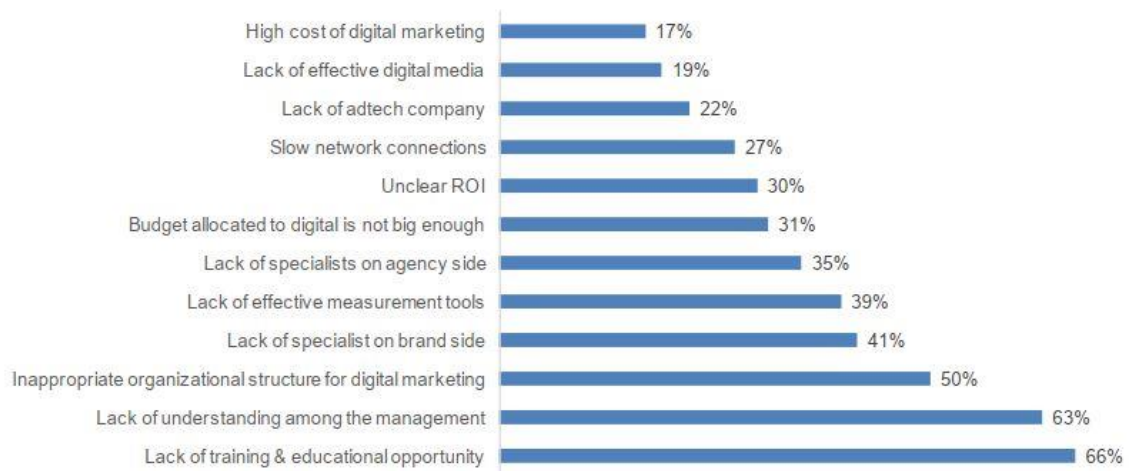


Source: We are social

Figure 10: Types of advertising media channels in Vietnam (1st quarter 2018)

Because of the rapidly increasing number of Internet users in Vietnam, so online marketing is the best distribution channel now to attract and interact with customers. Social media is the key success in this sector together with the active ranking as follows: Facebook (61%), YouTube (59%), Facebook Messenger (47%), Zalo (45%), and Instagram (32%). Online marketing is followed by the other traditional marketing which is television, in-store, poster, etc. These types

of advertising are only occupied one-second or one-fourth of the big piece - online marketing. (We are social report 2018.)



Source: Q&Me Vietnam Market Research

Figure 11: Issues in digital marketing of Vietnam

Besides the drastic growth and positive numbers mentioned before, there are some dilemmas that Vietnam has to figure out at the same time. Among the problems, “lack of training and & educational opportunity” is considering the serious issue that needs to tackle in order to boost the digital marketing industry into the new level. Even though employees are graduated from the university with degrees and certifications, but the practical quality is still a big question mark for all the employers. Apart from it, “lack of understanding among the management” is also a high-vote problem that every company has to deal with recently. The different perspective in digital marketing strategy creates a huge conflict between managers and employees leading to an unsuccessful campaign. (Q&Me, p.9.)

6.2 Digital marketing aspect in tourism

Tourism is a part of the service sector which is distinguished from other industries such as manufacturing, construction, art, and the primary sectors. Therefore, marketing plays an important role in this smokeless industry with different special characteristics. Intangibility is the first characteristic of this industry because tourism mainly provides services instead of tangible products like other industries. Next is the inseparability of production and consumption, which means services

are created and used at the same time by providers and tourists. Besides that, service marketing is perishable due to the fact that no service can be stored for future use. Finally, heterogeneity is a tough attribute in this industry where service is about to serve every kind of people, and people are all distinctive. (Srinivasan 2009.)

Additionally, tourism is one of the industries is impacted the most by the digital transformation era. As reported by the SaleCycle, the global online travel market was at around US\$629 billion in 2017 and forecasted to approach nearly US\$818 billion by the end of 2020. Two factors get influenced the most are transportation and accommodation when millions of apps and websites have been created for users to book the itinerary of their journey. At this moment, it is much easier than people can just buy an online ticket and check-in at the airport with the barcode or QR code, it not only helps customers reduce queueing time, but also reduce the workload of the airport ticket checking staffs. As a similarity to the transportation issue, the accommodation problem is also tackled conveniently with online booking. Clients do not need to call in advance or worry about the hotel is full, everything is well-prepared before the trip just with couple touches on the phones. (SaleCycle report 2020.)

Furthermore, thanks to the development of digitalization, passengers have an enormous activity to do on the plane with the advanced in-flight entertainment systems. Besides the movies, games, tv shows, music, etc. the in-flight system also plays a tool to promote the airline's products, especially for the low-cost airline. Digital marketing also facilitates small local travel businesses to promote their own brand and start-up. In particular, in some countries in South East Asia, people prefer to stay in a local homestay instead of luxurious hotels. At those places, they can enjoy and experience the daily activities of native as well as interact more with local people. That is why local tourism is extremely popular in that area, especially Vietnam and Thailand. (SaleCycle report 2020.)

It is undeniable to say that SEO, SEM, and Social media are the most popular tools in tourism marketing currently. With a good team of digital marketing, SEO and SEM skills will help a company increasing its search results in Google as well

as other marketing channels leading to reach more clients. It's true to say that the higher the position you are in the google search result, the more chance you have to get more customers. Besides that, instead of contacting customers via phone or email, now a travel agency can solve most clients' personal problems through any social media platforms fast and easily. If Google is the best channel to approach customers, then social media is the place to attract them with posts, blogs, videos, and reviews. A large number of active Internet users in Vietnam plays an important role in domestic tourism marketing.

Besides that, the mobile app is also a representative of media communication in the role of engaging customers. Currently, in every big city or famous local areas in Vietnam already have a mobile app providing tourists attractions, transportation route, well-known restaurants, accommodations, tips, facts, and a lot of useful information about Vietnam. For example, in the imperial city – Hue, most of the hotels from 2-5 stars and travel agencies have their own websites connected to travel apps in the region. Moreover, restaurants and hotels also join the world-popular booking apps such as Booking.com, Airbnb, TripAdvisor, etc. The multi-channel will give tourists more choices in selecting what they want exactly. (Nguyen Anh 2019.)

6.3 Vietnam's tourism marketing strategy

In 2010, Vietnam's government collaborated with the Environmentally and Socially Responsible Tourism (ESRT) development program in order to boost tourism marketing by building new policies and long-term strategies. The main objective of this project is to improve the potential capability of Vietnam's Tourism by boosting the social-economic aspect while natural and cultural resources are still being protected. Therefore, strategies have been proposed to improve tourism marketing, which is divided into two milestones as follow:

- 2013-2016: Firstly, promoting Vietnam's image to international tourists via various social media platforms as a "must-visit" country in the South East Asian region. Based on the advantages of exclusive cuisine, spectacular nature, and rich culture, video marketing together with website marketing will be the key success factors to introduce the country to the world. Secondly,

the advertisement should include a wide range of tourism services and products in every province within Vietnam, so the tourists' length of stay will be increased which means expense and experience will also grow. Finally, market segmentation will be gradually set up so as to improve the quality of management and financial efficiency.

- 2017-2020: This is the period of re-evaluation and adjustment for the goals in the previous period. There are three main criteria to assess the progress of the project:
 - Vietnam's Tourism is already recognized internationally, and consistently applies brand promotion's activities of the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT).
 - Rapid growth in market share from aimed target markets.
 - Professionalizing marketing and management activities, as well as contributing to digital marketing creativity.

(ESRT report 2012.)

Apart from it, Vietnam uses digital marketing to promote tourism by opening the country's official tourism portal, www.vietnam.travel, to provide useful information for foreign travelers. The website is monitored by VNAT and technical support from the Tourism Advisory Board where use the up-to-date digital marketing strategies to share Vietnam's tourism value to international audiences. A website is also a place for travel stories, reviews, videos, virtual tours, incoming events, and professional photography, visitors can entirely enjoy the trip in Vietnam via these useful data. (VNA 2018.)

In addition, industry 4.0 has been motivating business organizations to combine technology with tourism to reduce expenses and improve customers' personalization. Therefore, several tourism corporations have been planned to integrate high-tech devices so as to meet the customers' demands and keep up with global trends. Big companies will self-invest in a new apartment to develop the Virtual Reality (VR), meanwhile, SMEs will collaborate with other technological companies. VR technology provides a 3D stimulation, where tourists can choose wherever they want to go, just with a goggle device. They

can visit luxurious hotels, restaurants, Tokyo, Saigon, Hanoi, Everest Mount, etc. (Nguyen Anh 2019.)

6.4 Nation branding in tourism marketing

Brand promotion is a core in developing Vietnam's tourism to the world, it contains intangible values connecting people all around the globe. It is undeniable to say that tourism is a leading activity in improving nation branding by boosting cultural trade, peace, and relationship strengthening. The instinct of brand promotion is to deliver national essences to unforgettable memories inside international tourists' minds. Developing a national tourism image plays an essential role in competitive advantages with other countries, and digital marketing is a key factor at this moment. Nation branding is not only about advertisement, logo, website, brochure, but also public relations, special events, service, and product implementation. (VNAT 2009.)

Although Vietnam's tourism is evaluated as the top 10 countries with the highest potential in the world in the following 10 years, the current development has not met the expectation yet. With the poor infrastructure as well as uninteresting tourism's services and products, especially lack information, photography, and videos in many places in the world. The first slogan of Vietnam's tourism was in 2000, "Vietnam – a destination for the new millennium) together with a logo of a Vietnamese girl wearing an "Nón Lá" – Vietnamese traditional cone hat. A few years later, the slogan was changed into "Welcome to Vietnam", spreading widely in every media communication channels at that time, especially in Vietnam Airlines – the national airway of Vietnam. However, the success did not come to Vietnam after these efforts. In 2005, the VNAT organized the competition for a new symbol and slogan for the national tourism branding. Finally, "Vietnam – the hidden charm" was chosen regardless of controversy from different sides. Once again, it was slightly modified into "Vietnam – timeless charm". (VNAT 2009.)



Source: VNAT

Figure 12: Vietnam's tourism logo and slogan

Despite the fact that it was not that successful as expected, the government and big corporations have started investing 1-5% of their revenues to promote the national tourism branding by digital marketing in recent years. Several actions have been planned and conducted in order to achieve the ultimate objective of dominating the tourism market. Applications are created to analyze and target customers depending on the demographics, videos marketing, and contenting marketing contributed as customers' attraction tools. Additionally, the government encourages cinematic video creation on YouTube, where reaching and influencing people easily. These actions incredibly bring success in internationally promoting the nation branding, more and more foreign tourists visit Vietnam along with hugely positive reviews and vlogs posted on different social media platforms. (VNAT 2009.)

Thank these successes, VNAT plans to expand the range of promotion by cooperating with other countries' airlines, especially Asian nations. Vietnam's

tourism introduction videos will be shown on the in-flight entertainment system, brochures and specialties of the country are displayed on the flights heading to Vietnam. Besides that, direct and indirect flights between countries are necessarily opened to facilitate tourists' travel routes. The bilateral and multilateral relations with other countries are speeding up tourism developing progress in Vietnam.

Furthermore, to strengthen the pros and improve the cons, VNAT has been collaborating with a Japanese firm so as to create Internet websites for Vietnam's tourism. The E-marketing, Human Resource, and Information Technology team of VNAT are cooperating together in the project. The Tourism Information Technology Center (TITC) was established to take the responsibility of developing the information system including both the Intranet and the Internet. TITC will be monitored by the VNAT in order to achieve the primary objective of promoting Vietnam's national tourism branding. The websites will be programmed with optimal SEO on Google, Altavista, and Yahoo. Currently, there are four main official websites with different functions as follows:

- www.vietnamtourism.com: this is the first and main official website which is available in six languages: Vietnamese, Japanese, Chinese, English, French, and German. The key function of this website is to promote Vietnam's tourism to international tourists by personalizing the content according to the target market. TITC collects the statistics on the webpage to identify the Net surfer's country.
- www.vietnamtourism.gov.vn: This website focuses on company policies, current laws, and payment methods.
- www.dulichvn.org.vn: mainly aims at the domestic market with only one available language which is Vietnamese. The website provides news and innovations in the tourism industry.
- www.vietnamtourism-info.com: delivering information about tourism products and services in Vietnam.

These websites have been contributing significant benefits in attracting visitors as well as developing nation branding. In addition, TITC is also developing a new

website for tourists to reserve accommodations online, “www.myhotelvietnam.com”. However, this site requires a wide range of data, especially the destination management system in the future. Another dilemma of the website is the competition with other giant booking apps such as booking.com and Airbnb.

7 Data analysis and results

Based on the data of the literature review, the results of the survey clearly identify the significant influence of marketing on the tourism industry in Vietnam. There are 16 questions in the survey and it was conducted on Google Form. The survey was answered by 75 people who are both natives and foreigners living in Vietnam, Finland, America, and South Korea. After analyzing the data, the authors crystalized the results as follow:

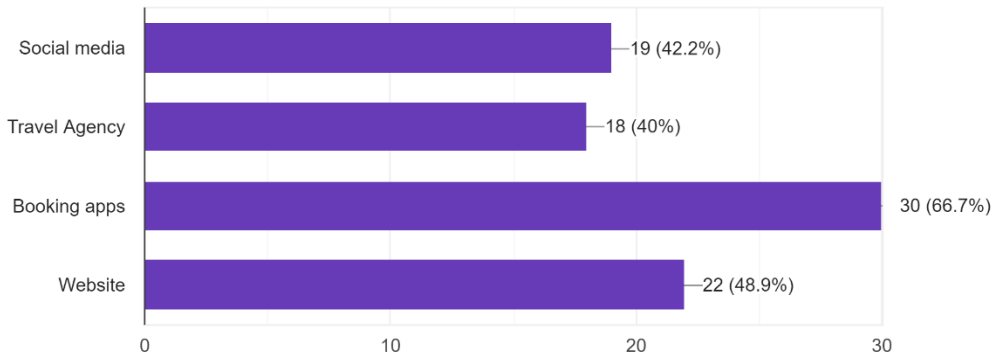


Figure 13: Types platforms that people use for travel

Due to the significant increase in digital applications, the travel agency is no longer a popular place to contact when traveling. Booking apps and social media are much more convenient to reserve tickets, accommodation, and travel activities. To be specific, Booking.com and Airbnb are the two most famous apps for the traveler with the percentage of using at 64.4% and 57.8%, respectively. The domination of technology leads to a huge amount of people believe that booking apps will replace the traditional travel agency in the future with more than 50% of agreement with the statement. The speedy scale-up of these apps by

marketing campaigns as well as unrefutable offers created a cut-throat situation for a travel agency to survive in the market.

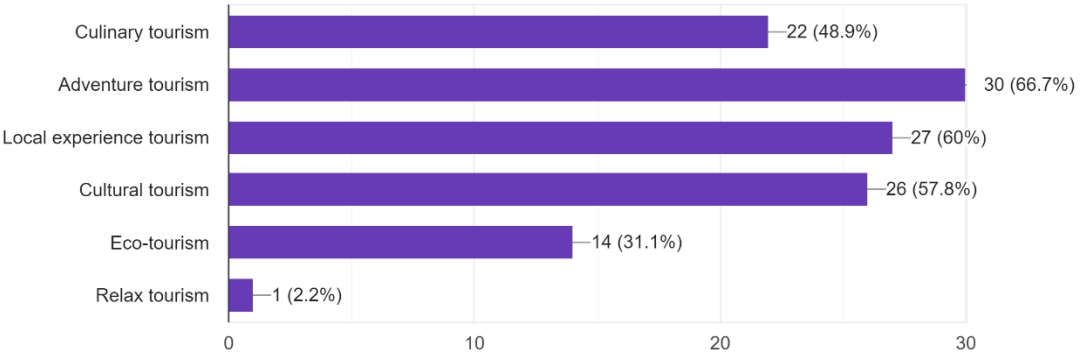


Figure 14: Types of tourism that people prefer to travel in Vietnam

Regarding the types of tourism, culinary, local experience, and eco-tourism, none of them attract travelers as adventure tourism with a percentage of 66.7%. The marvelous natural sceneries with dangerous trails are what attract travelers the most. Together with the largest cave in the world, Vietnam also has deadly jungles with rigorous climate, fatal insects, and many other poisonous creatures. Moreover, the mountain trails in Vietnam are extremely rough with bumpy roads where accidents are inevitable. However, these challenges are an unseen power for adventurers from different places in the world to conquer the gift that Mother Nature blesses for Vietnam. Even though adventure tourism dominates the gastronomy tourism in Vietnam when people are asked what they like the most in Vietnam, the majority of answers are food at 93.3%. This is the reason why Vietnam was chosen as “ Asia’s Leading Culinary Destination” in 2019.

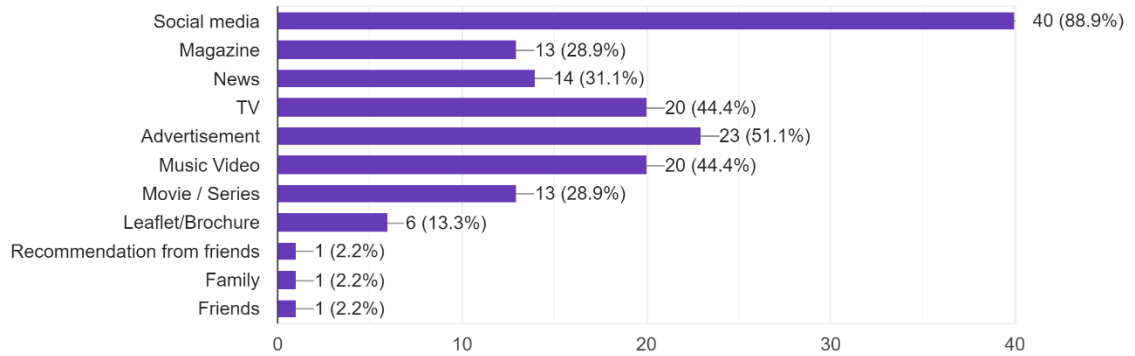


Figure 15: Platforms that people see the promotion of Vietnam's tourism

Among a wide variety of platforms, social media is where people usually see the nation branding as well as Vietnam's tourism promotions. Specifically, Facebook, Youtube, and Instagram are the main three platforms that the promotions are frequently displayed. Apart from it, people also believe that the government has been running some tourism marketing advertisement to attract international visitors to fill the gap of loss during the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, V-pop singers also give a hand in the campaign by adding national cultural values in their products, especially music videos.

In surveys, people also figure out the strengths and weaknesses of the promotion. People suppose that there are four factors in the nation branding considered as strengths which are cultural values, cinematic scenes, breathtaking destinations, and distinctive cuisine. These factors are considering as a huge advantage for Vietnam to compete with other countries in the region. If the government can utilize all of these elements and set a clear strategy with different methods to promote, the nation brand of Vietnam will be developed significantly shortly. Some of the respondents believe that vine videos and funny clips are the best way to introduce the country to international visitors. Apart from it, advertisements carrying the implications of national values and cultural essences are also another efficient way to approach foreigners.

On the contrary, they also point out some elements that the promotion needs to be improved which are poor content, lack of interaction and uniqueness, and inconsistent logo and slogan. Sadly admitting, the mentioned weaknesses are

still happening recently in the promotion progress. Although the country has a lot of resources to attract tourists, the ministries have not yet optimized the potential strengths. The final products of nation branding are still lack exclusiveness, and hard to see the outstanding points. Besides that, after years of modifying the logo and slogan, Vietnam just introduced the final logo and slogan which is “Vietnam-Timeless Charm” a year ago. To get more attractions, the country needs to have more campaigns to introduce the new image of Vietnam and increase brand awareness. Finally, it is undeniable to say that this precious feedback helps Vietnam enhance the country's tourism promotion in the future.

8 Conclusions and recommendations

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world in recent years. There is a huge potential for every country to develop this smokeless sector by utilizing national values. Tourism has also contributed significantly to the world's GDP at US\$8.9 trillion as well as reduce the unemployment ratio by providing 330 million jobs in 2019.

In terms of Vietnam's tourism situation, this industry helps Vietnam drastically increase the total GDP of the country by 10% in 2018. In recent years, Vietnam has successfully accomplished a wide range of achievements such as Rank 8th on the “Asia's most visited countries” in 2018, “Asia's leading destination in 2019”, “the World's leading heritage destination in 2019” and “Asia's leading culinary destination in 2019”. Thanks to tourism, more and more international visitors know about Vietnam, the S-shape country located in South East Asia.

Regarding digital marketing in tourism in Vietnam, the country has been evaluated as a nation with rapid growth in the number of Internet users recently. Understanding the potential, many companies have utilized the opportunities by rapidly investing in digital marketing and internet marketing to promote their products and services. Additionally, a big company in booking services such as Booking.com and Airbnb have also chosen Vietnam as a promising country to develop. These applications dominate the tourism services in Vietnam, a huge

number of traditional travel agencies have been in a tough situation and find a way to catch up with the giants.

Even better, in 2010, Vietnam's government cooperated with the Environmentally and Socially Responsible Tourism (ESRT) development program in order to boost tourism marketing by building new policies and long-term strategies. The main objective of this project is to improve the potential capability of Vietnam's Tourism by boosting the social-economic aspect while natural and cultural resources are still being protected. It marks a vital milestones in a development progress of Vietnam's tourism.

In order not to be left behind, companies choose the solution of creating their own travel for visitors. Meanwhile, other companies choose to join the network of big companies. Either way is good for business development as well as increases the reachability of customers to the companies.

Moreover, nation branding is also one of the main campaigns that the Vietnamese government concerns about. Different activities have been happening in order to drive the national brand promotion in tourism by driving cultural trade and peace, along with strengthening the multi-lateral relationship with all countries. Despite there are many events and the campaign has been run, the successes still do not meet the expectation.

To sum the study, there are some recommendations to improve the current situation of Vietnam's tourism as well as influences of marketing in tourism from the authors and survey results. Vietnam should maintain and develop its strengths such as food tourism, cultural values, and spectacular natural sceneries. In contrast, the country has to improve the weaknesses in poor infrastructure, unattractive services, and low-quality employees. Furthermore, high-tech integration should be considered as a key strategy in tourism development in the future. Virtual Reality (VR) is one of the most popular types of tourism in the latest years, this technology company usually appears in the airports where visitors can take a look at different places in the country they are visiting before the actual visit.

Additionally, the Vietnamese government and influencers could contribute huge values in promoting the national brand to foreign friends through social media marketing. To be specific, making more videos that introduce the country, travel vlog, and food vlog are also a good choice to show international tourists how marvelous Vietnam is, how delicious our food is. Finally, creating more attractive services and products that make visitors have to spend money on it, not by forcing them to buy. Every service and product they buy has to be worthy.

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10 Appendices

The survey questions:

1. How often do you travel?
 - a. Once a month
 - b. Once per 6 months
 - c. Once per year
 - d. Vacation only
2. What kinds of platforms do you reserve the accommodation, flight ticket, and travel activity?
 - a. Social Media
 - b. Travel Agency
 - c. Booking apps
 - d. Website
3. Which booking apps/websites do you use for travel?
 - a. Booking.com
 - b. Mytour
 - c. Traveloka
 - d. Trivago
 - e. Agoda
 - f. Airbnb
 - g. VNTrip
4. Do you think booking sites/apps are an indispensable part of nowadays tourism?

The answer ranks from 1. Totally Agree to 5. Totally Disagree
5. Do you think booking sites/apps will replace the traditional travel agency?

The answer ranks from 1. Totally Agree to 5. Totally Disagree
6. What kinds of tourism do you like?
 - a. Culinary tourism
 - b. Adventure tourism
 - c. Local experience tourism
 - d. Cultural tourism
 - e. Eco-tourism

7. Which parts of a country do you prefer to visit?
 - a. Rural areas
 - b. Urban areas
 - c. Beach
 - d. Mountain
 - e. Historical sites
 - f. Nightlife
 - g. Local life
8. What do you like the most about Vietnam?
 - a. Nature
 - b. Food
 - c. People
 - d. Lifestyle
 - e. Culture
9. Where do you see the promotion of Vietnam's tourism branding?
 - a. Social media
 - b. Magazine
 - c. News
 - d. TV
 - e. Advertisement
 - f. Music video
 - g. Movie / Series
 - h. Leaflet/ Brochure
10. Which social media platforms do you see the promotion?
 - a. Facebook
 - b. YouTube
 - c. Instagram
 - d. Twitter
11. What are the weaknesses of the promotion?

Each answer rank from 1. Totally Agree to 5. Totally Disagree

 - a. Poor content
 - b. Unpopular
 - c. Lack of interaction

- d. Lack of uniqueness
- e. Inconsistent logo and slogan

12. What are the strengths of the promotion?

Each answer ranks from 1. Totally Agree to 5. Totally Disagree

- a. Cultural values
- b. Cinematic scenes
- c. Breathtaking destinations
- d. Distinctive cuisine
- e. Going viral

13. Are you satisfied with the nation branding activities?

The answer ranks from 1. Extremely Dissatisfied to 5. Extremely Satisfied

14. What is your opinion to improve nation branding?

15. Is Vietnam worth visiting in your bucket list?

- a. Yes
- b. No