

Facebook as a Means of Communication in the Hotel Industry: A Case Study of Vietnam



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ABSTRACT: This study is carried out with the main objective of focusing on the analysis of the adaptation of Facebook in the hotel industry of Vietnam and verifies the importance of hotel presence on Facebook for communication with their consumers. This study was conducted through two studies that include a survey of Facebook users and a review of hotel presence on Facebook. The results from this study presented the importance of Facebook in the communication between hotels and their customers in both the presence of that network, as well as the ways used to communicate with their consumers. In addition, this study also will be established the foundations for future research related to the use of social networks in the hotel sector.

KEYWORDS: Facebook, communication, hotel, user, Vietnam.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, social media has become a useful tool where people do not only use to market online but also create their contents as well as interact with others, specially Facebook (Sharma & Sahni, 2015). Xiang & Gretzel, (2010) confirmed that users who have a positive emotional experience with companies on Facebook, will easily become consumers of these companies. Therefore, Facebook is increasingly attracting the attention of entrepreneurs (Sharma & Sahni, 2015) and that network is considered a marketing communication channel in the business activities of many companies (Burton & Soboleva, 2011).

Vietnam is the country that has more than half of the population that has at least one profile in social media and the number of social media users in Vietnam is expected to continue to increase in the near future (Q&Me Vietnam Market Research, 2020). Thus, many companies take the opportunity to use social media as a business tool (Leung et al., 2015; Loc et al., 2021). Based on the survey on e-commerce of companies in Vietnam carried out every two years by the Vietnam Electronic Commerce Association (2020), according to its latest report carried out in the beginning of 2019, in 4100 companies in the country of all business sectors, including tourism companies, it is stated that doing business on social media is a trend that draws the attention of companies, specifically, until 2018, 36% of the companies surveyed confirmed that they are doing business on the social media, is higher in comparison with 2017, 2016, 2015 and that was 32%, 34% and 28% respectively.

In Vietnam, tourism has had a remarkable growth. The quality of tourism services has been significantly improved with the participation of many large investors, which contributes to changing the quality of the infrastructure of tourism services, especially the hotel business. In 2020, the entire country had 31,000 tourist accommodation establishments with 750,000 rooms, 176 five-star hotels and 295 four-star hotels (Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, 2020) which generated increasingly competition in the accommodation industry. Therefore, to make a difference and improve competitiveness, many hotels are constantly looking for new business methods and elements of improvement in business activities, in which the application of information technologies is very important (Chan & Guillet, 2011).

According to data from a survey conducted by Q&Me Vietnam Market Research (2020), Facebook was voted the most used social media. Facebook users who buy through this media are increasing day by day. Given the popularity and competitive role of Facebook, researchers and managers in hotel industry need a clear understanding of how to manage Facebook effectively to contribute to good business marketing results. However, in reality, there is very little research on the application of Facebook in the hotel sector in Vietnam. Therefore, a study focused on the analysis of the adaptation of Facebook in the hotel sector in Vietnam is very necessary.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Social media in the hotel industry

The effective communication is the essential element to be able to listen, understand and treat the client properly and thus, satisfy their needs and expectations. Especially for companies that sell intangible products such as hotels, communication plays an essential role in business success (Burton & Soboleva, 2011).

According to García et al. (2017), social media can bring many benefits to hotels. There are the benefits related to communication with their current and potential clients; making sales and reputation on the net. As confirmed by Braun (2015) that marketing strategies through social media are very important for hotels since they can ensure sales thanks to the connection and interaction with consumers from all over the world.

The "basic" function of social media creation is communication (García et al., 2017). In the beginning, social media was instrument to facilitate the exchange of information between people and each time, it becomes a communication tool in exponential growth. Therefore, they are portals where large social communities are created with many participants (Wang et al., 2012). This is considered a great advantage for which hotels currently take advantage of it to interact with customers. As Deng et al., (2012) confirm, social media allow the relationship between clients and hotels to be direct and close despite geographical distance.

Selling through social media is no longer a strange thing today, especially for sellers of household products. Social media is a sales channel for all products, both tangible and intangible. On the part of consumers/buyers, through social media, they can buy 24 hours a day, finding information more quickly and accurately (Kotler et al., 2010). On the part of the providers/sellers, social media are like a new advertising and marketing channel through which they give information about their products or services provided, special offers or promotions (Deng et al., 2012). Before choosing a service or buying a product, clients usually go to social media to consult the opinions and evaluations made by other users who have had an experience with that service or product, accommodation service is not out of this aspect. The hotel sector is considered one of the most sensitive to customer opinions and ratings. Many times, the opinions or evaluations of the people who have stayed at the hotel can alter decision to choose it for other clients (García et al., 2017).

In addition, today, many hotels use social networks for many more things, such as for recruitment by posting job offers on social media, to search or communicate with intermediaries and suppliers or to report hotel news (García et al., 2017).

2.2. Facebook in hotel industry

The hotel sector is one of the most competitive business sectors on the internet, which has made all hotels feel obliged to be on social media (Chan & Guillet, 2011). Among various social media platforms, Facebook is preferred by hoteliers for their marketing efforts (Heller, 2016).

After 16 years of establishment, Facebook is the social media with the most users. Previous studies have mentioned that the significant impact of Facebook on hotels can be the emotional and informative appeal (Cervellon & Galipienzo, 2015). Bowen et al. (2015) confirmed that customers visit a hotel's Facebook page to search for information about rooms and to know experiences of other customers which determines the intention to book a hotel, including word of mouth. According to Smith (2013), Facebook gave online customers the power to read and evaluate the comments and notes of other customers on that network that are related to products or services of interest.

In addition, it is pointed out that effective advertising campaigns published on Facebook positively influence people and encourage them to buy the promoted products and services (Fink et al., 2020). Facebook users also consider the advantages of seeing new content from hotels, which prompts them to make purchase decisions through contacts on these social media platforms (Abitbol & Lee, 2017). This is particularly important for hotels (Fink et al., 2020).

In this sense, the main hypotheses of the study: Do hotels in Vietnam consider Facebook as a key element to communicate with their consumers?

3. METHODOLOGY

Two studies were conducted to check the communication of the hotels with their consumers on social networks

3.1. Study 1: Survey of Facebook users

Confirming Facebook are like a means of communication in the hotel sector, it is necessary to check whether the use of Facebook by hotels is really recognized by the users of that media. For this reason, a quantitative study was carried out based on an online survey conducted on Facebook users and they are also hotel customers.

The population object of this study was composed of the two requirements, there are: Users of Facebook and they have stayed in hotels in Vietnam. The objective of study 1 was not to analyze and deepen the behavior of users' use of Facebook to interact with hotels, but to verify that if they knew the presence of hotels on Facebook and interacted with hotels through that social media or not. The most convenient sampling technique was non-probability sampling, that is, any respondent who met the requirements of the target population could answer the survey. Method to publish the survey was through Facebook. The author published on

Facebook as a Means of Communication in the Hotel Industry: A Case Study of Vietnam

Facebook and with the help of other users to share it in her biographies and also published it in groups related to consumer experiences in hotels in Vietnam.

The time to receive the answers was one month, from March 6 to April 6, 2021. The questionnaire was prepared by the author and consisted of 14 questions; of which 80% with aspects of users' knowledge about the presence of hotels and interaction with hotels on Facebook and 20% about their attitude of using social networks

3.2. Study 2: Presence of hotels on Facebook

This study was carried out in order to find out the presence of hotels on Facebook. Based on the registry of the Tourism Organization hotels, the database of 891 hotels from three to five stars was found. Therefore, it was taken into account that the target population of the study would be composed only of these hotels. However, due to the limited investigation time, not all 891 hotels could be checked. Therefore, the size of the tested hotels was selected.

Table 1. The calculation of the sample size

Study population 891	Hotels from three to five stars
Macro population	Vietnam National Administration of Tourism
Level of signification	0.95
Sample error	0.05
Hypothesis parameters	$P=Q=0.5$
Sample size	269

Source: Own elaboration

In addition, the 891 include 491 three-star hotels, 273 four-star hotels, and 129 five-star hotels. So a proportion of the hotels of the following size was made:

	Population	Sample
Three star hotels	489	148
Four star hotels	273	82
Five star hotels	129	39
Total	891	269

Source: Own elaboration

To collect data from the hotels in the sample, the web portal was used: www.vietnamtourism.gov.vn (official site of the Vietnam Tourism Organization) and then collected the number of hotels necessary for the sample in a manner random since it had the inventory of all the hotels ordered by alphabets.

To collect all the data, each of the hotels was consulted about their participation and activity on Facebook. It included: Direct search for hotel names on Facebook to identify their presence there; the activities that the hotels establish with the users in that social network.

The study data are public, so any user can access them. The hotels Facebook presence review date was from June 1 to June 15, 2021.

4. RESULT

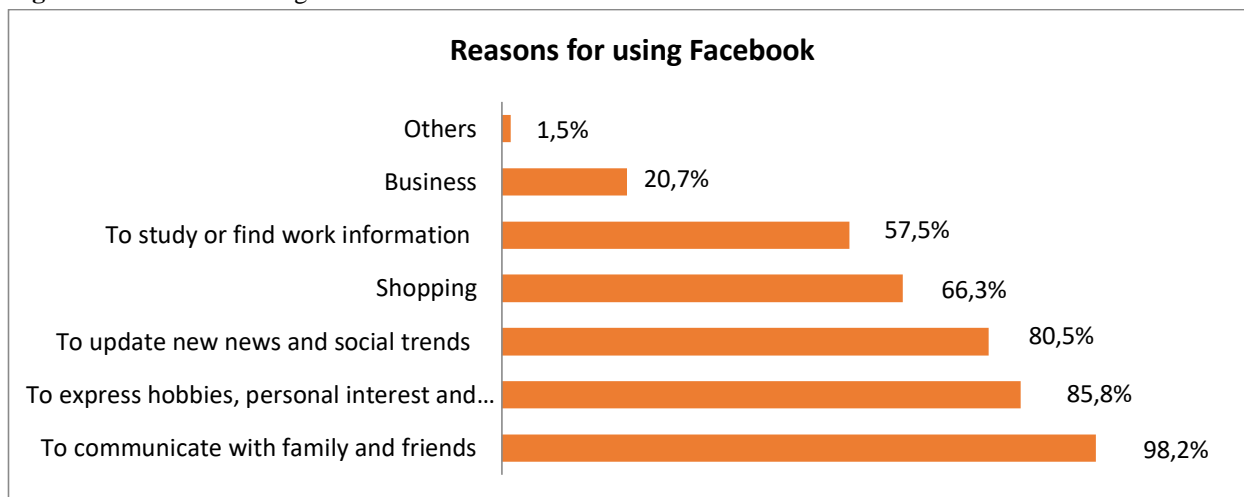
4.1. Study 1: Survey of Facebook users

In the end, they have 386 valid answers, most of the people who took the questionnaire (319 people), are between 18 and 35 years old, so it is very similar to the age of use of social networks in Vietnam according to the Q & Me Vietnam Market Research report results.

Regarding the reasons why users in the sample use Facebook, practically 379 respondents (98,2%) admit to using them to communicate with family and friends. The second place is to express hobbies, personal interest and entertainment answered by 331 respondents (85,8%). Third place is for updating new news and social trends with 312 respondents (80,8%). Fourth place is for shopping (66,3% with 256 respondents). They also use it for other reasons such as finding study or work information (57,5%) and doing business (20,7%) (Graphic 1).

Facebook as a Means of Communication in the Hotel Industry: A Case Study of Vietnam

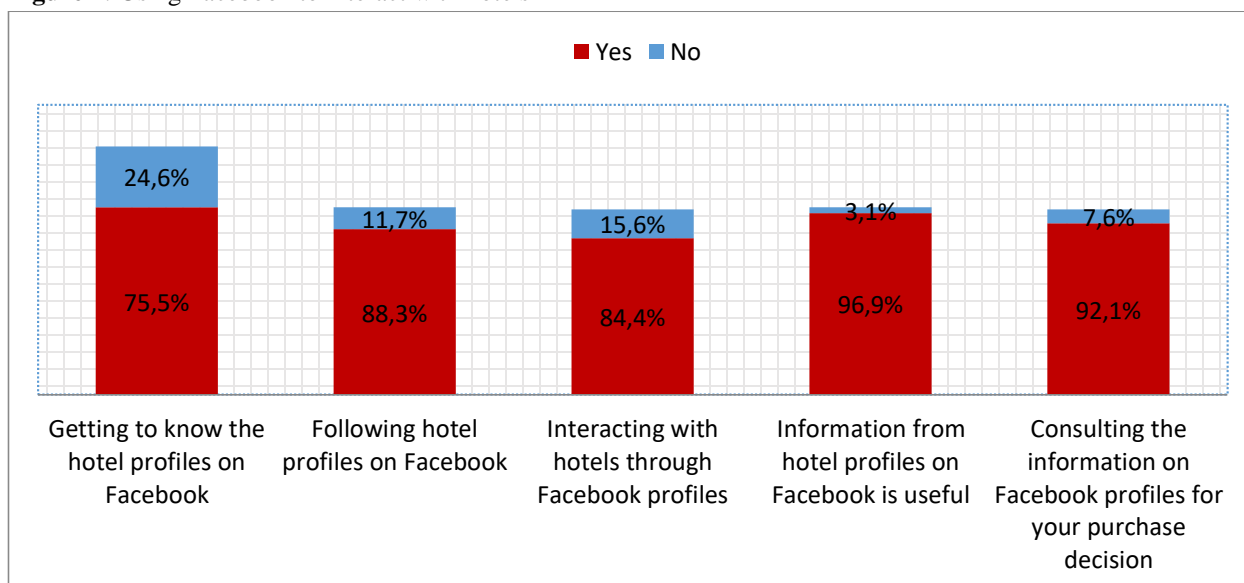
Figure 1. Reasons for using Facebook



Source: Own elaboration

Regarding the use of Facebook in order to interact with hotels, the sample of the present study is quite active in terms of interaction with hotels through Facebook. 291 respondents responded, representing 74.4%, who have the feeling that hotels are present on Facebook, while the remaining part answered that they are not (Figure 2), which shows that in reality, many hotels achieve an interaction with users on Facebook.

Figure 2: Using Facebook to interact with hotels



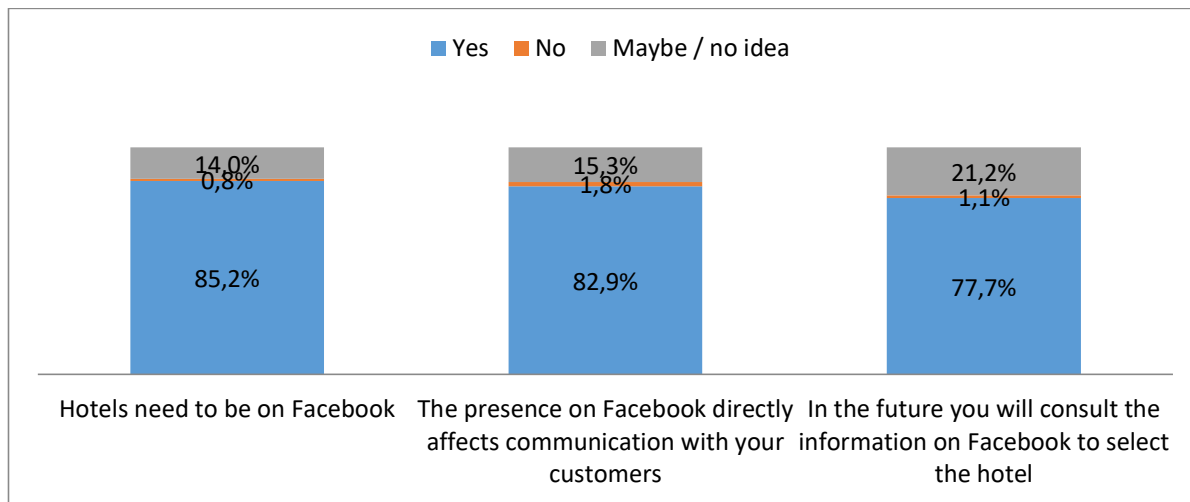
Source: Own elaboration

Most of them know the hotel profiles on Facebook by direct search through their profile, representing 84,2% (245 respondents). Among 291 people who said Yes, 88,3% of them (257 respondents) are following Facebook profiles of the hotels. 288 people responded to the question that if they have ever sent a private message, made a like, commented and/or shared posts of said hotels on social networks and 84,4% of them said Yes.

In addition, the positive assessment of the content of the posts is impressive, 96,9% of 291 respondents know the profiles of the hotels on Facebook, they evaluate that the content is useful. 92,4% said that at least once they had consulted the hotels' Facebook profiles to decide to use the hotel's accommodation and other services.

Regarding the need for the hotel to be on Facebook, 329 respondents, representing 85,2% of them said Yes. 82,9% (320 respondents) answered that the presence of the hotel on Facebook directly affects communication with their customers and 77,7% of them (300 respondents) affirm that in the future they will consult the information on Facebook profiles of the hotels to select their accommodation (Figure 3).

Facebook as a Means of Communication in the Hotel Industry: A Case Study of Vietnam



Source: Own elaboration

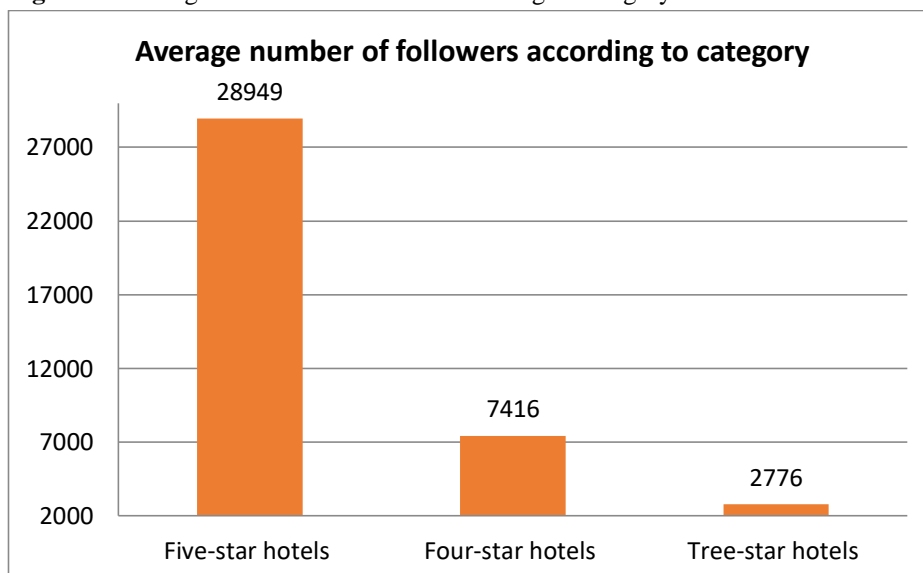
On the other hand, regarding the main interests to follow a hotel on Facebook, 344 people responded that they find about the current services/products that the hotel offers. The second interest is to have the experiences and opinions of other consumers who have stayed in hotels (288 people). In addition, some users seem to appreciate from their interaction with tourism companies through Facebook is the fact of being updated on the news of services/products (283 people) and places of interest near the hotel (277 people).

4.2. Study 2: Presence of hotels on Facebook

After the information collection process, it is observed that all 269 hotels in the sample, representing 100% of the sample, have a presence on Facebook.

Regarding the number of followers, it is identified that the 39 five-star hotels have much more followers than the four and three-star hotels. As can be summarized, the average number of followers of 39 hotels out of five is 28 949 people, while that of 82 four-star hotels is 7 416 and the value of 148 three-star hotels is 2 276. In particular, the hotel gets more followers than everyone has 120 131 people and the hotel has less than 103 people.

Figure 4: Average number of followers according to category



Source: Own elaboration

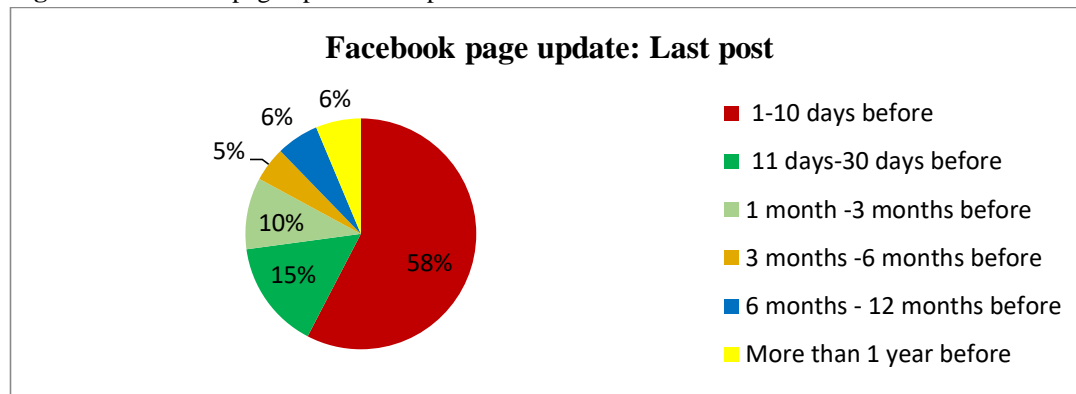
Regarding the updating of Facebook profiles, it is evaluated through the last post of the hotels on their pages. However, since the author's accession date is random, so, to obtain an objective conclusion of the frequency of the publication of the posts, the last post is observed in the time intervals.

Most of the hotels (155 hotels) update their Facebook page very frequently that their last post was 1-10 days before, it represents 58% of the sample, especially all 39 five-star hotels in the sample are in this group. There are 15% (41 hotels) showing

Facebook as a Means of Communication in the Hotel Industry: A Case Study of Vietnam

that their last post was from one to three months prior, 10% (27%) from three months to 6 months. In addition, it is observed that some hotels create their Facebook pages but not many posts are published, specifically 17 hotels that have the last post more than a year ago and most of them fall into the three-star hotels and that are the hotels with minor followers.

Figure 5: Facebook page update: Last post



Source: Own elaboration

Regarding participation and activity on Facebook, after accessing each of the Facebook pages of all hotels, it is identified that in general, all pages contain information necessary for any user to know, contact or arrive to the hotel such as the name, address, telephone number, links to the website and other social media in which the hotel has a presence as Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. In addition, the hotel offers are found and also the opinions and comments of users who have stayed in the hotel.

Regarding the activities, the contents of posts are diverse, such as: the products and services provided (the room, bar, restaurant, pool, hotel store), experiences of the clients, promotions and special packages, publications of the new products and services, interesting tourist places near the hotel, events and activities (sociocultural, environmental, educational...) and that are published through formats such as photo, video with explanations written in Vietnamese and/or English. Also, one way that is used by hotels on their pages is pinned publication. It is very creative and useful to draw the attention of users to the important post.

Regarding the interaction and response to customers, the first way that hotels use is that all Facebook pages in the sample automatically set the chat bubble to facilitate the accession of users who want to consult the private messages. The second is to respond to user comments and to verify this point, the last post of the hotels is reviewed and it turns out that all hotels responded to comments related to hotel issues.

5. CONCLUSION

The results show the evidence to answer the hypothesis of the study. Concluding all previous analyzes, the presence of Facebook is considered as an instrument to facilitate and improve hotel business strategy. Facebook is a mean of communication used both to offer information to users and to interact with them in order to obtain a close and mutual relationship between the hotel and their user. Many hotels have already achieved the dissemination that users have the feeling of their presence on Facebook. These hotels propose a series of information in their profiles so that customers can know and enjoy both the services/ products provided, customer experiences, new offers, promotions and publications, socio-cultural activities, among others. However, despite their importance, it is true that the management of some hotels is still not efficient. Some hotels have a presence on Facebook but have not yet taken advantage of the network to improve their communication with their customers.

In addition, during the investigation, it is realized that the topic of social networks is new in Vietnam and there have been very few investigations related to the use of social networks in commercial activities. Thus, it is advisable to delve into how companies in Vietnam are using social networks as a business element to improve their business.

As a future line of research, based on the results, it is possible to propose and investigate the motivational factors of the users of Facebook that influence the acceptance of Facebook as a mean of communication between users and hotels in Vietnam.

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Facebook as a Means of Communication in the Hotel Industry: A Case Study of Vietnam

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