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### Brand strategy of the Big4 tourism companies in Vietnam

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#### Abstract

Travel is an important sub-sector in tourism. Occupying a large share of the total tourism market and being the key to the international tourist market, it can be said that Vietnamese travel businesses have a great influence on the formation and development of the industry. tourism. As a bridge between tourists and local service providers, tour operators have a role to play in influencing the management and use of resources at the destination by influencing decisions. service choices of tourists, performance of service providers and ways of development of destinations. Therefore, with Vietnam, tour operators can influence a large proportion of international tourists in terms of the choice of accommodation facilities, attractions, means of transportation, level and form of travel. interactions with

local residents and the natural environment. But today, there are many travel businesses that are increasingly formed and developed, providing services and serving people to places. And these businesses are very competitive with each other and build a brand strategy to promote their travel business. To find out what the brand strategy of travel businesses is different. And the four major travel agencies in Vietnam selected for the study are VIETRAVEL, SAIGONTOURIST, BEN THANH and THIEN MINH. And on the basis of analyzing the brand strategy at four travel agencies in Vietnam in recent years, from which the essay will propose some recommendations and developments to improve the brand quality of businesses.

**Keywords:** Brand Strategy, Big4, Tourism Industry, Tourism Companies, Vietnam

#### 1. Introduction to the problem

Currently, international economic integration is an inevitable trend of the world economy. This trend has taken place at a rapid pace. International integration brings tourism service businesses in general and travel service businesses in particular to many opportunities but also many challenges. In order to take advantage of opportunities and overcome these challenges, travel businesses need to develop policies to actively integrate to effectively promote the synergy of the economy, enhance high competitiveness in the market. One of those policies is to build a brand strategy. Brand not only plays the role of a characteristic of goods and services, positioning businesses, is a factor for businesses to affirm their position, but also a valuable intangible asset, a symbol of health. potential and strength of the national economy. Thus, it can be affirmed that the role of the brand for businesses, especially travel service businesses, is very important.

Our country is in the process of industrialization and modernization of the country, developing in the direction of opening up, international integration, in order to improve competitiveness and be able to stand firmly in the market, travel businesses need to must build for themselves a sustainable brand in the hearts of consumers. Building a brand is a process that requires constant efforts and appropriate investment of the business. The process of building a brand is not only about designing and building, but also paying attention to how that brand can become a strong brand. A strong brand will provide business opportunities and leverage for other activities, seen as the basic weapon in competition.

In a fiercely competitive economy, the main business activity of a travel agency is to constantly improve the quality of traditional products, exploit new products, and carry out construction, development, and advertising activities. advertise that brand in the market. Managers not only want the company's products to be popular with consumers in the market, but also make consumers have feelings, loyalty, and preference for the business's brand. From there, customers will come back to use your products more. However, according to the change of living environment and economic conditions, customers are not only interested in product quality but also interested in its accompanying value. That is, when consuming a product, customers not only want the quality of that product, but they also want to buy a product - something that helps them affirm their value and class to those around them. For a business doing business in the field of travel when the product is invisible and consumers can only feel it after using the service, the brand element is an extremely important factor - making for customers to trust and use

the services of the business. Therefore, brand strategy is the first factor that affects the success or failure of businesses, especially travel businesses. Below, we will analyze and compare the brand strategy of Big4 travel companies in Vietnam (VIETRAVEL, SAIGONTOURIST, BEN THANH, THIEN MINH) and make recommendations to help businesses develop their brands better.

## 2. Theoretical basis

Today, a brand is more than just a label affixed to a product. A successful brand must also have a distinct identity in the mind of the customer. Brand equity is intangible, but it is invaluable for a business, especially for travel businesses. From organizations of all sizes to individuals, branding is one of the most important strategies. Because the brand is very important, not only countries and large corporations have to build brands, but even small companies from the beginning of their formation must also focus on branding. Thus, we can see the role of brand strategy in the success of businesses in general and travel businesses in particular. But to be able to build a brand strategy for travel businesses, we must first understand what a brand is?

Brand is a very important factor for the success of a business, but today there are many concepts of "brand" that are understood differently by each researcher and from many different angles.

From a marketing perspective, according to the American Marketing Association (AMA, 1960) defined: "*Brand is a name, symbol, sign, design, or combination of all elements. this element so as to be able to identify the goods or services of one seller and to distinguish it from the goods or services of other sellers*". A brand is also a seller's commitment to provide consumers with products that are characteristic of the company in terms of features, benefits and services.

From the perspective of intellectual property, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO, 2009) "*A brand is a special sign (tangible and intangible) to identify a product or goods. or service produced or provided by an individual or an organization*". Therefore, a brand is used to help customers distinguish a company's goods or services from those of competitors.

Philip Kotler, a marketing guru, believes that: "*Brand can be understood as a name, term, symbol, design, or a combination of them, used to identify the goods and services of one seller and to differentiate them. differentiate it from competitors' products*" (Kotler & Keller, 2012).

A brand is a product or service that helps an organization distinguish its product or service from others (Kotler, 2012). The role of brand becomes important to the organization as it translates into loyalty and higher profits in the long run. We can think of a brand as the idea or image that people have in mind when thinking about a company's particular products, services, and activities, both physically. Thus, it is not only the physical characteristics that make up the brand, but also the emotions that consumers develop towards the company or its products. This combination of physical and emotional cues is activated upon exposure to a name, logo, visual identity, or even the message being communicated.

"Branding is giving products and services the power of a brand" (Kotler & Keller, 2015). Branding is the process of giving meaning to a particular organization, company, product or service by creating and shaping a brand in the minds of consumers. It is a strategy designed by organizations to help people quickly identify and experience

their brand, and to give them a reason to choose their product over a competitor's, by how to clarify what this particular brand is and which is not. Branding helps both consumers and manufacturers create a win-win situation. Brand to consumers, it helps to identify the source of the product manufacturer and at the same time assigns responsibility to an organization for the product bearing the brand, the customer's experience with the products of the same brand. Brands help them quickly decide if they want to continue with their purchase decision, make it easier for them to make a decision, brands offer them a certain level of quality assurance. Brand to company, brand provides legal protection to unique features or aspects of a product, brand loyalty helps organizations retain their existing customers while diversifying from one product line to another. It provides security for demand and creates a barrier for other manufacturers to easily access existing customers.

Companies can charge a premium for owning a brand that drives profit per sale. Products can be copied, but brands cannot. Once a brand is established, it is an invaluable asset to an organization. A well-established brand adds to the overall value of the company while calculating its net worth. Organizational branding helps businesses provide a clear image, and personifies the values of that organization (Chernatony, 1999).

Branding is the process of promoting selected images (Gold & Ward, 1994) in order to build a favorable reputation (Anholt, 2007). Branding plays a role in almost every sphere of life, including "political, social and cultural, formal and informal, private and public" (Anholt, 2010).

Building a travel brand in general or building a tourist destination in particular is an invisible "product", tourist destinations in particular depend on location brands to attract tourists. As Morgan and Pritchard (2000) note, the battle for customers in the travel industry will not be a battle of price but of hearts and minds, where branding will be the key to success. It is important that brands not only represent a set of images to promote products or places; they are about trust and respect (Bell, 2005). The meanings, symbols, and values that brands stand for (Berthon, Holbrook, Hulbert, & Pitt, 2007) "not only reinforce the identity and uniqueness of the destination, but also reassure people, habits, values, and values. values and symbols of their own culture, thus preserving... the 'status quo' of the place" (Campelo, 2011). As such, branding is a powerful tool to convey a preferred image of a product, service or real place (Aitken, 2011; Campelo, 2011; Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2004). A strong, positive brand image helps locations differentiate themselves from others (Kotler & Gertner, 2002, 2004; Kotler, Jatusripitak, & Maesincee, 1997). The defining and differentiating functions of brands (Aitken & Campelo, 2011) make them a powerful influence on consumers' thoughts, attitudes and behaviors (Heilbrunn, 2006). A strong brand can "allow for high pricing, as well as market segmentation that can communicate a consistent message to a target group of customers" (Berthon, Holbrook, Hulbert, & Pitt, 2011). Therefore, brand strategy is an important factor that determines part of the success or failure of a business. According to Johnson and Scholes in Exploring Corporate Strategy: Text and Cases, Financial Times/Prentice Hall, "Strategy is the direction and vision of an enterprise in the long-term, through which the enterprise can gain an advantage. through its resources in a competitive environment to meet market needs and investor

expectations". Strategy can also be understood as a set of activities designed to create a sustainable competitive advantage. Brand strategy is the construction and management of customer concepts and thoughts in order to create a meaningful image for the brand. A brand strategy is a long-term plan designed to build a brand with the mission of achieving specific business goals.

The issue of building a brand strategy in travel business activities plays an important role. Travel is basically understood as a tourism activity with the main purpose of making trips for subjects from one place to another through the use of different means and from different reasons. Different, it is not necessary that subjects will need to return to the original starting point. Travel business means carrying out the stages of organizing market research and selling the results of that research in the form of intermediaries or indirectly to representative offices of the organization. Brand strategy helps travel businesses promote their images and brands more easily, thereby reaching more customers, helping to improve brand awareness; make a difference, in business always have a plan to build a difference for the brand, to have a firm foothold in the market requires businesses to dare to be creative, to dare to be different and to stand out; Maintain customer loyalty, deliver great customer experiences. To do so, businesses build and apply an appropriate brand strategy.

### 3. Research Methodology

Research object: Big4 travel enterprises VietTravel, SaigonTourist, Ben Thanh, Thien Minh.

The research methods used in the essay are based on the understanding of the brand strategies of four pioneering enterprises, VietTravel, SaigonTourist, Ben Thanh, and Thien Minh in the field of tourism and travel. The specific methods are: theoretical data statistical method, data synthesis and analysis method on the strategies of big4 travel agencies, comparative method used to compare the strategies of the 4 travel agencies. enterprise.

The first is about the statistical method of theoretical data: Use this method to make statistics of data from which to select data for the research topic. Find out information about the strategies that big4 uses to position and promote its brand to customers, specifically here are marketing development strategies,...

Next is the method of analysis, comparison, synthesis: From the selected data, then further analyze the brand strategies of the 4 travel agencies above, then use the comparative method. compare strategies. Finally, summarize all the data analyzed and compared, draw conclusions and complete the article.

In addition, the article also uses methods such as: History used to introduce as well as the development process of each of the above businesses. Methodology uses the theoretical basis to give the views, importance, strengths and weaknesses of Big4.

The research topic is based on the theoretical basis of the subject of Brand Management to help us better understand the brand management of VietTravel, SaigonTourist, Ben Thanh and Thien Minh, besides helping us to have an overview of the brands. strategies to develop and position the brands of the four enterprises mentioned above.

From the above methods, the results have been given to evaluate and study the basic contents of the topic.

## 4. Research Results and Discussion

### 1. Vietravel

#### ▪ Product

Vietravel always focuses on the best quality in each of its products. That is what creates the brand and is also the factor that attracts customers. The company has launched many tours that are responsible for the community and the environment. With the promotion policy, we always improve service quality. Vietravel has always affirmed its position as the leading brand in tourism in Vietnam's tourism market.

#### ▪ Client

Vietravel's customers help the brand grow by giving positive reviews of the services the company provides, sharing travel experiences, recommending friends and relatives about Vietravel, and reusing services. company in the next trip. Satisfied and trusted customers will help Vietravel create a good brand and develop sustainably in the tourism market.

#### ▪ Position

Vietravel is one of the leading tour operators in Vietnam and ranks first in the list of the largest tour operators in Southeast Asia.

#### ▪ Scale

Vietravel with a scale of operations spread across the country and internationally. Vietravel Company has more than 20 years of experience in the field of tourism and has now developed into a multi-industry business, including travel activities, flight booking, hotels and tourism investors. On Vietravel's website, the company claims to have more than 40 sales offices nationwide.

#### ▪ Power

Vietravel's resources in the travel industry include: Professional, experienced and well-organized staff. System of branches, representative offices and partners nationwide and internationally.

The investment and use of modern technology with tourism management software, website system and mobile application.

#### ▪ Technology

Vietravel has applied the development of technology and the Internet through two versions of selling tours online on two platforms: computer and mobile phone. Vietravel has invested in building an advanced and user-friendly website and mobile application. In addition, Vietravel also created two new forms of advertising named: Famtrip and Presstrip. In particular, Famtrip is the trip mainly for foreign tourists, they will come back to experience the life of Vietnamese farmers. Presstrip is a trip for journalists to survey travel, both to introduce and promote the place, and to promote the image of the brand.

### 2. SaiGon Toutist

#### ▪ Product

Saigon tourist company creates unique products, has its own imprint of Saigontourist compared to other travel businesses. At the same time, improving the quality of new products creates the trust of tourists with their business and it is a factor creating the prestige, reputation and brand of Saigontourist in the domestic and foreign markets.

#### ▪ Client

Improve service quality and create good customer experience: Brands need to ensure service quality and create a good experience for customers to increase their

satisfaction and reliability. Offer attractive incentives and promotions to attract returning customers and make a difference from competitors to affirm the Saigontourist brand.

▪ **Position**

Saigontourist Travel Service Company has always been voted the number one title of the leading international travel in Vietnam and the top of the leading domestic travel in Vietnam.

▪ **Scale**

Saigontourist is one of the major travel companies in Vietnam, with a nationwide scale and many activities in the field of tourism. The company provides services related to travel and tourism, including domestic and foreign tours, transportation services, entertainment services and hotels and restaurants.

▪ **Power**

Abundant resources, professional team

With more than 1,000 officers and employees working at the head office and branches and transaction offices across the country, Saigontourist Travel system gathers an abundant, experienced and creative human resource.

▪ **Technology**

Technology has helped the Saigontourist brand to grow by improving the customer experience through the provision of online services such as hotel bookings, air tickets, tours and other entertainment activities. In addition, Saigontourist has also used technology to manage its business using strict booking and management systems to optimize operational performance.

3. Ben Thanh

▪ **Product**

Ben Thanh Tourist's products are diverse, including tourism-related services and products such as domestic tours, international tours, flight bookings, hotel bookings, car rentals, etc. Book tickets to visit famous tourist attractions, provide customer support services such as guides, airport transfers,...

Thanks to these products and services, Ben Thanh Tourist has built a better brand.

▪ **Client**

Satisfied customers can leave positive reviews on the company's website or social media sites, customers can share their travel experiences on social networks, tag BenThanh Tourist and recommend company to their friends and followers. These reviews can help attract new customers looking for travel services to promote the company's brand.

▪ **Position**

Ben Thanh Tourist in the tourism industry is one of the leading travel agencies in Vietnam, has built a solid foundation, affirming the position of Top 10 leading travel companies in Vietnam.

▪ **Scale**

The company has more than 20 years of experience in the field of tourism and has built a wide network of agents and customers, the system of Ben Thanh Corporation always meets the increasing needs of tourists. domestic and international.

domestically and internationally. Ben Thanh Corporation has invested in a system of accommodation and resorts stretching from the North Central Coast to the South, including 25 hotels and resorts with 2,337 rooms, managed by major corporations in the world such as Accor, Marriott,

Norfolk Group, Centara.

▪ **Power**

Ben Thanh Tourist Company owns a team of highly qualified and experienced staff in the field of tourism. The company owns many different means of transportation such as cars, planes, boats, bicycles... to meet the needs of customers.

▪ **Technology**

Designed based on modern technological achievements, BenThanh Tourist's new professional tour management and sales platform contributes to helping the company exploit the maximum potential of tourism development in the 4.0 era. This platform also allows BenThanh Tourist to quickly access essential information and transaction history of customers at the company, thereby offering products and services that match the interests and needs of customers.

4. Thien Minh

▪ **Product**

Thien Minh Tourism Joint Stock Company provides a variety of tourism products including domestic tours, international tours, air tickets, hotels and airline services. In addition, the company also organizes special tours such as art tours, sports training tours and professional travel training programs. The products of Thien Minh company have contributed significantly to the company's brand in the field of tourism.

▪ **Client**

Every year, Thien Minh welcomes about 90,000 tourists and serves about 200,000 guests staying at the group's hotels. With such a large number of customers, if customers are satisfied with the quality of the company's services, they can recommend the company to others and attract more new customers, while helping the company promote its products and services. trademark.

▪ **Position**

From a small tour office more than 28 years ago, it has now risen to become one of the leading groups in the tourism and hotel industry in the region.

▪ **Scale**

Over 20 years of experience in the field of tourism, Thien Minh's scale is quite large, diversified business activities from hotels, travel services, online travel, aviation, destination management, investment with branches and agents are also expanded in many different provinces.. The large scale of the company will contribute to the prestige and brand of the company to customers and partners.

▪ **Power**

Thien Minh currently has about 2000 experienced full-time employees at branches. This is a team of experienced human resources in the industry as well as closely associated with the company. There is a collective leadership of the Board of Directors and sets of employees who unite to strive and dedicate themselves to the development of Thien Minh, especially the leaders who are experienced and work oriented. clear strategy.

▪ **Technology**

Thien Minh Tourism Joint Stock Company has applied technology in management by deploying hotel and tour management software, providing online booking and air ticket services, creating websites and applications. Mobile application makes it easy for customers to find information and book tours. The company also uses new technologies such as AI and chatbots to enhance the customer experience.



In addition, the company used the website to promote the image and brand. From the process of analyzing product factors, customers,

position, scale, resources, technology of 4 enterprises. Below are the comparison results of the brand strategies of Big4 of travel agencies in Vietnam.

**Table 1:** Comparison results of the brand strategies of Big4 of travel agencies in Vietnam

<i>Big4</i>	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Weakness</i>
<i>Vietravel</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Big brand</li> <li>- Staffs are well-trained, reputable and experienced leading tour sales network and wide PR channels</li> <li>- Good financial potential</li> <li>- Have a Foresight</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High Tour Price Low Profit.</li> <li>- Personnel</li> <li>- Passive about the service provided</li> <li>- Slow Claims Resolution</li> </ul>
<i>Saigontourist</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Get support from outside</li> <li>- Good leadership and management skills.</li> <li>- Built a brand in the market</li> <li>- Strong human resources, professionally trained.</li> <li>- Strong human resources, professionally trained</li> <li>- Lots of industry experience</li> <li>- Strong promotional campaign</li> <li>- Reputation with customers</li> <li>- Large scale, good infrastructure</li> <li>- Cost advantage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Massive investment, lack of selection leads to inefficiency</li> <li>- Service quality is not uniform</li> <li>- Arbitrary price increase</li> <li>- Lack of pilgrimage tours</li> </ul>
<i>Tourist wharf</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Make good use of the inherent competitive advantages of the industry and enterprises</li> <li>- The ability to promote and position the brand well</li> <li>- Diversity of products, tours as well as product quality</li> <li>- Long-term business experience</li> <li>- Good service quality and reputation</li> <li>- Trusted partner network</li> <li>- Reasonable price</li> <li>- Highly qualified managers and guides</li> <li>- Staff have good foreign language skills</li> <li>- The attractiveness of service packages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Uneven infrastructure</li> <li>- The trend of sustainable development is not high</li> <li>- Lack of linkage of the whole tourism industry, with the locality and the domestic trade and entertainment industry</li> <li>- Tourism promotion (Vietnamese tourism marketing, advertising and promotion activities lack professionalism)</li> <li>- The ability to exploit tourism products is still limited</li> </ul>
<i>Thien Minh Tourism</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strong financial strength</li> <li>- A well-known brand in the industry</li> <li>- Providing outstanding products and services</li> <li>- Dynamic young human resources</li> <li>- Understand demand, forecast demand in advance, proactively control distribution channels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Investing in services that no one has yet provided should be risky.</li> <li>- Expanded investment capital into new major fields.</li> <li>- Young staff from many countries lack loyalty.</li> <li>- Diversified portfolio should have many risks, especially financial</li> </ul>

From the above comparisons, we can see the following common problems:

**Strength**

The common point of these travel Big4 is that they have strong financial potential, the human resources are usually experienced people and already have a lot of business experience in the profession. Because they have a lot of experience, they can promote their inherent capabilities or competitive advantages. In addition, with their age, these brands are already available on the market, so they are often selected and used by service users.

**Weakness**

The companies all have a team of knowledgeable employees, but the quality of service for customers is really not equal inside and out in general and companies in particular.

Besides, these tour operators lack a way to choose services so that customers have more choices and the business of many areas or investing in too many places without being selective is also a weakness of these companies. .

**5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

**5.1 Conclusion**

After presenting the research results and discussion, the following conclusions have been reached:

For business enterprises, building and providing services to customers and being trusted by customers is a very important task for the company.

The article has clearly analyzed the advantages of four pioneering brands in the field of travel and tourism, and also pointed out the limitations of each of the above businesses. Analyze the problem of subjective factors directly related to businesses such as: Quality of products that businesses give out, modern technological factors used by businesses. Analyzing and clarifying the issues of size, customer quality, .... From the above conclusions, Big4 travel businesses have been strongly asserting themselves. Affirming its position and brand in the field of travel and tourism services.

Besides, we also constantly improve services as well as overcome problems that affect the brand and face of the business.

**5.2 Recommendations**

For VietTravel businesses, it is necessary to promote solutions to overcome the disadvantages of price as well as the speed of response to customer complaints.

On the side of SaigonTourist, it is necessary to be selective and cautious in investing in services to avoid risks, develop more services as well as diversify types of tours.

Ben Thanh Tourist also needs to improve its ability to exploit products and services, promote development and advertise more widely.

Finally, about Thien Minh Tourism, investment is diversified, so it is easy to encounter risks, it is necessary to overcome this problem soon.

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