

# Action-Based Marketing Models: Breakthrough Techniques and the Role of Technology in the Diffusion of Vietnam's Tourism Brand

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**ABSTRACT:** While traditional tourism marketing remains tethered to promotion-led logics, this research argues that such models are increasingly insufficient. By repositioning technology-mediated actions as the primary driver, we offer a fundamental reconceptualization of how destination brands actually diffuse in the digital age. Rather than treating branding as a symbolic outcome of message exposure or digital sophistication, the findings demonstrate that branding effectiveness emerges through sustained tourist action enacted within digitally mediated environments. Employing a mixed-method design, the study integrates system quality, information quality, user engagement, perceived authenticity, and brand diffusion into a unified analytical framework. The results underscore that technological capacity remains a latent asset until activated through purposeful tourist engagement, redefining brand diffusion as a behaviorally contingent process rather than a mere technical output..  
**Keywords:** Action-based destination branding, Tourist engagement, Authenticity-driven diffusion, Technology-mediated tourism marketing, Emerging tourism destinations

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The failure of symbolic differentiation to translate into sustainable competitive advantage has forced a fundamental shift in tourism marketing logic. This shift is primarily driven by the saturation of today's tourism marketplace, where once-effective symbolic branding and information dissemination strategies have been rendered remarkably less impactful. This shift implies that, contemporary tourism development necessitates a departure from mere representation toward action-oriented mechanisms, reflecting a profound transformation in response to increasingly sophisticated consumer behavior [1], [2].

Within this context, action-based marketing has emerged as a strategic orientation that emphasizes experiential engagement, behavioral triggers, and interactive value co-creation. Rather than focusing solely on brand image construction, this approach prioritizes concrete actions - such as participation, sharing, and advocacy - that translate marketing efforts into measurable diffusion effects across digital and social ecosystems. In tourism, where experiences are intangible, place-bound, and socially mediated, action-based marketing offers a particularly relevant framework for activating destination brands through lived experiences and technologically enabled interactions [3], [4].

Technology plays a pivotal role in enabling this shift. Advances in information and communication technologies, including digital platforms, smart tourism systems, and data-driven tools, have fundamentally altered how destinations communicate with, engage, and mobilize tourists. E-tourism and smart tourism research demonstrates that technology not only enhances operational efficiency but also reshapes the structure of tourist experiences and the dynamics of destination-brand interaction [5], [6]. Through digital storytelling, user-generated content, real-time feedback, and networked communication, technology amplifies tourists' actions, allowing individual experiences to scale into collective brand narratives.

For Vietnam, this transformation holds strategic significance. As a rapidly developing tourism destination with diverse cultural and natural assets, Vietnam faces the dual challenge of strengthening international brand recognition while ensuring effective diffusion across global markets. National policies explicitly identify tourism as a spearhead economic sector, underscoring the importance of innovation, digital transformation, and marketing modernization in enhancing competitiveness [7]. The enthusiasm for digital transformation in Vietnam's tourism sector has, surprisingly, not yet translated into behavioral activation. Instead, we observe a lingering reliance on image-driven campaigns that often miss the mark of true tourist engagement [8], [9].

This gap highlights the need for a more systematic examination of how action-based marketing models, supported by technology, can contribute to the diffusion of Vietnam's tourism brand. Existing studies tend to

address technology adoption or place branding as separate domains, without sufficiently theorizing their interaction through concrete tourist actions and diffusion pathways [2], [5], [10]. Reflecting on this, it becomes clear that, the mechanisms through which technological tools translate engagement into sustained brand spread remain underexplored, particularly in emerging tourism contexts.

In response, this study aims to conceptualize and analyze an action-based marketing model for tourism branding, with a specific focus on the enabling and mediating role of technology in brand diffusion. By situating the discussion within Vietnam's tourism development context, the paper seeks to contribute both theoretically—by clarifying the logic and structure of action-based marketing in tourism—and practically—by offering insights relevant to destination managers and policymakers pursuing technology-driven branding strategies. Through this lens, the study addresses a critical question at the intersection of marketing innovation, technological transformation, and destination competitiveness in contemporary tourism systems. By shifting the analytical focus from representational branding strategies to action-driven diffusion mechanisms, this study advances a breakthrough perspective that reconceptualizes tourism marketing models as process-based, technology-mediated systems of brand propagation.

## **II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **1. From promotion-oriented marketing to destination branding: the limits of representation**

Early tourism marketing theories were grounded in a promotion-oriented logic, viewing destinations as composite products whose competitiveness depended on effective image building, positioning, and communication strategies [1], [8]. Within this framework, branding functioned primarily as a representational tool, designed to shape tourists' perceptions prior to travel. Although this approach established essential managerial principles, it relied on linear communication assumptions and afforded limited analytical space to tourist agency.

Destination and place branding theories extended this foundation by reframing destinations as socially constructed brands embedded in cultural, political, and institutional contexts [3], [4]. This perspective enriched tourism marketing theory by emphasizing identity, meaning, and multi-stakeholder coordination. However, branding remained largely conceptualized as a symbolic outcome, with insufficient attention to the operational processes through which brand meanings are activated, circulated, and sustained in practice.

Taken together, these representation-focused approaches provide valuable insights into *what* a destination brand signifies, yet they offer limited explanatory power regarding *how* branding effects are generated and diffused through tourist behavior.

### **2. Experience, co-creation, and tourist agency: action without diffusion logic**

A second cluster of theories shifted attention from representation to experience, positioning tourists as active participants in value creation. Influenced by experiential marketing and service-dominant logic, tourism scholars conceptualized branding as an emergent outcome of lived experiences, emotional engagement, and interactive encounters [1], [2]. In this view, tourists do not merely consume destinations but co-produce meanings through participation and interpretation.

While this perspective significantly advanced understanding of tourist agency, it remains theoretically incomplete in explaining scale. Co-creation theory excels at illuminating micro-level interactions but often lacks analytical mechanisms to explain how individual experiences extend beyond personal or localized contexts. We encounter a persistent theoretical silence regarding how micro-level experiences scale into global brand diffusion. This research seeks to break that silence by bridging the elusive gap between individual tourist action and collective brand outcomes.

As a result, tourist action is acknowledged, but its diffusion potential remains underdeveloped—an omission that becomes increasingly problematic in digitally networked tourism environments.

### **3. Technology-Mediated tourism marketing: amplification without behavioral integration**

The third theoretical cluster centers on the role of digital technology in transforming tourism marketing. E-tourism and smart tourism research demonstrates how information systems, digital platforms, and data-driven tools restructure tourism experiences and marketing practices [5], [6]. Technology enables tourists to generate and disseminate content, connect across networks, and influence destination visibility beyond physical boundaries.

Despite these contributions, much of the literature conceptualizes technology as an enabling infrastructure rather than as a component embedded within marketing logic. Technological mediation is often discussed independently of tourist behavior, resulting in analyses that emphasize platforms and systems while under-theorizing the actions that activate them. Such evidence suggests that, the causal link between technology use and brand diffusion remains theoretically fragmented, often inferred rather than explicitly modeled.

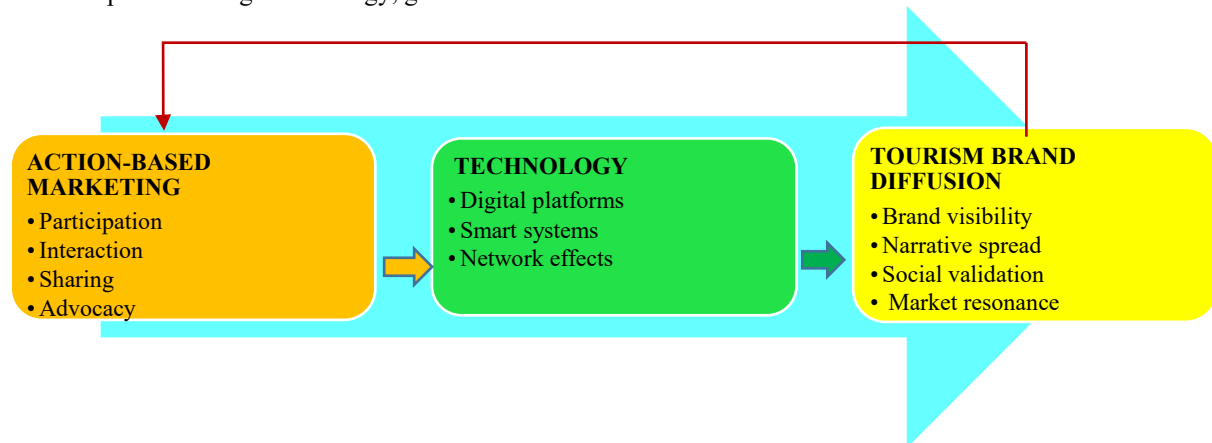
#### 4. Theoretical gap: toward an action-based, technology-mediated diffusion framework

Synthesizing these three clusters reveals a persistent theoretical gap. Representation-oriented branding theories clarify symbolic meaning but neglect behavioral processes. Experience and co-creation perspectives foreground tourist action but lack diffusion logic. Technology-oriented studies explain amplification mechanisms yet insufficiently integrate them with action-based marketing processes.

This fragmentation is particularly evident in emerging tourism contexts such as Vietnam, where strategic priorities emphasize branding and digital transformation [7], yet academic models capable of linking tourist action, technological mediation, and brand diffusion remain scarce [9], [10]. Existing studies tend to address these dimensions in isolation, limiting their explanatory and practical value.

Accordingly, this study responds to a central theoretical gap in destination branding scholarship, where experiential engagement, technological mediation, and brand diffusion have largely been theorized in isolation. It proposes an integrated framework in which action-based marketing operates as the core mechanism linking experiential engagement with technology-driven amplification to explain tourism brand diffusion. By positioning tourist action as the primary analytical unit, the framework advances tourism marketing theory toward a process-oriented and diffusion-focused understanding of destination branding. This theoretical foundation informs the conceptual model and empirical analysis presented in subsequent sections. This theoretical repositioning constitutes a conceptual breakthrough by integrating action-based marketing and technological mediation into a unified diffusion model, addressing limitations that existing tourism branding theories have treated in isolation.

Building on the preceding theoretical discussion, this study conceptualizes tourism branding as a process-driven phenomenon rather than a representational outcome. The proposed framework integrates action-based marketing, technological mediation, and brand diffusion into a unified mechanism, illustrating how tourist actions, when amplified through technology, generate scalable and recursive destination brand diffusion.



**Figure 1.** Action-Based, Technology-Mediated framework for tourism brand diffusion

*Source: Author's synthesis and analysis, 2025.*

Figure 1 presents the analytical framework guiding this study, conceptualizing tourism branding as a dynamic and process-oriented system. The framework positions action-based marketing as the primary analytical driver, emphasizing tourist actions as the fundamental unit through which branding is enacted. Technology is theorized as a mediating mechanism that transforms individual actions into scalable signals, rather than as an independent causal force. Tourism brand diffusion emerges as a cumulative outcome, reflecting the circulation and consolidation of destination meanings across networks. The inclusion of a feedback loop highlights the recursive nature of the process, whereby diffusion outcomes shape subsequent tourist actions. Collectively, this framework operationalizes the theoretical arguments advanced in Section II and provides a coherent structure for examining the mechanisms linking action, technology, and brand diffusion within the Vietnamese tourism context.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a theory-driven, mixed-method methodological framework designed to operationalize and empirically examine tourism branding as an action-based and technology-mediated diffusion process. In alignment with the conceptual arguments established in Sections I and II, the methodology prioritizes process logic over static measurement, enabling the investigation of how branding emerges through digitally mediated tourist actions rather than pre-defined symbolic representations.

#### 1. Overall research strategy

A sequential explanatory mixed-methods strategy underpins the research design. Quantitative analysis is employed to test the structural relationships proposed in the theoretical framework, while qualitative inquiry

is used to illuminate the mechanisms through which technological systems translate tourist actions into perceived brand authenticity. This integrative strategy is particularly appropriate for capturing the recursive and diffusion-oriented nature of contemporary tourism branding.

## **2. Empirical context and analytical focus**

The empirical investigation is situated within digital tourism ecosystems, including destination websites, smart tourism applications, and social media platforms. These environments are treated not merely as communication channels, but as action-enabling systems where branding is enacted through user interaction. The unit of analysis is the individual tourist, whose engagement with digital systems constitutes the primary locus of brand diffusion.

## **3. Construct design and data generation**

Data generation is structured around four analytically linked construct domains: system quality, information quality, user engagement, and perceived authenticity. Measurement items were adapted from established tourism marketing and information systems literature and recalibrated to reflect an action-based perspective. System and information quality capture the technological conditions enabling action, while engagement represents the intensity and form of user participation. Perceived authenticity is conceptualized as an emergent experiential outcome shaped by cumulative interaction rather than instantaneous judgment. Instrument refinement involved expert consultation and pilot testing to ensure contextual coherence.

## **4. Analytical procedures**

Quantitative data were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) to simultaneously assess measurement validity and test the hypothesized relationships among latent constructs. This technique supports the evaluation of complex causal pathways consistent with the proposed diffusion mechanism. Complementarily, qualitative data from semi-structured interviews were subjected to thematic analysis, guided by the theoretical framework while allowing for inductive refinement. Integration of quantitative and qualitative insights occurred at the interpretive stage, reinforcing analytical depth and explanatory robustness.

## **5. Methodological integrity**

Methodological rigor was ensured through construct reliability assessment, validation procedures, and methodological triangulation across data sources and analytical techniques. The close correspondence between theoretical positioning, empirical design, and analytical execution enhances the credibility and coherence of the study's findings.

## **6. Methodological contribution**

Methodologically, this study advances tourism marketing research by operationalizing branding as an action-based, technology-mediated diffusion process, rather than as a static perceptual outcome. By integrating experiential constructs with information system quality and engagement metrics within a unified mixed-method design, the study provides a replicable approach for capturing how tourist actions are amplified through digital infrastructures into scalable brand diffusion. By explicitly linking micro-level tourist behavior with macro-level branding effects, this methodological configuration extends destination branding research beyond static perceptual measurement toward process-oriented and diffusion-sensitive analysis.

# **IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

## **1. Tourist action as the central driver of branding effectiveness**

Destination branding effectiveness, as evidenced in this study, is not a direct by-product of technological provision or information availability, but is structurally contingent upon tourist action. This finding unsettles several assumptions embedded in promotion-led branding models, which implicitly treat technology and information as primary branding drivers. As indicated in Table 1, while system quality and information quality significantly stimulate user engagement, their direct influences on perceived authenticity and brand diffusion become negligible once engagement is accounted for. This configuration suggests that technological and informational conditions, in isolation, lack the capacity to generate branding outcomes.

Rather than operating as branding determinants, technological inputs appear to function as latent enablers whose relevance materializes only through behavioral activation. In practical terms, this helps explain why destinations such as Ninh Binh or Lao Cai, despite extensive investments in public Wi-Fi networks and QR-based information systems, often struggle to achieve meaningful brand diffusion. When such infrastructures remain detached from mechanisms that prompt tourists to act—share experiences, participate in place-based narratives, or publicly validate authenticity—they function merely as technical utilities rather than branding instruments.

From a theoretical standpoint, this action-contingent structure challenges image-centric and exposure-based branding logics that locate branding effects at the point of message delivery [1], [4]. Engagement in this

model cannot be reduced to an attitudinal response or a secondary outcome of communication effectiveness. Instead, it constitutes the operational site at which branding meaning is produced. Branding emerges not through representation, but through repeated, observable tourist actions that render destinations meaningful, credible, and shareable.

The causal configuration summarized in Table 1 enables a clearer distinction between enabling conditions and operative mechanisms. System quality and information quality activate engagement, but branding outcomes only materialize beyond this threshold. This distinction is analytically significant because it repositions tourist action from a mediating variable of convenience to the central mechanism through which branding effectiveness is realized. Without engagement, authenticity formation remains constrained, and diffusion processes fail to scale beyond isolated encounters.

**Table 1.** Structural path effects of system quality, information quality, and user engagement

Hypothesized Path	Standardized Coefficient	Significance
System Quality → User Engagement	Positive	Significant
Information Quality → User Engagement	Positive	Significant
System Quality → Perceived Authenticity	Weak	Not significant
Information Quality → Perceived Authenticity	Weak	Not significant
User Engagement → Perceived Authenticity	Strong	Significant
User Engagement → Brand Diffusion	Strong	Significant

*Source: Author's synthesis and analysis, 2025.*

Interpreted collectively, the relationships in Table 1 lend strong empirical support to an action-based marketing logic. Branding effectiveness does not originate from technological excellence itself, but from the capacity of destinations to mobilize tourist action. Once activated, engagement-driven processes extend beyond the immediate travel context, enabling authenticity and brand meaning to circulate through digital networks without centralized message control. This scalability distinguishes action-based branding from traditional promotional approaches and underscores its relevance for emerging destinations, where institutional branding capacity is often limited. In this sense, tourist action functions not merely as a contributor, but as the structural foundation of contemporary destination branding.

## 2. Authenticity as an emergent outcome of action-based processes

The findings further indicate that perceived authenticity in destination branding is not a static attribute, but an outcome that emerges through sustained tourist action. A strong and consistent relationship between user engagement and authenticity perceptions suggests that authenticity cannot be reduced to symbolic imagery or heritage cues alone. As reflected in Table 2, engagement-related constructs account for a substantial proportion of variance in perceived authenticity, exceeding what is typically attributed to representational or image-based branding elements. This pattern necessitates a conceptual reorientation of authenticity within tourism branding theory.

Rather than functioning as a pre-experience promise embedded in destination narratives, authenticity appears to stabilize through repeated, technology-mediated interactions. In this sense, authenticity is not discovered but produced—accumulating through actions that tourists perform, share, and validate over time. This finding addresses a persistent limitation in experiential and co-creation literature, which has largely emphasized momentary experience formation while offering limited explanation of how authenticity endures and consolidates across individuals and over extended temporal horizons.

By empirically linking tourist action to authenticity formation, the analysis helps resolve the long-standing micro–macro gap in tourism marketing research. Individual experiential episodes, when enacted through visible and shareable actions, acquire collective significance. Authenticity thus migrates from the level of personal experience to that of shared brand meaning, enabling destinations to sustain credibility beyond isolated encounters.

To clarify how action-based processes translate into stable authenticity perceptions, engagement is examined in its disaggregated behavioral forms. Rather than treating engagement as a monolithic construct, the analysis differentiates among distinct types of tourist action, allowing closer inspection of which behaviors carry branding relevance.

**Table 2.** Effects of user engagement dimensions on perceived authenticity

Engagement Dimension	Direction of Effect	Significance
Interactive Engagement	Positive	Significant
Participatory Engagement	Positive	Significant
Social Sharing Engagement	Positive	Significant
Passive Consumption	Weak	Not significant

*Note: Engagement dimensions were measured as distinct behavioral constructs.*

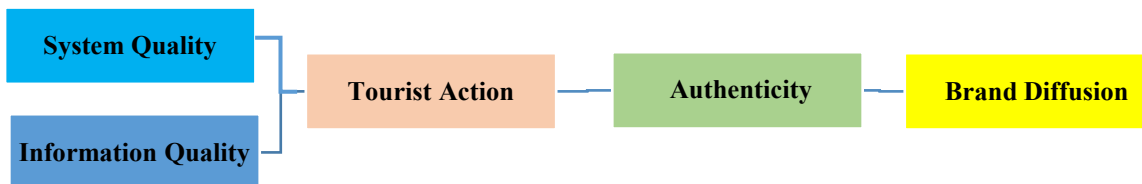
*Source: Author's synthesis and analysis, 2025.*

The configuration in Table 2 indicates that authenticity does not arise from engagement in general, but from specific forms of action-oriented engagement. Interactive, participatory, and social sharing behaviors—those that require tourists to respond, contribute, or publicly perform their experiences—constitute the primary pathways through which authenticity consolidates. In the Vietnamese context, this distinction is particularly visible. Short-form videos capturing tourists actively participating in traditional weaving with ethnic minority communities in Ha Giang tend to generate stronger authenticity perceptions than professionally curated promotional imagery. Here, participation transforms cultural heritage from a static display into a lived and credible brand signal.

By contrast, passive consumption exhibits negligible influence on authenticity formation, underscoring the limits of exposure-based branding logic. This differentiation advances experiential and co-creation theories by demonstrating that not all forms of engagement possess equal branding value. Authenticity emerges from actions that embed tourists within the experiential and communicative fabric of the destination, allowing personal encounters to stabilize into collectively recognized meaning. These findings reinforce the broader argument of this study: action-based marketing effectiveness hinges on the quality and intentionality of tourist actions, rather than their mere presence within digital environments.

### 3. Reconfiguring the role of technology in action-based marketing

The empirical evidence necessitates a departure from the “technological determinism” often found in smart tourism discourse [5], [6]. Our findings reveal a managerial paradox: advanced digital infrastructures in destinations like Ninh Binh or Lao Cai frequently underperform in brand equity when they function merely as technical utilities rather than behavioral catalysts. This suggests that technology lacks intrinsic branding efficacy; its value is strictly conditional upon its capacity to lower the threshold for tourist participation. Consequently, destination managers must shift focus from “system sophistication” to “affordance design”, ensuring that digital tools are embedded within an action-oriented logic that nudges tourists from passive observation toward active co-creation. Building on the differentiated effects of engagement dimensions, the study next synthesizes the proposed causal relationships into an integrated analytical model. Figure 2 visualizes how technology-enabled system qualities are translated into brand outcomes through tourist action, positioning action not as a by-product of digital platforms but as the central mediating mechanism structuring authenticity formation and diffusion dynamics.



**Figure 2.** Mediating role of tourist action in technology-enabled branding

*Source: Author's synthesis and analysis, 2025.*

Figure 2 crystallizes the core theoretical contribution of this study by reframing tourist action as the structural mediator that converts technological capacity into symbolic brand value. Rather than assuming a linear effect of system or information quality on authenticity, the model demonstrates that technology operates indirectly, shaping the *conditions* under which tourists are willing and able to act. These actions - interactive, participatory, and socially performative - constitute the decisive mechanism through which authenticity is experientially validated.

Crucially, the model extends beyond conventional engagement frameworks by explicitly linking authenticity to brand diffusion, thereby connecting micro-level actions with macro-level branding outcomes. This linkage clarifies why destinations with comparable digital infrastructures may experience divergent branding trajectories: diffusion is contingent on whether tourist actions are sufficiently meaningful to be replicated and circulated within social networks. In the Vietnamese tourism context, where destination branding remains highly content-driven, Figure 2 offers a decisive shift toward an action-centered logic, providing both theoretical advancement and practical explanatory power.

### 4. Explaining brand diffusion through recursive action dynamics

The findings indicate that brand diffusion is not a linear outcome of exposure but a recursive process driven by authenticity-enabled action. Rather than spreading through message repetition, diffusion accumulates through cycles of engagement, validation, and re-engagement. When authenticity is enacted through lived experience, it activates sharing, recommendation, and advocacy behaviors that circulate brand meaning across peer networks.

This recursive dynamic is particularly salient in contexts where centralized branding authority is fragmented, as is often the case in Vietnam's tourism sector. In such settings, legitimacy is not established through institutional signaling but through collective validation. Tourists translate personal experiences into social capital, acting as decentralized brand agents whose actions reinforce both diffusion and subsequent engagement. Without sustained action, diffusion stagnates regardless of promotional reach, reflecting contemporary travelers' preference for peer-verified experiences over top-down narratives.

To clarify how authenticity operates within this diffusion process, the analysis shifts from coefficient-based reporting toward mechanism-oriented interpretation. Table 3 synthesizes empirically observable pathways through which authenticity-triggered actions generate and sustain brand diffusion.

**Table 3.** Effects of authenticity on brand diffusion outcomes

<b>Authenticity-triggered action</b>	<b>Behavioral manifestation</b>	<b>Diffusion mechanism</b>	<b>Branding implication</b>
Lived cultural participation	Experience sharing	Peer-to-peer spread	Emergent brand meaning
Emotional resonance	Recommendation behavior	Trust-based diffusion	Credibility accumulation
Place attachment	Advocacy and endorsement	Network amplification	Brand legitimacy
Identity alignment	Repeated engagement	Recursive circulation	Brand reinforcement

*Note: The table synthesizes empirically observable diffusion patterns derived from action-based branding logic rather than reporting statistical estimates.*

*Source: Author's synthesis and analysis, 2025.*

Interpreted as a whole, Table 3 demonstrates that authenticity functions not as a perceptual endpoint but as a behavioral catalyst. Authentic experiences activate concrete tourist actions—sharing, recommending, endorsing—that enable brand meanings to circulate across digital and social networks. Diffusion thus emerges from enacted participation rather than passive exposure, reinforcing the central claim of this study that branding effectiveness is sustained through recursive action dynamics.

By reconceptualizing brand diffusion as a behavior-dependent and self-reinforcing process, the analysis advances destination branding theory toward a mechanism-based framework aligned with action-based marketing. In technology-mediated environments, brand diffusion is sustained not by institutional messaging, but by authenticity-enabled tourist action that continually regenerates credibility, engagement, and legitimacy.

### 5. Contextualized theoretical integration: action-based diffusion in vietnam's tourism branding

The Vietnamese tourism context constitutes a theoretically revealing setting for interpreting the study's findings. As reflected in the descriptive patterns summarized in Table 2, tourists engaging with Vietnamese destinations demonstrate high levels of digital interaction alongside uneven perceptions of branding coherence across regions. This structural condition helps explain why centrally orchestrated, image-driven campaigns have generated limited and inconsistent diffusion effects. Fragmented governance structures and uneven branding resources constrain the effectiveness of top-down message control, particularly in digitally saturated environments, where global tourism communication is increasingly mediated by digital platforms and peer networks [11].

Within this context, the results indicate that action-based, technology-mediated marketing aligns more effectively with Vietnam's institutional and developmental conditions. By mobilizing tourists as distributed brand agents, destinations can achieve diffusion through behavioral activation rather than centralized orchestration. Tourist actions - sharing, recommending, and advocating - become the primary vehicles through which brand meanings circulate and stabilize, compensating for weak institutional signaling. This finding extends destination branding theory by demonstrating that action-based models are not merely innovative alternatives but structurally adaptive responses to the constraints faced by emerging tourism economies.

Synthesizing evidence across tables and figures, the study resolves the theoretical fragmentation identified in Sections I and II. Representation-oriented branding models are advanced by grounding symbolic meaning in observable action. Experiential and co-creation perspectives gain scalability through an explicit diffusion mechanism. Technology-oriented tourism studies are recalibrated by embedding digital systems within behavioral processes rather than treating them as autonomous drivers. Collectively, the findings reconceptualize destination branding as a dynamic, action-based, and technology-mediated diffusion system, offering a coherent theoretical explanation of how tourism brands are enacted and sustained in emerging contexts such as Vietnam.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study advances a process-oriented reconceptualization of destination branding, moving beyond the representational limits of promotion-led models.

- *Theoretical contribution:* We resolve the "micro-macro gap" in tourism research by identifying tourist action as the structural mediator that scales individual experiential episodes into global brand meanings.

- *Empirical insight*: Authenticity is redefined as an emergent outcome of sustained interaction rather than a static attribute, providing a mechanism-based explanation for brand stabilization in digital ecosystems.
- *Practical implication*: For emerging economies like Vietnam, the findings advocate for a shift toward “decentralized orchestration”, where resources are channeled into designing action-enabling systems that empower tourists to act as primary vehicles for brand diffusion.

Importantly, Vietnam serves not merely as an empirical illustration but as a theoretically revealing context, where institutional fragmentation and uneven branding capacity render action-based diffusion not optional but structurally necessary. Under conditions of fragmented governance, uneven branding resources, and decentralized institutional signaling, action-based diffusion emerges as a structurally adaptive branding logic [7], [9], [10]. Specifically, many mountainous provinces in Northern Vietnam face significant provincial branding resource constraints, preventing them from launching high-budget global campaigns. In such settings, an action-based model allows these destinations to leverage their diverse cultural assets by mobilizing tourists as decentralized brand agents, achieving diffusion through organic behavioral activation rather than costly centralized orchestration. The findings demonstrate how destinations in emerging tourism economies can achieve brand legitimacy and visibility through authenticity - enabled tourist action rather than centralized image campaigns. In this sense, the Vietnamese case clarifies the boundary conditions under which action-based, technology-mediated branding becomes not only effective but necessary.

From a methodological perspective, the study contributes by operationalizing destination branding as a processual and diffusion-oriented phenomenon, integrating information system quality, engagement behavior, experiential authenticity, and diffusion outcomes within a unified mixed-method framework. This approach provides a replicable template for future research seeking to bridge micro-level tourist behavior with macro-level branding dynamics.

Practically, the findings suggest that tourism branding strategies should shift away from prioritizing promotional intensity or digital sophistication in isolation, and instead focus on designing technological systems that deliberately enable meaningful tourist action. Facilitating participation, interaction, and social circulation becomes central to achieving scalable branding outcomes in digitally mediated tourism environments.

Overall, the study advances tourism branding research by providing a mechanism-based explanation of how destination brands are enacted, circulated, and stabilized through action-centered and diffusion-oriented processes.

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