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Regional Destination Images on Instagram: The Case of Visit Southeast Asia Official

The purpose of this study is to analyze the use of Instagram as a social media platform by the South-East Asia tourism organization. Three dimensions are used in this study namely functional, information, and performance. For this study, 854 visual and textual posts from South-East Asia official Instagram account content analyzed. The findings reveal that functional dimensions are related to the South-East Asia countries' image which is rich in natural and cultural attractions. From the information dimensions, it was revealed that postings related to special events, campaigns, and promotions. From the analysis of the performance, the engagement rate was 2.14 (average category). This study contributes to the categorization of regional tourism themes and provides a robust indicator for the tourism organization in terms of evaluating their engagement and measure their performance in social media. The study has limitations such as the perspective of South-East Asia tourism organization. Future study can use multiple perspectives and analyse the textual data from Instagram accounts of tourism organizations.

Introduction

In the ASEAN region, tourism is especially becoming one essential aspect of economic development (12.4% of the total GDP of ASEAN countries). This value is higher than the world average at 9.8% and of Asia in general at 8.5% respectively (Asean Tourism, 2018). The ASEAN area includes 10 Southeast Asian countries collectively, as a highly desirable tourism region. Many factors determine ASEAN success in the tourism sector which includes diversity in terms of culture, people, culinary experiences, flora and fauna, landscapes, superstructures, entertainment, shopping, recreation, and excitement. In 2017, the ASEAN countries launched the ASEAN Tourism Marketing Strategy (ATMS) 2017-2020, with the campaign tagline 'Southeast Asia: feel the warmth'(Asean Tourism, 2018). The members participating in the campaign are Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. One of the ATMS strategies is to develop and market the regional brand and experience by promoting the regional area as one destination. Therefore, the information and communication displayed on the social media accounts of the ASEAN tourism organization are the focus of this study.

According to the latest data, internet penetration around the world has reached 57% of the world population, with social media penetration having reached around 3.48 billion people (45%) worldwide (Kemp, 2019). With the development of social media in the context of the tourism and hospitality industry, information exchange about products and experiences has changed dramatically, travelers and organizations now share online knowledge using various platforms (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Social media has changed the way organizations communicate with their customers by allowing a two-way communication channel between the organization and customers (Guidry et al., 2015).

To comprehend the potential effect of social media on an organization, continuous social media management, and performance evaluation must be undertaken frequently. An organization also needs to maximize its engagement with customers on social media; research suggests that most tourism companies spent, on average, less than 1% of their marketing budgets on their social media platforms (Hudson & Thal, 2013). Consumer demand for immediate access to the organization and product information is answered predominantly by social media (Virtanen et al.,

2017). To determine the effects of social media strategies employed by NTO's, in their major study Hays et al., (2013) identified three main themes; post frequency, interaction, and content from seven countries present on Twitter and Facebook.

Thus far, previous studies have confirmed the effectiveness of visual content (pictures, photos, and videos) and indicated that these are particularly important in engaging and mediating travel experiences (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). This statement is supported by Leung, Law, VanHoof, and Buhalis, (2013), namely the fact that social media also plays a mediation role in the traveler's decision-making process by minimizing the risk of making the wrong travel decision. Most tourism and hospitality social media research focus on Facebook, Twitter and TripAdvisor than on Instagram and the topics are more related to social factors, organizational attributes, platform attributes, user characteristics and user engagement (Hays et al., 2013; Mariani et al., 2016; Ngai et al., 2015). In the context of destination communication strategy, few writers have been able to undertake systematic research into user engagement with the attractiveness of content posted by the official city social media account in particular cities or countries, i.e., Facebook, Flickr, Instagram (Nixon et al., 2017; Paül I Agustí, 2018; Roque & Raposo, 2016).

This study will analyze the official Instagram account of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) concerning functional, informational, and performance dimensions. This study sets out to investigate the usefulness of Instagram rather than other social media since 50% of the variance in intention to visit and creation of the destination image is influenced by the Instagram platform, followed by Facebook and YouTube (Molinillo, Liébana-Cabanillas, Anaya-Sánchez, and Buhalis, 2018). Another concern is that a user public account has no boundaries in terms of content visibility (Casaló et al., 2017; Hu et al., 2014). The framework used involves consideration of the functional (more tangible) experience, information, and performance to measure the NTO's presence on Instagram. The first dimension of functionality can be used to explain the destination characteristics in terms of natural, cultural, and tourist infrastructure. Second, the information dimension will inform the characteristics of tourism organizations' communication content on the Instagram platform. Third, analyzing performance dimensions will allow us to analyze the evolution of the ASEAN tourism engagement rate in their official Instagram accounts from 2016 until 2019. Therefore, this study seeks to address the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the functional characteristics ASEAN tourism posted on their official Instagram account?

RQ2. What type of information does ASEAN tourism post on their official Instagram account?

RQ3. How effective is the performance from the ASEAN tourism official Instagram account?

Literature Review

Instagram

Online networking is broadly utilized in business today since web-based social networking can catch a consumer's attention and influence them to have a different perspective (Powers et al., 2012 in He et al., 2019). Social media is related to big data and can be categorized as high velocity, large in volume, diverse in variety, exhaustive in scope, with a fine-grained resolution, having a relational nature and flexibility in its approach (Quan-Haase & Sloan, 2016, p. 5). With the rapid development of mobile phone technology, the current forerunners in social media are now image-based service applications, such as Instagram, Pinterest, and Snapchat (Stuart et al., 2017). In particular, Instagram has emerged rapidly as a well-known mobile photo, video capturing, and sharing platform with more than 1 billion active user accounts around the globe (Abed, 2018; Kemp, 2019). Instagram is currently the most popular social media platform for marketing purposes in 2019; the number of people reached by Instagram adverts is almost 894.5 million, with more than 65% of them in the age range 18–34 (Kemp, 2019). Nowadays,

Instagram has changed the paradigm of people in terms of enjoying visual experiences with photo sharing, social relations, marketing using social media, privacy and surveillance issues, and questions around identity (Serafinelli, 2018). The use of Instagram has become the basis for the so-called new mobile and visual aesthetics, where it has radically transformed the traditional functions of photography (Serafinelli, 2018, p. 8).

Instagram allows users to post and share photographs instantly to multiple platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, besides Instagram users can view a core page that shows a stream of pictures and videos from all accounts that they are followed in chronological order (Hu et al., 2014). The Instagram platform offers users a list of account types that can be chosen by the user to provide information in their biography. Most common are a personal account, blog, public (thematic community), business account, brand account, celebrity account, or landing account. Instagram has a story-telling feature, which can enhance the information presentation of an organization allowing the story to be easily shared by users (Virtanen et al., 2017). Collaborating with social media influencers and tourists who document their journey will increase the feasibility and images of vacations, adventures, and other kinds of journey experiences for other potential visitors.

Visual Destination Images

The study of the destination image is fundamentally related to image formation and measurement study in psychology. A destination image is formed at two levels first, as organic and developed from the assimilation of information from everyday life. Secondly, it is an inducing image, formed on the influence of tourism promotions directed by marketers (Gunn, 1988). Further explained by Pike (2007), the destination can be described in terms of the variety of things to see and do, representing competitive and comparative advantages such as natural, cultural, and developed resources.

Further studies by Hunter (2012) have attempted to explain visual destination images, through research related to the explicit and implicit messages in promotional media such as brochures, maps, magazines, postcards, and guidebooks compared with the original condition of the destination in the urban area being described. Other researchers find that the destination image is associated with travel motivations and the affective qualities and characteristics of the photographs taken by photographers and tourists (MacKay & Couldwell, 2004; Pan et al., 2014); however, Song and Kim (2016) studies are more concerned with subtle distinctions between the typical characteristics of pictorial information which appear on the social media platform and which originally appeared in two different Destination Management Organizations (DMOs). Interestingly photo-sharing by using social media has become more critical for travelers in terms of searching for information and building a perception about the destination and decision-making due to greater freedom in the image creation and dissemination processes.

Detailed examination of a destination image by using a web content mining approach was used by Költringer and Dickinger (2015), based on research and image representation through several information channels available online. Furthermore, web content mining methods were used to analyze three different resources which were UGC, media, and official NTO's which provide topics of interest to the travel community and travel guides to be identified.

In the case of promoting NTO's, seven categories measure visual context on social media platforms (Instagram and YouTube) and these are based on content, major themes, information, engagement, interactivity, promotion, and customer service variables. NTOs utilize social media as a traditional marketing tool, rather than exploiting it as a customer service tool to mitigate potential customer problems (Uşaklı et al., 2017).

Tourism Functional Components

According to Echtner and Ritchie (1991), functional impressions are one of the components formed by a destination image. This component is related to the mental picture or image that describes the physical characteristics of a place and is measurable for a destination. It is important to note that the functional components of a destination consist of several attributes from nature such as natural landscapes and natural attractions, national parks, beaches, flora and fauna, water-based attractions (i.e., river, waterfall, and lake). Stepchenkova and Zhan (2013) compared pictures posted by the official NTO in social media photos application Flickr. The results show that there are three main dimensions related to the destination: people, natural landscapes, and archaeological sites.

Cultural dimensions also play a part and have a significant influence on the functional images of a destination; they can include historical sites, architecture/buildings, art, stories and museums, food and beverages, tourist sites/activities, festivals, and people. Supporting facilities and local infrastructure that support tourist activities such as entertainment, shopping facilities, sports facilities and activities, accommodation and restaurants are also essential elements (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). This view is supported by Beerli and Martin (2004) who write that there are eight dimensions/attributes in this category which help to determine the perceived destination image: natural resources, general infrastructure, tourist infrastructure, tourist leisure and recreation, culture, history, and art.

Information Content

The essential component in the positioning process for a destination is to create a distinctive and appealing image. Moreover, it has been explained that the projected image links to ideas and impressions generated from various information sources, which are related to a destination and available for travelers' consideration (Deng & Li, 2018; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). In other words, attributes that describe a destination can be translated into a projected image as a supply-side image that serves to describe the choice of activity, location, and attractiveness of the destination. The media used by tourism organizations has now transformed traditional text-based communication into the image or animation-based information (Song & Kim, 2016).

In the digital era, the national tourism organization (NTO) as a publisher of tourism destination images, uses the projected image for marketing purposes where the contents represent the mission, campaign, and marketing strategy of the organization. In other words, such images are induced images (construed through the assimilation of travel information from commercial sources (Michaelidou et al., 2013, p. 791). According to Költringer and Dickinger (2015), digital information sources provide for proper image formation and allow for branding and thus, potentially, impact upon travelers' impressions of a place and serve as platforms to communicate perceptions. In connection with the changes in behavioral patterns based on social media visual content, several studies have shown a significant impact from utilizing images for communication processes on social media, because an image requires fewer cognitive abilities compared to words (Nixon et al., 2017; Pittman & Reich, 2016; Song et al., 2018).

Social Media Performance

Some researchers study experimental visual aesthetics consisting of context, content, and composition to validate Instagram Likes as a potential measure of the aesthetic appeal of content, major themes and information type (Thömmes & Hübner, 2018; Uşaklı et al., 2017). In terms of the context of destination, topical linguistics is used to measure digital tourism initiatives as identified by their official hashtags (#). Moreover, social media data business analytics are used for the extraction, tracking, visualization, and reporting of unstructured data (posts, comments, answers) (Vecchio et al., 2018).

Engagement rate is the proportion of all engagements on a post to the total number of impressions, expressed as a percentage. It is considered a major key performance indicator on Instagram. To calculate the engagement rate, every social media is calculated differently depending on the platform. For example, total engagement on Facebook is comprised of the total amount of shares, likes, reactions, and comments. Total engagement on Instagram would be comprised of the total amount of likes and comments on a post with the total number of followers, then multiplying it by 100 (Mee, 2016).

Evaluating the performance are based on the industry-standard engagement rates according to DevriX (2020) are based on the criteria as follow: less than 1% (low engagement rate); between 1% and 3.5% (average engagement rate); between 3.5% and 6% (high engagement rate); above 6% (very high engagement rate). Another benchmark for the engagement rate is based on the industry characteristics, according to Milenkovic (2020) Instagram's average engagement rate is 1.9%, but this differs for every industry. Public figures have the biggest average influencer engagement rate on Instagram with 5.7%, while the lowest engagement comes from the shopping and retail industry with only 0.97%. Interestingly, the engagement rate of one of the most popular influencer industries – travel – dropped from 8% in 2018 to only 4.5% in 2019.

In conclusion, the evidence from previous studies in analyzing destination images in social media are related to three dimensions which are functional, informational and performance, previous researchers have consistently used these three dimensions to describe a tourism destination image content. Two important themes emerge from the previous studies discussed so far: first, how do functional (tangible) elements appear in natural, cultural and tourist infrastructure images of national tourism organizations; secondly, what is the perspective of the organization as a publisher in terms of providing relevant information on social media, and how is this performance measured. Altogether, previous research offers essential insights into the framework for this study.

Methodology

Content analysis will be used in this study; it is a suitable method that offers an orderly and objective analysis of images and textual content posted on Instagram. This procedure is valuable for understanding social correspondence and cooperation practices to enable specialists to inspect the correspondence and coordinate efforts straightforwardly (Choi et al., 2007). In the last few years, this method has been used by researchers in the tourism and hospitality industry related to traveling and tourism websites, social media campaigns and sentiment analysis for online reviews (Mich & Baggio, 2015; Minazzi & Lagrosen, 2013; Pan et al., 2014; Song & Kim, 2016; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013).

Variables and measurement development

Based upon previous literature related to social media and visual destination images, evaluative dimensions were developed to measure the visual destination images posted by NTO on an Instagram platform; sizes included three aspects: functional elements, information, and performance. Items explained the usefulness of the images of the destination-related to nature, culture, and tourist facilitation (Choi et al., 2007; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). The information dimension related to the publisher cognitive concept (PCC) (Deng & Li, 2018) and was combined with the relevance of different social media platform information types and content such as behind-the-scenes posts, educational posts, trending posts, influencer posts and a short video (Hunter, 2012; Költringer & Dickinger, 2015; Uşaklı et al., 2017).

In previous studies, researchers conducted observations to assess engagement on social media with the information given, by measuring the number of likes, shares or comments received and

tags related to the images posted by users based on linguistics and topical characteristics (Acuti et al., 2018; Choi et al., 2007; Coelho et al., 2016; Mariani et al., 2016; Mich & Baggio, 2015; Minazzi & Lagrosen, 2013; J. Song et al., 2018; Vecchio et al., 2018).

Data collection

The official Instagram account of the ASEAN regional tourism organization has been chosen for this study because first, ASEAN tourism online is one regional tourism organization that utilizes Instagram to promote their regional tourism destination. Second, more visual information (images and videos) and textual information (caption, hashtags, mention, and comments) are available on the Instagram platform to be analyzed.

To analyze the activities of ASEAN tourism on Instagram, the first step was to crawl the data available by using the dedicated Instagram data crawler's application 4kstockgram (Acuti et al., 2018). In this research, this application 4kstockgram (Version 3.0; Open Media LLC, 2020) allows data on the public account, such as relating to photos, videos, stories, and text information, such as caption, hashtag, and mention to be retrieved. The data collection was conducted in December 2019. The data was taken from the official ASEAN tourism Instagram account (@visitsoutheastasiaofficial). The crawler was set to track and summarize the activity on the account over four years from the year 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019. ASEAN tourism joined Instagram on 19 August 2016. During the data collection period, the official account has 5750 followers.

Data analysis

The first step in the research was to determine the guidelines for coding based on the dimensions and categories used in this study corresponding to evaluation criteria (see table 1). The next step was to group the contents based on the functional and information dimensions. After the data were obtained from the software, the entire contents of the program were stored in separate folders for each category of images and short videos. The tabulation output consisted of the full caption, the URL link to each Instagram post, the date and year of each post. Furthermore, textual data (caption, hashtag, and mention) output (.csv file) was cleaned for each category. After the cleaning process, the corpus file was analyzed for textual and frequency content used Voyant Tools (Version 2.4; Stefan & Geoffrey, 2019) to complete the work.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

Results and Discussions

[INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]

Functional

As we can see from table 3, functional images are the most-posted content by ASEAN tourism online, with 740 posts or 86.7% from the total postings. They were composed of information on cultural features 332 posts (38.9%), natural features 223 posts (26.1%), and tourist infrastructures 185 posts (21.7%). There were 18 categories used to classify the postings into functional categories.

Natural features (NF)

The posts on nature show the beauty of the ASEAN countries, with the most-posted category being natural landscapes with 92 (10.8%) posts ranging from islands (i.e., Palawan, Ha Long Bay, Bali), mountains (i.e. Mount Bromo, Mount Kinabalu) and hills (i.e. Chocolate hills) to rice fields (i.e. Lao Cai, Banaue rice terrace). The second most posted natural features in the ASEAN region were beaches (4.7%) from Phuket, Koh Phi Phi in Thailand, The Gili Islands in Lombok (Indonesia), and My Khe Beach in Vietnam. Freshwater features such as lakes, waterfall, and rivers also have the same post with beaches (4.7%), several destinations such as Kayangan Lake in the Philippines, Mekong River which crosses five ASEAN countries (Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, and Cambodia), and Aling-Aling waterfalls which include waterfalls at different heights. Another two categories with a minor number of posts related to flora and fauna (3.3%) that consists of animals such as Orangutan, Elephant, Komodo dragon, tigers, Irrawaddy dolphin that can be found in ASEAN countries. Other posts are related to conservation and national parks (2.8%).

Cultural features (CF)

Most of the functional aspects of destination are represented by content on culture (38.9%), with the heritage site category including 151 posts (17.7%) representing the greatest number of images for any category. Most of the content represented the uniqueness of ASEAN culture such as heritage sites (i.e. Kek Lok Si Temple, Angkor Wat, Borobudur, Sam Poh Tong, Malacca straits Mosque); hotels and palaces (i.e. Grand Palace, Taman Sari water castle, The Raffles Hotel); old towns (i.e. Hoi An, Malacca); and UNESCO world heritage sites (George Town, Singapore botanical garden).

Local cuisine categories represented 11.5% of total posts and represented the culinary diversity from ten ASEAN countries such as Tom Yum Goong (Thailand), Nasi Lemak (Malaysia), Rendang (Indonesia), Loh Bak (Singapore). The local traditions and customs category represented 2.9% of the total posts, some of the local traditions such as Kecak Dance from Indonesia, the performance of Khon in Thailand. Other categories such as traditional markets, local people, art, and handicrafts, museums all had post frequency below 2%.

Tourist Infrastructure (TI)

Posts related to tourist infrastructure, appearing on ASEAN tourism, mostly related to the hospitality industry, such as accommodation (5.6%) including five-star luxury hotels and resorts, heritage hotels, specialty accommodations such as village homestays and jungle treehouse. Another segment of the hospitality category related to restaurants, bars, and cafes business (4.7%) including the famous Michelin star restaurant Suan in Thailand and Lau Pa Sat Hawker center in Singapore. Tourist recreation facilities such as Mini Siam in Thailand, Gardens by The Bay,

Splash Waterpark Bali accounted for 3.9% of all posts. Some modern buildings and landmarks were also highlighted for certain destinations such as Jewel in Changi airports Singapore, PETRONAS Twin Tower in Kuala Lumpur, and Siam Paragon in Bangkok, this category account for 2.0% of total posts. Other categories such as health and wellness facilities accounted for 2.7 % and sports facilities for 0.9% of the total posts.

Information

The second dimension in this study related to information posting by the ASEAN tourism organization account. There was a total of 114 posts or 13.3% of overall posts related to information. This dimension offered more content related to recent news from the organization (2.1%) and special campaigns/ contests (3.4%). Contents from travelers from celebrity/public figures combine to account for 4%. Other posts, such as special promotions, public holidays were less frequent, these two categories combined accounted for below 0.8% from total posts.

Performance

Number of posts, likes, and comments

From 2016 until 2019 (table 3), ASEAN tourism online posted a total of 854 posts or an average of 0.81 posts per day. The total number of likes was 46,331 There was a significant increase for likes number from 2017 to 2018 (167%) however from the period 2018 to 2019 the number is decreasing (-15%). Meanwhile, the total comments from Instagram users are 1,867 comments or 2 comments per post on average.

[INSERT TABLE 3 HERE]

Engagement rate

This study used a popular method from Chacon (2018) for calculating the engagement rate to measure the effectiveness of the ASEAN tourism Instagram account. Three variables were used in the calculation: number of likes, number of comments, and the total number of followers. There was also a tendency towards an increasing amount of user engagement each year, especially looking at the engagement rate from 0.82% in 2016 to 3.22% in 2019. As benchmarks for the calculation the latest numbers of ASEAN tourism followers (5,760) and during the period of this study from 2016 to 2019, where the average numbers of likes were 11,583 likes. The average number of comments given by Instagram users was 467 comments.

$$\text{Engagement Rate} = (\text{Likes} + \text{Comments})/ \text{Followers}$$
$$= (11,583 + 467): 5,760$$
$$= 2.09\%$$

The average engagement rate of 2.09% obtains by ASEAN tourism in 2019 show that the levels observed in this investigation are below those observed in previous research. A possible explanation for this might be that the ASEAN tourism account has only had around 5,000 followers and the number of likes and comments is still in average numbers. According to Rabo (2019), the global engagement rate for an Instagram account is 4.7%; moreover, in his report, he explains that the Instagram engagement rate for the travel industry is slightly higher (4.94%). Having a high engagement on an Instagram account gives increased credibility amongst the social circle. It also shows that the account post-high-quality content that resonates with their followers.

The distribution of engagement rate (Figure 1) from each post where the majority of 561 posts (65.7%) are in low engagement rate (less than 1%). While the average engagement (1%-3.5%) account for 33.1% from total posts. The other posts with high engagement rate (3.5% - 6%) and a very high engagement rate (above 6%), both account for only 1.2% from total posts.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

Topical Linguistic

Captions

For the topical language information, there were 854 captions in a total of textual data crawled for analysis. The information in the captions related to the images posted. Most of the captions in the functional categories (nature, culture, and tourist infrastructure) described the images, history behind the image, an exciting fact or location with the references of website link for more detailed information. For the information categories, most of the captions related to news from the ASEAN tourism organization, information, and about special promotions from hotels, restaurants, and airlines. Regularly, the organization also posted information about contests (i.e., photo competitions, blog competitions) and celebrations for special days (Christmas, New year, Independence days).

Mentions

There were 201 mentions from 171 unique Instagram users. The most frequent mentions were from individual accounts/tourists who had visited various destinations in ASEAN countries and captured an image of one of the ASEAN destinations and also their reviews and captions, while the second most mentioned were related to the official ASEAN NTO's account, followed by travel blogs and professional photographers. Other accounts that have been mentioned related to travel and tourism facilities such as hotels and resorts, restaurants/cafés, wellness and health, online travel reviews, and retail shops. Some of the mentioned accounts had a connection with ASEAN tourism organization activities and campaigns such as public/thematic communities/ NGOs, NTO official accounts, local television, and promotional accounts.

Hashtags

In total there were 17,125 hashtags on the ASEAN tourism account or, on average, 20 hashtags per post. From the analysis, there were 461 unique hashtag words (Figure 2). Historically, each year, the account has had different themes and campaigns for the keyword hashtags for example, between 2016 and 2017, ASEAN celebrated its 50th anniversary and the main hashtag used was #VisitASEAN@50 and #ASEAN50. In 2018, there was more variety in using hashtags ranging from #TravelByASEAN, #TasteOfASEAN, #MeanwhileInASEAN and #wellnessbyASEAN.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]

Conclusions

The Objectives of this study are to analyze the official Instagram account of the Association of South-East Asian Nation (ASEAN) regional tourism organization by identifying three dimensions namely functional, information, and performance. The research was based on the analysis of the pictures and information on nature, culture, and tourist infrastructure of the different destinations on the Instagram platform. From the results of this study, it was revealed that functional dimensions represented the majority of posts on content about ASEAN tourism (86.7%) related to a variety of natural attractions such as high mountains, green landscapes, sea, sand and sun, and the richness of the flora and fauna. Meanwhile, cultural diversity was influenced by multi-ethnic backgrounds, religion, and race, and many options were offered for heritage sites to visit and the tastes of the various ASEAN countries to experience the region's culinary heritage. The second significant finding was that information dimensions were less frequent on the ASEAN tourism account (13.3%). Information content appeared periodically in posts related to destinations relating to news including special events, campaigns, contests, special promotions, and endorsements using celebrities/ public figures as influencers to promote the attractiveness of a destination for Instagram users.

The third findings show that the average engagement was 2.09% for the four years. Therefore, the ASEAN tourism account can be categorized as having an average/good engagement rate (1% – 3.5%) (Mee, 2016). The use of hashtags and mentions was related to campaigns, the categories of posts, and specific interest for better search purposes. The main hashtags (#visitasean@50) were mostly found in every post; supported with several campaigns that were useful to inform the audience about an organization's campaigns and special events. These findings add to a growing body of literature, such as the previous study (Acuti et al., 2018; Coelho et al., 2016; Mariani et al., 2016; Vecchio et al., 2018) on how social media performance can be measured based on topical linguistic characteristics.

The research findings also have significant implications for the understanding of how regional tourism organizations communicate their functional destination images on social media platforms such as Instagram. Other than that, perhaps the most critical finding is that the categorization of tourism themes will provide a robust indicator for NTOs in evaluating their performance and helping them to choose the right marketing strategy. It is undeniable that functional photos/images are used as a representation of the destination image for potential and existing audiences. Social media has become an essential platform for brands to take care of and reach consumers online (Evans et al., 2017). Instagram is one of the social media platforms that can be categorized as a content community where users can share media content like texts, videos, and photos. There are now a growing number of users as well as the elevated trend towards visual content in social media marketing (Evans et al., 2017; Virtanen et al., 2017). In tourism marketing, there are several very decisive factors in achieving target markets; a destination must be able to differentiate itself from its competition, or in other words, create a positive image for the consumers.

The ASEAN regional tourism marketing strategy 2017-2022 mentioned that engaging with influential audiences through social media is likely to become a useful tool in the Southeast Asia region. The rise of digital technology will enable tourism organizations to shift from traditional marketing tactics to a more targeted content marketing strategy with more customized content relevant for travelers (ASEAN Secretariat, 2017, p. 1). The implications of this study can be used to create awareness and promote more significant efforts by the ASEAN tourism organization to inspire visitors and develop relationships with potential stakeholders, not only travelers themselves but also travel bloggers, photographers, social media influencers, and tourism-related companies.

The findings also suggest that ASEAN tourism organizations should increase their use of digital platforms rather than marketing efforts through traditional channels (i.e., printed material, audio). The most critical themes focus on innovation and transformation from traditional marketing tactics (broader audiences) to more targeted efforts and the use of content marketing for more targeted audiences by utilizing interaction with potential travelers via digital media by sharing information and experiences. Moreover, continuous measurement of and optimization on digital and various social media platforms will provide access for travelers to their destinations. Tourism organizations can also consider the need to utilize the advertisement option on Instagram and link their account with other social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and its official website to retain more engagement with the users.

The generalization of these results is subject to certain limitations. First, the analysis is only from the secondary data of Instagram posts which are images and textual (captions, hashtags, number of likes, and comments), the perspective of users and the regional tourism authority itself are not included in this research. Analyzing users' comments will also help us to better understand the traveler's perspective on ASEAN as a regional destination. While the perspectives of the national tourism organization will also establish a higher degree of accuracy related to the posts of the functional and information content. Future research can also involve the regional tourism organization's authority by conducting in-depth interviews to identify their social media marketing strategy on social media. It also suggests that future studies can compare the information in this study with other regional destination organizations with various cultural, natural, and tourist infrastructure characteristics.

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