

# AN APPLICATION OF AHP APPROACH TO INVESTIGATE TOURISM PROMOTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The tourism industry service network (TISN) is considered to be one of the largest components of tourism in the modern Vietnamese economy. The Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) is currently developing a long-term plan to diversify the country's tourism industry and to improve the destination image of Vietnam. To successfully implement this plan, the Vietnamese tourism industry must employ effective promotional strategies.

**Design** – This study designs to determine the necessity of measuring the effectiveness of the promotional activities of tourist destinations and to decide upon a promotional strategy that appropriately parallels the desired destination attributes and destination image.

**Methodology** – This study proposes to address tourism promotional efficiency using the analytical hierarchy process (AHP) methodology, a decision-making method based on pairwise comparisons between criteria, and constructs an evaluation structure with criteria-associated weights for factor selection.

**Approach** – In accordance with AHP design, this study selects participants who had been in charge of or served in the Vietnamese tourism industry for a number of years.

**Findings** – This study finds that “government policy”, “service staff” and “tourist satisfaction” are the three most important factors impacting tourism promotional effectiveness. Surprisingly, “tourist loyalty” and “tourism infrastructure” are considered to be the least important factors affecting tourism promotional efficiency.

**Originality of the research** – This study provides valuable information and knowledge of tourism promotional effectiveness to be fully shared and passed on in the tourism industry, resulting in a corporate cultural atmosphere that creates the innovative impetus of destination attributes and images.

**Keywords** Tourism promotion; destination attributes; destination image; analytic hierarchy process (AHP)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Based on research by the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) and the Visa International Company (VISA) in 2010, Vietnam is becoming a more popular destination for international tourists, particularly for tourists from China, Thailand, Japan, Singapore and Australia. As stated in the 2010 VNAT report, VNAT has been implementing its tourism promotional strategies for travelers to attract foreign visitors to Vietnam. However, due to the limited promotion strategies of tourism in VNAT, the World Economic Forum's 2011 report implies that Vietnamese tourism promotional

activities remain inefficient. In this perspective, the branding of a tourism destination is clarified as a linkage to that destination's promotional activities and contextualized within the domain of marketing communications (Skinner 2008). Tasci and Kozak (2006) demonstrate that, whereas the destination image contributes to forming a destination brand, two different images are involved in branding. One of these images is that generated by the promotional activities of the government based on the destination attributes, whereas the other image is that created by the feedback from visitors possessing experience with the destination or from non-experienced visitors utilizing various external sources of information, which also generate feedback and thereby influence the evaluation of alternative destinations (Fakeye and Crompton 1991).

Bansal and Eiselt (2004) address that the investigation of travelling behavior for government planners is to get the answers of where to locate new facilities, what type of facilities, and what kind of tourism promotion strategies (including demographic issue and tourist consuming behavior) in order to provide a better and more successful environment in TISN. The aim of this study is to determine the necessity of measuring the effectiveness of promotional activities of tourist destinations and to decide a promotional strategy that appropriately parallels the desired destination attributes and destination image. Chen (2006, 167) addresses that "prioritizing factors and attributes affecting convention site decision making can be viewed as a complex multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM) problem. The analytical hierarchy process (AHP), a prevalent MCDM method, could facilitate understanding the decision-making process and thus assist decision makers in allocating limited resources to strategic investment such as marketing, positioning, and so on". This study addresses tourism promotional effectiveness using AHP approach, and constructs an evaluation structure with criteria-associated weights for factor selections. The criteria studies here may be of importance in explaining the performance measurement of tourism promotional projects. The results of this study could provide useful principles for decision makers who need an effective performance measurement of tourism promotional projects.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The effectiveness of promotional strategy of tourism is to measure the outcome/results of implementing that strategy. Wells and Wint (2000, 21) suggest that "promotion techniques are commended when embarking on country wide promotion activities. This includes, improving investment in concern country which will reflect the image of the country and providing services to prospective and current investors (investment – service activities)". Given the effectiveness of the tourism promotion activities, understanding the travelers' decision making process is of great interest to marketers (Currie and Wesley 2008). For measuring the effectiveness of tourism promotion, the determining factors that influence tourists choice of a destination is important in developing marketing strategies (Hsu et al. 2009), as well as the planning of public services. When a destination is able to meet the needs of a tourist, it is perceived to be attractive and is likely to be chosen. Tourist decision behavior is a complex procedure, strongly influenced by the attributes and characteristics of tourist destination as well as past experiences (Shukla et al. 2006). Lin and Huang (2008) address that destination

image has become a very important issue in the marketing research in TISN since many countries use promotion and global marketing to support their images and to compete with other destinations. This study uses three main factors that affect the promotional effectiveness as promotional activities, destination attributes and destination images.

### **2.1. Promotional activities**

The promotional activities that Vietnamese government has adopted to promote the tourism industry are intended to introduce the country's image to international visitors. In this perspective, the evaluation of the effectiveness of a destination's promotional strategy is considered important for two reasons. First, it would assist the marketers in deciding which promotion activities to continue and to terminate; secondly, it would give operators the information that they could use to decide which factors to "buy into" (Perdue, 1990). Based on the literature reviews and experts interview, there are four factors having been selected for the influential promotion activities in this study: government policy, promotion budget, destination marketing management and promotion method.

The government policy of tourism development is defined as the set of regulations, rules, guidelines, directives, promotional objectives and strategies that provide the framework within which the collective and individual decisions directly affecting long-term tourism development and the daily activities within a destination are undertaken (Kooiman, 1993). Olson and Eoyang (2001) state that the promotion of tourism-related laws, regulations, and restrictions has a great impact on tourism activities. In particular, governmental actions help to determine both the position and role of tourism in the tourism industry service network (TISN) and the centrally coordinated policies implemented to improve the destination image, which not only regulate stakeholders in the tourism industry but also affect the overall promotional strategy and the efficiency of the national promotion department (Selin and Chavez 1995). The tourism policy, particularly as it relates to tourism promotion, must be very flexible because it not only must fit the niche market of potential tourists but also must be broadly acceptable to local companies within the country. The main purpose of tourism policy is to ensure that tourists are hosted in a way that maximizes the benefits to stakeholders while minimizing the negative effects. The activities of tourism, such as marketing, event development, attraction operations, and visitor reception programs, are greatly affected by various types of tourism policies. To indicate the role of government policy, Ap (1992) notes that the perceptions and attitudes of the government toward the impacts of any proposed tourism model should be considered in the planning studies conducted on tourism policies, particularly if the tourism initiatives in question are intended to be sustainable over the long term (Ritchie and Inkari 2006). Moreover, to ensure policy success, the local community must play an active role and participate in the design and management of the tourism policy developed by the government.

Tourism scholars have discovered that the budget for tourism often appears to be unrelated to the volume of visitor arrivals or the economic impact of the tourism industry in developing countries (Martha and and Raymond 2009). Tourism agencies typically rely on the availability of public funds, which places them under the limitations imposed by governmental budgets (Bryden 1973, Mowforth and Munt1998).

Ideally, however, to enhance promotional efficiency, the budgets for tourism promotion should be funded by a mix of public and private sector sources (Hunt 1990). The existing literature primarily focuses upon government attitudes toward tourism and includes research addressing the methods that are used to spend government budgets on tourism promotion (Sirakaya, Teye and Sonmez 2002). In a study examining the expenditures of tourism marketing, Deskins and Seevers (2010) suggest that spending higher amounts on tourism promotion can trigger higher levels of tourist activity and enhance the employment growth rate for the tourism industry. Burgan and Mules (1992) also predict that when tourism promotion is adequately funded for a nation, the number of visitors to that nation will increase, enabling tourism income to significantly contribute to a portion of that country's GDP.

Robin et al (2002) observe that tourism destination marketing has traditionally been heavily oriented toward promotional activities. However, Poon (1993) demonstrates that destination marketing organizations may achieve greater success by focusing on improving destination competitiveness, which implies that the needs of both destinations and stakeholders should occupy a more strategic perspective in tourism planning, development and marketing. At present, the marketing activities conducted by destination marketing organizations are mainly centered on the promotion of the destination as a whole (Lewis et al. 1995). Hassan (2000) argues that to maintain tourism competitiveness, the management team for a destination should be focused on a systematic examination of the unique comparative advantages that provide the destination in question with a specialized long-term appeal to the target travel consumer segments. Crouch and Ritchie (1999) state that destination marketing management incorporates the myriad factors of enhancing the appeal of the destination's core resources and attractors, strengthening the quality and effectiveness of the destination's supporting factors and resources, and adapting effectively to the constraints imposed by the destination's context and setting.

The promotion method refers to the means used to implement promotional activities and includes promotional tools, information channels, and promotional programs. Kotler et al. (1993) define the term "promotional strategy" as the activity of communication with the target audience in a market (or multiple different markets). Various modes of promotional strategies and tools exist, including sales promotion, direct selling, advertising, public relation, and personal selling. According to Reimer's (1990) study of the destination selection process, tour operators and travel agents serve as both distribution channels and image creators. Tour operators and travel agents also represent a primary source of the information contributing to image formation that travelers use when selecting destinations (McLellan and Foushee 1983). While conducting the promotional activities, it is necessary for tour operators and travel agents to coordinate with all of the sectors in TISN. Tour operators and travel agents have multiple and critical functions in the tourism market because they provide information and develop destination packages for potential travelers (Baloglu and Mangaloglu 2001). Before examining the usage of promotion as a marketing tool, it is therefore necessary to examine whether the product segmentation presumed by a tourism destination is actually consistent with the perceptions of travel agents and tour operators (Lewis and Meadows 1995). Market segmentation is one of the foundational aspects of devising marketing strategy. Only by presenting the destination to the right

segment of potential clients in the appropriate way can a popularly selected destination maximize the effectiveness of its marketing and promotional initiatives. By understanding a visitor's expectation and market segment, marketers can then choose the correct promotional tool to attract visitors to a destination. In addition, marketers should vigilantly evaluate and review the impact of the promotional tools on the market segments that have already been targeted (Weaver and Lawton 2006).

## **2.2. Destination attributes**

Destination attributes are the main factors formulated by researchers for the purpose of describing the various aspects of a country's image, which predominantly influences a person's perception of the country. This perception cannot be easily altered or manipulated by any other aspect of the destination selection processes (Beerli and Martin, 2004; Kotler et al., 1993). Dann (1977) uses the pull factors as the destination attribute attractiveness (such as landscape, culture, price, service, climate etc.) to pull one to some of the tourism supply components such as attractions or destinations. The "pull factors" can be deemed as exogenous forces, which have been characterized in terms of the features, attractions, or attributes of a destination (Klenosky 2002, 385). Dann's "push-pull framework" provides a simple and intuitive approach for understanding tourists' motivations for traveling and explains why a certain tourist selects one destination over another. Truong and King (2009) show that the destination attributes are the key characteristics that may be conveniently grouped as "The Five A's" of attraction, activities, accessibility, accommodation, and amenity. The destination-choice process is strongly associated with the destination image. Destination image is basically defined as a mental picture or impression of a place, a product, or an experience held by the general public (Milman and Pizam 1995), or a compilation of the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination (Crompton 1979). Although the definitions are interpreted differently, these definitions lead to the conceptualization of how tourists perceive the destination and evaluate its attractiveness or attributes at the destination (Fakeye and Crompton 1991, Kim 1998). In this study, there are four sub-factors of destination attributes such as the environmental framework, heritage/cultural festival, staff service, and tourism infrastructure.

The environmental framework of a tourism destination is defined as the natural backdrop within which the visitor enjoys the destination. The environmental framework also includes the destination's physiography, climate, flora and fauna, scenery and other physical assets (Dwyer and Kim 2003). As Porter (1990) emphasizes, "factor creation" is a source of competitive advantage, and a destination's endowment of natural resources is crucial for encouraging many forms of tourism and enhancing visitors' satisfaction. Natural resources are an important part of the tourism industry. Millions of people in the world travel to experience various natural environments each year, and visitors are typically fond of experiencing varieties of natural and cultural environments (Dodds and Butler 2010). According to studies by Mitchell (1989) and Bishop and Gimblett (2000), natural tourism destinations can be assessed based on attraction or panoramic view using the three landscape assessment approaches of landscape surveying, involving an expert team to identify a good aerial view based on site analysis and topography, and employing a geographical information system. The

policy for destination promotion based on natural resources should be focused on planning for ecotourism, which requires a greater coordination between the natural resource management and service delivery aspects of the tourism industry. The coordination of tourism management should be based on a greater understanding between industry segments and the consideration of future demand and client expectations. To address the requirements of a future influx of visitors, changes in perspectives and priorities will generally be necessary for the tourism industry, natural resources managers, and specific ecotourism operators. Moore and Carter (1993) state that tourism in the natural environment has been characterized as (1) the marketing of resources without acknowledging the impact on resources that visitation can create and (2) the management of resources without acknowledging the impact of protection policies on tourism operators and their clientele. Both responses have failed to adequately consider the long-term impact of visitation on future visitor experiences and on the physical, social and economic environment of the tourist destination. In this study, natural resources are understood to be one of the attributes for destination promotion in tourism industry. The awareness of natural resources can be generated by various means, including destination promotion activities, and popularization can influence the perception of natural resources and thus affect visitation patterns.

The element of heritage/culture festival can be used for tourism purposes to start attracting flows of visitors to a destination. This element is typically based on the cultural values and assets of material and non-material natures that are produced by a people, used by tourism and traced from prehistory up until modern times as the testimonials of a culture. The heritage/culture festival of a destination, which can include features such as the destination's history, institutions, customs, architectural features, cuisine, traditions, artwork, music, handicrafts, dance, etc., provides fundamental and powerful attracting forces for prospective visitors (Murphy et al. 2000). In the literature addressing tourists' decisions of destination selection, most studies are based on the discussions of sites or destination activities. Tourism sites or activities are important motivators for tourists to visit a certain destination. As culture is one of the important decision-making factors involved in destination selection, the cultural festival is increasingly utilized as a means of social and economic development, and the cultural aspect of the tourism market is being flooded with new attractions, cultural routes and heritage centers. However, many consumers are tired of encountering the serial reproduction of culture in different destinations and are searching for alternatives (Richards and Wilson 2006). In fact, the growth of cultural consumption (of art, food, fashion, music, and tourism) and the industries that cater to it have fueled the "symbolic economy" of countries and regions. The image of a country or region becomes founded on both its physical assets and the series of experiences it provides (Wilson 2002). Dwyer and Kim (2003) propose five features that can be expanded to promote tourism and attract visitors, namely, tourism infrastructure, special events, and the range of available activities, entertainment and shopping.

The service staff is a central factor in achieving competitiveness and underscores the importance of consumer loyalty in maintaining high demand. Workers in tourism services organizations must be highly skilled, reliable, and educated individuals. Baum (2007) indicates that people are considered to be a critical factor for the successful delivery of tourism services in TISN. To demonstrate this statement, Baum (2007, 1386) asserts that “the story of successful tourism enterprises is one that is largely about people—how they are recruited, how they are managed, how they are trained and educated, how they are valued and rewarded, and how they are supported through a process of continuous learning and career development”. Based on the above statement, the role of people is important in the service industry, especially in the tourism sector, in which the customer and staff must jointly participate in the process of delivering service products and activities. The delivery of qualified products and services within international tourism and hospitality reflects an increasing focus on the intangibles of human factors (Baum and Sheryl 1997). Suprenant and Solomon (1987) state that the interactions between employees and consumers of services are recognized as critical factors in determining consumer satisfaction. Also, the interaction time is the moment of meeting consumer’s expectations and depends on consumer’s retention and loyalty (Bowen and Ford 2002). The pleasure to be served completes and sometimes overcomes the pleasure of the actual products consumption. Bowen and Ford (2002) point out that the most important difference from the productive sphere among the duties of service workers is the interaction with customers. The contact between employees and customers is a co-participation in the service experience. The employees not only are task-oriented but also are able to interact and oversee the customers while customers are consuming the services.

As humans are the most important factor influencing the TISN, the requirement for tourism management should essentially focus on the methods of acquiring qualified employees within the tourism industry. That is, the tourism industry is configured to depend on its sources of labor. Because of this dependence, certain modifications have recently occurred within the industry, as the original demand for personnel trained in specific product and technical skills has shifted to the current desire for personnel possessing the “generic skills” of communication, personality (aesthetic and emotional labor), and the ability to use technology (Hofman and Steijn 2003). The traditional training for tourism employment, offered through tourism colleges in the form of formal courses and qualifications, thus plays a less important role in meeting industrial needs at present.

A destination’s general infrastructure includes its road networks, airports, train systems, bus systems, water supply, telecommunications, sewerage, healthcare facilities, sanitation, electricity generation system, financial services, and computer services. Many of the services and facilities used by visitors are provided by the private sector, but the public sectors at all levels (national, regional, and local) are also becoming involved in the tourism industry in different ways (such as planning, infrastructure provision, and economic regeneration) due to economic, social, cultural, environmental and political reasons. It is important to emphasize that these economic activities are essential components for the development of tourist destinations and may be considered to be good indicators of the destination’s quality and of the trip value. To develop a tourism market in countries, it is necessary to have good planning for

developing regional tourism that encompasses the government, non-profit organizations and commercial enterprises (Tosun and Jenkins 1996). Whereas Watson and Kopachevsky (1994) argue that tourist experiences cannot be properly understood unless people account for the larger context and setting in which tourist encounters take place, Bittner (1990) claims that the service infrastructure is housed within the larger macro-environment or 'physical plant' of the destination. Smith (1994, 54) argues that "service infrastructure is housed within the larger macro-environment or physical plant of the destination". Smith stresses the fact that the level, use, or lack of infrastructure and technology in a destination are also visible and determining features that can enhance the visitors' trip experience. Crouch and Ritchie (2000) and Truong and King (2009) subsequently support this views and address that tourists' overall impression develops their image of a destination after their visitation, and the destination infrastructure may play an important role in that respect.

### **2.3. Destination image**

Destination image is the primary topic within tourism research, and there are many scholars who are currently researching this issue. The destination image is commonly recognized as "the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination" (Crompton 1979, 18). From a theoretical perspective, this study agrees that destination image is not only a cognitive component but also an antecedent of the affective component that evaluates the way in which consumer responses stem from their knowledge of the objects in question (Anand, Holbrook and Stephens 1988, Stern and Krakover 1993). One of the key elements of successful destination marketing is tourist satisfaction, which influences the choice of destination and the decision to return. Since there are a lot of sub-factors under the concept of destination image, Buhalis (2000) addresses that a destination image can be influenced by tourism products and services consumed under the same brand name offering consumers an integrated experience, which is subjectively interpreted according to the consumers' travel itinerary, cultural background, purpose of visit, and past experience. However, Dmitrovic' et al (2009) state that in tourism industry, high service quality and resulting satisfaction lead to positive word-of-mouth endorsements, referrals, and repeat visits, which ultimately affect destination images associated with the tourism promotion strategy.

Truong & Foster (2006) show that the underlying processing mechanisms for evaluating quality and satisfaction are distinct; therefore, assessing satisfaction through the destination attributes is often found in tourism research. Chi and Qu (2008) conclude that attribute satisfaction is antecedent to overall satisfaction, and attribute satisfaction and overall satisfaction are both determinants of loyalty. In other words, the relationship between perceived quality and loyalty is partly mediated by overall image. Therefore, this study selects three sub factors of the destination image factor as perceived value, tourist satisfaction, and tourist loyalty.



Morrison (1989) describes the perceived value of quality as the mental estimate of consumers' perceptions of the travel product and perceptions of value as being drawn from assessments of personal cost/benefit. The perceived quality of tourism services appears to be crucially linked to the context of service experiences (Johns 1993). In consumer settings, both the focal (service) and the contextual (environmental) dimensions of a product play significant roles in determining its quality to travelers (Gotlieb et al. 1994). Murphy et al. (2000) indicate that destination environmental characteristics of climate, scenery, ambience, friendliness and cleanliness are key predictors of destination quality. In the tourism literatures, the perceived value of quality is the visitor's overall appraisal of the net worth of the trip, based on the visitor's assessment of what is received (benefits) and what is given (costs or sacrifice) (Chen and Tsai 2007). The service dimension of the tourism experience is vital. Efforts must be made to ensure the quality of service, and the need to ensure that the total quality of service meets visitors' expectations is now realized (Go and Govers 2000). Therefore, the received value of service quality is the first factor that influences the image perceived by customers of the destination, and this factor can be recognized as the antecedent of behavioral intentions during the time of a visit (Petrick 2004). The provision of reliable and responsive tourism services enhances a destination's competitive advantage. The initiatives to enhance the quality of the experience provided by a tourism destination include (1) the establishment of standards for tourism facilities and performance of personnel; (2) the use of programmers to objectively and subjectively monitor the quality of experiences provided; and (3) the monitoring of resident attitudes towards visitors and toward the development of the tourism sector (Dwyer and Kim 2003). Based on Stevens' (1988) study, the perceived value is thought to be a significant determinant of whether a traveler would be satisfied and intend to return to the destination again.

To gain an in-depth understanding of tourists' attitudes and behaviors after visiting destinations, there is a need to investigate the relationship between destination attributes and tourists' satisfaction from the tourist's perspective. Tourists express satisfaction or dissatisfaction after they buy tourism products and services (Fornell, 1992). If tourists are satisfied with the products, then they will have the motivation to buy the same products again or they will recommend those products to their friends. Tourist satisfaction is important to the construction of successful destination marketing, and tourism promotional activities in particular are required to understand the influence of visitors' attitudes regarding their choice of destination, consumption of products and services, and decision to revisit the same destination (Kozak and Rimmington, 2000). Chen and Tsai (2007), who conducted research into the destination choice of tourists, have shown that satisfaction is the extension of overall pleasure or contentment felt by visitors and that satisfaction typically results from the ability of the trip experience to fulfill visitors' desires, expectations and needs. To measure satisfaction, Barsky and Labagh (1992) use the model of "expectation met" factors, weighted by attribute-specific importance; as a result, Barsky and Labagh (1992) conclude that satisfaction is correlated to the willingness to return to a destination and that this willingness improves the destination image to visitors

Loyalty of tourism is expressed in the literature as the visitors' perception of the destination after their visit; in particular, this concept relates to judgments regarding the likelihood of revisiting the destination or the willingness to recommend that destination to others. For example, Oliver (1997) defines consumer loyalty as the behavior of choosing to return, to buy or to be the client for a tourism product or service in the future, regardless of the degree of external commercial influences and what efforts are made to change those potential influences. Tourists express satisfaction or dissatisfaction after purchasing tourism products and services (Fornell, 1992). Chon and Olsen (1991) discover a fitting correlation between tourists' expectations and satisfactions. After tourists have purchased the travel service and products, if their evaluation of their experience of the travel product is better than their expectations, then they will be satisfied with their travel experience, and this satisfaction may influence their loyalty with respect to the tourism destination. Furthermore, Chon and Olsen (1991) provide an intensive literature review of tourist loyalty. One thing to be noted is that, although the posited social cognition theory offers an alternative way of explaining satisfaction processes, its methodological mechanism is analogous to that of expectancy–disconfirmation theory. In other words, the concepts of congruity and incongruity can be interpreted similarly to the concepts of confirmation and disconfirmation, both of which can result in either positive or negative directions. Pizam, Neumann, and Reichel (1978) state that it is important to measure consumer loyalty for each attribute of the destination, as consumers' dissatisfaction with any one of the attributes typically leads to dissatisfaction with the overall destination. Furthermore, Rust et al. (1993) explain that the relative importance of each attribute to the overall impression should be investigated because dissatisfaction can be the result of evaluating a combination of various positive and negative experiences. Therefore, different organizations are needed within TISN to effectively and efficiently cater to consumer needs and expectations and minimize the potential negative socio-cultural, economic and ecological impacts of visitors on the host community.

### **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study applies the AHP method, one of the common methods used in multi-criteria decision-making processes developed by Saaty (1980). AHP is considered to be a decision method that decomposes a complex multi-criteria decision problem into a hierarchy using experts as the objects of a questionnaire survey. In accordance with typical AHP design, this study selects participants who had been in charge of or served in the Vietnamese tourism industry for a number of years. The AHP questionnaire analysis is calculated by Expert Choice 2000 and Excel. The results of this AHP calculation meet both the desired consistency index (CI) and consistency ratio (CR) values in the hierarchy comparison analysis, both of which should be less than or equal to 0.1, and conform to the acceptable deviation scope suggested by Saaty. After structuring a hierarchy, the pairwise comparison matrix for each level is constructed. The scale used in AHP for preparing the pairwise comparison matrix is a discrete scale from 1 to 9, as presented in Table 1.

**Table1: Scale of the relative importance of factors**

Number Rating	Definition	Explanation
1	Equal importance	Two factors contribute equally to the objective.
3	Moderate importance	Experience and judgment slightly favor one over the other.
5	Essential importance	Experience and judgment strongly favor one over the other.
7	Very strong importance	Experience and judgment very strongly favor one over the other. Its importance is demonstrated in practice.
9	Absolute importance	The evidence favoring one over the other is of the highest possible validity.
2, 4, 6, 8	Intermediate values	When compromise is needed.

**Table 2: The survey question of main factors**

Factor	Absolute importance	Very strong importance	Essential importance	Moderate importance	Equal importance	Moderate importance	Essential importance	Very strong importance	Absolute importance	Factor								
	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1		2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Promotional Activities																		Destination Attributes
Promotional Activities																		Destination Image
Destination Attributes																		Destination Image

**3.1. Factor selection and hierarchy building**

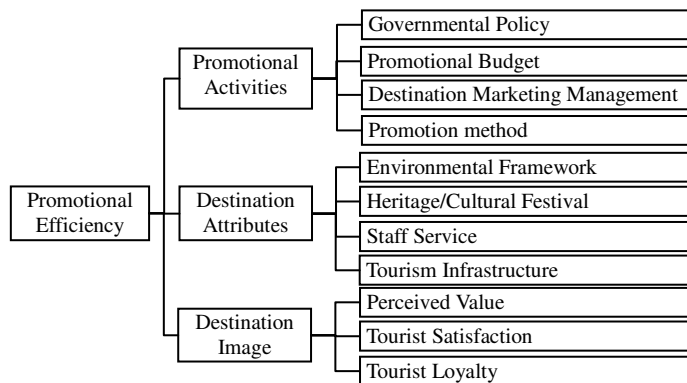
Based on the literature discussion and expert interviews, the researchers select factors for research that can be represented in a hierarchy of promotion efficiency (Figure 1). This study applies decision systems analysis (DSA) to formalize an interview procedure for the experts. For participants to make effective decisions, the participants may benefit from an accurate understanding of how current decisions are being made. DSA permits the systematic description of a strategic decision process and can be used to evaluate whether recommended policies have been conducted properly. DSA flowcharts are adapted as a follow-up interviewing guide when charting the participation and roles of different groups and individuals in decision making (Ronkainen, 1985). In particular, the developed semi-structured interviewing procedures of DSA (Hulbert et al. 1972) are useful for creating a series of detailed flowcharts describing manufacturing process decisions.

DSA includes the drawing of a series of preliminary flowcharts depicting the decision phases and the interactions of managers. In the follow-up interviews, these preliminary flowcharts are shown to managers to elicit additional details of the decision processes and to enable any necessary corrections to be made. The preliminary flowcharts are then revised to enhance their completeness and accuracy. The flowchart revisions should be shown to the managers in a third round of interviews and can be shown to other managers who had observed the decision process but who had not been directly involved in the previous interviews. A final version of the flowcharts can be completed based on the third set of interviews. After the third round of interviews, three main variables are obtained in this study: Promotional activities, Destination attributes, and Destination image. For promotional activities, all of the experts recommended that the following four main factors should be considered: the policies that affect promotion, the promotion budget, managerial expertise in promotion, and the methods used for promotion. Environmental framework, cultural heritage festivals, service staff and tourism infrastructure are considered to be sub-factors of these destination attributes, whereas destination image is linked to the tourist's perceived value, tourist satisfaction and tourist loyalty.

Table 3: **Interview Experts' Background (third round of interviews)**

No	Expert's organization	Department /sector	Experience	Title
1	Tourism Agency	Marketing	7 years	Executive
2	Tourism organization	Consultancy	9 years	Executive
3	VNAT	Promotion project	10.5 years	Vice chair
4	Hotel	Public	12 years	Manager
5	Tourism company	Private	16 years	Manager

Figure 1: **Hierarchy of promotional efficiency**



### 3.2. Respondents

In total, 18 experts were chosen to participate in the AHP survey. Among these experts' answers, 5 questionnaires contained inconsistent answers. These inconsistent questionnaires were sent back to the respondents to be filled out again, whereupon 2 experts refused to revise and correct their responses. Consequently, their answers were excluded from the analysis. Therefore, the result of this study is based on the responses of 16 experts. Table 4 presents the background of the study's respondents.

Table 4: The backgrounds of the respondents

No.	Expert's organization	Department/Sector	Experience	Title
1	VNAT	Marketing	9 years	Executive
2	VNAT	R&D	8 years	Executive
3	VNAT	Administrative	28 years	Deputy
4	VNAT	Promotion project	10.5 years	Vice chair
5	VNAT	Promotion project	10.5 years	Vice chair
6	Hotel	Public	20 years	Manager
7	Hotel	Public	15 years	Manager
8	Hotel	Public	12 years	Manager
9	Hotel	Public	12 years	Manager
10	Tourism company	Private	16 years	Manager
11	Tourism company	Public	20 years	Manager
12	Tourism company	Private	6 years	Tour guide
13	Tourism university	Public	30 years	Professor
14	Tourism university	Private	15 years	Professor
15	Tourism agency	Marketing	7 years	Executive
16	Tourism organization	Consultancy	9 years	Executive

Once the hierarchy has been constructed, the second step is to calculate the local weight vectors; specifically, the weight vectors of the decision factors to the goal and the weight vectors of alternatives to each factor must be computed. Both of these weight vector types are calculated using the same procedure. In this step, a pairwise comparison matrix must first be constructed through pairwise comparisons of each decision factor, using subjective judgments to determine the importance of one factor relative to another. The pairwise comparisons for each factor pair were judged by the study's experts. As the judgments of experts may cause an inconsistent pairwise comparison matrix, and significant inconsistencies will lead to an unacceptable decision result, the next step of AHP is to check the consistency of the matrix. The calculations below are used to check whether appropriately little inconsistency is present in the data. In this case, the  $\lambda_{max}$  is the eigenvalue that can be obtained using the Perron-Frobenius theory (Saaty, 2001), CI indicates the Consistency Index, and CR indicates the Consistency Ratio. RI refers to the Random Index. If the calculated result of CR is less than or equal to 0.1, the consistency matrix is acceptable; otherwise, the comparison matrix should be rearranged. Finally, the global weight vector can be obtained by formula (1) below. Thus, the global weights of each alternative can be obtained, and the alternative with the largest value is the preferred and optimal selection for the decision in question.

$$t_i \sum_{j=1}^n (b_{ij} w_j) \quad (1)$$

where:  $t_i$  is the global weight of the  $i^{th}$  alternative  
 $b_{ij}$  is the local weight of the  $i^{th}$  alternative to the  $j^{th}$  factor  
 $w_j$  is the local weight of the  $j^{th}$  factor

Table 5: Local and global weights and the ranking levels of main and sub factors

Main factors	Weight (w)	Rank	Sub-factors	Local weights (wL)	Global weights (wG)	Ranking
Promotional Activities	0.42*	1	Government Policy	0.55**	0.23	1
			Promotion budget	0.18**	0.08	5
			Destination Marketing Management	0.16**	0.08	7
			Promotion method	0.10**	0.04	9
Destination Attributes	0.28*	3	Environmental Framework	0.18***	0.05	8
			Heritage/Culture Festival	0.28***	0.08	4
			Service Staff	0.42***	0.12	3
Destination Image	0.30*	2	Tourism Infrastructure	0.12***	0.03	11
			Tourist Perceived Value	0.24****	0.07	6
			Tourist Satisfaction	0.64****	0.19	2
			Tourist Loyalty	0.12****	0.04	10

\* C.I. = 0.003; C.R. = 0.005(<0.1); \*\* C.I. = 0.089; C.R. = 0.095(<0.1);  
\*\*\* C.I. = 0.000; C.R. = 0.000 (<0.1); \*\*\*\* C.I. = 0.021; C.R. = 0.037 (<0.1)

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Main factors

The findings are consistent with the relationships derived from reviewing the literature. The weights and rankings shown above clearly provide answers to major questions of this study. The ranking of the main factors from the most important to the least important is promotional activities ( $w=0.42$ ), destination images ( $w=0.30$ ) and destination attributes ( $w=0.28$ ). Thus, from the perspective of the Vietnamese TISN, the most important factor affecting the success of promotion is the factor of promotional activities. The results indicate tourism promotional activities as the first important step in attracting tourists. The implication from these results suggests that the mission of VNAT is to build a brand image of Vietnam as a tourism destination on the national scale (in the macro perspective). The promotion of tourism must be conducted from an economic, rather than the current administrative, perspective. One of the weaknesses of Vietnam's tourism sectors is that it lacks branding due to both incompetence at market segmentation and the targeted development of service/product-specific markets as well as a lack of management professionals with organizational skills. This weakness explains the respondents' concern that promotional activities are the most important factor for Vietnam if this country wants to improve its promotional efficiency. Without a proper investment in tourism promotion, the target of 5.5 million foreign visitors in 2012 will be difficult for the Vietnamese government to achieve.

The second most important factor is destination image. This result appears to be reasonable because visitors only know about a destination after being provided with information through the promotion activities. If visitors have a good perceived image of and feel satisfied with the Vietnamese TISN, they may introduce the TISN to another potential visitor, generating “word-of-mouth” marketing. This process will increase the efficiency of tourism promotion. Finally, destination attributes are at the bottom of the list of important factors, but their weight value is not much lower than that of the destination image. The reason for this ranking becomes clear when considering that, although Vietnam has 9 world heritage sites, the Vietnam tourism industry is ranked only 80th out of 139 countries. Although Vietnam is a very attractive destination due to its many famous landscapes, the tourism industry clearly has yet to fully exploit the country’s strengths and its tourism potential. Clearly, there is still a lack of effective promotional activities to improve the image of Vietnam to potential visitors.

#### **4.2. Sub-factors of promotion activities.**

By employing an AHP questionnaire and face-to-face interviews, this study provides rankings of all of the factors and sub-factors impacting tourism. This ranking indicates the relative importance of the success factors compared with one another, which will provide a clear map to Vietnamese tourism managers and marketing managers of tourism companies. From Table 5, it is clear that the Vietnamese TISN considers the sub-factor of government policy to be the most important factor affecting promotional success. The second and third most important factors are tourist satisfaction and service staff.

##### ***Government policy***

Government policy ( $wL=0.55$ ) is considered to be the most significant factor. This prioritization arises because crucial gaps in the tourism management structure and the government policy toward tourism are among the causes of tourism promotional weakness. There is a need of the government policy to provide more power to VNAT to be responsible for managing national tourism marketing and national image. This result also indicates that the government factor is a generate factor and has the influence on the other factors in promotional activities as promotion budget, destination marketing management and promotion method.

##### ***Promotion budget***

According to the results, the promotion budget ( $wL=0.18$ ) ranks the fifth in the total of 11 sub-factors. This means that the promotion budget is an important factor for the effectiveness of tourism promotion. For example, in average, there are 5 million foreign tourists that visited Vietnam in a year, and 2 million of these visitors are exempt from visa fees. The remaining 3 million visitors are required to pay 25 USD per person, and thus, the total annual income of visa fees is up to 75 million USD. This amount certainly contributes to the Vietnamese economy and TISN. Furthermore, from the AHP result, it is clear that the promotion budget ( $wL=0.18$ ) is less important than the sub-factor of government policy ( $wL=0.55$ ) because there would be a lot of sources for the promotion budget if the VNAT can establish good tourism policies from the government.

#### ***Destination marketing management***

The destination marketing management ( $wG=0.08$ ) is totally ranked the seventh. This result can be explained from the importance of government policy factor. Since the present obligations and functions to promote tourism abroad in TISN belong to the Vietnamese Department of International Cooperation, VNAT is only responsible for the domestic tourism promotion. This arrangement of obligations and functions hinders the promotion of tourism and explains why the destination marketing management factor ( $wL=0.16$ ) is considered to be less important than the government policy ( $wL=0.55$ ). This aspect demonstrates that there should be an organization that owns higher administrative and managerial level to effectively implement and manage tourism promotions in TISN.

#### ***Promotional method***

After joining the WTO in 2006, Vietnam has implemented various promotional strategies for the tourism industry. Vietnam is adopting two very traditional forms of promotion, including participation in annual international fairs on tourism in the UK, Germany, China, and other nations to promote the image of Vietnam. Vietnam also collaborates with other agencies in charge of national tourism to organize tourism events, such as Vietnam Day in France and the US, and takes advantage of other cultural and diplomatic activities to promote Vietnam's image. However, it appears that these strategies are inefficient due to the lack of attractive promotional methods. Therefore, the result suggests that even though the promotional method is important in TISN, the effectiveness of promotional method can be improved by learning from other countries and destination experiences or lining up with the international promotional channels, such as the international tourism associations.

### **4.3. Sub-factor of destination attribute**

#### ***Environmental Framework***

The environment in Vietnam is considered to be a good place for travel because of the Vietnamese landscape, climate, natural heritage, and the coastline from north to south. Recently, Vietnam has emerged as an attractive destination for international travelers. In 2011, the Halong Bay of Vietnam was voted as one of 7 new wonders organized by the "New7Wonders" organization. This recognition affords a good opportunity for Vietnam to promote its tourism industry. Vietnam's successes in this sub-factor may be the reason why environmental framework has a small local weight of 0.18 compared with others in the destination attribute in addition to the low weight of the total destination attribute factor.

#### ***Heritage/culture festival***

In the destination attribute, the heritage/culture festival factor ( $wL=0.28$ ) is considered to be the second most important factor and is ranked the fourth in the total factors (see Table 5). Vietnam is well known for its long history and rich traditional culture. With five objects of cultural heritage that have been recognized as UNESCO World Cultural Heritages, Vietnam can fully exploit the heritage tourism model. Along with the growing number of landscapes, the development of heritage tourism is a matter that is receiving more attention from tourism experts. According to the latest statistics of the Department of Cultural Heritage in 2011, the country has over 4,000 historical



monuments and cultural places. Moreover, more than 3,000 relics are nationally ranked, whereas more than 5,000 relics appear in provincial rankings. With such a rich variety of cultural heritages in Vietnam, cultural values must be a competitive advantage that allows Vietnam to promote the development of "smokeless industry", that is, tourism based on available estates.

#### ***Service staff***

As discussed previously in the literature, the service staff is a central factor in achieving competitiveness and underscores the importance of consumer loyalty in maintaining high demand. In this study, service staff ( $wL=0.42$ ) is ranked as the third most important factor for promotional activities of TISN in Vietnam. The Vietnam TISN remains generally weak in human resources. Therefore, the development of human resources in tourism is of great importance; in particular, Vietnam must expand its contingents of tour managers, hotel managers, tour guides, receptionists, chefs, bartenders, room service staff, and waiters/waitresses. At present, apart from universities, higher education institutions and secondary vocational training institutions that provide training in tourism are under the management of the Ministry of Education and Training and other relevant ministries. The National Administration of Tourism has its own training system specialized in tourism training from vocational to higher education levels, which is capable of satisfying everything needed to ensure high-class services. However, although the scale of tourism training has been increased, and the network of tourism training has been expanded, the tourism industry still suffers from a serious lack of well-trained staff resources. Similarly, Truong and Foster (2005) also address that many service staffs in the tourism industry are still lack of experiences in dealing with Western customers.

#### ***Tourism infrastructure***

The tourism infrastructure is important and of concern due to the weakness of Vietnam's TISN. However, this study found that the tourism infrastructure ( $wL=0.12$ ;  $wG=0.03$ ) is the least important factor than other factor in destination attributes due to the experts' recognition of well-planned projects in the Vietnamese TISN. After re-interviewing the experts and referring to documents from VNAT, the data show that there are approximately 12,000 tourist accommodation establishments with 240,000 rooms, of which 53 5-star hotels have a total of 13,470 rooms; 118 4-star hotels have 14,479 rooms; and 245 3-star hotels have 17,044 rooms. Additionally, there are approximately 981 international tour operators (VNAT 2010) in the Vietnamese TISN. This result is consistent with the statement of Truong's (2005, 241) study that "respondents were satisfied with room quality in Vietnam; however, some mentioned that the service quality from a number of hotels needed improvement".

#### **4.4. Sub-factor of destination image.**

##### ***Tourist perceived value***

The AHP respondents believed that tourists visiting Vietnam wish to explore the charm of this country and that they perceive the value of rich cultures, are excited to explore a country with World Heritage Sites, and enjoy the land tours from the south to the north of Vietnam. Therefore, the factor of tourist perceived value ( $wL=0.24$ ) is judged to be less important than the tourist satisfaction ( $wL=0.64$ ). However, tourists do not obtain

benefits from the service quality during their trips in Vietnam. Due to the high management costs, connected transactions, and unprofessional nature of service staffs, the package tour prices in Vietnam are much higher than those of the other countries in Asia (Truong and King, 2009 and Truong and Foster, 2006).

#### ***Tourist satisfaction***

The second importance factor for promotional efficiency is tourist satisfaction. This judgment by the respondents is consistent with the tourism literature. Tourist satisfaction ( $wL=0.64$ ;  $wG=0.19$ ) is the most important factor in the destination image and ranks the second in the total factors. Within the context of the Vietnamese TISN, the quality of service is still low due to the lack of management ability to motivate service staff members to improve the service quality. This deficiency results in the low tourist satisfaction and return rate. It also explains why tourist loyalty is not viewed as the more important factor in this situation. The AHP respondents first recommend the improvement of tourist services, which will eventually result in improvements in tourist satisfaction and return rate.

#### ***Tourist Loyalty***

Tourist loyalty is typically an important factor for the tourism industry. However, based on the AHP results in this study, tourist loyalty ( $wL=0.12$ ;  $wG=0.04$ ) is considered to be the factor of the second lowest weight. As discussed previously, if the tourists are satisfied with the service, they will eventually return to the destination or recommend it to others. According to the report of VNAT 2010, the rate of visitors returning to Vietnam is 15%, which is much lower than the return rates for Thailand and Indonesia (both countries have better than a 50% return rate).

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This study is based on data gathered from the Vietnamese TISN. There are few studies conducted in Vietnam in the field of success factors of tourism promotion. Therefore, the results of this study are useful not only to the Vietnamese tourism industry with respect to academic theories and practical issues but also to the tourism managers who have large investments in the tourism business. The framework used in this study is primarily based on the AHP method, which explores the tourism promotion success factors through three main factors, including promotional activities, destination attributes and destination image. The results show that promotional activities play a moderately important role in the success of tourism promotion. In addition, there are 3 sub-factors recommended for improvement to obtain a higher efficiency in tourism promotion, namely, government policy (1st), tourist satisfaction (2nd) and service staff (3rd). The next most important factors of promotion for TISN include heritage/culture festivals (4th), promotion budget (5th), tourist perceived value (6th), and destination marketing management (7th). The least important factors of those examined are the environmental framework (8th), promotion method (9th), tourist loyalty (10th), and tourism infrastructure (11th). Finally, this study is limited due to the sparse amount of previous research conducted in the Vietnamese tourism industry. In addition, the study was conducted using a limited sampling of data from a small geographical area; except for the experts from VNAT, this study was only conducted with managers and

professors working in Hanoi, Vietnam. For future research recommendations, this study will be improved if a survey can be conducted of international visitors. Moreover, the AHP framework used in this study can be tested by other statistical methods, such as the factor analysis and structural equation model, by designing a different questionnaire for the same factors and choosing larger samples, including both experts and customers.

From the viewpoint of marketing implications, the results shown in this study identify several outcomes suggested by the interview experts, and these outcomes are useful for the tourism promotion in the Vietnamese TISN. Vietnam is perceived as an attractive country in terms of its cultural and natural attractions and heritages. The findings provide relevant information of promotional strategies for VNAT, such as the need of government policy to strengthen the administrative and managerial level of VNAT to effectively implement and manage tourism promotions in TISN. Based on the previous discussion, Vietnam government can approximately receive 75 million USD for the annual visa fees. If Vietnam government can invest 1 USD from the visa fee paid by each visitor to Vietnam, there will be around 3 million USD that could be contributed to the active promotion in the Vietnamese TISN. Regarding to the promotion method, the result suggests that VNAT should learn from other countries and destination experiences or line up with international promotional channels to strengthen the Vietnamese natural and cultural resources for promoting Vietnam to the world. Regarding to the tourist perceived value of the trip, due to the high management costs, connected transactions, and unprofessional nature of service staffs, the package tour prices in Vietnam are much higher than those of other countries in Asia. Since improving the qualities of tourism service and infrastructures is an urgent task while the quantity and quality of tourists are increasing in this modern society, this study suggests that TISN should implement different marketing policies, such as reduced prices for goods and services at the destination or an incentive tour price by considering seasonal impacts. For overall destination image, the AHP respondents recommend the improvement of tourist services, which will eventually result in the improvement of tourist satisfaction and return rate.

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