Practice of Online Marketing with Social Media in Tourism Destination Marketing

The case study of VisitSweden, Sweden

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The paper seeks to provide insights into the application of internet communication technologies with social media in tourism industry from the perspectives of destination marketing organizations (DMOs), evaluating their effectiveness for tourism destination marketing management. The specific purpose is to uncover the important role online marketing with practice of social media to build the destination brands and engage the audience to reach potential visitors.

Design/methodology/approach: Qualitative case-study method generates understanding of approach on digital innovation in DMOs’ marketing. In-depth interview allows exploration of how online marketing strategies with practice of social media used in destination branding processes and engagement of the audience.

Findings: DMOs need to realize the role online marketing and social media activities in marketing tourism destination and engage the audience to reach the potential visitors. Social media as one of internet communication options is an area of growth in the online marketing communication.

DMOs need to emphasize the wide participation in online marketing and social media activities to achieve benefits. DMOs have to be in the place where the visitors are. Integrating online marketing and social media activities with traditional marketing is an essential marketing strategy for today’s DMOs.

Practical implications: Understanding the role of online marketing and social media in building destination brands and creating audience’s engagement may contribute to the success of marketing strategies and correspondingly to the destination’s ability to increase the competitiveness.

Research limitations/implications: This study offers the contributions to the need of creating online marketing strategies and leveraging social media activities. However, it probably suffers from the fact that it has been conducted in a specific DMO. Therefore it would be evaluated in comparison with the results of other DMOs to generalize the patterns.

Originality/value: The study contributes to debates on the use of social media in destination marketing, the value of the study lies in a new approach to the role of online marketing and social media focusing on building destination brands.

Keywords: Online marketing, social media, Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), VisitSweden
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Södertörns University, 16th June 2011

Viet Hung Nguyen

Zhuochuan Wang
For the time we live and study at Sweden!
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1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to give an overview of the topic with the scope of research and to provide readers an outline of the paper. It begins with the discussion about the background and research problem, along with the study objectives and research questions. The boundaries of the study subject are also mentioned. Finally, an outline of the study is presented.

1.1. BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM DISCUSSION

We are living in the age of real-time information and communication spreading all over the world. By June 31, 2010, 29% of world population is using internet. (Internet Usage Statistics, 2011). Moreover, these internet users are much more connected than ever. The customer no longer receive the information passively or listen direct personal recommendation. The visitors could gather travel experiences, advices by attending the travel forum, asking questions to have answers instantly from people at the destination or any corner of world. They have already been engaged and interacted with the information channels and social virtual communities without any borderlines. The vast development of the buzz words such as Google, Facebook, video-sharing website Youtube, blogs and micro-blog such as Twitter are the most efficient evidences, considering as the heart of change in the communication channel and the virtual social life.

According to Brand-Finance (2011), the world’s most comprehensive brand value survey called The BrandFinance® Global 500, has ranked Google as the most valuable brands across all major markets. Google, the dominant website of information search engine sector, is the most valuable brand in the world ($44.3 billion), edging Microsoft ($42.8 billion) into second place. The report shows that the people are increasing dependence on the internet in the world that is reflected by Google’s position at No.1. By the time of writing this paper, Facebook exceeds 500 million active users to become the most famous social networking website (Facebook company timeline, 2011) more than the population of the United State as the third most populated nation in the world. The development of these digital information technologies forces firms, organizations to focus on it as one the key aspects to compete in the international marketplace.

In the new global economy, the rapid growth and diversification of tourism over the years have become a worldwide phenomenon and affected significantly the national economies. These increasingly considerable effects of tourism are not only on overall economic activities, but also on communities. (World Tourism Organization, 2010). Within the tourism activities, tourism destination is a crucial and fundamental element of the tourism system where most of significant and dynamic elements of tourism occur. (Cooper, Fletcher, David and Wanhill, 1998). Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) plays an important role in the tourism development and marketing of the area. Since the late 19th century and for most of that time DMOs have played an effective role in the development.
of tourism worldwide. (Pike, Destination Marketing Organizations, 2004). The marketing strategies and its implementation are the backbone of destination’s activities. Together with long-time traditional marketing tactics by using marketing campaigns, events and so forth to build the destination brands gradually and reach the potential visitors, DMOs could take the advantages of internet communication technologies and the development of social media to market the destination as the distinctive online marketing strategies. The term of online marketing could be called in different ways in its evolution process such as e-marketing, digital marketing, internet marketing or web-based marketing. World Tourism Organization and European Travel Commission (2008) showed that the purpose of online marketing is to exploit internet and other forms of digital communication to correspond with target markets in the most cost-effective way. Online marketing should not be a separate activity, must be an integral part of the marketing program of DMOs. Internet has become an increasingly important means of promoting and distributing tourism services. An online platform of DOMs can be created through the reciprocal linking of websites, where customers can access information and purchase multiple components of a holiday online. (Palmer & McCole, 2000) Online marketing is a relatively new aspect of strategic implementation. It expands rapidly and becomes very important to nearly all types of businesses. Online marketing might be considered as a functional aspect of marketing strategy. (Natekin, 2010). Online marketing offers DOMs the realistic potential to reach a far wider audience than ever before. (Vella & Kester, 2008)

Social media is still in its inception because of its constant evolution with the up-to-minute development of internet and information technologies. Social media is essentially one of the communication channels. Therefore, it has the potential influence to the customers. However it needs to be planned and defined as a distinctive strategy. The controversy about the practice of social media and how to adapt them in different economic sectors have raged unabated at this time. According to a 2009 report from Altimeter Group, the company deeply engaged in different online social media channels, grew in revenue by 18% over the last year while companies that were least engaged dropped in average 6% of revenue over the same period. (Li, 2009).

Debate continues about the best strategies of leveraging online marketing and social media for the management of DMOs. Within the academia environment, there have not been many researches and the practical demonstration of online marketing and social media in the tourism studies in general and the destination marketing management in particular.

In 2010, the proposal for national strategy for Sweden tourism to 2020 was published since it has emerged on the initiative of Sweden tourism in dialogue with other industry stakeholders as well as the demand of promoting the brand of Sweden globally. The strategy proposal was conducted by Swedish Tourism AB (Svensk Turism AB) in cooperation with the Swedish Hotel and Restaurant Association (SHR), VisitSweden, Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Tillväxtverket), Swedish Airports (Swedavia AB), Stockholm Visitors Board , Sweden’s Network of Regional Tourism Organizations/West Sweden Tourism Council (Nätverket Sveriges Regionala Turistorganisationer/Västsvenska Turistrådet) with assistance from the Swedish Board of Agriculture (Jordbruksverket) (Nilsson, 2010). There are many aspects that concern both among the industry organizations, destinations and individual companies with many focusing areas and strategic objectives. The need for marketing and promoting the Sweden tourism destination is also mentioned in the proposal which proves partly the strategy of
Sweden towards the development of tourism industry in general and the destination marketing management in particular in the next decade.

This study uses the case study of VisitSweden, that is the Swedish national tourism marketing organisation, owned equally by the Swedish Government (via Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communications) and the Swedish Tourism Industry. The company has indentified their marketing assignment to focus on the international marketing of the Swedish brand and Swedish destinations and experiences. (VisitSweden website, 2011) As other DMOs, VisitSweden is making an effort in integrating digital marketing within their traditional marketing techniques. The company is partly involved in social media marketing by building the social media platforms to strengthen the brands and reach potential visitors. The report in VisitSweden’s Devblog in 2007 showed that by the time of lunching an official online community, VisitSweden used social media as one of the strategies for promoting Sweden brands and engage the online community with an attempt to reach potential visitors. The community was linked directly to VisitSweden.com the Sweden’s official tourism website, was the first one to focus on entire country with interactivity and user-generated contents (Devblog, 2007).

1.2. PROBLEM DEFINITION

The internet and other new technologies have changed most of the industry from service, industry to business sector on an unprecedented scale. Tourism industry is not an exception. Internet information is now one of the important influences to the customer decisions in many major markets. The tourist tends to book travel trips, arrange their air ticket and accommodation as well as find the information of destination in travel forum, online group or social networking website in the internet. As a result, it is clear that the internet and new information technologies have become a priority for both tourism enterprises and DMOs. Travellers have become increasingly knowledgeable and sophisticated as they could know about their destinations before arriving destination by searching information in travel blogs, asking questions on travel forum to get instant answers. Social media has also gradually changed tourist’s behavior in finding information from asking travel agent’s advices to that of asking friends and peer reviews, word of mouht through social media networking websites and other source from internet.

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and European Travel Commission (ETC) (2010) showed that the national tourism organizations (NTOs) need to find the solution of remaining relevant and useful to potential visitors in the digital age. The web 2.0 environment requires NTOs to change their mindset in implementing marketing communications. It need to be involved in more active and transforming activities to leverage the destination brands in the competitive situation when destination marketing has become increasingly competitive and less differentiated as more countries compete with similar branding and positioning strategies. Tourism destination around the world needs to acknowledge the importance of their brand as the source of international competitiveness.

Recently, The Singapore Tourism Board has changed and refocused the Singapore destination brand from “Uniquely Singapore” (used from 2004 to 2009) to “YourSingapore” (lunched on 5 March, 2010). (YourSingapore Wikipedia, 2011). At the heart of the campaign is a holistic digital approach that includes online marketing strategies such as a new website, significant investment into search engine marketing,
blogger engagement, mobile, social media and travel e-commerce. The success of this campaign has not been revealed and will be answered in the future.

Obviously, it raises the question for DOMs that what will be the outcome of adaptation to apply online marketing strategies with social media activities as one of internet marketing communication channels in building brands, engage audience and reach potential visitors, and how to practice these marketing tactics to achieve the successful results. To contribute to the limited research, this paper provides an insight online marketing and the use of social media for DOMs to consider. The focus is the approach to examine the role of online marketing for today’s tourism destination marketing and to develop and monitor social media platforms as one of efficient marketing communication options, in doing so, the DOMs could build destination brands and acquire more audience to reach potential visitors.

1.3. PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

By assessing the existing theory and up-to-date situation of online marketing and social media in business and tourism sector as well as in the context of DOMs, the authors aim to contribute an understanding online marketing and digital communication channels with social media as one of marketing communication options in destination marketing. The research focuses on discussing and analyzing the role of online marketing with the use of social media in marketing destination. Leveraging online marketing and social media to convince DOMs that social media as one of marketing communications tools is a necessity in building and strengthening destination brands as well as engaging audience and attracting potential visitors. Therefore, the aim of the research is to answer the following questions.

- Online marketing – why it is essential for today’s tourism destination marketing?
- How do destination marketing organizations (DMOs) build destination brands through social media?
- How do DMOs use digital social media platforms to engage the audience to reach potential visitors?

The answer of research questions is to contribute to the knowledge of online marketing and social media in destination marketing management. It helps destination marketing director or destination manager review their destination marketing strategies and social media approach to adjust suitable marketing strategies. Understanding the character of online marketing tactics and social media and confronting them with efficient strategies may contribute to develop more attractive tourism products and create more innovative tourism campaigns. In addition, the topic correspondingly interacts with the potential growing area of mobile marketing, geo-location with advertising and mobile applications in the mobile devices, thereby enabling DMOs to have more competitiveness.

1.4. BOUDARIES
Choosing the case study of VisitSweden, we have found that the case study of VisitSweden will be appropriate to answer our research questions because VisitSweden – The official tourism board of Sweden acts as DMOs is responsible for promoting the Sweden’s brands internationally. Moreover, VisitSweden are also putting the internet communication technologies with online marketing strategies and social media as one of the strategic development. The company is participating to some degree in social media activities by using the social media platforms such as official online community of Sweden, Facebook fan page, Twitter, blog. Choosing this particular case study, the research results may only be valid for specific DMOs, which would make replication studies in other DMOs to take more generalized conclusion. Therefore, for more conclusively generalized suggestion a more extensive investigation is required.

1.5. ESSAY OUTLINE

The thesis is designed into five major chapters. The first chapter gives the reader a considerable background in an extensive literature study in the field of online marketing, social media in business and tourism sector as well as points out the problem discussion and the objective of the research. Research boundaries are also introduced.

The second chapter is the research methodology demonstrating the qualitative research method with the use of interview as the main method to obtain the primary data. The quality of research is also mentioned.

The third major chapter of the research is the literature review that is built to narrow down the scope of extensive theory. The literature review will help the reader to have a better understanding of the subject and it is directly used to relate and discuss the empirical data.

The forth chapter is the empirical study. The empirical data was collected from the interview with the person who is related directly to the topic of research. In addition, we combine interview with examining the company’s web site contents and the official blog of development (Devblog) and VisitSweden CEO’s blog (VDblogg) which are directly connected to the issue of online marketing and social media activities that are being done at VisitSweden and the official online community of Sweden for the purpose of verifying and analyzing to achieve our analysis and conclusion.

The last chapter of the research is the analysis and conclusion. In the analysis we discuss our findings from both of our research questions and the theoretical study. We analyze our findings in two dimensions. First we have some of conclusions from the literature study, and then we examine and discuss the empirical data from the interviews in relation to relevant theory from the literature study. Finally, we discuss the empirical study in relation to the general findings and conclusions from the literature study and make conclusions for the research. The conclusion also gives the reader the recommendations for further research and indicates limitations of the study.
2. METHODOLOGY

The intention of this chapter is to provide the reader a brief description of a range of strategic research approaches and methods used for collecting data. The authors made a choice of using the appropriate qualitative research method to answer the research questions. The chapter starts with the research approach giving our research strategy and defining clearly our choice of research method, then followed by method of secondary and primary data collection, and method of data analysis. This chapter ends with our awareness of research validity and errors.

2.1. RESEARCH APPROACH

2.1.1. Research strategy

A clearly defined and expressed research problem is one of the important preconditions for developing research plan. To conduct the research, choosing a research strategy with the facts such as available time, facilities, availability of data, methods of analysis, and researcher’s developing skill is also critical. (Walliman, 2005). Phillip and Pugh (1994) identified three basic aims of research: Testing out (a common feature of this kind of research is that it make generalizations from specific examples), Problem solving (this kind of research identifies a ‘real-life problem’.) and Exploration, (as cited in Walliman, 2005). Walliman asserted that exploration research delves into the new and relatively unexplored problem issues with little or no previous researches which have been done on those topics. It will be hard to delineate precisely the scope of the research or predict the results. Therefore, exploring existing theories, concepts and methods might be used, or failing those, formulating new ones is a necessary element.

During the time conducting this study, we have realized that the researches about online marketing and social media in tourism as well as its application in destination online marketing is still new and comparatively limited. In addition, there are a very rapid expansion and development of this aspect with many debates and discussions. As a result, we have tried to explore existing theories about online marketing and social media including paper source and electronic format in business sector to apply to the scope of destination marketing management in tourism.

Walliman (2005) claimed that there are commonly five major different types of research (or research strategies or methodologies), namely experimental, survey, archival analysis, historical and case study. The case study of VisitSweden – the national official tourism board of Sweden is used in this research.
2.1.2. Case study selection

Daymon and Holloway (2002) stated that a case study is an intensive examination, using multiple sources of evidence which may be qualitative, quantitative or both, of a single entity which is bounded by time and place. The case could be an organization, a set of people such as a social or work group, a community, an event, a process, an issue or a campaign. As a research strategy, using case study for research purposes is also one of the most challenging of all social science endeavors. (Yin R. K., 2003)

The case study VisitSweden - the official tourism board of Sweden is used to contribute to our knowledge of organization as well as the awareness of up-to-the-minute related knowledge about online marketing and social media applied in destination marketing management. We have found that the case study of VisitSweden will be appropriate to answer our research questions because. VisitSweden as DMO, has the clear assignment to promote and market destination brands globally, highlights the role of online marketing and social media The company is conducting the social media activities by using a wide range of social media platforms such as largest online community of Sweden, social networking site Facebook, Twitter information channel and blogs.

2.1.3. Research method

There are three types of research methods which are usually mentioned, namely quantitative, qualitative and the mixture of that. Generally quite a strong distinction is made between quantitative and qualitative research, which also requires different techniques for analyzing of relatively separated and different data. (Walliman, 2005).

We decided to use the qualitative approach within the scope of study. Strauss and Corbin (1998) defined that by the term “qualitative research” we mean any type of research that generates findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification. The research objective is not to obtain the formulation for the practice of VisitSweden as a DMO and other DMOs to use online marketing strategies with social media to build brands and engage the audience as a must. It is rather desired to go deeper into the needs and new method to market tourism destination which is more innovative, so VisitSweden could be differentiated from other DMOs. Personally the research is also to help the author having an in-depth understanding of this up-to-minute and worldwide interested phenomenon. The focus of the study will be the analysis of empirical data collected from the in-depth interview with person who work for the destination marketing organization combined with the findings from the existing theories to have the findings and conclusion.

2.2. DATA COLLECTION

According to (Walliman, 2005), once the research problem has been identified, it will be appropriate to decide first the type of quantitative or qualitative approach, which will be needed to investigate the research problem, and then type of data which is required to be collected in order to make analysis. Commonly, there are primary and secondary data. The distinction between these data is based on the sources from the data are derived, i.e. from primary or secondary source.
2.2.1. **Primary data collection**

Data from primary sources can be gained by direct detached observation or measurement of phenomena in the real world, undisturbed by any intermediary interpreter. For example, the recording what actually happened during a meeting can be regarded as a primary data (Walliman, 2005). The authors have chosen the method of in-depth interview as the main way of collecting primary data combining with evaluation of VisitSweden website contents and official blogs.

2.2.1.1. **Interview method**

According to Daymon and Holloway (2002), the qualitative research method in the topic of marketing communications and public relations, interviews are a useful kind of data collection since they allow researcher to explore the perspectives and perceptions of various stakeholders and publics.

In this study we conducted the interview with Lars Näslund who is responsible for online marketing strategies, internet communications and social media at VisitSweden.

**Lars Näslund**

Lars Näslund is head of Internet Communications department. He is in charge of develop and maintain the internet communications technologies for all online activities at VisitSweden and 12 foreign offices, including VisitSweden official web site [www.visitsweden.com](http://www.visitsweden.com), with partner site [http://partner.visitsweden.com/](http://partner.visitsweden.com/), B2B meeting & incentive [http://meetings.visitsweden.com/](http://meetings.visitsweden.com/), [www.communityofsweden.com](http://www.communityofsweden.com), Facebook and Twitter accounts, blogs, YouTube channel. The department also support for the single tourism campaigns for each period of time. As the head of the department, he is also responsible for all the online initiatives and social media application at VisitSweden.

2.2.2. **Secondary data collection**

One of the important tasks to undertake the collection of data is secondary data collection. Walliman (2005) claimed that it is difficult to see how a researcher could conduct an effective research using only primary data and ignore the theoretical in the same or similar area of study. In this paper, our most common form of secondary data is writings in books, articles, reports, newspapers and other publications both in electronic and printed form. In addition, the discussions on professional social networking site Linkedin, opinion of social media experts also have considerable contribution to the process of generate secondary data.

2.3. **DATA ANALYSIS**

According to Yin (2003), “Data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining both quantitative and qualitative evidence to address the
initial propositions of a study.” In this paper data analysis is the combination of both theoretical and empirical data.

We try to build a solid and reliable theory framework that will help the authors to process the theory within the literature study. We consider the theory as one source of data to discuss and make conclusions to answer the research questions from literature study.

One important process of data analysis is our discussion from the combination of empirical data from the interviews in relation to relevant theory from the literature study, and then we analyze and discuss the empirical study in relation to the general findings and conclusions from the literature study and make conclusions from that.

2.4. RESEARCH QUALITY

In the past time, reliability and validity are used commonly in quantitative research, however, reliability and validity are used extensively in the qualitative research paradigm at present and they are reconsidered. (Golafshani, Understanding Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research, 2003)

2.4.1. Validity and Reliability

Yin (2003) noticed that there are four tests: construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability, which are commonly used to judge the quality of any empirical social research. These four tests are also very vital concepts that relate to case studies. In this study, these entire four tests are examined carefully.

2.4.1.1. Construct validity

According to Yin (2003), construct validity is especially problematic in case study research. Critics of case studies often argue subjective judgments are used to collect the data. To increase construct validity when doing case studies, there are three tactics can be followed: the first is to use multiple sources of evidence; the second is to establish a chain of evidence; the third is to have the draft case study report reviewed by key informants.

This study has used multiple sources of evidence such as interviews and official publishing from VisitSweden on the blog. The authors have also tried to maintain chain of evidence by keeping the accuracy of evidence. The interview was carried out with cautious notes and recorded.

2.4.1.2. Internal validity

Internal validity can be seen as the concept that addresses whether or not an observed should be considered a causal relationship. (Calder, Phillips and Tybout, 1982)
Yin (2003) argued internal validity from two perspectives. First he argued internal validity only concerns causal or explanatory case studies. This means when researchers try to determine if one event will lead to another event, they might put some interpretation from their side into the final conclusion without knowing, and this could occur the risk of internal validity. Furthermore, Yin also mentioned the concern of internal validity may be extended to the broader problem of making inferences.

2.4.1.3. External validity

External validity means to examine whether or not an observed causal relationship (findings of the study) should be generalized to and across different measures, persons, settings, and times (Calder, Phillips and Tybout, 1982). Yin (2003) mentioned that case study will be difficult for generalizing since case studies rely on analytical generalization. So, the analysis should try to generalize the findings into “theory”. In this study, the authors try to point out the findings from literature and empirical study at VisitSweden that could consider as “theory” for the practice of online marketing with social media in DMOs.

2.4.1.4. Reliability

Reliability can be considered as the measure of how stable, dependable, trustworthy, and consistent a test is in measuring the same thing each time. (Worthen, Borg and White, 1993) This means the same result should be arrived if one researcher followed the same procedures and conducted the same case study as a previous researcher did. (Yin R. K., 2003). The goal of reliability in a research is to minimize the errors and biases. Yin also mentioned two tactics to strengthen the reliability of the case study, namely the use of a case study protocol and the development of a case study data base.

In this study it is impossible for later researchers to get the same answers because the development of internet communication technologies and social media are consistently changing in various types. The studies about online marketing and practice of social media in DMOs could be carried out by later researches but the results cannot exactly be the same as we concluded in this study and it will be difficult to generalize from the case study VisitSweden to another as typical sample for the practice of other DMOs.

2.4.2. Errors

In this study there are some sources of error. Firstly, in this paper the choosing case can affect the results of the study. Different case study may lead to different results. Secondly, the biases of the authors also have an effect on the results of this study. In the process of writing we may put our own opinions in the interpretations of the results. Lastly, the interview to collect the empirical date is conducted in English, which is not the first language for both the authors and interviewee. This may lead that there are misunderstandings or misinterprets during the interview.
3. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the literature review will be built to narrow down the scope of theory by collecting of previous relevant researches. The literature review will contribute to the knowledge of the studied subject which help the reader have a better understanding of the study.

3.1. ONLINE MARKETING

3.1.1. Online marketing definition

According to Eley and Tilley, (2009), online marketing can be simply defined as promotional activity on the Internet, including email. It can take many forms, including search engine marketing, email marketing, online advertising, social media, and affiliate marketing.

The term of online marketing could be used by many authors in different ways such as e-marketing, digital marketing, internet marketing or web-based marketing. Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, Johnston and Mayer (2006) explained that Internet marketing can be simply defined as “achieving marketing objectives through applying digital technologies” (p.8)

Chaffey et al. (2006) explained that in practice, Internet marketing will include the use of a company web site in conjunction with online promotional techniques, such as search engine marketing, interactive advertising, e-mail marketing and partnership arrangements with other web sites. The term ‘Internet marketing’ tends to refer to an external perspective of how the Internet can be used in conjunction with traditional media to acquire and deliver services to customers.

According to (Vella and Kester, 2008), the purpose of online marketing is to exploit the internet and other forms of electronic communication to communicate with target markets in the most cost-effective ways. Online Marketing can be considered as a targeted approach to reaching both potential and existing customers and the online information is the crucial influence on the decisions of consumer (Vella and Kester, 2008).

3.1.2. Types of online marketing

Online marketing is a vast subject, to make the online marketing business successful companies need to find the suitable marketing strategy to reach the real target market, and to take full advantage of online marketing. (Admin, 2010) There are numerous types of online marketing that many companies follow, in this paper some major types are discussed as follows:
Search Engine Optimization (SEO): is the use of techniques to increase the website traffic. By using the appropriate keywords in the content of the company website, the search engines will display the website on the top of the search results when a reach of a certain topic is made, and more traffic can be obtained (Cho, 2010). Search engines can be divided into three different types, namely primary, secondary and targeted search engine (Ledford, 2008).

*Primary search engine* (also called major), is the type of search engines which is common known by people such as Yahoo! Google, and MSN are primary search engines. Primary search engine will bring majority of the traffic to the website of company. Each primary search engine differs slightly from the others. (Ledford, 2008)

*Secondary search engines* are the search engines with general content but targeted at smaller, more specific audiences. Secondary search engines are useful for regional and more narrowly focused searches to generate valuable traffic. Lycos, LookSmart, Miva, Ask.com, and Espotting are secondary search engines. The ranking of search results will vary in the way from one to another. (Ledford, 2008)

*Targeted search engines* (sometimes called topical search engines) are the most specific of all the search engines. Targeted search engines are very narrowly focused, usually to a general topic, like medicine or branches of science, travel, sports, or some other topic. For examples, CitySearch, Yahoo! Travel, and Music Search are targeted search engines. Same as other types of search engines, ranking criteria will vary from one to another. (Ledford, 2008)

Email Marketing: is promoting the company’s products to a known database of existing and potential customers via email (Cho, 2010). E-mail marketing is becoming an essential, integral part of online marketing and it has become an accepted method of communication for both consumers and businesses. Compare to the traditional direct mail, E-mail offers more practical benefits. Firstly, it takes lower cost, which means it is possible to send more, better targeted, to more audience, and this can help the company to reach more traffic. Secondly, in order to keep the customers to visit back, E-mail can be used to send reminders about a sales promotion or messages about offer to the customers. Finally, e-mail is a two-way communication: customers can give the feedback to the company. Meanwhile, companies can improve the strategy to satisfy the customers. E-mail can be seen as a communication tool that gives more options for converting the audience to action. (Chaffey, 2003)

Social Media Marketing: social media is the most popular marketing strategy presently. It is also a tool for the companies to obtain more traffic through interacting with the customers. (Admin, 2010) Social media has impacted the way of communication for both companies and customers. It offers a platform which is easily to access by everyone through Internet. By using this platform, people can communicate and interact with each other, share information, and it also provides wider opportunities for companies to reach customers and build company brands.
**Pay per click (PPC):** is an online marketing technique with costs. The companies create different advertisements with keywords and place them on the related websites. The more the company pays for the click the more its advertisement appears on the search engine (Admin, 2010). In order to succeed at PPC advertising, one of the most important factors is the ability to persuade people to take action by using just a few well-chosen words. And this also can help the companies to discover which words and messages are most effective at persuading customers to buy. By using this information companies can design other online and offline campaigns. To achieve optimal results, all elements of a PPC campaign must be in good working order, operating together synergistically (Szetela and Kerschbaum, 2010).

It is obviously that all the types of online marketing that mentioned above are just some of the online marketing strategies, and more online marketing strategies are being invented all the time.

### 3.1.3. Advantages of online marketing

Since the online marketing has increased rapidly, companies must become aware of that some of the consumers have shifted the way they perceive, instead of the traditional marketing (television, radio, print) more and more customers prefer to search and acquire information from the online search engines. Companies have to realize the playing field has been leveled. The benefits of online marketing are wide-ranging, as a burgeoning marketing strategy online marketing can benefit both consumer and company interests. (Vella and Kester, 2008)

**Benefits to consumer:**

- It is convenient for the customers. Instead of going to the real store, customers can shop 24 hours a day from any places. (Kotlerof and Armstrong, 1998)
- It is interactive. Two-way interaction between consumers and companies, or between customer and other like-minded customer. (Vella and Kester, 2008) These interactions can help customers to find the information, products, or services they desire.

**Benefits to company:**

- Build customer relationship. Through the interaction companies can get the ability to engage with customers and to build customer databases. (Vella and Kester, 2008)
- Cost-effectiveness. Avoid the expense in conveying information and products. (Vella and Kester, 2008)
- Flexibility. Product availability, prices, and promotions can be adjusted daily or even hourly, to match changing market conditions. (Vella and Kester, 2008)
- Opportunity to access to Global Markets. (Vella and Kester, 2008)
- Brand building and promoting. (Vella and Kester, 2008)
3.2. ONLINE MARKETING IN TOURISM DESTINATION

Tourism is an industry with the nature of information-intensive and it demands an important role of internet communication technologies in the promotion and marketing of destinations. At the present time, Internet has become a primary tool for the delivery of information. In a burgeoning market, competitiveness takes advantage. Therefore nearly all major markets use Internet as a marketing medium. The online marketing of DOMs gives a platform for visitors to access information and to communicate with others, furthermore the online marketing also offers DOMs more opportunities to reach both existing and potential visitors than ever before.

3.2.1. Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs)

According to Pike (2008), a destination marketing organization (DMO) is the organization which is responsible for the marketing of an identifiable destination. This therefore excludes separate government departments that are responsible for planning and policy, and private sector umbrella organizations.

Most tourism activities take place at destinations. It has even been suggested that destinations have emerged as “the fundamental unit of analysis in tourism”, and form a pillar in any modeling of the tourism system (WTO, 2002). Some studies indicate clearly that destination marketing organizations (DMOs) are concerned with the selling of places (Pike, 2008).

Nowadays, travelers are offered a mass of choices by the destinations. Therefore all the destinations are facing the challenges: How to attract travelers? How to enhance the long term competitiveness of the destination? DMO is considered as a major solution to solve the challenges. Pike (2008) pointed out that the purpose of any DMO is to foster sustained destination competitiveness.

The research uses the case study of VisitSweden as the DMO of Sweden. VisitSweden is a communications company half-owned by the Swedish state, through the Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communications and half-owned by the Swedish tourism industry, through Svensk Turism AB (VisitSweden, 2011). As the official DMO of Sweden, The assignment of VisitSweden focuses on both the international marketing of the Swedish brand and the foreign marketing of Swedish destinations and experiences. VisitSweden applied itself to promote a positive image of Sweden, the whole organization works closely with foreign operators and the Swedish tourism industry. VisitSweden also develops the collaboration with the other members of the Council for the Promotion of Sweden Abroad. By sharing the information from different offices, VisitSweden can strengthen its competitiveness in the market and as a result increase sales in the tourism industry.

VisitSweden concentrates on 12 prioritized countries for the international marketing of Sweden: Norway, Denmark, Finland, Russia, Germany, Netherlands, United Kingdom, United States, France, Italy, Spain and China. All these foreign offices offer VisitSweden the information on culture, trends, travel needs, accessibility, local lifestyle, local issues.
and perceptions of Sweden, which can help VisitSweden to design the suitable strategy for the whole organization (VisitSweden, 2011).

Figure 1: VisitSweden website

### 3.2.2. Online marketing in DMOs

As mentioned before in this study, tourism is an information-intensive industry and Internet is the most effective and efficient tool in information exchange worldwide. Most tourism organizations are by now familiar with the Internet. The Internet can potentially enable tourism destinations and enterprises to strengthen themselves in today’s competitive environment. Furthermore the Internet can also provide tourists the additional information about the destinations. Even the smallest countries are able to advertise themselves freely in the Internet. To use Internet as a marketing media can benefit to virtual all areas of marketing, from marketing research, through market segmentation, targeting and positioning, to the effective use of the marketing mix, and marketing organization and control (Liu, 2000).

Internet and digital communication technologies have been used by some DOMs as an innovative factor in the marketing strategies. In this study, the authors take some DOMs as examples of applying the digital technologies in marketing strategies to give the reader a picture of recent trend in marketing destinations. Singapore and Canada are two brands of destination organizations that did impressive job at the realm of online marketing and social media, the brief introduction of these two destination organizations will be presented in the following.

**Singapore Tourism Board (STB)**

Recently, STB claims to put the digital to the heart of destination marketing strategy when changing the destination brand from “Uniquely Singapore” (used from 2004 to 2009) to “YourSingapore” (Lunched from March 5th 2010) (Singapore Tourism Board, 2010)
As the previous Singapore’s destination brand, Uniquely Singapore positions Singapore as a unique blend of the best from the modern world and rich cultures to deliver enriching experiences for discerning visitors. During the five years since Uniquely Singapore was launched, there was a huge increase of visitor arrivals from 8.3 million in 2004 to 9.7 million in 2009, representing a growth of 16.8%. Singapore has also witnessed strong growth in its Tourism Receipts during this period from S$9.8 billion in 2004 to S$15.2 billion in 2008, a growth of 55.1%. (YourSingapore, 2010)

To constantly evolve to present new and engaging travel experiences, and make itself to be suitable to live in an ever-changing environment, Singapore Tourism Board (STB) decided to use YourSingapore to take over from where “Uniquely Singapore” has left off. YourSingapore focus on visitor-centricity, meaning the experiences are made wholesome and personal, drawing their allure from the breadth and richness of attractions many have grown to love here in Singapore. In the YourSingapore marketing campaign, YourSingapore.com is intended to drive people to visit the campaign website, where they will be inspired to explore what Singapore has to offer and be motivated into creating their personal journey, from securing a room in the latest boutique hotel to booking seats for a musical matinee. It emphasizes that each interpretation or experience of the destination is the unique one, differ from the others. YourSingapore website is an interactive platform, visitors can experience a virtual version of Singapore, and it also offers visitors the space to share their experiences about Singapore. Corresponding to the brand strategy, YourSingapore also engages with visitors through social media, such as, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. (YourSingapore, 2010)

Figure 2: YourSingapore website

Canadian Tourism Commission (CTC)

The Canadian Tourism Commission (CTC) is the official DMO of Canada. The vision of CTC is inspiring the world to explore Canada. CTC leads Canada's tourism marketing efforts in global markets and consumer segments where there is the highest potential for return on investment. Currently CTC approach targets international travelers in 11 countries around the world, namely Australia, Brazil, China, France, Germany, India,
Japan, Mexico, South Korea, the United Kingdom and the United State (Canadian Tourism Commission, 2011)

CTC works in collaboration with the Canadian private sectors, international travel trades, meeting professionals, and the governments of Canada, the provinces and the territories to position Canada as a place where travelers can create their own unique and extraordinary personal experiences. The CTC’s business structure focuses marketing investments where the Canada tourism brand is a leader. To achieve the strategic goal of growing revenue for Canada's tourism economy, CTC follows a strategy of focusing on markets where Canada's tourism brand leads and yields the highest return on investment. In addition, by harnessing the collective energy of different levels of government and the private sector, CTC takes the lead in communicating a strong, consistent, global brand for Canada. Overall, CTC is leading the way to attract the more and more visitors to Canada. CTC engages in integrated advertising campaigns using broadcast, social media, newspapers, magazines, billboards, online marketing and database marketing. All these media and public relations activities aim to develop key relationships with international media to influence a high level of positive coverage about Canada (Canadian Tourism Commission, 2010).

Social media is an important element of the overall marketing strategy of CTC. Embracing social media enables CTC to reach influencers and consumers. The common social media platforms used in CTC are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr (Canadian Tourism Commission, 2010). Canada travel keeps exploring social media research to find a better way to communicate with customers. CTC is definitely in the first category and constantly looking for examples of innovation and best practices to share (CTC, 2010). CTC has gained a global reputation as a leading innovator in tourism research. All these works CTC has done about online marketing contribute to giving Canada's tourism a competitive edge (Canadian Tourism Commission, 2010). CTC got two Adrian Awards honoring outstanding achievement in advertising, public relations and digital marketing in travel industry in 2010 (CTM, 2010).

Figure 3: Canada official tourism website
Today, visitors want to personalize their travel experience based on their individual needs and tastes. The way people plan and book travel are fundamentally changed by social media and Internet based search as well as e-commerce tools. Furthermore, social media has changed the nature of word of mouth referral in travel, instead of asking travel agents advice, visitors now prefer to ask friends and check reviews through social media networks. For nearly all of the DMOs, to consider using Internet and social media as the tools for marketing and applying to the online marketing strategy will enhance the competitiveness of the DMOs. As a result, DMOs are able to reach more visitors worldwide.

3.3. SOCIAL MEDIA

3.3.1. Social media definition

Over the last few years, there have been many authors’ definitions of social media. Each of them could reflect different perspectives about social media. Poynter (2010) explained that the term of social media is a very broad phrase which is hard to define but easy to recognize and the core element of the definitions of social media is the way that the internet and its advantages are being used to move away from media that was fundamentally a one-to-many model towards a many-to-many model. It related to the ability to create and share content. Everyone can blog, share their photo, video for free. Zarrella (2010) shared the same opinion with Poynter about the term of social media when the author compared with the traditional media paradigms which primarily are one-way static broadcast technologies such as television, newspapers, radio, and magazines. The instant feedback to the editorial board cannot be sent if the readers disagree with something in the newspaper. By contrast, the new web technologies of social media permit anyone to create and distribute their own content as well as leave your comments or feedbacks instantly.

According to Scott (2010), the term of social media does not refer the different technologies and tools but rather how those technologies allow people to communicate. It refers to a variety of media that people use to communicate online in a social way.

Safko and Brake (2009) claimed that social media and web 2.0 come together since both of them have principal goal to enable communities to form and interact with one another. According to O'Reilly (2005), the concept of Web 2.0 initially began with the conference between O’Reilly Media, inc., and MediaLive International focused on the noticeable ship in the revolution of World Wide Web. Web 2.0 does not refer to a new physical improved version of Internet. Web 2.0 comes together with social media and has its primary goal to enable communities to form and interact with the other (Safko and Brake, 2009).

The idea of Web 2.0 focuses on new business models. Whereas the focus of Web 1.0 was on delivering products. Web 2.0 had permitted a shift to deliver services that can be used and combined with other services in new ways and presented the interactivity with end users in new ways, enabling users to drive what is important or of the most value (Bernal, 2010). Bernal demonstrated the different between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 by the following figures.
Web 1.0 presents a strict approach to delivering web content from webmaster and content contributor. The website is built and maintained for consumption by end users. The relationship between user and webmaster is strictly unidirectional in web 1.0. In contrast to the approach in Web 1.0, the web 2.0 permits the user to interact with the website and the other people. Users can create, edit, rate, their own content at will, which provides other users with new information.

Barefoot and Szabo (2010) also gave a comparison between web 1.0 and web 2.0 as following table.

Figure 4: Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 paradigm (Joey Bernal, 2009)
3.3.2. Social media platforms

Nowadays, the buzz words such as Google, Facebook, video-sharing website Youtube and so forth become so popular to the internet users which force the online marketing researchers to take an in-depth evaluation on it Cavazza (2011) introduced his third vision of the chart illustrates the latest diversity of social media in the following.

![Social Media Landscape](image-url)
The chart is composed of seven primary categories. Within each of these categories, the main players are listed accordingly. Unlike the older vision, as we can see Facebook and Google in the center of this model. The author claimed that Google is relatively quiet on the social media field because his offering is spread on several platforms (Google owns the video sharing site YouTube and it is said that they are developing their own social networking site to compete with Facebook). Facebook can be seen as the center of social media as a convenient place where one can find most of services offered in a single platform.

3.3.2.1. Social networks

Bernal (2010) claimed that Social networks implicate the creation of a virtual community where internet user can share, discuss, collaborate, and even argue about topics of common interest. When it comes to the social networks, the popular websites are mentioned, namely Facebook, MySpace, Bebo and Linkedin. Currently, Facebook is the dominant social networking site. As other social networking sites, the fundamental features on Facebook are a person’s Home page and Profile with connection of friend. People communicate with one another through Chat, personal messages, Wall posts, Pokes, or Status Updates. Additionally, Facebook also provide applications, photos, events, video, groups and pages which let people connect and share their interest in rich and engaging ways (Facebook, 2011).

In February 2004, Mark Zuckerberg (the founder and CEO of Facebook at present) and three of his friend launched Facebook from their Harvard dorm room. Sometime between April 2008 and February 2009, Facebook overtook the world’s most popular social network MySpace at that time (Zarrella, 2010). Facebook reaches over 500 million active users By July 2010 (Facebook company timeline, 2011).

Linkedin is the social networking site for professionals. As mentioned in the factsheet of company’s website. LinkedIn operates the world’s largest professional network on the Internet with more than 100 million members in over 200 countries and territories (Linkedin, 2011). The core function of LinkedIn is professional networking which is used heavily by job seekers and recruiters. It is the only one of the four major social networking sites that charges a fee for some types of access (Zarrella, 2010).

3.3.2.2. Blogs / Publishing

The term blog is a combination of the words web and log, was born in December 1997. Blogging did not start to bloom until 1999, when the website LiveJournal and Blogger were launched (Zarrella, 2010). Blog is a type of website or part of a website which is usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. However blogging has become as a mass medium and it is no longer kept up by individual. 95% of the top 100 US newspapers have reporter blogs such as New York Times with Bits blog offering a steady stream of news and analysis on the technology industry throughout the newspapers writers and freelancers (Technorati, 2011). Moreover, many companies use blog as a communication channel to build a personal relationship between Southwest employees and customers as
the case of Southwest Airline’s blog (www.blogsouthwest.com). In another example, the computer producer Dell launched its blog, Direct2Dell, in July 2006, to engage customers, open up the lines of communication. (Solis, 2010).

In recent time, the term micro-blogging is used as one kind of blogging that limits the size of each entry. Most authors such as Safco and Brake (2009), Solis, Scott and Zarrella (2010) considered Twitter as a typical micro-blogging. At the heart of Twitter is small line of information called Tweets which let you publish the information together with links, photo, video and other media contents. Each Tweet has maximum 140 characters in length. According to the statistical facts from Twitter, up to September 14, 2010, there are 175 million registered users with 95M tweets are written per day. (Twitter, 2011).

Whereas a blog is mostly a way for individual or a small group of people to share information, a wiki is much more collaborative. (Bernal, 2010). Wikis is a website that allows site visitors to add, edit, update, and amend information through any Web browser. One of the most successful and influential websites in existence is a wiki is Wikipedia. (Solis, 2010). Wikipedia is a multilingual, web-based free-content encyclopedia project which is hosted by Wikimedia foundation a non-profit organization that also hosts other projects such as Wikimedia Commons - a free media repository, Wikiquote - a collection of quotation, Wikitionary – dictionary and thesaurus and so on. (Wikipedia website, 2011). It provides a platform for the world’s largest online user-generated content encyclopedia. (Safko and Brake, 2009). Wikipedia has an incredible rank in the Google page-rank function, and in most cases the primary result for any search in Google search engine will direct you to the corresponding page in Wikipedia. (Solis, 2010).

### 3.3.2.3. Multimedia sharing

According to the Oxford Online Dictionary, the term multimedia means the use of a variety of artistic or communicative media (Oxford, 2011). The multimedia sharing sites allow internet users to create and upload multimedia content such as images, photos, presentations, video, music and radio. The multimedia sharing sites did not bloom until 2004, when Flickr was launched, combining easy photo uploading with tagging and social networking functionality. Founded in February 2005, YouTube is currently the largest video-sharing site on the Web and the third most visited site on the Internet (Zarrella, 2010). YouTube which allows people to discover, watch and share originally-created videos. In addition, it provides a forum for people to connect, inform, and inspire others. During 2010 more than 13 million hours of video were uploaded and 35 hours of video are uploaded every minute (YouTube, YouTube statistics, 2011).

Recently, there is one kind of audio sharing which is called podcast. Zarrella (2010) claimed that podcasts are defined as audio files. The word podcast comes from combining the terms “iPod” (Apple iPod digital music player) and "broadcast." and actually applies to both audio and video recordings. Otherwise, Podcasts are like blogs in that they can be RSS-fed. According to Scott (2010), the simplest way to think of podcast is that it is like a radio show but you listen to each episode at your convenience by online or downloading to your computer or mobile device such as cell phone or IPod.
3.3.2.4. Online customer reviews and ratings

It is increasingly common for internet users to read about product experiences of other consumers on the internet and also to write and share their own experiences. Recently, a survey which conducted an online poll of 2,012 local consumers across the US & UK by BrightLocal.com finds that 79% of people aged 16-34 trust online customer reviews as much as personal recommendations. The figure also shows that the younger local consumers are more trusting online reviews than older consumers aged 55+ (Anderson, 2010)

![Graph showing trust in online customer reviews](image)

Figure 7: Do you trust online customer reviews as much as personal recommendations? (Anderson, 2010)

3.3.2.5. Tagging and social bookmarking

Tagging is a tool helping internet users to define content. Tagging an item on the website means to simply identify or categorize that item with one or more category name. The list of categories is called a tag cloud. Normally, the most popular tags become darker and bigger in the list. (Bernal, 2010).

Social bookmarking sites, such as delicious.com, Diigo.com, and Stumbleupon.com provide a social network for people to save, share and discover relevant link of favorite websites. It also permits internet users to have online bookmarks with tagging to share the interest with other web surfers instead of keeping it in their own personal computer.

3.3.2.6. Forums

Zarrella (2010) claimed that forums are a modern version of community bulletin boards that is arguably considered as the oldest type of web-based social media. The focus of
forums is discussion. Users will make posts to them and others will respond. Nowadays there are thousands of popular forums on the Web. Your profile on a forum is a representation of who you are and your communication on a forum is your writing posts with text-based piece of content or image.

3.4. USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

With the advent of social media, many organizations from public to private aim to invest on it. Organizations are increasingly taking advantage of these tools with different purposes. To answer fully the question what is the aim of using social media will need more examinations. Some companies have been investing in exploring the strategies of using social media. Many social media experts share the same opinion about the inevitable external impacts of social media as one of the marketing tools which help to boot the sales, gain traffic and new audience from social sites, build close dialogues with customers as well as reach potential customers and retain their interest. As a result, social media has become the brand ambassadors.

According to a recent survey of Deloitte a consulting, financial advisory company, there are many business goals for social media investment such as to increase brand reputation, create competitive advantage, increase sales or customers fidelity, or enhance the success of new products and so forth. However, Brand reputation and word of mouth marketing are the most common goals among the companies that approach and investing in social media. The result is demonstrated by the chart as follows:

![Figure 8: Business goals for use of social media (Cipriani, 2010)](image-url)
One of the rising trends recently is the use of social media for recruitment because of the development of the professional networking sites such as LinkedIn (the largest professional network that allows you to be introduced to and collaborate with other professionals through the world) and Xing (mostly considered as European business network with more than 10 million members). These business networks have created an online database of resumes that will be used by hiring firms, corporate HR departments to locate candidates digitally.

There have been many widespread debates over the use of social media as part of internal communication plan. Stratmann (2010) claimed that by using internal social media platforms, companies are able to have real-time, authentic conversations with employees which lead to the participation in discussions, involvement and add value to the employee experience. In the case of a global company it also means that people can connect with their colleagues all over the world on a more involved level than just email and phone, thanks to the picture, profile and forum. The hint is that companies can boost productivity and improve information and knowledge (NOVA Workforce Board, 2011).

When it comes to these internal communication and collaboration, Some of small and mid-sized companies are using several web enterprise collaboration platforms such as Yammer (www.yammer.com), SharePoint developed by Microsoft (http://sharepoint.microsoft.com), Socialcast (www.Socialcast.com) which permit the company to unite the staff, data and application in the real-time with the tool such as micro-blogging (share status update, questions, comments and ideas) Create and private or public groups, communities to collaborate the teams within the network, manage and share documents, data and application

According to Brown (2009), there are a few organizations that are doing social media internally very well, namely IBM, Nortel, Microsoft and British Telecom, among others and most are still using one-way communication with their employees, i.e. newsletters, bulletin boards, email and static intranet sites. The answer for this limited internal use of social media is that the management still fears the backlash from the use of social media when the employees spend too much time at work which could lead to the loss of the companies’ money and the number of organizations has blocked access to social media sites on their networks. However, Questions have been raised whether or not it also closes off potential for collaboration and development of new ideas across the whole organization.

### 3.5. TOURISM DESTINATION BRAND

#### 3.5.1. Brand and branding

According to Kotler and Keller (2006), the most distinctive skill of professional marketers might be their ability to create, maintain, enhance, and protect brands. As a result, branding has become a marketing main concern. Kotler and Keller found the following

The American Marketing Association defines a brand as a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one sellers of group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors (p. 274)
Kapferer (2008) demonstrated brands as “living systems make up of three poles: products or services, name and concept”. In brand management, when talking of the term brand we should not refer to a single aspect as a name or a logo. We should assert it as the whole system, relating a concept with inherent value to products and services that are identified by a name and set of proprietary signs such as logo or other symbols.

Figure 9: Brand system (Kapferer, 2008)

Blois (2000) asserts that no one accepted one definition of brand, only share a significant degree of agreement in the perspectives. The author groups these different perspectives into six categories: visual/verbal approaches as Aaker (1991) defines a brand as: a distinguishing name and/or symbol such as logo, trademark; positioning approaches emphasizing the establishment of unique position in consumer’s mind that differentiate from the competition; brand image approaches based on a clear understanding of target consumer; added value approaches underlining the importance of value in what the brand has to offer and represent the needs of consumer; perceptual appeal approaches and personality-based approaches, for example, the personality of Coke has been carefully built to represent youth.

What is the importance of brands? Kotler (2003) quoted the word of Roberto Goizueta the formal CEO of Coca-Cola to talk about the critical role of brands as follows.

All our factories and facilities could burn down tomorrow but you’d hardly touch the value of the company; all that actually lies in the goodwill of our brand franchise and the collective knowledge in the company. (p. 8)

Brands obviously provide critical benefits to both firms and consumers, a question then is, how are brands created? and how you can brand a product? (Keller, Aperia and Georgson, 2008). Interbank Group argued that branding has been around for centuries as a method to distinguish the goods of one producer from those of another, for example the craftspeople from medieval time in Europe put trademarks on their product to protect against inferior quality or the artists’ signature on their work (as cited in Kotler and Keller, 2006). The authors claimed that Branding helps consumers organize their knowledge about the product and services in a way that sheds light on their decision making and, in the process,
provides value to the company. In another way, “Branding is endowing products and services with the power of a brand. Branding is all about creating differences.” (p.275). Branding a product need to teach consumer “who” the product is by using a name for instance as well as “what” the product does and “why” buyer should care. The consumer perception of differences between brands in a product category is the key to branding. (Keller, Aperia and Georgson, 2008).

When it comes to how to built brands or brands management, Kotler (2003) claimed that brands are built holistically, through the whole variety of tools, including advertising, public relations (PR), sponsorships, events, social causes, clubs, spokespersons, and so on. It will be a mistake to consider that advertising builds brands. Advertising is mainly used to call attention to the brand. It might also even create brand interest and brand talk among consumer.

World Tourism Organization and European Travel Commission (2010) showed that brand is not a product, a logo, a slogan, imagery, a design style or a marketing campaign. These all elements are also in marketing destination. It should be informed by destination brand. However, they are not the brand. The brand is the core of all this marketing strategies.

Figure 10: Brand at the core of all marketing activities and behavior (NWTO & ETC)

**3.5.2. Brand equity**

In early 1990s, the financial markets in the United States started to have switched on recognition of the value of intangible asset and brand marketing academics. The result led the development of the concept of brand equity which was made popular to the world by the publications of David Aaker and Kevin Keller (Lindemann, 2010).

According to AAker (1996), brand equility is a set of five categories of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand name or symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a company or that firm’s customer. These categories of brand
assets are (1) brand loyalty, (2) brand awareness, (3) perceived quality, (4) brand association and (5) other proprietary assets such as trademarks, patents and channel relationships.

Kotler and Keller (2006) defined that “brand equity is the added value endowed to products and services” (p. 276). The added value could be reflected in how consumers think and feel about the brand or act with respect to that, as well as the prices, market share, and profitability that the brand gets for the firm. Brand equity is one of the important intangible assets of the firm. Aaker claimed that a particularly key concept for building brand equity is brand identity. Brand identity is the unique set of brand associations that present what the brand stands for and imply a promise to customers (Aaker, 1996). Aaker asserted brand identity consists of 12 dimensions organized around four perspectives: (1) brand as product, (2) brand as organization, (3) brand as person, (4) brand as symbol in the following chart.

**Figure 11: Brand identity system (Aaker, 1996)**

### 3.5.3. Customer-based brand equity

Researchers have many perspectives and approach to study brand equity. One of these is customer-based approach. As Keller, Aperia and Georgson (2008) demonstrated customer-based approaches view brand equity from the perspective of the consumer either an individual or an organization. Keller et al (2008) also mentioned that the basic premise of the customer-based brand equity model is that the power of a brand lies in what customers have seen, read, heard, learned, thought, and felt about the brand over time as a result of their experiences. Customer-based brand equity is the differential effect that brand knowledge has on the response of consumer to the marketing of that brand. The customer response could be positive when consumers react more favorably to a product or negative if consumers react less favorably to marketing activity.

There are three key ingredients of customer-based brand equity:
• Differential effect
Brand equity arises from differences in consumer response. The brand name product will be essentially a commodity if no differences in
• Brand knowledge
The differences in response of consumer are the result of consumer’s knowledge and experience of the brand
• Consumer response to marketing
The differential response by consumers that makes up the brand equity is reflected in perceptions, preferences and behavior related to all aspects of the marketing.

### 3.5.4. Marketing communications in building brand equity

According to Keller, Aperia and Georgson (2008) building the brand equity is one of the most critical tasks of marketing. The marketing activities, product and distribution strategies can help to contribute to brand equity. When it comes to the brand building, marketing communications plays an important role on that. In a sense, marketing communications represent the voice of the brand. Keller et al (2008) claimed that marketing communication are all the means by which firms and organizations attempt to inform, persuade and remind consumers. It could be directly or indirectly related to the brand. Marketing communications can contribute to brand equity by rising awareness of the brand.

Keller et al (2008) mentioned the marketing communication options as follows:

![Marketing communication options](Keller, Aperia and Georgson, 2008)

**Figure 12: Marketing communication options (Keller, Aperia and Georgson, 2008)**
The marketing options will be used for appropriate marketing communication campaign. As a result, the main objective of marketers is to develop an integrated marketing communication campaign in term of the most advantageous range of marketing options that should be chosen. Moreover, marketers should mix and match communication options to build brand equity (Keller, Aperia and Georgson 2008)

3.5.5. **Destination brand**

According to Kotler and Keller (2006), branding can be applied almost anywhere a customer has a choice. A physical good, a service, a store, a person, a place, an organization or an idea could be branded.

The concept of place means geographic location such as city, country or regions. Keller, Aperia and Georgson (2008) explained that places, like physical product and people, can be branded and increased mobility of both people and businesses as well as tourism growth has contributed to the need of place marketing. As a result, place branding is making people aware of the location with favorable image and then linking desirable associations to it.

According to Frost (2004), the relationship in branding a physical product and a place is by no mean simple, although product and place brands could share many similarities. The author referred to some other author’s opinions about this as following; Supphelen argued that in principle, product and place branding is similar. It’s all about identifying, developing and communicating the favorable parts of the identity to some specified target groups, but the analysis of identity and of target group perceptions, brand building activities are much more complicated for places than for products. Papadopoulos asserted the most important challenges of place branding are lack of unity of purpose, difficulty in creating actionable and measurable objectives, lack of authority over inputs and control over outputs, lack of marketing practical ability as well as the restricted flexibility. He pointed out some examples as following; Place marketing comprises many stakeholders, often with competing interests. Measuring the effectiveness of place marketing will be more difficulties and marketers have less control over place brands since besides country marketing campaigns, people may learn about a country in school; from media sources such as newspapers, books, TV and movies; from purchases; and from trips abroad or from contact with citizens or former residents (as cited in Frost, 2004)

Within the tourism industry, the term of destination is used widely. Destination refers to a country, region or city considerably as a tourism destination which wishes to attract visitors. The concept of destination brand is significant for destination to be identified as one of the important aspect of destination marketing management. “It should effect to every marketing communication activities and behavior by national tourism organization and the destination’s stakeholders” (World Tourism Organization and European Travel Commission, 2010)

Cai (2002) stated that the core of destination branding is to build a positive destination image that identifies and differentiates the destination by selecting a reliable and coherent brand element mix (as cited in Hailin, Lisa and Holly, 2011). One of the most significant criteria in building a successful brand is to accurately communicate an authentic branded image to the potential visitors being targeted. When the visitors discover that the branding
is inaccurate they will never return. Furthermore, the branding should be understandable, memorable as well as usable (Kolb, 2006). Destination branding is about how to make people to have the essence of your destination consistently through brand language and audio-visuals, and to protect it through management of the customer’s experience (World Tourism Organization and European Travel Commission, 2008).
4. EMPIRICAL

In this chapter, the empirical findings collected mainly from the interview with Lars Näslund and reports from official VisitSweden web site, press releases, CEO’s blog and blog of development (Devblog) which are demonstrated closely to the issue of online marketing and social media activities at VisitSweden will be displayed. The empirical study will show our new findings and it is motivated in relation the theory.

4.1. INTRODUCTION

To obtain the most primary data for online marketing and social media activities at VisitSweden, the interview with Lars Näslund was conducted.

Lars Näslund is the head of Internet Communications Department. He is responsible for all the online initiatives and social media applications at VisitSweden. The department is in charge of internet communications at head office, Stockholm and 12 foreign priority markets. Up to now the internet communications channel which are using at VisitSweden are VisitSweden official web site www.visitsweden.com, with partner site http://partner.visitsweden.com/, B2B meeting & incentive http://meetings.visitsweden.com/, www.communityofsweden.com. Facebook and Twitter accounts, blogs, YouTube channel. In addition the department also provides the support for the separated tourism campaigns for certain time such as Outdoor and Food academy of Sweden.

4.2. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

4.2.1. The role of online marketing in DMOs

As a communication company, the most priority role of VisitSweden is to build and strengthen the Sweden brands. Branding a place or a country is far more complex, with many operators, residents, policy makers and events that affect the reputation and image of the destination. Competition with other countries is fierce and it is about to reach through the sound of the travelers. Thomas Brühl, the CEO of VisitSweden said: “Knowing what the traveler wants is a good start to a successful marketing effort.” (Brühl, 2007) As a result, understanding visitors could be one the most important tasks in marketing communications in either traditional or digital.

Lars Näslund asserted that online marketing with the core part of internet communication technologies were defined clearly and put as the center in the marketing strategies of VisitSweden. Lars Näslund expressed that the internet could change during the time of development and customer’s behavior is difficult to change. The marketers need to adapt...
to this reality to become aware of which communication channels could reach the customer. VisitSweden and other DMOs emphasizes the need of reaching potential tourists by integrating online marketing tactics into traditional marketing activities. Therefore, VisitSweden put internet communication technologies as a decisive factor in online marketing and social media activities. Firstly, the website as official digital platform is designed to deliver appropriate rational and emotional values with user interface since web site is the first place which visitor could find information about destination in a fastest way. The domain Visitsweden.com is the official website for Sweden as a tourism destination. The site is built for foreign visitors and has high credibility. Visitsweden.com is part of Sweden.se - the official portal for general information about Sweden and delivers the same feeling of visual framework. Visitsweden.com was chosen as the Sweden's best site in 2008 by the magazine Internet World has attracted a total of more than 250 000 visits from potential Sweden travelers per month with the income which is more than 1.5 million Swedish krona every month. The site is available in ten languages: English (UK / US), German, Danish, Finnish, Dutch, Norwegian, Italian, French, Russian and Spanish (VisitSwden, 2010).

Lars Näslund mentioned that websites are the first impression that customers get of the company. Therefore the website must be built with a user-friendly design and easy navigation. VisitSweden.com is normally the first contact point for potential international visitors to Sweden. Therefore VisitSweden decided to make it easy for visitors to find attractive destinations in Sweden that inspire them to come and visit. VisitSweden also enables direct access to Swedish tourist products via an online booking system, making it possible for tourists to book their holiday in Sweden online. One of the innovation and unique feature of website is also the navigation map using with inspiration to visitors via the real map, facts about destination such as accommodation, culture places, outdoor activities and experience. The visitor can navigate the map, along with getting the fact and experience at the same time, so visitors can find out the information and attraction places easily in a short time. Using website is one of the tools to deliver customer’s experiences.

The online community VisitSweden is for everyone who wants to share pictures, tips and travel experiences of Sweden. With a large amount of resources, Visitsweden.com gives a reliable image of Sweden, it also creates a personal connection among the travelers, and furthermore the site offers a greater opportunity to get close to the country. The material from CommunityOfSweden.com has enhanced the content of visitsweden.com. To strengthen the charm of the country, VisitSweden regularly sends news of experiences in Sweden to thousands of followers and potential Sweden travelers in 11 countries (VisitSwden, 2010).

In international competition all successful destinations raise clear and positive associations with their target audiences, which also affect the overall image of the country. VisitSweden's overseas offices are a unique existence and a network work with other Swedish authorities and organizations, such as the embassies of Sweden, who also works to promote Sweden's image abroad. VisitSweden has been working together with the Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Industry, Trade Council, Swedish Institute and Invest Sweden for several years, from a common platform for communication of Sweden's image. VisitSweden also cooperates with editorial offices in foreign countries includes everything from finding and distribute interesting news, and arrange viewing trips for journalists, to be updated in the media landscape and identify the newspapers, magazines,
radio, websites and TV channels which target audiences consume. The goal is to attract visitors, investment and knowledge to Sweden. (VisitSwden, 2010)

### 4.2.2. Social media approach at VisitSweden

By the time of building the CommunityofSweden in 2007, Maria Ziv – the marketing director reckoned that user-generated contents and social media is the most protruding trend in the online community (Sollén, Devblog, 2007). The community is the place of giving the up-to-date and truth worthy information by building and engaging the community. Additionally, the community is also the solution for the problem of how to communicate with a large number of people on a very limited budget. This can partly demonstrate the approach of VisitSweden to using social media as one of the tools to map audience and reach customers.

CommunityofSweden was developed before VisitSweden lunched other social media platforms (VisitSweden Twitter account was created in 2009 and Facebook in 2010). According to Lars Näslund, the change is actually happening with the vast development of social media. The question is how people are using the web? He explains the digital relationship on the social life is one of the decisive factors at this time in the digital world. People tend to trust the one they know such as close friends, friends on social networking sites. If there is not a social life, people will not trust what the others are saying. However, if they are saying that they are experts in that area. We will trust them. As a result, this changes the way we live and think and the way we socialize and communicate with each other. He claimed that the visitor is becoming wise and sensible with the traditional marketing tactics. For example, if VisitSweden advertises an attractive place for the visitor to go whether or not the visitors will be attracted on that, the visitor may know the company to pay the money for the articles with stunning pictures and so on, as a result, to persuade and attract visitors VisitSweden need to engage the visitor, push the social media, get more experts to discuss about that and have more people to talk about that to make the visitor believe.

Despite the fact that there are still many challenges in fully participating and leveraging social media to engage audience and build the destination brands, Lars Näslund asserts that VisitSweden could carry out the traditional marketing tactics with events, marketing communication campaigns but it must be connected with social media activities to build the relation, to interact with visitors and also to be where the visitors are. VisitSweden will take advantage of the social media platforms and work with TripAdvisor, VirtualTourist and so on to reach visitors.

Regarding to the process of driving and monitoring social media activities, Lars Näslund affirmed that there are still many places in social media where VisitSweden can participate in. However, it will take time and effort for VisitSweden to have a full participation. Thus VisitSweden are only focusing on Facebook, Twitter, CommunityofSweden, Linkedin for B2B incentive and meeting and blog as the key communication channels that VisitSweden will concentrate on to build the relation and broad themselves. On the other hand there are the places in the Internet VisitSweden will not be active, but will be a part of it, then uploading contents, pushing the information to market Sweden, then if the traffic and the visitor’s interest go up. It would be the time to be active to get the most efficient outcomes.
Monitoring social media activities will not always gain the successful and profitable outcome. Lars Näslund explained that the user-generated contents as one of the main characters of social media will have both positive and negative impacts to social community, for example visitor could have the negative reaction and comment to your social media platforms such as Facebook fan page, forum.

Lars Näslund claimed that social media is definitely an area of growth in the company’s marketing strategies and it is a key and a must for VisitSweden when it comes to engage and interact with visitors and reach potential tourists. He added the young generations are also using social media for finding information which gradually replaces the popular Google search engine.

VisitSweden defines the clear assignment with two focuses; international marketing of Swedish brand and foreign marketing of Swedish destinations and experiences. Lars Näslund declared that it will take time and needs the patience with the contributions from many players, stakeholders and politics also. Answering the question why VisitSweden does not have the tourism logo and slogan as many DMOs usually have. Lars Näslund claimed that it is the differentiation of VisitSweden when most of DMOs use that tradition marketing tactics at this time. VisitSweden could have the separated tourism campaigns on target market but they will have their separated logo.

### 4.2.3. Social media platforms monitoring at VisitSweden

#### 4.2.3.1. Community of Sweden

The Community of Sweden is a part of the official VisitSweden Web site lunched on November 1st 2007 (Sollén, Devblog, 2007) As the name of community it’s a place for registered online members to share photos, stories, tips and experiences about Sweden. By registering as a member with the profile, you can make friends with other people in Sweden and all over the world and join the groups. The website also permits the users to join or create a topic on the forum or group with cloud tags of different topic to discuss and share their experiences. Kelly, one of marketing social media expert (2009) demonstrated that the community was designed to be bright, positive, warm and friendly. The objective of the community is to inspire people to travel to Sweden, one of the best ways to inspire the people is the great photos, in addition the community makes it easy for people to upload and tag photos and Italians are the most active members at that time.

At the first step of foundation, the community defined their suitable personas for the online community as the target members. It is Double Income couples with No Kids (DINKS), Active Family (Family with kids that enjoy active holidays), Wealthy Healthy Older People (WHOPS), Swedes (domestic) and Swedes (expatriates – Swedes that live abroad). The name Community of Sweden was explained to be self explanatory and search engine optimized and 2 months after its beta launch, Community of Sweden, got 1000 members (Sollén, Devblog, 2007). Maria Ziv asserted that the community is the solution of how VisitSweden can communicate with a large amount of people on a very limited budget.

According to the CEO’s blog of VisitSweden, the community won the EPiServer awards for the best Swedish community with over 6,000 members at that time and 1000 stories and 12 000 photographs from various locations in Sweden shared on the community.
(Brühl, 2009). By the time of interviewing with Lars Näslund, the community has 30,000 members. Lars Näslund stated that the purpose of online community is to give the audience and visitor more detail up-to-date information. It’s also the relationship builder to engage the people. One of the important tasks is that the community has to keep inspiring and engaging within the community. He claimed that only by inspiring community’s members and having more experts and Swedish lover as well as the Swedes, the community will be the place for visitor finding the up-to-date and trust worthy information since the information comes from their peers.

![Community of Sweden website](image)

**Figure 13: CommunityofSweden website**

4.2.3.2. **VisitSweden on Facebook**

Facebook is one of the social media platforms which VisitSweden evolved. The Facebook campaigns were lunch in 2010 by VisitSweden.

By looking at the website VisitSweden.com, we found the direct link to official Facebook page named “Sweden”. Another one is “Visit Sweden” shares the same name with the company without any specific information about the page. The other pages are “I like Sweden” and “Outdoor in Sweden”.

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Table 1: Facebook pages of VisitSweden

By evaluating these pages, we found that the page Sweden is the official Facebook page of VisitSweden with one way broadcasting from the page’s administrator, Facebook wall is now a “closed” platform. The users can leave comments but cannot post on the wall of the page. A wide range of information in English from many fields is updated quite regularly. The page “Visit Sweden” is inactive page without any detail information about the page, just a very few post from the begging, there are little interaction between followers and page administrator.

By the time of interviewing, VisitSweden has a clear strategy of social media to define the responsibility of staff in participating in Facebook activities and how many hour public relations personnel and social media staff should work with these social media platforms.

4.2.3.3. VisitSweden on multimedia sharing

By the time of our writing, the official channel of VisitSweden on YouTube which was created on 9th Nov 2005 has been uploaded with 46 videos. The channel has 132,244 views and 793 subscribers. Among 46 uploaded videos, 7 videos exceeded more than 10,000 views, 16 videos have less than 100 views (YouTube, Sweden's Official Channel, 2011).

The video clips posted on the YouTube channel are both in English and Swedish. The content of the video is a wide range from clips promoting regional destination such as Stockholm, Lapland, Gotland and Göteborg and so on to the theme such as Swedish
Fashion, Sport, Design, Music and Food as well as the tourism campaign like Dave Goes To Skåne, Outdoor Academy of Sweden, Academy of Sweden – Culinary (in Swedish). There is also one clip about the Community of Sweden.

It is somewhat surprising that there are still quite few video clips are produced professionally about the city, regions and tourism attraction in Sweden. As the interviewee Lars Näslund demonstrated, VisitSweden is quite late with video and the company needs more attractive videos.

Recently, VisitSweden together with Swedish Institute have lunched the Image Bank Sweden. Image Bank Sweden is an image service with royalty-free images for publication in foreign media. It includes images from all of the major subject categories i.e. Culture, Economy & Trade, Education & Research, Society and Travel & Tourism. The images may be used free of charge only for the purpose of promoting Sweden to foreign media and to Swedish media with an exclusively foreign audience.

4.2.3.4. VisitSweden on Twitter

The Twitter accounts for Sweden head office and foreign markets were created in 2009, at this time, two of Twitter accounts “Sweden” and “VisitSweden” are considered as the most active. The department of Social media and Public Relations is responsible for these Twitter accounts, the account “VisitSweden” is mostly tweeted in Swedish and handled by cooparate communications officer. The account “Sweden” is updated in English by social media manager. Both of the accounts are posted with information about the tourism in Sweden and campaigns of VisitSweden.

The regional accounts are managed by the local PR personnel. Some accounts are not active. Lars Näslund also mentioned that VisitSweden is training very hard the staff of social media and RP department.

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<td>Out of 100</td>
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</table>

Source: (Twittergrader, 2010)
Table 2: Twitter accounts of VisitSweden

4.2.3.5. VisitSweden on Blogs

The domain http://bloggar.visitsweden.com/wp-login.php is the main VisitSweden’s blog based on the easy-to-use open source blogging website named WordPress where the internet user can create their account for free and start a blog. The VisitSweden’s blog combines of 6 links to the other blogs. There are three blogs in English, namely Devblog (http://bloggar.visitsweden.com/devblog/), Outdoor Academy of Sweden (http://bloggar.visitsweden.com/oas/) and Culinary Academy of Sweden (http://bloggar.visitsweden.com/culinaryacademyofsweden/).

The blog Devblog with the first post in Jan 2007 is managed by Tommy Sollén – the Social Media Manager of VisitSweden and official Community Manager of the website CommunityOfSweden.com. The content is the updates of social community and editorial site VisitSweden.com.

The other two blogs share the same name Academy of Sweden is a program for journalists, tour operators and other stakeholders. Activities are arranged within the areas of food, outdoor and soon fashion. The aim of this is to offer a showcase by theme to the visitor. As the name academy, the important message is learning. It helps the participants become “ambassadors” of Sweden in these specific areas (Culinary Academy of Sweden, 2011)
5. ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the data collected will be analyzed. This study using single case study, therefore a within case analysis is conducted. By using divided sections the research questions will be analyzed. The authors discuss and state the conclusions from the literature study, then analyze and discuss the empirical data from the interview and official publish articles in relation to relevant theory from the literature study. Finally, we discuss the empirical study in relation to the general findings and conclusions from the literature study and make conclusions.

5.1. Online marketing – why it is essential for today's tourism destination marketing?

Nowadays, most of the business are aware of that the businesses are no longer success by only completely relay on the traditional word-of-mouth strategy and the persuasive print advertising. In order to be truly successful in the competitive environment, it is absolutely essential to conduct comprehensive online marketing. (Bery, 2007)

DMOs have already started to switch the attention to online marketing communications and online marketing has become one of the top strategies to promote a DMO. At present, many DMOs also want to incorporate social media in their marketing efforts, because word-of-mouth gets a new megaphone through social media networks, which influences on travel purchase decisions. Since more and more people prefer to search information online, it is necessary for DMOs to offer a website with the information what the customers are searching for. Furthermore, a powerful website can help DMOs to strengthen the position in today's competitive environment.

Online marketing offers an interactive platform which can benefit both DMOs and customers. For DMOs, applying online marketing techniques can save plenty of time and money in comparison to other ways of marketing, online marketing is cost effective. Online marketing advertising could be more effective than other ways of advertising. It is accessible anytime anywhere without restriction of time and space, the target market can be worldwide, the information is available all the time.

Online marketing also allows DMOs to see almost immediately the reaction of the target customers, hear them and read their feedback. Furthermore, through the proper use of online marketing, it can help DMOs to gain higher rank in the search engines like Google, Yahoo etc. High position in the search engines would help the visitors to reach the DMOs’ website easily. In order to achieve these high positions in search engines, DMOs need to
understand consumer search engine behavior to build the contents which desired by visitors.

DMOs usually find difficulties in measuring and evaluating the online marketing strategies and the return on investment. DMOs need to identify the niche market before starting the online marketing campaigns, DMOs have to find out which the suitable strategy is for them, who the target group is, and what the target group wants as Thomas Brühl CEO of VisitSweden pointed out “Knowing what the traveler wants is a good start to a successful marketing effort”. Social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other online community, forum could give the DMOs a demographic of visitors, for example Facebook page provides the age, gender, race, location and even interests of every members, as a results, targeted advertisements can be customized and displayed for each member for that reason Julian Assange the founder of WikiLeaks has called Facebook as “The Biggest Spy Machine Ever”.

Online marketing offers a much higher degree of flexibility with campaigns, and in today’s market a good online marketing campaign can determine the future success of DMOs. It is obviously the online marketing campaign should be paid as same attention as the business plan. Online marketing also can help DMOs to build strong presence on the internet, and this can strengthen the DMOs’ brands in order to reach more audience. Instead of waiting for the traffic to come, today’s business should go where the traffic is and attract them to come to the destination. Online marketing gives the opportunity to reach the audience much wider than ever before.

It is also shown that the practice of online marketing with internet marketing communication channels offers more opportunities for both DMOs and visitor to meet each other than ever before.

5.2. How do DMOs build destination brands through social media?

The term of social media evolves when the internet communications technologies permit people communicate not in one-way direction as the traditional media such as newspapers, magazines and television as a medium to deliver the information, news to the audience. There has always been a dominant relationship between the media and business. The media is a tool for business to deliver their message and image in the eye of customer. As a result, media is considered as one of the marketing communications tool. Keller, Aperia and Georgson (2008) stated that marketing communications with communication options such as media advertising, consumer promotions, event and public relations can play different roles in the marketing campaign. According to the customer-based brand equity model, marketing communications can contribute to brand equity by creating awareness of the brand. Keller et al. (2008) use the term new media to demonstrate the development of internet and mobile phone. This media landscape with the expansion of social media has forced marketers to re-evaluate which channel they should use and how they should best communicate with consumers. Social media therefore is one of online marketing communication channels. Marketers have to develop an integrated marketing communication campaign with wide range of marketing communication options in both traditional way and digital approach. They should mix and match communication options
to build brand equity. Undeniably, Social media is an addition to the firm’s integrated marketing communication plan to build the brands by increasing the brand awareness.

The action of branding a tourism destination or a place is somewhat different from branding a product because of some reasons such as place marketing usually comprises many stakeholders from business, industry to politics having both competing interest and the close association. Marketers have less control over place and destination brands since people can have their viewpoint about destination brand from other sources such as education, movies, television and so on. Therefore, using social media to build tourism destination brands needs to link and integrate the relation between tourism and other sectors such as culture, education, industry, business and so on.

Building a strong destination brand is not an easy task. Recently, The Nation Brands Index 2010 ranks Sweden as number 10’s most valuable country brand. This will certainly have impact to the brand of Sweden in general and tourism industry in particular. For the long time of development, Sweden brand has attached in the eye of foreigners with the long-established images such as a cold country with high living standard, the land of Viking people or a country with innovative fashion, design. These factors still have contributions to the destination brands. However, to need the innovation and differentiation from competitor in an increasingly competitive environment and attract the visitors, the next step in the strategy will be the answer for the question of the new generations when those traditional images could be weakened gradually. What will the next young generations see Sweden as a tourism destination when internet and social life become growingly common? It means that VisitSweden need to have the appropriate strategies to mobilize the brand of Sweden to make Sweden more unique and produce more products. Unfortunately, by the time doing the research, the authors don’t have a chance to access the proposal of Swedish National Branding Strategies conducted by The Council for the Promotion of Sweden (Nämnden för Sverigefrämjande i utlandet - NSU), Swedish Institute and Ambassy since It will be official published until late 2011. It will be one of the valuable sources to have better understanding of Swedish branding situation.

Social media is established with the interaction and user-generated contents. One aspect that will be inevitable is the difficulty in managing the contents as well as monitoring the social media activities in a positive way. The destination could have the negative reactions or comments from visitor to their social media platforms such as unconstructive comments on Facebook fan page, or uncooperative discussion on forum, online community. Along with the increasing number of people like the Facebook fan page of destinations, organizations and products, we can find that there are growingly number of groups such as “I hate New Zealand”, “I hate winter” and so on. Thus, the control of social media activities will not be the best solution. The visitors or customers can feel free to say whatever is on their mind. These social media platforms are place to receive constructive criticism and give destination a chance to redeem themselves with the customer. Social media is the place to be truth worthy as the conclusion of Lars Näslund.
5.3. How do DMOs use digital social media platforms to engage audience and reach potential visitor?

Social media is changing and broadening continuously, more channels and platforms with both advantages and disadvantages are added. Destination management could sometimes find difficult to identify the appropriate communication channels with which kind of interaction to participate in. Social media is not a one-way advertising medium but an open channel for two-way dialog which visitors can initiate an interaction. They can follow the destination’s information channel such as Twitter, interact in social networking site Facebook, create and comment on the blog or articles, share information, stories, photos or video, ask for information in real-time conversations quickly. Those actions could establish the opportunity for visitor to have personal online interaction and a virtual social relation.

The concept of “national border line” was starting to fade by the time internet was invented. Visitors tend to have e-experience before coming to the real destination since they are provided by bunch of travel information, photos and videos. Nevertheless, the era of booming social media give better opportunity to connect with the audience. The number of people participating in social networking site Facebook and following the Twitter channel is increasing dramatically. Hundreds of thousands of people like Facebook fan page of tourism destination such as Canada, Holland, Paris and so on to be updated with information, make friends and interact to the virtual social communication activities. It is easier than ever for DMOs to connect and engage visitor in a cost effective way despite where they come from or which age group and nationality they are.

VisitSweden as well as other DMOs are facing a situation that customers become cleverer and get familiar with traditional advertising via TV, newspapers, magazines or billboards and posters and so on. These kinds of traditional media seem to be losing their grip on customers. The development of online marketing and social media permits everyone can publish the information on the web by creating their own blogs, wiki and so on. The source of information from internet will be confused by visitors. Some people choose the way to find information and recommendation from forum or online community. Some other could gather information from travel blogs or social networking sites. As a result, to reach the potential visitor and engage them in the activities of destination, DMOs need to invent the authentic source of information that the visitor are eager to consume and interested. Moreover, DMOs need to take the advantages of all social media platforms to deliver their information and ideas and get the visitor’s awareness.

The empirical data collected from the interview with key person related to the study at VisitSweden and evaluation of previous literature study, along with up-to-minute conversations and articles on the internet help the authors to shed light on the urgent initiation of DMOs in taking part in social media. DMOs need to be in the place where the visitors exist instead of waiting for visitor coming. DMOs need to select the social media platforms which the visitors are to have the appropriate marketing strategies. For example, DMOs can build an intuitive and useful framework and visual design for the official destination web site that creates a user interface with clear and consistent site navigation, upload the tourist destination instruction videos, use travel podcasts, stories, tips, photos and build contents for the special purpose and tourism products. Thus, DMOs could engage the audience and reach potential visitors.
Moreover, DMOs need a thorough understanding of which digital channels the audiences and visitors exist and how they interact within the channels since those channels will help DMOs to know the visitor’s behavior.

The digital social media channels are developed, but on the other hand traditional media will not be excluded from communications strategies. DMOs need to make it easy for visitors to join and follow on their social media platforms and integrate social media into traditional marketing communication channels and marketing campaigns.
6. RESULTS

This chapter is the study conclusions. The chapter demonstrates the final findings and conclusions which the authors have after doing the research. The conclusions are from what we have in literature study, case study of VisitSweden and the combination also. The chapter will present the reader what is new that they can learn from the research which is also the most important objective of this research. In addition, the implications for further research and limitations are also mentioned.

6.1. CONCLUSION

This dissertation has investigated the approach of practicing online marketing with social media as one of digital marketing communication options to build destination brands and engage audience to reach potential visitors. The study was undertaken to examine and evaluate the role of online marketing and social media in destination marketing strategies and managements. One of the most significant findings to emerge from the study is that DMOs need to emphasize the wide participation in online marketing and social media activities to achieve benefits. DMOs have to be in the place where the visitors are instead of waiting for them. Integrating online marketing and social media activities with traditional marketing is an essential marketing strategy for today’s DMOs. The other conclusions are presented in the following:

Role of Online marketing

Online marketing became an important business strategy for DMOs in the era of information technology. It was shown that in order to be innovative in the competitive environment DMOs should establish an online marketing strategy and remain the attractive information source for the visitor. Moreover, it was proved that destinations should be proactive in taking online marketing strategy.

One important issue for DMOs to notice is to make a clear goal for the online marketing strategy. DMOs have to find out which the suitable strategy is, and what the visitor needs. With the clear strategy, it can help DMOs to reach success.

Nowadays, Internet is a huge source of information with different qualities. Visitors become fastidious because of the mass of information. How to attract the customers by the contents of website is another essential subject for all the DMOs. Well designed and user-friendly website is required by DMOs to give the visitor an e-experience.

Social media in relation to DMOs
Social Media is not a fad. It can be the key for DMOs to gain the increase the competitiveness. DMOs need to understand the trend of social media, recognize the place where the visitors are by using social media as one of marketing communication channels to build destination brands and engage and interact with visitor as one of the channels to recognize the need of visitors in destination.

How do DMOs engage the audience to reach potential visitors? The answer is to integrate audience by put them first. DMOs need to prioritize the audience. Let them be interested in destination and discuss about it by focusing on what is attractive then talking to them about that. DMOs have to use contents and conversation to reach potential visitors. The engagement of audiences and customers makes easier for DMOs to reach potential tourists. Moreover, DMOs have to understand how each social media platform works, and understand how to assemble and integrate social media into traditional marketing tactics to achieve the profitable outcomes.

In general, we shall admit that many of the findings from literature study were supported by the case study and the issue of online marketing is given considerable attention by the management board in VisitSweden. In conclusion, the chosen case study of VisitSweden shows compliance with the overall findings suggested by theory.

6.2. FURTHER RESEARCHES

Digital world is changing constantly. Online marketing and social media is somewhat still in its inception. In addition, there overall has been limited research performed in the field of online marketing and social media from DMOs perspective, further extensive research is needed on the topic. The study also takes a broad approach, it is suggested that future studies focus on specific issues which might include:

- How to Identify the way of intergating online marketing with traditional marketing strategies. The digital technonology has the obvious contribution to DMOs. However, the traditional media should not be excluded from traditional media and marketing.

- Finding the way of evaluating on return of investment in online marketing and social media in DMOs and how to measure the success of the online marketing and social media activities

- Examine the intergration of online marketing and social media with mobile social media and social geo-location application with the development of smart phone.

- Social media are certainly a enormous concerns for the organizations including public and private sector. Debates continues about the dark side of social media. Further studies are required to identify the negative impact of social media in destination marketing management which could prevent destinations from attracting visitors or even ruin their brands.
6.3. LIMITATIONS

The study was limited in several ways. Firstly, the literature review for the practice of online marketing with social media were not of sufficient quality to allow a firm foundation regarding the role of online marketing and social media in the business sector in general and tourism in particular. This is somewhat unavoidable because the digital world is changing constantly and technology is easy to become out-of-date than ever. In addition, we have found the difficulties in finding a reliable theory framework for the study since there are many theories could be provided by media companies and self-appointed online marketer and social media experts. We have to struggle to choose the authentic sources of material. Thus, in order to build a solid fundamental base for social media and online marketing is a need.

Secondly, there overall have been limited researches performed in the field of online marketing and social media from DMOs perspective. By the time of writing this study there are still very few DMOs applying innovation and digital technology as the center of marketing activities. Thirdly, the authors believe that an issue that was not addressed in this study was how to evaluate the success of online marketing and social media activities as well as the negative impact could happen to the DMOs. It will be necessary for DMOs to consider before deciding to direct their strategies with the importance of online marketing and practice of social media as the heart of change.

Finally, one source of weakness in this study which could has affected the measurements of our conclusions is that the empirical data gathered from single case study VisitSweden has the limited possibilities for generalization of the practice and benefits of online marketing and social media to apply for other DMOs.
7. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND CRITICAL REVIEW

This paper focuses on the importance of online marketing and the practice of social media in tourism destination marketing management. To define the purpose of research clearly, the authors present three research questions:

- Online marketing – why it is essential for today’s tourism destination marketing?
- How do destination marketing organizations (DMOs) build destination brands through social media?
- How do DMOs use digital social media platforms to engage the audience to reach potential visitors?

In order to observe how online marketing and social media have engaged in the practical management of DMOs, we chose VisitSweden (which is the Sweden’s national tourism marketing organisation owned equally by the Swedish Government and the Swedish tourism industry) as the case study.

With a view to answer the questions, we chose numerous resources from large numbers of books, articles, reports and other publications in paper. All these resources have been used as the support of theoretical part in this paper. In the empirical part, in order to get the authentic data, we decided to conduct the face to face interview and questionnaire with the managers from people in different positions related directly to our topic at VisitSweden. Moreover, we also collected some data by browsing a plenty of authentic websites about online marketing and social media and downloading some web articles and e-books.

Some of the weakness and strength must be mentions as follows:

The Weakness

- The topic of the research is relatively new. Therefore, there are difficulties in collecting enough resources to support the authors’ viewpoint.
- For some reasons, the authors cannot conduct the interview with all the people related to the topic, and this causes the data collected maybe not enough to be convincing for the analysis.

The Strength

- Since this study’s topic is relatively new, it gives adequate space for the authors to express the standpoints.
- The research use the ground theory of the business sector since up to now that is still the most active player in online marketing and social media to apply to tourism industry in general and destination marketing management in particular to create the foundation and framework for further researches.
- The person who the authors conducted interview with, is the experienced manager in the realm of internet communication, therefore, the data which collected from the interview are more reliable.
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