

A SOCIAL MEDIA PLAN FOR 'THAIS VERKEERSBUREAU'
TOURISM AUTHORITY OF THAILAND IN THE DUTCH MARKET

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This thesis is about establishing the possibilities for Thais Verkeersbureau on social media to get more exposure on the Dutch market and to generate more traffic to Thailand. Thais Verkeersbureau is the Dutch Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT). TAT has its headquarters in Bangkok and has been promoting Thailand as a tourist destination for over 50 years.

The problem Thais Verkeersbureau is facing, is the lack of activity and awareness on social media. In order to get more exposure on social media, Thais Verkeersbureau need to have a clear plan with clear goals.

This thesis reviews the internal and external environment of Thais Verkeersbureau, the marketing mix and the social media statistics of today. Based on this research, the following research question will be answered: *“What are the possibilities for Thais Verkeersbureau to enlarge their exposure on social media in order to generate more traffic to Thailand?”*. As a result of this research a social media plan for Thais Verkeersbureau has been established.

Thais Verkeersbureau has a growing strategy, based on the confrontation matrix, in which it can use its strengths to work on the opportunities in the external environment. The threat of substitutes and competitors are relatively low, which gives Thais Verkeersbureau a great advantage.

Social media is deeply integrated in everybody's life nowadays. The main social media in the Netherlands are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and upcoming (new) social media are Google+, Instagram and Pinterest. The main focus of the social media is to share content like pictures, videos and news items with close friends and family. The main target group of Thais Verkeersbureau are families, couples/singles and retired people (or 50+). All these target segments are using social media, with the age group 25-39 being the biggest, although growth is stagnating. The older people, on the other hand, have a smaller group of active users, but is growing in numbers over the last few years.

While using social media it is important to establish some key factors like: make a clear plan/schedule to keep an overview, be clear in the posts, be active on social media every day and evaluate that activity, invite the people to interact with you and offer enough physical evidence to hook the Dutch potential tourist to go to Thailand.

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INTRODUCTION

*“Word of mouth is one of the key factors influencing the final choice of a destination”
(Xiang & Gretzel, 2009)*

During the last two years, social media has become an important element in the world of marketing for every industry. Tourism is an information-intense industry, which makes it important to keep up with the changes in technology and consumer behavior. Today’s traveler can virtually see destination at the touch of a finger and plan personalized trip adventures through many online platforms. By failing to connect with this generation, many tourism authorities are fighting an uphill battle.

So is the Thais Verkeersbureau; they are active on social media, but they need to improve in order to keep up with the others around them.

Aim

The aim of this thesis is to establish a social media plan for Thais Verkeersbureau. It is a marketing plan focusing on the social media strategy. To fulfill this aim, the internal and external environment will be analyzed plus the social media situation of today.

The **central question** to be answered is: *“What are the possibilities for Thais Verkeersbureau to enlarge their exposure on social media in order to generate more traffic to Thailand?”*

Author

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Justification of research methods

Research questions

The aim of this thesis is to research the possibilities for Thais Verkeersbureau on social media. The main question to answer is:

“What are the possibilities for Thais Verkeersbureau to enlarge their exposure on social media in order to generate more traffic to Thailand?”

In order to answer the main question the following sub-questions will be used:

1. What is Thais Verkeersbureau and what are their activities?
2. What is social media and how did it develop?
3. What are the trends of the Dutch tourism market regarding social media?
4. What are the competitors of TAT?
5. Which social media are relevant to use for TAT?
6. *What is the best way to use those social media?*

Methodology

The methodology of this research consists out the epistemological position and the research methods.

The epistemological position can also be referred as the ‘theory of knowledge’. Meaning which knowledge is already available and acquired. Knowledge about social media and marketing is already available outside this research. Conclusions will be drawn upon the research on the existing data and events.

A marketing plan consists of an evaluation of the internal and external environment. These are analyzed to establish the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT-analysis). The macro-environment is analyzed using the DESTEP method (demographic, economic, social, technological, environmental, political). Using the Five Forces model of Porter, the competitors of Thais Verkeersbureau will be analyzed. Following by the marketing mix according the 4 P’s (product, price, place, promotion) plus the additional 3 P’s (people, process, physical evidence) for the tourism industry. All this research led to a social media marketing plan with recommendations for Thais Verkeersbureau on using social media.

The research methods have a quantitative and deductive nature. Quantitative research for the trends of the Dutch population taking holidays and the use of social media (by either the Dutch population and tourism organizations). The deductive research approach started with theories and generalizations (concerning Thailand, holiday taking habits of Dutch people and the impact of social media), with lead to hypotheses and at the end a plan to test those hypotheses.

Research model

My research started already while I was an intern at Aviareps Tourism NL. Working for Thais Verkeersbureau gave me access to the information of the situation of Thais Verkeersbureau.

The preliminary research for my thesis consisted out observing the current situation of tourism authorities on social media, researching on marketing plans and the use of social media. I determined the main question and the chapters of the social media plan. Internet, books, articles and case studies were collected and used for the internal and external analysis.

This preliminary research led to the establishment of the main research question. From there on the sub-questions were researched and answered to explain the background of the current situation of the organization and of the different social media. With the knowledge of that, an action plan is established.

CHAPTER 1

Profile of the organization

1.0 Description

The Tourism Authority of Thailand is the official tourism board of Thailand. At this moment, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (also referred to as TAT) has been promoting

tourism for Thailand for over 50 years now. As stated in their annual report, they strive for being the best in the promotion of tourism based on sustainable acts to maintain the unique Thai splendor (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2011). TAT's main mission is promoting Thailand as a potential tourist destination for worldwide visitors, to support the development of Thailand's tourism industry and boost the domestic travel for Thai people. Besides this, they strive to achieve an international standard regarding the economic, social and environmental balance.

“When a society takes good care of its environment, tourism is a constant source of pride and benefits. With this tenet in mind, the Tourism Authority of Thailand is committed to being the bridge that links responsible tourism with conservation of Thailand’s nature, environment and human heritage of priceless value for now and forever.” - Mr. Suraphon Svetasreni, governor of TAT (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2011).

1.1 History

The Tourist Organization was established in March of 1960 by the Royal Thai Government and became the first organization that specifically focused on the promotion and marketing of Thailand's tourism and the tourism industry. As explained in the annual report of Thais Verkeersbureau, the government renamed it the Tourist Organization of Thailand (TOT) and in 1979 it changed its name to their current name, Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT). In 1965 TOT established its first international office in New York, following with their first domestic office in Chiang Mai in 1968. Since the foundation of their first office in Chiang Mai they have established 35 regional offices throughout Thailand. Currently TAT exists 53 years and has its headquarter located in Bangkok (TAT Annual Report, 2012).

1.2 Organizational structure

TAT has 26 international offices. Each one of them is responsible for their own market which consists of several surrounding countries. Each office carries out activities and promotions in the market of their responsibility. That includes participation in key travel trade shows, as well as joint activities with tour operators and comprehensive advertising campaigns in print and broadcast media (TAT, 2013). Below the different layers from the head of TAT to the Thais Verkeersbureau are laid down. For the full organizational chart see appendix A.

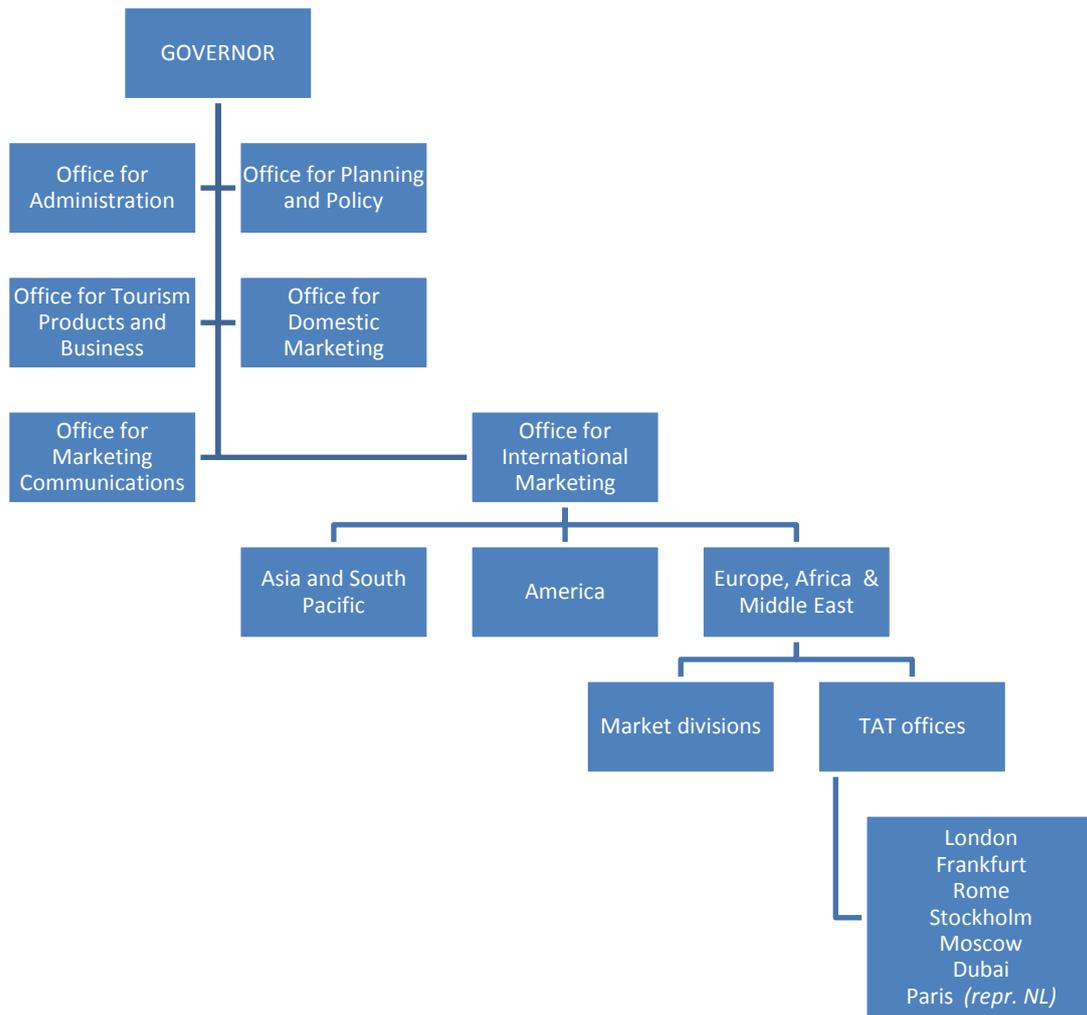


Figure 1.0: Organizational Chart TAT

1.3 Internal analysis

1.3.1 Thais Verkeersbureau

The Thais Verkeersbureau is the Dutch representative of the Tourism Authority of Thailand. As a part of the larger organization TAT, it reports to the regional TAT office located in Paris. In the Netherlands the Thais Verkeersbureau is fully represented by the company Aviareps Tourism. On their website they describe themselves as a full-service communication consultancy agency that works primarily for companies in tourism. It advises and supports these clients with all their communication requirements, core areas being marketing, public relations and representation (Aviareps Tourism).

Mission

Thais Verkeersbureau is a non-profit initiative focused on the promotion of Thailand as tourist destination. They are responsible for all the activities on the Dutch market regarding tourism to Thailand. Their main activity is to promote Thailand on the Dutch market in order to generate more traffic to Thailand. They provide information to Thailand-interested people, tourists, tour operators, and (travel) journalists by e-mail, phone, festivals, fairs and other events (Aviareps Tourism).

Resources

Thais Verkeersbureau consists out of only a few employees. There are two teams; one team is responsible for the PR/marketing and another team is responsible for the customer relations. Each employee has great affiliation with Thailand and is strongly motivated to promote Thailand on the Dutch market.

Thais Verkeersbureau is a non-profit organization, which means they are not focused on making money. Each year they are appointed a certain amount of money from the headquarters in Bangkok. At the beginning of each year a plan will be made with the outlines on how to spend the money. For the year 2013, these activities were divided into the following sub-categories (Aviareps Tourism, 2013):

- Strengthen the Amazing Thailand Brand Strategy
 - o E.g. promotion of Thailand as wellness destination in cooperation with PuurenKuur
 - o Organizing individual/group press tours to promote Thailand through positive publications

- Thailand Academy
- Thailand and ASEAN¹
 - o E.g. sales activities in cooperation with Vliegtickets.nl and FOX Vakanties to increase the sales via airlines and travel agents
- Create networks and collaboration (Roadshow)
- Thailand Go Green
 - o E.g. press tour; individual and for Reizen Magazine, the most popular travel magazine in NL (ANWB, n.d.)
- Quality Up Market Project – Dual Track Marketing strategy
 - o PR + sales activities to increase exposure and sales through joint-promotions with organizations like De Jong Intra, Personal Touch, STIP Reizen, Shoestring, and CheapTickets.

Offerings

Thais Verkeersbureau has its own website containing information about Thailand. This website contains the latest news items and updates regarding the current situation/events in Thailand plus practical information for people travelling to Thailand. From Monday till Friday people can contact them by telephone with any question related to Thailand. People can order free informative brochures via the website about the different regions, activities and/or culture aspects of Thailand for better preparations of their trip (Thais Verkeersbureau, n.d.).

Promotion is an important activity of Thais Verkeersbureau. The promotion towards the consumers and the travel industry is mainly about organizing trade fairs, press trips, online communication, editorial focus and advertising. To achieve this aim, Thais Verkeersbureau organizes study trips for travel agents or press trips for journalists. An important activity is joint-promotions with famous tour operators and travel agents. Those are promotional campaigns about Thailand where both parties are involved. Thais Verkeersbureau pays a certain amount to make this promotion happen.

Besides that, the Holiday Fair every year in January is an important event for the promotion of Thailand. This year, 2014, the Holiday Fair attracted in total 117.073 visitors, this is 13% more in comparison to 2013 (NRC, 2014). Thailand has its own stand where people can get detailed information about Thailand and available tour operators and travel

¹ Association of South-East Asian Nations

agents for Thailand. Besides information, people can enjoy a Thai massage or dance performance.

Previous results

The main goal is to enlarge the number of Dutch arrivals in Thailand. Thailand is performing strong and stable on the Dutch market. Despite the influence of external factors during the past years (2010 protests, 2011 floods, 2012 suppressed Dutch economy, expensive THB) visitor levels in 2012 grew. In 2012, there were 201.499 NL arrivals in Thailand (see appendix C). This is a growth of 4,33% in comparison to 2011. The Dutch market is known for its high level of repeat visitors to Thailand (more than 70% in 2012).

Regarding social media, Thais Verkeersbureau already has a Facebook page and recently opened a Twitter-account and a YouTube Channel. The last two are still in the beginning phase and are not really active.

Business relationships

As Thais Verkeersbureau itself does not offer travels to Thailand, they are dependent on the existing tour operators, travel agents and airlines (the suppliers). Therefore, Thais Verkeersbureau tries to build up good business relations in order to work together on the promotion of Thailand as a touristic destination. Appendix F shows a list of main tour operators to Thailand in the Netherlands.

1.4 Conclusion

After analyzing the internal environment of Thais Verkeersbureau, the different opportunities and weaknesses appeared. Thais Verkeersbureau is only a small part of the broader Tourism Authority of Thailand, which gives it more stability as an organization. As well as the opportunity to profit from other overseas offices of TAT regarding marketing strategies.

A downside of being part of the bigger TAT is that Thais Verkeersbureau is dependent on the decision made by the headquarters of TAT regarding the budget for example. Besides decision making, there are many layers of communication to go through when executing plans. Internal communication on the other hand is much easier, because Thais Verkeersbureau only has a few employees. This gives high work pressure on each employee, which can have a negative effect on their work.

Although, each employee is highly motivated and passionate about Thailand and have great expertise and knowledge about the destination. Outweighing the opportunities and weaknesses, Thais Verkeersbureau has about the same amount of each. Although, the weaknesses cannot be influenced this makes them harder to deal with.

CHAPTER 2

External analysis

2.0 Market analysis

In this part the external environment will be investigated to determine the market situation in the Netherlands regarding tourism.

The macro environment contains largely uncontrollable external elements that can potentially influence the ability to reach goals. This environment can be analyzed using the DESTEP-model: demographic, economic, social, technological and political situation (Wood, 2012).

NOTE: This is an analysis of the Dutch market as The Netherlands is the target market of Thais Verkeersbureau. Although, some situations are more important and has more influence when looked at Thailand. Therefore I have evaluated both for some situations.

2.0.1 Demographic situation

In October 2013, the Dutch population included 16.779.575 inhabitants with a growth rate of 0.44 %. In 2013, the Netherlands counted 7.569.000 households of which 2.802.000 were one-person households (CBS, 2013). The largest age-group is the people between 25-54 years old (CIA, 2013).

2.0.2 Economic situation

The economic environment includes GDP and the situation of the exchange rates, fuel prices (airlines), unemployment, and inflation. The Dutch economy is the sixth-largest economy in the euro-zone. It is noted for its stable industrial relations, moderate inflation and unemployment rates and plays an important role as a European transportation hub. (CIA, 2013) In 2012, the inflation rate was 2,8% and the unemployment rate was 8.3%. (CBS, 2014) In 2012, the GDP per capita of the Netherlands was €35.800, which was - 0.3% compared to 2011 (Country Economy, n.d.). In 2012 the consequences of the ongoing economic crisis got more visible. The economy shrunk, the government had to cut the budgets, unemployment rose and people had less money to spend.

Due to the crisis, people wait longer to book their holiday. They are still insecure and they don't know what will happen in the next months and what for influence that will have on their financial situation (Meulen, 2014).

Figure 2.0 shows the relation between the economic situation and the holiday behavior of the Dutch population from previous years. The last turning point was in the years of 2008/2009 when the economic crisis began. Even though the economy shrank, the numbers of holidays were still going up.

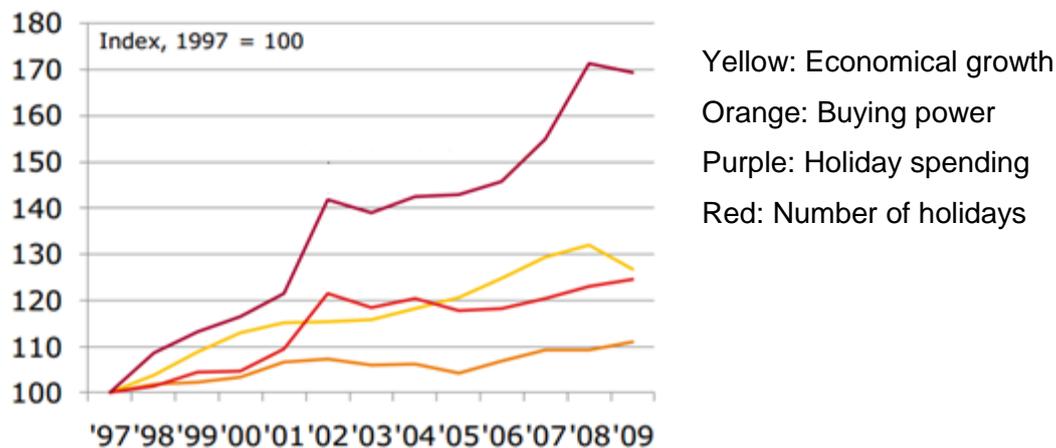


Figure 2.0: Relation economy and holiday behavior in the past
Source: CBS & NBTC-NIPO Research, CVO

2.0.3 Social situation

The social environment includes the cultural values, holiday taking habits, tourist behavior, and social concerns. In 2012, the economic situation in The Netherlands was still under pressure and the country officially was (and still is) in recession. However, Dutch people kept travelling. The number of holidays² even increased with 447.000 to 36.7 million holidays in 2012, a growth of 1% in comparison to 2011. In 2013, 81% of the Dutch population undertook at least one domestic and/or outbound holiday (Market Analysis Report). Of those travelers, 51% went for an outbound holiday spending in total 12.6 billion euro's (Boekee, Engels & Veer, 2014). The holiday frequency has been stable for the last couple of years, with a slight growth from 2.83 holidays in 2011 to 2.87 holidays in 2012. Especially among the people with the higher income increased travelling. The holiday frequency was the highest among the people between 55-64 years old (3.39), who also stayed at the destination longer than the average traveler.

² **Definition of a holiday:** each stay outside the home for the purpose of relaxation or fun with at least one overnight stay. Staying with family, friends or relatives abroad also belong to the definition of a holiday.

2.0.4 Technological situation

The technological environment includes internet usage, social networking/media usage, smart phone users etc. There is an increasing importance of mobile internet: in 2012 The Netherlands had 6 million smart phone owners and 2.8 million tablet users (+ 1 million since the end of 2011) (CBS, 2013). The use of internet and social media as a communication tool increased among tour operators and travel agents. Plus, more applications became available for use during holidays. Nowadays it is easy to arrange a holiday by using the internet without any help from the outside. Prices of airlines and hotels can be easily compared, which makes the market more transparent. Many website offer independent advice and review about the to-be visited place.

2.0.5 Environmental situation

The environmental situation in the Netherlands is not really a great influence on the holiday behavior of Dutch people. Although, Dutch people are more aware of the consequences for the environment while going on a holiday. Sustainable tourism, ecotourism, green travel: all terms which are getting more popular among the Dutch travelers (Krikke, 2008). Such kind of tourism can be defined as: “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people” (TIES, n.d.). Ecotourism is growing since 1990 with 20-34% per year (CREST, n.d.).

On the other hand, the environmental situation of Thailand is actually of great influence of the Dutch travelers’ behavior. In 2004, a large tsunami hit South-East Asia and destroyed a large part of Thailand’s south coast. Many countries released a negative travel advice for Thailand and told their citizens not to go to Thailand if not necessary. An article in the Dutch newspaper NRC about the impact of the tsunami explained that in the years after the tsunami, almost everything was rebuilt and tourism to Thailand was increasing again (NRC, 2014).

2.0.6 Political situation

The political environment includes the legislation and regulations of a countries market but also the current political situation and possible unrest in the country. The political situation in the Netherlands is quite stable and has no influence on the behavior of Dutch travelers.

On the other hand, the Thai political situation is more important. An unstable Thai political situation has a negative influence on the amount of Dutch travelers to Thailand. Over the years the political situation in Thailand varied a lot. From the year 2008 the economic

crisis began. This had an impact on every country, including both the Netherlands and Thailand. This year, January 2014, an emergency situation is announced for Bangkok. There have been many protests against the Thai government. The tourists are not the target, but people worry about their safety and think twice before they go (Eldering, 2014).

From past experience, these incidents say that unrest and political unrest mainly influence first time visitors to Thailand (see appendix D).

2.1 Market segmentation

The tourism market can be segmented into different groups: leisure market, special interest market and luxury market. Each market can be re-segmented into smaller sub-markets. Tourism can be divided into many more sub categories, but these are the most relevant segments for tourism to Thailand. This is a combination of the visitor preferences/behavior (appendix G) of the Netherlands and the image Thailand wants to bring to the visitors (Aviareps, 2013). The following sub-groups and their share are taken from the Market Analysis Report for Thailand, made by Aviareps.

2.1.1 Leisure market:

- *Round trip travelers*: The biggest segment for long-haul with culture/adventure/authentic Thai life/ beautiful nature/off the beaten track preferences. Share 35%
- *Family/Couples Beach holiday travelers*: More families are not afraid to travel far-away but very price sensitive with popular beaches and (new) less crowded destinations preferences. Share 25%
- *Single travelers*: It is a growing segment with more single tours offers on the Dutch market to explore destinations with a group of like-minded single people. Share 10%.
- *50+/-retired travelers*: Big and very strongly growing segment with people who are still fit and have time and money to travel. Prefers travelling in a group for safety, culture, good weather. General longer stay, especially during winter to escape the cold.

2.1.2 Special interest market:

- *Business travelers*: Due to economic crisis a shrinking segment that moves to online meetings.
- *Long-haul city breaks travelers*: Mainly couples without children with preferences for culture, shopping, entertainment, food. Share: 3-4%
- *Green travelers*: Dutch people are environment-friendly and enjoy green travel with unspoiled nature, animal-friendly camps, and hotels built with eco-friendly materials and

green activities preferences. Share: 3-5%

- *Active travelers*: Dutch people are active and enjoy activities during their holidays like biking, hiking, jungle tours, diving, snorkeling, kayaking, but good facilities and safety are important. Share: 2-3%.

2.1.3 Luxury market:

- *Golf travelers*: Small segment, but Thailand has a large selection of facilities for people seeking luxury. Share 1-2%

- *Cruise travelers*: Small, but strongly growing segment. Especially by people of 50+ years old with comfort and entertainment preferences. Share 2-3%

- *Wellness travelers*: Small segment, but it is growing steadily due to the growing interest for health, relaxation and wellness treatments. Share 1-2%

- *Honeymoon travelers*: Small segment. Share 1-2%

2.2 Target group

Thais Verkeersbureau main target groups are family's/single's/couple's for a beach holiday, round trip travelers and '50 plus' (people with the age above 50 years old)/retired people. Figure 2.1 shows an overview of the characteristics of each target group.

Type of holiday	Target group	Size
Beach holiday	Families	4.767.000 (household with more than 1 person)
	Couples	
Group tours, long winter stay	Age 50 +	2.428.345
	Retired	
Exploring new destinations with like-minded people	Singles	7.895.899 (unmarried people)

Figure 2.1: Size of target segments (CBS, 2014 January 14)

An important element about the target group is their activity on social media. Chapter 5 will elaborate more on this topic, but figure 2.2 shows the activity on different social media

per age group. The young generation (15-39 years old) is the most active on every social media. Although, the elderly (which is an important target group) has also a great share active users on Facebook and YouTube (Stats Dashboard, n.d.).

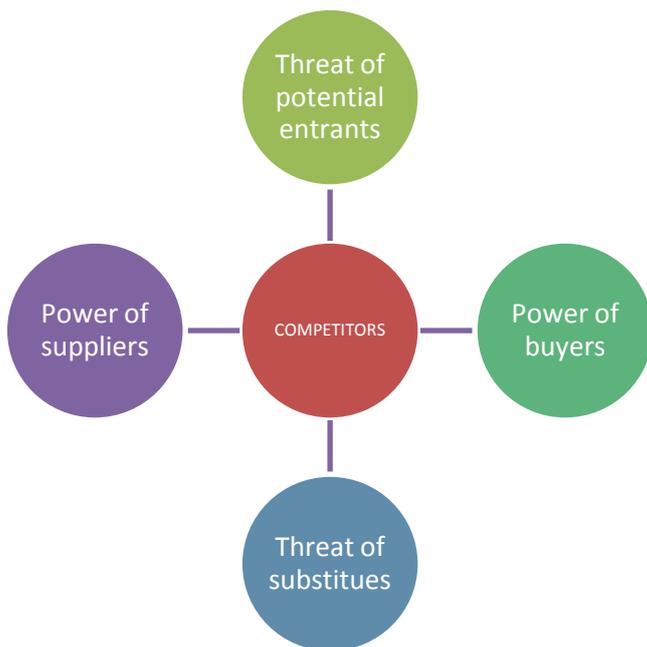
Age	Facebook	LinkedIn	Twitter	YouTube	Google+
15-19 years	87%	10%	54%	82%	23%
20-39 years	76%	48%	33%	71%	15%
40-64 years	54%	29%	21%	48%	15%
65-79 years	33%	10%	8%	30%	13%
80 years and older	25%	5%	8%	18%	0%

Figure 2.2: Active use social media (Stats Dashboard, n.d.)

2.3 Competitor analysis

Analyzing competitors helps to better understand market dynamics, anticipate what rivals will do and create more practical marketing plans. Michael Porter’s model of competitive forces affecting industry profitability and attractiveness shows that competition in a particular segment is affected by the number of new potential entrants, the power of suppliers and buyers, and the potential threat presented by substitute products (Wood, 2011).

Figure 2.3: Five Forces of Porter



Power of suppliers: In this case, the suppliers are the tour operators/travel agents/airlines who are offering products to Thailand. Their power is limited. They need to react on the demand of the travelers. If they change their prices at expense of the travelers, the ‘buyers’ will seek other options in for example neighboring countries.

Threat of potential entrants: Potential entrants are new TO/TA focusing on other (competitive) countries than Thailand, or existing TO/TA expanding or changing their product to competitors of Thailand. The threat of those potential entrants is low: to enter this market it

takes a lot of time and effort to build up relationships with partners in order to be able to offer one's customer the right product (travels).

Power of buyers: In this case, the buyers are the Dutch travelers to Thailand. Their power is big, as they decide whether to-go or not-to-go to Thailand. They have become more price-driven which results in a lowers the amount of bookings.

Threat of substitutes: The threat of substitute is average. Surrounding countries like Malaysia and Indonesia are getting more popular among the Dutch travelers. Thailand has been on the Dutch market for quit a period now and is more known among the Dutch travelers. Although, new upcoming countries still have the interesting, unexplored factor which may attract Dutch first time travelers to (South-East) Asia.

Competitors: Thais Verkeersbureau is one of the few South-East Asian tourism authorities who have an office in the Netherlands. This is an advantage for Thais Verkeersbureau. Besides Indonesia, the neighboring countries of Thailand do not have an offshore tourism marketing office. They only have their embassy to go to.

Thailand is surrounded by countries that are experiencing double-digit growth in arrivals, growing in popularity among travelers. According to Trip Advisor³, Thailand is still the number one Asia Destination of the year. And MasterCard announced Bangkok as most popular city trip destination of the year 2013 (Trip Advisor, 2013).

"Now people who have been to Asia two or three times are looking for something different. The playing field is crowded and consumers want choice and new experiences." says TAT governor, Phornsiri Manoharn (TAT, 2011)

Thailand's main direct competitors are Malaysia and Indonesia. Thailand is performing strong and stable on the Dutch market. Asian main competitors like Malaysia and Indonesia saw previous growth of visitors decreasing again in 2012, according to intelligence from the market and their official publications (see figure 2.4).

³ The world's largest travel site, enabling travelers to plan and to review the perfect trip. (TripAdvisor, 2013)

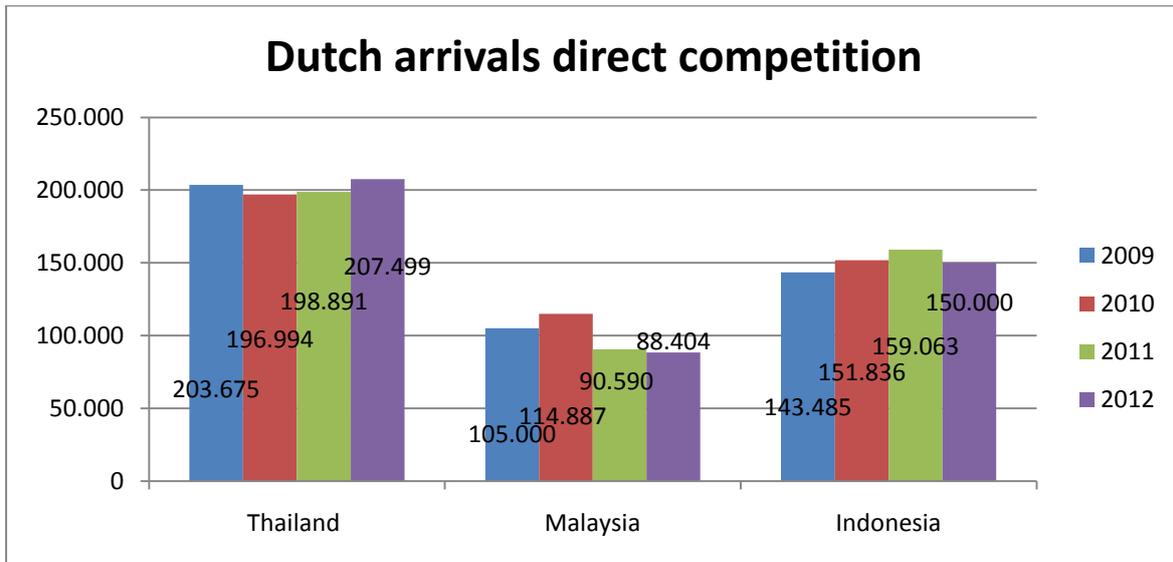


Figure 2.4.: Dutch arrivals direct competition
Source: Publications by respective Tourism Authorities 2012 (Market Analysis Report)

Comparing the GfK⁴ statistics for the period week 1-10 2013 (January1 untill March 10) with the same period last year for the major long haul destinations, Thailand is among the best performing destinations based on sales via the traditional tour operators/travel agents (see figure 2.5)

Thailand	- 0.67%
Malaysia	- 14.29%
China	- 20.17%
Indonesia	- 19,84%
Dutch Caribbean	- 8.92%
South Africa	+0.97%
Brazil	- 16,81%
Kenya	- 30.62%
India	- 42,31%
Market over all	- 6,0%

Figure 2.5: GfK statistics week 1-10 2013
Source: GfK statistics

⁴ GfK is the fourth largest market research organization in the world

Bangkok has a good airlift from the Netherlands (see appendix E). This helps in taking the lead in ticket sales over the past years (see appendix E). Also because it is known as an important *hub* in South-East Asia. Bangkok has a good connection with worldwide and regional destinations, which makes it a perfect start for (Dutch) travelers to start their holiday, combining Thailand with a visit to neighbouring countries like Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia or even Vietnam or Singapore.

Regarding social media activity of competitors in the Netherlands, Thais Verkeerbureau is one of the strongest. Competitors Indonesia and Malaysia have no to little activity on social media targeted at the Dutch market. Each country have the international tourism pages/profiles, but, besides Thais Verkeersbureau, only Indonesia has a Dutch Facebookpage (see figure 2.5).

	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube
Thailand	'Amazing Thailand NL' 1.384 likes	Thailand Fanclub NL (@AmazingThai_NL) 6 followers	Only International
Indonesia	'Wonderful Indonesia NL' 2.377 likes	Only International	Only International
Malaysia	Only International	Only International	Only International

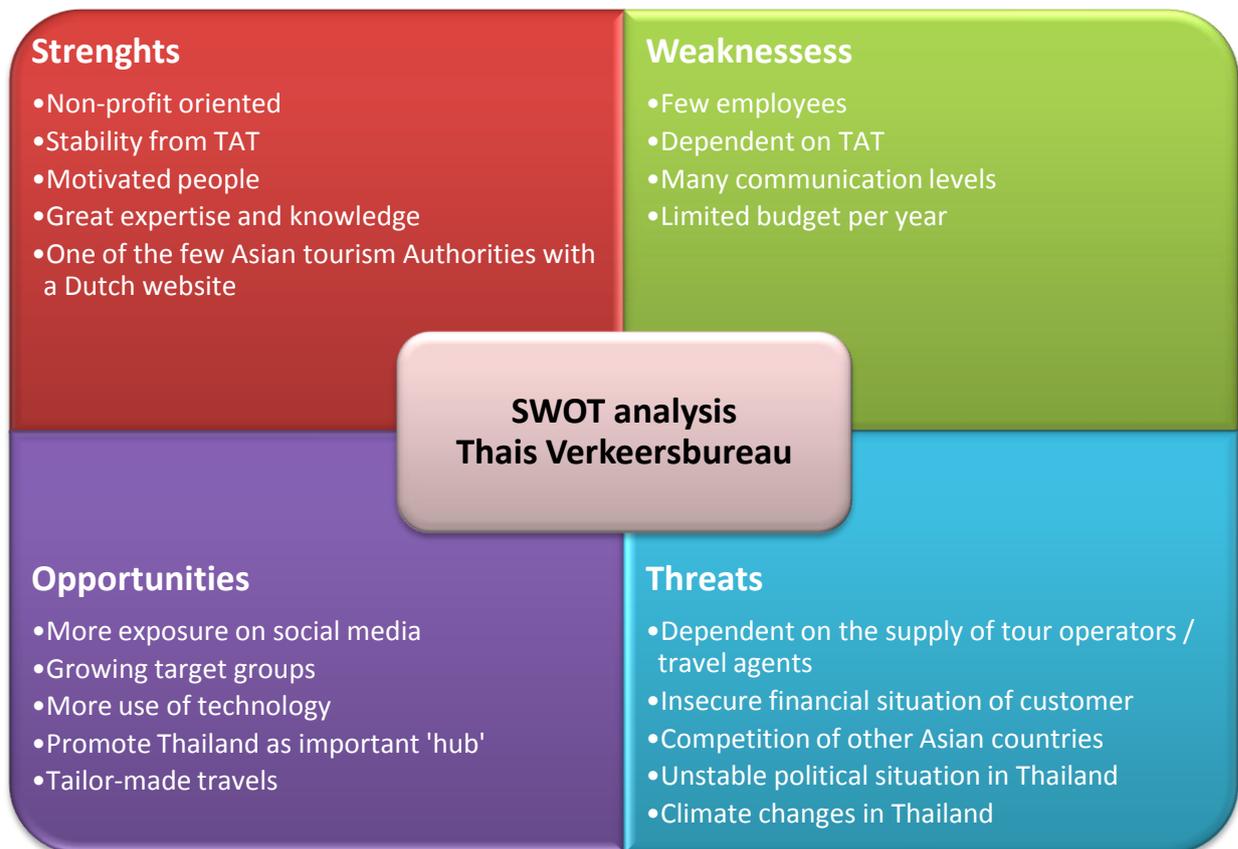
Figure 2.6: Social Media Activity Competitors

2.4 Conclusion

Looking at the factors from the five forces model, the market dynamics are in favor of Thais Verkeersbureau. Thais Verkeersbureau has growing competitors, but is still the best performing country in South-East Asia. Thailand mainly welcomes repeat visitors from the Dutch market, which means a great brand loyalty among the Dutch travelers. Besides, as a tour operator or travel agency it is difficult to enter this market. This means Thais Verkeersbureau is unlikely to suffer from substitutes. All in all Thais Verkeersbureau/ Thailand has a strong position on the Dutch market, but competitors are coming closer and closer every year. Regarding social media, Thais Verkeersbureau is way ahead of tourism authorities of competitors.

CHAPTER 3

SWOT-analysis



3.1 Strengths

As Thais Verkeersbureau is a part of the larger organization TAT (in Thailand) they have more stability as when it would act on itself. Moreover, they can profit from the expertise and experiences from TAT offices in other countries.

Thais Verkeersbureau is a non-profit initiative, so there is no pressure to make money offering their services. As Thais Verkeersbureau is one of the few tourism authorities of the Asian countries active on the Dutch market, they have an advantage with the target group. They only have a few employees, which makes internal communication easy and quick. Besides, all employees are very motivated and have a great expertise on Thailand.

3.2 Weaknesses

Because Thais Verkeersbureau is a part of TAT, they are not completely independent and always have to justify their actions and outcomes of their market to their responsible TAT office (in Paris). Every year there is given a specific amount of money to spend on promotion of Thailand on the Dutch markets. They have to adjust their plans to the money available.

Besides, each campaign needs to be approved by different organizational layers; first by the office in Paris which in their turn reports to the office in Bangkok. That can cause long communication processes, because many different people are involved. Their internal team consists only out of a few employees which keeps the work pressure high.

3.3 Opportunities

The main opportunities for Thais Verkeersbureau are the online opportunities. Their activity on social media is still small, which leaves room for many improvements to reach a bigger audience. This in combination with the growing target groups and use of technology (phones, tablets) and online information search.

With the great airlift from the Netherlands to Bangkok, Thailand can be the gateway to South-East Asia. People tend to combine countries in one trip, and with this airlift Thailand remains popular as one of the visited countries.

Tailor-made travels are getting more and more popular. This means that people can choose themselves where to go and what to see. Thais Verkeersbureau could react on that by giving more individual information and advice.

3.4 Threats

The economy is still not very stable and is still recovering from the economic crisis from 2009. This causes more hesitation among travelers as they are not sure if their financial situation will stay the same in the upcoming months.

As Thais Verkeersbureau does not offer trips and/or packages itself, it is dependent on what the existing tour operators and travel agents in the Dutch market have to offer. If their offers reduce, the customers have fewer options to choose from to book a trip to Thailand and they could choose easier for competitors. Thailand's competitors are rapidly growing which is a threat for the future.

The unstable political conditions in Thailand influence tourism. People are more scared to go to a place where there is a high risk of protests and riots. Especially while an 'emergency situation' is announced. Besides the political situation the regional crises, e.g. terrorism, avian flu and the threat for a tsunami also has an influence and could discourage tourism.

3.5 Conclusion

After establishing the strengths/weaknesses plus the opportunities/threats and put together in a SWOT analysis, the different factors can be evaluated through a confrontation matrix. The aim of this matrix is to identify the most important strategic issue the organization is facing. Combining the external against the internal factors, different strategies will turn out (see figure 3.2).

		Opportunities					Threats				
		O1	O2	O3	O4	O5	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5
Strengths	S1	SO: using strengths to work on opportunities.					ST: using strengths to bear and turn threats into opportunities.				
	S2										
	S3										
	S4										
	S5										
Weaknesses	W1	WO: taking an opportunity without having the competency which could be very risky.					WT: it should not do business in this market with large threats and not having the competences.				
	W2										
	W3										
	W4										

Figure 3.2: Confrontation matrix

Looking closely at the SWOT-analysis, it is evident that Thais Verkeersbureau suffers from more strengths and opportunities than from weaknesses and threats. Some threats include factors which cannot be changed like environmental and political factors in Thailand. But those factors are not directly influencing the marketing strategy of Thais Verkeersbureau. They have enough strengths to work on the opportunities. The established weaknesses of Thais Verkeersbureau (like many communication levels and dependent on TAT) do not heavily affect the strengths and opportunities. Therefore, Thais Verkeersbureau can be placed in the SO section of the confrontation matrix. This will make up for the negative sides of the analysis regarding the threats and is the ideal strategy.

This strategy means that Thais Verkeersbureau can do what it is good at when the opportunity arrives; external factors on which Thais Verkeersbureau can respond with their strengths. Using this strategy Thais Verkeersbureau can have a quicker and more easily growth in their activities. Besides, they can use their strengths and opportunities to reduce the threats. Spreading their knowledge and expertise of Thailand (strength) on social media (opportunity) can reduce the influence of the climate/political situation in Thailand (threat). By spreading trustworthy and actual information people can be convinced that Thailand is a great destination to spend their holiday.

CHAPTER 4

Marketing Mix

The marketing mix consists out of the 4 P's: product, place, price, promotion. (Marketing, an Introduction) In tourism there are 3 additional P's: people, physical evidence and process. Each explaining the important elements of the organization/product (Free Nomads, 2013).



Figure 4.1: Marketing Mix

4.1 Product

In the tourism industry it can be hard to define the 'product'. There is a differences between the 'promise of the product' (what the customer actually buys) and the 'actual product' (the service of giving information). The tourist's purchasing decision is based on the promise of the product, established by what the tourist sees in the promotional material.

The product of Thais Verkeersbureau can be defined as the service of giving information to (future) Dutch tourist travelling to Thailand. Although Thailand, as a touristic destination, can be seen as the indirect product. This is because Thailand is the actual 'product' where customers are traveling to and where it is all about. That is why Thailand as a product is also included in this marketing mix

Thais Verkeersbureau delivers it services through its website (general information, news updates, and brochures) and every month they send out a newsletter to their subscribers. If people can't find what they are looking for, they can contact Thais Verkeersbureau by telephone for personal and individual help.

Thailand, as a touristic destination, offers a variety of products. One of Thailand's biggest attractions are the many, pristine beaches. With a long coastline and many islands, Thailand's reaches the top 25 beaches in Asia with 8 different beaches (Trip Advisor, 2013). Besides the beaches, Thailand offers cities/shopping, roundtrips, green/eco travel,

culture/history, family travel (resorts, excursions), active (hiking, biking, water sports, golf) and wellbeing/wellness.

4.2 Price

Price is about what a business/organization charges for their services. This is defined by the interacting forces of supply and demand.

As Thais Verkeersbureau is a non-profit organization, they offer their products for free. This is positive and attractive for the customer, because it doesn't cost them any money. This way people will easier and quicker use their services. On the other hand, people could doubt the quality of the service, because it is for free.

4.3 Place

Placement is the distribution of the product. In the tourism industry, the product cannot be distributed to the customer, but the customer travels to the product. So, unlike physical products, tourism distribution is more related to how one distributes the information about the product and how to make it available to the customer. For example trade shows, resellers, web pages etc, which makes it closely related to the P of promotion in this marketing mix.

Thais Verkeersbureau main distribution channel (for the information about the 'final' product: Thailand) is their own website with general information about the country and sights, but also the latest update about news items. Via their website visitors can gather information, order brochures or contact them directly with their questions. Social media could become an important distribution channel for Thais Verkeersbureau to deliver their services.

4.4 Promotion

Promotion is all about communicating with the customers. It is the activity of telling the market about the product. Communication can include advertising, public relations, personal selling, viral advertising and any other form of communication between the organization and the customer (Ebert & Griffin, 2009).

Thais Verkeersbureau mainly uses advertising. They strive to make Thailand more visible on the Dutch market through joint-promotions with tour operators, online promotions, social media, and events to the agent and consumers. Joint-promotion with tour-operators

can include outdoor campaigns (posters at train/tram stations), dedicated newsletters, dedicated landings- page of their website, special offer to increase bookings etc. Advertising gives the ability to reach a mass public at the same time. Though, it brings high financial costs with it, which makes partnerships necessary. (Know This, 2013) As Thais Verkeersbureau is fully represented by Aviareps, they can profit from their expertise on the promotion of touristic destinations.

4.5 People

The human component of a service in tourism is very important. This is the added value for the customer to a purchase decision or holiday experience. It includes attitude towards the customer, skills of the employees and appearances. Because much of the tourism industry is based on word-of-mouth advertising, friendly personal service and trained employees can make a break in tourism.

As Thais Verkeersbureau consists out of a small team, it is all more personal which makes the human component very important to build a good relationship with their customer. As for Thailand, the country is known as the 'Land of Smiles'. The Thai people are famous for their great hospitality which makes it for tourist a pleasant country to visit and makes them feel welcomed.

4.6 Process

In tourism, businesses/organizations offer services. The processes those services can offer specific advantages. They should do more than just make life easier for the business – they must help customers get what they want. The coming together of all the stages of the processes constitutes a marketing process (Free Nomads, 2013).

For Thais Verkeersbureau this could be:

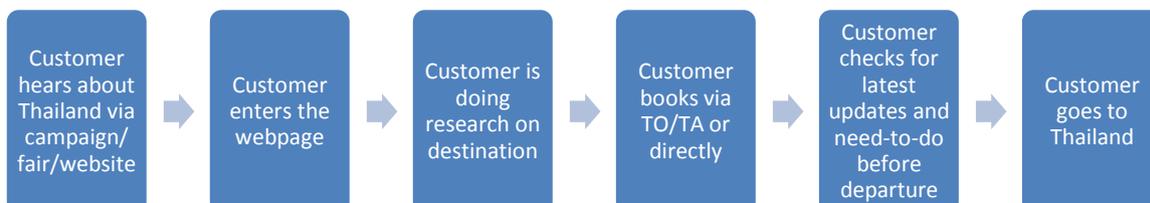


Figure 4.1: Marketing process for Thais Verkeersbureau

4.7 Physical evidence

A service is an intangible product and cannot be experienced before it's delivered. Therefore, it carries a great risk for potential customers as they don't know what to expect. To reduce this feeling of risk, physical evidence plays an important role in hooking the customer and improving the chances for success. In this way, the potential customer sees what the product is like and if that fit their preferences.

Thais Verkeersbureau offers brochures with many photographs and also the website provides a lot of information and pictures on what Thailand is like. Social media could be the next step for Thais Verkeersbureau to improve their offer of physical evidence about Thailand.

CHAPTER 5

Social Media

5.1 Definition

social media *noun [treated as singular or plural]*

websites and other online means of communication that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking (Oxford, n.d.)

5.2 Development

Social media has a number of characteristics that make it different from traditional media such as newspapers, television, books and radio. The most important factor of social media is the ability of interaction and the participation of the audience. The birth of the social networking as people know now was in 1994 when Geocities was launched. Following by AOL Instant Messenger and SixDegrees.com in 1997, which allowed users (for the first time) to make their own personal profile and ‘friend’ people (Walker, 2011).

In the new millennium social networking rapidly developed into more sophisticated systems. Friendster was the pioneer of social networking, being the launching point for the more famous network MySpace. Friendster was ‘the next best thing’ the world could understand, participate and dream on (Chafkin, 2007). In 2003, LinkedIn and MySpace were launched and soon these two media were getting more popular and Friendster became something from the past (Goble, 2012). MySpace has been on the social networking throne in many English-speaking countries until today’s global leader Facebook came into the picture.

Founded by university students, like many other social networks, Facebook initially was a university-orientated website only for students of Harvard College. Quickly they expanded to other college’s and even high schools, to end up going ‘global’ for everyone with a valid email address (Goble, 2012). Traffic to Facebook increased rapidly and in according to a study by Nielson Media Research, in 2009 Facebook became the second most accessed website (behind Google). Although this study is done in the USA, similar patterns are expected in other countries (Fernandes, 2011).

5.2.1 Classification of social media

Social media technologies have been taking on different kind of forms. From magazines, social blogs, micro blogging, wiki's, podcasts to photographs and pictures, video and social bookmarking. As new sites appear every day, Kaplan and Heanlein created a classification model based on two different dimensions. On the one side social presence/media richness and on the other hand self-presentation/self-disclosure (Kaplan & Heanlein, 2010). Within this model they created 6 different types of social media:

1. Collaborative projects (for example Wikipedia)
2. Blogs and micro blogs (for example Twitter)
3. Content communities (for example YouTube)
4. Social networking sites (for example Facebook)
5. Virtual game-worlds (for example World of Warcraft)
6. Virtual social worlds (for example Second Life)

		Social presence/ Media richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self-presentation/ Self-disclosure	High	Blogs	Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)	Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life)
	Low	Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia)	Content communities (e.g., YouTube)	Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)

Figure 5.0: Classification of Social Media (Kaplan & Heanlein, 2010)

Relating to Thais Verkeersbureau, not every type of social media is of interest. The main social media types Thais Verkeersbureau could work on are: blogs and micro blogs, content communities and social networking sites.

5.3 Description of existing social media

Comparing the subscribers and active users of all the social networking sites, the 'big five' social media are: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and Google+ (Stats Dashboard, 2013).

5.3.1 The Big Five

Facebook

“To give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected”



Facebook was founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg. Facebook creates a way to stay in contact with friends and family, to see what is going on in the world and to share/express/discuss actual matters (Facebook). As of September 2013, Facebook has on average 727 million daily and 1.19 billion monthly active users. In the Netherlands, 71% of the population has a Facebook profile (Bighelaar & Akkermans, 2013). For individuals Facebook offers a personal profile page with personal information/interests and the possibility to post updates, photo's, videos or share someone else's. For company and/or organizations, Facebook offers a different profile page which individuals can 'like' instead of 'befriend'. Facebook can be a medium to display photos about Thailand with information on several topics related to traveling to Thailand. Facebook offers a way to communicate to the consumer, but also a way for the consumer to communicate with the organization.

Twitter

“To give everyone the power to create and share ideas and information instantly, without barriers”



Twitter was founded in 2007 by Peter Chernin and Jack Dorsey. Twitter is a micro blogging network, a tool to express how people feel, to stay in contact with people and to follow the activities of someone's favorite person or company/organization. Twitter is all about the so-called 'tweets'. Every tweet has a maximum of 140 characters, which makes it perfect for a headline, big idea or timeline observation (Twitter, n.d.). Twitter has over 230 million daily active users with approximately 500 million tweets that are sent each

day. The Netherlands has almost 4 million active monthly users (Oosterveer, 2013). Twitter's main focus is on news-related items. It is possible to add a photo to a tweet, but it will not immediately display; it is more about the 'headlines'. Twitter is a perfect way to keep travelers to Thailand updated about recent news on: political situation, environmental situation, contests or tips about airlines/hotels/activities.

LinkedIn

“Connect the world's professionals to make them more productive and successful”



LinkedIn was founded in May 2003, by Reid Hoffman. He started this network out of his living room in 2002, but officially launched it one year later. Using LinkedIn, you get access to people, jobs, news, updates and insights that will help you to be great at what you do. LinkedIn is a social networking site for people in-, or searching for a professional occupation. Through a personal profile with information about education, experience and competences, people can create their own (professional) network to stay connected, be introduced to an employer, find new employees or find contact information about a company (LinkedIn, n.d.). In the Netherlands, LinkedIn has 4.400.000 subscribers and 3.975.000 monthly users (Stats Dashboard, 2013). LinkedIn is mainly focused on business relations and job offers. This doesn't make it suitable for Thais Verkeersbureau.

YouTube

“Allows billions of people to discover, watch and share originally-created videos”



YouTube is a video-sharing website and was founded in 2005 by three former PayPal employees. It provides a forum for the people to connect, inspire and inform other people through videos. Most of the material is uploaded by individuals, but also some media companies share some of their content on YouTube (YouTube). In the Netherlands, 7.1 million Dutch people use YouTube of which 0.9 million every day (Social Media in Nederland, 2013). YouTube brings the opportunity of showing real life videos to travelers. Physical evidence is a strong influence in the final decision making of a destination, so YouTube provides the perfect channel to reach the widest range of people with videos.

Google+



The essence of Google+ is about connections, data and people. Via the social network of Google+, Google gains a huge amount of data which helps them to provide a more personalized web. Important to know, is that a Google+ account is mandatory when applying for a Gmail account. Meaning that there are many people who have an account only because they had to. In the Netherlands there are 2.0 million Dutch users of which half of them use Google+ everyday (Oosterveer, 2013). Google+ is not very popular yet as social medium in the Netherlands and can also be seen as an upcoming social media. This due to the relative low market penetration, whereby the worldwide developments and innovations of Google+ stay undetected (Social Media in Nederland, 2013) On the other hand, when the Dutch market does discover Google+ better, a large growth can be expected.

5.3.2 Upcoming Social Media

Every year, new and/or unknown social media platforms are evolving and taking a larger share on the Dutch market. Important platforms on the rise are: Instagram, Pinterest and Foursquare. According to a research done by Newcom, the awareness and the use of new (upcoming) social media are still low. Instagram is known by 32% of the Dutch people and Pinterest only by 20% (see figure 5.3) (Newcom, 2013).

	Instagram	Pinterest	Foursquare
<i>Launched</i>	October 6, 2010	March, 2010	March, 2009
<i>Knowledge</i>	32%	20%	17%
<i>Users</i>	720.000	530.000	240.000
<i>Daily</i>	120.000	56.000	52.000
<i>Focus</i>	Photo/Video	Photo/Impressions	Location

Figure 5.3: Details of upcoming social media

5.4 Comparison analysis

Each social media has its own strengths and its own features. Some will be more suitable for Thais Verkeersbureau to use than others. Main features which are important for Thais Verkeersbureau are:

1. *Description of organization*
2. *Post (text) updates*
3. *Photo/Video sharing (physical evidence)*
4. *Connection with other social media* (linking more media to each other to update the same message on different media at the same time reaching a bigger audience.
5. *Ability to directly communicate and react to customers (interaction, room for asking and answering question to Thais Verkeersbureau)*
6. *Mobile app* (social media with an mobile app has more active users, because it makes it easier accessible)

I have compared the main social media looking at the different features. In figure 5.4 you can find the main results. In appendix G, the complete comparison table can be found. Every social media discussed before is included, except for Foursquare. That is because Foursquare is still too small to focus on and does not have the right focus for Thais Verkeersbureau.

5.4.1 Conclusion

Facebook and Twitter are most popular in the Dutch market when looked at the active users. Besides that, they also score high in the comparison analysis regarding the interest points of Thais Verkeersbureau. Google+ is a large and growing social media, but has not a big number of active users. Still, Google+ needs to be discovered by many Dutch people which makes it an important opportunity for the future. Instagram and Pinterest are potential social media to use for Thais Verkeersbureau, but are still not very known among the Dutch people. As they are rapidly growing, these media could be interested to reach more public in the future. Interesting is that almost all Twitter users also use Facebook (86%), when only 36% of the Facebook users also use Twitter.

	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube	LinkedIn	Google+	Instagram	Pinterest
1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	Yes	Yes	Only with video	No	Yes	Only with photo/video	Only with photo
3	Both	Both	Video	None	Both	Both	Photo
4	Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Instagram	Facebook	No	No	No	Facebook, Twitter	Facebook
5	Yes, wall post + instant messaging	Yes, react on tweet with tags	Limited	No	Limited	Limited	No
6	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Figure 5.4: Social media comparison

5.5 Social media trends in Dutch (tourism) market

With the enormous amount of information available for travelers, the internet became an important platform for exchanging that information between the customer and the industry supplier (like attractions, transportation sectors, hotels), controllers (like government bodies), as well as non-profit organizations such as destination marketing organizations (Thais Verkeersbureau). Social media have emerged as an important domain to facilitate the interactions between online consumers/travelers (Xiang & Gretzel, 2009).

Today, social media are largely integrated into everyday life. Facebook and Twitter are the largest platforms when looking at daily users, although YouTube has more subscribers than Twitter. The importance of Facebook is still growing; six out of ten sees Facebook as the most important platform according to a survey conducted by Newcom Research & Consultancy (Veer & Boekee, 2014). Of the five biggest platforms, the expectations are that Google+ will be experiencing an explosive increase in 2014.

An important element for the use of social media is the trust the users have in the several social media platforms. Trust in social media means to what extent people believe and rely on the things said via social media. This can be by either companies/organizations or friends and family. According to last year, the trust in social media as a medium is declining from 37% to 21% (Veer, et al., 2014).

Social media is getting more important for the business world. Two out of three social media users started following one or more organizations last year. Of those people, 20% said something negative and over 40% said something positive about the organization they followed. That shows that interaction between the organization and the customer is very important for the customer. This requires a good web care strategy to react on the comments of their followers/customers. (Social Business, August 2013)

The importance of social media during and after the holidays grew. According to a research conducted by Corendon, 70% of the Dutch population says to *be able* to have no internet for two weeks during their holiday, but 47% also says that they *don't want* to. Remarkable is, that both young (<30) and older people (>60) 18.8 % thinks that Wi-Fi during holidays is very important. Popular devices to take with them on holidays are mobile/smart phone (95%), camera (68%) and a tablet (39%) (Corendon, 2013). The

mobile/smart phone is more popular amongst the people <30 years old, while the tablet is more popular among the people of >30 years old.

More than 50% of the people say to be active on social media during their holiday, of which 57% is daily active. The most popular social medium is Facebook followed by Twitter (see figure 5.1)

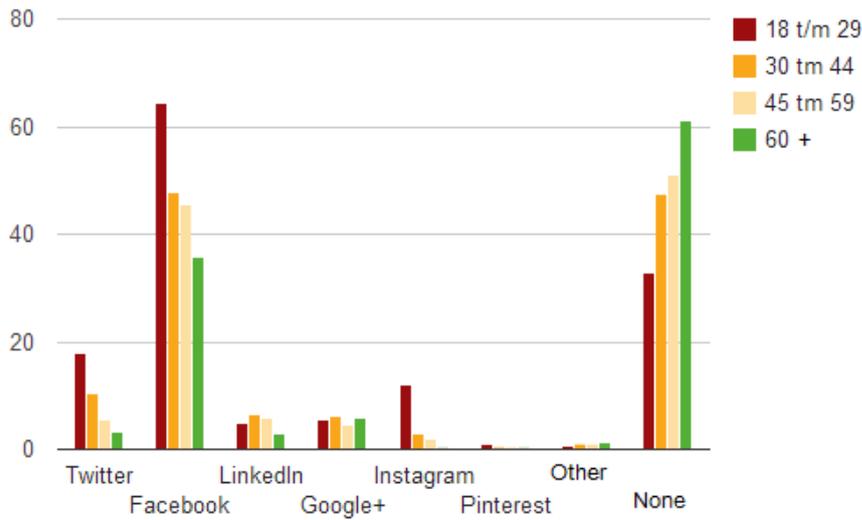


Figure 5.1: Use of social media during holiday (Corendon, 2013)

Dutch people placed more posts about their holiday destinations according to previous years. People between 18-24 years old posted the most about the latest holiday. Main topics of posts were: accommodation, excursions, transportation and travel agency/tour operator (Aviareps, 2013).

People orientate online before choosing a holiday, for hotels the most important website with reviews is www.zoover.nl. People share their experiences during and after the trip via online media like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Sharing and communication became key-words: shared values & shared experiences. This way people can gather information from independent travelers. People can arrange their trip on their own, no need for travel agents. It is easy to book and to compose a trip online via organizations or directly with the airlines or accommodations. A negative side of this easy going online sharing process is the fact that not only positive, but also negative news is spreading more easily and quicker. News about crime, political unrest or (negative) weather conditions gets more attention.

5.6 Guidelines for using social media

Besides determine which social media are relevant to use, it is important to set some guidelines that can be applied for any kind of social media. Kaplan & Heinlein (2010) established several key-points to keep in mind when using social media:

Choose carefully: as there are dozens different social media out there, it is not necessary to participate in all of them as 'being' active is a key factor to success. Eliminate smaller media and media focusing outside the target group. Also keep in mind the time and effort it takes to keep it active.

Ensure activity alignment: when using different media for the same target group it is crucial that all activities are aligned with each other. Nothing is more confusing for the customer than contradicting messages across different channels and you will lose the trust of the target group.

Media plan integration: while social media becomes more important, traditional media did not disappear. In the customers' eyes they are both part of the corporate image. When something books great results and enthusiasm on social media, it should be considered to also run it in traditional media like magazines or television.

Access for all: this may sound logical, but it is worth checking if every employee can access the active accounts. Social media requires constant care and quick responses. They also underline the fact that employees should identify themselves when posting a comment which keeps it credible for the consumer.

Be active: to create a relationship with the consumers, it is important to take the lead and remain active. Social media is all about sharing and interaction; keep the information fresh and engage the consumers in discussions.

Be interesting: to be interesting you should listen first to your consumer to see what they want and expect from you. With that information you can develop and post content that fits the interests of the followers.

Be honest: respect the rules of the social media. Make sure to get familiar with the rules and regulations so there are no unexpected surprises. Especially while working closely with partners, be sure how to use and/or relate to each other on social media.

CONCLUSIONS

The main question of this thesis was: “What are the possibilities for Thais Verkeersbureau to enlarge their exposure on social media in order to generate more traffic to Thailand?” The answer to that question is researched by analyzing the current internal and external situation of Thais Verkeersbureau plus the current situation of social media on the Dutch market regarding tourism and the possible options for Thais Verkeersbureau.

Thais Verkeersbureau is dependent of many factors: policy of TAT (including budget), supply of tour operators/travel agencies for their customers and the external factors like political/environmental situation and competitors. These un-changeable factors make it even more logical to enlarge social media presence to build up more brand loyalty.

Thailand remains welcoming to a growing amount of Dutch arrivals. Still, competitors are getting more popular as there is a change in holiday behavior. Mainly due to the economic crisis and insecure financial situation, people are searching for holidays closer to home or to less famous/known and therefore cheaper destinations. This is at expense of Thailand, which is a long-haul destination for Dutch travelers. Therefore, Thais Verkeersbureau could make Thailand more attractive using social media, even for a short-break holiday.

Social media has made a major step forward in the last two years. The main social media among Dutch people are: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and Google+. Comparing the numbers of previous years the growth is stagnating, but the daily active users are still growing. Social media has become an important role in the online travel information search. People create word of mouth advertising, which is seemed as one of the most trustworthy source of information.

For YouTube the situation is a bit more complicated. One can simply apply for an account, but to get an own ‘channel’ where people can subscribe to, a certain amount of money should be paid to YouTube. As Thais Verkeersbureau does not have a lot of video material available yet to show, it is not likely that the channel of Thais Verkeersbureau will be easily found.

With the development in technology, it is easier to have access during holidays to communication devices and wireless internet. Before and during holidays people are more active on social media updating about their activities in the visited country. This is positive

for Thais Verkeersbureau; once tourists update (positive) posts about their experiences, creating word-to-mouth advertising.

The main direct competitors of Thailand are Malaysia and Indonesia. Like Thailand, Indonesia has a tourism authority office in the Netherlands, but Malaysia and surrounding South-East Asia countries don't. This is an advantage for Thailand as they are more active promoting Thailand on the Dutch market. Regarding social media, none of the tourism authorities are very active. Thailand has the most social media accounts at this moment, but are not really engaged to it yet. On the other hand, its competitors only have international accounts. This gives an advantage for Thailand, because this way Thais Verkeersbureau has more (Dutch) information available about their product.

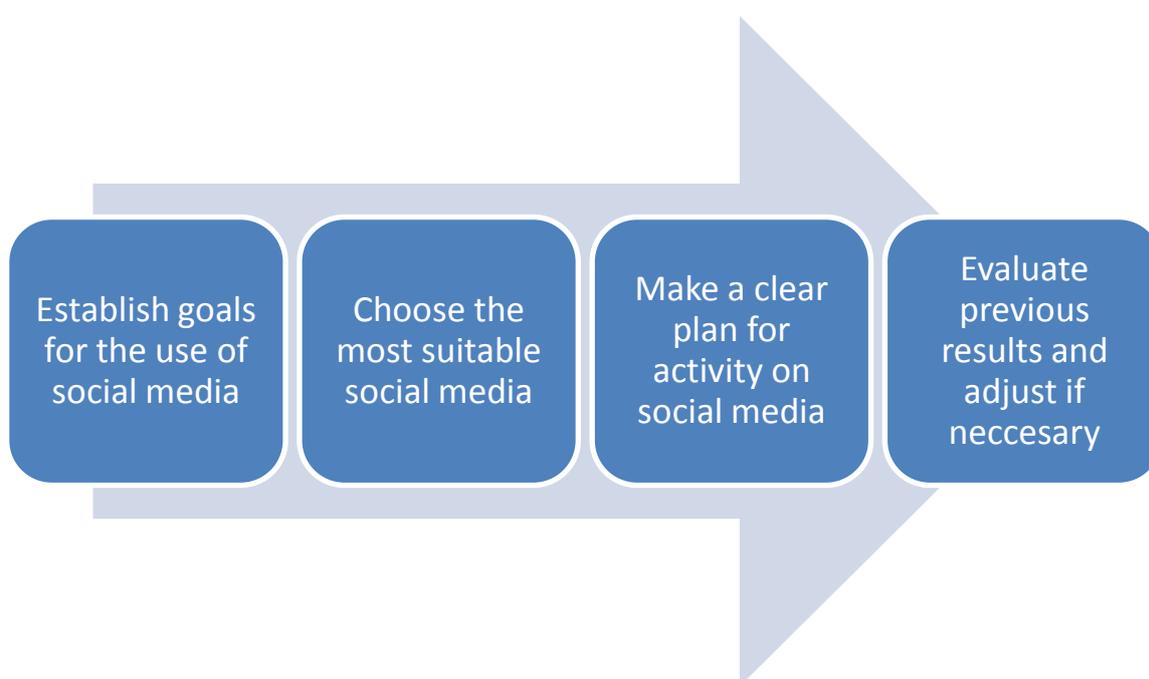
Important when using social media is to establish some guidelines on how to use the selected media. Customer relationship and interaction are two major key factors in successful social media use. This means that the posts and activity on social media should have a purpose and not just a random nice picture or an informative text. When the followers of Thais Verkeersbureau are interested and enthusiastic, the challenge is to make them share their feelings with friends and family.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Outcome of the research

A social media plan for Thais Verkeersbureau

After all the research for this thesis, I came up with the following social media plan. Thais Verkeersbureau could use the following steps to create a social media plan, established after all the research done for this thesis.



Establish goals for the use of social media

The aim of this social media plan for Thailand is to get more exposure among the Dutch social media users in order to generate more traffic to Thailand. This exposure must consist out what Thailand has to offer: destination, beaches, cities etc. Besides the products Thailand has to offer it is important to keep spreading the image of Thailand as a welcoming country for tourists (Land of Smiles), that people will get value for money and that Thailand is full of hidden cultural and natural treasures.

So, specific goals for the social media usage of Thais Verkeersbureau could be:

- Spreading/strengthening the service of Thais Verkeersbureau and the image of Thailand as touristic destination
- Increase conversation with (potential) travelers to Thailand
- After one month of intensive social media use seeing a significant growth in likes/followers (Facebook: 10%, Twitter: 300%)
- Develop 'relationships' on social media with Thailand-related tour operators, travel agents or airlines.

Choose the most suitable social media

Choosing the right social media depends on different factors. *The available resources:* Thais Verkeersbureau only has a few employees which give them limited opportunities as they already have a large work pressure. Thais Verkeersbureau should appoint one person with (great) knowledge about social media to do this task and to constantly work on it (this could also be an intern for example). *The activity of the target group:* the main used social media among the target group of Thais Verkeersbureau (which are families/couples, singles, and 50+/retired people) are Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Those three social media enables Thais Verkeersbureau to post/share content, photos, videos and the possibility to interact with their customer. However, due to a small staff I would recommend to focus first on solely Facebook and Twitter, which also allows Thais Verkeersbureau to post and show videos like they could on YouTube.

Make a schedule for the activity on selected social media

It is important to keep active and keep the posts aligned with all other using media. To keep control and to keep an overview of these activities on social media, Thais Verkeersbureau could make/use a clear schedule. This way, they could create a pattern in their posts to cover all areas of information and to keep an overview of recent activity. An example of a social media plan is shown in appendix H.

Evaluate previous results and adjust if necessary

Like every other marketing plan, it is important and necessary to evaluate the process. It is important to keep a clear eye on the activity around the posts, the interaction between Thais Verkeersbureau and the customers. It will not be possible to measure the growth of

Dutch arrivals in Thailand as a result of the social media activity. Still, it is interesting if there is a significant change in bookings after starting intensive social media use. Another way to find out the actual result is to conduct a survey among the target group. This can simply be done via for example Facebook.

As it is important to 'be active' on the participated social media, I recommend to only focus on the three most popular social media among the target group: Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. This way, it is easy to reach a large number of people at the same time. After evaluating the first results, possible new social media are Google+ and Instagram. These social media are rapidly growing, and looking to the future this could be a great opportunity for Thais Verkeersbureau.

Moreover, I would recommend making posts and updates which invite the travelers to react. This way there will be interaction which is an important key to be successful. This can be done by asking question about the experiences of travelers who already went to Thailand, ask for tips from other travelers or simply ask what they would like to see more from Thais Verkeersbureau.

Physical evidence is a very important part of the promotion of a touristic destination. Social media makes it easy to post photos and videos. As TAT has a large image bank, it is easy to post a picture every day about the treasures of Thailand. For more interaction: ask the followers/friends to post their favorite pictures and publish the most beautiful ones in a folder every week. Or make a game of it: 'Who knows where this picture is taken?'

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APPENDICES

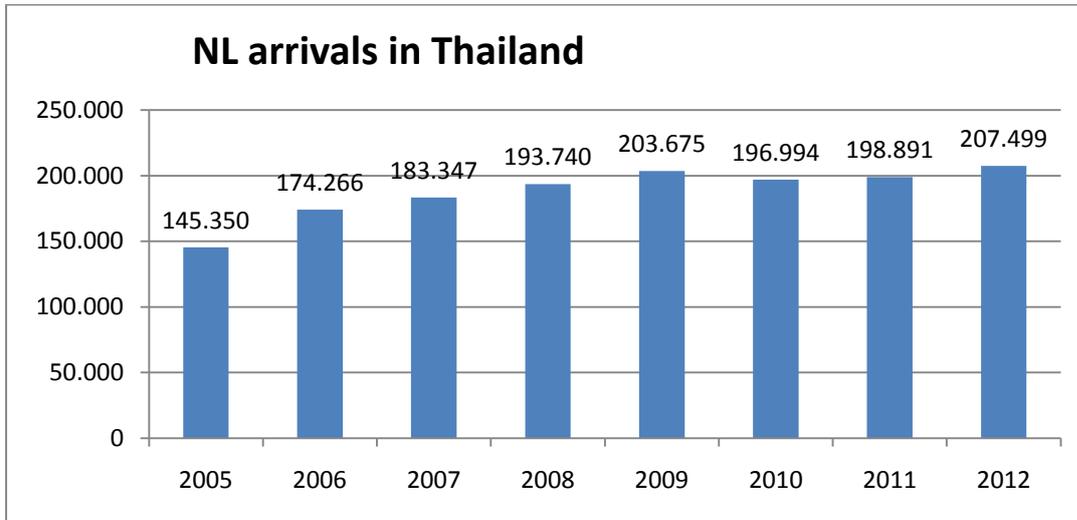
Appendix A: Organizational Chart TAT

Appendix B: Important index in 2013 compared to 2012 NL Market

Subject		2011	2012	+ / -
1.	Number of Outbound travelers	12.766.000	12.800.000	-34.000
2.	Number of Internet users	15.300.000 internet users 90% of the population are active users	15.500.000 internet users 96% of all 12 to 75 years old are active users	+200.000
3.	Number of Smart Phone / Android users	5.000.000	6.000.000 <i>6 out of 10 internet users go online with mobile</i>	+1.000.000
4.	Number of Social Media users (Facebook/Twitter / Instagram, etc...)	NL Facebook users: 6.700.000 NL users Twitter: 727.000 (March 2011)	NL users Facebook: 7.500.000 NL users Twitter: 1.300.000 <i>Over 2/3 of internet users (8.260.000) participate in the social networks Hyves, Facebook and Twitter</i>	+800.000 +573.000
5.	Number / Percentage of booking through offline TO and TA	25%	22%	-3%
6.	Number / Percentage of bookings through online TO and TA	75%	78%	+3%
7.	Number/ Percentage of TO and TA that ceased	<i>Info not available, but no</i>	<i>Info not available, but no</i>	

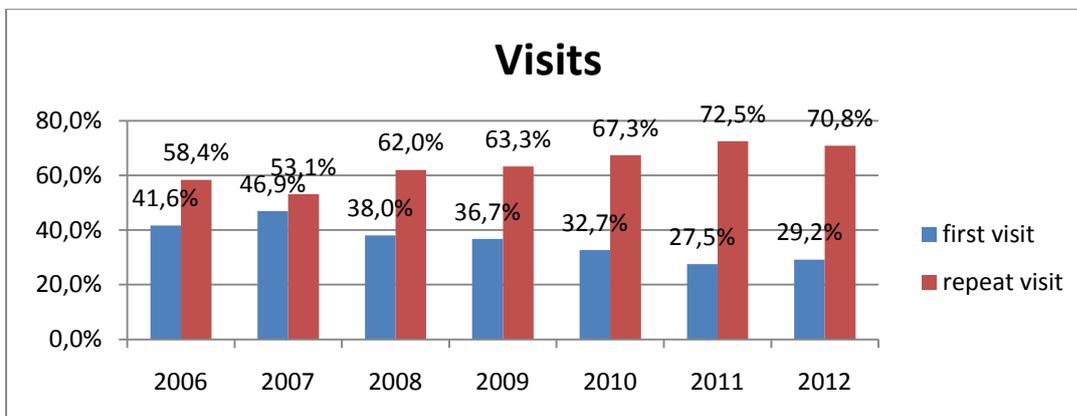
	operation	<i>more than 2%</i>	<i>more than 2%</i>	
8.	Number/ Percentage of TO and TA changed from offline to online	<i>Info not available, but 95% of the TO/TA have a website where they sell their products online</i>	<i>Info not available, but 95% of the TO/TA have a website where they sell their products online</i>	
9.	Number/ Percentage of newcomer TO and TA online	<i>Info not available, but no more than 2 %. It is a saturated market</i>	<i>Info not available, but no more than 2 %. It is a saturated market</i>	
10.	Number / Percentage of online booking through TO/TA (airlines or accommodation)	Total of 75% online booking of airlines + accommodation. <i>For percentages division of the 75% online bookings, see chart below</i>	Total of 79% online booking of airlines + accommodation. <i>For percentages division of the 75% online bookings, see chart below</i>	+4%
11	Number / Percentage of online booking directly to airlines website and hotel website	<i>For percentages division of the 75% online bookings, see chart below</i> Total number of online booking airline ticket: 2.777.000 Total number of online hotel booking: 5.300.000	<i>For percentages division of the 75% online bookings, see chart below</i> Total number of online booking airline ticket: 2.862.000 Total number of online hotel booking: 6.218.000	+85.000 +918.000
12	Range of stay for Long Haul destination (including period)	65% of abroad holidays is 7 nights or more	64% of abroad holidays is 7 nights or more	-1%
13	Range of stay for Short Haul destination (including period)	35% of abroad holidays takes 1-6 nights	36% of abroad holidays takes 1-6 nights	+1%

Appendix C: NL arrivals in Thailand



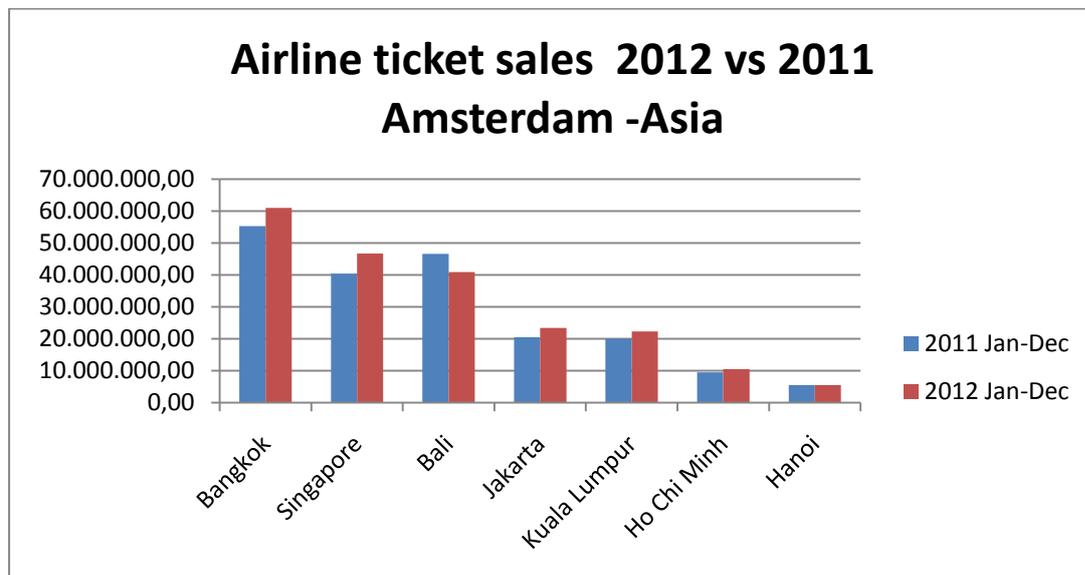
Source: TAT arrival statistics 2012

Appendix D : First and Repeat visitors to Thailand (Dutch Market)



Source: TAT Statistics 2012

Appendix E: Airline ticket sales Amsterdam-Asia



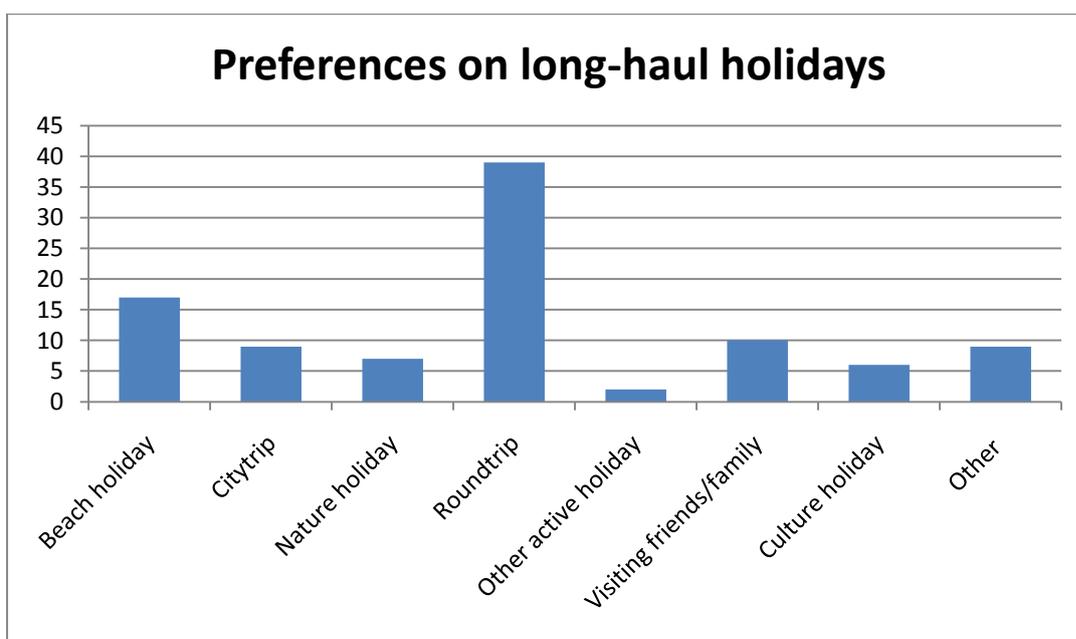
Source: eSmash/BSP

AMS-BKK	Frequency	Via	Departure time	Arrival time	Equipment
China Airlines CI	D	Non Stop	14:00	6:45	A340-300
EVA Air BR	2,4,6	Non Stop	21:40	14:30	777-300
KLM KL	D	Non Stop	17:25	10:05	777-300 / 777-200
Egyptair MS	D	CAI	15:00	8:45	737-800 / 777-300
Emirates Airline EK	D	DXB	14:40	12:05	380-800 / 777-300
Singapore Airlines SQ	D	SIN	10:30	8:40	777-200
Cathay Pacific Airlines CX	D	HKG	12:25	11:10	340-300 / 777-300
Turkish Airlines TK	D	IST	18:15	14:15	777-300 / A330-200
Lufthansa LH (also in recent cooperation with Condor from AMS)	D	FRA	20:05	14:00	321-200 / 747-400
Malaysia Airlines MH	D	KUL	12:00	10:15	777-200 / 737-800
Air France AF	D	CDG	10:45	6:25	A320 / 777-300
Etihad Airways EY	D (from May2013)	AUH	22.00/11.35/ 15.00	18.05/07.05/ 19.05	332 / 330 / 77W

Appendix F: Main touroperators for Thailand

MAIN TOUROPERATORS	
FOX Vakanties	Group tours, individual tours, beach holidays, family tours, single tours, round tours, combi-tours
Thailand Travel	Round tours, combi-tours, beach holidays
Koning Aap	Group tours, Family/kids tour, motor tour
Djoser	Round tours, combitours
Stip Reizen	Round tours, combo-tours
NRV Holiday	Group tours, private tours, beach holidays, 50+ round tours
333Travel	(Private) round tours, combo-tours, day tours
Shoestring	Group tours, combitours
Van Verre	Round tours, combi-tours, excursions
Sawadee	Round tours
Travel Trend	Round tours
WRC Reizen	Individual round tours, combo-tours
Silverjet	Private round tours
Kras	Round tours, single tours

Appendix G: Preferences on long-haul holidays



Source: nbtc-nipo research 2012

Appendix H: Social Media Comparison

Appendix I: Social Media Plan