Leveraging the Tourism Sector in Bangladesh by Country Branding: An Exploratory Synopsis

Md. Kamrul Hassan[*]
Mohammad Badruzzaman Bhuiyan[**]
Md. Kamruzzaman[***]

Abstract: *Tourism is now recognized as the single largest service industry all over the world. Many countries want to achieve excellence on the industry. For obtaining success in tourism industry new concepts like country branding, or destination branding, or nation branding are come out. In this paper it is tried to bring in country branding concept for leveraging Bangladesh tourism sector. Country branding not only works for tourism but also works for trade & commerce and even creating relationship with other countries. But the most affirmative benefits are gained in the tourism sector by country branding. Through Bangladesh branding, tourism will find a position it deserves. Country branding is long term and continuous process like 'product' or 'corporate' branding. By considering the background characteristics of Bangladesh, this paper suggests to target the business tourist segment to attract to Bangladesh. Creating exclusive tourist zone for MICE tourism Bangladesh can earn a huge amount of foreign currency. Developing a favorable image, using comprehensive marketing plan, attracting foreign investment, hiring country branding experts, fostering regional alliances, and so on can leverage the country brand of Bangladesh. The present resources can be positioned in the world of tourist-market to make the country-brand stronger. Branding will be more effective if Bangladesh can develop its infrastructure and superstructure up to the world standard.)*

Keywords: *Country branding, tourism, Bangladesh*

Introduction

The concept of branding has been applied extensively to products and services; tourism destination branding is a relatively recent phenomenon (Blain *et al.,* 2005). In the case of

[*]**Md. Kamrul Hassan,** Assistant Professor, Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, University of Dhaka, Dhaka 1000

[**]**Mohammad Badruzzaman Bhuiyan,** Assistant Professor, Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, University of Dhaka, Dhaka 1000

[***]**Md. Kamruzzaman** Lecturer, Department of Marketing, Barguna Govt. Mahila College, Borguna, Bangladesh

destination branding, the brand name is relatively fixed by the actual name of the location (Keller, 2001). Branding has a role to play in integrating efforts to promote tourism (Foley, and Fahy, 2004). Positive image-building and image-reconstruction (repositioning) are efforts of branding that can create a distinctive advantage of a country for not only travel & tourism industry but also for trade and commerce, foreign direct investment (FDI), and even relations with other countries. In a competitive tourism marketplace, destinations - from resorts to countries - are increasingly adopting branding techniques to craft and differentiate an identity emphasizing the uniqueness of their product (Pritchard, & Morgan, 1998). Different types of strategies are needed to create favorable images as well as take apart the unfavorable depictions from the country image. Bangladesh can reap the benefits for its tourism industry through appropriate country branding. The branding exertion has to identify where our country image is presently in, where we want to go, and how we can obtain our target image. Country branding is synonym with nation branding. Nation branding is a better term because it gives a clear understanding that it's the people who brand their country, who benefit from an improved national reputation, and who truly 'own' that national brand. Place branding is simply a broader term which covers nations, regions, cities - and even towns and villages (Anholt, 1998). Destination branding is about combining those things associated with a 'place', a destination. This includes all of its products and services like agriculture, tourism, sports, arts, investment, technology, education, etc. (Tourism Western Australia, 2007). In this paper the terms, country branding, nation branding, place branding, or even destination branding, are used as related words. Both country branding and tourism have causal relationship. Country branding can benefit tourism sector and at the same way an eminent tourism sector of a country can help become a successful country brand. Here, this paper will try to check up how branding effort can boost up the tourism sector in Bangladesh. As tourism is recognized as the single largest industry in the world and as its growth rate, employment generation and contribution to GDP is increasing every year significantly around the world, every destination country should adopt effective strategies to establish a strong brand image to leverage its tourism sector. As Bangladesh has lot of tourism resources, the country should go for country branding aptly. But it is not easy task to make a successful country brand. Possible weakness and threats have to be identified before going to develop an extensive branding program.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to find out how Bangladesh can introduce, grow and sustain as a country brand to obtain distinctive advantage in tourism industry. Specific objectives of this study are:

- To provide an overview of country branding and development of tourism industry as well as relationship between them;

- To realize the rationale for developing country branding or find out benefits out of country branding;

- To identify the country branding strategies for Bangladesh; and

- To recommend what should we do to build up Bangladesh as a world class tourists' destination.

Methodology

This paper is of a qualitative design and based on both secondary and primary data. For gathering information from secondary sources about the country branding and its strategies different home and foreign published literatures, journals, brochures, articles, researches, case studies etc. are studied. Relevant facts are collected from various texts on country branding, books and papers regarding the same. For formulating country branding strategies of Bangladesh we could have ideas through different studies of foreign and domestic articles and research papers. And some open ended questions are used for conducting an in-depth interviews on four industry experts and observations of different facts for having ideas what Bangladesh should do to create a successful country branding.

Literatue Review

A large number of research studies on the subject of country branding have been done throughout the world. But a few papers highlighting the aspects of branding or image building for Bangladesh could be found. In an article "Globalization and Identity", True (2006) has explained, nation or country branding is a field of theory and practice which aims to measure, build and manage the reputation of countries (closely related to place branding). Hossain (July, 2008) has mentioned that the image of a country is a matter of perception of other people about what, why and how the country's people think contemplate, articulate and interact as individuals or as groups or as a nation. Planning promotional program, preventing media aggression, improving country's law and order situations, improving governance, practicing honesty, respectfulness by the citizens, developing overall socio-economic condition can improve the image of Bangladesh. Finally, Hossain (2008) stated that the image of a nation develops through time and do not change overnight. Anholt (1998), the creator of nation branding concept, pointed out that country brand depends on their good name, reputation or 'brand image', like corporations. Places acquire their images very slowly, as a result of the things their governments, businesses and people do, the things they make, and they way they do and make those things. If a country wants to change that image, it must change what it does

and what it makes, and change the way it does and makes things. There's no magical shortcut through marketing or advertising, logos or slogans. Simply doing better tourism promotion might attract more tourists, but it won't do nearly as much to affect the 'nation brand' as when all the stakeholders work together around a single, visionary national strategy. Scholars such as Evan H. Potter at the University of Ottawa have conceptualized nation brands as a form of national soft power. All efforts by government (at any level) to support the nation brand - either directly or indirectly - becomes public diplomacy. Hell (1999) also supports this idea. Besides, Morgan *et al.* (2003) statements agree that a combined effort is necessary for country branding. The marketer seeks to activate specific associations from a country image, and to match these with important characteristics in the target market through the design of all the components of the marketing mix (Kleppe *et al,* 2002). By adopting Aaker's brand personality scale, Ekinci & Hosany (2006) aimed to identify whether tourists ascribed personality traits to tourism destinations. And their study shows perception of destination personality is 3-dimensional: sincerity, excitement, and conviviality. Ekinci & Hosany (2006) endeavor the importance of destination personality over destination branding. They have the same opinion that tourism destinations become more substitutable due to increasing competition in global tourism markets; destination personality is seen as a viable metaphor for building destination brands and crafting a unique identity for tourism places. According to Hankinson (2004), four streams of thought are identified as regards to the nature of brands. These include the brand as a communicator, the brand as a perceptual entity or image, the brand as a value enhancer and the brand as a relationship. Keller (2003) says in his "Strategic Brand Management: Building, Measuring, and Managing Brand Equity", the growth in the tourism industry has contributed to the rise of place (country) marketing. As such, cities, states, regions, and countries are now actively promoted through advertising, direct mail, and other communication tools. Again, Walmsley (1998) says spreading a "right" country-image becomes essential when looking for "quality" visitors' attraction. Third element in this "image-mix" relates to experience by oneself and/or relatives, friends, etc.

Value Addition by Country Branding

Brands are more than trademarks; they are 'trust marks' (Tourism Western Australia, 2007). The leading tourism destinations like Thailand, Australia, USA, UK, South Africa, Canada, New Zealand, Egypt, and some Western European countries understood the value of branding much earlier. They made huge efforts to highlight their uniqueness to the world and captured their target markets. Country branding also works positively for other areas including trade, commerce, relationship building with other countries, etc. "In today's globalize markets a favorable country image has a considerable impact on consumers' evaluation of products originating from other countries and therefore

influences their subsequent buying decisions (Roth, & Diamantopoulos, 2009)." As such, different items of Bangladesh can get the international markets, if it can develop its image. But the most positive benefits are gained by the tourism sector through country branding. Clarke (2000) has identified six benefits of tourism branding. Those are the choice of tourists, impact of intangibility, consistency across multiple outlets and through time, minimized risk factor attached to decision making about holidays, facilitated segmentation, and an integration of producer efforts helping people to work towards the same outcome. To build a favorable image through country branding is very essential to promote the tourism directly. Visitors' choices of destinations are based on the degree to which they generate favorable images on those destinations. It also increases or decreases the visitors' length of stay in a certain destination. Thus the image of a country detracts from or contributes to the successful development of tourism in a destination country (Hossain, 2008).

Country Branding Attempt in Banglesh

Bangladesh government launched a new tourism brand at the end of 2008, named 'Rupomoy Bangladesh' (Beautiful Bangladesh), as a part of its efforts to attract both tourists and foreign investors. The 'Rupomoy Bangladesh' branding logo features a rising sun over a blue sea and is quite applicable for a growing country. All aspects of the country – tourism, government, corporations, businesses, art, culture, sports and media sectors – have a role in promoting the new slogan and the logo. The ultimate goal of branding is to attract international visitors and investments in Bangladesh. But Branding requires huge activity that progresses continuously. Only a slogan and a logo are not sufficient for appropriate branding. A lot of activity is related with the country-branding efforts. Strong tourism strategic marketing plan has to be developed and proper implementation and monitoring of the plan must be ensured. To support the broad tourism strategic marketing plan specific short and medium term plans should be developed. Bangladesh is presently suffering from an image problem. It is not possible to eliminate all the negative perceptions from the outside world. But it is possible to convey our glory and belongings. Creating positive image is obvious for country branding. We have to attach the favorable things around the name of our country.

Country Branding Strategies for Bangladesh

Country branding is not different from 'product' or 'corporate' branding. But the extent of country branding activities is huge. For market oriented country branding, appropriate strategies have to be developed. This paper it has provided some strategic guidelines for branding Bangladesh.

Approaches to Creating Country Brand: Segmenting, targeting, and positioning strategies have to be determined *firstly*. For branding this country, it is necessary to segment all the leisure and business travelers. Then the feasible segments have to be targeted to reach with tourist's products and services. Appropriate positioning strategy is necessary to attract tourists through right communication mix. Making relationship with the existing travelers is indispensable so that they recommend others to visit Bangladesh. A more informed and systematic basis on which to develop a destination's business tourism positioning strategy by providing a framework for selecting relevant brand image attributes (Hankinson, 2005). These image attributes can facilitate to select the right position strategies for Bangladesh. Identifying the value of this destination's personality will also assist what would be the positioning strategies for Bangladesh. *Secondly*, developing a competitive marketing mix for meeting the needs and wants of target tourists is essential. The tourist's products and services in Bangladesh will be of international standard. Offering distinctive products and services through well-built supply chain is equally necessary. The pricing will be competitive in comparison to other destinations. *Thirdly*, deciding the suitable shape of tourism in consistent with the nature of the country is essential. It is not possible for Bangladesh to go for mass tourism because of land limitation. Mass tourism generally produces less income from individual tourists and is harmful to fragile environment and sustainable development. So the target tourists of this country should be small-scale quality tourists. *Fourthly*, there is a necessity of matching between tourists and local people characteristics. The community participation in tourism planning and operation should be ensured if the tourism activities are operated in locality. Local people should not be avoided. Community people know the nature of the environment very well. They can help in the development decision that will not destroy the aesthetic beauty. *Fifthly*, creating a desirable image is essential to delineate the country as tourist destination. If a destination has no significant favorable image the tourists keep out that name from their consideration. Altering all unfavorable images is not always possible. But conveying more positive things as well as correcting wrong images which may not be true can provide perfect image for Bangladesh. Bangladesh can define an image standard and try to communicate that for getting a distinct favor in tourism.

Real Image   Ideal Image

| Organic Stimuli/ Data | ⇒ | Image-Mix of Tourism Destinations | ⇐ | Induced Stimuli/ Data |

Empirical Stimuli/ Data   Experienced Image
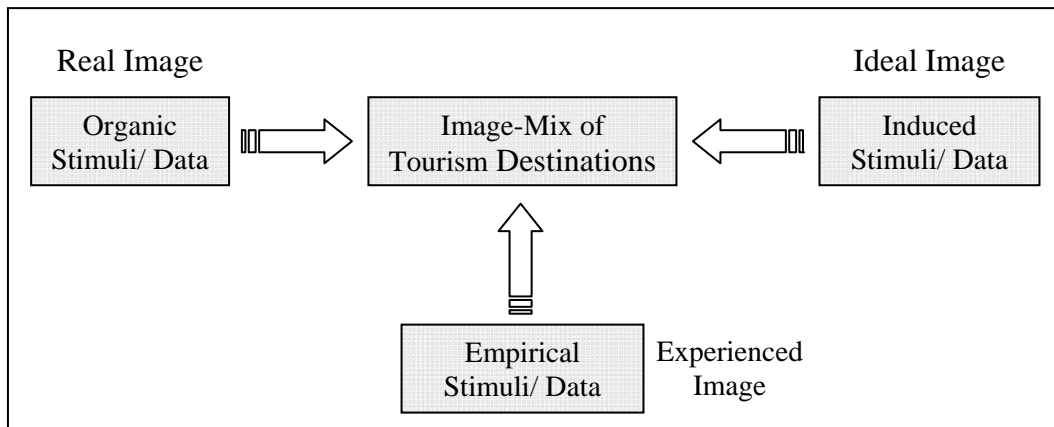
Figure : Components conforming image-mix of tourism destination

Source**:** Vazquez *et al.*, (2005)

Brezovec *et al.* identified five key elements of a destination country's image which influence its tourism image: political, economical, socio-cultural, technological, and environmental. Countries which are well in these elements are enjoying good country image. Bangladesh has to be sound on all these five aspects. *Sixthly*, comprehensive branding plan should be taken for saving time and money. The single branding effort will cover tourism, trade & business, culture and all the related aspects of country branding. Bangladesh, as such, should adopt its all out efforts to popularize its single brand name in order to save money and time.
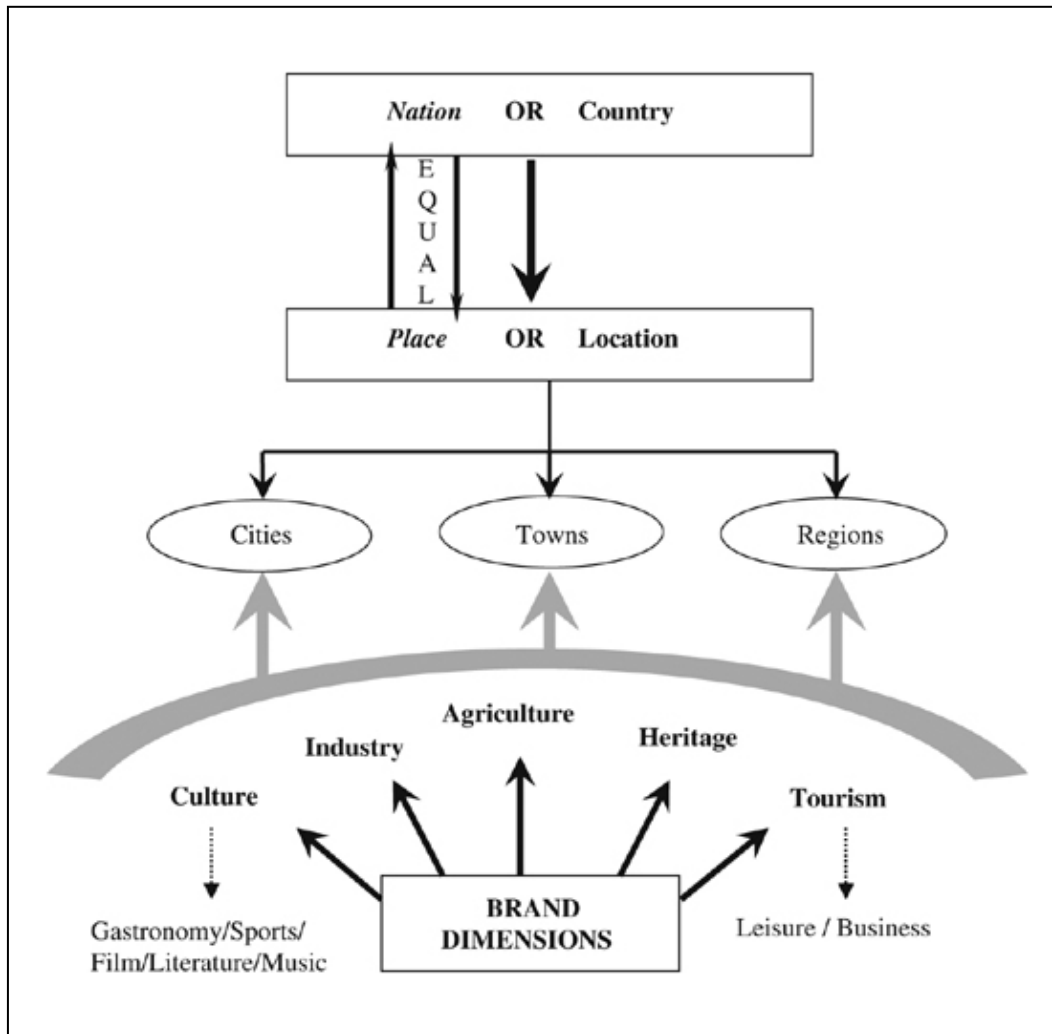
Figure : Hierarchical relationship between 'place' and its associated words

Source**:** Hanna & Rowley (2008)

Finally, to set the name of Bangladesh in target tourists' heart, extensive integrated marketing communication endeavor should be undertaken. A target audiences' reachable communication mix has to be designed to promote Bangladesh. Jago *et al.* (2003) identified events that have become an increasingly significant component of destination branding. Bangladesh can highlight different events like Pahela Baishakh, Durga Puza, Eid-ul-fitr, Ekushey February, etc to international community. Participation in international tourism fairs and contacting with foreign mass media can promote distinctiveness of the country and achieve competitive advantages. Continuous marketing

research should be conducted to know the changing needs and wants of target tourists' segments.

There are several steps of place marketing (Kotler *et al.*, 1999). The marketing system of tourism products and services is similar to that of regular products and services. Proper marketing activities can increase the demand of tourists' products and services and help make a perfect country brand. The following levels could be applicable for marketing the tourist destination of Bangladesh.
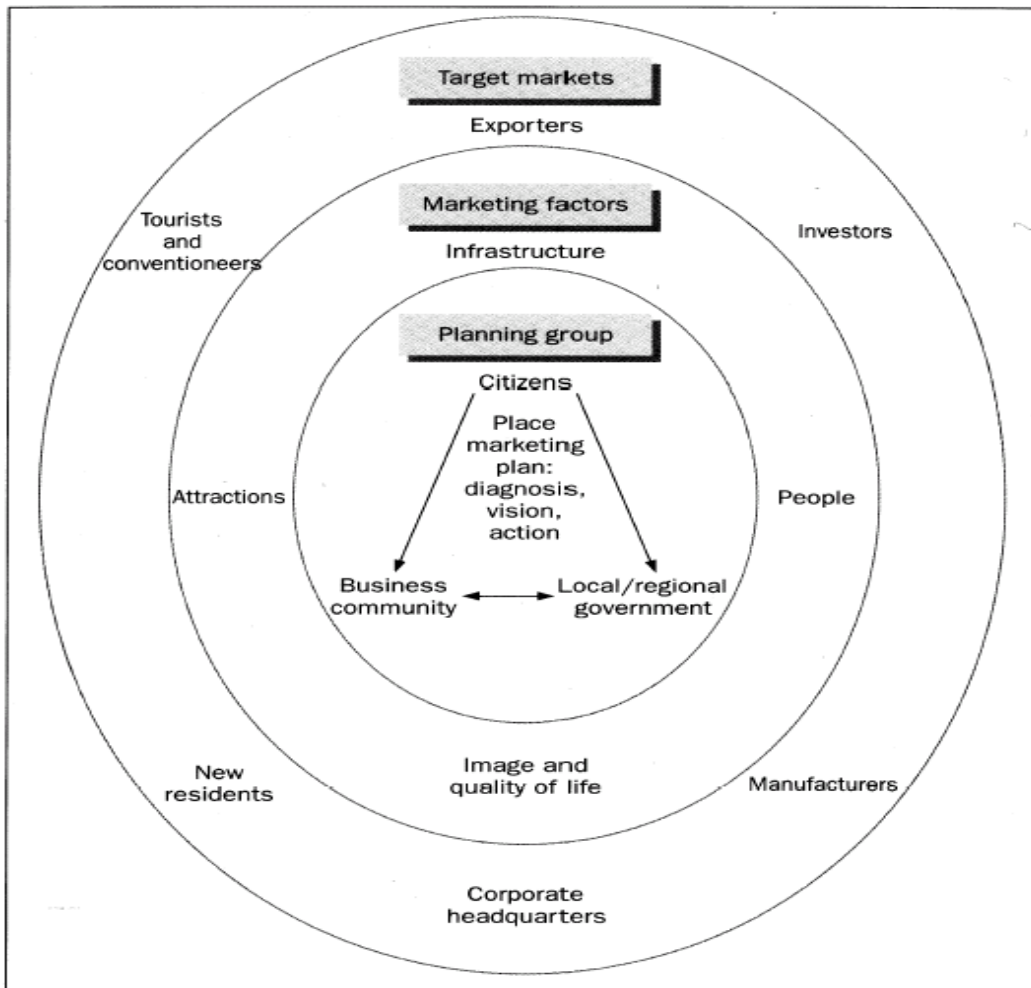
Figure : Levels of place marketing.

Designing, developing, and marketing the tourists' products and services are not sufficient to create a long term sustainable country brand. Proper management is essential to enjoy benefits for longer period of time. Hankinson (2007) has designed a framework for the management of place brands. Bangladesh as a tourist destination may follow the following model.
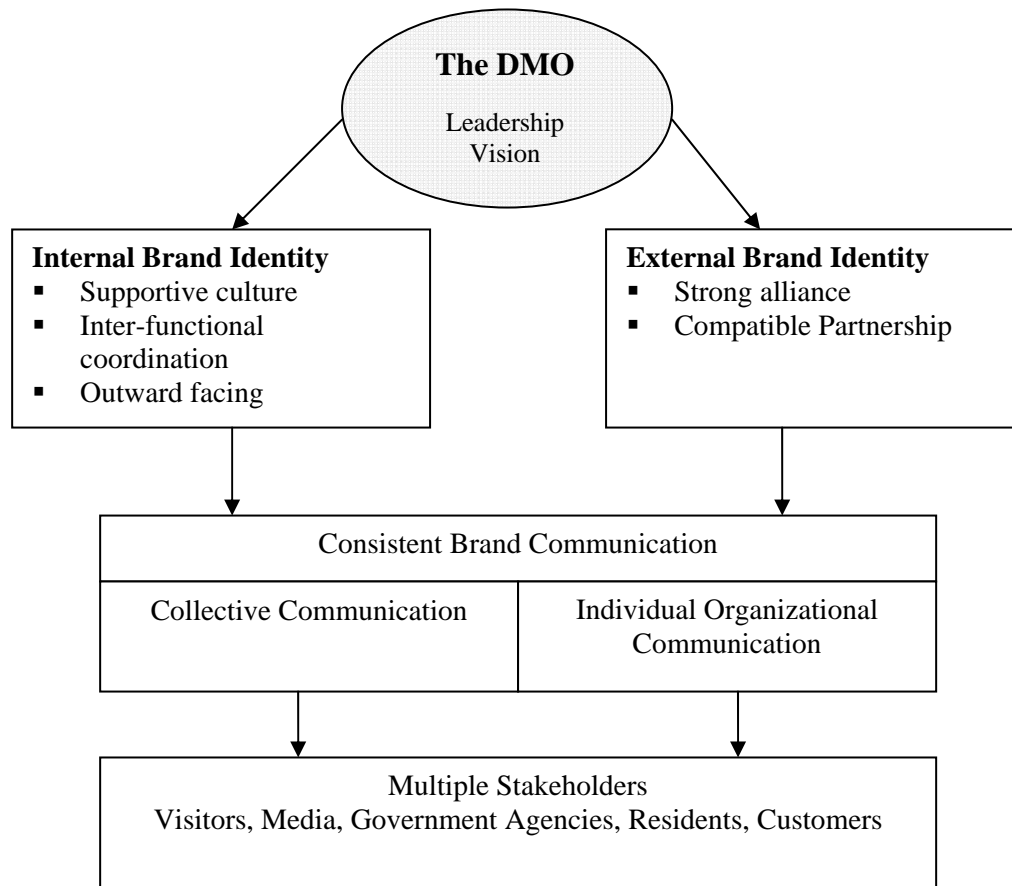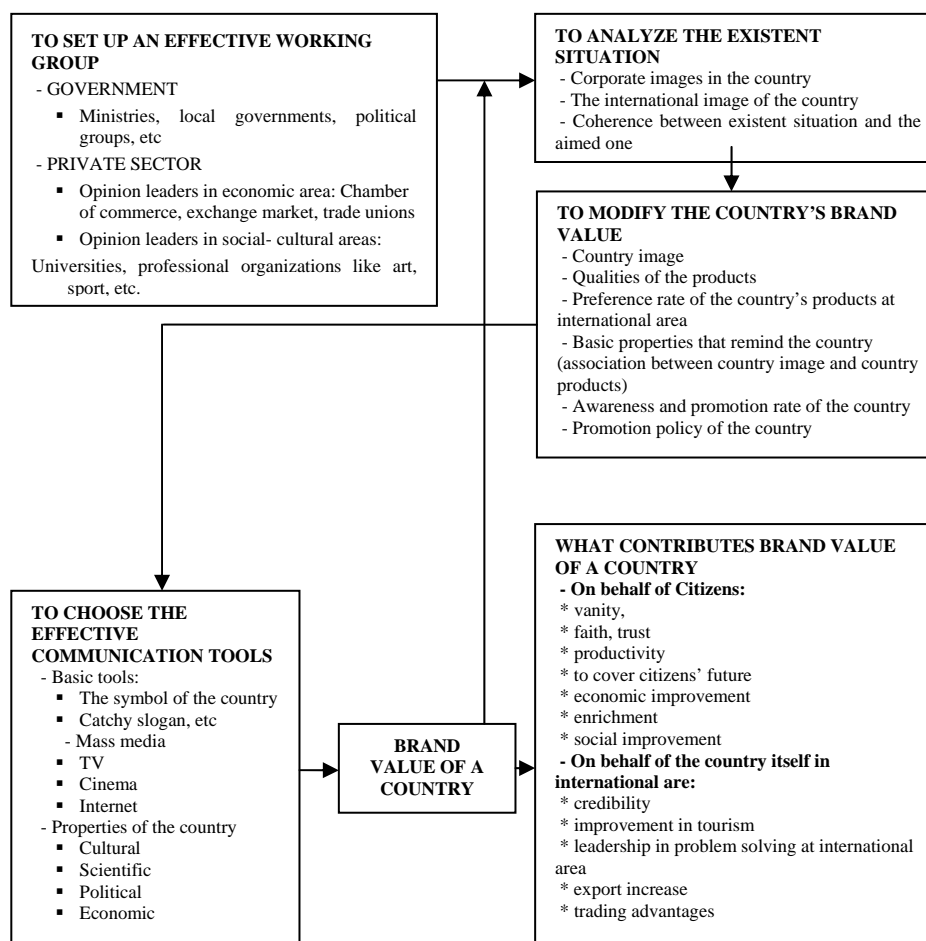
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                        ┌─────────────────────┐
                        │      The DMO        │
                        │                     │
                        │   Leadership        │
                        │     Vision          │
                        └─────────────────────┘
              ╱                                      ╲
             ╱                                        ╲
┌─────────────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────────────┐
│ Internal Brand Identity     │      │ External Brand Identity     │
│  ▪  Supportive culture      │      │  ▪  Strong alliance         │
│  ▪  Inter-functional        │      │  ▪  Compatible Partnership  │
│     coordination            │      │                             │
│  ▪  Outward facing          │      │                             │
└─────────────────────────────┘      └─────────────────────────────┘
              │                                        │
              ▼                                        ▼
┌───────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│              Consistent Brand Communication                    │
├───────────────────────────────┬───────────────────────────────┤
│    Collective Communication   │   Individual Organizational   │
│                               │        Communication          │
└───────────────────────────────┴───────────────────────────────┘
              │                                        │
              ▼                                        ▼
┌───────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                   Multiple Stakeholders                        │
│  Visitors, Media, Government Agencies, Residents, Customers    │
└───────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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Figure : A Framework for the Management of Place Brands (Hankinson 2007 p.247)

In this section there are seven broad functions identified with a maintained sequence. It is not necessary to maintain the sequence during the time of country branding rather a country can use the above tools according to the market needs. In a general situation these functions are conducted to make a country brand.

Country Branding and Image Building Process: Developing a positive country image and a national branding are continuous and long term process. A model with several steps regarding Kyrgyzstan "to develop the country's brand value and its sustainability" has

been constructed to describe the country branding process. These steps might be used for all the other countries as well. First of all, developing a positive country image and a national branding must be done according to a definite program. In order to operate that program properly, many factors and process should be considered carefully. By considering the specific properties of Bangladesh, it is possible to use the steps of the model to illustrate the country branding and image building process of Bangladesh. In the chart below, components and process that are needed are displayed.

**TO DEVELOP THE COUNTRY'S BRAND VALUE and ITS SUSTAINABILITY**

TO SET UP AN EFFECTIVE WORKING GROUP
 - GOVERNMENT
   ▪ Ministries, local governments, political groups, etc
 - PRIVATE SECTOR
   ▪ Opinion leaders in economic area: Chamber of commerce, exchange market, trade unions
   ▪ Opinion leaders in social- cultural areas:
Universities, professional organizations like art, sport, etc.

TO ANALYZE THE EXISTENT SITUATION
 - Corporate images in the country
 - The international image of the country
 - Coherence between existent situation and the aimed one

TO MODIFY THE COUNTRY'S BRAND VALUE
 - Country image
 - Qualities of the products
 - Preference rate of the country's products at international area
 - Basic properties that remind the country (association between country image and country products)
 - Awareness and promotion rate of the country
 - Promotion policy of the country

TO CHOOSE THE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TOOLS
 - Basic tools:
   ▪ The symbol of the country
   ▪ Catchy slogan, etc
  - Mass media
   ▪ TV
   ▪ Cinema
   ▪ Internet
 - Properties of the country
   ▪ Cultural
   ▪ Scientific
   ▪ Political
   ▪ Economic

BRAND VALUE OF A COUNTRY

WHAT CONTRIBUTES BRAND VALUE OF A COUNTRY
- On behalf of Citizens:
 * vanity,
 * faith, trust
 * productivity
 * to cover citizens' future
 * economic improvement
 * enrichment
 * social improvement
 - On behalf of the country itself in international are:
 * credibility
 * improvement in tourism
 * leadership in problem solving at international area
 * export increase
 * trading advantages

Source: http://www.bledcom.com/uploads/papers/Tunca.pdf

The first step of the process of country branding and developing the country's image is to set up an effective working group. That effective working group consists of public and

private sectors participation. The public bodies such Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC), Bangladesh Tourism Board, Ministry of Tourism & Civil Aviation, and all other related departments have to work with private sector such as chamber of commerce, Association of Bangladesh Travel Agencies and Tour Operators' Associations of Bangladesh, universities, tourism professionals, local political leaders, representatives of community people etc. Destination marketing must lead to the optimization of tourism impacts and the achievement of the strategic objectives for all stakeholders (Buhalis, 1999).This model also suggests analyzing the existing value and true facts of the country.

Building Bangladesh as a Strong Country Brand: Proper brand management is certainly a powerful tool for tourist boards and is long overdue for adoption in many countries (Anholt, 1998). The power of branding is in making people aware of the location and then linking desirable associations (Keller, 2003). Many negative associations like the poverty, disaster, crime, political unrest, etc of the country, and very few positive associations like freedom movement of 1971, language movement of 1952, achievement of Nobel Prize, a country of green etc. are deeming by international people about Bangladesh. Adding new associations with the country name would leverage to build a strong country brand. For the purpose enriching the country brand, negative associations have to be eliminated and some more positive associations have to attach in the mind of target people. An example can be provided of desired associations of Bangladesh.
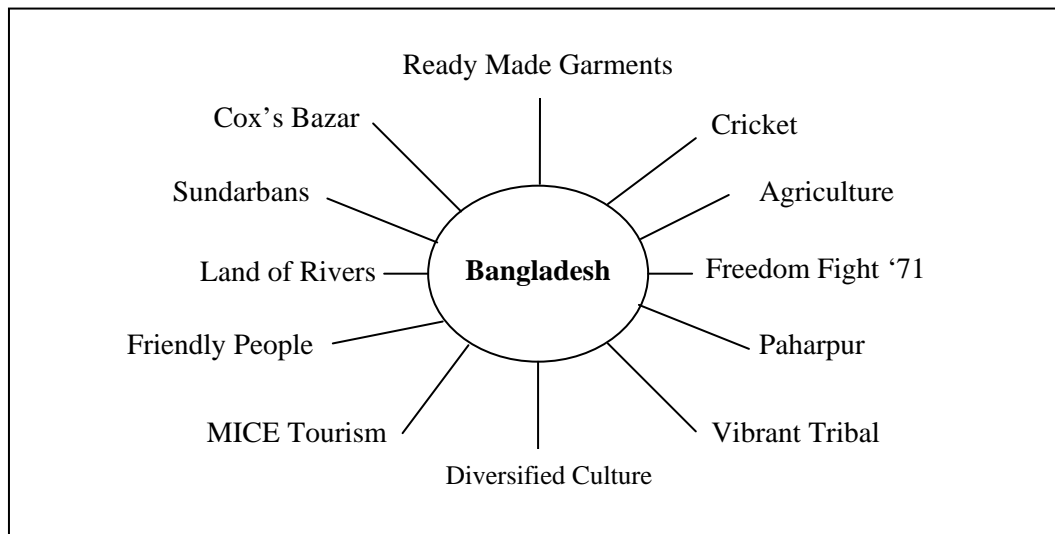
These associations are designed in consideration of just tourism industry in Bangladesh. More associations can be added for improving trade, business or other purposes. This paper would try to exploring the country branding just for tourism. When tourists will

hear the name of Bangladesh they would hold the associations in their memories. But it is not an easy task to attach these characteristics with the name of Bangladesh. To connect these associations we have to work with an innovative set of tools that helps to assess, develop and implement brand strategies. Creative marketing program is necessary to link strong, favorable, and unique associations to the country brand in memory.

It is possible to brand the country from different angles. We can use CBBE (Customer Based Brand Equity) model of Keller (2003) to create Bangladesh as a powerful tourist brand. This model will help to create high level of awareness and familiarity with the country brand and holds some strong, favorable, and unique brand associations in memory. Therkelsen (2007) also support to doing the same type of jobs to make the brand strong. Many countries used his model to building country as a powerful brand.
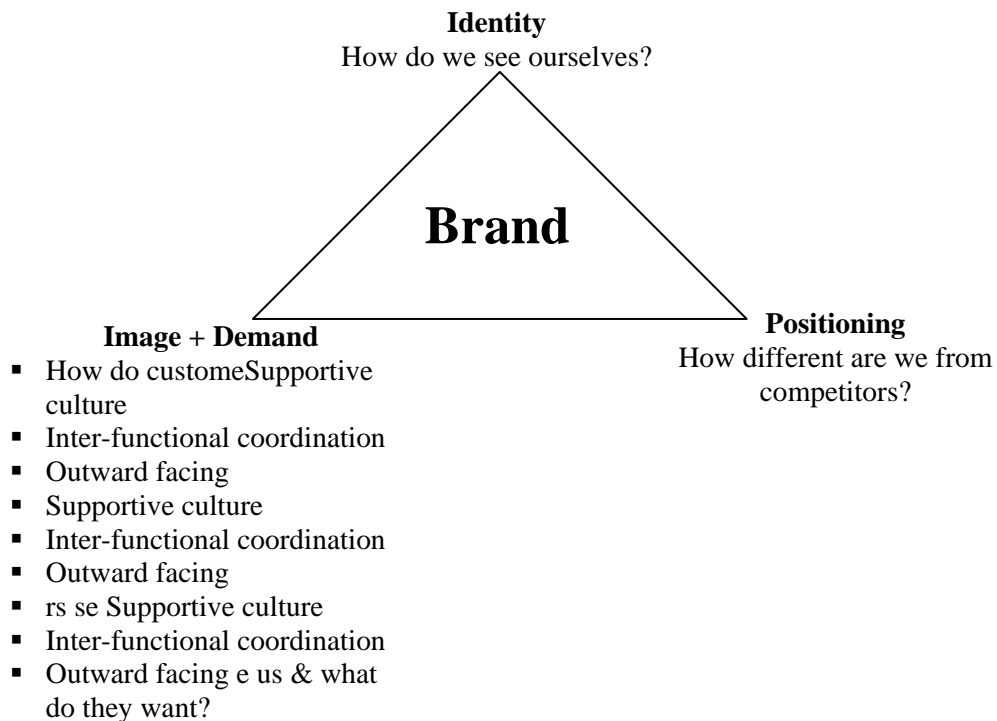
Identity
How do we see ourselves?

Brand

Image + Demand
- How do customeSupportive culture
- Inter-functional coordination
- Outward facing
- Supportive culture
- Inter-functional coordination
- Outward facing
- rs se Supportive culture
- Inter-functional coordination
- Outward facing e us & what do they want?

Positioning
How different are we from competitors?

Figure : Brand Fundamentals (Source: Therkelsen 2007)

Challenges of Country Branding for Bangladesh: Destinations seeking to brand themselves face three unique constraints - a lack of control over the total marketing mix, their relatively limited budgets, and often, over-arching political considerations (Pritchard, & Morgan, 1998). These three constraints are also true for branding

Bangladesh. Country branding is an expensive effort. Still Bangladesh has no significant budget of the government for this purpose. Political unrest, frequent changes of government decisions, lack of resources and instability in tourism policies might affect the branding decision and activities in Bangladesh. The challenges and threats to Asian prosperity have never been greater as new opportunities arise and new threats mount at an increasingly faster rate (Kotler *et al.*, 2001). It is also a big challenge to make the tourism opportunities into business. Another thing is negative image of Bangladesh throughout the world. Successful repositioning is necessary to create new favorable image. Marshalls (2007) says that country's image can not be overhauled by reviewing curbing factors like the history and geographical dispensation can not be altered or easily manipulated. Bangladesh is enjoying a glorious history and geographical position. So it is possible to repair the unfavorable images of Bangladesh.

Policy Implementation

Bangladesh could not exploit the potentials of its tourism. The country needs experience of Singapore, Hong Kong and Dubai which lack natural resources but have been successful in tourism. The geographical location of Bangladesh is most suitable for tourism. The neighboring Nepal, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Thailand, India, the Maldives and China have vibrant tourism. Outgoing tourists from China are expected to exceed 100 million in the next three years. Indians will also be moving around the globe as tourists. Bangladesh needs to attract them. The visa process for the tourists must be easier. Immigration officials need to be friendly. The tour operators need to be professional in providing their services. Good law and order, uninterrupted power supply and infrastructural supports are also essential. Trained manpower can do miracles. Universities and professional human resource development institutes have to pay attention to create the professionals for the tourism and hospitality industry for domestic and foreign employment. The institutions are yet to recognize the large demand of tourism professionals.

Creating and Correcting the Image of Bangladesh: Creating and correcting the image crisis can help in the process of successful branding of Bangladesh. It will be really possible to heighten the image through collective contributions from citizens' national duties and responsibilities. Otherwise, the country will have difficulty in competing with images created by competing countries. Advertising, PR and other promotional activities must complement informal information obtained through word of mouth (WOM) and personal recommendations, by either building upon the latter or correcting negative perceptions of the tourists.

Haring Country Branding Experts: Bangladesh can hire country-branding experts who will show how to attract initial investment, maintain the development through targeted policies, and establish a high–profile investment environment for long–term growth. Outsourcing of country branding experts is wise decision. Though it may be expensive but will ensure the success in the branding process.

Adopting Strategic Tourism Marketing Plan: In the challenging environment, Bangladesh tourism industry needs to adopt a strategic marketing plan to popularize its destinations and build its brand name. A comprehensive and visionary marketing plan along with branding strategy for tourism and other promising product and service is obvious for enhancing its image.

Fostering Regional Alliances: Bangladesh, Nepal and India could work together for mutual benefits of the sub region. Mutual country branding will provide brand value of this sub region. Making a tourism alliance among the neighboring countries will be fruitful to achieve sustainable market growth in the region.

Ensuring Public & Private Sector Partnership: Coordination between the public and private sectors can make sense to both partners. Private sectors are often knowledgeable to work in the challenging environment. Government should work with the private sectors to ensure maximum benefits of country branding. Working with destination marketing organizations (DMO), convention and visitor bureaus (CVB), chambers of commerce, economic development agencies, and national tourism organizations, and other non-government agencies is essential for gaining perfect and prompt actions in country branding. Morgan *et al.,* (2003) highlighted the necessity of partnering among stakeholders. The political processes should also be involved in successful brand management process.

Continuous Monitoring and Corrective Action: Destination branding process is a continuous work. It should go on until the country image takes a lasting shape in the industry. Otherwise there is a great chance of another country taking over the market share.

Conclusion

In spite of country branding incurring costs and taking time, this is essential for receiving a great deal of favor for a country's tourism industry. The present study is based on secondary data analysis, which had a purpose to provide with an in-depth discussion of the role of the destination's image building in country-branding of Bangladesh. If the government and the tourism industry in Bangladesh follow the above mentioned

guidelines and adopt the strategies highlighted earlier, it can be expected that Bangladesh will be able to position a relatively better country-brand in the minds of the potential tourists worldwide. The discussions of this paper clarify how these can be used for Bangladesh. By considering the challenges and limitations for image building (Limited budgets, poor politics, difficult to control external environment, accumulating and managing destination product properly, creating differentiation is not an easy task etc.) and by following the policies, Bangladesh will be able to create favorable image of the country as a tourist destination in the near future. It is urgently needed to prepare plans for national, regional, district, and destination-level in Bangladesh. Finally, monitoring, evaluation, and review are equally essential to uphold and create a better image of destination-Bangladesh. As such, tourism sector will reach to the desired level of development very soon. Therefore, the country has to work consciously and continuously to create, maintain, and uphold the image for a suitable branding of Bangladesh.

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