Governing National Image and Reputation: Information Access and Destination Communication in Vietnam

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Abstract: This study examines how destination communication contributes to Vietnam's national image, and how uneven information access and limited responsiveness may affect national reputation. It draws on Gartner's cognitive-affective-conative model, Cooper et al.'s 4A framework, and Liu's cultural-economic-political model, interpreted through Grunig and Hunt's two-way symmetrical model and Cull's public diplomacy framework. A mixed-methods design combines a survey of 411 respondents with 32 semi-structured interviews. Three findings emerge. First, destination communication is positively associated with the public's cognitive, affective and conative responses to Vietnam's national image, and of the five associations estimated, the one between affect and conative tendency is the lowest ($\beta = 0.481$, $R^2 = 0.231$), suggesting that favourable perceptions do not consistently translate into intentions. Second, public cognition of Vietnam is uneven - symbolic attributes score high, while service and support attributes score lower and are more widely dispersed. Third, international respondents rate both destination communication ($d = 0.60$) and Vietnam's national image at the cognitive level ($d = 0.73$) lower than domestic respondents ($p < 0.05$); interviews link the gap in part to difficulty in obtaining complete, trustworthy practical information before travelling. Reputation thus depends not only on message visibility but on accessible information, responsiveness, and consistency between mediated representation and lived experience.

Keywords: national image; national reputation; destination communication; information access; public diplomacy.

1. Introduction

National reputation has become an object of deliberate state management. Governments across Asia commission campaigns, fund destination brands, and track their standing in international indices, on the premise that how a country is perceived abroad carries economic and diplomatic consequences. Tourism promotion occupies a distinctive place: it reaches audiences not seeking political information, travels through commercial and social channels rather than diplomatic ones, and delivers impressions of a country's culture, competence and stability under the guise of holiday planning. For many international publics, a tourism video is the first and sometimes only sustained encounter they have with a country.

This gives destination communication a reach that formal public diplomacy rarely achieves, and raises a question the promotional literature has been slow to ask. If it functions as an instrument of national reputation, it should be judged by the standards applied to other public communication functions, not only by reach and sentiment. Those standards concern access and response: whether the public can obtain needed information in usable form, whether they have a route to report their experience, and whether institutions act on what they hear. A campaign may achieve strong visibility and favourable audience responses without necessarily ensuring effective information access, feedback mechanisms or institutional responsiveness.

Vietnam is a useful case in this respect. Over the past decade the country has invested substantially in destination promotion, gained wide international recognition for its cultural and natural attractions, and written the reputational role of tourism into national policy. Its communication system, however, is spread across ministries, provincial authorities, state media, private operators and user-generated content, and coordination among these actors

remains limited. The strengths of Vietnam's promotion and the shortcomings of its coordination can therefore be examined within the same case.

This paper reports a mixed-methods study of how Vietnamese and international publics receive destination communication and how that reception relates to their image of Vietnam. It asks three questions: how destination communication relates to the public's cognitive, affective and conative responses to Vietnam's national image; whether public cognition of Vietnam is internally consistent or varies across attribute types; and whether domestic and international publics differ in their evaluations, and what interview data suggest about any difference.

The paper uses an audience-reception study as a diagnostic tool for governance. Instead of asking whether destination communication works, it asks what kind of communication reaches which publics, under what conditions, and with what institutional follow-up. The findings show that Vietnam's destination communication establishes symbolic recognition very effectively but is considerably less effective in providing the practical, service-related information on which decisions and trust depend. This imbalance, the paper argues, represents an important consideration for the effective management of national reputation.

2. Destination communication, national image and reputation governance

2.1 From promotion to reputation

Research on destination image has developed largely within tourism marketing, where the dependent variable is a visit decision and the unit of analysis is the destination. Research on national image has developed separately, within international relations, public diplomacy and public relations, where the dependent variable is standing or influence and the unit of analysis is the state. The two literatures have converged slowly, and the conceptual boundary between them remains contested [1], [2].

This convergence matters because, in practice, the two fields have become increasingly difficult to separate. Digital destination content rarely shows scenery alone: a short video of a city street conveys infrastructure, public order, consumer culture and social atmosphere at the same time as it presents a place to visit. Anholt [3] argued that tourism is one of the principal channels through which countries are perceived, precisely because it is the channel audiences seek out voluntarily. Papadopoulos and Heslop [4] similarly positioned place image as a composite that audiences assemble from commercial, cultural and political signals without distinguishing between them.

If destination communication carries national image, it should also be held to the expectations placed on communication about the nation. Cull [5] placed listening, understood as the systematic collection and use of public opinion abroad, first among the components of public diplomacy, and argued that advocacy conducted without it tends to fail. Grunig and Hunt [6] made a parallel argument within public relations, distinguishing one-way publicity models from a two-way symmetrical model in which the organisation adjusts in response to its publics. Although neither framework was developed for tourism, both offer evaluative criteria that promotional metrics leave out, and they are used for this purpose here.

2.2 National image and the public's responses

The study distinguishes what national image consists of from how publics respond to it. For the latter, it follows Gartner's [7] cognitive-affective-conative formulation, developed for destinations by Echtner and Ritchie [8] and Beerli and Martín [9]: publics form beliefs about a country (cognition), feelings towards it (affect) and intentions concerning it (conative tendency). Cognition, affect and conative tendency are therefore treated as the public's responses to Vietnam's national image, not as components of the image itself. Following Kock et al. [10], the three responses are understood as interacting rather than strictly sequential, so that destination communication may be associated with affect and conative tendency as well as with cognition. This distinction makes it possible to identify the responses on which

communication performs well and those on which it performs less well, each with different policy implications.

For the content of national image itself, the study uses Liu's [11] three-dimensional model, which defines national image along cultural, economic and political dimensions. Public cognition can thus be examined as a profile across domains rather than as a single score, and this provides the basis for the second finding reported below.

The independent variable is operationalised through the 4A framework [12], which decomposes a destination into attractions, accessibility, amenities and ancillary services. The framework is conventionally used to describe destination supply; here it is used to describe destination communication, on the assumption that each component generates a distinct information need. Communication about attractions primarily relies on visual representations and narratives, whereas communication about accessibility, amenities and ancillary services requires practical, reliable and up-to-date information. This distinction is central to the argument that follows. Applying the framework to communication rests on the premise that each supply component is also an object of communication: publics encounter attractions, access conditions, amenities and support services first as information, and the quality of that information can be evaluated separately from the quality of the services themselves. The framework is therefore used here as a content map for communication items, not as a model of supply. No one-to-one correspondence is assumed between the four communication components and Liu's three image dimensions; the relationship between the two constructs is examined at the level of composite variables.

Empirically, a close precedent is Matiza and Slabbert [13], who examined how the marketing and media profile of a destination relates to international tourists' travel motives during the COVID-19 crisis and found that the nation brand, particularly its people and negative-events dimensions, partially mediated the relationship between destination marketing and nature- and culture-oriented travel motives. Their study supports the premise that destination communication and national-level image are connected rather than separate domains. Related work points the same way: Chaulagain et al. [14] show that country image and destination image jointly shape travel intention, and Kock et al. [10] model cognitive, affective and conative responses to a destination as interacting rather than strictly sequential. A review of the field [15] indicates that most of this research treats image as an antecedent of visitor behaviour, and studies of Vietnam have followed the same pattern, examining destination image as a driver of satisfaction and loyalty among international visitors [16]. Much less attention has been paid to how the communication itself is evaluated, by which publics and how consistently; this is the question the present paper takes up.

2.3 The Vietnamese policy context

Vietnam provides an unusually explicit setting for this question because the reputational role of tourism is stated in policy rather than merely implied. Resolution No. 08-NQ/TW of 16 January 2017 [17] established tourism as a spearhead economic sector and linked its development to the promotion of the country's image abroad. The Cultural Diplomacy Strategy to 2030 (Decision No. 2013/QĐ-TTg of 30 November 2021) [18] and the Vietnam Tourism Marketing Strategy to 2030 (Decision No. 440/QĐ-BVHTTDL of 2 March 2023) [19] both assign destination promotion a function in national positioning that extends beyond visitor numbers. Subsequent instruments have reinforced the digital transformation of tourism promotion and the development of a national tourism data infrastructure, and a 2026 strategy sets out how Vietnam's image is to be communicated abroad for 2026-2030 (Decision No. 173/QĐ-TTg of 27 January 2026) [20].

These policy documents establish a clear strategic direction for destination communication, while their effective implementation requires continued coordination among relevant institutions to ensure the consistent provision of practical information. Responsibility for destination messaging is distributed across the culture and tourism authorities, foreign

affairs, provincial governments, state media, private operators and platform-based content creators. Interviews with officials and practitioners describe an emerging smart-tourism ecosystem and a national tourism database, alongside persistent constraints in budget and in the availability of communication personnel with international market expertise, who are concentrated mainly at central level. The contrast between a strong policy mandate and limited coordination forms the institutional background against which the findings below are interpreted.

2.4 The governance question

Taken together, these strands lead to a more specific question. If destination communication is a reputational instrument, and if reputation is sustained by trust rather than by exposure, then it should be evaluated less by impressions and sentiment than by four criteria: whether information reaches publics in usable form; whether it reaches all publics or only some; whether it holds up against experience; and whether publics who find it inadequate can say so and see a change as a result. These criteria guide the presentation of the findings.

3. Method

3.1 Design

The study uses a convergent mixed-methods design in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected in parallel, with interview findings contributing contextual explanation of the survey patterns. The quantitative component estimates associations between destination communication and the public's cognitive, affective and conative responses; the qualitative component examines how participants encounter, interpret and evaluate communication and their experiences of Vietnam. The data derive from the author's doctoral research on destination communication and Vietnam's national image. This article presents all five bivariate association models (Table 1) alongside descriptive and group-comparison analyses relevant to reputation governance.

3.2 Survey instrument and sample

A standardised questionnaire was developed in Vietnamese and English and administered online, supplemented by in-person distribution for some domestic respondent groups. Items were measured on five-point Likert scales. The instrument comprised three sections: demographic and travel-experience variables; a common block measuring channel use, evaluations of destination communication, and the public's cognitive, affective and conative responses to Vietnam's national image; and role-specific blocks for state officials, tour guides and international visitors. Destination communication and national image were operationalised as separate constructs using distinct sets of questionnaire items. Destination communication items were developed with reference to the 4A components and communication-process attributes, including source credibility, message clarity, cross-channel consistency and feedback. National image items drew on Liu's cultural, economic and political dimensions and were assigned to the cognitive, affective or conative response that each measures. Each composite variable was calculated as the mean of the items assigned to that construct. No questionnaire item was included in more than one composite measure.

Sampling combined convenience and purposive approaches, appropriate for reaching dispersed audiences with differing levels of exposure to Vietnam's destination communication. Purposive recruitment included Vietnamese travellers, state communication officials, tourism practitioners, overseas Vietnamese and international visitors. Data were collected between March and September 2025, online and, for some domestic groups (travellers, guides and tourism-sector employees), in person. After screening for incomplete and inconsistent responses, 411 valid cases were retained: 389 in the domestic group and 22 in the international

group. The domestic group comprises Vietnamese travellers, state officials, tour guides and tourism-sector employees.

3.3 Interviews

Thirty-two semi-structured interviews were conducted: five with state officials and experts involved in destination communication, 23 with international respondents (visitors and non-visitors, including overseas Vietnamese holding foreign citizenship), and four with domestic respondents, including a tour guide and a local official. Interviewees did not take part in the survey. Participants came from Australia, Cambodia, Canada, Germany, India, Japan, South Korea, the United Kingdom, the United States and Vietnam. Interviews covered recognition of destination messages, evaluation of communication quality, perceived constituents of Vietnam's national image, the transition from knowledge to feeling and from feeling to intention, and perceived shortcomings. Transcripts were analysed in NVivo using a combined deductive and inductive coding frame: deductive codes followed the study's theoretical structure, while open coding captured themes not anticipated by the model. All names used below are pseudonyms.

Research ethics. Survey and interview participants were informed of the purpose of the study, how their data would be used, and their right to decline or withdraw at any point. Participation was voluntary and unpaid, and participants gave their consent before taking part. Personal data were kept confidential; in reporting, respondents are identified only by pseudonyms or codes with the contextual details needed for interpretation, and quotations are reproduced without alteration of meaning.

3.4 Analysis

Survey data were analysed in SPSS using descriptive statistics, five separate bivariate OLS regressions to estimate associations involving destination communication and the public's cognitive, affective and conative responses to Vietnam's national image, Welch's t-tests to compare domestic and international respondents, and one-way ANOVA with Games-Howell post-hoc comparisons to assess differences across channel-combination groups. Conative items measure intentions concerning Vietnam.

4. Findings

4.1 Destination communication and the public's three responses

Destination communication is positively and significantly associated with the public's cognition, affect and conative tendency regarding Vietnam's national image, and the links from cognition to affect and from affect to conative tendency are also significant (Table 1). All five models are significant at $p < 0.001$. Among them, the association between destination communication and cognition has the highest coefficient, and the association between affect and conative tendency the lowest.

Table 1. *Destination communication and the public's cognitive, affective and conative responses (N = 411)*

Path	B	SE	β	t	R^2
Destination communication → Cognition	0.886	0.018	0.922	48.17	0.850
Destination communication → Affect	0.619	0.032	0.685	19.04	0.470
Destination communication → Conative tendency	0.529	0.033	0.616	15.82	0.380
Cognition → Affect	0.675	0.032	0.719	20.91	0.517
Affect → Conative tendency	0.458	0.041	0.481	11.09	0.231

Note. Each row is a separate bivariate OLS regression; all $p < 0.001$. F ranges from 122.99 to 2320.09; Durbin-Watson values range from 1.77 to 1.95. Conative tendency is the mean of a three-level item and a five-point item (range 1-4).

The association between affect and conative tendency ($\beta = 0.481$, $R^2 = 0.231$) is the lowest of the five bivariate associations reported in Table 1. This finding highlights the importance of distinguishing favourable evaluations of Vietnam from the intentions associated with those evaluations when assessing the effectiveness of destination communication..

This pattern is consistent with theory, as behaviour is shaped by constraints that lie outside the communication system, such as cost, distance, visa requirements, language and time. It is nonetheless important for diagnosis, because it suggests that further investment in favourable impressions may do little to change the conditions under which intentions are formed. The findings that follow help to identify those conditions.

4.1.1 How destination communication builds cognition

The interview material points to three ways in which destination content shapes what publics know about Vietnam, which also helps to explain why public cognition is so closely associated with destination communication.

The first is symbolic anchoring. Destination communication converts tourism resources into compact, memorable units - Ha Long, Sapa, Ninh Binh, Hoi An, Da Nang, pho, coffee culture, street life - that function as cognitive reference points. Respondents who had never visited Vietnam could reproduce this repertoire readily, indicating that the symbolic layer transmits efficiently and at low cost to the audience.

The second is repositioning along a tradition-modernity axis. Several respondents described revising an earlier assumption that Vietnam was less developed than they found it to be. One Canadian visitor noted having expected smaller cities to be considerably less developed than they proved. This shift is significant for reputation because it counters images of Vietnam shaped by its past. It also carries a risk: other respondents observed the unevenness between major urban centres and rural areas, suggesting that a uniformly modern portrayal sets expectations that parts of the country will not meet. Communication should therefore aim to set realistic expectations rather than raise them as high as possible, since an idealised campaign may generate initial enthusiasm followed by disappointment.

The third is framing Vietnam as peaceful, stable and accessible, which corresponds to the highest-scoring quantitative indicator. The interviews show this frame extending beyond personal safety into judgements about governance capacity. One state-sector respondent described how promotional material had established Da Nang as a liveable, green and smart city, reading those messages as evidence of administrative competence and urban management quality. In this way, tourism content also conveys impressions of institutional performance, and destination image and national image come together in practice.

4.2 Symbolic consensus and functional divergence

Disaggregating public cognition by attribute shows that what publics believe about Vietnam is not uniform. Public cognition is strong and highly consensual on symbolic and general attributes, and weaker and markedly more dispersed on practical, service-related attributes.

Table 2. *Selected indicators of destination communication and public cognition (N = 411)*

Indicator	M	SD
Vietnam presented as a peaceful and stable country	4.53	0.75
Support-service communication builds a safe, professional image	4.37	0.76
Tourism communication reinforces political stability	4.32	0.82
Tourism communication improves understanding of Vietnamese culture	4.27	0.88
Information about Vietnamese tourism is easy to access	4.27	0.84
Communication accurately reflects economic development	4.09	0.87
Service modernisation is consistently represented	4.01	0.91
In-trip support information is clearly provided	3.64	1.18
Emergency contact information is complete and usable	3.61	1.25
Visitor feedback is absorbed and reflected in service improvement	3.53	1.11

Note. Five-point Likert scale. The table presents selected descriptive indicators relating to destination communication and perceived national attributes; the indicators are not all items from a single composite scale.

The mean scores describe a familiar promotional profile: Vietnam is understood as peaceful, culturally rich, safe and increasingly modern. Every symbolic and general indicator exceeds 4.0. The three lowest-scoring indicators, by contrast, all concern information needed for practical action rather than for forming impressions: guidance during a trip, emergency contacts, and evidence that complaints lead to change. None of these indicators falls below the scale midpoint, so the difference is relative; the ranking is nevertheless consistent and reflects a meaningful distinction between symbolic and practical information.

The standard deviations add an important dimension to the mean scores. The highest-rated indicators generally show relatively limited dispersion - peace and stability at SD = 0.75 and professional support-service communication at SD = 0.76 - while emergency contact information (SD = 1.25) and in-trip support (SD = 1.18) show greater variation in reported evaluations. This contrast highlights a more shared assessment of symbolic attributes alongside less uniform evaluations of practical information.

Taken together with the interview data, this variation suggests that respondents differ in the practical information they encounter and in the situations in which they need it. The accessibility and usability of functional information is therefore an important governance priority.

The indicator ‘information about Vietnamese tourism is easy to access’ has a mean of 4.27, showing that respondents generally regard tourism information as accessible. This broad assessment sits alongside lower and more dispersed ratings for specific practical information,

including in-trip support, emergency contacts and feedback handling. The difference lies between the general availability of tourism information and its usefulness for particular tasks and situations.

The lowest-rated indicator concerns whether visitor feedback is reflected in service improvement (M = 3.53). It captures respondents' assessment of perceived responsiveness, a dimension directly relevant to the listening and two-way communication frameworks used in this study. Combined with the interview accounts, it points to a practical area for improvement: showing visitors how institutions respond to their concerns.

4.3 Domestic and international respondents

Table 3 compares the evaluations of domestic and international respondents.

Table 3. *Domestic and international respondents compared*

Variable	Group	M	SD	n	Welch t (df)	p	Cohen's d
Destination communication	Domestic	3.934	0.687	389	2.71 (23.4)	0.012	0.60
	International	3.519	0.699	22			
Cognition	Domestic	4.011	0.659	389	3.46 (23.6)	0.002	0.73
	International	3.530	0.634	22			

Note. Welch's t-tests; Cohen's d based on the pooled standard deviation.

International respondents rated both destination communication (M = 3.52 vs. 3.93) and cognition of Vietnam's national image (M = 3.53 vs. 4.01) lower than domestic respondents, and both differences were statistically significant (Table 3; destination communication: $t(23.4) = 2.71$, $p = 0.012$, $d = 0.60$; cognition: $t(23.6) = 3.46$, $p = 0.002$, $d = 0.73$).

The interviews help to explain this pattern. International interviewees frequently expressed goodwill towards Vietnam alongside difficulty in finding complete and trustworthy practical information before travelling, in their own language and on the platforms they use. Improving access to functional information for international publics is therefore one practical way of narrowing this gap.

4.4 Channel combinations and differences in audience evaluations

National image research usually measures communication exposure as an aggregate. When exposure is broken down by channel combination, however, the results call into question the assumption that broader exposure is always better. Respondents were grouped by the channels through which they encountered information about Vietnam, and groups with at least ten cases were compared by one-way ANOVA. Differences between groups were significant for both destination communication ($F = 13.32$; $p < 0.001$) and cognition ($F = 13.92$; $p < 0.001$) (Table 4).

Table 4. *Destination communication and cognition by channel combination*

Channel group	n	Comm. M	Comm. SD	Cognition M	Cognition SD
Social media only	48	4.173	0.703	4.282	0.645
Social media + structured channel (web/TV)	46	4.025	0.623	4.140	0.602
Multi-channel (three or more)	214	3.984	0.670	4.040	0.652
Social media + word of mouth	88	3.531	0.659	3.633	0.610

Note. Groups with n < 10 excluded (15 cases; N = 396). In Games-Howell comparisons, the social media + word of mouth group scored lower than each other group on both variables (all p < 0.001); no other pair differed significantly (p > 0.05).

Adding word of mouth to social media is associated with lower rather than higher scores on both variables. The interview material suggests an explanation: word of mouth may function less as a source of new information than as a verification mechanism, confirming or contradicting what social media has already established. Respondents in this group may be balancing an idealised mediated image against concrete, sometimes negative, first-hand accounts from people they trust, with correspondingly more guarded evaluations. Several interviewees described friends or acquaintances with direct experience of Vietnam as their most credible source, ranking such accounts above official material.

The other three groups do not differ significantly from one another. The social-media-only group has the highest means on both variables and combining social media with a structured channel such as a website or television, or using three or more channels, is not associated with higher scores. Wider exposure alone, therefore, does not lead to more favourable evaluations. One plausible explanation, consistent with the interview data below, is that different channels perform different functions, so that adding channels without aligning their content may create contradictions as easily as it reinforces messages.

The interview data identify four channel groups with distinct mechanisms, which help to interpret the quantitative pattern. Social media and short-form video operate as a gateway: algorithmically distributed, visually driven, high in reach and speed but shallow in informational depth. Respondents described encountering street-life and food content that made the destination feel immediate and real without conveying systematic knowledge. Word of mouth and personal networks operate as a credibility filter rather than an information source, confirming or disconfirming what other channels have established; respondents consistently ranked acquaintances with direct experience as their most trusted source. Long-form video, vlogs and documentaries generate the deepest cognitive engagement but require active searching, and their credibility rests on perceived independence from sponsorship. Official communication and state digital platforms supply the macro-level positioning frame; this group featured more prominently in domestic than international reception, and when it lacks consistency the other channels operate without a common frame and the national image fragments.

Each channel group therefore fulfils a role that the others cannot replace. A strategy that concentrates resources on social media and short-form video can maximise reach, but it leaves verification, depth and framing largely to actors outside state control.

4.5 Two contrasting cases

The interview data include two cases that do not fit the general pattern and that together show two points at which the transition between the public's responses is most vulnerable.

The first concerns Jaiden, a second-generation Vietnamese-Australian who visited Vietnam with substantial prior cognitive awareness of the country. That awareness did not develop into positive affect. Limited Vietnamese language ability and the absence of local social connections produced a sense of isolation, and his overall disposition remained neutral. The contrast with other overseas Vietnamese respondents is instructive: those with language competence and continuing family ties acted as active cultural advocates. The difference lay less in their origin than in their practical ability to connect with the country through language, personal networks and familiarity.

The second concerns Eujun, a South Korean visitor who arrived with positive affect already established through mediated content. That affect did not convert into an intention to return, following an experience of being overcharged. The obstacle in this case was price transparency, which is a matter of destination governance rather than communication content.

The value of these cases is diagnostic: they illustrate the kinds of conditions that may lie behind the lower association between affect and conative tendency, and in both cases the problem lay in conditions on the ground rather than in the messages. Neither problem can be resolved through a communication campaign alone. The interviews more broadly support this reading, with several respondents observing that the quality of their emotional experience depended substantially on chance encounters, such as a helpful local or a capable guide, rather than on any systematic provision.

5. Discussion: destination communication as reputation governance

5.1 Two communicative registers, two levels of governance

The findings point to two layers of communication that publics evaluate differently. The symbolic layer, which covers heritage, landscape, cuisine, peace and stability, is rated favourably and relatively consistently, as shown by the high means and lower dispersion in Table 2. Ratings of the functional layer, which covers accessibility, in-trip support, emergency information, price transparency and feedback handling, are more varied. Practical information provision therefore emerges as a specific priority for reputation governance.

The distinction is relevant to the 4A framework: promotional imagery associated with attractions performs strongly in respondents' assessments, while selected indicators concerning accessibility, amenities and support services receive less favourable and more varied ratings. These findings, read together with the interviews, indicate why practical information and on-the-ground experience matter alongside favourable impressions when considering intentions to visit or return.

From a reputational perspective, this imbalance is a source of risk. Symbolic communication raises expectations, and functional communication has to help publics meet them. When symbolic messages run ahead of practical information, a gap opens between what is promised and what visitors experience, and it is in this gap that trust in a country's reputation can be weakened.

5.2 Information access as a reputational resource

From an information-access perspective, these findings raise an issue of consistency across audience needs and communication contexts. Domestic respondents rate both communication and their cognition of Vietnam's national image more favourably than international respondents, while international interviewees describe difficulties finding practical information in languages and channels convenient to them. Taken together, these

findings support a policy focus on the accessibility and usability of functional information for diverse audiences.

Seen in this way, the issue concerns the distribution of information as well as its promotion. What matters is not only how many people a campaign reaches, but whether the information each person needs is available to them, whoever they are. From this perspective, the findings suggest relatively effective communication reach, alongside opportunities to improve the accessibility and distribution of practical information across different audience groups.

5.3 Responsiveness and the limits of one-way communication

The two-way symmetrical model provides a framework for the final set of observations. In Grunig and Hunt [6]'s formulation, communication that only transmits leaves the organisation unable to learn from those it addresses. Cull [5]'s placement of listening at the foundation of public diplomacy makes the same point in the international context: advocacy that is not accompanied by listening may increase the volume of messages without increasing credibility.

Perceived responsiveness links the empirical findings to this model. The feedback-related indicator receives the lowest mean rating in Table 2, while interview accounts underline the importance of practical support, language access and price transparency. These results point to the value of clear feedback channels and visible institutional responses as elements of reputation governance.

This has a direct implication for governance. A campaign can further raise symbolic scores that are already high, but it cannot standardise emergency information, make prices transparent or create a feedback loop that visibly improves services. These tasks require coordination with the agencies responsible for transport, hospitality, consumer protection and destination management. Reputation governance therefore needs to be approached as an inter-agency task rather than as a matter for communication agencies alone.

5.4 Implications for practice

The findings have three implications for practice, at the levels of content, channel strategy and institutions.

At the level of content, the priority is to improve the accessibility, clarity and consistency of functional information alongside symbolic promotion. Standardised, multilingual and verifiable provision of emergency contacts, in-trip support, transport and pricing information addresses the indicators with relatively lower means and greater dispersion. Monitoring both average evaluations and variation across audiences would offer a more informative basis for evaluating progress.

At the level of channel strategy, the finding that combining social media with word of mouth is associated with the lowest evaluations, and that broader channel combinations are not associated with higher ones, argues against treating channel expansion as inherently beneficial. Structured channels, such as official websites, television and multilingual platform presence optimised for search, can supply the organised, functional information that short-form video does not, but their value depends on being planned together with other channels rather than simply added to them. Since the credibility of word of mouth derives from the speaker's first-hand experience, the most durable way to improve what this channel carries is to improve the visitor experience itself.

At the institutional level, the responsiveness finding calls for mechanisms as well as messages: accessible channels through which visitors can report problems, and clear evidence that their reports lead to change. Strengthening this aspect of two-way symmetrical communication requires closer coordination between communication agencies and other institutions responsible for destination management and public services.

6. Conclusion

This study has examined destination communication as a governance function rather than only as a promotional activity, and three findings support this approach. Destination communication is positively associated with the public's cognitive, affective and conative responses to Vietnam's national image, while the association between affect and conative tendency is the lowest of those estimated. Public cognition of Vietnam is internally uneven, strong and consensual on symbolic attributes but weaker and notably dispersed on the practical attributes that decisions depend on. International respondents also evaluate both the communication and the country's national image at the cognitive level less favourably than domestic respondents, and the interviews indicate that difficulty in obtaining practical information contributes to this gap.

The findings suggest that national reputation depends on more than the visibility of messages. It also depends on whether information reaches publics in usable form and on equitable terms, whether mediated representations hold up against lived experience, and whether institutions can be seen to respond to what publics tell them. The evidence indicates that the first and third of these conditions are not yet fully met. Vietnam's destination communication has contributed to a coherent and favourable symbolic image. Sustaining and further strengthening this image requires continued attention to the accessibility of practical information, institutional responsiveness and consistency between communication and visitor experience.

Future research could extend these findings through longitudinal designs, larger international samples and multivariate modelling of the relationships among the public's cognitive, affective and conative responses to Vietnam's national image.

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