

Evaluation of Official Tourism Websites of ASEAN Destinations

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Abstract:- The purpose of the study is to preliminarily assess the positioning of four official tourism websites of ASEAN—Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand by the method of content analysis. The findings provide implications for ASEAN destination marketers of the country in evaluating destinations.

Keywords:- ASEAN Destination, Brand Element, Website, Official Tourism.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, internet becomes an important advertising medium in the tourism industry (Wu, Wei, & Chen, 2008). With the increasing use of the internet for tourism promotion, travelers generally decide on which destinations to visit based on the information available to them online (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Xiang and Fesenmaier 2006).

The challenge of branding destination lies within the complexity of the decision process on the part of tourists (Buhalis, 2000; Chen, & Tsai, 2007; Prebensen, Woo, Chen & Uysal, 2013). This paper aims to provide a preliminary assessment of brand positioning of 4 countries in ASEAN on how they project their official tourism websites using the method of content analysis. The units of analysis are 4 official tourism websites of member countries in ASEAN region—Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

➤ *ASEAN as a Travel Destination*

ASEAN stands for Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the term includes 10 member states in Southeast Asia which are Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia. Out of the 10 countries, 8 destinations in 5 countries are ranked among the top 20 destinations in Asia Pacific by international overnight arrivals: 1. Bangkok (Thailand) ranked first, 2. Singapore ranked second, 3. Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) ranked third, 4. Phuket (Thailand) ranked sixth, 5. Bali (Indonesia) ranked eighth, 6. Pattaya (Thailand) ranked tenth, 7. Siem Reap (Cambodia) ranked thirteenth, 8. Phnom Penh (Cambodia) ranked nineteenth, according to the MasterCard Global Destination Cities Index in 2016.

➤ *Online Destination Branding*

An important tool for creating destination brand image is e-marketing and especially the websites of the tourism destinations. Given almost every destination uses a slogan as the focus of positioning (Pike, 2009) the use of effective tagline and logo of a destination increase the potential to attract international visitors to the region. As Pike points out that in supporting marketing efforts, many Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) have developed logos to enhance the destination's image and DMO managers tends to equate the development of destination logos and associated "taglines" with the more comprehensive process of destination branding. Furthermore, Pike states that the name of the destination is the key destination brand, ironically, in most cases, the name cannot convey an explicit association with the position sought in the travel markets (Pike 2005). Government tourism websites or the websites organized by NTOs are the most powerful travel promoters for destinations because the scopes of their marketing efforts are at the national level (So & Morrison, 2004).

III. METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The overall approach for the analysis is content analysis, a research method that is used to systematically evaluate the symbolic content of all forms of recorded communications (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991). The unit of analysis includes the official tourism websites of four tourism destinations in ASEAN—Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. These destinations are chosen as the unit of analysis due to their competitive position in the global market (Master-Card Global Destination Cities Index, 2016) as competing destinations can serve as a frame of reference required for defining a position. The contents of the websites were retrieved on June, 2018. Table 1 shows the logos, slogans as featured in the official tourism websites. Table 2 provides the results of the content analysis of the homepage. Further analysis on the visual, verbal, and graphic images projected on the official tourism websites are included in the discussion section.





Country & URL	Slogan	Logo
Indonesia www.indonesia.travel	“Wonderful Indonesia”	
Malaysia www.malaysia.travel	“Truly Asia”	
Singapore www.visitsingapore.com	“Passion Made Possible”	
Thailand www.tourismthailand.org	“Amazing Thailand”	

Table 1

Official Tourism Homepage	Indonesia	Malaysia	Singapore	Thailand
Logo and slogan appeared on homepage	*	*	*	*
Brief textual description of destination		*	*	*
Photograph of the destination	*	*	*	*
Click on icon or graphic to enter site		*	*	*
Moving or changing text			*	*
List of internal links		*	*	*
Possibility of selecting the language	*	*	*	*

Table 2

IV. DISCUSSION

➤ Indonesia (www.indonesia.travel)

Official tourism website of Indonesia, with the slogan “Wonderful Indonesia”, offers information about its country, people and tourism. The content analysis of keywords from the homepage of Indonesia’s official tourism website shows 7 keywords which are Indonesia (3), Bali (3), treasure (2), beach (2), paradise (1), wonder (1), event and festival (1). The keyword finding and the promotional graphics as shown on the homepage suggest that the tourism of Indonesia mainly focuses on beach destinations. However, when compared with the other pages of the site, other pages seem to have a diverse focus. For example, the ‘Experience 5 Wonders’ page features a wide ranges of destination categories, ‘Nature, Scenic, Landscape & Wildlife’, ‘Culinary & Wellness’, ‘Arts, Culture & Heritage’, ‘Recreation & Leisure’ and ‘Adventures’.

It should be pointed out that in addition to the official tourism website, www.indonesia.travel, where it displays its official slogan “Wonderful Indonesia”, other NTO websites are found such as, the Official Bali Tourism Board Website, www.balitourismboard.or.id, and the website of Visit Indonesia Tourism Officer, www.visitindonesia.co.in. These multiple official tourism websites all display their own logos or slogans and may hinder the development of tourism of Indonesia as a whole.

➤ Malaysia (www.malaysia.travel)

The official tourism website of Malaysia uses “Truly Asia” as a slogan to promote the country’s tourism. From the content analysis of the relevant keywords found in promoting the brand image of Malaysia’s official tourism website are explore (3), wonders (2), secret (2), events (2), experience (2), sports (2), culture (1), heritage (1), activities (1), performances (1), adventure (1), festival (1) and exhibitions (1). The homepage features variety of changing images, from pictures of wild animals, shopping malls, hiking, to cultural dances. There are also sections with pictures and clickable text ‘Find out more’. From the findings, it does not show any keyword that forms the brand slogan of Malaysia, ‘Truly Malaysia’, however, it may be implied that Malaysia Tourism tend to focus on event and festivals, as most of the visuals and promotional keywords used in homepage centers around festival and events, with a large section of ‘Event Highlights’ showcasing ‘Kuala Lumpur Fashion Week 2018’, ‘Rainforest World Music Festival’ and ‘11th Sabah Women Art Exhibition’. At the left corner, online visitor can choose between ‘Corporate’ to visit ‘Tourism Malaysia Website’ or continue to navigate on the homepage under ‘Holiday to Malaysia’. It is expected that the ‘Corporate’ section would cater to the needs of corporate or business travelers. Instead, the corporate site contains mostly news from Tourism Malaysia with other sections seem to be redundant with the ‘Holiday to Malaysia’ site or the homepage. Surprisingly, the corporate site features a section on ‘Start Discovering Malaysia, Truly Asia’, showing the brand slogan of Malaysia which is missing from its homepage.

➤ Singapore (www.visitsingapore.com)

The official tourism website of Singapore, with the slogan, “Passion Made Possible”, seems to highlight what to see and do in Singapore. Information includes sections with ‘See & Do, ‘Festivals & Events’, ‘Eat & Drink’, ‘Shop’, ‘Stay’, ‘Traveller Essentials’, ‘Deals’, with hidden subheadings on each section and many clickable texts such as ‘We’re where passion is made possible’ and clickable graphic sections such as ‘Foodies’, ‘Explorers’, ‘Collectors’, ‘Socialisers’ and so on. The frequency counts find the relevant keywords as passion (3), culture (3), passionate (2), foodie (1), (2), entertainment (2), culture (2), buzz (2), performances (2) mice (2), spa (1), cuisine (1), beauty (1), culinary (1), nature (1), sport (1), colorful (1), museums (1), exhibitions (1), fashion (1), food (1). The site is full of information, pictures and features, yet it is still unclear on the intended projected image of official tourism of Singapore with its slogan “Passion Made Possible”.

➤ Thailand (www.tourismthailand.org)

The official Tourism of Thailand, showcases its long time slogan “Amazing Thailand”. The site features 4 sections ‘Where to go’, ‘Things to do’, ‘What’s on’ and ‘Trip Planner’ with hidden subsections. At first glance, the first section catching the attention of online visitor contains the tagline ‘Open to the New Shades’ and the picture of ‘Kam Tok Island’ showing the location as ‘Laem Son National Park, Ranong’ which is rather an unknown destination for most global tourists and the destination is not

in the list of world's top destinations of Thailand. The next section features 'Events & Festivals' and is divided into 12 months. The later section is divided into 5 regions 'North', 'Northeast', 'East', 'Central' and 'South' with the list of 17 destinations of the North on top. The relevant keywords and the frequency counts found are Thailand (5), Mekong (4), Pattaya (1), Chiang Mai (1), Kamphaeng Phet (1), Lamphun (1) Nakhon Sawan (1), Phayao (1) Phicit (1), Phrae (1), Tak (1), Uttaradit (1), Chiang Rai (1), Lampang (1), Mae Hong Son (1), Nan (1), Phetchabun (1), Phitsanulok (1), Sukhothai (1), Uthai Thani (1). The keyword finding presents Thailand as a region or location based destination. Due to the design of the website, only destinations on the north provinces are appeared, while online visitor can further click on 4 other regions to find information on destinations across Thailand. However, it may be overlooked by potential tourists and interpreted as featured destinations.

V. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Destinations that promote themselves well enough using effective positioning will also be distinguished among competitors. As Pike (2009) states that brand positioning reinforces one or few destination attributes that travelers perceive as positive. From the above analysis, the inconsistent use of logos and slogans with multiple projected destination images indicate weak evidence of the brand-building elements. As emphasized by Pike (2005) that in effectively position a destination, it requires a narrow focus, with one or a few projected images.

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