Doctoral Dissertation Summary

Projected and Perceived Images of Vietnam

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This dissertation presents the findings of five studies on the projected and the perceived images of Vietnam. In the preliminary stage, three independent studies were conducted (1) to summarize the development of place image studies from 2008 to 2012, (2) to distinguish four similar concepts of place attachment, sense of place, community attachment, and sense of community, and (3) to develop an integrated scale to measure the life-satisfaction construct.

Within the five main sub-studies, the study on the projected image of Vietnam targeted the collection of 54 logos of provinces and cities. Two arts students in Hanoi were employed to content analyze the logos. The counting of the frequency of attributes recognized in the logos revealed that the natural, cultural, and symbolic attributes dominated the projection of Vietnam's image. In terms of the colors, red, blue, yellow, and green were the most popular ones, which can generate positive emotions. However, the focus of the creation was to express as many symbolic meanings as possible (i.e., province/city's nature, culture, history, and tradition). Therefore, the abstract images in many logos could not properly perform their roles as the simple means of communication toward the target audiences, especially those who don't reside in or don't have enough background knowledge about the province/city. These findings generate important implications for the creation of logos in both national and provincial levels, especially those logos used periodically (i.e., national tourism logo), and those will be created. Accordingly, the pictorial elements of the logos should be easy to understand. The affective aspects of the logos should not be overlooked because they can create emotional connections between the audience and the logos in particular and the province/city in general.

The sub-study on the perceived image of Vietnam utilized the answers of 882 respondents (international tourists = 367; foreign residents = 169; local residents = 346). Applying ANOVA and cluster analysis techniques, the sub-study found that the perceivers' evaluations of the country image were not similar, and each group of perceivers was not homogenous. The findings suggest that several attributes can be emphasized in the communication campaigns targeted the international tourists, for example, "natural

landscapes/scenery," "world heritage sites," "cultural activities," "history," "architecture," "foods," "safety, security," "people's friendliness," "ways of life," and "proximity to other destinations in Southeast Asia." The management of the country's image should consider the improvement of some key attributes, including facilities (transportation, accommodations, restaurants), tourist attractions (nightlife/entertainment, shopping), and hospitality (prices, cleanliness, service quality). These attributes were not highly favored by many international tourists, and poorly evaluated by the majority of local and foreign residents. Therefore, they are the actual weak points of Vietnam tourism in particular, and the development of the country in general. This outcome urges stronger efforts to cope with and address the common issues that a developing country has been facing, for example, facilities, attractions, hygiene, and service quality.

To further understand the importance of the country-image construct, three independent studies were implemented with the three populations. The study with the international tourists (n = 350) addressed the relationships among country image, tourist motivation, trip satisfaction, and tourist loyalty. Applying the structural equation modeling technique, this study found that country image significantly and positively predicted tourists' overall satisfaction with the trip, and their loyalty to Vietnam in the future. Implications for the management and communication of some important attributes of the country were generated. The management and communication of Vietnam's image as a tourism destination is not the sole job of the tourism industry. This process requires an incorporated effort of construction management, education, communication, and tourism sectors, among others. However, the tourism ministry should perform its own functions and its coordinating role properly in order to fully exploit the country's tourism potentials.

The study with the foreign residents (n = 206) examined the relationships among country image, country attachment, life satisfaction, and country attachment. Pair-wise deletion was adopted to handle the missing values in the data. The outcomes of regression analysis advocate the important roles of the affective components of psychological constructs (i.e., country image, country attachment, and life satisfaction). Foreigners' perceptions of "transportation and cleanliness" significantly affected their evaluation of "health and safety" (life satisfaction), and their intention to recommend the country to their friends and family (loyalty). Therefore, the improvement of these attributes of Vietnam may produce positive and significant effects on country attachment, life satisfaction, and loyalty of its foreign residents.

The study with local residents investigated the relationships among country image, emotional solidarity, life satisfaction, and support for tourism. The outcomes of structural equation modelling analysis on the sample of 306 responses confirmed the existing literature by revealing the role of country image as a predictor of life satisfaction, and of emotional solidarity as an antecedent of support-for-tourism. When tested separately, country image and life satisfaction were found to have significant effects on support for tourism, while emotional solidarity could generate a significant influence on life satisfaction. These results provide important implications for the management of several social and tourism issues in Vietnam. Accordingly, the improvement of the appearances and performances of the country as a tourism destination not only helps attract more tourists but also advance local residents' life satisfaction. In addition, Vietnamese local residents demonstrated a "welcoming nature" toward international tourists and foreigners. This is a firm base for the development of tourism in particular.

In summary, the three groups of respondents shared some similar perceptions of Vietnam (i.e., safety). International tourists and foreign residents had some common impressions of culture, history, and cleanliness. These findings suggest that the projection and communication of Vietnam image to the international tourist and foreign resident targets should focus on the cultural/safety themes. Currently the theme of cultural values has been emphasized in the provinces/cities' logos. However, the logos could not project the impression of a safety country. Thus, future communication efforts should highlight this particular image of the country using other means of communication.

The three independent studies with international tourists, foreign residents, and local residents didn't test the same theoretical model. However, they were grounded on a similar theoretical framework, and hypothesized similar paths between/among the constructs. Specifically, these studies measured the relationships among country image, other psychological constructs (tourist motivation, country attachment, emotional solidarity), satisfaction (trip, life), and attitudinal/behavioral intentions (revisit/return, recommend, support). The results revealed that the psychological constructs could play the predicting roles with satisfaction, and attitude/intention. Moreover, satisfaction can act as the mediating variable between other psychological predictors and attitude/intention. The psychological constructs also had significant correlations with one another (e.g., country image and tourist motivation, country image and country attachment, and country image and emotional solidarity). These outcomes suggest some implications for both commercial and societal marketing. Specifically, it urges marketers and/or practitioners to consider the psychological

aspects of their customers and/or targets (e.g., residents in the case of social marketing) to make them satisfied with their products/services, consequently, to win over their loyalty and/or support.