

MARKETING PLAN FOR ATTRACTING LEISURE TRAVELLERS

Case: Pearl River Hotel & Apartments Hai Phong, Viet Nam

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Marketing and marketing plan serves as a solid foundation for the success of a business. In tourism and hospitality industry, marketing is of particular importance, determining the firm's success due to several distinguishable characteristics of service industry. The objectives of the thesis is to formulate a marketing plan for the commissioner: Pearl River Hotel & Apartments, Hai Phong, to expand more in leisure-travel segment. The business has been dependent on a specific segment: business travellers; therefore, there is a need to enlarge more in leisure-travellers segment, resulting in a sustainable development. Moreover, thesis limitations and suggestion for further researches are also identified.

The thesis includes four main sections: theoretical background, data collection, suggested marketing plan and discussion and evaluation. Theory in terms of marketing, marketing plan as well as travel behaviours were utilized, building a solid foundation for the analysis and discussion. Secondly, in the phase of collecting data, a survey was conducted to collect qualitative data on travel behaviours to researched region. Based on theoretical background, collected data and the analysis of current situation of commissioning company, the thesis suggested a detailed appropriate marketing plan for the commissioner. The last part is the discussion and evaluation of the entire thesis.

Key words Marketing, marketing plan, travel behaviours , leisure-travellers.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In the view of current uncertainties, tourism is one of a leading and resilient economic sector, and its growth necessitates responsible management in order to best capitalize the opportunities tourism can provide for the communities (UNWTO 2020). Going along with this development, Vietnam has been identified as an emerging economy with a significant and expanding tourism market (Bui & Jolliffe 2011). In recent years, Viet Nam tourism industry has been simulated in a fully-serviced way applying to various big cities in which Hai Phong becomes one of the most potential destination for this development (Vietcetera 2022). Raising the demand of accommodation by this enlargement in tourism industry, Hai Phong hotel system's requirements stay no longer between leisure-travellers needs adaptation and predictable trends of society.

It is demonstrated that an enterprise's success or failure is mainly determined by the success or failure of its marketing (Tracy 2014, 1–5). Therefore, there is an essential need for the firm to understand adequately the concept of marketing and to be able to apply it into practice, resulting in a sustainable, profitable business performance. Moreover, when it comes to service industry, especially hospitality industry, travel behaviour is a complex field that also need to be taken into consideration in order to provide enhanced customer service and generate customised marketing plan (Ramkissoon 2018, 271). The purpose of this thesis is to develop an appropriate marketing plan for a 5-stars hotel in Hai Phong city to expand more in leisure-travellers segment, and to go along with the development of tourism industry in the region. The research bases on the theory of marketing in general and hospitality marketing in particular as well as the theory of travel behaviours. In this context, qualitative method is utilised since it is widely used in the meaning of supporting researchers understanding phenomena that are directly related to historical, economic, cultural and social aspects (Siliverman 2000). Additionally, in order to reach research's objectives, a survey examining leisure-travellers' behaviours when it comes to Hai Phong city is conducted, providing an overview of new market segment of the firm,

resulting in a formulation of effective marketing plan which is the main goal of this research.

2 COMMISSIONER – PEARL RIVER HOTEL & APARTMENTS HAI PHONG

The commissioner of the thesis is Pearl River Hotel & Apartment in Hai Phong city, Viet Nam and it is the first five-star hotel in the city. Hai Phong is a city in northern Vietnam, approximately 100 kilometres far from Hanoi – The capital of Vietnam, and it serves as a pleasant base when visiting other northern spots such as Cat Ba Island and Halong Bay – a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The city is well-known as the City of Flame Flowers There are also a variety of places worth visiting in the city including temples, shrines, pagodas, and beautiful beaches and landscapes. Generally, Hai Phong has its own strengths to develop more in tourism industry, and for attracting leisure-travellers in particular. (Vietnam Online 2022.) Pearl River Hotel & Apartment is considered as a pioneer in hotel industry in Hai Phong city, as well as has been successfully created its status on national level. The hotel comprises two main buildings, one contains 113 elegant appointed hotel rooms and suites for short-term guests, the other includes 125 high-quality serviced apartments targeting long-term customers. All spacious rooms and apartments at the hotel feature cosy furnishings as well as luxury facilities and amenities. In addition, the hotel has two restaurants and two cafés inside, providing guests extraordinary culinary experience with Western and Chinese cuisine. Moreover, with a diversity of meeting rooms and various modern and professional banquet equipment, the hotel is also an ideal venue for all types of executive meetings, business conferences and special events. Furthermore, other luxurious hotel properties such as outdoor swimming pool, gym, spas including sauna, steam bath and jacuzzi also can be taken advantage of in order to provide guests all-exclusive service package. (Pearl River Hotel 2022.)

The hotel's slogan is "hospitality with personal touch". The hotel basically is customer-centred, all customers' needs and wants are prioritized, aiming at pleasant experience for the guests while staying. Besides maintaining a diversity of luxurious facilities and amenities, training program for all staffs are arranged once every three months in order to ensure that high quality service is delivered to the guests in a professional way. In-service training for all employees is

considered as the most essential part of hotel development process, since they act as responsible experience creators delivering service and hospitality values to the customers. Although being a local brand, with all these advantages mentioned above, Pearl River Hotel & Apartments has its strengths to stand out among competitors and to thrive in the field. (Pearl River Hotel 2022.)

The appearance of numerous international hotels recently in the region has presented an increasing threat for the researched company (Future Southeast Asia 2022). Faced with rapidly changing market conditions and business environment, there is a need for the hotel to restructure and reorganize operation management. Marketing is one of the most important part that should be taken into consideration carefully in changing process, since marketing aims to design the best relationship to win and keep customers, thereby bringing the business a lasting value. This thesis reviews main concepts and elements of strategic marketing, as well as suggest effective changes in marketing plan.

3 MARKETING

3.1 Marketing, Hospitality Marketing and Its Characteristics.

To commence with, no matter in which field the business participates in, an enterprise's success or failure is primarily determined by the success or failure of its marketing (Tracy 2014). Therefore, there is an essential need for the business to understand adequately and correctly the term marketing. Marketing is defined as "the process by which companies create value for customers and society, resulting in strong customer relationships that capture value from customers in return" (Kotler et al 2014, 11). Additionally, according to America Marketing Association, "marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners and society at large". There are a variety of definitions of the term marketing, however, in essence, all these definitions emphasize the creation of a profitable relationship between customers and providers. Some small companies have overlooked the importance of marketing and considered it as an act of selling or giving promotion, however, the way of selling and offering promotion are only two basic elements of marketing. Instead, marketing is a long-term process that "focuses on planning for the future success of the organization" (Bowie & Buttle 2004).

In such a fiercely competitive and financially difficult global environment, the long-term existence and effectiveness of the business are dependent not only on its capacity to satisfy consumers' requirements and wishes but also on its ability to respond strategically to current challenges (Tsotsou 2012). Moreover, by pursuing different strategies, different rivals in an industry will be able to achieve and retain competitive levels of superior performance (Varadarajan 2015, 85). Therefore, besides understanding marketing as a broad and general term, companies should understand the term "marketing strategy" more precisely. Varadarajan defines marketing strategy as "an organization's crucial decisions that specify its pattern of behaviour in the marketplace pertaining to the creation, communication, and delivery of products that offer value to customers in exchanges with the organization and thereby enable the organization to achieve specific objectives". Additionally, it is stated that marketing strategy is considered

as “a consistent, appropriate and feasible set of principles through which a particular company hopes to achieve its long-run customer and profit objectives in a particularly competitive environment” (Hamper & Baugh 1990). In the definition of marketing strategy, there is a special emphasis on firms’ specific resources and particular product-market. In other words, the primary purpose of marketing strategy is to “identify and leverage new points of differentiation” (Varadarajan 2015, 84). In order to gain competitive advantages in a particular industry, the company has to define its strengths and unique selling points before implementing an effective marketing strategy to allocate and coordinate marketing resources and tactics to accomplish the firm’s objectives within a specific product-market (Boyd, Walker & Larreché 1998).

Hospitality industry is regarded as a complex phenomenon that encompasses a cluster of service sector activities associated with the provision of food, drink and accommodation. Fulfilling the essential requirements of the customers including providing meals and rooms was at first primary aim of hospitality providers. However, in competitive business environment nowadays, hospitality is beyond those fundamentals, it additionally incorporates providing unique and exhilarating experience for the guests and creating life-time value for the customers (Dilek & Harman 2018, 6). In order to achieve an outstanding performance in hospitality industry, meticulous attention should be devoted for hospitality marketing. Hospitality marketing is defined as “the process by which hospitality companies create value for customers, and memorable customer experiences, and build strong customer relationships in order to capture value from customers in return” (Dilek & Harman 2018, 11). Hospitality marketing also encapsulates the essence of marketing theory in general, however, its definition includes the marketing of services and experiences. Hospitality marketing should be undertaken professionally and differently in comparison with marketing goods or industrialized products due to several distinguishable characteristics of hospitality industry. This section mentions and discusses four main distinctive characteristics of service industry that differentiates services from physical goods or tangible products and related marketing issues.

There are various researches about special characteristics of hospitality industry and the names or descriptions of the unique features vary slightly, however, most researchers have agreed on four distinctive outstanding characteristics of hospitality, namely intangibility, inseparability, perishability and variability (Bojanic 2008). Figure 3 is the summary of distinguishable service characteristics.

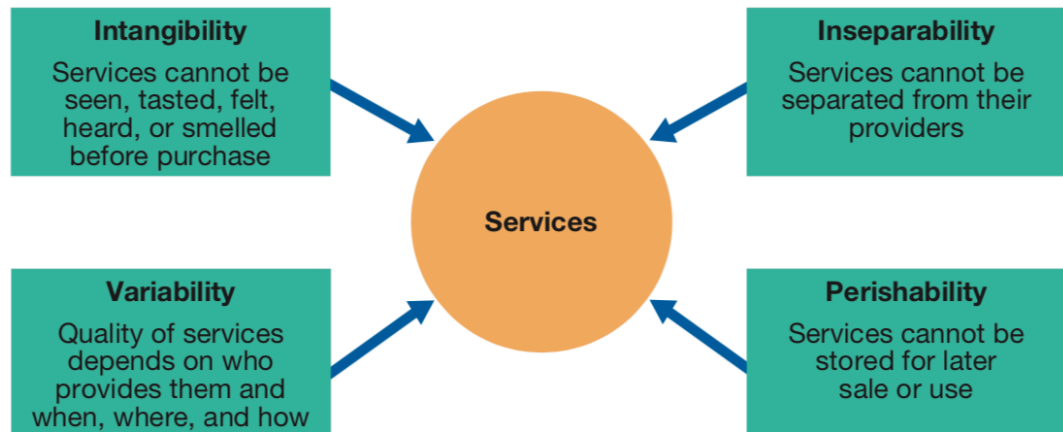


Figure 1. Four Service Characteristics (Kotler 2014, 39)

Firstly, services are intangible dominant products, which means that it cannot be seen, touched, tasted, felt or experienced before it is purchased. Hence, it is more common that the customers often sense a higher level of risk and hesitate to purchase intangible services. When marketing intangibles, marketers have to face the challenges of tangibilising or delivering appropriate evidence of service. (Bowie & Buttle 2004, 27.) For example, restaurants or bar can display colourful pictures as well as provide detailed descriptions of their menu so that the customers can give an attempt to evaluate the services in advance. For hotel, site inspections is the most popular way of marketing for business customers with considerable volume. Additionally, internet is considered the most useful tool nowadays since the customers can easily have access to service providers' websites or social media for detailed information and high quality pictures. (Bojanic 2008, 73.)

Secondly, services are inseparable, which means that both providers and customers play an important role in service performance (Lovelock & Wright

1999). In comparison with physical goods, services are not under traditional process of distribution, in fact, services are typically produced and consumed simultaneously at the service point. This element implies that customer interaction and their participation in the co-create process with hospitality staffs provides plenty of opportunities to influence customer satisfaction, either in positive or negative way (Gursoy, Buttle & Bowie 2016, 23). Accordingly, when marketing intangibles, marketers should also pay attention to enhancing positive interaction with the guests as well as maintaining good image of hospitality employees, promising enjoyable experience at the service place.

Thirdly, it should be acknowledged about the perishability of a service. Unlike manufactured goods and products, services cannot be warehoused for future use (Gursoy, Buttle & Bowie 2016, 25). For example, there is a fixed number of seats on airplane, or at restaurants as well as hotels room available each day or night. These services cannot be sold when the time have passed. This unique characteristic of services presents particular difficulty for the service providers in managing their inventory with a fluctuating demand pattern. Thus, the major principle of hospitality marketing is to build the strongest customer relationship during peak times and adjust their prices in response to fluctuating demand in order to maximize potential revenue (Bojanic 2008, 74).

Lastly, since services involve high interaction between customers and service providers, it is impossible for hospitality companies to provide non-variable customer service, which is called variability in the delivery of services. In other words, because of various service inputs such as people, products, and the surrounding environment, service quality or service performance is highly variable. To respond to the problem caused by variability, many firms attempted to standardize their operations as well as train their staffs to follow standard operating procedures. (Bojanic 2008, 76.) In terms of hospitality marketing, it is recommended that hospitality companies acknowledge about this unique characteristic of service. In fact, this feature can be taken advantage of when doing hospitality marketing since variability reveals a chance to personalize and customize service. These four characteristics mentioned above of the hospitality industry demonstrate that hospitality marketing is partly different from marketing

for manufactured goods and physical products. Hospitality marketers should understand and encapsulate the essence of product marketing techniques; however, there is a need to have versatile marketing strategies and tactics in accordance with distinctive features of hospitality industry.

3.2 Elements of Marketing Plan

3.2.1 Mission Statement

In the era of turbulent global business environment, tourism dynamics and development are becoming more intense, strategic marketing and management in tourism or hospitality enterprises are required in order to ensure efficient and effective business operations (Kirovska 2011, 69–76). Corporate mission statement plays an important role in strategic marketing and management of the firm. It is believed that hospitality companies with clear mission statement is likely to outstand in the market (Bowie & Buttle 2004). Bowie and Buttle also define mission as a declaration of an organization's reason for being an existence, of what it wants to accomplish in long-term and a brief description of its competitive advantage. It is also emphasized that the mission statement should be market oriented, clear, enforceable, motivating, flexible and environment adaptable (Tanković 2013, 331–342).

Bowie and Buttle also discuss about principal purposes of forming a clear and detailed mission statement. When conducting strategic marketing, mission serve as a guide and constraint. Mission directs a focus on futuristic performance of the firm, serves as a link between the company's short- and medium-term objectives and the organization's long-term goals (Bowie & Buttle 2004). In other words, with definitive defined mission statement, the firm is more likely to achieve superior long-term development without being deflected by short-term advantages, disadvantages or variations.

3.2.2 Marketing Environment

Since marketing is an forward-looking business philosophy, marketers in hospitality businesses must comprehend and adapt to changes in the marketing environment. Customers and businesses are affected by both macro- and micro-

environmental factors, which in turn influence the practice of marketing (Gursoy, Buttle & Bowie 2016). Figure 2 provides an overview of the marketing environment in which hospitality organizations operate.

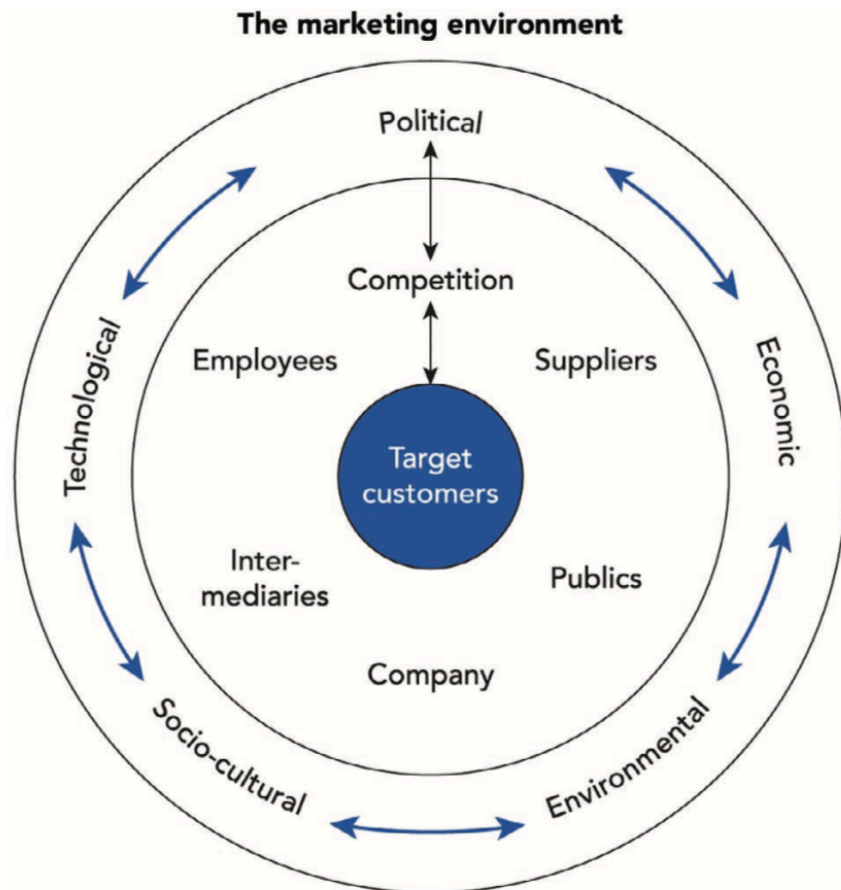


Figure 2. The Marketing Environment (Gursoy, Buttle & Bowie 2016)

According to Gursoy, Buttle & Bowie, the macro-environment includes all of the political, economic, socio-cultural, technological and environmental (PESTE) forces that have impacts on its customers and operations. Hospitality industry have limited control over PESTE influences; however, either minor or major changes in one PESTE factor can have a significant impact on the business. Thus, it is a must to acknowledge about these ever-changing factors.

The political direction of a country determines how consumers and commercial organizations can act. When a company plans its strategy, it must take into account the legislation about trade, tax, labour and environmental. Additionally,

different countries have a variety of regulations concerning online and offline customer communications such as tracking customers' online activities, advertising, sales promotion, sharing customers' personal information and experiences. All these elements regarding political factor should be considered carefully when planning and implementing marketing. (Gursoy, Buttle & Bowie 2016.)

Secondly, economic factors influence many industries in different ways; hence, it is vital for the firm to understand the connection between these factors to their own industry. Economic situation influences business and consumer confidence, purchasing power as well as business investment. When it comes to hospitality industry, when economy experience a rapid growth, hospitality markets thrive; when the economy is in recession, hospitality markets suffer and businesses are more likely to fail. (Gursoy, Buttle & Bowie 2016, 15.)

Thirdly, the socio-cultural environment influences consumers' purchase and consumption behaviours due to a diversity of preferences and tastes, as well as demand of certain products and services. Differences between regions and countries bring out great challenges for hospitality marketers. It is recommended that hospitality marketers should raise the awareness of socio-cultural differences and trends to generate appropriate marketing approach, leading to a better competitive edge in the market. (Gursoy, Buttle & Bowie 2016, 16.)

Next, technological rapid pace of innovations can either be a breakthrough for some industries or be a curse for others. Technological innovations have revolutionized hospitality marketing, though the core principles of marketing remain the same. These advancements create an easy access for customers to various sources of information and reviews related to travel products, which presents an alternative marketing channel for the firms. However, it should be noted that when applying technological innovations into hospitality marketing, it is more challenging to monitor; negative reviews about hospitality services and products that go viral easily can demolish company's image. (Gursoy, Buttle & Bowie 2016, 16.)

Lastly, as people become more aware of the effects that tourism have on the environment, environmental factors have become increasingly significant in all forms of business all over the world. Mass tourism is nowadays a controversial concept, and the term sustainable tourism is gaining more attention than ever, therefore, the tourism or hospitality companies should take into consideration the environmental factors when developing products and implementing marketing strategy. It is recommended that a marketing strategy that pays careful attention to environmental issues can improve positive image of the firm. (Gursoy, Buttle & Bowie 2016, 17.)

Besides, SWOT, which is an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, has been ranked the most frequently used tool for analysing the business environment (Hung 2013, 82). SWOT analysis has achieved widespread popularity thanks to its simplicity and practicality. SWOT analysis allows the creation of strategic direction for business practices for taking advantages of company's strengths, and minimizing the negative effect of its weaknesses, therefore, to increase company's opportunities and lower the risk of threats (Kolbina 2015, 76).

Furthermore, SWOT analysis consists of examination in both internal and external factors of business environment, providing a foundation for effective strategy formulation (Dyson 2004, 631). In SWOT analysis, strengths and weaknesses refer to internal factors. Strengths include internal capabilities and resources that are helpful for the organization to achieve its goals; whereas weaknesses refer to internal limitations that are detrimental to its objectives (Hung 2013, 82). Moreover, opportunities are favourable external factors from which the company may benefit from; and threats are unfavourable factors that may present challenges to the business (Kotler, Bowen & Makens 2014, 111). Figure 3 provides a clear explanation of SWOT analysis

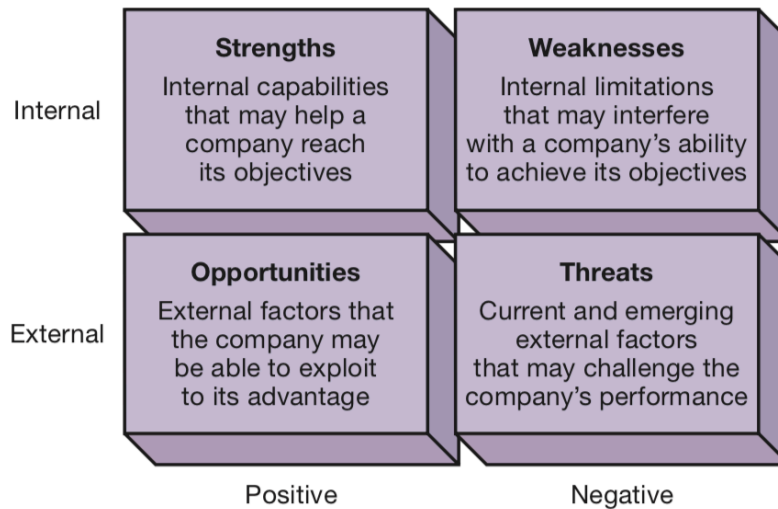


Figure 3. SWOT analysis (Kotler, Bowen & Makens 2014, 111).

3.2.3 Segmentation and Target Market

The market consists of an extremely large number of consumers, scattered and heterogeneous in their wants and needs and ways of buying that cannot be satisfied by just one business. Therefore, enterprises need to find segmentation and target market that seem attractive and suitable for their goals and resources. Market segmentation is the division of the market into distinct segments, each of which can be carefully selected as targets to be achieved by a particular marketing mix (Camilleri 2018). In essence, market segmentation is not product research or service research, but customer group research. However, it is recommended that target market segmentation should be clarified concentratedly in order to discover ideal customers, tailored marketing and personalized content.

There is no single way to segment a market, different segmentation variables should be examined methodically (Decker 2011). This section mentions four common approaches used in segmenting customer market namely geographic, demographic, psychographic and behavioural segmentation. According to Kotler, Bowen & Makens, the process of dividing a market into different geographical units, such as nations, states, regions, countries, cities or neighbourhoods is known as geographic segmentation. An examination on the characteristics of customer's living area or the place where the company takes place could help identify customers. Secondly, demographic segmentation is the process of

categorizing marketing based on demographic variables such as age, life cycle, gender, income, occupation, education, religion, and nationality. It is claimed that demographic variable is the most common base for the market segmentation, since it narrows down the suitable customer groups easily. Thirdly, psychographic segmentation divides consumers into different segments on the basis of social class, lifestyle, or personality traits. In a comparison with demographic variables, psychographic aims at inspecting intangible aspects of the customer. It is pivotal to acknowledge that consumers in the same demographic group may have distinguishable psychographic characteristics. Lastly, customers also can be divided into groups on their knowledge, attitude or interaction with a product or service, which is called behavioural segmentation. It is recommended that different segmentation variables should be integrated flexibly in order to obtain remarkable customer's insight so that detailed and effective marketing strategy can be implemented. (Kotler, Bowen & Makens 2014, 219–230.)

3.2.4 Marketing Mix

A company should define the marketing mix before developing a concrete strategy for a product or service. According to Kotler, "Marketing Mix is the set of controllable variables that the firm can use to influence the buyer's response". The controllable variables in this context refer to the 4Ps including product, price, place, and promotion (Kotler & Keller 2016, 47). However, due to some distinguishable characteristics of service, it requires another type of marketing as well as different type of marketing mix. Three additional elements namely People, Process, and Physical Evidence were added, a marketing mix involving 7Ps was developed to tackle challenges of marketing services. Each firm strives to create marketing mix composition that can be used to define and recognize weaknesses of product or services, provide highest level of consumer satisfaction and at the same time to meet its organizational objectives. Depending on different industries and the target of the marketing plan, marketers may take various approaches to each element in the marketing mix.

In order to clarify marketing mix, explanations about each element in marketing are given in this section. The first element in the marketing mix is "product" which

refers to “anything that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition, use or consumption that might satisfy a want or need” (Kotler et al. 2014, 251). When creating a product, the added value of the product for the customer is important. The designed product, which represents the company or the brand should be easily identifiable by the customer and should leave an emotionally bound impression (Išoraitė 2016, 28).

The second P stands for “price”, which is the second most essential element in the marketing mix. Price is defined as “the sum of all the values that customers give up to gain the benefits of having or using a good or service” (Kotler, Armstrong, Harris & He 2020, 303). In the marketing mix, price is the only element that generates revenue; all other elements represent costs. It is acknowledged that price is one of the most significant elements that determine a firm’s market share and profitability. However, the profitability should not hold the first priority, creating customer value and building customer relationships also should be taken into account.

Place, which is also called the distribution, is also an important element of marketing mix. The distribution is defined as the activities or processes by which the services or products reach the intended customer (Luenendonk 2019). In other words, this element emphasizes on the accessibility of the service or product to the customer. The product should be available in the appropriate place, at the right time and in the sufficient quantity (CIM Insights 2009, 4).

The last element of 4Ps is promotion, which refers to a company’s ability to connect and communicate with customers about its offerings (Jain & Jain 2022, 243–251). There are a diversity promotion tools, but five most commonly-used ones are advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations, and social media marketing (Kotler, Armstrong, Harris & He 2020, 397). It is common that the retailers or service providers normally utilize the combination of those tools in the practice of marketing. The main purpose of promotion is to gain customer’s attention, create dialogues and build customer relationships, not just to provide information about features of a product or service (CIM Insights 2009, 5).

Furthermore, people is also considered one of the most significant variables in marketing mix, especially when it comes to service industry. All human factors who have interaction with the customer, are able to exert impact on customer experience, either positive or negative. People in this context refers to both the firm's personnel and other customers (Rafiq & Ahmed 1995, 7). In service industry, due to the simultaneity of production and consumption, the firm's personnel play an unreplaceable role in influencing customer perception of product quality (Gursoy, Buttle & Bowie 2016, 24).

Moreover, in marketing mix, process is also regarded as a crucial element which generates great impact on customer experience. Process encompasses "procedures, mechanisms, and flow of activities" (Grădinaru, Toma & Marinescu). A process should be designed for customer's convenience and focused on customer's needs and wants. In service industry, the variability of a service is acknowledged, however, a standard procedure of providing customer service should be formulated in order to tackle this challenge.

The last "P" in marketing mix stands for physical evidence which incorporates all of a service's tangible representatives (Grădinaru, Toma & Marinescu). In this context, physical evidence refers to "the environment in which the service is delivered and tangible goods that facilitate the performance of the service" (Rafiq & Ahmed 1995, 8). Due to the fact that service is intangible-dominant, hence, there is a need to emphasize all tangible facilities that provide foundation for customer to access the quality of service provided and level of service they can expect. In conclusion, marketing mix can be used as an useful framework that helps the firm define properly a product or service, develop customer relationship, resulting in long-term success. All elements of marketing mix are equally important, an ignorance of one may lead to failure. In addition, it should be noted that the practice of marketing mix in a particular firm may differ from one to another, depending on its resources, market conditions and changing needs of customers (Goi 2009, 4).

4 CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

4.1 Travel Behaviours Conceptual Framework

In order to provide an enhanced customer experience and a customised marketing plan, hospitality providers have been compelled to incorporate best practices as a result of the rapidly expanding competitive market and fundamental paradigm shift in the behaviour of hospitality consumers. (Ramkissoon 2018, 271). Travel behaviour is about all of the decisions that were made by a traveller when consuming, obtaining and disposing all of the products and services before- and during their travel (Engel et al 1995). A more detailed explanation for consumer behaviour was stated by author Rajeev Kumra as “the psychological processes that consumers go through in recognizing needs, finding ways to solve these needs, collect and interpret information, make plans, and implement these plans, making purchase decisions and post purchase behaviour”. Even though there are a diversity of definitions in terms of customer behaviour in general and those in hospitality and tourism industry in particular, all of those definitions highlight that consumer behaviour is a complex, dynamic, multidimensional process that involves more than the act of purchase, and in this process, consumers can be influenced by various factors. Understanding customer behaviour properly brings a chance for the service providers and marketers to influence this process in a positive way, and it is considered as a foundation of successful marketing (Hudson 2009, 29).

4.2 Differences Between Leisure Travel and Business Travel

When it comes to travel behaviour, it can be divided into a diversity of distinct segments based on different theoretical background, however it is believed that travel behaviour generally falls into two broad categories: leisure travel and business travel. Service providers as well as marketers in hospitality industry are acknowledged about the difference between the categories to some extent, however, they seem to neglect specifics in that difference (Leiper et al 2008). This section concentrates on discussing about the comprehensive and generic differences between leisure travel and business travel. It should be noted that

tourism industry is complex phenomenon, and travel behaviour is a psychological process and it differs from one to another, hence, it is challenging to clarify. However, Leiper, Witsel and Hobson gave an attempt to provide a comparative analysis of differences between leisure travel and business travel. Certain generic differences between leisure travel and business travel can be expressed based on several factors such as: motivation for travelling, types of experiences occur during the trip, the focus of the experiences, travel expenses, occasion of trips and trip management (Leiper et al. 2008). The table below is the summary of generic differences between leisure travel and business travel (Leiper et al. 2008, 3–8).

Table 1: Generic differences between leisure travel and business travel (Leiper, Witsel & Hobson 2008, 3–8)

	Leisure Travel	Business Travel
Motivation	Personal, Optional	Obligatory upon certain purposes related to work and business
Types of experiences occur during the trip	Recreational, creative or a combination	Meetings, Negotiations, exchange of information, observations made for business purposes
The focus of the experiences	Involve certain features and characteristics of places visited (tourist attractions)	Focus on the agenda of the meetings, conferences, and business-related phenomena that traveler interact with
Occasion of the trip	Depend on personal choices, preferably on weekend, travel season,	Depend on work schedule

	summer or public holiday or on some personal special occasion.	
Trip management	The management of travel is managed by the traveller themselves, sometimes with support from travel agents or tour operators.	Trip management is normally left for either specialist staff working as travel officers, or a travel agent – a specialist in business travel who handle all travel requirements for the organization.

4.3 Major Influences on Travel Behaviours

It is acknowledged that there is a need to understand about customer behaviours and other factors that influence this psychological process. This section discusses those influences in details and in which way marketer can take advantage of those in order to target potential preferred market segment. According to Mayo and Jarvis, customers' decision-making process does not operate in a vacuum, it is also influenced by forces outside the individual. These factors that have impacts on decision-making process of the customers can be categorized into two main groups, which is called internal and external influences, respectively (Mayo & Jarvis 1981). The internal psychological factors that influence travel behaviours include perception, learning, personality, motivation and attitudes; and motivation is considered as a significant determinant of the tourist's behaviours. It is undeniable that internal factors are intimately related to personal cognition and personality and mainly present within customers, hence, differ from one to another. Accordingly, it should be acknowledged that marketers or service provides can only create negligible impact on internal influences. In contrast, external factors, which is also called environmental or social influences, affect customers from the outside. These factors are grouped into four main areas, namely role and family influences, reference groups, social classes, and culture and subcultures (Mayo & Jarvis 1981). Despite the fact that these external

elements do not affect customers' behaviours directly, they will gradually filter through consumer's cognitive thinking and influence decision-making process (Hudson 2009, 109). It is believed that by understanding these factors and taking them into consideration while conducting marketing, marketers are able to create impacts on consumer behaviour in a positive way, encouraging them to the act of purchase. Figure 4 presents a comprehensive overview on major factors that affect travel decision-making process.

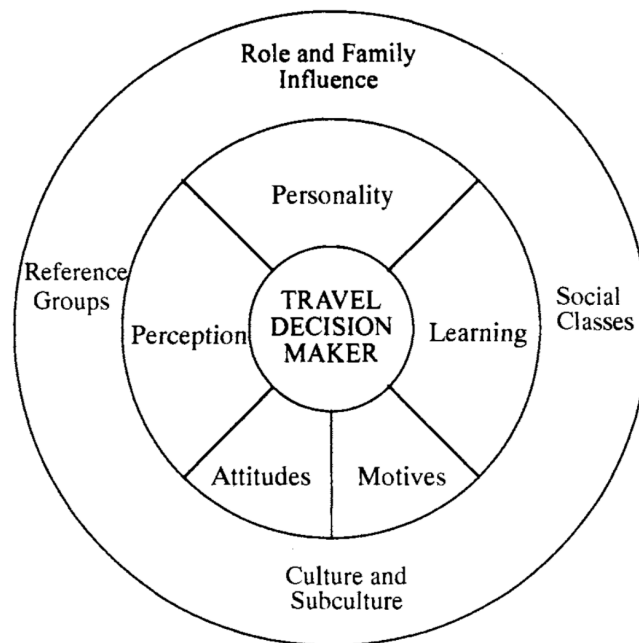


Figure 4. Major Influences on Travel Decision Maker. (Mayo & Jarvis 1981)

In this section, the paper provides detailed explanations about environmental influences including four main groups, namely Role and Family Influence, Reference Groups, Culture and Subculture and Social Classes, and how they affects customer buying behaviours.

Firstly, buyer behaviour is strongly influenced by their family member (Tyagi 2018). It is common that many decisions of life, including consumption choices are discussed within family. When it comes to travel decision-making process, an individual normally take into consideration whether they will travel alone or with their family and dependants, which affects their choices of destination, types of creational activities, accommodation and all other related services. Moreover,

each person has distinct roles and statuses in terms of family, groups, organization that they are a part of (Tyagi 2018). For example, a single woman may choose travel destination where she can enjoy herself while travelling, whereas, a married woman with children is willing to choose a travel destination where her kids can be involved in all activities.

Secondly, according to author Tyagi, reference groups have the potential for the formation of an attitude or behaviour of the individual (Tyagi 2018). Reference group is defined as “a collection of people used by the individual as a standard for his or her own attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviours” (Decrop 2009, 110). Within a group, individual tends to be interdependent on each other, have interaction with certain types of people in the group, as well as follow models of behaviours that the group already had. In this way, it is undeniable that reference groups influence the decision-making process of an individual in various ways. Moreover, there are a variety of reference groups that can powerfully influence consumer behaviours. A group of people with whom a person compares themselves, evaluates their own status, and occasionally seeks advices is known as comparative reference group . Another important reference group that should be mentioned is aspirational reference group. This group involves people that individual may not know in real life, however, still have significant impacts on customer behaviours, such as successful business-people, famous artists, or key opinion leaders (KOLs) in general (Tyagi 2018). When it comes to marketing practices, the firm should consider to take advantage of aspirational reference group which is normally presented as cooperation with KOLs or influencers especially in modern life when accessibility to information and reviews on the internet is unlimited. Furthermore, the avoidance group is yet another noticeable group. This group involves people and behaviours that an individual is extremely against which affects decision-making process in a negative way (Solomon 2018).

Thirdly, a person’s behaviour is significantly influenced by their culture and subcultures. Culture is considered as “a broad, impersonal reference group consisting of the knowledge, behaviours, customs, and techniques socially acquired by human beings” (Decrop 2009, 110). Hence, culture influences the

way a person behaves as a consumer or as a tourist. For example, Asian tourist normally has a different preference in terms of travel destination or occasion for travelling, in comparison with tourist from Western countries. Furthermore, there are subcultural influences within a culture. Subcultures are groups or distinct segments based on region, race, religion and traditions (Decrop 2009, 111). For instance, in Viet Nam, it is distinguishable between the culture in the North and in the South.

Lastly, social classes are considered as significant factor that impact travel behaviour. Social classes “are the consequence of the division of society on the basis of status and prestige” (Decrop 2009, 111). It should be noted that social class is not only determined by income, but also by other important factors such as wealth, education and occupation (Tyagi 2018). It is believed that each social class exhibits a distinctive life-style that reflects values, interpersonal attitudes, and self-perceptions that differ from those held by any other social class (Mayo & Jarvis, 1981). Furthermore, people who belong to the same social class tend to have same preference in particular products or services, and follow similar behaviour pattern. It is recommended that marketer acknowledge about different social classes, thus, marketing activities could be adapted to those.

In conclusion, customer behaviour in general or travel behaviour in particular is a complex psychological process of an individual that includes more than just an act of purchase. In order to conduct successful marketing strategy, there is a need for marketers and service providers to understand properly this process and its major influence factors. Internal factors that affect decision-making process normally present within an individual which is challenging to alter, however, marketer has possibility to take into account and alter other external factors that also generate significant impacts on customer behaviour.

5 THESIS PROCESS AND METHODOLOGIES

5.1 Qualitative Research Method

When conducting research, there are a variety of research methods that can be utilised, but the majority of them fall into two main categories: qualitative and quantitative, and a mixed method is sometimes in use as well. Quantitative research method is operated in collecting and analysing data in a large pool of consumer and participants, which is generally used when conducting a case study or gathering users' feedbacks. Whereas, qualitative research provides detailed descriptions of how people experience and feel about a specific research issue (Mack et al 2005, 2). The types of data that qualitative method generate are filed notes, audio, video, recordings, and transcripts; aiming at providing information about the human side of an issue, as well as identifying intangible factors (Mack et al 2005, 3).

The main significant difference between quantitative and qualitative method is that quantitative method focuses on utilising statistics and numerical data. On the other hand, qualitative method is distinguished by emphasizing on the holistic view of phenomena from the perspective of people involved in the matter (Sliverman 2000, 6–12). It is widely used in the meaning of supporting researchers understanding phenomena that are directly related to historical, political, economic, cultural and social aspects.

The thesis aims at investigating the behaviours of leisure-travellers to specific region mentioned in the research, as well as the actual situation happening in outside environment; hence qualitative method is utilised in this context. Although in the phase of collecting data, questionnaire is used, providing such numerical data; these data only act as a foundation for providing general knowledge for the firm about targeted market and developing efficient marketing plan to achieve this particular market segment, which is the final goal of this thesis.

5.2 Questionnaire Survey

In term of collecting data, survey is the one of the most common method widely used especially when analysing social science inquiry with the main objective of obtaining relevant information in the most reliable and valid manner. Surveys are used in many different situations with different form and written style. They will be published in both social media forms and paper printed designs. In research, especially market research and strategies consulting, questionnaires are used to visual the actual situation happening around the segment with a high accuracy and visible number of percentage. The result will be visualized in chart and line, and comparing with table for a deep look into the distribution of properties in market segment as the researches are conduct in sufficiently large samples (Brace 2018).

The thesis research focuses on discovering new market segment: leisure travellers in specific region Hai Phong city, Viet Nam where the commissioning company is located. The purpose of the survey is to examine the customer behaviour when it comes to leisure travel to specific region, including their backgrounds, motivation and expectations, preferences in terms of creational activities, as well as factors that affect their choices. The survey framework, which is deemed short, concise, and descriptive, consisted of multiple-choice questions with a single answer, multiple-choice questions with multiple answer, matrix-question questions and open-ended questions (Appendix 1).

The survey includes three main sections: general questions about respondents' background, motivations, expectations and preferences when it comes to leisure travel, as well as questions with relevance to marketing. The survey is published on social media, including Facebook and Instagram. Moreover, the survey approaches respondents through emails, involving all the guests staying at commissioning hotel.

5.3 Reliability and Validity

It is undeniable that validity and reliability are key aspects of all researches. This issue is of particular vital in qualitative research, where the researcher's subjectivity can be easily integrated with the process of collecting and analysing data, resulting in questionable research findings (Brink 1993). According to Brink, in research, validity is concerned with accuracy and truthfulness of scientific findings. In addition, the investigators' capacity to collect and record information accurately, as well as the consistency, stability and repeatability of information, are all referred to reliability (Brink 1993).

To ensure the validity and reliability of this research, questionnaire is chosen as the way to collect accurate data. When processing the survey, some questions are taken into consideration such as the purpose of the survey, what information is searching and what level of accuracy is required. This survey aims to ensure that the finding is valid and reliable based on experiences and opinions of respondents who have travelled to or at least have an interest in researched region, minimizing researcher's subjectivity to the least. The result of survey is utilised, parallel with the theoretical background to enhance the validity and reliability of research outcome.

6 SURVEY RESULT

6.1 Respondents' background

The survey with 16 questions was conducted successfully, having received 97 valid responses (Appendix 1). Questions in this survey are based on theoretical background discussed in earlier chapter as well as on commissioner's requests, in order to examine customer behaviours and current trends when it comes to travelling to Hai Phong city. As a result, an effective marketing plan is developed to target specific market segment.

Firstly, the targeted market segment is defined based on demographic segmentation, which is a precise form of customer identification based on descriptive data such as sex, age, gender, employment status, and nationality (Mialki 2022). Since people from different cultures could have different preferences when travelling and follow different patterns of travel behaviours, nationality is questioned in the survey. Based on survey result, half of respondents are Vietnamese, 17.5% of participants come from South Korea, 13.4% of them are Japanese and the participants with other nationalities occupied the remaining percentage (Figure 5). According to this result, it is recommended that the commissioning company should focus on attracting domestic travellers. Additionally, it is reported in the survey that South Korea and Japan are two international growing markets that should be taken into consideration when developing marketing plan for the commissioning company.

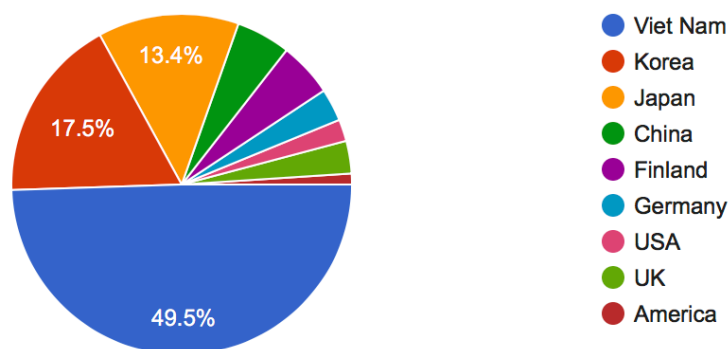


Figure 5. Respondents' Nationality

Moreover, age is considered to be a crucial demographic factor by service stakeholders due to the fact that leisure demand can effectively be predicted through customer's age (Kara & Mkwizu 2020). In this study, two main age groups are from 18 to 25 years old and from 26 to 35 years old, with the share of 39.2% and 42.3%, respectively. Whereas, participants being either under 18 years old or beyond 35 years old occupies the minority of 18.5% (Figure 6). Age is reported to have influence on the probability of activity participation, young people are more active in joining recreational activities when travelling; whereas when individual grows old, they tend to search for relaxation or wellness activities (Ma et al. 2018).

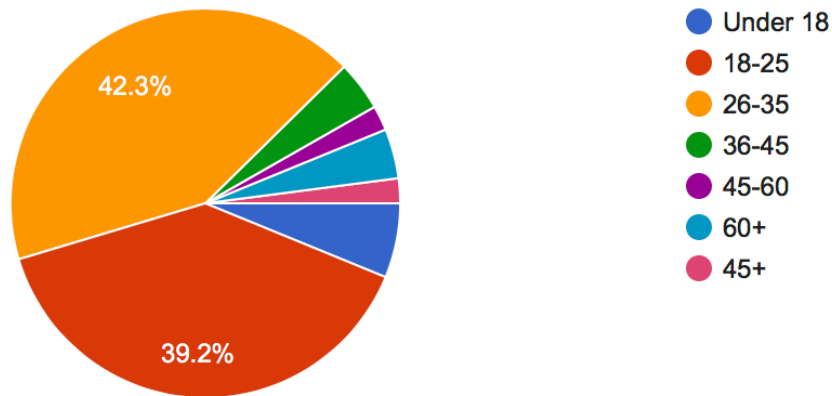


Figure 6. Respondents' Age

Furthermore, gender is also one of the major factors influencing travel behaviour. According to Kara and Mkwizu, woman are said to be highly involved in shopping, dining, wellness and cultural activities; whereas men are more interested in adventure activities. The survey included 49.5% of female respondents and 46.4% of male respondents, and other occupies a negligible minority of 4.1% (Figure 7).

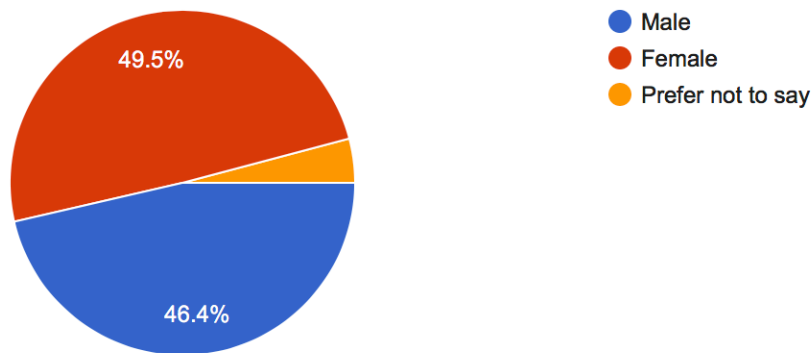


Figure 7. Respondents' Gender

In addition, employment status is also important factor that affects travel behaviour. It is reported that employed individual has more intention of travelling with the purpose of relaxation than unemployed individual has. Moreover, it is believed that employed people with stable income are less sensitive about the price of products or services than unemployed people. (Ferreira, Oosthuizen & Perks 2015, 647–650.) Figure 8 indicates the employment status of participants in this survey to give a holistic overview of respondents' background. The majority of respondents are employed with full-time job, accounting for nearly 60% and the minority of respondents are either employed with part-time job (7.2%) or unemployed (12.4%).

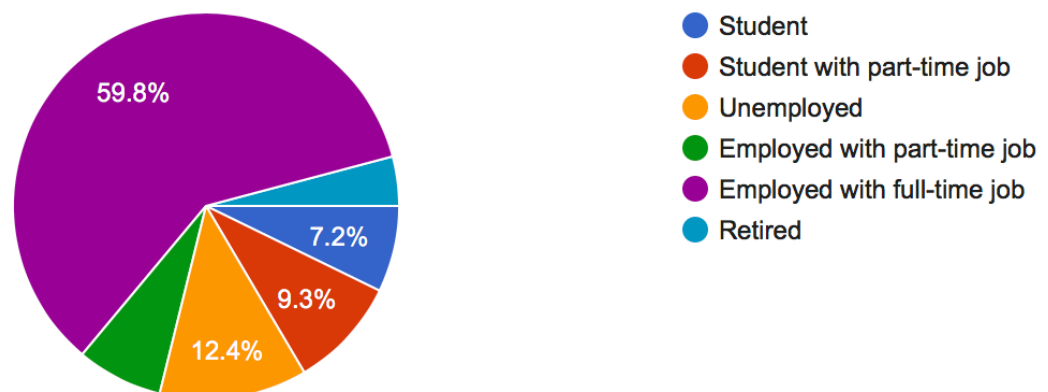


Figure 8. Respondents' employment status.

Based on respondents' background, the company may identify potential customers and tailor marketing techniques to target customer who belongs to young and middle-aged groups and are employed with stable financial performance. On top of that, domestic traveller should be targeted as the main market of the firm, and as for international traveller, South Korea and Japan are two potential markets in which the firm can develop more.

6.2 Leisure Travellers' Behaviours

For the purpose of this research, customer behaviour and preferences when it comes to leisure trip should be examined carefully so that marketing plan and tactics could be tailored accordingly to target preferred market segment. It is acknowledged that the purchase-making process of a customer does not operate in a vacuum, it is also affected by other factors outside an individual. According to Tyagi (2018), buyer behaviour is strongly influenced by their family member. In this survey, it is reported that 47.4% of participants normally travel with family with children, 24.7% of respondents prefer travelling with partner, and only the minority of 8.2% of participants normally travel alone (Figure 9). Based on this result, it is recommended that services and package that are suitable for families should be developed and promoted to satisfy the need of customers.

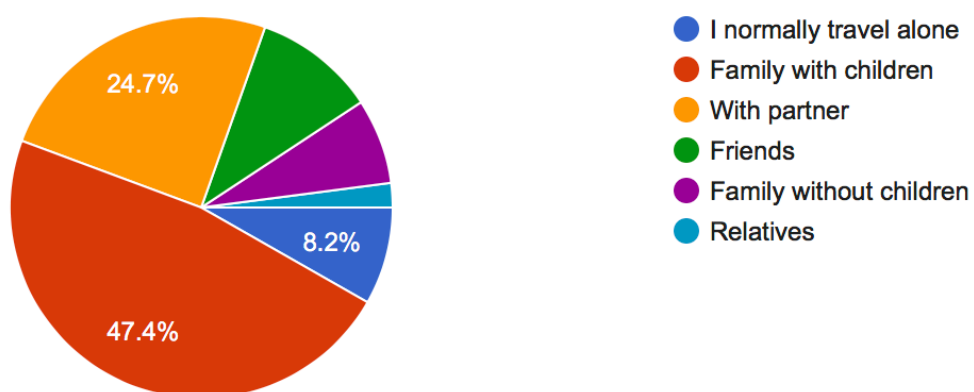


Figure 9. Preferences of Whom Travellers Would Like to Travel with.

In order to understand clearly traveller behaviours, occasion when the visitor prefer going for a leisure trip as well as length of the trip are also questioned in this survey. As shown in Figure 10, on public holidays and during the summer

time are two particular times of the year when respondents are willing to go for a leisure trip. It is understandable that there are several public holidays in Viet Nam when the workers get paid annual leave; hence it is preferred occasion for travelling (Vietnamnet 2021). Additionally, summer time is favourable time of the year to travel especially when it comes to families with children since parents with spendable income tend to use the vacation time to create memorable experience with their children (Kumar & Krishnaraj 2015).

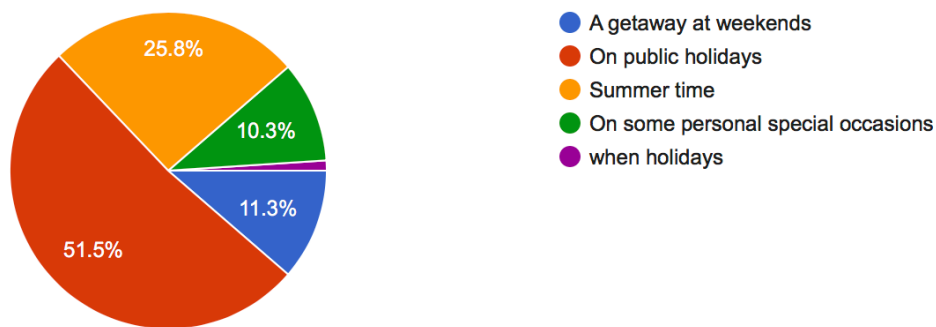


Figure 10. Respondents' Preferred Occasion for Leisure Trip

Moreover, figure 11 provides informative details about duration of leisure trip that participants normally have. The chart demonstrates that most of respondents normally have over-night trips. The majority of leisure trip normally lasts from 3 to 5 days (54.6% of total responses) and the trip lasts from 1 to 2 days accounts for 29.9%. These data indicates that respondents normally have a trip on public holidays or during summer time on average 3 to 5 days, which is considered a short time for relaxation and leisure activities.

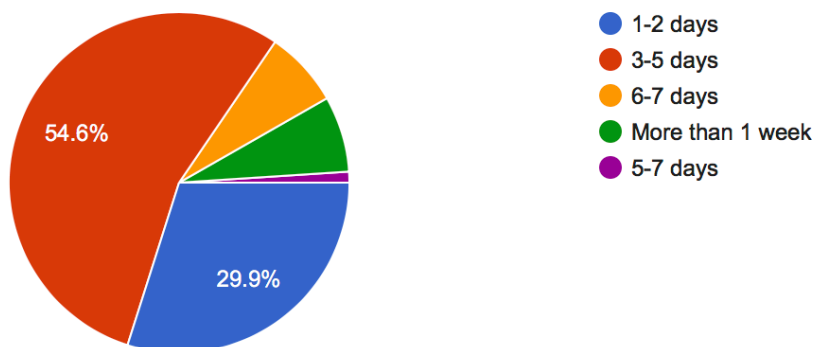


Figure 11. Respondents' Duration of Trip.

Subsequently, Figure 12 generates information regarding respondents' preference of travel style. It is reported that 44.3% of participants prefer partially packaged tour with transportation and accommodation, and number of respondents who are likely to choose non-packaged, independent travel account for considerable amount of 42.3%; whereas merely 13.4% of respondents are into fully packaged tour. The reason for this choice of travel style is that participants mainly belong to young and middle-aged group who value independence and flexibility when travelling.

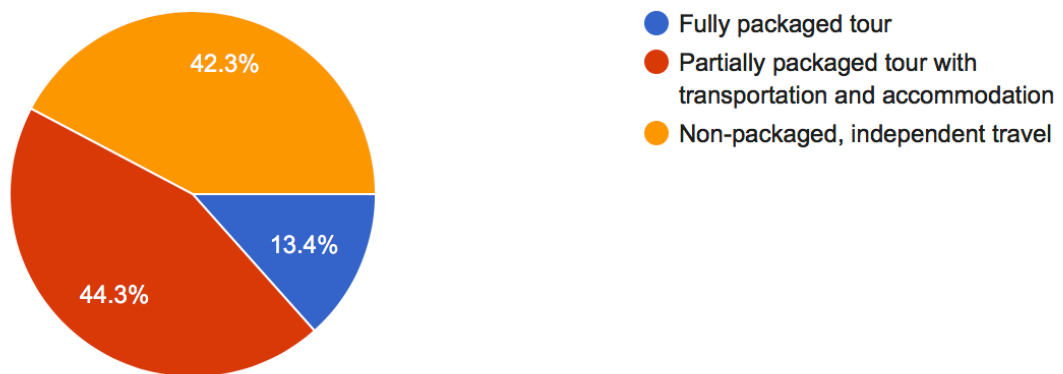


Figure 12. Respondents' Preference of Travel Style.

For the purpose of developing more suitable products and services for tourists and conducting marketing tactics to target this specific segment, favourite activities of respondents when it comes to leisure trip is also examined in this survey (Figure 13). The following question allows respondents to choose as many options as they desire due to the fact that an individual may have various favourite activities or have intention to participate in a diversity of experience when travelling.

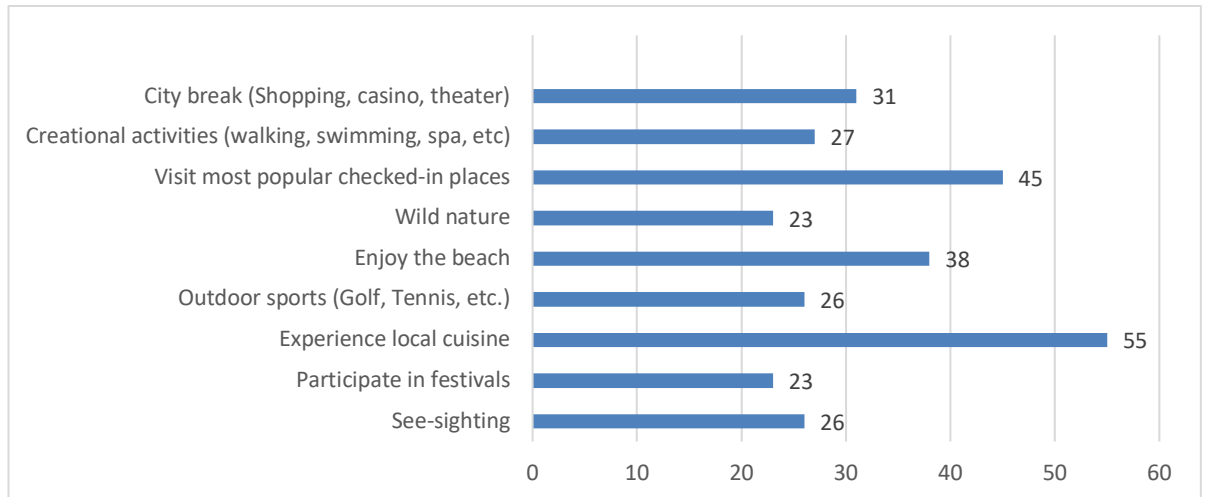


Figure 13. Respondents' Favourite Leisure Activities

Reportedly, the most popular activities that the participants prefer is experiencing local cuisine. In this day and age, experience cuisine from different cultures is becoming one of the main incentives for tourist to travel, and Vietnamese cuisine has acquired considerable reputation, becoming an unique factor that attractive to tourist (Vietnam Plus 2022). Specifically, in Hai Phong city, food tour has recently become increasing trend that attracts traveler to the destination. Hai Phong Tourism Department has created a digital map giving informative recommendations about local food and restaurants to promote culinary tourism in the region (Vnexpress 2022).

Next, visiting most popular checked-in place ranks the second among preferable leisure activities (45 out of 97 respondents selected this option); of which Hai Phong has been strongly developed. Hai Phong has gained considerable popularity nationally since the city still preserve many architectural attractions, such as pagodas, ancient temples, and French neoclassical architecture on old streets (Journey On Air 2020). Besides, enjoy the beach is other option that was selected by considerable number of respondents. On top of ancient architecture, Hai Phong is also well-known for its magnificent beaches that have made a great impression on tourists' minds for their pristine and unspoiled beauty (Journey On Air 2020).

Based on these collected data from the survey, target market that the commissioning company should concentrate on is people who belong to young and middle-aged group (18-35 years old) with stable financial performance. The

company should focus on attracting domestic travellers, and as for international tourists, Korean and Japanese are two main markets that should be taken into consideration. Additionally, it should be noted that short trip that lasts no longer than 5 days is preferred by respondents and summer time as well as public holiday occasions are considered as peak season in the region.

6.3 Marketing related questions

For the purpose of this research, some questions in relevance to marketing were added to this survey. Channels that respondents normally use for searching information related to travel destination are investigated in this section. This following question allows respondents select as many options as they desire since an individual may rely on a variety of reliable sources to acquire enough information when planning to travel (Figure 14). Reportedly, social media such as Facebook and Instagram and online video sharing platforms including Youtube and Tiktok stand in a crucial group of providing tourism information for customers. Besides, online booking and review platforms such as Booking.com, Agoda, Tripadvisor are also preferable channels of customer when searching for information about travel destination. It is undeniable that the Internet has revolutionized the way of planning and travelling. Gone are the days when planning a holiday required a visit to travel agent; in this day and age, customers can take advantage of online platforms with easy accessibility to acquire informative details about travel destinations (Garín-Muñoz & Amaral 2011). Consistently, it is recommended that service providers should be active on those online platforms to build awareness, ensure speedy information transfer and retrieval, as well as improve interactive relationships with customers.

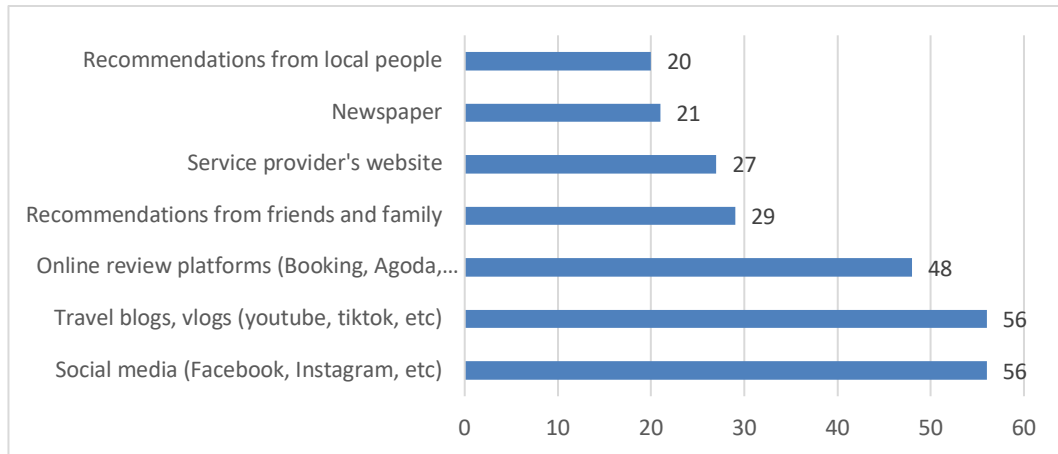


Figure 14. Preferable Channels for Searching Information about Travel Destination

To formulate appropriate marketing plan, content marketing is of crucial importance needed to be taken into consideration. The following question inquires information about kinds of content that respondents wish to see on service providers' marketing channels (Figure 15). Undoubtedly, information about current packages and promotion that service providers offer is the most common topic of interest among respondents. Moreover, stories about local people and informative posts about historical and cultural attractions are considered as attractive content to participants. These information should be utilised while developing marketing plan for the commissioner in order to generate attraction and stimulate strong interest of targeted customers.

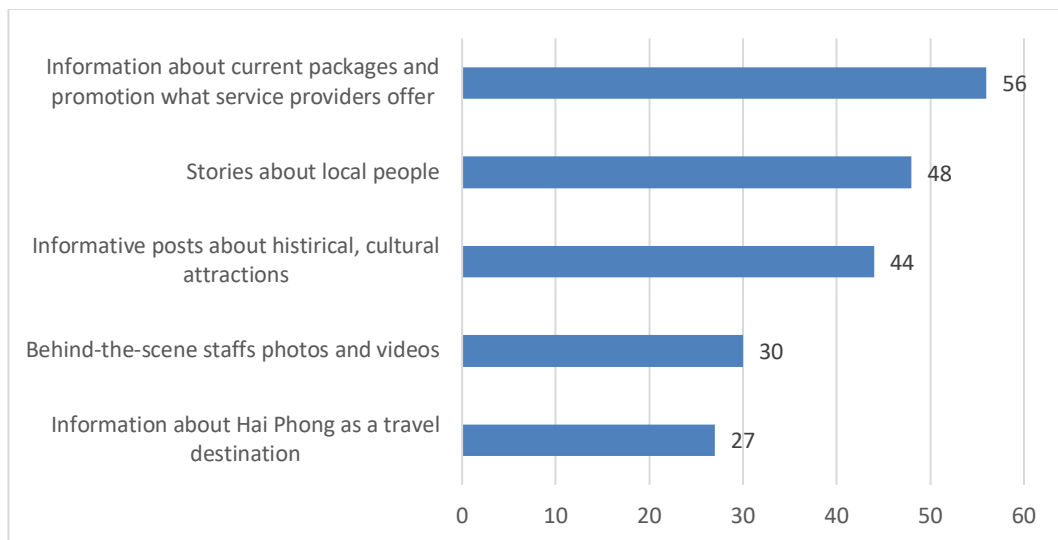


Figure 15. Preferred Content on Service Providers' Marketing Channels

In summary, based on result of this survey, target market for the commissioning company is successfully defined. The company should concentrate on developing products and services and formulating appropriate marketing plan that target at tourists who belong to young and middle-aged group, with stable financial performance. Domestic market should be solely focused on, and South Korea and Japan are two international main markets. For the case of researching company, there are two specific times of the year when promotion should be greatly intensified to attract customers: on public holidays and during summer time. Additionally, online platforms with easy, unlimited access are recommended to be in use in order to build awareness and enhance interactive relationships with customers.

7 MARKETING PLAN FOR COMMISSIONER

7.1 Current situation of commissioning company

Since it is believed that the firm which attempts to asset its present and future environments proactively is likely to outperform competitors, the first step when developing marketing plan is to conduct an analysis of current situation of an enterprise (Reichel 1983, 332). In this section, SWOT analysis is utilized in order to provide a comprehensive picture of commissioner's current situation in general (Table 2). It is undeniable that the hotel has superior strengths to stand out among the competitors. With high reputation by operating over 14 years in the market and excellent rating on various Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) such as Booking.com, Agoda and Tripadvisor, the company has enormous potential to develop more and more in the future. Besides, Pearl River Hotel & Apartments is the only one hotel in Hai Phong that has casino being operated currently. Additionally, screen golf service is being installed, and will be opened for the guest at the end of 2022, providing excellent first-class service for leisure travellers. Moreover, hotel's long-term, experienced staffs and executives are also considered an immense strength. In terms of marketing, an attractive official website and Facebook page of the hotel has been developed and updated regularly, building up favourable customer relationship. Furthermore, the hotel has successfully managed marketing activities on Online Travel Agencies such as Booking.com and Agoda, with the excellent rating of 8.4/10 and 7.7/10, respectively. Since Booking.com and Agoda ranked the first and the second of leading online travel agency used in Viet Nam, having achieved high rating on those platforms is considered superior strength of the commissioning company (Nguyen 2022).

When it comes to weaknesses of the company, the most significant one is the lack of membership programs. It is acknowledged that membership program is one of the most effective way to retain loyal customer, the absence of those programs create real difficulties for the hotel to keep its frequent customers. Despites all promotions that hotel has to offer for frequent guests, the customer still may find it not as advantageous as a global membership program from an

international brand. Regarding marketing tactics, even though the firm has developed attractive Facebook page and official website, the absence of marketing on other platforms is considered a shortcoming. In this case, Instagram and Tiktok should have been utilized due to the fact that besides Facebook, Instagram ranks the third of leading active social networks among internet users and Tiktok has recently emerged as one of the networks with the highest user growth in Viet Nam (Statista 2022).

In terms of external analysis, the company can benefit from a number of favourable opportunities. Direct flights from Asian countries such as Japan, South Korea, Thailand to Hai Phong city are operated frequently after the Covid-19 pandemic, opening up an ideal opportunity for the hotel to attract and welcome leisure travellers. Moreover, according the Director of Tourism Department in Hai Phong, the city has made enormous investment in developing infrastructure for tourism, and policies to support businesses in tourism has been formulated, bringing up a golden opportunity for the firm to grow along with the development of tourism in the region (Hai Phong News 2022). On the other hand, the company needs to be aware of some potential threats. Several hotels of strong international brands have been under construction recently such as Hilton, Sheraton and Pullman from Accor group, resulting in intensified competition in the region.


In sum, SWOT analysis presents a comprehensive overview of current situation of commissioning company, acting as a foundation for the development of services and marketing plan.

Table 2. SWOT analysis of Pearl River Hotel & Apartments

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spacious room in COMP Set - Recently renovated modern-style room categories - Good reputation in local market by operating over 14 years and the first 5 stars hotel - Most of rooms with balcony with undisturbed surroundings - Outdoor swimming pool - Facility; Pearl Gaming Club, Screen Golf, Outdoor Swimming Pool, Gym, Spa - High rate of long-term employees and recognizes executives - All indoor events venues located on one floor - Hotel's Facebook page has been developed and customer relationship's built on - Attractive hotel's website - High rating on OTAs (Booking.com: 8.4/10, Agoda: 7.7/10, Tripadvisor: 4.5/5) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No membership program - Small and out-of-date ballroom (210 sqm) - No Executive Lounge - Bad air circulation in guest rooms affecting by poor ventilation and air conditioning system - Uncontrollable on water temperature of swimming pool in winter - No Instagram, Tiktok account - Few interaction with guests are generated through official website
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strong Vietnamese Government's activities on foreign investment - Massive investment from Hai Phong Authority for tourism purpose - Located near the city center (about 7km) and near famous Do Son beach (15km) - Easy access from Hanoi (Capital of Vietnam) thanks to Hai Phong - Hanoi Highway - International direct flight from several Asia countries (Korea, Thailand, Japan) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business and economic impact by COVID-19 Pandemic - Over-dependent on particular market and account (LG groups from Korea); over 80% - No leisure market and lack of tourist area (mostly business traveller) - Strong international brand hotels in the market <p>Sheraton Hai Phong: 2022 opening. Hilton Hai Phong (150 keys): 2022 opening Pullman Hai Phong (200 keys); 2022 opening</p>

Since the purpose of this thesis is to develop marketing plan for the firm to expand in leisure-travel segment, it is worth examining the business performance when it comes to this specific market. According to actual data of commissioning company (Figure 16), the business has been over-dependent on a particular market: business traveller that accounts for nearly 90% of occupancy. Consequently, the company may experience unstable financial performance since the sales may decrease sharply during holiday season. However, it shows in the report that the sale for leisure-travel segment achieved the highest during the summer time (Jun 2019, 2022). Hence, expanding more in leisure-travel segment is considered as preferable solution for the firm to achieve stable business performance and long-term sustainable development.

In addition, in 2020 when the Covid-19 pandemic spread globally, social distancing rules, travelling restrictions or even lockdowns caused massive consequences in service industry (Jiang & Wen 2020). Correspondingly, the sales of researching company in 2020 especially when it comes to leisure-travel segment experienced a dramatic drop in comparison with its in 2019. In 2022 – post-covid situation, it can be said that the business has slightly recovered; however, it has not reached its peak in 2019.



PEARL RIVER HOTEL

Monthly Market Segment Report

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2019	Mar.		Jun.		Sep		Dec.	
	Rm nite	%	Rm nite	%	Rm nite	%	Rm nite	%
OTA/ ONLINE TRAVEL AGENCY	101	5.3	282	12.8	75	5.0	139	12.2
Travel Agent	178	9	28	1.3			4	0.4

2020	Mar.		Jun.		Sep		Dec.	
	Rm nite	%	Rm nite	%	Rm nite	%	Rm nite	%
OTA/ ONLINE TRAVEL AGENCY	21	2.7	5	0.9	14	3.8	19	5.8
Travel Agent	1	0.1	16	2.8			3	0.9

2022	Mar.		Jun.		Sep		Dec.	
	Rm nite	%	Rm nite	%	Rm nite	%	Rm nite	%
OTA/ ONLINE TRAVEL AGENCY	17	1.2	76	3.3	81	3.1		
Travel Agent	15	1.1	6	0.3	54	2.1		

Figure 16. Hotel Leisure-Travel Segment Report.

In terms of marketing, the firm currently concentrates on doing marketing for business travellers which requires private sale-calls, meetings, negotiations since the business travellers normally come in large volume. It is acknowledged that there are different characteristics between business travellers and leisure travellers, and different marketing plan should be designed to target particular market segment. Currently, the business follows the marketing plan that is formulated for business travellers. Marketing tactics are performed by attending business conferences, meetings, working with airlines and travel agencies, advertising on magazines and newspapers. Marketing result is mainly measured by number of sales and occupancy rate, the interaction with customers on marketing channels is challenging to measure, and is neglected to some extent. In order to expand in leisure-travellers segment, an appropriate marketing plan should be created, targeting this specific segment by paying more attention to additional services, recreational activities, events that service provider has to offer.

In summary, the researching company has been over-dependent on particular segment, which presents potential threat for the performance of the business. The firm should utilized its immense strengths and take advantage of favorable opportunities that the market and Hai Phong city have to offer, in order to expand in leisure-travel segment, leading to sustainable development in long-term.

7.2 Marketing Plan

7.2.1 Product

Combining with the characteristic of leisure travel, bed and breakfast will not be enough in standing as a compromise of customers need and service providers. In order to come up with a fully adaptable marketing strategy in the aspect of products, the author separate the customers by age segmentation methods. Based on the result from the survey, the age segment of leisure-travellers that the hotel should focus stand between 18-25 and 26-35 years old.

Firstly, customers from eighteen to twenty-five years old belongs to the mind set of trying experience and young living style, who will be attracted by three main criteria: luxurious operation, trendy perception, and night life expectation. As a result, the author comes up with a table based on the criteria and solutions as well as changes in order to fulfil this kind of customers.

Table 3. Development Ideas for Products.

Criteria	Accommodation in the Hotels	Development
Luxurious Operation	Restaurant	In restaurants development, fine dining menu can be upgraded into a variety of choice as in the perception of youth, fine dining is one of the most luxurious operations that they want to try as Asian perception is based on one concrete though where Western meals is considered as high quality ones. Moreover, being evaluated as 5-star hotel, the hotel can take advantage of this reputation, combining with fine dining Western meal to form such a high-class restaurant and will attract young customers.
	Café	About café development, the most crucial thing that can attract young customers lies between fancy atmosphere and luxurious drinks in menu. The way of setting up the space and atmosphere should look modern and the menu should have some special drinks combining with some original ones.
Trendy perception	Decorations	Based on survey result, most of the customer will travel during the seasonal holidays which give out a high requirement of places for photographing. As a result, the author recommend a seasonal change in decorations of both restaurant, café and the entire hotel. Four special events that need special decoration in order to attract customers are: Valentine, Christmas, Lunar New Year and Summer season.
	Café Service	About café service, hotel can offer seasonal drinks which is limited in only a short period of time. This will

		boost up the service in our café and attract the domestic customers living in Hai Phong as well since they are considered as leisure travellers.
Night life expectation	Sky Lounge	This is one of the hardest criteria in development as in Vietnam, the policy in building and operating the lounge is very complicated. The author suggest that outsourcing the sky lounge is one of the most suitable ways for the development of this criteria. Although outsourcing will lead to many difficulties in fully controlling and making changes based on the hotel policy, it will help to promote hotel in the perception of night active. Moreover, on the perception of night life, a 5-star hotel bar is also placed in a high rank which is promised to create expectations for the youth to experience.

Secondly, for the development of product for customers from 26 to 35 years old, the author recommends in equipment upgrade for spa, swimming pool and children activity. In terms of spa development, it will consist of two main criteria. Firstly, as spa in the hotel is in a very poor quality as they are not focusing on the services, the improvement can be made by adding more function in spa such as sauna, massage and entertainment like billiards or board games. This not only attracts the family with two people but also provide places for families' children having the best time of their own.

Furthermore, the author suggest that swimming pool area should be improved as well to attract more customers. In Vietnam, fancy swimming pool could be considered as a highlight of accommodation's feature to capture tourists' attention, especially when it comes to leisure-travel when the guests spend most of their time to relax. Moreover, swimming pool upgrade will support not only the demand of services but also provide the places for events such as BBQ party or small cosy atmosphere for families dinners.

Last but not least, based on survey result, the majority of participants normally travel with family with children, the author suggest that some special activities and events for children could be developed to attract more customers. Events can be organized on special occasions such as Children's Day or on Mid-Autumn Festival, turning the hotel into attractive destinations for quality family-time.

7.2.2 Price

In this department, price is the key point of the plan since it affects hotel's profitability and it is one of the first impression of customers when they receive information from the hotel. In normal price plan, reducing price for a better customer view is the first consideration of many marketing procedure but as operating the 5-stars hotel, reducing price brings difficulties in processing and quality controlling. Moreover, the main segment of customer that the hotel target is the one with full time employees and stable financial performance, leading to decision of not reducing the price. Based on the analysis from the survey and the above analysed situation, the author suggests some changes in the package of the hotel in order to increase the benefits for customers in the same price range. In details, instead of selling several services separately, an inclusive package could be created. In this case, the amount of payment the customer has to pay is completely the same but they will feel like they are benefit more in their payment.

7.2.3 Place

Generally, in terms of distribution of products and services for leisure-travellers, it necessities mass marketing that can approach a large amount of customers, not only privates sale-calls, meetings and negotiations as the company has been implementing to target business travellers. Based on the connection and network communication equipment in the whole market there are three main platforms that the hotel can put up products for information findings as well as customer accessibility: online platforms, face to face meeting and events, brochure and leaflet.

Online platforms are considered the most essential places for information announcing as the development of both internet era and digitalization process of the world. This method will boost both information findings and customer accessibility up to a higher level of both legitimate and accuracy. Those channels should be solely focused due to its accessibility and cost-effectiveness.

Moreover, events and meetings are also another way of effective marketing. This method should be applied only when the company wants to concentrate on specific marketing campaign since events and meetings require a lot of effort in the phase of preparation and operation. However, this method will draw a straight line for customers who have interest in particular products and services, therefore these events and meetings should be utilised as an effective way of marketing.

Lastly, brochure and leaflet are the traditional ways of getting more customers; however, as the standard of 5-stars hotel, the author does not recommend using this method quite often. This method can be applied to only small events organized in the hotel, or in some other events that hotel acts as cooperation.

7.2.4 Promotion

In this section, promotion plan is dealt with a high potential of pushing both reputation and causing more impact on leisure department. The promotion plan should be applicable to a huge number of leisure-travellers. It falls in three main steps: pushing bookings and orders in social media, cooperating with more travel agencies, and assigning hotel as a mid-destination.

In the first step, the point will stand for two main purposes: adding more reputation and promoting our service. When pushing booking and services advertisement on social media such as Facebook or Tiktok, the accessibility of the hotel will be spread into a wider range of network which helps customers to have an easier time in finding information about us. As a result, the number of contacts and connections of the hotel will rise as well as the awareness of customers and hotel reputation. On top of that, it is recommended that promotion should be updated

frequently on Online Travel Agent channels, and the firm should be able to manage and keep up the conversations with customers on those channels.

Besides pushing advertisements on social media and online travel agent channels, the firm should broaden its network by cooperating with a variety of traditional travel agencies and Destination Management Organizations (DMOs). The firm could participate in or even become a sponsor for events organized by DMOs in order to be updated with policies and trends in tourism in specific region. This can also be considered as an opportunity for the firm to enhance preferable image and build up profitable relationship with tourism agencies and organizations.

Last stage in our promotion plan is to turn parts of hotel into a mid-destination of many tours. After having sold rooms for the agencies, the hotel can be assigned as a mid-destination of many tours which can utilize large amount of available room at last minutes. The promotion of this step will base on DMO contracts and the seasonal traveller so that we put this at the last step which do not impact the overall plan of our promotion process.

8 DISCUSSION

The last chapter acts as an assessment of the whole thesis in terms of three main criteria including research question answering, validity and reliability and further development. Firstly, the thesis has brought out a clear marketing plan in supporting the department of leisure traveller marketing. The operation of the campaign has been planned through evaluating the 4P's criteria which are: Products, Price, Place and Promotion.

Based on the survey results, there are two separate plans for the products changes which relate to attracting 18-25 years old customers by putting more effort in decorations and service providing and gaining more benefit from 26-35 years old ones by upgrading services that families can be involved. Secondly, as the hotel has a quite high reputation with the name tags of 5-star hotel, the price reduction will not be a wise choice as it will bring difficulties in controlling quality and processing. The recommendations given by the thesis are the changes in both staying and entertaining packages. This will allow marketer to gain more contacts through striking into the psychology thought of willing to go for a full pack which can be cheap.

Next, in the place concept, events and online platforms are the two main places for marketing campaign operation because of the easiness in accessing to those site and customer friendly usage. Moreover, as brochure and leaflet are quite effective in delivering to customers, but it will fail particularly on information delivery based on the uncomfortable in holding paper of consumers. The last part of the plan coming with promotion will be split into two different directions. The first one comes up with advertisement on social media such as Facebook or Tiktok where information is updated every second. This method will bring out an outstanding access and give customers information about our business in just no time. The second path is turning the hotel into a mid-destination by assigning as a member of Destination Management Organization (DMOs). This will on one hand lower the burden of the marketing department in gaining more access as the DMOs will take care of it. On the other hand, the information about the hotel will be delivered through more platforms meaning more acknowledgement about the business.

Secondly, the validity and reliability of the thesis are quite accurate as the pools of participants that the thesis operated on are the customers who have a trend in travelling to researched region. Moreover, the questions in the survey are designed in order to eliminate the improper answers. Additionally, the research is based on various fields of theory, including marketing, hospitality marketing, customer behaviours in tourism industry, building a solid foundation for the thesis.

Lastly, as the market of hospitality and tourism is ever-changing due to the changes in the society, it opens the path for further researches. In the thesis result analysis, the behaviour of the customer is being understood mainly through the employment status and ages but further research can dig deeper in the concept of nationality and personal concepts in travelling. Not only the commissioning company can benefit from this research, other firms in the same industry can consider it as a guideline to formulate strategic marketing plan.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Questionnaire Survey Form

Appendix 1. Questionnaire Survey Form. 1(7)



Customer behavior when traveling to Hai Phong city, Viet Nam

Dear valued participants,

I am Ngoc Nguyen, senior student at Lapland University of Applied Sciences. I would kindly ask for your participation in this survey, which is a part of my thesis project. The purpose of this survey is to examine travel behaviors when traveling to Hai Phong, Viet Nam as well as to discover current trends when it comes to leisure travel in Hai Phong. Your responses will give the author and service providers valuable information to develop tourism products and to conduct suitable marketing strategy.

The survey takes only 5-7 minutes to answer. All answers from respondents will be kept confidential and survey results will be published in summaries, tables, figures in the thesis papers.

May you have any feedback and additional questions, please don't hesitate to contact me via email :

Ngoc.Nguyen@edu.lapinamk.fi

Sincere thanks for your support and cooperation!

Appendix 1. Questionnaire Survey Form. 2(7)

Participant's background

Description (optional)

1. Where are you from? *

☐ Viet Nam

☐ Korea

☐ Japan

☐ China

☐ Finland

☐ Germany

☐ USA

☐ UK

☐ Other...

Appendix 1. Questionnaire Survey Form. 3(7)

...

2. Gender? *

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Prefer not to say

3. Age? *

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18-25
- ☐ 26-35
- ☐ 36-45
- ☐ 45-60
- ☐ 60+

...

4. What is your current employment status? *

- ☐ Student
- ☐ Student with part-time job
- ☐ Unemployed
- ☐ Employed with part-time job
- ☐ Employed with full-time job
- ☐ Retired

Appendix 1. Questionnaire Survey Form. 4(7)

Customer behavior when traveling to Hai Phong City, Viet Nam



Hai Phong is a city in northern Viet Nam, approximately 100km far from Ha Noi - The capital of Viet Nam. Hai Phong is also known as The City of Flame Flowers because most of its streets are lined with flame flower trees. It also serves as a pleasant base when visiting other northeastern spots such as Cat Ba and Halong Bay - a UNESCO World Heritage Site. There are many places worth visiting in the city including temples, shrines, pagodas, mausoleums, and beautiful beaches. Moreover, Hai Phong is also known for a handful of festivals that are organized every year.

Whether travelers prefer to have a relaxing and enjoyable vacation by the beach, or to have adventurous experience, Hai Phong has something to offer for everyone.

5. Have you ever visited Hai Phong City, Viet Nam? *

- ☐ I have never been to Hai Phong
 - ☐ I visited there sometimes
 - ☐ I visited there quite often
 - ☐ I visited there on regular basis
-

Appendix 1. Questionnaire Survey Form. 4(7)

6. How interested are you in Hai Phong city as a travel destination? *

1 = Very interested; 2 = Somewhat interested; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Not very interested ; 5 = Not at all interested

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. Who do you often travel with? *

- ☐ I normally travel alone
- ☐ Family with children
- ☐ With partner
- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Other...

8. How long does your trip normally last? *

- ☐ 1-2 days
- ☐ 3-5 days
- ☐ 6-7 days
- ☐ More than 1 week

9. On which occasion do you prefer to go for a trip? *

- ☐ A getaway at weekends
- ☐ On public holidays
- ☐ Summer time
- ☐ On some personal special occasions
- ☐ Other...

Appendix 1. Questionnaire Survey Form. 5(7)

10. Preferences of travel style? *

- ☐ Fully packaged tour
- ☐ Partially packaged tour with transportation and accommodation
- ☐ Non-packaged, independent travel

:::

11. What are your favorite activities when it comes to leisure trip? Please select all that apply *

- ☐ See-sighting
- ☐ Participate in festivals
- ☐ Experience local cuisine
- ☐ Outdoor sports (Golf, Tennis, etc)
- ☐ Enjoy the beach
- ☐ Wild nature
- ☐ Visit most popular checked-in places
- ☐ Creational activities (walking, swimming, spa, etc)
- ☐ City break (Shopping, casino, theater)
- ☐ Other...

Appendix 1. Questionnaire Survey Form. 6(7)

Marketing

✕ ⋮

This section includes some questions regarding your preference while searching for information for traveling

⋮

12. When you stay at HOTEL while traveling, how important are these following factors?

1= Extremely important; 2= Important; 3= Neutral; 4= Low importance; 5= Not at all important

	1	2	3	4	5
Room conditio...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cleaniess	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Price	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Decor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Staff's hospital...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Additional serv...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. Which channels do you often use to get information about the travel destination? *

- ☐ Social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc)
- ☐ Newspaper
- ☐ Travel blogs, vlogs (youtube, tiktok, etc)
- ☐ Online review platforms (Booking, Agoda, Tripadvisor, etc)
- ☐ Service provider's website
- ☐ Recommendations from friends and family
- ☐ Recommendations from local people
- ☐ Other...

Appendix 1. Questionnaire Survey Form. 7(7)

...

14. What kinds of content do you wish to see on service providers' marketing channel? Please * select all that apply

- ☐ Information about Hai Phong as a travel destination
- ☐ Information about current packages and promotion what service providers offer
- ☐ Behind-the-scene staffs photos and videos
- ☐ Stories about local people
- ☐ Informative posts about historical, cultural attractions
- ☐ Other.....

15. Would you recommend Hai Phong City - Vietnam as a leisure travel destination for your friends and family? *

1= Very likely; 2= Likely; 3= Neutral; 4= Unlikely; 5= Very unlikely

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

...

16. Thank you for participating in this survey. Please write here if you have any further development ideas, or you would like to mention something that is important to you while traveling

Long answer text

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