

Tran Ha Mai Ly

**MEASURING THE PERCEIVED
DESTINATION IMAGE OF VIETNAM IN
FINLAND**

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Measuring the perceived destination image of Vietnam in Finland

Ly Tran

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Summary:

Vietnam tourism has been developing fast in recent decades with the considerable increase in the number of international tourists. Among Nordic countries, Finland is one of the most potential tourist markets for Vietnam as it had a noticeable growth rate in the number of tourists to Vietnam last year. Admittedly, Vietnam recently emerged as the new tourist destination for Finnish people and is gradually becoming a favorite choice of many tourists. In an attempt to boost the activities of Vietnam tourism in Finland, it is essential to identify 'the extent of awareness of Vietnam destination image in Finland'. This study focuses on figuring out the image of Vietnam as a tourist destination in Finnish people's perception. It also aims to explore the influential degree of these image characteristics on travelers' decision-making and the obstacles limiting Finnish tourists from travelling to Vietnam.

Quantitative approach was employed to gather necessary information from Finnish participants. The survey questionnaire is designed in structured and unstructured format to capture all components of the destination image. Based on data from 121 survey responses, the study's results were analyzed and presented in both forms of numeric and narration. The results provide valuable information regarding to the prominent destination image of Vietnam in Finland and the difficulties constrain Finnish tourists from visiting Vietnam. The study proposes the preliminary suggestions for effectively promoting the destination image and tourism activities of Vietnam in Finland. Moreover, several improvement recommendations for tourism activities in Vietnam were also mentioned in this paper.

Keywords: Vietnam, Finland, destination image, awareness, Finnish tourist, marketing.

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1. Choice of Research	2
1.2. Research Objectives.....	3
1.3. The Structure of Thesis.....	4
1.4. Research Outline.....	4
2. Destination Image.....	6
2.1. Image Formation.....	7
2.2. Destination Image Conceptualization and Definition.....	10
2.3. The Operationalization and Measurement of the Destination Image	16
3. Factors Influencing Destination Image	23
3.1. Stimulus Factors:	24
3.2. Personal Factors:.....	27
3.3. The Effects of Destination Image on Tourist Behavior	29
4. Vietnam Tourism and Its Relation with Finnish Tourist Market.....	34
4.1. Vietnam Tourism in General	34
4.2. Tourism Development in Vietnam.....	39
4.3. Vietnam Tourism's SWOT Analysis	43
4.4. Vietnam-Finland Relation in Tourism.....	50
4.5. Finnish Tourist and Travel Trends.....	52
5. Research Methods and Design	54
5.1. Study Methods	54
5.2. Study Sample	58
5.3. Research Implementation and Data Collection	59
5.4. Data Analysis.....	62
5.5. Validity and Reliability.....	63
6. Findings and Discussion.....	65
7. Conclusion.....	77
8. References	81
Appendices	86

1. Introduction

According to the UNWTO, tourism has become one of the fastest growing economic sectors and the largest service industry in the world due to its rapid development. Despite of today's world recession and economic crisis, tourism industry still manages to expand and develop considerably worldwide. It has great contributions to the countries' development as it helps to foster the local economy, generate employment opportunities in many other sectors and increase quality of life for local communities. Admittedly, tourism is regarded as a vital driving force for the socio-economic progress of one country. The significant increase of new emerging destinations demonstrates that tourism can potentially produce abundant economic and social benefits for local communities.

For many developing countries, tourism industry is considered as the primary income source and one of the key factors for the socio-economic development. Vietnam is also not an exception in this case because tourism has emerged as a spearhead sector in the local economy. Vietnam tourism industry has been developing fast during last decades, generated 3.7% of total country employment and accounted for 4.3% of national GDP (David Scowsill, WTTO). The high increase in the number of international tourists indicates the development chances for Vietnam tourism in next coming years. Among other Nordic countries, Finland stands out to be the new potential tourist market for Vietnam as it had a remarkable increase in the number of tourists to Vietnam last year. Annually, there are six million Finnish tourists travelled to Vietnam for holiday and this number had increased by 42.87 percent in 2012 in comparison with the same period in 2011. Although the number of Finnish tourists in Vietnam is increasing gradually, the total amount is trivial. Comparing with other Asian destinations, Vietnam is regarded as a new tourist destination for Finnish people and it only became popular in Finland last few years. In an attempt to attract more Finnish tourists to Vietnam, it is very necessary to find out 'how is Vietnam as a tourist destination in the Finnish people's eyes?'

Destination branding is an effective and sustainable way to maintain the competitive position of Vietnam over other strong Asian destinations. In which, destination image is undoubtedly one of the most critical factors to the success of any destinations; it has great impacts on the travelers' decision-making process and level of satisfaction during and after

the stays. In simple words, destination image can be understood as a unique characteristic/identity which helps destination being differentiated from competitors. In truth, the image of destination is perceived differently in different places because of the dissimilarities in culture, social perception, history, prejudice ..., and particularly in the frequent extent of marketing campaigns at the places. Due to the important role of destination image in attracting tourists to Vietnam, it is highly needed to study Finnish people's image of Vietnam as a tourist destination. Likewise, defining the degree of awareness of Vietnam destination image in Finland is the requisite for developing appropriate and effective marketing strategies. Moreover, the study aims to investigate the negative factors or obstacles which constrain Finnish tourists from visiting Vietnam. The study's findings provide valuable information for improving the current situation of Vietnam tourism in Finland. Moreover, the collected data can be used as a helpful source for further researches of destination image, branding strategies and marketing campaigns of Vietnam tourism in Finland.

1.1. Choice of Research

Through the international travel fairs in Finland, author had chances to interact with numerous Finnish travelers who showed a huge interest in Vietnam travel. Indeed, the demand of travelling to Vietnam is increasing considerably in recent years and Finnish tourists start to consider Vietnam as a new interesting tourist destination that they would like to visit during their holiday time. However, Vietnam has just emerged as a popular destination for Finnish tourists last few years. Thus, the question comes obviously: how much Finnish people aware of Vietnam as a tourist destination? How they perceive Vietnam as a tourist destination? to what extent?. Actually, all of these questions regard to the Finnish people's perception of Vietnam destination image.

As Finland is a relatively new tourist market for Vietnam tourism, the branding and promoting activities in this area are still poor. Therefore, relevant marketing strategies should be developed and promoted in this potential tourist market so that Finnish people will aware of Vietnam as a great destination for their holiday. In order to develop proper and effective marketing campaigns in Finland, it is necessary to identify 'the overall image of Vietnam as a tourist destination' in Finland.

Taking the chance of this thesis work, the author would like to find out the answers for these issues which she is extremely interested in. The study focuses on measuring the perceived image of Vietnam as a tourist destination in Finland. The findings of the study would support Vietnam tourism board and Vietnam Embassy to develop suitable marketing strategies in Finland.

1.2. Research Objectives

As the study focuses on the image of Vietnam in Finland, its core aim is to find out the possible answers for the question:

How is the image of Vietnam as a tourist destination perceived in Finland?

In the broader sense, the objectives of this study are as follows:

- To identify the image of Vietnam as a tourist destination in Finnish people's perception. In other words, the study aims to figure out what impressive images appear in the Finnish people's minds whenever they think of Vietnam as a tourist destination.
- To measure the degree of awareness of Vietnam destination image in Finland.
- To figure out the influential extent of image characteristics on the Finnish tourists' decision-making.
- To find out the negative reasons that affects the level of awareness of Vietnam destination image in Finland.
- To define the difficulties and obstacles that may limit Finnish tourists from travelling to Vietnam
- To suggest preliminary improving strategies for Vietnam tourism in Finland as well as in hometown.
- To serve as a solid base for further researches in the field of destination image, branding strategies and marketing campaigns of Vietnam tourism.

1.3. The Structure of Thesis

The thesis paper consists of seven main parts. The first section introduces generally about the study: the background information, research problems, choice of research areas and the core objectives of this thesis research. The second section focuses on the literature review of destination image and its measuring methodologies. It presents theoretical information of the conceptualization, formation and particularly components of destination image. The influential factors on destination image are described profoundly in the third part. Fourth section provides an overall view of Vietnamese tourism industry and its development process. It also includes the SWOT analysis of Vietnam tourism at current stage and the relation of Vietnam and Finland in tourism. In the fifth part of this paper, the information of empirical research is described in detail. It introduces the research approaches, depicts the data collection process, presents analysis paradigm and explain the validity as well as reliability of the study. The sixth section – the most crucial part of the study- displays the final findings of the empirical research. The preliminary recommendations for the improvement strategies of Vietnam tourism in Finland are also included in this part. The last section closes the paper with a brief summary of the whole study and the author's discussion on the needed development of Vietnam tourism in the future.

1.4. Research Outline

The outline of this research consists of seven major phases: identifying the interest areas and goal of the research, figuring out the main research areas, conducting the literature review in order to reinforce the theoretical knowledge, choosing the effective research approaches, implementing empirical study, analyzing the collected data to deduce the final findings of the study. This research paper (report) is mainly based on two major information sources: literature review and data derived from empirical study. In order to fully convey the essence of the study results, author presents it in both forms of quantitative and qualitative explanations. The outline of research is illustrated in the figure

1

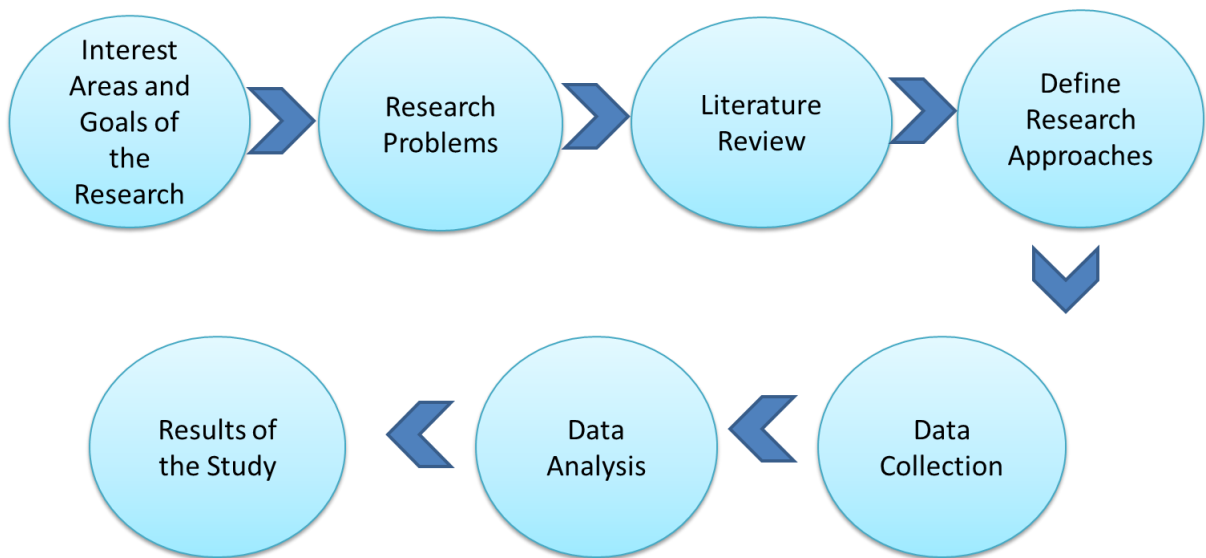


Figure 1: The Research Outline

2. Destination Image

Tourism industry has remarkable growth in last few decades, and countless new destinations are continually developing and expanding for tourism purpose. The increasing destination selections had created the huge challenges for the destination marketers and service providers. Moreover, the higher level of living standard, disposal income and convenient transportation network had heightened the consumers' needs and expectations. To date, consumers have longer leisure time, sufficient finance and efficient means to choose the best suitable destination among varied others.

Therefore, the tourism marketers face many challenges in convincing the consumers as well as differentiating the destination in a competitive market. Actually, the most challenging task is developing an effective positioning strategy to promote the destination in key target markets as well as increase the public awareness of the destination. According to Calantone, Di Benetto, Hakam and Bojanic (1989) (as cited in Echtner and Ritchie, 2003, p.37), the crucial constituent of this positioning strategy is the formation and management of the unique and appealing perception, or in other words the image of the destination.

In recent decades, destination image had received much attention in tourism sector. It was brought in tourism research in the early 1970s and its construct was increasingly concerned in 1990s. Destination image is regarded as one of the most important factors in promoting and marketing a successful tourist destination due to its impacts on both supply-demand side aspects of the marketing. Referring to supply-side aspects, some researchers had demonstrated that destination image has great influences on the marketing positioning and promotion processes of the destination (Govers and Kumar, 2007; Tasci and Gartner, 2007); whereas, it also has considerable impacts on the destination choice and tourist behaviors regarding to the demand-side aspects (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003; Tapachai and Waryszak, 2000; Jenkins 1999; Chon 1992; Hosany, Ekinci and Uysal, 2005; Tasci and Gartner, 2007). Furthermore, it also affects the level of tourists' satisfaction because they often evaluate the travel experience based on the perceived images before and after the visitation to destination.

According to Woodside & Lysonski (1989), tourists seemingly consider and choose the destination that appears with the strong and positive image during their travel decision-

making process. To date, destination image is regarded as the key component in numerous models of travel decision-making. Thus, the image is extremely vital for one destination to be viable and successful in the competitive tourism market. Three major topics of destination image literature are covered in this summary. Firstly, the formation process of destination image is discussed. Secondly, it presented the literature regarding to the conceptualization and definition of destination image. Last but not least topic mentions the frequent used measurement methodology of destination image.

2.1. Image Formation

Reynolds (1965, p. 69) defined the formation process of destination image as a construction of mental picturing that relies on several impressions selected from the flood information about a particular destination. Other researchers also describe the image formation as a development of mental construct on the fundamental information that is provided by the image formation agents and chosen by a person (Bramwell and Rawding, 1996; Tasci and Gartner, 2007, p. 413). The essential information for the formation of destination image comes from various sources such as: others' opinions (family or friends, travel agents), promotional literature (travel advertises, posters, brochures) and general media (books, television, newspapers, movies...).

In an attempt to deepen understanding about destination image formation, we should firstly look at the meaning of a person's image of particular place. According to Jenkins and McArthur (1996, p.11), an individual's image of a specific place is a unique combination of own memories and imaginations. In the tourist destination context, each person's image tends to be influenced and altered based upon the initial information and experience after the actual visitation. Several researchers have examined the influential factors of image formation process. Hunt (1975) & Scot et al (1978) (as cited in Jenkins, 1999, p.3) have mentioned in their papers that people tend to visit the destinations near their usual areas and have been provided information about them through family, friends and media; therefore the destination image formation is probably decided partly by the distance from the destination. They also showed that the image of destination is likely stronger and more realistic to the consumers if the place is close to their usual areas. Nolan (1976, as cited in Jenkins, 1999, p.3) noted in the study of domestic tourists in America that the advices from

family and friends are the most frequent used travel information source while promotional publications are the least. In addition, services provided by the government and advices of family and friends are regarded as the most informative travel information sources, therein guidebooks are ranked at the first place in term of reliability.

Although there are many studies of destination image formation, its process is not well understood. In an attempt of constructing a theoretical framework for the destination image formation process, Gunn's seven-phase model (1988) of travel experiences provides useful information. Indeed, it points out the impacts of various information sources as well as their functions in the formation process of destination image.

As the figure 2 shows, the process of destination image formation is identified in three phases: First, Second and Seventh. In the first and second phases, destination image is created basing upon the secondary data source. While in the seventh phase, the destination image would be modified with the actual travel experience after the visitations.

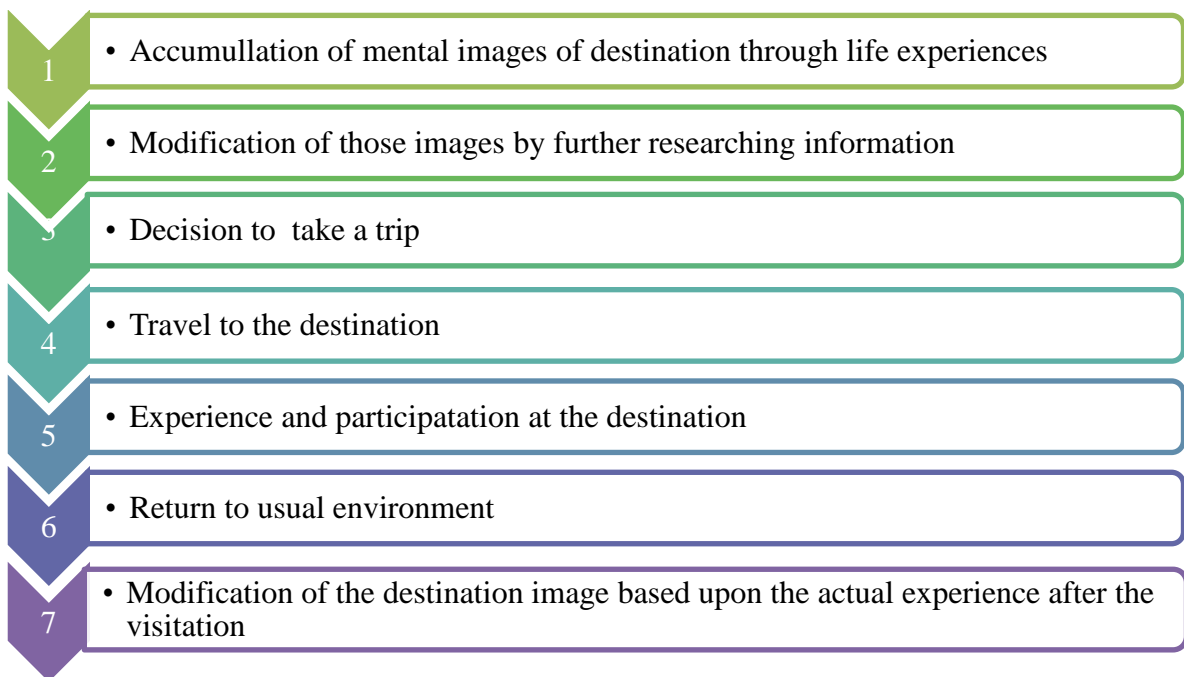


Figure 2: The seven phase model of travel experiences. (Source: Gunn, 1988)

Relating the destination image established in the first stage, Gunn (1988) named it as an organic image which is based on the provided information from non-commercial and non-touristic references for example opinions from friends/relatives, education (school,

exchange programs, international student activities) and the general media (newspapers, television, movies, books, magazines). Stepping to the next stage, the commercial information sources start to be utilized. When approaching to various data from travel agencies' consultants, travel guidebooks and posters, the organic image would be affected and changed. Therefore, the modified destination image in the second phase is named as induced image. In the seventh phase, the actual travel experiences are utilized to modify the induced image. This is the final stage in destination image process, in which the destination image is labeled as modified induced image. According to Stabler (1988), there are 2 major factors affecting the formation of destination image: supply-side and demand-side factors. The formation of organic image is generally correlative with demand-side factors, whereas the supply-side factor is corresponded with deduced image formation.

Gunn's seven phase model also indicates that the potential visitors, non-visitors, and returned tourists perceived destination image in a different way. According to Echtner and Ritchie (2003), several researches also imply that the returned tourists tend to perceive the destination image in more complicated, realistic and differentiated way. In other words, the destination image is likely more complex, realistic and differentiated after the visitation (Pearce, 1982; Murphy and Hodel, 1980; Chon, 1987 as cited in Echtner and Ritchie, 2003, p.39). However, the tourist destination image could be faded or regressed if the memory of tourist is interfered by other visitations to the similar destinations (Phelps, 1986, p.172).

A country's tourism image is often perceived in associating with its national image (World Tourism Organization, 1980). Therefore, the destination image is seemingly incorporated by broad information sources that are regarding economic, social, historical and political factors. These information sources are considered as non-commercial, while most of the destination product's or service's information sources are for the commercial purpose.

Chon (1992) has examined the relation between the destination image and the tourists' actual experience. According to her, it would lead to the positive evaluation of the destination if the tourists have the positive destination image and positive visiting experiences. In contrast, it would result in a negative evaluation if the tourists have a positive destination image, whereas the travelling experience is negative. The most positive evaluation would come from the tourists have a negative destination image and high positive experiences.

(Echtner and Ritchie 2003, p.37) Two main issues are highlighted in the formation process of destination image:

1. The destination image can still be held by individuals even if they haven't made a visitation or been exposed to valuable commercial information sources. By measuring this base image, the marketers probably recognize the strengths, weaknesses, precise and imprecise of the existing destination image. Since then, they would plan effective promotion strategies.
2. Because of the changes in destination image before and after the visitation, therefore it is very essential to differentiate the destination image hold by non-visited tourists and returned tourists.

2.2. Destination Image Conceptualization and Definition

2.2.1. Destination Image

The destination image study is probably related to the broader field of image formation and measurement which basically concern to the research of imagery in term of psychology. According to numerous psychologists, the imagery is defined as the discrete path of 'processing and storing multisensory information in memory' (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003). In which, imagery would probably consists of all or any senses such as sight, sound, touch, smell or taste. Thus, the processing of imagery is primarily based upon 'holistic impression' of representing information, whereas the discursive processing is primarily based upon the information of lists attributes or features.

Echtner and Ritchie (2003) have noted in their paper that the 'image' term is used to explain both imagery as well as a discursive method of processing information. In other words, the term 'image' is described by the incorporation of discursive forms which relates to the awareness of particular attributes & characteristics, and imagery forms which regards to the overall feeling, impressions and atmosphere.

In order to have a better understanding of destination image definition, it is necessary to review the term 'image'. Pearce (1988, p.162 as cited in Hosany, Ekinici and Uysal, 2005, p.64) has mentioned in his study: 'image is one of those terms that will not go away.... and

it is a term with vague and shifting meanings. The 'image' term carries various meanings since it has been differently utilized in numerous contexts and disciplines. In behavioral geography, the definition of image relates to the holistic representation which comprises of knowledge, emotion, associated expression, belief and values. Meanwhile, the concept of image is associated with the visual representation in psychological studies. Researchers in the marketing studies tend to connect the image conceptualization with the attributes that underlie image and link image to the customer behaviors.

Regarding to socio-psychological aspect in other studies, Dann (1966, p.42, as cited in Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil, 2007, p.197) has defined the 'image' term as a 'reflection or representative of sensory or conceptual information which is... built on past experience and govern one's action ... shared by similar people who also form part of that image'. Moreover, in an attempt to clarify the complicated exist in the use of term tourist image, Bramwell and Rawding (1996) have distinguished the term 'image' into two categories: projected image and received image. He defined the projected image as: 'ideas and impressions of a place that available for people's consideration' (Bramwell and Rawding, 1996, p.202). According to this definition, the 'projected image' is conveyed to consumers by communication channels. And since then, the image information will be filtered by consumers in association with their personalities, need, knowledge, expectations, emotion, and experiences. As the consumers change and modify the projected image through their subjective phase, the received image is defined as: their own 'a unique representation or mental construct' (Bramwell and Rawding, 1996, p.202).

Despite of the rising concern on the study of destination image in the tourism field, it is a big challenge to define the precise meaning of the term 'tourist destination image'. Echtner and Ritchie (2003) had a review of various destination image definitions which were discussed in the ubiquitous destination image measurement researches. They commented that these definitions are ambiguous, and are even not clearly expressed in some studies. Relating to these definitions, destination image is simply explained as: 'the expression of one place' or perceptions of an area'. Although there are many definitions for tourist destination image, these definitions are not comprehensive as they do not cover all the aspects of destination image at the same time. The reason of lacking comprehensive definition is that each researcher centralizes on defining a specific aspect of destination image.

Many researchers have stated that the image of the destination is primarily conceptualized in two terms of cognitive and affective components (Crompton, 1979; Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil, 2007). In which, the cognitive component relates to the individual's knowledge of the object whereas the affective component relates to the individual's impressions or feelings on what they know about the destination. Towards the same concept, other researchers have proposed the alternative terms for these components: attributes-based instead of cognitive and holistic impression instead of affective (Jenkins, 1999; Echtner and Ritchie, 2003; Tapachai and Waryszak, 2000; Tasci and Gartner, 2007; Gartner, 1989). According to Echtner and Ritchie (2003, p.41), there is no specific indication on whether the researchers count on the holistic impression or attribute-based, or both components in defining the destination image. In study of methodologies measurement for destination image carried out by Echtner and Ritchie (2003), most of the researchers defined the destination image in term of attribute-based rather than holistic impressions. Gartner (1989, p.17) is one of the researchers defined the destination image in term of attributes component as: 'a complex combination of products and associated attributes'.

Nevertheless, the importance of holistic impressions is increasingly shed light on the tourism literature. Crompton (1979, p.18) described the destination image as: 'the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that person has of a destination'. In incorporating with Um (1990), he once again defined the destination image as a holistic construct. Moreover, Reilly (1990) also underscored that destination image is not individual characteristics; it is a total impression a destination set on minds of visitors.

In addition, the holistic component of destination image is emphasized in Lawson and Baud Bovy's definition (1977)(as cited in Jenkins, 1999, p.2): 'the expression of all objects knowledge, impression, prejudice, imaginations, and emotional thoughts an individual or group might have of a particular place. This definition includes both personal images as well as stereotypical images that are common mental picture shared by group. Destination image is also defined by Pearce (1988, as cited in Echtner and Ritchie, 2003, p.42) as an overall mental picture which indicates 'a search of a long term memory for scenes and symbol, panoramas and people' He pointed out the existence of a common mental picture of destination held by public, beside the existence of a unique mental picture of destination that is held by individual.

The significant role of destination image in travel behavior was discussed in many researches (Jenkins, 1999; Echtner and Ritchie, 2003; Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil, 2007). The image of the destination is considered as a powerful decisive factor in the tourist's decision-making process. Therefore, Tapachai and Waryszak (2000) have conceptualized the destination image as a beneficial image of the destination that influences the potential traveler's deciding process to a particular destination. Based on the concepts of consumption values and marketing image, Tapachai and Waryszak (2000, p.38) defined the beneficial image of destination as:

‘Perceptions or impressions of destination held by tourists with respect to the expected benefit or consumption value including functional, social, emotional, epistemic and conditional benefits of destination. These perceptions or impressions in turn lead to the decision to visit a country as a vacation destination.’

In short, the accurate meaning of the term ‘destination image’ is not well understood as there are various definitions referring to different particular aspects of destination image. These definitions do not provide the comprehensive view of destination image because none of them covers all the dimensions of destination image at once. In order to generate a complete definition, the destination image should be conceptualized in both terms of holistic impressions and attributes component as: individual's belief, ideas, and perceptions of a destination that involves not only the particular characteristics but also the total impressions of that destination.

2.2.2. The Components of Destination Image

As the conception and definition of destination image indicates the important roles of holistic impression and attributes, they are obviously two crucial components of the destination image. Echtner and Ritchie (2003) mentioned in their paper that the destination image should be defined in term of both holistic and attribute-based components. Furthermore, Martineau (1958, as cited in Echtner and Ritchie, 2003, p.42) has suggested that the image also relies on the functional and psychological components of the object. This conceptualization of Martineau was also applied to the case of destination image, thus these characteristics actually have critical roles in the defining process of destination image. The functional characteristics of image are considered as directly observable and

measurable such as landscape, attractions, villages, service's facilities, accommodations, weather, price level...etc. In contrast, the psychological characteristics are defined as intangible, abstract and difficult-to-measure traits of the destination such as general feeling, atmosphere, friendliness...etc.

Additionally, Echtner and Ritchie (2003) have introduced one more important dimension of destination image which is often pretermitted in most of the previous research. This is the unique/common dimension of the destination image. Figure 3 presents the model of destination image's components that is proposed by Echtner and Ritchie (2003). They suggested that audiences should envision this model in three dimensions: attributes/holistic, functional/psychological and last but not least common/unique. The association of these dimensions generates various components of destination image.

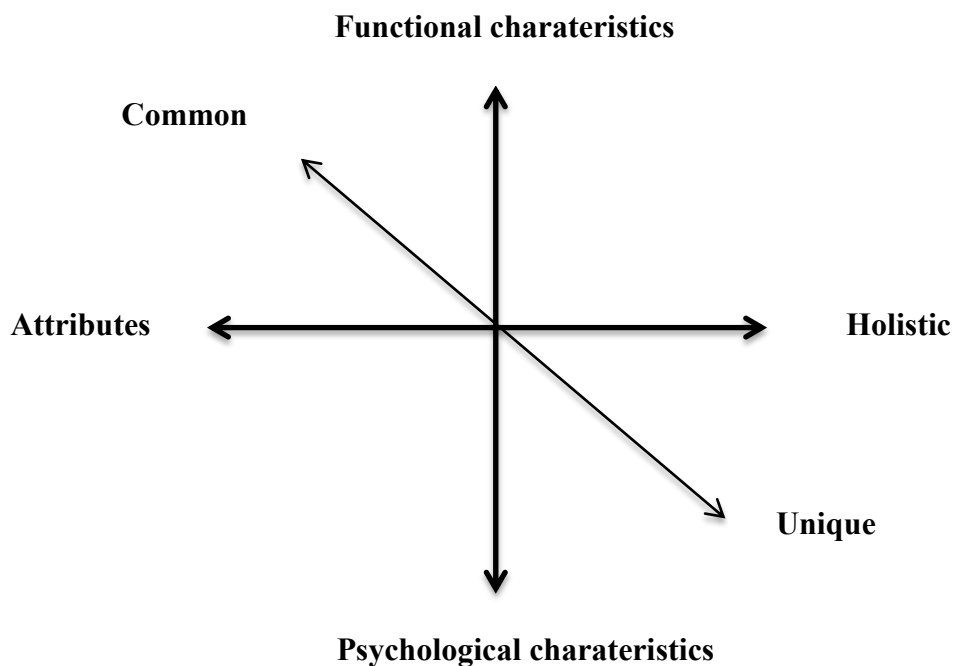


Figure 3: The components of destination image. (Source: Echtner and Ritchie, 2003, p.40)

According to the model, both of the attributes and holistic components of destination image contain the psychological and functional/physical characteristics. Regarding to the holistic aspect, the functional characteristics include the mental pictures of physical features of the destination such as landscapes, villages...etc. Moreover, the psychological

characteristics relate to the general impressions and feelings of destination atmosphere or mood of the place. Regarding to attribute-based aspect, the destination image consists of abundant perceptions of individual features of the destination, ranging from functional to psychological characteristics.

Besides, the image of destination could range from the perceptions relied on the common psychological and functional characteristics that can be used to rate and compare all the destinations, to those based on unique traits. In essence, on one end of the dimension, the destination image can comprise of the evaluation of the common psychological characteristics such as the friendliness of local community, safety, beauty of landscapes, the fame of the destination. It's also based on the rating of common functional characteristics such as accommodations, infrastructures, transportation, and price levels. At the other end of the dimension, the image of destination could contain the unique functional features such as symbols, traditions and special events, as well as the unique psychological features such as auras, feeling regarding to the destination heritages, historical events, religious activities...

The importance of unique functional features was emphasized in several destination image studies. It was mentioned in Mac Cannell's discussion (1989) (as cited in Echtner and Ritchie, 1993, p.2) of 'marker' or 'must-see-sights'. Furthermore, Pearce (1988, as cited in Echtner and Ritchie, 1993, p.2) has considered the symbols as a decisive factor of destination image. The significant role of unique features in forming the destination image is obviously shown in numerous cases around all over the world. Whenever we mentioned about Italy, it will evoke the image of Pisa Tower or Rome ancient. It also evokes the image of Nepal with Everest Mountain, Brazil with carnival festival, China with Forbidden Kingdom or Finland with Santa Claus village... Furthermore, many destinations can be differentiated from other places by their particular atmospheres, surrounding environments or set of values for example: Paris is considered as the City of Light and Romantic, Vatican is a holy place, India is perceived as mystery country.

In summary, this model proposed the conceptual framework for destination image. In which, the attributes and holistic impressions are two major components in defining the image of destination. In other words, destination image contains not only the perceptions of the individual attribute features but also the holistic impressions of the place. Additionally, the image of the destination also comprises of the functional characteristic

regarding to the measurable and tangible traits as well as psychological characteristics relating to intangible and hard-to-measure traits. Last but not least, the unique and common aspects undoubtedly have a vital role in the defining process because the destination image could be range from those features that are commonly appeared in many destinations, to those unique features that are solely held by a particular destination. Unfortunately, none of the mentioned above destination image definitions could cover all of these dimensions/components.

2.3. The Operationalization and Measurement of the Destination Image

Echtner and Ritchie (2003) have argued in their paper that there is a connection between image's conceptualization and image's operationalization or measurement. The operationalization process of destination image requires the measurement of two major components: attribute-based features and holistic impression aspects. In the measuring process of these components, the researchers need to take into consideration the roles of functional and psychological characteristics of the destination. Additionally, the measurement also should focus on the common features as well as the unique aspects of the specific destination.

In order to enhance the understanding of the measurement methods of destination image, it is very helpful to review the popular methods that have been employed in the previous general 'Image' studies. Most general studies on the measurement methodologies of image have mentioned the involvement of two fundamental approaches: structured and unstructured. In which, the structured methodologies are used to measure the attribute-based features and the structured methodologies are considered as efficient approaches to measure the holistic and unique features.

In the structured methods, the common attribute features of the image will be defined, categorized and integrated into a standardized rating scale such as Likert type scales or a semantic differential scale. The participants are then requested to rate each of the pre-determined attributes or characterize the stimulus by standardized tools. These ratings are valuable information for eliciting the profile of 'image' (Ferber, 1974, as cited in Echtner and Ritchie, 2003, p.44). The advantages of these structured methods are very easy to

manage & carry out, simple to code the collected information and convenient to analyze the results with the delicate statistical techniques. Besides, by using the standardized scale system, the structured methods also facilitate the comparisons between different destinations.

As the structured methods include the prior determined list of attributes, the participants are asked to relate the 'image' to the list of attributes that is designated by the scales. Thus, the results may overlook several important attributes that have not been included in the scales. Furthermore, the participants could not describe their holistic impressions of the destinations because they complete the survey only by rating the scale items. They supposed to assess the list of attributes on more general and common characteristics. In contrast, the unique traits of destination cannot be captured by these structured methods. In summary, the structured methods are very useful to measure the common and attributes, whereas they are not effective to measure the unique and holistic impressions.

According to the destination image's component conceptual model mentioned above, the complete measurement should cover not only the functional characteristics but also the psychological traits of the destination attributes. In order to ensure all the attributes would be revealed, it is essential to carry out an extensive research because the attributes of destination image are probably abundant and multiform.

The other popular methodology used in image measurement studies is the unstructured methods. In which, the participants are permitted to spontaneously describe their impressions of the destination. It implies that this approach allows the image of destination to be measured by free form descriptions. By using the unstructured methods, the researchers would collect data from the participants through open-ended survey questionnaire or focus group approach. Since then, different dimensions of the image can be derived from this collected information by employing diverse classification techniques and content analysis. Nevertheless, the range of gathered information is majorly relied on the participants' writing and/or verbal skills. Besides, it's also based on respondent's voluntariness to provide their individual knowledge and perceptions of destinations.

The unstructured techniques are very helpful to capture and measure individual holistic impressions of the destination. Moreover, they also support to capture the unique traits of destination image through the respondents' description of personal experience and impression. The other advantages of this approach are reducing the interview tendency and

the possibility of overlook some important traits. However, as the nature of this approach is gathering information from the spontaneous description, it virtually restricts the statistical analysis of the data as well as comparative analysis on various destinations. To sum up, the unstructured methodologies concentrate on measuring the holistic components and unique features of the destination image.

2.3.1. The Measuring Methods for Destination Image

According to Echtner and Ritchie (2003), the majority of researchers in destination image measurement studies greatly prefer the quantitative approach with the structured methods. In essence, almost all the researches have employed Likert scales or semantic differential scales to measure the image of particular destination. Due to the use of these structured techniques, most of the studies have emphasized on the attributes components as well as the common features of destination image. However, the previous researches were not successful in integrating both relevant psychological and functional characteristics, hence, the list of attributes may not be sufficient to capture all destination image traits. The functional attributes are obviously the focus of existing destination image studies.

In order to develop a list of destination image attributes, previous researchers had also used secondary information sources such as general literature review, brochures as well as opinions of experts in travel industry. Echtner and Ritchie (2003, p.45) argued that the implementation of qualitative research (unstructured methodologies) at the primary stage would support to reveal a complete set of destination image attributes. In essence, the focus group approach would be very helpful to expose the attributes that are relevant and important to the consumers. However they also assumed that the qualitative research with consumers is very time and money consuming. Because of these disadvantages, relative few researchers have used the qualitative methods (unstructured methodologies) in measuring destination image. In other words, only few studies have utilized the consumers to uncover the list of attributes that used to measure the destination image. While most of previous researches use the structured methodologies, Reilly (1990) has made an exception by using the open-ended questions to construct which permits participants describing their experiences in their own words.

Regarding to structured methodologies, Jenkins (1999) has referred to the use of visual techniques in combination with word-based scales to measure destination image. By using visual techniques, the research could easily evoke the consumers' experiences which cannot be described by text or verbal words. Pearce and Black (1996, p. 419, as cited in Jenkins, 1999, p. 6) have stated in their paper that the researchers have not yet integrated the visual presentations in their own studies. Moreover, the traditional research methods with texts and words are probably obsolete and inefficient to evoke the consumer's experiences because today's world is dominated by visual and audio presentation. They also suggested that the pictures and maps should be taken into consideration in the destination image studies as they facilitate the consumers in recalling the travel memory and providing more profound information.

The combination of structured (quantitative) and unstructured (qualitative) methodologies should be used in the future researches in order to completely capture the components of destination image. In essence, this combination would assist researchers to uncover not only the common, functional characteristics and destination attributes but also the unique traits, psychological characteristics and holistic impressions concerning to destination image. The complete research process includes utilizing the unstructured approach to reveal a relevant and salient list of destination attributes which are then used in the structured approach to investigate the destination image.

Echtner and Ritchie (1993) have applied both structured and unstructured methods in their studies. In which, they employed extensive procedure to develop a destination image measurement scale with a complete set of attributes and the open-ended questions to measure the holistic and unique components of the destination image. Their research process comprises of reviewing the salient literatures of destination image, integrating the expert's and consumer's opinions by focus group method and pre-testing the preliminary construct by judges. The standardized measuring scale was aimed to measure the common attributes of destination image in both terms of psychological and functional characteristics; whereas, the open-ended questions are developed to measure the unique traits and holistic impressions of the destination image. (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993, p.4-5)

2.3.2. Destination Image Research Model

Jenkins (1999) noted that the researchers have increasingly used unstructured (qualitative) methods in their studies after Echtner & Brent Ritchie’s recommendations. Additionally, more researchers in destination image studies started using interviews and focus group methods to uncover the list of attributes as well as incorporate consumer’s inputs into developing process of semantic differential or Likert scales. Jenkins (1999) has developed a comprehensive model for carrying out the destination image research that integrating both qualitative (unstructured) and quantitative (structured) approaches. As the Figure 4 showed, the first phase of the model was labeled as qualitative phase which use the unstructured methods to investigate the proper inputs and develop relevant constructs for the target groups. In the tourism field, the term ‘constructs’ is known as the respondents’ perceptions of destination image’s components. In addition, the qualitative methods also help to capture the unique traits and holistic component in both terms of psychological and functional characteristics. In the phase 2 (quantitative phase), the valid set of scales is developed to quantitatively measure the destination image in term of psychological and functional attributes.

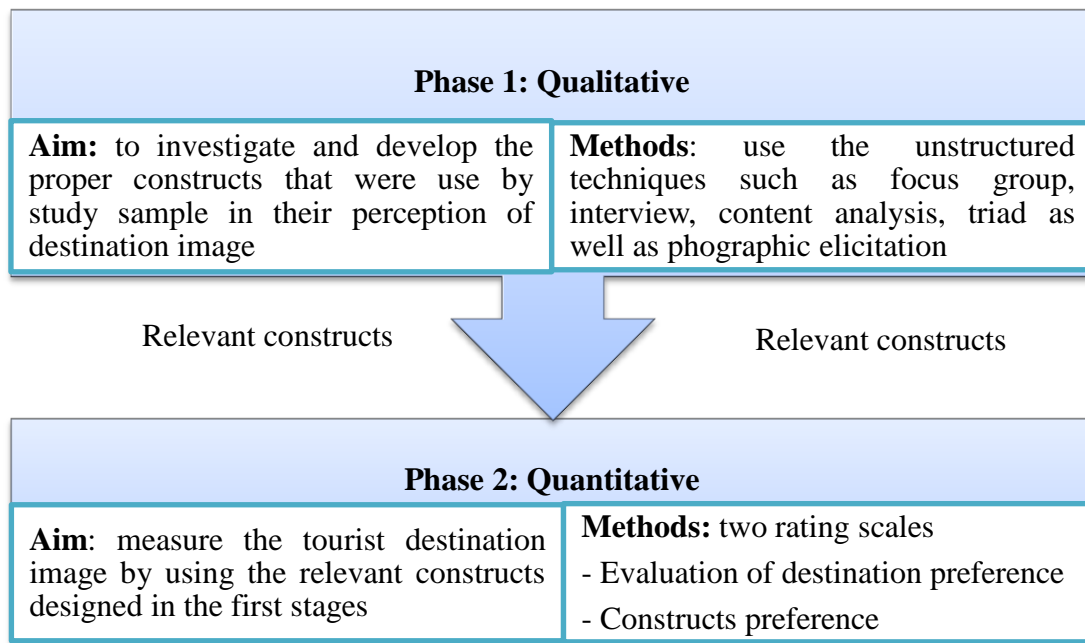


Figure 4: A model for conducting destination image research. (Source: Jenkins, 1999, p.7)

The application of unstructured methods in the first phase is very useful to reveal the important and salient attributes in the consumer's perceptions of destination image as well as to minimize the bias of forcing participants to respond to the standardized scales which may not probably be a precise presentation of their destination image. According to the Jenkins's model (1999), various qualitative (unstructured) methods could be used in the first phase of destination image measurement studies.

a. Content Analysis

Content analysis can be conducted on two different forms: written literature and interactive communication. The review on relevant destination image researches, travel brochures, guidebooks would provide precious information of the projected image of the destination (Jenkins, 1999, p. 8). Moreover, the interactive communication such as interview and focus group methods would help to gather information of the respondents' destination image. This collected information would be very useful for eliciting the important and salient destination attributes and dimensions.

b. Free elicitation

This method is mainly performed in the form of word-association. In which, the respondents are permitted to freely describe the destination image according to their perceptions instead of following the predetermined scales. In addition, this method helps to measure whether the image of the destination is weak or lacking, in case the participants could not provide any replies. Furthermore, it also supports to uncover the stereotype image of the destination as the responses are lack of in-depth processing due to the rapid reaction times and high frequency of specific replies. (Jenkins, 1999, p.8)

c. Triad elicitation

The 'triad elicitation techniques' of Kelly (1955, as cited in Jenkins, 1999, p.8) are used in several researches to investigate the constructs of destination. This method involves the combination different groups of three elements. In essence, the researchers set up different groups of three elements and request the respondents to compare three elements as well as identify the constructs that make two elements are similar and different from the third.

d. Photographic elicitation

The photo-elicitation technique refers to the open-ended interview that is guided by visual presentations. By using the visual image from travel brochures, personal travelling photographs, this method assists to investigate the tourists' experiences and the constructs of particular destination image from the respondent's point of views.

After the constructs and attributes of destination image are defined in the first phase, the unstructured methods are employed in the second phase to measure the individual's destination image. The semantic differential scale or Likert scales are usually employed in the structured methods. In other words, the defined attributes or constructs are used to develop the complete set of measuring scales. In which, the participants are required to rate the destination attributes according to the scales. The rating process has two important aspects: evaluative preference and construct preference (Jenkins, 1999, p.12). The evaluative preference rating scale refers to the individual evaluation on the particular constructs of destination. And the construct preference rating scale relates to individual evaluation on the importance or salience of the destination constructs to herself/himself. This method supports to classify the market segment based on the travel preferences. Due to the modification in travelers' experiences before and after the visitation, this measurement technique also helps to notice the changes in destination image over time (Weiler, 1989 as cited in Jenkins, 1999, p.12)

By combining both of these rating scales, the researchers could discover the particular destination image held by individual respondents and evaluate the important extent of these image aspects. Instead of measuring each of these aspects, the proposed model by Fishbein (1963, as cited in Jenkins, 1999, p.12) enables combining both of these measurements into one single measurement of 'attitude'. He supposed that the attitude of individuals towards a tourist destination is equal to the multiplication of 'the preferred extent of individuals for the destination attributes and the important degree of attributes to herself or himself'. Therefore, by measuring the individual's attitude towards particular destination, the researchers can deduce the multiplied results of two rating scales.

3. Factors Influencing Destination Image

The process of destination image formation is influenced by numerous factors which mainly relate to the information obtained from destinations, the characteristics of perceivers as well as the information from independent agents (Beerli and Martin, 2004, p. 661; Tasci and Garner, 2007, p. 414; Tasci, 2007, p. 23). The major factors are categorized into 2 main types: stimulus factors (the information sources from destinations and autonomous agents) and personal factors (characteristics, mental construction, social and psychological state...) (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a). Both of these factors have significant impacts on the interrelationships stimulating and formulating the individual's compound image of destination.

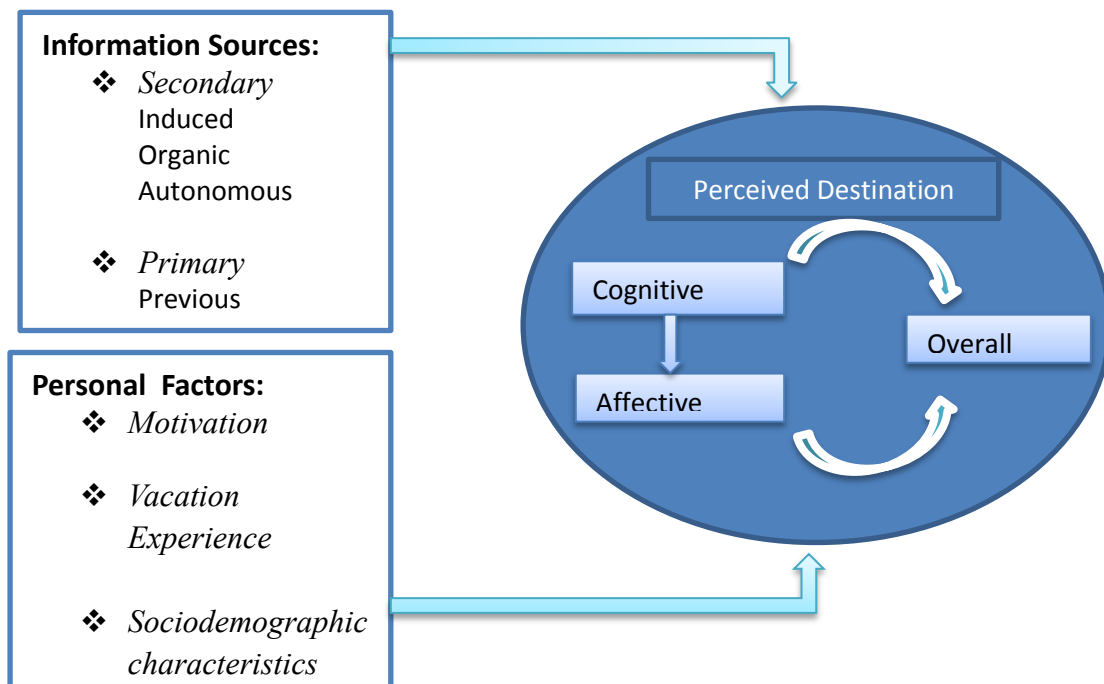


Figure 5: Model of the formation of destination Image (Source: in Beerli and Martin, 2004, p.660)

Figure 5 presents a conceptual model of destination image formation which is developed by Beerli and martin (2004). The model indicates clearly the process and determinant

factors of the individual's perceived destination image formation. In which, the overall destination image is constituted and governed by two crucial components:

- ❖ Cognitive image refers to the individual's knowledge, perception and evaluation of destination attributes, physical attractions and resources.
- ❖ Affective image refers to the emotion and feelings of individual that are aroused by the destination.

As the model displays, the cognitive component has direct influence on the affective image due to the fact that the evaluation and behavior of the visitors are depending on their perception and knowledge of destinations (Holbrook 1978; Anand, Holbrook and Stephens 1988; Stern and Krakover 1993; Russel and Pratt 1980 cited in Berlin and martin, 2004, p. 658).

3.1. Stimulus Factors:

Because of the intangible nature of tourism products, information sources become the crucial factors in introducing, presenting and providing a general overall view of the destination to the consumers until their actual visitations. Stimulus factors refer to various information sources exposing to the consumers in order to establish the image of destination, generate interest and stimulate desire of visitation to the destination. They are also called as 'image forming agents' (Gartner, 1993) as they have influences on the forming process of individual's awareness, evaluations and image of destination. Consequently, they are also postulated as an influential factor on consumers' decision-making process in considering destinations as potential alternative choices.

According Gartner (1993) the information sources are categorized into varied types which influence the destination image forming process differently. Due to the differences in market segments, the level of marketing effectiveness, degree of support by destination promoters and credibility to consumers, these sources or agents should be utilized together to bring out the best result in promoting the destination image (Tasci and Gartner, 2007, p. 414). These following image forming agents are frequently concerned and mentioned in most of the destination image studies:

- a. *Overt induced agents*: refer to the promotional materials provided by media, travel agencies, promotional campaigns or different institutions in destinations. This type of agents uses advertising, promotions and other public channels to establish, reinforce and change the image of destination. In order to maximize the effect of projecting destination image in consumers' mind, this promotional information is mostly formulated as visual and verbal message. The visual feature enables consumers seeing the vivid authentic pictures and the actual dimensions of destinations. According to MacKay and Fesenmaier (2000 cited in Tasci and Gartner, 2007, p.415), before the visitation to the destination, consumers often form their first image of destination based upon the visual presentation rather the actual features of destination. Thus, visual materials obviously play important roles in shaping and forming the preliminary individual's image of destination. Nevertheless, the attempt of projecting a positive destination image sometimes has an adverse effect as the consumers likely set up higher expectations than the actual performances. Some of the overt induced agents tend to exaggerate features of destination and plant unrealistic expectation in the consumers' mind. Consequently, it can lead to the dissatisfaction of the consumers and hurt the image of the destination.

- b. *Covert Induced Agents*: refer to the use of popular people to represent, promote and advertise the destination in numerous marketing activities, reports, annual events and articles. It is an effective way to catch public attention and send implied messages to audiences.

- c. *Autonomous agents*: are effective intermediate factors between destination and consumers. They transmit information to audiences and consumers through a variety of public means such as broadcasting news, television shows, documentaries, movies or education programs about the destination. Most of the autonomous agents are out of the destination's control therefore all the provided information is believed as objective, more credible and general. In comparison to induced agents, these factors have more influences on the destination image formation due to its ability to reach the crowds and generate more reliable information.

- d. *Organic agents*: refers to the friends, relatives or acquainted people who probably share their experiences, stories, knowledge and information of the destination. The word of mouth is considered as the most powerful and effective tool to spread the information. And people also rate it as one of the most trustworthy channels to obtain truthful information. Indeed, these information sources play important roles in shaping individual's perception about the destination as people tend to believe in the provided information from their close persons and non-commercial sources.

The last ubiquitous agents *are individual's experiences during the visitation*: this is considered as the most important factor in the destination image formation. By experiencing, enjoying and being exposed to the destination's different dimensions, the visitors definitely have more realistic image of the destination than the pre-visit image. According to Phelps (1986) these factors are regarded as the primary sources of information because the destination image formation is mainly dependent on the visitor's experiences and acquired information from the visitation. Undeniably, these information sources have the highest credibility in comparison with other agents. It enables visitors having a more comprehensive and truer view of the place rather than projected image from the destination.

Beside the primary information sources, secondary sources (induced, organic and autonomous agents) also play a crucial role in forming image of destination before the actual visitation. Mansfeld (1992) (cited in Beerli and Martin, 2004, p.662) stated that the secondary sources probably help visitors to reduce the risk of making destination choice, to have a pre-visit image of destination and to have evidences for later justification of their choice. Indeed, destination image formation is considered as a consecutive process, in which diverse information sources play different roles in creating a combined single image in individual's mind. Both primary and secondary sources of information have certain roles in the image formation; they together support and influence the forming process continuously until the overall image of destination is created.

Regarding to secondary sources, the extent and amount of provided information is obviously a major factor influencing and changing the perceived image. If the incoming information is different than the previous one, people tend to avoid obtaining new information so that it will not lead to the 'dissonance in cognition' (Festinger 1957 as cited

in Tasci and Gartner, 2007, p.415). The perceived image will stay the same if the avoidance is successful, otherwise it will change due to the dominance of new information (Tasci and Gartner, 2007, p.415). In other words, the image will be changed if visitors are exposed to the new information which is more credible and different than the previous one. Nowadays, the dominance of mass media, social networks, movies and newspapers facilitates people having quick access to the information about dramatic happenings in certain places or new emerged and distant destinations. The image change will occur dramatically if the content of the information is highly reliable and relating to the safety and security issues.

Moreover, the degree of destination familiarity also has impacts on the change of image because people gain more experiences after each visitation. The intensive interaction with destination enables visitors approaching to various dimensions of the places and enhancing their personal experiences. Thus, the more experiences people acquired, the more realistic and holistic image of destination will become. According to Echtner and Ritchie (1993) people, who have less experienced or less familiarity with the places, mainly form the image relied on the attribute or common traits. On the other hand, people with more experiences and familiarity with the destinations seemingly shape the image based on holistic, unique or psychological characteristics. The visitors' experience is generally affected by the intensity of the trip and the extent of personal engagement with the destination. Indeed, these factors reflect how well visitors know about the place, how far they interact with local community and how much they experience different dimensions of the destination. Obviously, they are the core components in deciding the level of visitors' experience that directly influences their post-visit image formation.

3.2. Personal Factors:

Many researchers (Um and Crompton, 1990; Gartner, 1993; Tasci and Gartner, 2007; Beerli and Martin, 2004) pointed out that the image forming process is not only affected by the external agents but also the internal factors. Beside the information sources, the consumers themselves are also the determinant factors in shaping their image of destination. It is necessary to emphasize the importance of personal factors in the image formation as the consumers are the persons who receive and filter all the provided

information from stimulus agents in order to generate their own image of destination. There are definitely no two people have exactly the same experience and image of destination (Dann, 1996, p.52). Although being exposed to the same information, each consumer will understand and interpret it differently due to the dissimilarity in characteristics, needs, knowledge, prior experiences or motivation. Hence, the perceived image is the consumers' mental picture of destination formed through their comprehension of the projected image and the personal factors (Beerli and Martin, 2004, p. 663; Tasci and Gartner, 2007, p. 416).

Referring to the personal factors, socio-demographics and the psychological nature of consumers are believed to play determinant roles in the image formation. The socio-demographic characteristics mention to the age, gender, education, social class, occupation, household status, income and place of residence.... The psychological nature of an individual refers to the motivation, lifestyle, values, self-concept, personality, experience.... These internal factors are the vital components of the individual's cognitive organization which has direct influences on the thoughts and actions of that person. Together with the environmental factors (culture, social norms, bias, traditions...), they have great impact on the way people perceive the destination and its images.

Many researchers have studied the influences of socio-demographic characteristics on individual's perceived image; however the results are surprisingly contrastive (Tasci and Gartner, 2007, p.417). Some of them agreed that perceived images would be different depending on the gender, age, social class, level of education, country of origin...; whereas some of them discovered 'no differences' in perceived images due to the age, gender, marital status or education level... While other socio-demographic characteristics still receive mixed opinions about their effects on perceived images, country of origin is recognized by most of the researchers as the greatest influential characteristic on the affective and cognitive components of image. The differences in culture, social norms, ethnic groups, values... stimulate the people's curiosity, interest and desire to explore the new destinations. Moreover the geographical distance also affects the destination familiarity, knowledge and visiting tendency of the consumers. Since then, it also influences the individual's motivation and image shaping process. According to Tasci and Gartner (2007, p.418), the destination image is not only relied on the personal comprehension and interpretation of the projected information, but it is also involved in the histories, bias, prejudices, fantasies and stories. It implies that social relations and culture

always play significant roles in forming individual's behaviors, perspectives and perception of destination image.

When mentioning to the psychological nature of consumers and its relation with the image formation, the motivations and past experiences seem to receive particular concerns from many researchers. Motivations are believed to have direct and indirect influences on the consumers' destination choice and destination image shaping process. With different motives, people likely evaluate and choose destination based on their needs and affective domain. It implies the importance of motivation in consumer's affective domain and their destination image formation.

In fact, personal experiences have great impact on the consumer's overall image shaping process as people tend to connect the acquired information and experiences from the previous visitations to the current situations. Consumers usually assess and interpret the obtained information of destination in comparison to the past experiences. For the visitors, the personal experiences are crucial information sources because they are more reliable and truthful than the provided information from external sources. Hence, people seemingly place more weight on their past experiences which are considered as the important factors for decision-making process as well as perceived image formation. According to Beerli and Martin's study findings (2004, p.671), the personal experience plays a significant role in cognitive assessment of the first-time visitors and affective assessment of the repeat visitors.

All in all, the individual's image of destination is shaped and influenced by various factors which involve both external and internal information sources. While the external factors provide valuable information of destination to consumers, the personal factors shape their image perception based on their socio-demographics characteristics and psychological nature. All of these sources are together supporting and affecting consumers in establishing their own mental picture of destination.

3.3. The Effects of Destination Image on Tourist Behavior

For the tourism marketers, destination image is considered as one of the key elements for the successful destination marketing. Most of the tourism researchers are all agreed that

developing a proper destination image is very important for the viability and the overall success of a destination in tourism (Tasci and Gartner 2007, p.413). Indeed, destination image has significant impacts on both supply-side (destination) as well as demand-side (consumers) aspects of marketing. Regarding to supply-side aspects, it supports the promotion, advertising and other marketing related issues of the destination. And in relation to demand-side aspects, the destination image influences the consumers' decision making, destination choice and satisfaction. Several destination image studies have stated that the overall image and attributes of the destination affect tourist behavior not only before but also during and after the visitation.

3.3.1. Before the Visitation

When the consumers are less familiar or have little experience and knowledge of the destination, they tend to perceive destination based on the visual presentation. Due to the fact that tourism products are mainly intangible therefore image is regarded as a vivid representative for the destination. Truly, destination image is believed to have strong influences on consumers' destination choice and decision-making. The destination is chosen by consumers when it has a strong positive overall image and distinctive attributes in comparison to other places. In other words, the consumers select a specific destination only when its positive image aspects obviously surpass its negative image aspects (Chen and Kerstetter, 1999 cited in Tasci and Gartner 2011, p.419). Actually, the more impressive and distinctive the overall image is, the greater influences it has on the consumers' choice of destination. Moreover, the influential degree of destination image on the consumer's choice and decision might also alter depending on not only the types of images but also the dimensions as well as the elements of those images.

According to Hunt (1975) and MacKay & Fesenmaier (1997), the image crudely presenting the exotic or unique features of the destination probably makes the potential consumers uncomfortable and anxious about the quality of the destination. Thus, consumers tend to avoid the destination with coarsely exotic or unreasonably presented images. On the contrary, they are more interested in the destination image that depicts the natural beauty, the community environment or local climate. The image showing distinctive features of the destination is thought to have more influences on the consumer's

destination choice than the one relating to recreational attractions as well as activities (Hunt, 1975).

Not only the overall destination image but also the image forming process affects the behavior of tourists. When being exposed to varied information from induced agents, the consumers definitely enhance their awareness of different dimensions and features of the destination. Once the consumers are aware of the destination, they usually want to explore and learn more about it. It implies that tourist information obviously plays an important role in shaping the consumer's perception of destination as well as stimulating their interest and desire to have a visitation. Besides, the consumers tend to prefer travelling to the destination that is more familiar with them during the obtaining information process. Likewise, Woodside and Lysonski (1989) stated that the consumer's destination preference and choice are also affected by the degree of familiarity they have with the destination through the image formation.

Indeed, the positive destination image can result in the consumer's decision-making to destination. On the other hand, the visitors would probably hold a negative image of the destination if they are forced to travel for particular reasons such as business trip, or being part of travel group but cannot decide the desired destination. According to Gartner (1993), when the consumers are interested in learning more about a particular destination, they subconsciously put it into their 'realizable opportunity set' in the course of decision-making. In order to have final destination decision, the consumers normally undergo different states of mind (Gartner, 1993):

- Being aware of the destination image and consequently placing the interested destination into the 'opportunity set'.
- As the 'opportunity set' is faded gradually, the destination then will be put in 'consideration set'.
- With the influences from affective components of image, it progresses to the 'choice set', 'evoked set' and finally 'decision set'.

However, these evaluation stages would probably be skipped if the consumers' mind is dominated by a specific destination. It implies that the consumers might not interest in other destinations during the evaluation process if a particular destination hold a significant

meaning for them – result in an unhesitating travel decision. In fact, this evaluation process also supports the marketers in learning about the consumers' preference, concerns and behaviors at the time of decision-making. Since then, the destination marketers can identify the potential target market and promote the preferred attributes to advance the consumer's perception of destination.

3.3.2. During the Visitation

There are relatively few studies on the effects of destination image on the tourist behavior during the visitation. Some researchers stated that there is a correlation between the destination image and the tourists' spending time at the destination. In comparison to the short-stay tourists, the long-stay tourists probably acquire more truthful and reliable image of the destination (Fakeye and Crompton, 1991). Besides, the destination image is also believed to have some effects on the satisfaction and enjoyment of tourists. If the tourists' actual experience matches their anticipated destination image, the tourists will be very happy and satisfied. On the contrary, it will result in the dissatisfaction if the on-trip experience is worse than their expectations. The most positive case happens when the actual experience is better than the pre-visit anticipations and expectations; it will lead to the surprise of tourists at destination.

3.3.3. After the Visitation

Despite the effects of destination image on post-visit tourist behavior are generally acknowledged in tourism literature, this aspect is seemingly disregarded in the theory of destination image. Indeed, there are only few empirical researches conducted to examine these effects. Most studies indicate the relation between destination image and the consumers' post-visit evaluative responses. When the consumers have positive on-trip experience and positive overall destination image, they probably want to visit the destination again (Chon, 1992; Ross, 1993). Likewise, Martin and Waalen (2001, p.523 cited in Tasci and Gartner 2007, p.421) pointed out the correlation between destination loyalty and the positive destination image. According to them, the consumers tend to become more loyal to a destination if they had various cultural experiences and advantageous means of travel at that place.

Undeniably, image is an essential element for the success and viability of the destination because it greatly influences on consumers' choice and decision-making. The image forming process helps to create the consumers' awareness of a destination, stimulate their interest and curiosity to explore that place. Additionally, the relation between pre-visit image and on-trip experience is believed to have significant impacts on the consumers' satisfaction, enjoyment as well as loyalty to destination. The positive destination image can result in positive responses of consumers after the trip such as revisit intention or recommendation to other people. Apparently, destination image has been largely recognized in many tourism researches for its effects on tourist behavior, destination marketing as well as tourism development.

4. Vietnam Tourism and Its Relation with Finnish Tourist Market

In order to have a better understanding of Vietnam Tourism and its destination image in Finland, we should firstly have an overall view of the development of tourism in Vietnam, its competitive position in the global tourism market as well as its relations with Finland in tourism. With the support from public documents, reports and statistic of Vietnam Tourism Organization, this chapter provides the key facts of Vietnam tourism industry and Finnish tourist market in recent years. Besides, this chapter also aims to clarify the trend and activities of Finnish tourist in Vietnam so that it will help to strengthen the result of this study.

4.1. Vietnam Tourism in General

Vietnam is a tropical country locating on the easternmost of Indochina Peninsula in the South East Asia. Vietnam is bordered to three countries: China on the north, Laos PDR on the north-west, Cambodia on the south-west and the South China Sea to the east. The total area is 331,210 square km of which the land area is 310,070 square km. Vietnam is a homeland of numerous wonderful beaches due to its long coastline (3,444 meter) stretching along the country. With 90.3 million population (estimated in 2012), Vietnam is known as the thirteenth most populous country in the world and the eighth most populous country in Asia. There are 2 major cities: Hanoi – the capital of Vietnam and Ho Chi Minh is the main business and commercial city of Vietnam.

Geographical location and climate is a big advantage of Vietnam in creating a wonderful tourist destination; the North and the South regions are covered by a flat delta, whereas mountains and hilly highlands on the central, far north and northeast areas. The S-shape country with 1,650 square km stretching from the north to the south has a wide range climate zone which varies obviously from the region to region. Vietnam's climate is relatively complicated, diverse and different in 3 main unique regions: Northern, Central and Southern part of Vietnam. The climate in the northern part of Vietnam is humid, subtropical and strongly influenced by the monsoon. The Northern Vietnam has full four seasons and the general temperature is much lower than the Southern Vietnam which enjoy warmer climate all year around. The Southern Vietnam has a tropical climate and only two

distinct seasons: dry and rainy seasons. Whereas, the Central Vietnam – home of many ethnic minorities, beautiful beaches, ancient imperial city – enjoys an extreme climate which is very cold in the winter and hot in the summer time.



Figure 6: The map of Vietnam (Source: travelnewsindochina.com)

The S-shape country (Figure 6) with the unique climate zones, geographical location and long history has enchanted visitors by her beautiful natural landscapes, ancient traditions, historic attractions, old pagodas as well as world heritage sites. Currently, Vietnam has thirty one national parks, twenty one national tourist areas, eight world biosphere reserve

zones and seven UNESCO world heritage sites. Furthermore, tourists are also attracted to the major cities in Vietnam by its distinct culture, lifestyle, traditions, foods and beauty:

- **Ha Noi:** the capital and the second largest city in Vietnam. It is popular for the rich food culture and world's famous dishes. It is voted as one of the 'top ten must-go food cities' in the world by the Shermans Travel. Ha Noi turned into 1000 years old in 2010 and became the oldest city in Vietnam. It is home of the first university of Vietnam, six hundred old pagodas and thousands of ancient architectures. The most unique characteristics of Hanoi comparing to other cities are the ancient beauty of thousand years old capital, classic old architecture and traditional authentic lifestyle.
- **Hue:** the old capital – imperial capital during the Nguyen dynasty. It is well-known for the historical monuments which is one of seven UNESCO world heritages in Vietnam. It is definitely a great place for visitors who love to learn more about the Vietnam's feudal period and the former Royal Capital. The top tourist attractions in Hue city are the Forbidden City, Emperors' tombs, monuments, pagodas and Perfume Rivers. Annually, many big national - international festivals and events are organized in an attempt to preserve and promote the ancient culture as well as attract more tourists to the city.
- **Da Nang:** is the largest city in the Central part of Vietnam. It is located on the South Central Coast of Vietnam and faced to the China Sea. It is a homeland of many wonderful beaches and several UNESCO world heritage sites. During the wartime, Da Nang was the major base in the South Vietnam for both French as well as American armies. Nowadays, these war bases were turned to the museums and tourism sites for domestic as well as international tourists. In addition to the war remnants, it has many lovely beach resorts, an enchanting Cham museum and Cham historical architecture.
- **Nha Trang:** is well-known worldwide for the fascinating beaches and water-sport activities. It is totally a coastal city, situated on the South-Central Coast area of Vietnam. Undeniably, Tourism is the key economic sector of Nha Trang as it brings a huge amount of income and foreign investment to the city. Nha

Trang is one of the most crucial tourist hubs of Vietnam and it is an extremely popular destination for not only the affluent tourists but also the backpackers. With comfortable climate, compelling clean beaches, and world class resorts, Nha Trang attracts millions of domestic tourists as well as international tourists every year. Additionally, Nha Trang bay is also regarded as one of the most wonderful bays in the world. Every year, the attractive sea festivals and international water sport events turn this place becoming a not-to-be-missed tourist spot.

- **Phan Thiet:** Same as Nha Trang, Phan Thiet is a coastal city and famous worldwide for its enchanting world class resorts and beaches. ‘Mui Ne’ is the most famous tourist spot in Phan Thiet; it is regarded as the resort capital of Vietnam. With thousands of world standard and luxury resorts, Mui Ne is a favorite destination for Russian, Western and affluent domestic tourists.
- **Ho Chi Minh (Saigon):** the biggest city of Vietnam – business and commercial center – symbol of dynamic and modern lifestyle in Vietnam. Saigon is the important hub of technology, scientific, industrial and tourism in Vietnam. Locating in the South of Vietnam, Saigon enjoys the tropical climate with two distinct seasons: rainy and sunny seasons. The unique characteristic of Saigon is the combined culture of traditional Vietnamese, Chinese and French. Saigon’s culture and architecture are strongly influenced by the French due to long colonial time in 1800s. To date, the French-style architecture becomes an icon for SaiGon city and a representative for Saigon culture. Nowadays, these French-built buildings, monuments, cathedrals and tree-lined boulevards become unique icons of Saigon. They are also compelling tourist attractions for who love to see the Western architecture style in the middle of Southeast Asia country. The city is also popular for the historic war sites as it was a major base of American army during the war time. The reunification palace and war remnant sites are the top tourist attractions for history lovers. This city is a bridge of the past and the present as well as the dynamic western and ancient Asia. It is definitely a great tourist spot and must-to-go place when tourists come to the Southern Vietnam.

- **Can Tho:** Situated in the center of Mekong Delta, it is the biggest city in this region. Can Tho is popular with the floating markets, pagodas and friendly local people. It is a homeland of delicious food and fresh fruits. It is a great place for tourists who want to experience the exotic orchards and local life on the river.

It is definitely a must to mention the top favorite attractions among numerous fascinating cities and tourist spots throughout Vietnam. Thanks to the special geographical structure and natural beauty, Ha Long bay is the most popular tourist destination for both domestic and international tourists. Ha Long Bay locates in the northeast part of Vietnam and is made of thousands of big to small islands which are covered by thick and green vegetation. In 1994, Ha Long Bay is recognized by UNESCO as one the most unique and important natural heritage sites of the world. Lately in 2012, it is officially named as one of the world's new seven natural wonders of New 7 Wonders Foundation. The outstanding seascape, floating village and huge caves inside the hollow islands create an irresistible beauty of Ha Long Bay.

The second popular destination is Hoi An - a small ancient village locating in the Central Coast of Vietnam. Hoi An was an international trading port in 1500s and 1900s, it is now recognized as one of the UNESCO world's heritage sites for the well-preserved ancient architectures. Hoi An is well-known nationwide for its ancient beauty, traditional textile, charming old houses and lantern festivals. Possessing a world's heritage site and beautiful beaches at the same place, it attracts thousands of culture lovers, backpackers and young tourists every year.

Sapa Terrace is another hot destination for tourists who want to experience an authentic ethnic culture and exotic landscape. It is located in the Northwest mountain of Vietnam – 1500 meters above the sea level. Sapa is home of many ethnic minority groups and the highest mountain of Vietnam- Fansipan. Sapa is an extremely beautiful town which was mentioned in many national and international tourism magazines. It is famous for the picturesque landscape, beautiful rice terraces, fresh air, peaceful valley and diverse culture. The incredible scenery and friendly ethnic minorities' people will bring a unique experience for tourists visiting Sapa.

Besides the wonderful natural landscapes, the war remnant site is also a hotspot for tourists in Vietnam. Cu Chi Tunnels is the most visited war tourism site which locates 40 km from

Ho Chi Minh City Centre. Cu Chi Tunnels are the important military base of Viet Cong soldiers during the Vietnam War in 1900s. It is an elaborate underground network connecting of 250 km tunnels and chambers which are dug barely with simple tools and hands. Cu Chi Tunnels are a part of a wider underground network below the Ho Chi Minh City. During the wartime, it is used as a hiding and living place for Viet Cong soldiers. Besides, it also served as weapon storage, hospital as well as supply and communication routes for local people and soldiers. Nowadays, it is a top attraction for tourists who want to see a part of the Vietnam War and experience the underground life of Vietnam soldiers.

Mekong Delta: is the southern part of Vietnam where the Mekong River plays a vital role in everyday life's activities. It is featured by the large green rice fields, fish farms, lush orchards, easygoing local people and brown canals. Due to the large rice production every year, this area is considered as the Rice Basket of Vietnam. Local life relies heavily on waterways and most of everyday activities are carried out along the nearby rivers, canals and swamps. Come to the Mekong Delta, tourists can visit the colorful floating markets, discover the interesting riverside towns, observe rare bird species in the sanctuaries or experience the local life with homestay tour.

Obviously, with the long stretching coastline from the north to the south, the heroic history and diverse culture, Vietnam is gradually becoming one of the most favorite tourist destinations in the world.

4.2. Tourism Development in Vietnam

Tourism has increasingly become an important factor in Vietnam development. It has been developing significantly in recent decades and plays a major role in Vietnamese economy. Vietnam has emerged as a new, potential and appealing destination in Southeast Asia and was ranked the second place among newly emerged destinations that are mostly chosen by international tourists in 2013 (according to the survey report of the US Tour Operation Association) (Arno, 2013). Indeed, Vietnam has attracted millions of international tourists every year and this number is increased remarkably in the last ten years.

Since the economic reforms and opening up countries from the mid-1990s, Tourism in Vietnam has been growing rapidly and has become a crucial component of the Vietnamese

economy. According to the survey conducted by the World Travel and Tourist Council (WTTC), Vietnam is placed 47th in the ranking table of general development, 54th in term of contribution to Vietnam's economy and 12th for long-term growth (Nghi, 2011). The rapid growth of tourism has brought a huge amount of foreign investment sources, foreign exchange and business opportunities into the country. It also helped to generate million jobs for low skilled labors as well as improve the country's economy potentials. The importance of tourism during 'the development of Vietnam economy period 2011-2020' was strongly emphasized in the "Strategy on Viet Nam's tourism development until 2020, vision to 2030": The general objectives of Vietnamese government are to develop tourism into the vital economic sector and become a driving force for the growth of social economy (The Government of Vietnam, 2011). This strategy aims welcoming 7-7.5 million international visitors, 36-37 million domestic visitors, creates 2.2 million jobs for local people and contributes up 5.5-6% GDP by 2015.

Likewise, Vietnam targets to receive 10-10.5 million foreign tourist arrivals, 36-37 million domestic tourists, generate 3 million jobs and reach 18-19 billion US dollar in term of total revenue from tourism activities by 2020. Recognizing the great benefit of the tourism industry for the country development, the government is striving to turn tourism becoming a spearhead sector of the economy in Vietnam. Moreover, with the financial support from state resources and private investment, the government of Vietnam stated that they will allot around 94.2 billion US dollars to improve the tourism infrastructure and its competitive potential within the region until 2013 (Arno, 2013). In addition to the tourism infrastructure development, the prime minister of Vietnam Nguyen Tan Dung also indicated the special concern for allocating this fund to tourist product development, skilled-workforce training, as well as remote attractions upgrading.

Despite Vietnam tourism industry is relatively young; it underwent remarkable stages and is developing substantially in the last few years. The figure 7 indicates the number of international tourists and domestic tourists in the period of 2001-2012. After the global economic recession in 2009, tourism industry has recovered and increased by 13% in 2010. Since then it gradually attracts more and more international tourists to Vietnam and becomes a compelling destination in Asia-Pacific region. Currently, Vietnam tourism industry majorly relies on the domestic tourists however the increasing number of international tourists shows the positive prospect for the future development. The president and CEO of World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), David Scowsill also has an

optimistic view of the future development of Vietnam tourism: ‘Travel and Tourism industry contributed 4.3% to the national GDP and accounted for 3.7% of the total employment, and these numbers are expected to rise almost twice in the next 10 years’ (WTTC, 2012).

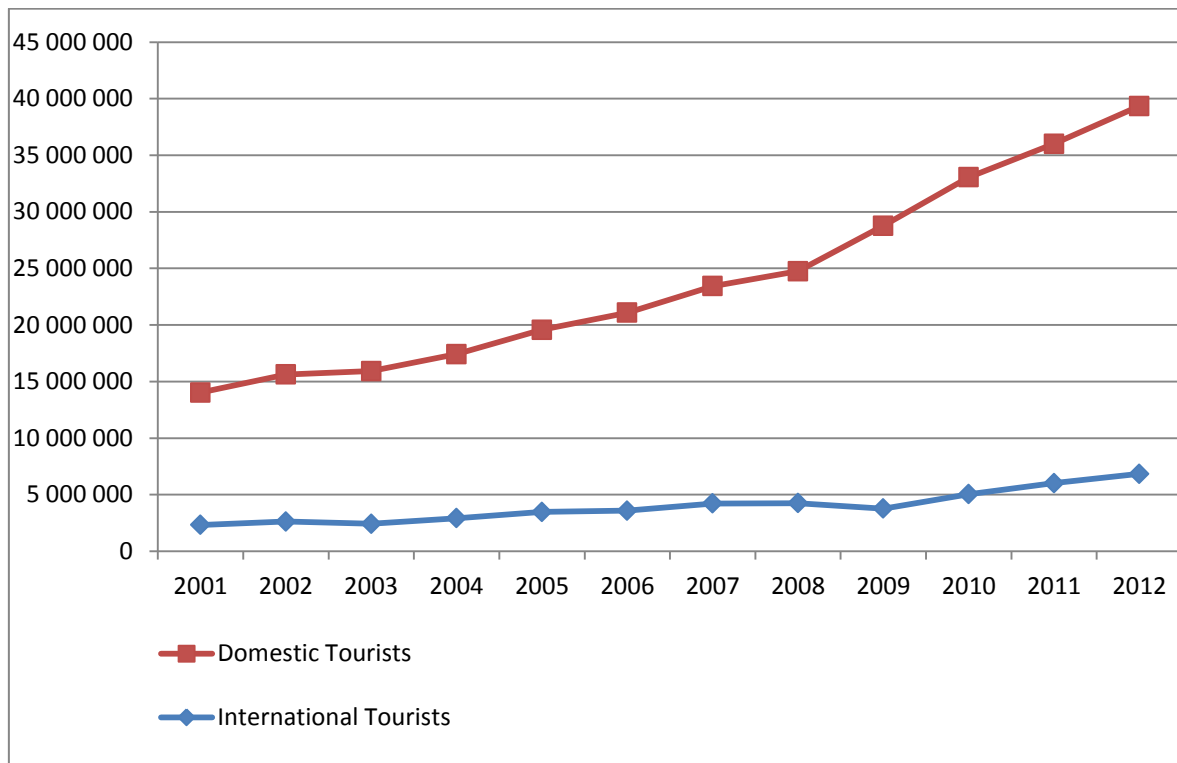


Figure 7: The number of tourists in Vietnam period 2001-2012 (Source: General Office of Tourism and General Statistic Office of Vietnam, 2012)

In 2012, Vietnam received 6,847 million international tourist arrivals (represents a 13% growth in comparison to the same period of last year) and 32, 5 million domestic tourists (increase 8% over the same period of last year), the total revenue from tourism reached up to 160 trillion VND which is increased by 23% compared to the year 2011(The Government of Vietnam, 2012). With the ‘Heritage Tourism’ theme, Vietnam tourism has widely recognized and received a significant concern from worldwide tourism organizations, field experts and tourists. The strong strategy and compelling theme have helped to bring 1.31 million international tourists to Vietnam in only two first months of the year 2012. Truly, the year 2012 is an important milestone in the Vietnam tourism development as Vietnam received many awards and considerable acknowledge from the international reputable organizations and scholars.

In 2013, Vietnam Ministry of culture, sport and tourism has launched many cultural events and tourism simulation programs in hope to welcome 7.2 million international tourists and 35 million domestic tourists. By promoting the ‘Vietnam-Endless beauty’ campaign in the major tourist markets and boosting the development of tourist products, Vietnam aims to become an attractive tourist destination with high quality services and business travel. According to the United States Tour Operators Association (USTOA) survey, Vietnam is ranked second among the emerging tourist destinations for international tourists, whereas it is placed at the top position in the last year (SGGPOL, 2012). Being named in the USTOA’s best emerging destinations list is a great chance for Vietnam to attract more tourists from North-America and captured the public attention.

According to UNWTO report in 2011, Vietnam is considered as the fourth country has the fastest tourism development in the world and also accounts for the fifth largest domestic tourists among ASEAN countries in the year 2011 (Businesswire, 2012). In the same year, Vietnam is ranked among fifty top tours of lifetime and one of the thirteen best tours in Asia by the National Geographic Traveler Magazine. These ranking numbers strongly indicate that Vietnam is becoming a popular destination for not only Asian tourists but also Western tourists. According to Vietnam’s General Department of Statistic, most of the international tourists in Vietnam come from Asian countries such as China, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Cambodia etc... China is the biggest target market which averagely accounts for 20-25% of the total number of international tourists in Vietnam. Besides, The United States, Russia and France are also listed in the top ten countries which send the most tourists to Vietnam. The high growth in the number of tourist arrivals from European countries is a good sign for Vietnam tourism. Russian is considered as the country with the highest growth of tourist arrivals in Vietnam (71.5%), Finland came to second place with 43% increase , Belgium with 13.5 % increase and Germany by 6.4% (SGGPOL, 2012).

The figure 8 shows the top ten countries which have the highest tourist arrivals in Vietnam. It also displays the number of tourists by countries in year 2011 and 2012.

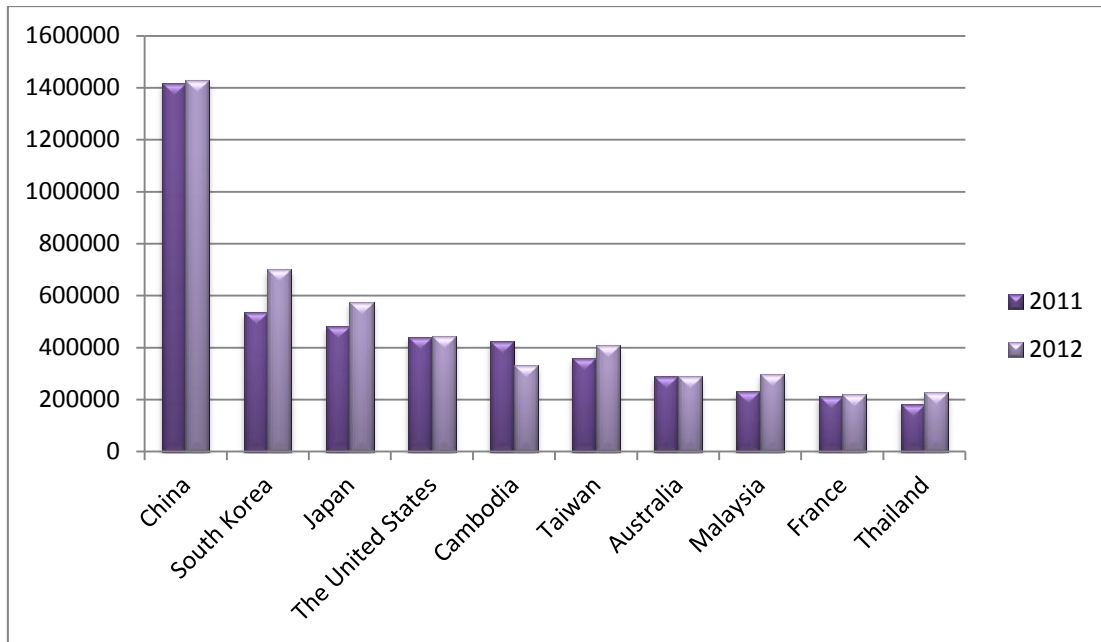


Figure 8: The number of international tourist arrivals in Vietnam in 2011 and 2012
(Source: General Statistic Office of Vietnam 2011, 2012)

4.3. Vietnam Tourism's SWOT Analysis

This section will indicate the main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities as well as threats of Vietnam tourism industry. The aim is to give readers a better understanding of Vietnam tourism's current situation.

1. Strengths:

Undeniably, the geographical location and rich natural resources are the great advantages for the development of tourism in Vietnam. In addition, the diverse climate creates an abundant ecosystem which is home of millions of rare fauna and flora. Vietnam has thousands of compelling nature wonders and attractions which are recognized worldwide such as Ha Long Bay, Phong Nha-Ke Bang, Nha Trang Bay etc.... are truly hotspots for nature-lovers and adventure-lovers.

With the long coastline from the north to the south and 4000 islands, Vietnam has many world's outstanding beaches and resorts which are the most favorite destinations of international tourists. Indeed, beach and island tourism is the primary factor pulling tourists to Vietnam; therefore it is obviously a most potential strength of Vietnam in promoting and developing tourism. According to a CNN internet survey (June, 2013), two Vietnamese beaches (Long Beach, Phu Quoc – 93th place and An Bang Beach, Hoi An – 86th place) are listed in top 100 best beaches in the world. In the same year, My Khe-Da Nang with golden and long flat sand shore was ranked as one of the six most attractive beaches on the planet by American Forbes Magazine and was also considered as one of the top ten beautiful beaches in Asia by the Sunday Herald Sun of Australia (Vietnamonline, 2013). Being recognized and ranked by the world's popular magazines, these golden sandy beaches have plenty of potential in becoming a world's hot tourist spot.

In addition to the nature landscapes, the diverse cultural heritages and glorious history are the bright points to attract tourists to Vietnam. Four thousand years of history, and distinct traditions of 54 ethnic groups give Vietnam abundant advantages in developing different tourism models. Tourists can experience diverse cultures, traditions, cuisines, folklores and lifestyles at different regions along the country. The rich culture and unique heritages give the favorable conditions for Vietnam tourism development. Last but not least, Vietnam is known as a safe tourist destination for international visitors as it has a very stable political situation. Thus, the political stability becomes one of the strengths of Vietnam in promoting tourism over other South-East Asians countries.

2. Weaknesses:

Despite the remarkable development of tourism industry in recent year, Vietnam tourism is still lagging behind other Asian countries. The first reason comes from the inappropriate use of natural resources which are considered as the most essential asset for the tourism development. Many tourism resources and natural landscapes are exploited indiscriminately, causing the high risk of degradation and depletion of valuable resources. The technology constraints and short term visions in tourism development are also the big obstacles for preserving and sustaining tourism resources. To date, there is no clear statistics, assessments or clarification of tourism natural resources as well as human

resources. This deficiency leads to the ineffectiveness and unsustainability in the management system. The lack of proper exploitation and sustainable development strategies leads to poor and monotonous tourism products.

Poor infrastructure is the major weakness of Vietnam tourism. The transportation system is very poor and inconsistent; tourists probably face many difficulties in accessing to different remote tourist spots. Moreover, tourist guides, entertainment services, hotel & restaurant systems are not developed properly and sufficiently for the high demand of tourists. The tourist products and activities are still operated in small scales, amateur manner and inconsistency. In which, the service quality is regarded as the most notorious reason to hinder international tourists from visiting, revisiting or recommending Vietnam as a good tourist destination to others. Despite the high ranking on the popular tourism magazines, the quality of tourism services is evaluated as relatively low and unprofessional in general.

Mr. Nguyen Thien Nhan (The Deputy Minister – the head of the National Steering Committee for Tourism) and many tourism managers had addressed seven prominent problems causing the bad performance of Vietnam tourism: the weak management system, irresponsible managers and staffs, pricey tourism services, insufficient tourist guides, lack of sustainable strategies for tourism products and some popular attractions have an overcrowded situation (VNTimes, 2013). In truth, the weak intra-sector cooperation between transportation, accommodation and travel agents leads to the unreasonable price and inconsistency in tourism services. There is a huge amount of travel agents in Vietnam and it keeps increasing quickly year by year, however their quality is actually inversely proportional to their growing speed. Unqualified and unprofessional travel operators cause the repetition and degradation in tourism products. The lack of reliable information sources could result in the loss and confusion of potential consumers. According to a representative of Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) and Vietnam Tourism Association, it is needed to establish an international tourism association which can unite and manage the travel agents as well as protect the consumers' benefits (Asianewsnet, 2013)

Skilled workforce is always the core factor of all tourism products and development however Vietnam is constrained to have a better performance because of low-skill workers. Despite the large human resource, the labor force is not trained properly and

professionally. Furthermore, the quality of hospitality training education is still limited and insufficient for today's competitive market. In general, the tourism human resource is lack of skilled and professionally trained workers who can bring quality services to the consumers. In order to be competitive in the global market, Vietnam must have a considerable concern for tourism training and education improvement as well as create opportunities for young workers approach to a professional working environment. Having a trained and skilled labor force is the prerequisite condition for the sustainable development of tourism industry.

Further, the weaknesses and limitation in the tourism market research at macro level and enterprise level constrains Vietnam from developing suitable, efficient and creative products for certain target groups. Additionally, the weak and poor marketing strategy is also a main reason holding the whole sector back. The promotion and marketing campaigns are not planned specifically and implemented effectively in the potential target markets. Unlike other neighboring countries in the region, Vietnam has very limited budget for the tourism marketing and branding therefore the promotion activities are not supported much. Nguyen Thi Thanh Huong (head of Market Department of VNAT) also emphasized the importance of long-term financial plan in branding and marketing a successful image of Vietnam as a tourist destination (Dao Loan-TheSaigonTimesDaily, 2008). The branding and brand management is still lax and inconsistent, the promotional message is vague and doesn't focus on the specified features or uniqueness of Vietnam. Particularly, Vietnam tourism's logo and slogan do not convey a strong and clear message to the audiences. Many experts and travel agents criticized that these logos (Figure 9) and slogan are not impressive and do not connect to the actual Vietnam tourism. Luu De Ke (the director of Hanoi Tourist) expressed his dissatisfaction with the logo as it is vague and doesn't help audiences imagine the beauty of Vietnam tourism (Vietnamtravelarticle.com, 2012).



Vietnam Tourism's Logo 2006-2011



VietnamTourism's Logo 2011



Vietnam Tourism's Logo 2012-2015

Figure 9: Logos of Vietnam tourism in different periods (Source: VietnamTourism Government)

While South Korea has 27 representative offices abroad, Thailand has over 20 offices and Malaysia has more than 40 offices abroad to promote and advertise their country's tourism at target markets, Vietnam doesn't have any representative offices abroad and is now planning to open one in Japan within this year 2013. Therefore, the image of Vietnam tourism in target markets may not be aware correctly and profoundly.

Last but not least, the Vietnam travel firms are not equipped properly and sufficiently the information communication technology system (ICT), therefore Vietnam may encounter many difficulties in attracting international tourists in today's technology era. Nowadays, Western tourists rely heavily on ICT and use it as an effective tool to search for tourism information, plan for their trips and share experience. Hence, travel agencies should focus strongly on improving their ICT so that it can help them in promoting the tourism products online, approaching to distant consumers, providing up-to-date information and reducing the operational costs.

Although the considerable increase of tourist numbers in recent years, Vietnam tourism's facilities, infrastructures, service quality and promotion are developing at very slow pace. The lack of funding and effective long-term strategies would be the major causes of these problems.

Opportunities:

In 2012, Vietnam National Tourism Administration has approved the visa exemption proposal for seven major tourist markets: Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Russia, Japan, and South Korea. The tourists of these countries are allowed to travel 15 days in Vietnam without visa registration (30 days-visa exemption proposal will be presented to the Government in late 2013) (Vietnamvisaform.com, 2013). The visa-exemption is a good attempt in maximizing the convenience and accessibility to the country. Last year, the total revenue of tourist arrivals from Japan, South Korea and Russia reached to 2 billion US dollars and this growth can be dropped by 50 percent if the visa exemption is not approved. Furthermore, VNAT and Vietnam's cities tourism departments are launching many campaigns to raise awareness of Vietnam beautiful image nationally and internationally as well as stimulate the tourism development. Festivals and events with special themes attract huge loads of domestic and foreign tourists to Vietnam annually, thus the unique features such as UNESCO world's heritages, seascape, cultural events, natural beauty should be used as an effective advertising tool for tourism marketing.

As mentioned in the weaknesses' part, Vietnam government is planning to set up representative offices in the major tourist markets such as France, Japan, US, China, Singapore, Australia. These representative offices are responsible for promoting Vietnam's tourism and strengthening tourism cooperation with the target markets as well as enhancing the tourists' awareness of Vietnam's destination image. In 2011, Vietnam Government has received the non-refundable financial support from European Union for the environment and society responsible tourism (ERST) program for the period of 2011-2015 (ERST Vietnam, 2012). The ERST program is funded 11 million euros from the European Union and 1.1 million euros from the Vietnam Government in an attempt to support the technical development and heightening the service quality in Vietnamese public and private sectors. The program is currently implemented under the management of the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism as an executive authority in cooperation with VNAT as implementing body. Apart from the ERST program, Tourism advisory board's establishment (TAB) in November 2012 is also a part of the EU funded project. The main aim of TAB's establishment is to provide consultancy to Vietnam's private and public

travel firms, enhance the Vietnam's competitiveness in term of sustainable tourism and strengthening the partnership of private and public sectors (ERST Vietnam, 2012).

Vietnam tourism will have great opportunities when the ASEAN workforce agreement comes to be valid in 2015. According to Mr Tran Phu Cuong (a representative of VNAT), this agreement will facilitate the free-movement scheme of certified and qualified workforce of ASEAN members (Vietnam News, 2013). It is a great opportunity for Vietnam to attract qualified human resources from other countries as well as allow the tourism professionals finding a good job in the bloc's members.

Threats

Vietnam's tourism industry is still very young, weak and lack of proper investment. The pressure of international competition in the tourism industry is increasing fiercely especially when globalization and ICT strongly influence the development of tourism. Vietnam has to compete drastically with the countries in the region such as Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippine, China, Singapore which have had strong tourism development strategies in many years. Vietnam's destination image is still vague and faint in the tourists' eyes comparing with these countries. Thus, Vietnam needs to invest intensively in improving the competitiveness of tourism products, building a strong destination image and a unique national brand.

In the 21st century, climate change is seemingly one of the biggest challenges that the world's industry has to face and overcome. Vietnam is identified as one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to the strong hazards of climate change (AusAID, 2013). Having the long coastline and flat delta, Vietnam is easily exposed to more frequent and intense natural disasters such as sea rising level, cyclones, typhoons, and flood. Vietnam tourism is dominantly focusing on islands and coastal areas; therefore it will face enormous and unpredictable impacts of tides, coastal erosion and salt water intrusion. The anomalies of climate will directly cause many difficulties and obstacles for tourism activities. According to AusAID (2013) the weather-related issues cause the loss of 2 percent GDP annually in Vietnam. It indicates the huge impact of weather and climate

change on the Vietnam tourism industry. In addition, the environmental pollution and depletion of natural resources are also becoming big threats for tourism development.

To date, the world's tourism trend has changed towards the new value set which is based on the basis of traditional culture values (originality, uniqueness), natural value (primitive, wild), create value and ICT (comfort and convenience). Green tourism, sustainable tourism, responsible tourism, community tourism, ecotourism become the prominent trends. Vietnam need to understand and catch up the new trends strategically otherwise the tourism industry would be at the risk of falling back, lose the market shares or perform inefficiently.

4.4. Vietnam-Finland Relation in Tourism

In 2013, Vietnam and Finland celebrate its forty year anniversary of official relationship with many impressive events. Finland has listed Vietnam as one of the long-term partner countries for the development cooperation in 1973 and started to set up a Finnish Embassy in the capital of Vietnam, Ha Noi 1974 (Embassy of Finland in Vietnam). Since then, the two countries have a tight cooperative relation in many areas such as science-technology, education, culture, human resource-training, economic-trade and especially tourism. According to Embassy of Finland in Vietnam, Finland has particularly supported Vietnam in two main areas:

- natural resources management and climate change's issues
- knowledge society

Indeed, Vietnam had received approximately 260 million euros financial aid from Finland during the period of 1979 till 2012. However, Vietnam-Finnish development cooperation will be shifting to the new form in next coming years as Vietnamese economy is growing potentially. In May 2006, Vietnam – Finland Friendship Association was established with the aims of reinforcing the friendship, solidarity and understanding between two countries' citizens as well as boosting the cooperative relations (VNA, 2013).

From 1st January 2009, Finnish tourists are exempted from entry visa when staying in Vietnam under fifteen days. It indicates the importance of Finland in Vietnam's tourism

development and close friendship between two countries. The main aim of entry visa exemption is attracting more tourists from Finland which is considered one of the potential target markets in the Northern Europe. In November 2012, Finnair (the national airline of Finland) announced that they will open a new route directly from Helsinki to Ha Noi, Vietnam in beginning of June 2013. Finnair offers direct flights to eleven major destinations in Asia and Ha Noi honorably becomes the 12th destination. It is the only European airline having a direct flight to the capital of Vietnam at current stage. With the advantageous geographical location, Vietnam has favorable condition to become a convenient transit place for Europe-Asia route. Although the Helsinki-Hanoi flight is only operated for 3 summer months (June-October), this initiative shows the huge interest of Finland toward Vietnam as well as the potential of Vietnam in Finnair's long-term Asia strategy. The short and direct route facilitates the Vietnam tourism in attracting more tourists from Finland and Europe in general.

With the rapid increase of number Finnish visitors in recent year, Vietnam considers Finland as one of the important target markets in the Scandinavia region. Since 2009, Vietnam Embassy, Vietnam Tourism Association (VTA) and five domestic travel firms started to participate in the Helsinki MATKA Fair which is the biggest annual Tourism Fair in Nordic region. Every year, MATKA Nordic travel fair attracts more than 17000 tourism trade professionals from 76 countries around the world, 70 000 visitors and 1 100 media (Breakingtravelnews, 2013). The Fair has been organized in Helsinki, Finland for twenty six times already and it has different themes for every year. Attending annual Travel Fair is a great opportunity for Vietnam to officially introduce destination image to the Finnish people, promote tourism activities and cooperate with other potential travel firms. In other words, it is an effective way to approach Finnish market and enhance the awareness of Vietnam destination image in Finland.

Although the number of Finnish tourists visiting Vietnam is pretty modest, it has been increasing considerably since 2006. According to Susanna Jacquelin (an attaché of Finnish embassy), there are approximately 8 000 Finnish people travelling to Vietnam every year but this number is probably higher because some tourists don't register with the embassy (thanhniennnews.com, 2013). The Figure 10 shows the growth of Finnish visitors in Vietnam period 2002-2012. Particularly in 2012, the number of Finnish visitors in Vietnam increased by 42, 87 percent comparing to year 2011.



Figure 10: Number of Finnish Tourists in Vietnam period 2006-2012

4.5. Finnish Tourist and Travel Trends

Finnish people have made approximately 7.8 million leisure trips abroad in 2012 and this number is anticipated to rise much higher in 2013 (Statistics Finland, 2013). Comparing to 2011, the outbound leisure travel and business travel have increased considerably in 2012. Beside the huge number of trips are made to the neighboring countries and other European countries, Finns are now heading more to the beautiful destinations in Asia and Oceania region. According to Statistics Finland 2012 report, there are 280 thousand leisure trips are made to Asia and Oceania destinations and this number is increased by 50 percent than the same period last year. Among the Asian countries, Thailand stands out to be the most favorite destination for Finns in term of leisure travel. Every year, Thailand welcomes approximately 120 000 -146 000 arrivals from Finland and it accounts for 50 percent of total trips to Asia.

Having the long holiday and harsh winter time, Finns tend to spend their vacation in a warmer and sunnier destination. The duration of the Asian trip is often longer than the usual European trip which only last for few days. Beach holiday and city breaks are the ubiquitous type of travels that Finns mostly choose and this trend probably remains the same in the next several years. In fact, new cultural experience and relaxing are the most important things that Finnish tourists always want to have in their trips. They are keen to

experience authentic cultures, explore new things, immerse into the local communities and have fun with family. With the advantages of geographical location, weather and exotic culture, South-East Asia is becoming a trendy destination for Finns who love seascape, beach, nature, culture and adventure. Especially, the Asia Pacific tourism industry is expanding rapidly with the focus on beach and green tourism; it is not only a favorite destination but also the trendy destination for Western tourists.

Statistics Finland stated that more than 96 percent of Finns aged 15 to 84 have at least one leisure trip in 2012. In which, 49 percent of this number have at least one leisure trip to foreign countries. It indicates the strong travel tendency of Finnish people and their huge demand for leisure trip abroad. According Eurostat tourism statistics in 2008, Finland is considered as the country has the highest number of leisure trips per capita (averagely 6.9 trips every year). Finnish tourist group aged 45-64 has the highest tourism intensity while group aged 65 plus have the lowest travel intensity. The tourist group aged 15-24 and 24-44 years old have relatively similar travel intensity. The main reasons of difference in the travel intensity of age groups are the average income level and health issues.

- 15-24 years old group: tourists have a limited budget and usually focus on budget travel. They seek for the new cultural and adventure experiences.
- 24-44 years old group: tourists have stable income and often travel with family. They want to enjoy the relaxing vacation with friends or family at an authentic destination. They also value the unique travel experience and cultural learning than money.
- 44-65 years old: tourists have stable and high income/savings. They have high demands for the quality and luxury tourism products. They are willing to spend more money on their holidays and expect to experience high standard quality services and private environment.
- 65 plus years old: retired residents, they have a stable income and quite a lot of savings. They want to spend their leisure time at relaxing and peaceful destinations. The long trips abroad to quiet and comfortable destination are the most favorite travel type of this group.

Truly, the longer holidays and increased disposal income enable Finnish tourists spending their vacations at more distant and exotic destinations. It is definitely a good sign for Vietnam tourism and Asia-pacific tourism in general.

5. Research Methods and Design

Methodology refers to the proper approach adopted to collect the knowledge of the study reality and carrying out the study (Phillimore and Goodson, 2004). Many people usually confused the meaning of methodology and method. The method refers to the techniques, tools that support to gather the empirical study data in practical, whereas the methodology refers to the broader parcel of both practical tools and political, philosophical commitment that come with a specific approach (Saukko, 2003, p. 8). In other words, research methods are different types of tools, ways or techniques used by researchers to study and collect necessary information for their fields of interest. Choosing the suitable methods is always the tricky process because the inappropriate methods would lead to the inefficiency in research.

5.1. Study Methods

As the main research problem is ‘measuring the perceived destination image of Vietnam in Finland’, it aims to find out how Finnish citizens be aware of Vietnam’s image as a tourist destination. The chosen methods should assist author in finding out the sufficient information to draw out possible answers for the research problems. A careful review of relevant destination image literature was conducted to have a deep understanding of destination image concepts, formation, components and effective research approaches. The literature review provides a profound knowledge for author in choosing the right research methods and analyzing methods which are usually used in the previous studies.

In this study, quantitative approach is employed to collect primary data and it is also a ubiquitous method used in most of researches studying about destination image. As the name suggests, quantitative research methods mostly concern with the collection and analysis of information in numerical form such as percentages or statistic (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 1996, p. 61). And it is usually used to quantify data and generalize information from the large numbers of population. Quantitative methods are frequently used in social sciences researches: marketing, economics, sociology, political sciences in the hope of generating the objective results which can be generalized to the large scale of population. Hence, it is definitely a suitable approach for author to yield general and unbiased results.

Among other quantitative methods, the author chose survey questionnaire which is considered as the most productive tool to gather information that represents the general views of the whole target group. It is widely used by many researchers due to its high convenience, time-efficiency and feasibility. Indeed, by using the survey questionnaire, author can collect a large amount of necessary data in a short period of time with relatively low cost. Moreover, the standardized data facilitates the analyzing process particularly in term of large number of target sample. In order to have explicit questions, the author did a deep review of literatures, prior studies and articles concerning with destination image measurement. The preliminary research of existing documents provides profound information for authors in defining the relevant content and essential elements for generating effective questions. These questions should elicit and encourage the participants to share their opinions, thoughts as well as experience at the site.

The destination image comprises of many components, therefore it is extremely important to measure fully all of these elements: attribute - holistic, psychological - functional, common-unique. Close-ended and open-ended questions are employed to capture both common/attributes elements and unique/holistic elements of the destination image. Close-ended questions are very effective in measuring the attributes/common traits, whereas open-ended questions are widely used to capture the holistic images. In addition, a set of scales is also utilized to discover the important attribute traits that may be overlooked in other sections. The survey questionnaire has 13 questions which centralize around Vietnam's characteristics as a tourist destination and participants' experiences or perceptions of Vietnam tourism. The questions' content and scales' items are derived based upon the similar questionnaire in the previous popular studies. Same in other previous studies, the survey questions also include many features that would help to elicit the image of Vietnam as a tourist destination: host culture, historical sightseeing, safe destination, natural attractions, climate, recreations... These features are very useful in evoking the participants' memories or perceptions of the destinations.

Because the study's target population is Finnish citizens, who have visited Vietnam as well as haven't visited Vietnam, the survey questionnaire is designed for both target groups. The questionnaire is designed into 2 parts so it can facilitate both groups giving their answer conveniently. Two sections are designed particularly for the Finnish citizens who have visited Vietnam and the participants who haven't visited Vietnam can skip these two

questions. The rest of the questionnaire is for both groups as it is not concerned with the participants' experience at the destination.

After developing the set of questions and scale, the author sent the survey questionnaire to the group of experts including: tourism professors, Vietnamese ambassador and travel experts who have experience and knowledge of research methods. The experts were asked to give evaluations and advices for the questionnaire design, content and wordings. The experts' comments and suggestions were taken into consideration during the questionnaire modifying process. The revised version is also the final version of survey questionnaire which was then sent to the group of population.

As the gender and age have influences on the perception and travel intensity, two first questions are meant to identify the average age and the gender of the participants. The level of perception and awareness of destination image are varied at different stages of life, hence age and gender are definitely essential information or identifying the participant's perceived destination image process. The question: 'Have you ever visited Vietnam?' is to define the types of participants and categorized them into 2 main groups. It also aims to facilitate the participants in their following answering process. The next four open ended questions are designed to discover the unique and holistic components of the destination image:

- What images or characteristics come to your mind when you think of Vietnam as a tourist destination?
- How would you describe the atmosphere or mood that you expect while visiting Vietnam (ex: relaxing, friendly hospitable, tropical weather...)?
- Please list any distinctive or unique tourist attractions that you can think of Vietnam?
- What kind of tourist activities you think Vietnam is good at offering (ex: historical sightseeing, cultural experience, adventure...)?

The fourth question allows the participant to freely express their opinions, thoughts and perceptions about Vietnam as a tourist destination. It is a great technique to elicit the participants' overall impression of the destination. However, participants may answer this question with the focus on the functional traits of the image; therefore the fifth question is designed to catch the psychological characteristics. The participants are asked to describe the mood or atmosphere that they wish to experience in Vietnam. The answers will reflect the knowledge or psychological expectation of participants towards Vietnam as a tourist

destination. The sixth question is designed to discover some of the salient, distinctive or unique attractions of destination in participants' perception. The seventh question aims to determine some of the tourist activities that participants considered popular in Vietnam. These open-ended questions are also to examine the pre-visit image of the destination that the participants hold in their perceptions. They can freely express their opinion without being interfered by predetermined constructs of the researcher.

The scale is especially designed for the participants who have visited Vietnam. The author has to employ different techniques as well as undergo several stages in order to develop a proper scale and relevant items. By developing scale step by step, the author would ensure the content validity, consistency of scale items as well as dimensionality. The literature review is always the most important step for designing an effective scale. It helps an author in defining the constructs or the attributes of the destinations that may be most appropriate to the target group. The scale is designed to measure the common and attribute-based traits of the destination therefore it is very necessary to have a complete list of attributes that describe the destination. The lists of the attributes are derived based upon the prior studies and the literature review:

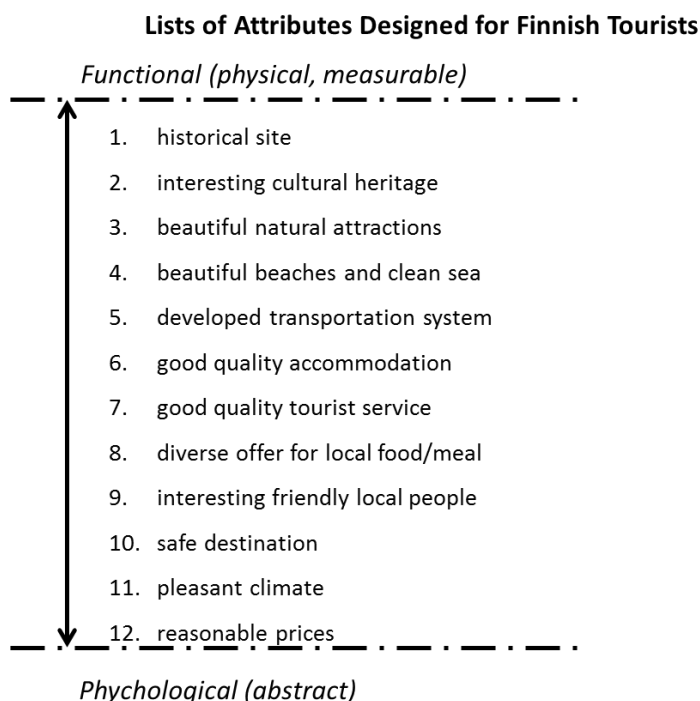


Figure 11: Question 7: the scale attributes items

The Figure 11 shows the final list of prominent characteristics and attributes traits that were used in the question 7 (Scale). The participants, who haven't visited Vietnam before, are required to skip the question so that the result's reliability is ensured. The respondents were asked to rate the relative importance of these factors in their decision-making process, they can choose one among five intensities:

* Not important at all * Not important * Neutral * Important * Very important

The responses will help author in identifying the important degree of attributes in the participants' eyes and how strong or what level they affect the participants' trip decision making. Then, the author can deduce the Finnish tourist' image of Vietnam in term of attribute-based and common characteristics of the destination.

The ninth question is also created to discover the post-trip image of the Finnish citizens who have been in Vietnam recently. The closed-ended question asks the participant to rate their satisfaction with their previous Vietnam trip. The tenth and eleventh questions are also closed-ended question which attempts to find out the participants' travel tendency to Vietnam as well as the obstacles preventing them from visiting Vietnam. In the question eleventh, there is a small open section where respondents can freely describe the difficulties or obstacles limiting them from traveling to Vietnam. The twelfth question is an open section for all the participants to share their suggestions and thoughts for developing a better Vietnam as an attractive tourist destination. This part will reflect the expectations and wishes that respondents would like to have in their trip. The last question is actually an extra section for participants to give comments, feedbacks or anything they would like to say about the current situation or future development of Vietnam tourism.

5.2. Study Sample

Obviously, the research problems and target group are always the core part in all researches. The target group or population is defined as a set of people, events or objects that the researchers would like to study about them. It is extremely hard or even impossible to investigate the entire population due to undefined amount of objects. It is also extremely expensive and timely to study the whole group of population. Therefore, the sample is used to replace the population in most of the studies. The sample is considered as a subset of the

population as it is directly withdrawn from the population. In other words, the sample is a small group of people/objects randomly chosen from the population and it represented for the whole population in the research. Hence, by investigating the sample, the author can generalize the findings back to the population.

Regarding to the nature and objectives of this study, the population are the Finnish citizens who aged from 15-60 plus years old. The core aim of the research is studying the perceived destination image of Vietnam in Finland; therefore all the Finnish citizens (the persons have visited Vietnam and haven't visited Vietnam) are the target group that author would like to investigate. As it is nearly impossible to study every single Finnish citizen across the country, this study focused on the persons who visited Nordic Travel Fair and who can access to the Facebook social network. Although, the visitors of Nordic Travel Fair came from all over the world, the author only approached to the Finnish guests who visited the Vietnam's stand in the Fair. During three days at the Fair, all the active Finnish guests (at all ages) were invited to participate in the survey and small thanking presents were given to them after completing the questionnaire.

The second sample group is the Finnish citizens who have a Facebook account or ability to access to the Facebook social network. This group is mostly young and middle aged people who aged from 20-50 years old. They should be active users in the social network and also other Finnish community pages. The participants are expected to spend approximately 5-7 minutes for the questionnaire and their information are kept confidentially and solely served for this study's purpose.

5.3. Research Implementation and Data Collection

The research process has 3 major stages: literature review, questionnaire design and research implementation. The literature review provides the essential knowledge and information for the designing stage. By reviewing the prior destination image studies, literatures, salient articles, the author figured out the proper research techniques, relevant questions' construct and content, as well as list of appropriate image attributes for target population. In the second stage, the questions and scale are developed based on the knowledge and documents derived from literature review. The third stage is the

implementation phase where the survey questionnaire is sent and handed to participants. The research process is shown in the figure 12

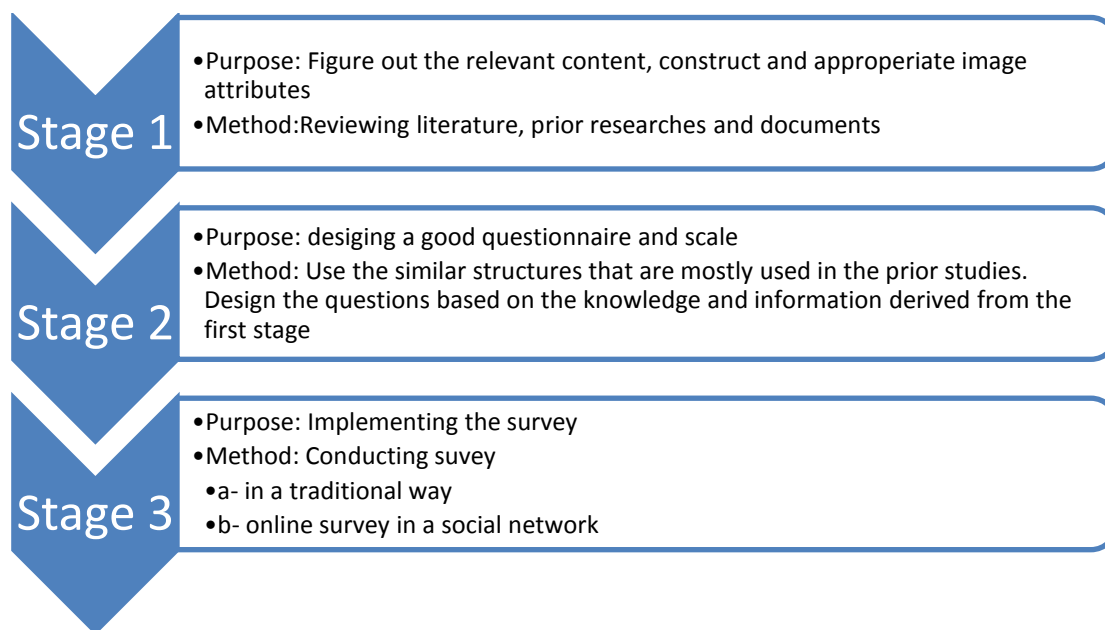


Figure 12: The process of research

In order to maximize the effects of the survey, the author conducted it in two different ways. Firstly the survey was conducted in the traditional way where the paper questionnaires were handed to the participants. Taking chance of Nordic Travel Fair 2013, the traditional survey was implemented during 3 days of the Nordic Fair. Nordic Travel Fair 2013 attracted more than 70 thousand visitors and 1000 exhibitors from more than 70 countries around the world. Approximately sixteen thousand travel trade professionals were present at the fair to introduce their products and socialize with the potential partners/customers. It was definitely a golden chance for author to collect information from Finnish tourists and travel experts. Being a representative for Embassy of Vietnam in Finland during the Nordic Fair, the author had responsibility to introduce Vietnam tourism and support travel agents in consulting guests about Vietnam tourism products. With the permission from Vietnam ambassadors, the author conducted the survey after completing the main tasks in the Fair. The author started to ask the stand’s visitors to fill in the questionnaires.

As the study focuses on Finnish’ awareness of Vietnam destination image, only the Finnish visitors were asked to complete the survey in their free time. Most of the respondents have

visited Vietnam and came to the Vietnam's stand to share their experience and opinion with the young tourism market. Some of the respondents haven't visited Vietnam so they came to search for valuable tourist information and consultancy from the staff. The questionnaire papers were handed to the participants who expectedly spent 5-7 minutes completing the questionnaires. During 3 days at the Nordic Travel Fair, the authors handed the questionnaire to more than 80 participants and received 70 responses back.

The second survey was conducted online on the social network: Facebook. The questionnaire was designed and implemented with the support of the Webropol surveys software. Webropol is a very popular online tool for conducting surveys, collecting information, and analyzing data. Because the English survey questionnaire causes several difficulties for elder Finnish citizens therefore the online survey questionnaire was written in both Finnish and English languages. The Finnish participants seemingly easily shared more experience and personal thoughts with the Finnish questionnaire version. After completing the questionnaire model on webropol, the author posted the link on Facebook which is known as one of the most powerful social networks in the world. Facebook has more than 1.15 billion active users from all over the world by September 2013 (Craig Smith, 2013), hence it's absolutely a great tool for collecting data from the crowds. Besides, one of the most magic features of Facebook is connecting people from different places in the world and spreading news or information only by one click. This great feature allows author gathering information not only from her friends but also her friends' friends and family. The survey questionnaire was sent privately to author's Finnish friends through their Facebook accounts, posted on the author's Facebook wall so every people and their friends can see it. It was then posted on the Facebook's page of the University of Lapland and several popular Finnish communities. The author also asked her friends to send the survey links to their friends so that she can gather as much data as possible. The posting activity was repeated 4 times during 1 month in order to catch the public's attention. After 1 month online surveying, the author received 51 responses which are written in both English and Finnish languages.

In total, the author received 121 responses from the Finnish participants. These responses are primary and priceless sources of information for addressing the research's problems. The analysis method and process will be described carefully in the next part.

5.4. Data Analysis

The data analysis is divided into two main parts: analysis of open-ended questions, analysis of close-ended question analysis- and scale ratings. The paper responses were then added to the Webropolsurvey site to facilitate the analyzing process.

5.4.1. Analysis of Open-ended Questions

The responses to open-ended questions are mostly meaningful texts, phrases and description, hence the main objectives in analyzing these questions were to identify, categorize and label the group of descriptions/words used by the respondents. Then, the author looked at the repetition frequency of the words/description to define the most ubiquitous holistic characteristics and unique traits that commonly hold of the Finnish citizens. Truly, all the words and items are coded and labeled into specific categories/themes. The coding process helped author to identify the similarities and discrepancies among these categorizes. After classifying various descriptions into certain groups, re-coding process was conducted to ensure all the themes and groups are well defined. It is important to note that the specific items or descriptions were also classified into the groups that have the similar theme in general. For example: the respondents may mention the name of the mountain or cultural heritages, consequently these items would be listed in the group of mountain and cultural heritage in general.

5.4.2. Analysis of Closed-ended Questions and Scale Rating

This part analysis was strongly supported by the Webropolsurvey tool where the answers were analyzed directly and shown clearly on the data collection site. The tool is extremely useful as it helped save a lot of time in an attempt to analyze large numbers of responses. The collected data from the closed-ended questions were clearly indicated on the graphs of intensity. The analysis of the scale appeared in the table which displayed the average rate for the attributes items. It is very easy to recognize the most important image attributes by looking at the highest average point in the analysis table. It implies that the items with higher scores have more impacts on the respondent's trip decision making than the items

with the items with lower score. The first two questions (age and gender) were analyzed by traditional way. As the responses are very simple and repeated identically therefore the collected data was sorted into 2 main groups for gender and 4 groups for age. To facilitate the audience in tracking the number of respondents by age and gender, the data analysis will be exhibited in the pie graph.

5.5. Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are two terms that always pop up when discussing and analyzing the study's findings. So what are validity and reliability of this study? And why they are so important? By definition, Validity is regarded as the extent to the research study's results measure what it supposes to measure (Joppe, 2000). In other words, validity determines whether the study measures what the researcher intends to measure. Indeed, it refers to the truthful extent of the study's results. There are two types of validity:

- External validity: is mostly focused on the generalizability of the study's results. It refers to the degree to which the study's findings can generalize or transferable to the whole population.
- Internal validity: regards to the accuracy of the measuring means throughout the research process.

The reliability regards to the consistency of the research's results. Or we can say that the research study is reliable if the results can be repeatable under a similar methodology. In other words, reliability is the extent to which the study's findings are a precise presentation of the entire study's population and definitely consistent over time.

Regarding to the results of this study, they are mainly based upon the responses of the Finnish citizens to the questionnaire survey. In order to maximize the reliability and validity of the results, all the collected information is carefully recorded and analyzed. The sampling process was carefully implemented in order to ensure the generalizable findings for the entire population. Most of the responses are the participant's personal opinions, thoughts, experiences, perceptions and descriptions of Vietnam as a tourist destination; therefore the collected data is a primary source of information for the study analyzing process. The study's findings are directly derived from the primary data to ensure the

truthfulness and consistency in the results. In addition, the collected data is centralizing around the Finnish awareness of Vietnam destination image, thus it definitely meets the criteria of research's problems.

As the study's results are primarily relied on the information collected from sample, it is considered to be valid for a whole group of population at the certain degree. Although, the sample size and the number of respondents are relatively sufficient for generalizing the results, further research is needed to ensure the reliability of the findings. This research is a small effort in defining the Vietnam destination image in Finnish' eyes, so the findings can be served as a preliminary source of information for the future studies in this field. All in all, it is very important to note that the study's results can be generalized to the entire population at a certain extent and under the careful considerations.

6. Findings and Discussion

In this part, the collected data and findings of the study were displayed in the graphs and tables to facilitate the readers easily following the content. All the data are coded and analyzed carefully with the help of Webropolsurvey tool. In addition, the meaningful descriptions are also provided to support the graphs in explaining the contents to the readers. The following sections are clarifications of primary data collected from the survey questionnaire (both paper and online survey questionnaire)

In total, there are 121 Finnish citizens answered the questionnaire on paper and social network site. As illustrated in the figure 13, the majority of survey respondents are the Finnish citizens aged from 24-44 years old. Truly, there are 48 persons in this group actively participated in answering the questions and sharing their personal experience. The group of participants aged from 45-64 years old follows behind with 39 persons. The next group is participants aged from 15-24 years old with 23 persons and 65+ years old with 11 persons. The highest number of participants aged from 45-64 years old strongly reflects the high travel intensity and potential of this group. Whereas, the lowest participation of persons aged 65+ years old is due to the language and health obstacles. The elder persons didn't want to spend so much time on answering unfamiliar questions and completing the survey.

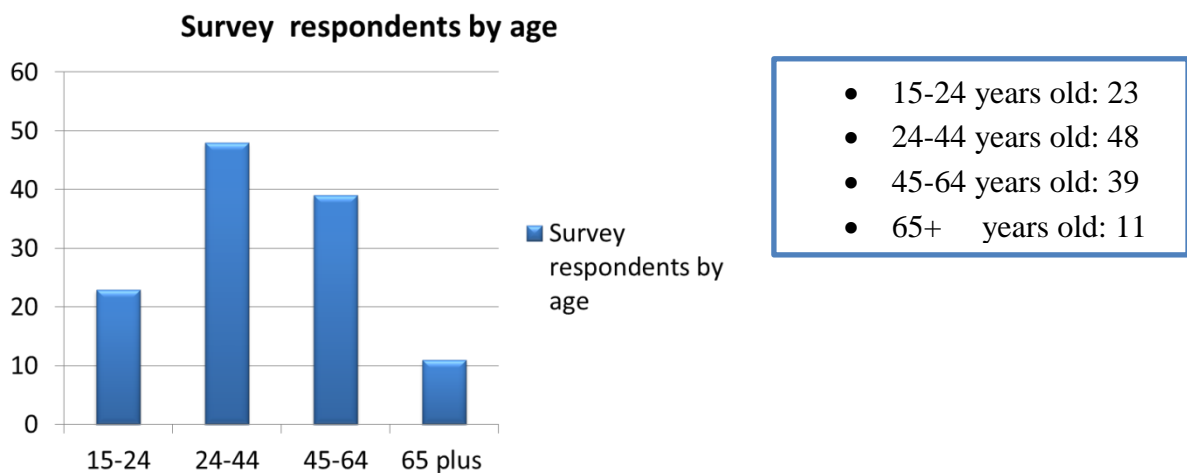


Figure 13 the number of respondents of age groups

The next figure 14 shows the number of respondents by gender. Obviously, female respondents have a much higher participation rate in comparison with male. There are 75 female respondents (accounts for 61 percent) and 46 male respondents (accounts for 39 percent) in the total of 121 participants. In which, 35 respondents have visited Vietnam and 86 persons haven't been to Vietnam for leisure trip (Figure 15)

Survey Respondents by gender

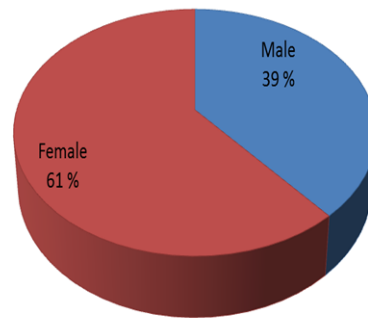


Figure 14: The survey respondents by gender

Respondents Have visited Vietnam

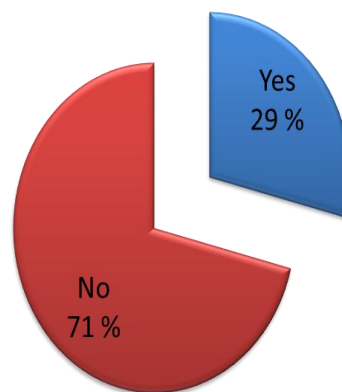


Figure 15: Percentage of Respondents have visited and hasn't visited Vietnam

Regarding to the open-ended questions which are designed to examine the holistic image of the destination in the Finnish citizen's perception, table 1 displays the most frequent image characteristics that are mentioned in the survey responses of Finnish citizens. Most of the respondents have a very positive image of Vietnam as they repeatedly mentioned of

beautiful natural landscape, delicious food, exotic country, friendly local people and nice beaches. Moreover, the respondents also acknowledged that large cities with hectic traffic jam, tropical climate, history and culture are the unique image traits of Vietnam. Indeed, these open-ended questions were very successful in evoking the holistic and unique characteristic of Vietnam destination image because the respondents comfortably expressed their personal impression, experience and thoughts of Vietnam as a tourist destination. The responses to the question 4 (what images or characteristics come to mind when you think of Vietnam as a tourist destination?) are the detailed descriptions of personal experiences which are priceless source of information for discovering the distinctive and unique image of Vietnam as a tourist destination. The responses to the question 5 (Descriptions of atmosphere or mood expected while visiting Vietnam) provided a deep understanding of the mood and atmosphere of the destination that respondents want to experience. In this question, the words ‘friendly, relaxing beaches, tropical weather, hospitable’ are strongly emphasized in the descriptions.

The question 6 encouraged participants listing the unique or distinctive tourist attractions in Vietnam in order to figure out the most highlights places in respondent’s perception. Numerous examples of tourist attractions were named; most of them are big cities, cultural heritages and historical sites. However, some of the respondents replied that they don’t know any specific places as they have never been to the destination. Question 7 showed that the respondents were able to name several high-rated tourist activities in Vietnam such as: historical sightseeing, culture-based tourism and adventure and water sport.

Regarding to Table 1, the most frequent characteristics were categorized into one group and general theme. The most mentioned themes were illustrated with the percentage of repeated frequency. For example: ‘friendly people’ theme not only includes friendly word but also happy, smiling, nice and lovely people words. ‘Good food’ theme also comprises of delicious, tasty, fresh, good cuisine and great food descriptions. In the theme of ‘beautiful scenery’, the descriptions of beautiful landscape, beautiful country, calm place, interesting sites, lovely scenes, nice temples, pagodas are also counted. ‘Beaches and Sea’ theme consists of impressions: clear water, beautiful sea, ocean, beaches, golden sand, and swimming. The theme of ‘tropical weather-warm climate’ also counts the words: sun, warm, hot, humid, wet, tropical, rainforest, moist, mosquitos, sweating, and pleasant climate. In the theme of ‘nature and natural landscape’, the descriptions of nature, beautiful natural landscape, forest, rivers, Mekong Delta and mountain are also included. The theme

‘exotic’ seems to be the only group that solely includes one item. The ‘interesting culture theme’ consists of many items such as authentic, untouched, mystery, culture and interesting Asian. The theme of history mentions to the impressions of historical sites, war, war relics, Cu Chi tunnels, long history. A ‘Crowded cities’ group includes the presence of words: cities’ names, traffic, crowded, busy city life. Last but not least, the words of affordable, cheap price, inexpensive are categorized into ‘cheap country’ theme.

Most Frequent Responses To 4 Open-Ended Questions

Question 4: Image or characteristic evoke when thinking of Vietnam as a tourist destination	
• Friendly people	(73%)
• Good food	(40%)
• Beautiful scenery	(43%)
• Nice beaches and sea	(27%)
• Tropical climate-warm weather	(24%)
• Nature - natural landscapes	(19%)
• Exotic	(18%)
• Interesting culture	(15%)
• History	(12%)
• Crowded cities	(12%)
• Cheap country	(11%)
Question 5: Descriptions of atmosphere or mood expected while visiting Vietnam	
• Friendly-hospitable	(80%)
• Relaxing	(70%)
• Tropical weather	(40%)
Question 6: Please list any distinctive or unique tourist attractions that you can think of in Vietnam	
• Big cities (HaNoi, Sai Gon)	(44.5%)
• Cultural Heritages (Hoian, Halong Bay)	(29%)
• Natural landscapes	(20%)
• Historical sites	(11%)
Question 7: Highlight Tourist activities you think Vietnam is good at	
• Historical sites	(51%)
• Cultural tourism	(50%)
• Nature-based tourism	(42%)
• Beach-Watersport activities	(23%)

Table 1: Most frequent image characteristic themes in the responses of 4 open-ended questions

Overall, the responses to open-ended questions helped to clarify the stereotypical mental image of the destination in term of psychosocial as well as functional traits. In comparison to the scale ratings (Table 2), the open-ended questions’ answers provided more vivid, distinctive, and detailed descriptions. With the standardized format, the scale items measured the important degree of these image attributes in the respondents’ travel decision making. The table 2 indicates clearly the average points for each scale items according to the rating of the respondents. With the highest score, ‘friendly local people’ is the most

important factor affecting tourist's travel decision making to Vietnam. It also implies that 'friendly local people' is the stereotypical mental image of destination that have great influence on the respondents' trip decision to Vietnam. In other words, it is the most distinctive impression of Vietnam in respondents' perceptions. With the same high score, 'diverse offer for food/meal' and 'beautiful natural' are the next important attributes having a great impact on the travelers' destination choice. It indicates the close relation of the mental images of destination in the respondents' perception and their influences on the respondents' travel decision making. The high rated scale items also coincide with the frequent image characteristics in the open-ended questions. Historical site and cultural heritage are the next attributes receiving high concern of the respondents, whereas with the lowest score, transportation system seemingly has less impact on travel-decision making than others. In other words, respondents do not have good impression of the transportation system and it is not the attractive factors pulling them to Vietnam.

Number of respondents: 35

	not important at all	not important	neutral	important	very important	Total	Average
1. historical site	0	1	5	14	15	35	4.23
2. interesting cultural heritage	0	1	3	17	14	35	4.26
3. safe destination	0	4	5	17	9	35	3.89
4. beautiful natural attractions	0	1	2	15	17	35	4.37
5. interesting friendly local people	0	0	2	16	17	35	4.43
6. beautiful beaches and clean sea	0	2	7	16	10	35	3.97
7. diverse offer for local food/meal	0	2	0	16	17	35	4.37
8. pleasant climate	0	1	3	26	5	35	4
9. developed transportation system	1	5	18	9	2	35	3.17
10. good quality accommodation	0	2	8	22	3	35	3.74
11. good quality tourist service	0	4	8	18	5	35	3.69
12. reasonable prices	0	2	6	17	10	35	4
Total	1	25	67	203	124	420	4.01

Table 2: The average scores of Scale Items (Question 8)

The main objective of scale items is measuring the common and attribute-based traits of the destination image. The accommodation, tourist service, transportation system were not mentioned in the open-ended questions. Although these attributes were not frequently mentioned in the holistic impression of destination, it is necessary to examine their important extent in the respondents' perception. As all the scale items are standardized, the responses delivered a broader perception of image information. In comparison, the answers of open-ended questions may pretermite some aspects of the destination image when the

respondents' holistic impressions as well as their stereotypical mental image of destination tend to focus on certain aspects such as friendly people or cuisine.

As discussed in the theory part, the destination image comprises of many components which are considered fall within 3 related continuums: holistic-attribute, psychological-functional and unique-common. These three sets of components together form and govern the image of destination. However, it is extremely hard to present the characteristics of destination image in three-dimension graph therefore these components will be separated into 3 different pairs of components so that it is easier to indicate the collected data in two-dimension graphs. The information from the survey's responses (open-ended questions and scale) is clearly displayed on each of these graphs. Figure 16 shows the functional/psychological and attributes/holistic characteristics of Vietnam image as a tourist destination. In which, the attributes (both functional and psychological) components are mainly derived from the scale items, whereas responses of open-ended questions are the primary source of information for holistic functional and psychological characteristics. The average scores of functional and psychological attribute-based traits were also provided on the left side of the quadrant. On the contrary, the right side of the quadrant was filled with data derived from open-ended questions. The answers to question 4 supplied the functional traits holistic destination image, while information from question 5 produced the psychological characteristics of holistic image. By finishing the questions and scale rating, the respondents actually provided their images of Vietnam in term of destination attributes and holistic components.

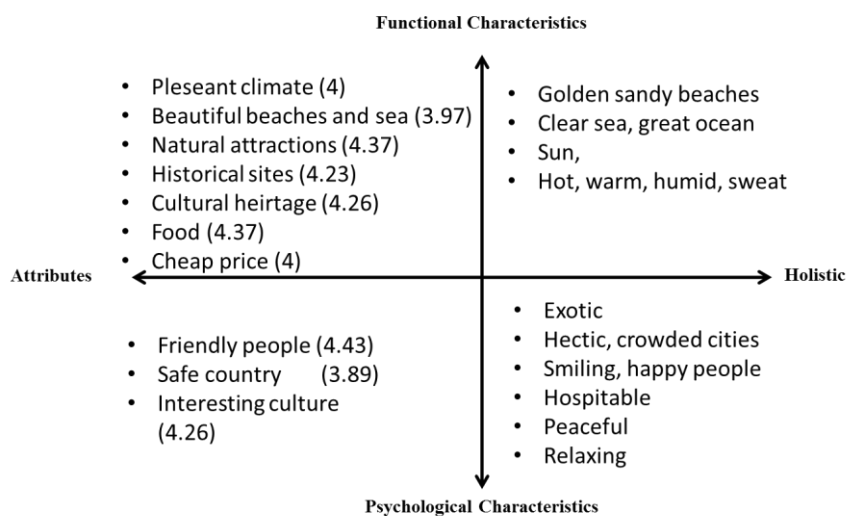


Figure 16: Functional/Psychological characteristics and Attributes/Holistic components of Vietnam Destination Image

Figure 17 presents the functional/psychological characteristics and common/unique characteristics of the destination image. The (functional and psychological) common traits of image are supplied by the scale items on the left side of the quadrant. The scale was an efficient tool in eliciting the common components of image, however it could not help to measure the unique components of the image as the scale items was standardized. The answers' of open-ended questions provided data for defining the unique/distinctive image of the destination (on the right side of the quadrant). The responses of question 6 (distinctive and unique tourist attractions in Vietnam) were the primary source of information for unique and distinctive traits. In the upper right of the quadrant (functional unique characteristics), the golden sandy beaches and tropical climate are obviously a unique characteristic to Vietnam but they can be considered as particular features that help to differentiate Vietnam from other tourist destinations. Regarding to the psychological unique traits of image, the data derived from question 5 helped to reveal the overall distinctive mood and atmosphere of Vietnam.

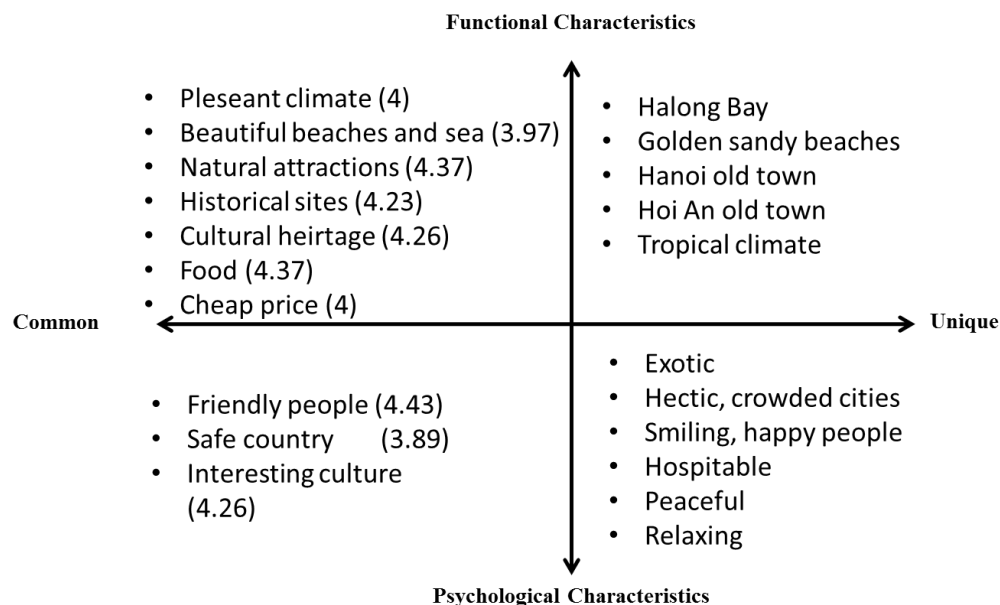


Figure 17: Functional/Psychological and Common/Unique Image of Vietnam

In the Figure 18, the common/unique and holistic/attributes characteristics of the destination image are illustrated. In this figure, the scale items only provided data for the upper left of the quadrant, while the rest parts of the quadrants were filled with the data from the open-ended questions. Although scale items were very productive in measuring the attribute-based characteristics of the image, it could not provide data for the unique attributes of the destination image. The right side of the quadrant showed the holistic image of destination in term of common and unique components. It was a bit difficult to differentiate the common and unique holistic imagery as their border line is very blurred. The most common holistic imagery can include both psychological and functional attributes such as golden sandy beaches, tropical climates or friendly people. The lower right quadrant was filled with the traits that are unique and distinctive to Vietnam.

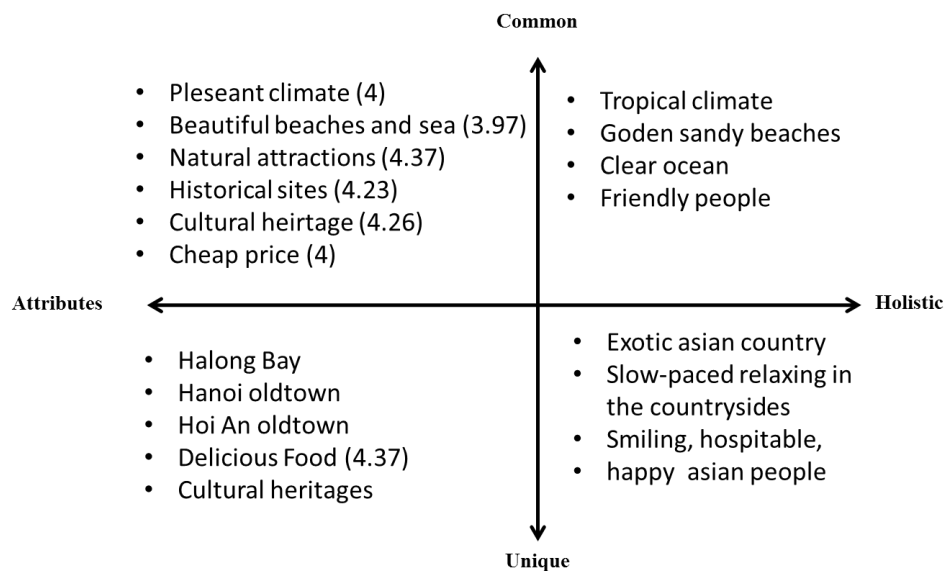


Figure 18: Common/Unique and Attributes/Holistic Characteristics of Vietnam Destination Image

In truth, the overall destination image of Vietnam is a combination and interaction of all of these components: holistic, attributes, psychological, functional, unique and common. The above figures illustrated the image of Vietnam as a tourist destination in a different set of components. Likewise, these figures were displayed to demonstrate that it is extremely needed to use different combined methodologies to capture the complete image of Vietnam as a tourist destination.

The question 9 was designed to figure out the satisfactory extent of respondents for their previous Vietnam trip. This question is only aimed for the respondents who have visited Vietnam. As illustrated in the figure 19, most of the respondents were quite satisfied with their previous trip in Vietnam, while five of them were extremely satisfied. Three respondents were neither satisfied nor disappointed as they experience several negative things in Vietnam. However, there are no respondents complaining that they were not satisfied and were disappointed with their Vietnam trip.

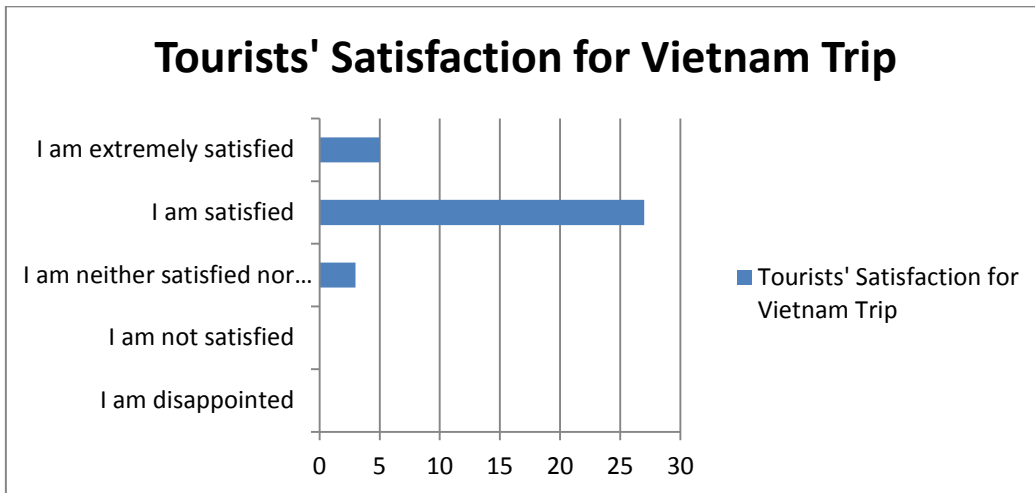


Figure 19: Satisfaction level of respondents for their previous trips in Vietnam

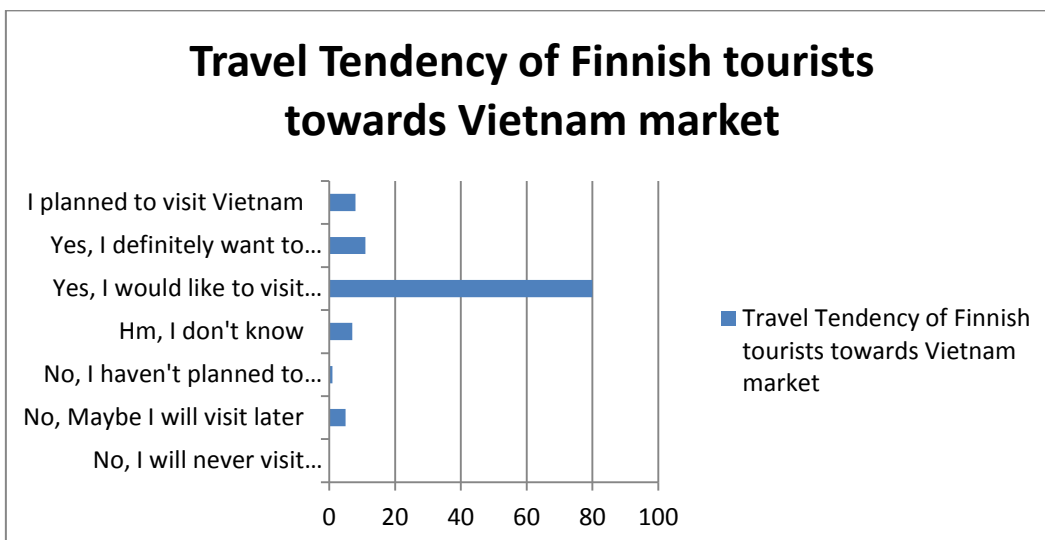


Figure 20: Respondents' travel tendency to Vietnam in the future

Question 10 aims to find out the travel potential and tendency of Finnish tourist towards Vietnam market in the future. Figure 20 presents the number of respondents with their travel tendency to Vietnam. In which, 80 percent of respondents expressed that they would like to visit Vietnam, and 4 percent of them stated that they have planned to visit Vietnam on defined date. Furthermore, eleven people, who have visited Vietnam before, stated that they definitely want to come back Vietnam as they have great experience in their previous trips. Few respondents mentioned about the travel possibility to Vietnam but they weren't sure that they can make the trip in the near future.

Regarding to question 11, several negative factors that may prevent Finnish tourists from coming to Vietnam are illustrated in the figure 21. There is also the small open section at the end of the question so that the respondents can add more reasons which may be overlooked in the above section. According to the Finnish respondents, one of the most negative factors limiting them from travelling to Vietnam is the long distance between two countries. The shortest distance from Vietnam to Finland is 8200 km but tourists have to make a transit flights at the third country on the way to Vietnam. That's why it makes the journey from Finland to Vietnam longer than its actual geographical distance. Normally, it takes around 18 flight hours from Finland to Vietnam; it is truly a long travel time for a leisure trip. The second prominent reason is the high travel cost due to the pricey airplane ticket and long travel distance. The next reason is the lack of marketing and tourism information about Vietnam tourism in Finland. The respondents complained that there is very little tourism information about Vietnam in Finland and Vietnam is not marketed well in Finland. Hence, Finnish tourists experienced difficulties in finding sufficient travel information of Vietnam.

Nevertheless, there are not only the internal factors but also external factors affecting Finnish people's travel tendency to Vietnam. Some respondents said that they would like to have leisure trips in other destinations rather than Vietnam. Referring to Southeast Asian destinations, respondents claimed that there are many wonderful places and they prefer going to these destinations. It strongly indicates the weaknesses of Vietnam tourism when compared with other popular places in Asia. Few people expressed that they are not interested in Vietnam as a tourist destination and few others complained about the bad services, infrastructure and accommodation. In the open section, the respondents raised the question of safeness in Vietnam as they experienced some bad situation in their previous

trips. Moreover, the level of hygiene was also emphasized as one of the negative reasons that may influence the tourists' travel decision making to Vietnam.

All in all, among many negative factors, the most highlight reasons that may influence the travel potential of Finnish tourists to Vietnam are: the long travel distance, expensive air ticket and lack of Vietnam tourism information in Finland.



Figure 21: Negative Reasons limit Finnish from travelling to Vietnam

The question 12 is actually an open section for all respondents to suggest the improvement ideas for Vietnam tourism. There are numerous suggestions for improving Vietnam as an attractive destination. As mentioned in the negative reasons, there is lack of Vietnam tourism information in Finland; therefore the respondents couldn't find sufficient information about travel packages, tourism activities or attractions in Vietnam. They also said that the image of Vietnam as a tourist destination was not well advertised and promoted in Finland, hence the Finnish people admittedly are not well aware of Vietnam as an attractive destination. According to respondents, the first and most necessary thing in improving this situation is promoting and advertising the image of Vietnam as a tourist destination in Finland as well as providing more helpful travel information to Finnish tourists. One respondent stated in his comment that he has never seen any advertisement of

Vietnam tourism in Finland public areas or media. Some people commented that they are very interested in the place but they don't know much about the travel possibilities, package offerings or valuable tourism information about Vietnam. They mentioned that Vietnam should have travel representatives in Finland so that tourists can find more reliable travel information and country information as well. Indeed, Vietnam should highly boost the marketing and advertisement for tourism in order to catch the public attention and raise the local's awareness of Vietnam image as a tourist destination. Respondents also suggested that 'the authentic and exotic image' of Vietnam in marketing campaign could help to attract more tourists to the place. In short, the destination image of Vietnam should be more visible in Finland and the tourist information should be spread broadly. Furthermore, Vietnam tourism board should cooperate well with the local travel agencies in offering varied tourism products for local people. In the broader senses, Vietnam should focus strongly on branding and marketing so that it can be differentiated among other wonderful and popular Southeast-Asian destinations.

Another highlight suggestion is more convenient transportation route between Finland and Vietnam. The long haul flight makes tourists afraid of travelling to Vietnam therefore the better flight offers and better flight connections probably help to attract more Finnish tourists to Vietnam. Regarding to the tourism condition in Vietnam, the respondents said that the better quality of accommodation and tourism services could help to improve the current situation. Other suggestions relate to the improvement of waste management, nature and environmental protection as well as tourism services' quality. There were several feedbacks complaining about the language skills and professionalism of tourism labor force. Therefore, they suggested the primary thing need to be done in the tourism improvement plan is equipping the tourism labor force with necessary English language skill so that they can guide and communicate well with tourists.

7. Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction part, this paper is a part of thesis work in the Master Program in Art, Culture and International Management at University of Lapland. The core aim of this paper is to present the process, methodologies, relevant literatures and results of the research which author was interested in studying about it throughout 6 months. The research was centralizing around ‘the perceived destination image of Vietnam in Finland’ therefore the main research objective is measuring ‘The Finnish people’s image of Vietnam as a tourist destination.

Firstly, the literature review was conducted to reinforce the author’s knowledge in the field of the destination image and collect valuable theoretical background for supporting the research implementation. In order to have a profound understanding of destination image, the author actively reviewed the salient theory, previous studies and articles concerning to the destination image conceptualization and formation. In addition, the author also had a close review of the destination image’s major components and prominent measuring methodologies. The influential factors on the pre and post- visited destination image were also presented and explained in detail. The theoretical review actually helped author in understanding the nature of destination image and figuring out the effective measuring and analyzing methods for her own study. The general information about Vietnam tourism and its relation with Finland was provided to facilitate the readers in following the research data collection and analyzing process. The experimental study part included the detailed description of research methodology, sample, data collection, data analysis and findings. The main aim of the study is to examine the Finnish people’s perceptions of Vietnam destination image. By using structured and unstructured questions as well as scale to collect data, the author was able to gather abundant valuable information from respondents.

There are totally 121 respondents who enthusiastically shared their perspectives and experience of Vietnam image as a tourist destination. When the respondents completed the survey questionnaire, they actually revealed their overall image of Vietnam. The data derived from the responses of open-ended questions helped to generate the overall image of Vietnam in term of holistic and unique characteristics. Admittedly, Finnish people have very positive image of Vietnam although many of them have never travelled to Vietnam. Most of the respondents have an overall stereotypical image of Vietnam as a country has:

friendly local people, delicious food, beautiful natural landscape, nice beaches, tropical weather and epic war. Among all of those characteristics, 'friendliness' is highlighted as the first image in the respondents' impression whenever they think of Vietnam. The 'friendliness' trait also received the highest score in the Scale items rating, which means it is the most influential factor on the travelers' decision making to Vietnam. Undoubtedly, the 'friendliness' image is the first and the most important component of the overall image of Vietnam as a tourist destination in Finnish people's perception. Surprisingly, the next impressive image of Vietnam in Finnish' eyes is the tasty and healthy local food. Furthermore, they also impressed with the golden beaches, cultural heritages and natural landscapes in Vietnam. In brief, Finnish people hold very optimistic holistic image of Vietnam as it is a beautiful tropical country with nice beaches, tasty food, hospitable Asian people, diverse natural landscapes and rich culture. The respondents' answers also helped to deduce the unique image of Vietnam such as Hanoi old town, Ha Long bay, smiley Asian people, tropical country with delicious food.

The scale is a productive tool in eliciting the attribute-based and common characteristics of Vietnam destination image. The scale rating is aimed to measure the influential extent of different attribute items on the travels decision making. Based on the scale average score, friendliness, local food and diverse natural attractions have the most powerful impact on the travelers' trip decisions. In other words, they factors are considered as the primary reasons pulling them to Vietnam. Furthermore, the respondents also rated several common attributes which could not measure in the question part such as accommodation system, quality of service and accommodation. The low average scores indicate that the respondents did not highly evaluate these items because of bad performance. In other words, Finnish respondents thought that the transportation, infrastructure and services are not well developed and managed in Vietnam. In the broader sense, the scores of the scale items reflect 'how good these attributes in the respondents' opinions'. Derived from data of scale items, the attribute-based and common images of Vietnam in Finnish peoples' perception are: friendly local people, diverse local food offers, pleasant climate, interesting culture, beautiful beaches, cheap price, moderate quality infrastructure and services, inconvenient transportation system.

The overall image of Vietnam as a tourist destination includes combination and interaction of many components therefore it is not easy to capture all features. In an attempt to produce a preliminary understanding of destination image of Vietnam in Finland, author

would daringly define the fundamental overall destination image of Vietnam based on the survey collected data: ‘Vietnam is a beautiful Asian country with friendly people, delicious food, interesting culture, beautiful natural landscape, tropical weather, numerous nice beaches, unique world heritages, war relics, old towns and affordable price. Contrasting to the relaxing atmosphere at the countryside, the big cities are characterized by crowds and traffic jams’

However, the awareness of Vietnam destination image in Finland is still very weak and vague. Most of the respondents said that they rarely see the Vietnam tourism advertisement in Finnish media and public area. In the Finnish people’s perception, Vietnam is relatively new tourist destination and it is increasing popular in Finland. However, the destination image of Vietnam is sadly not well noticed and aware in Finland. The lack of advertisement and travel information are the main causes for this situation. Thus, Vietnamese tourism board should strongly promote and advertise the image of Vietnam as an authentic and exotic Southeast Asian destination in Finland. They should implement different advertising strategies to catch the public attention and create a strong destination image of Vietnam in Finland. When Finnish people have a good image of Vietnam, they would want to know more about the place. Indeed, the first essential action is making Finnish People aware of Vietnam image as a tourist destination. In addition, Vietnam also needs to be really active in providing reliable, valuable and helpful tourist information to Finnish people. Participating in the international travel fairs, cooperating with local agencies and setting up travel representative offices in Finland are the effective ways to approach the Finnish tourist market and deliver valuable information to the potential travelers. Moreover, Vietnam needs to take into account the tailor tourist services for Finnish market so the tourism products are well suited for the Finnish tourists. Information about country’ economic, politic, safeness, hygiene, and environmental conditions and especially tourist attractions should be widely spread throughout country so that the Finns have a general understanding of Vietnam at the current stage.

Although Finnair has attempted to operate direct flight from Finland to Vietnam, this offering is only for a short period of time. The direct route actually facilitated tourists in travelling from Finland to Vietnam conveniently, therefore it is very necessary to have frequent direct or transfer flight routes. Vietnam should encourage the cooperation and coordination between different airlines so that tourists will have more options for flight routes. The destination image is not only constituted by the holistic characteristics but also

the attribute-based components. Hence, the current condition of tourism industry is one of the key elements in forming the Vietnam destination image. Despite the increased number of international tourists in recent years, the development of Vietnamese tourism industry is still at a snail's pace. To be competitive in the regions, Vietnam needs to have a strategic sustainable development plan. In which, infrastructure and transportation systems need to be concerned and improved properly to maximize the convenience during tourists stay. It is essential to have effective service management strategies to ensure the adequate quality of services, accommodations as well as transportation at the tourist attractions. As human resource is always the core factor in the tourism industry, the proper education and professional training programs should be developed and provided to tourism labor force. It is important to note that language skills should be regarded as a must-have-skill for all tourism staffs. With the skilled staffs, tourism industry promisingly provides higher quality of tourist products and services. Last but not least, waste management is also a vital issue in the sustainable development of Vietnam tourism. The government, local authority and tourism board should develop an effective waste management plan to protect the ecosystem, natural resources and environment which are considered as crucial assets of tourism. In addition to management programs, it is also needful to raise awareness of tour operators, local people and tourist in proper littering. Besides, the image of clean and environmental-friendly country always leaves positive impression in tourists' perception of Vietnam.

All in all, this paper provides fundamental understanding of Vietnam destination image in Finland and the awareness extent of Finnish people of Vietnam image as a tourist destination. The paper also presents the influential degree of several image traits on travelers' decision making as well as preliminary suggestions for future Vietnam tourism development. Thus, the study definitely can serve as a solid information base for any further researches in the field of destination image, country branding, marketing strategies of Vietnam in Finland.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1: The Research Outline.

Figure 2: The seven phase model of travel experiences.

Figure 3: The components of destination image.

Figure 4: A model for conducting destination image research.

Figure 5: Model of the formation of destination Image

Figure 6: The map of Vietnam

Figure 7: The number of tourists in Vietnam period 2001-2012

Figure 8: The number of international tourist arrivals in Vietnam in 2011 and 2012

Figure 9: Logos of Vietnam tourism in different periods

Figure 10: Number of Finnish Tourists in Vietnam period 2006-2012

Figure 11: Question 7: the scale attributes items

Figure 12: The process of research

Figure 13: The number of respondents of age groups

Figure 14: The survey respondents by gender

Figure 15: Percentage of Respondents have visited and hasn't visited Vietnam

Figure 16: Functional/Psychological characteristics and Attributes/Holistic components of Vietnam Destination Image

Figure 17: Functional/Psychological and Common/Unique Image of Vietnam

Figure 18: Common/Unique and Attributes/Holistic Characteristics of Vietnam Destination Image

Figure 19: Satisfaction level of respondents for their previous trips in Vietnam

Figure 20: Respondents' travel tendency to Vietnam in the future

Figure 21: Negative Reasons limit Finnish from travelling to Vietnam

Table 1: Most frequent image characteristic themes in the responses of 4 open-ended questions

Table 2: The average scores of Scale Items (Question 8)

Appendix 2: Paper Survey Questionnaire

1. Age:

2. Gender:

3. Have you visited Vietnam? Yes / No (If No, Skip the question 8 and 9)

4. What images or characteristics come to mind when you think of Vietnam as a tourist destination?

5. Descriptions of atmosphere or mood expected while visiting Vietnam (ex: relaxing, friendly-hospitable, tropical...)

6. Please list any distinctive or unique tourist attractions that you can think of in Vietnam.

7. What kind of tourist activities you think Vietnam is good at offering (ex: historical sightseeing, cultural experience, adventure...)?

8. If you have visited Vietnam, Please rate how important are these following characteristics in your travel decision-making. (1= not important at all, 2= not important, 3= neutral, 4= important, 5= very important)

a. historical site	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
b. interesting cultural heritage	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
c. safe destination	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
d. beautiful natural attractions	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
e. interesting friendly local people	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
f. beautiful beaches and clean sea	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
g. diverse offer for local food/meal	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
h. pleasant climate	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
i. developed transportation system	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
j. good quality accommodation	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
k. good quality tourist service	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
l. affordable prices	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5

9. Are you satisfied with your previous Vietnam trip?

10. Do you want to come to Vietnam in the near future?

11. Suggestions to develop Vietnam as an attractive tourist destination.

Appendix 3: Webropol Survey

(English version)

Internet Link:

<https://www.webropol-surveys.com/Answer/SurveyParticipation.aspx?SDID=Fin634872&SID=8ad91d5c-e534-4638-b1fb-0d68159d6d89&dy=1401889660>

(Finnish Version)

Internet Link:

<https://www.webropol-surveys.com/Answer/SurveyParticipation.aspx?SDID=Fin636244&SID=3c546cc8-9559-426b-8920-21bb4ee40e66&dy=1703974255>