

# THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG SOCIAL MEDIA, DESTINATION IMAGE AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS DESTINATION: THE CASE STUDY OF MEKONG DELTA TOURISM

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## Abstract

The aim of this study was to determine the relationship between social media, destination image and attitude towards destination of tourists in the Mekong Delta. Research data was collected from 512 tourists in the Mekong Delta. This paper employed Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, exploratory factor analysis, Confirmatory factor analysis and Structural equation modeling methods to test the proposed hypotheses. Estimation results revealed that social media positively influences destination image. Empirical findings also pointed out that social media and destination image have positive relationships with attitude towards destination. Based on the research results, several governance implications were proposed in order to help tourists form positive attitude towards the destination in Mekong Delta, including (1) Actively use social media in introducing, promoting and spreading information about the destination; (2) Build an attractive destination image.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Destination Image, Attitude towards Destination, Tourism, Vietnam

## 1. Introduction

Mekong Delta region is well-known as the largest “rice bowl” of Vietnam. In this region, agriculture sector is the main source of income of the local people. Besides that, other fields such as industrial sector, service sector in this place have also developed rapidly. In terms of tourism industry, there are many forms of travel service in the Mekong Delta such as river tourism, ecotourism, spiritual tourism, historical tourism, and tourism to islands. Therefore, Mekong Delta region greets large number of tourists every year. According to the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, Mekong Delta welcomed more than 47 million tourists in 2019, with a revenue of 30 trillion VND. This indicates that tourism in the Mekong Delta also contributes significantly to the economy of the region. Hence, the provinces and cities in Mekong Delta region have been increasingly exploiting and promoting tourism. However, tourism activities of the region have not yet developed commensurate with the existing potential.

Additionally, social network is seen as an innovative product of the technological revolution. Social network not only helps users communicate and share information quickly, but also supports the connection between suppliers and users. Information on social networks is easily spread, so social network also has a communication effect and is used to advertise and

propagate a business, a product, or a tourist destination,.... Chun and Suwannee (2018) stated that social network is an effective tool for tourism activities, people who often use social network will have a lot of information about tourist attractions. Consumers have changed the way of accessing information on tourism products and services from acquaintances to electronic word-of-mouth which is one of the most influential ways of transmitting information from social networking sites (Gruen et al., 2006). This shows that social networking service is an appropriate advertising method for tourism in modern times. In fact, social media not only makes a great contribution to promoting the image of a tourist destination (Yerizal and Abror, 2018; Prayogo and Kusumawardhani, 2016), but also improves positive attitude towards destinations of tourists (Iriobe and Abiola-Oke, 2019; Jalilvand et al., 2013). Moreover, Elliot et al. (2011) stressed that a destination with a beautiful image will contribute to creating positive attitude of tourists towards the destination. Thus, this study aims to examine the relationship between social media, destination image and attitude of tourists towards destination.

## 2. Literature and Hypothesis Development

Many researchers have proved that social media has a positive relationship with destination image and attitude towards destination. Particularly, Iriobe and Abiola-Oke (2019); Worapoj (2018); Jalilvand et al. (2013) pointed out that social media positively affects attitude towards tourist attraction. The research results of the studies conducted by Yerizal and Abror (2018); Prayogo and Kusumawardhani (2016) also demonstrated the positive correlation between social media and destination image. Besides that, Herrero et al. (2017); Phillips et al. (2013); Elliot et al. (2011) agreed that destination image contributes to increasing tourists' attitude towards destinations. However, although the relationship between social media and destination image, the relationship between destination image and attitude towards destination, and the relationship between social media and attitude towards destination exist in the research results of previous studies, few prior studies investigate the correlations among social media, destination image, and attitude towards destination.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) claimed that social media is a group of applications through the internet whose content is created, publicly updated, shared, and spread quickly by users. Social media, which is one of the fastest growing segments on the internet, provides tools that allow users to search, organize, share, annotate, comment, and contribute to content (Parra-López et al., 2011). Besides, Souza and Machado (2017) argued that social media is a powerful information exchange channel, where users can easily access large amounts of data in accordance with their needs. To fully understand social media, researchers should consider social network which can be understood as a space where individuals create their own homepage, record their daily diaries under blogs, post photos, share videos and music, exchange ideas, and connect to other interesting web services (Turban et al., 2008). Lange-Faria and Elliot (2012) showed that social networking helps users interact with many applications, display videos and images and filter information, thereby attracting a large number of users. The evolution of social network contributes to the formation and development of social media. In addition, Singh et al. (2012) stressed that social network was formed for the

purpose of sharing information, but now it has become an effective communication tool. Therefore, in this study, social media is understood in the sense of spreading information through social networks. In other words, social media is considered in terms of electronic word-of-mouth (E\_WOM), in which information is shared and spread quickly on social networks.

Destination image is no longer a strange concept for travel followers. Vaughan (2007) said that destination image represents the beliefs, ideas and impressions of tourists towards the destination. Hence, widely promoting the image of the destination can enhance the image of the tourist destination and attract more tourists. The research results of Kim et al. (2005) found that tourism promotion could create more positive destination image. Through social media, tourists easily reflect thinking, feeling and impression, rate and comment on tourist destinations. Chun and Suwannee (2018) argued that social media is spread by internet users, so information is more accurate. Hence, information on social media greatly affects the image of the destination. During trips, social media is used to find out information about attractions, recreational activities, to connect with friends, and to share travel experiences. After trips, tourists use social media to share reviews, travel experiences and destination photos (Assenov and Khurana, 2012; Fotis et al., 2012). Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) pointed out that recommendations from friends and relatives are the most reliable social media channel, which influences the tourist's perception of destination image. Setiawan (2014) mentioned that electronic word-of-mouth strongly impacts destination image as customers with multiple travel experiences often share destination images and information through images on social media, which contributes to building the image of the destination. The results of previous papers support the following hypothesis:

**H1:** Social media positively influences destination image.

Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) claimed that attitude towards destination is described as the psychological tendency of tourists expressed through the positive or negative evaluation. Attitude towards tourist destinations consists of cognitive, affective and behavioral components (Vincent and Thompson, 2002). Tourists' trust and feelings are formed during the process of accessing information through social media (Fotis et al., 2012). Thus, through social networks, tourists can easily reflect their attitude towards the service at tourist attractions. The study of Parra-López et al. (2011) showed that tourists use social media to express opinions and share information. Furthermore, information from electronic word-of-mouth can be argued and tested by many individuals, so accessing this information can shape attitude of tourists towards the destination (Shu and Scott, 2014). The empirical findings of Di Pietro et al. (2012) implied that electronic word-of-mouth has a significant impact on attitude towards destinations and this form of communication helps tourists share experiences and gain knowledge related to travel destination. These authors also stated that electronic word-of-mouth communication is supported by social networks. Tourists can be persuaded by information related to the destination from electronic word-of-mouth communication, then tourists will have positive or negative attitude towards the destination (Bhattacharjee and Sanford, 2006). Prior studies such as Zarrad and Debabi (2015); Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) also stressed that electronic word-

of-mouth significantly affects tourists' attitudes towards destinations. From the above arguments, this study proposes the second hypothesis as follows:

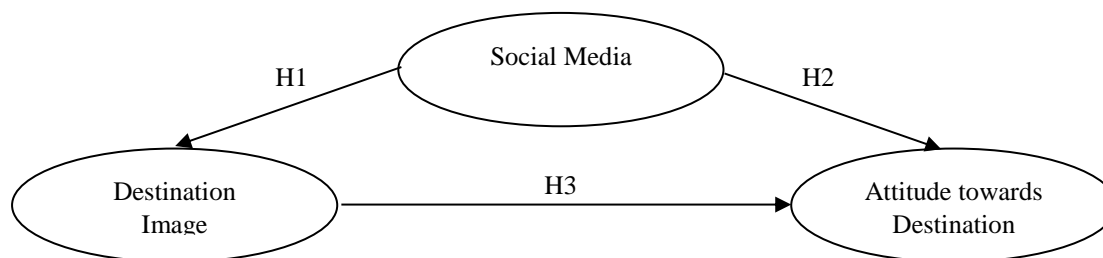
**H2:** Social media positively impacts attitude towards destination.

Many researchers believed that destination image could affect tourists' attitude towards destination. Herrero et al. (2017) found that destination image have a strong impact on tourists' evaluation. Hence, destination image is an important factor influencing tourists' attitude towards destinations (Yoon and Uysal, 2005). Moreover, Elliot et al. (2011) argued that beautiful destination image affects attitude of tourists towards that destination. Additionally, Brijs et al. (2011) pointed out that destination image is a premise that is reflected in tourists' attitude. The research results of Phillips and Jang (2008) also showed that destination image affects tourists' attitude towards the destination. Meanwhile, Phillips et al. (2013) agreed that destination image has a positive effect on attitude towards the destination. Hence, the third hypothesis is proposed as follows:

**H3:** Destination image positively affects attitude towards destination.

From the above arguments and based on the results of prior studies, the research model is generalized through Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Theoretical Model**



### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1. Sample Selection

Raykov and Widaman (1995) stressed that when analyzing linear structural models, the sample size must be large since this method is based on sampling distribution theory. Besides that, Hair et al. (1998) argued that for maximum likelihood estimation, the minimum sample size is from 100 to 150 observations. Hence, the sample size of the study is 512 observations, which are collected from a survey of tourists in destinations in Mekong Delta by convenience sampling method.

#### 3.2. Estimation Method

To determine the relationships among social media, destination image, and attitude towards destination, this study applies analytical methods, including: testing the reliability of the scale, analyzing exploratory factor, analyzing confirmatory factor, and using linear structural model. The set of measurement criteria for the scales includes social media (6 items), destination image

(10 items), and attitude towards destination (4 items). Table 1 demonstrates the scale of the components in the research model.

**Table 1: The Scale of the Components in the Research Model**

Factor/Item	Explanation	Source
<b>Social media (TTXH)</b>		
TTXH1	You always search for information about destinations on social networks (Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, etc.) to identify impressive destinations.	Jalilvand et al. (2013); Prayogo and Kusumawardhani (2016); Abubakar et al. (2017)
TTXH2	You always search for information about destinations on social networks (Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, etc.) to choose the right destination.	
TTXH3	You always consult the opinions of other travelers on social networks (Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, etc.) to choose a good destination.	
TTXH4	You always search for information about destinations on social networks (Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, etc.) before going to the destination.	
TTXH5	You do not feel secure about the destination if you cannot find out information about the destination on social networks (Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, etc.).	
TTXH6	You feel secure about the destination when you read positive comments about the destination on social networks (Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, etc.).	
<b>Destination image (HADD)</b>		
HADD1	Mekong Delta has many beautiful natural landscapes.	Popichit et al. (2013); Mohamad et al. (2012)
HADD2	Local people in Mekong Delta are friendly and hospitable.	
HADD3	Cuisine in Mekong Delta is rich and attractive.	
HADD4	Tourist destinations in Mekong Delta are very safe.	
HADD5	Tourist attractions in Mekong Delta are very secure.	
HADD6	Tourist destinations in Mekong Delta are always conscious of environmental protection.	
HADD7	Tourist attractions in Mekong Delta always create new services.	
HADD8	Tourist attractions in Mekong Delta have many entertainment activities.	
HADD9	Mekong Delta has unique cultural features.	
HADD10	Tourist attractions in Mekong Delta are interesting destinations.	
<b>Attitude towards destination (TD)</b>		
TD1	You really love the landscape of Mekong Delta.	Jalilvand et al. (2013); Rizky et al. (2017)
TD2	You really love the cuisine of Mekong Delta.	
TD3	You really love the culture of Mekong Delta.	
TD4	You are very interested in talking about Mekong Delta.	

#### 4. Empirical Results and Discussion

The research on the relationship among social media, destination image, and attitude of tourists towards destinations in Mekong Delta region is carried out through 4 steps. Firstly, the authors test the reliability of the scales through Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Next, the authors conduct exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to reduce data to a smaller set of summary variables, and to identify the structure of the relationship between the variable and the respondent. Then, the authors do confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to determine the fit of the research data with the

theoretical model. Finally, the linear structural model is applied to examine the relationship between the concepts in the research model.

### Step 1: Checking the reliability of the scale

The scales must be tested for reliability before being used. Table 2 presents the result of the reliability test of the scale.

**Table 2: Result of the Reliability Test of the Scale**

Item	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Social media (TTXH)		Cronbach's Alpha = 0.897
TTXH1	0.739	0.876
TTXH2	0.711	0.881
TTXH3	0.728	0.878
TTXH4	0.698	0.882
TTXH5	0.721	0.879
TTXH6	0.732	0.877
Destination image (HADD)		Cronbach's Alpha = 0.898
HADD1	0.642	0.888
HADD2	0.660	0.887
HADD3	0.666	0.887
HADD4	0.634	0.889
HADD5	0.634	0.889
HADD6	0.645	0.888
HADD7	0.682	0.886
HADD8	0.623	0.889
HADD9	0.636	0.889
HADD10	0.629	0.889
Attitude towards destination (TD)		Cronbach's Alpha = 0.762
TD1	0.569	0.701
TD2	0.563	0.704
TD3	0.573	0.699
TD4	0.536	0.718

Source: Survey results of 512 tourists

Based on the results in Table 2, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for social media factor, for destination image factor, and for attitude towards destination factor are 0.897, 0.898 and 0.762, respectively. These values are greater than 0.6, indicating that the scales are reliable and can be used to measure (Nunnally, 1978; Peterson, 1994; Slater, 1995). Besides that, all component items have total correlation coefficients greater than 0.3 and have Cronbach's Alpha coefficients if item deleted less than Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of the whole scale. Therefore, all items should be retained.

### Step 2: Exploratory factor analysis

Exploratory factor analysis method is employed to consider extracting 20 items from the scales into small groups. To perform the linear structural model, exploratory factor analysis is applied

along with principal axis factoring method and promax rotation method. Table 3 shows the result of exploratory factor analysis.

**Table 3: Result of Exploratory Factor Analysis**

Component	Factor Loading		
	F1	F2	F3
HADD3	0.727		
HADD2	0.702		
HADD9	0.693		
HADD10	0.679		
HADD7	0.677		
HADD5	0.662		
HADD6	0.592		
HADD8	0.587		
HADD1	0.559		
HADD4	0.525		
TTXH3		0.780	
TTXH1		0.779	
TTXH6		0.774	
TTXH4		0.737	
TTXH5		0.697	
TTXH2		0.683	
TD3			0.671
TD1			0.649
TD2			0.565
TD4			0.508
Eigenvalues	8.552	1.064	0.482
Total variance explained			50.486
KMO			0.956
Bartlett's			0.000

Source: Survey results of 512 tourists

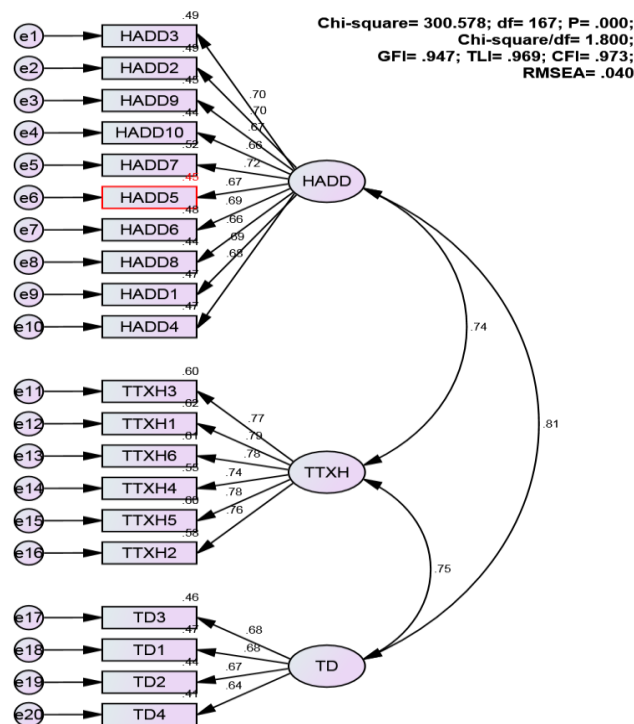
Based on the results in Table 3, the KMO test value of 0.956 ranges from 0.5 to 1 and the total variance explained value of 50.486 is greater than 50%, so the research model is suitable (Hair et al., 2006). Additionally, Bartlett's test has a value of 0.000 which is less than 0.05, thus the variables are correlated in the population. Besides that, the factor loading coefficients of the items are all greater than 0.5, which ensures the practical significance of the exploratory factor analysis. The results in Table 3 also point out that there are 3 groups of factors extracted, including F1: Destination image (HADD1, HADD2, HADD3, HADD4, HADD5, HADD6, HADD7, HADD8, HADD9, HADD10); F2: Social media (TTXH1, TTXH2, TTXH3, TTXH4, TTXH5, TTXH6); F3: Attitude towards destination (TD1, TD2, TD3, TD4).

### Step 3: Confirmatory factor analysis

Checking for convergence, reliability, unidirectionality, and discriminant validity are issues that need to be considered when performing confirmatory factor analysis, in order to determine the suitability of research data with the theoretical model. The convergence of the scale is tested

through the normalization coefficient of the scale and all items have values greater than 0.5, so they reach statistical significance. This shows that the scale achieves convergence (Gerbing and Anderson, 1987). Besides that, reliability is examined through Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, composite reliability, and total variance explained. Since the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for social media factor, for destination image factor, and for attitude towards destination factor are all greater than 0.6; the composite reliability and the total variance explained are greater than 0.5, it can be concluded that the scales in the research model are reliable (Hair et al., 2010; Gerbing and Anderson, 1987). Confirmatory factor analysis results are displayed in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Result**



Source: Survey results of 512 tourists

The result of the confirmatory factor analysis shown in Figure 2 shows that the scale has 167 degrees of freedom, the Chi-square test value of 300.578, the P-value of 0.000 which is smaller than 0.05; Chi-square/df value of 1.800 which is less than 2; TLI value of 0.969 which is greater than 0.9; CFI value of 0.973 which is larger than 0.9; RMSEA value of 0.040 which is less than 0.08. These results indicate that the criteria for testing unidirectionality are satisfied (Hu and Bentler, 1999), so the scale has a compatibility between the data and the theoretical model. The result of discriminant validity testing is shown in Table 4.



**Table 4: Result of Discriminant Validity Testing**

Correlation	r	S.E.	C.R.	P-value
HADD <--> TTXH	0.743	0.030	8.672	0.000
HADD <--> TD	0.807	0.026	7.380	0.000
TTXH <--> TD	0.753	0.029	8.477	0.000

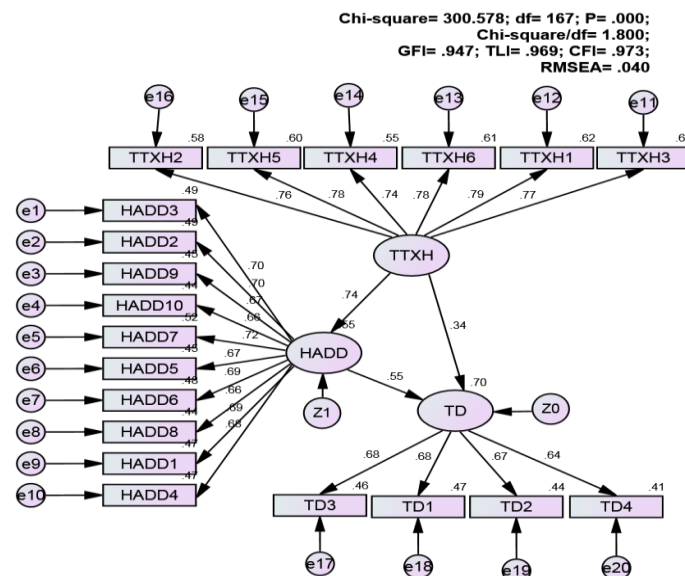
Source: Survey results of 512 tourists

Divergent validity value is used to test the difference between concepts in the research model. The results of testing the discriminant validity of the set of scales (social media, destination image, and attitude towards destination) in Table 4 point out that both the estimated coefficient (r) and standard error (S.E.) of the correlation between the factors have P-value of 0.000 which is less than 0.05. Thus, the correlation coefficients of pairs are different from 1 at the 95% confidence level, indicating that the pairs in the research model reach discriminant value.

**Step 4: Constructing the linear structural model**

The linear structural model is used to examine the relationship among social media, destination image, and attitude towards destination. The result of the linear structural model is clearly illustrated in Figure 3. Accordingly, P-value of Chi-square is 0.000 which is less than 0.05; Chi-square value adjusted for degrees of freedom (CMIN/df) is 1.800 which is less than 2; Comparative fit index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) have a value of 0.973 and 0.969, respectively, which are greater than 0.9; RMSEA index value is 0.040 which is smaller than 0.08. Thus, the linear structural model meets the condition of unidirectionality.

**Figure 3: Result of the Linear Structural Model**



Source: Survey results of 512 tourists

The linear relationship between the factors in the research model is presented in Table 5. More specifically, social media is correlated with destination image and attitude towards destination; destination image is correlated with attitude towards destination.

**Table 5: Regression Coefficients of Relationships**

Correlation	Estimated Coefficient	S.E.	C.R.	P-value	R <sup>2</sup>
HADD <--- TTXH	0.743	0.054	13.165	0.000	0.552
TD <--- TTXH	0.342	0.053	5.154	0.000	0.704
TD <--- HADD	0.553	0.061	7.605	0.000	

Source: Survey results of 512 tourists

From the estimated results in Table 5, it can be seen that social media positively impacts destination image with the estimated coefficient of 0.743 at the significance level of 1 percent. R-squared reaches 0.552, indicating that social media can explain 55.2% of the variation of destination image. Additionally, social media has a significant effect on attitude towards destination with the positive estimated coefficient of 0.342 at the significance level of 1 percent. Besides that, attitude towards destination is also strongly affected by destination image with the positive estimated coefficient of 0.553 at the significance level of 1 percent. R-squared has a value of 0.704, showing that social media and destination image can explain 70.4% of the variation of attitude towards destination.

## 5. Conclusion

This study aims to investigate the relationship among social media, destination image and attitude towards destination of tourists in Mekong Delta region. Based on the primary data of 512 tourists who have traveled to Mekong Delta region, the study employs Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, exploratory factor analysis, Confirmatory factor analysis and Structural equation modeling methods to test the proposed hypotheses. Estimation results reveal that social media positively affects destination image. Empirical findings also show that social media and destination image have positive relationships with attitude towards destination. Hence, the communication and tourism promotion of the destination will contribute to enhancing the beautiful destination image and positive attitude of tourists towards the destination. Besides that, an impressive destination image will increase tourists' positive attitude towards the destination.

Based on the research results, several governance implications are proposed in order to help tourists form positive attitude towards the destinations in Mekong Delta, including (1) Actively use social media in introducing, promoting and spreading information about the destination; (2) Build an attractive destination image. In order to actively use social media in introducing and promoting tourist attractions, it is necessary to set up a system of social network channels to serve the tourism promotion of the destination; build content to share on social networking sites; and implement strategies to introduce the destination's social networking sites to tourists. Moreover, in order to build an attractive destination image, it is important to regularly improve

the tourism service space at destinations; design unique and novel tourism products; and form typical check-in points of the destination.

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