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An Empirical Study on Bandarban, Bangladesh: Integrating Destination Branding and Supply Chain Management Opportunities

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Abstract: **Tourism industry is a growing sector in beautiful Bangladesh. With all its prospects, the competitions between various tourist destinations are increasing in case of attracting visitors. Destination Branding is a concept where a country or place is represented in a way that differentiates them from other destinations. So formation of USP (Unique Selling Proposition) creates new dimensions of the place in peoples mind. It is said that one must not miss the chance to visit Bandarban while exploring Bangladesh. The main attraction of this place is the heavenly scenic beauty and its adventurous characteristics which never fail to captivate ones soul. This paper assesses the reasons why tourists prefer Bandarban over other attractive tourist destinations and how the factors can be implemented over tourism supply chain. The destination branding of Bandarban successfully attracts the visitors with the assurance of great scenic beauty, adventure and proper accommodation. The method used qualitative and quantitative statistical analysis to find out people expectations and its perceived importance. This paper begins the process of developing an understanding of the destination branding of Bandarban as well as the supply chain factors behind tourist attraction towards this heavenly place.**
Keywords: Destination Branding, Factors, Bandarban, Tourism, Supply Chain.

1.   Introduction

Bangladesh is a small country gifted by the creator. It is rich with its diverse natural, historical, archaeological and cultural resources. The whole country has a very good prospect for the development of tourism. Tourism is a component of growth, particularly by its net contribution to foreign exchange earnings. But in reality, it won't be possible to take initiatives to brand the whole country. For that one of the most attractive places of Bangladesh-Bandarban is being selected for the purpose of research to understand the expectations of the tourists with which the tourism supply chain can be created. The factors of the choice criteria are a crucial element and might create new opportunities in the tourism industry in creation of supply chain. Again the thinking of the tourist may be different in case of the type and duration of the stay.

Research of the past decades has demonstrated that image is a valuable concept in understanding the destination selection process of tourists. Some studies have shown that human behaviour is dependent upon image rather than objective reality. It was noted that known factors would help to identify target markets and decide which image should be promoted to which segment of the target market. The idea and expectations might vary man to man and time to time, but generally in the long run an overall image of each destination can be established. Bangladesh is in the primitive stage of tourism research and development. There are some researches being conducted on destination branding sector for tourism supply chain implication.

Destination Branding is an emerging marketing concept for the tourism industry through which the destination or country represents themselves in innovative ways that keeps them highlighted, attractive and unique from other branded destinations. It is a framework which establishes a strong perception in the consumers mind about the destination that the place is worth visiting. Different destinations follow this type of branding strategy to survive in the competition.

Bandarban is the largest hill tracts area in Bangladesh where the three highest peaks are situated holding the utmost beauty of this country.

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Tourists choose Bandarban mostly because of its natural beauty, adventure, proper accommodation and other services. This paper analyses all important factors that are bringing the tourists in Bandarban and their reasons behind choosing this destination to visit among all other options. Bangladesh is a land of panoramic beauties and the destination branding of these beautiful places are done very competitively.

 In this paper destination branding of Bandarban will be followed to find out its effectiveness on the tourists, what is influencing them to visit the location which may lead to successful creation of sustainable tourist supply chain management. The natural beauty is the main attraction and along with that the service and the substantial marketing of the tourism business or agencies are highlighted. All the information is collected through various primary and secondary researches. The concepts of nation and destination branding as discussed in the review of the existing literature provide the basis for the analysis of the factor affecting the destination branding and supply chain. The paper concludes with recommendations for further research.

2.   Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1   Destination Branding

"Consumers often don't buy products; they buy the images associated with products. The power of the brand and its ultimate value to the firm resides with the customers" [10]. A branded destination might have loads to offer to the tourists. Destination Branding is a combination of a philosophy and its implementation. It's about giving careful thought to precisely what the destination should evoke in people's minds, selecting the appropriate features to put forward and using the appropriate communication techniques to make sure you get the right people as efficiently and persuasively as possible. All claims made by the destination must be truthful because the truth has a way of finding its way to the surface soon enough [16]. Destination branding should be the reflection of expectations of the tourists. "Consider the confused consumer, buffeted by the mixed brand signals he frequently gets from the industry" [5]. Destinations can be a country, a region, a city, a hotel, an event or an attraction. The branding of a country has

implications that go way beyond tourism and the revenues that the tourism industry brings in. The comparison might be created from two different dimensions- rational or emotional. Many countries all around the world are setting examples of destination branding.

2.2   Destination Brand Choice

Destination is a dynamic subject. In a tourism context, a destination brand "represents a unique combination of product characteristics and added values, both functional and non-functional, which have taken on a relevant meaning, which is inextricably linked to that brand, awareness of which might be conscious or intuitive" [12] suggests that the destination brand consists of a mix of brand elements to identify and distinguish a destination through positive image building. A destination brand can also be a fully integrated system of experiences focused on the customer. The summarization is: a destination brand might be tangible and emotional experiences communicated to the consumer through brand elements. From a tourist's point of view, the destination brand is a cluster of perceptions attached to various destination experiences sold under a specific brand name. The brand name can positively influence tourist's final destination choice by reducing the number of alternatives considered within the consideration set [3]. In the tourism literature, various models of destination choice exist that are similar, given that their foundation rest upon functional decision-making influenced by various psychological and non-psychological variables [17]. The researchers compared differences in destination image among three groups of non-visitors, first-timers, and repeaters. Five cognitive destination image factors were examined, including (1) social opportunities and attractions. (2) Natural and cultural amenities. (3)Accommodations, transportation, and infrastructure. (4) Food and friendly people and (5) bars and evening entertainment. [11] developed a destination image scale that included six cognitive image dimensions with a total of 28 items:(1) priority;(2) attractiveness for overnights;(3) resources;(4) facilities;(5) peripheral attractiveness; and(6) reputation. A different image might assure a high success rate and a positive image on consumer mind. Similarly, [1] identified five cognitive destination image factors related to Antalya region of Turkey. The identified factors are listed in the

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following:(1) shopping;(2) health and hygiene;(3) information;(4) transportation; and(5) accommodation.[6] recognized that destination image had both functional (e.g. scenery, facilities, activities, and accommodations) and psychological characteristics (e.g. friendly people, feeling, and atmosphere). The functional aspect was related to tangibility (i.e. cognitive) and the psychological characteristics included intangible aspects (i.e. affective). Following [4] reported a total of five cognitive image factors that pertained to destination image of a popular vacation site (i.e. Lanzarote in Spain). The cognitive factors identified were the following:(1) natural and cultural resources;(2) general tourist infrastructure;(3) atmosphere;(4) social setting and environment; and(5) sun and beach.

2.3   Tourism Prospects of Bangladesh

Tourism can be defined in many different ways but when it comes to define this interesting term in a basic way it is simply described as an activity or practice of touring, especially for pleasure in leisure or business purposes. To make it more clear the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defined tourism as – "Tourism comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes."

But tourism is not considered as same as travelling. Despite political confusions, natural disasters and economic crises in various parts of the world, international trade in tourism services has grown spectacularly. As this type of business is growing, the competitions between various tourism places are also noticeably increasing with the growth. The contribution of tourism in a country's economy is remarkable and undeniable. As a result, the industries in this sector and the competition of attracting the tourists in different strategies are getting strong. To survive the competition, destinations have had to analyze not just the experiences they offer, but ways in which these experiences would make them stand out.

Tourism is a developing industry not only in developed countries, but also in developing as well as in underdeveloped countries [14]. The tourism industry generates substantial economic benefits to both host countries and tourist's home countries.

According to the World Tourism Organization, 698 million people travelled to a foreign country in 2000, spending more than USD 478 billion. International tourism receipts combined with passenger transport currently total more than US$ 575 billion – making tourism as the world's most export earner[18]. The research conducted by IMF (2014) advocates that the growth of three sectors including agriculture, industry, tourism and services are creating opportunities for further growth and would make Bangladesh an outperformers of growth in South Asia (Bangladesh-Bank-Report 2015). It has been reported that several factors developed this prosperous tourism market in Bangladesh. First, the growth and establishment of the middle-class has increased the prospect for tourism industry. Second, the success in the real estate and garments industry in the mid-eighties is one of the reasons that have led to the birth of an affluent class in Bangladesh where consumers are ready to spend their earning on tours and trips within the country. Third, people are becoming busier and to run away from their busy schedules they are becoming dependent on short or long tours as a runaway.

Based on the reasons above, it is advocated that tourism have become an important sector in Bangladesh. Although the expectations are increasing, there is lack of studies in the extant literature about the psychology and motivations of Bangladeshi tourists. This study seeks to examine the factors that influence the behaviour of people towards a destination in Bangladesh. Sylhet have a very good potential to be developed as a lucrative tourist destination.

Bangladesh having various kinds of natural variations e.g., hilly areas, sea beaches, mangrove forest and many historical places, has a huge potential in the scenario of world tourism [8] But the basic structure required for attracting the domestic as well as foreign tourists is yet to be developed. Whereas the neighbouring countries like India, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Nepal attract substantial number of tourists every year and thus generates huge amount of foreign currencies. Though Bangladesh, since the industrial policy of 1999, that integrated tourism has been treated as an industry and termed it as a thrust sector [8], could not develop its various tourist destination sufficiently attractive to the foreign tourists. The performance of a tourist destination and satisfaction

of visitors with the destination are of paramount importance to the destination competitiveness since the pleasantness of the experience is more likely to influence visitors' future behaviour [2].

On this aspect of the tourism attractiveness, Bangladesh government has reformed the national tourism policy in 2010. Aims and goals of this policy are to increase employment, ensure economic development, environmental purity and sustainability [13]. The major objective of the policy is to develop Eco-tourism through conservation of natural resources and promote well-being of the community, preservation of cultural values of the local community and their participation and sharing benefits. Government of Bangladesh launched an act of "Protected areas of tourism and special tourism zone [9]. Tourism is one of the profitable sectors in Bangladesh. Tourism sector of Bangladesh is facing many obstacles [7].

2.4 Prospects of Bandarban

Tourism development is expected in Bandarban for the greater benefit of the local people- both the ethnic and non-ethnic. Tourism may offer immense scope in employment generation, poverty alleviation and maintaining ecological balance in Bangladesh especially in Bandarban [8]. Benefits from community-based tourism can be a combination of economic, social, environmental and cultural benefits. The aim of community-based ecotourism is to unlock opportunities for the poor rather than expanding the overall size of the sector [13].

2.5 Importance of Tourism and its Impact on Tourism Supply Chain

The importance of the tourism destination's image is universally acknowledged, since it affects the individual's subjective perception and consequent behaviour and destination choice [6]. Research of the past decades has demonstrated that image is a valuable concept in understanding the destination selection process of tourists. Some studies have shown that human behaviour is dependent upon image rather than objective reality. It was noted that known factors would help to identify target markets and decide which image should be promoted to which segment of the target market.

Recent studies [15] consider image as a concept formed by the consumer's reasoned and emotional interpretation as the consequence of two closely interrelated components: perceived/cognitive evaluations referring to the individual's own knowledge and beliefs about the object (an evaluation of the perceived attributes of the object), and affective appraisals relating to an individual's feelings towards the object. Researchers proposed a general theoretical model of image-formation factors which differentiates between stimulus factors (information sources, previous experience, and distribution) and personal factors (psychological and social). In another study, the major attributes/dimensions determining perceived destination image are classified [4] into nine dimensions: natural resources; general infrastructure; tourist infrastructure; tourism leisure and recreation; culture, history and art; political and economic factors; natural environment, social environment, atmosphere of the place. Previous studies have identified factors that generally focused on what developments might be created. But there are high chances to find out more specific understanding of the tourists expectations and scopes that can be converted into realities.

The ultimate objective of the concept is managing tourism in line with sustainable tourism best practices, generating alternative livelihood options and income for local communities and contributing to the conservation of natural resource and cultural heritage of Bandarban .In this current study, data from several secondary international sources along with an exclusive survey conducted to analyze the factors of tourism in Bangladesh, focusing on Bandarban.

2.6 Importance of Tourism Supply Chain

Tourism supply chains involve many components - not just accommodation, transport and excursions, but also restaurants, handicrafts, natural beauties' and the infrastructure that supports tourism in destinations. A further aspect of the tourism supply chain is the activities of customers while on holiday, particularly in relation to their behaviour, and what they source for themselves in destinations. Some of the successful tourism destinations have focused on 5A's-Accomodation, Accessibility, Attraction, Accommodations and Amenities. A number of initiatives in destinations in many developing countries are designed to

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enhance possibilities for tourism supply chain. But it all depends on the expectations of people. How they want the service to be provided is a crucial issue. In relation to the tourism supply chain and direct inputs to tourism, destinations provide infrastructure and services

3.   Research Methodology:

3.1   Research design

Descriptive research does not fall under any specific methodologies such as, qualitative or quantitative research; instead it utilizes the elements of both, often within the same study. When it comes to online surveying, descriptive is by far the most commonly used form of research. Most often, organizations will use it as a method to reveal and measure the strength of a target group's opinion, attitude, or behaviour with regards to a given subject. But another common use of descriptive research would be the surveying of demographical traits in a certain group (age, income, marital status, gender, etc.).

Here descriptive research design is implemented to conduct survey. The main idea is to find out the general peoples' perception while choosing destination for travelling. To know their factors and behaviour, it required some qualitative information. The survey questionnaire contains questions related with this issue. The survey questionnaire questions are created accordingly to collect data online. Using online methods for conducting a survey is very popular now-a-days, as it is very inexpensive, flexible and faster way to conduct a survey. Moreover, it gives an accurate result and keeps the privacy of the respondent as well. The initiatives reviewed in this report focus on improving benefits to the destination, consumers and the tourism industry. These initiatives are focused around two main points in the tourism supply chain.

The initial idea is to find out the expectations of people from their chosen destination. Then create a linkage between their idea and tourism supply chain management to make Bandarban a branded destination.

3.2   Respondents and sampling procedures

Sample Size:

The size of the sample was 50 respondents from different arena. However, larger sample size can give accuracy in future research. The convenience sampling is being used to conduct the research and the respondents were frequent travellers of age between 18-54 years. This age range is been selected because from the perspective of Bangladesh most people use to travel within age range. Moreover, non-probability sampling is being used to create the survey design, as the samples came from people of different professions and different spares of life. Purposive samples of selection of tourist respondents will be used. The respondents are tourist from outside of Bandarban division was undertaken to identify their expectations and to share their experiences.

3.3   Methodology

The method used qualitative and quantitative statistical analysis to find out people expectations and its perceived importance. Data is being collected with the help of a structured questionnaire and analyzed quantitatively. Available literature and other published material are consulted for the reference of secondary data. Different academic articles, reports, concerned websites, and books will be used to reach to a meaningful conclusion.

4.   Findings and Results:

Bandarban is one of the amazing tourist destinations of Bangladesh for the travellers and this research is being designed to find out the factors that motivate the tourists to choose it as destination spot. This study also includes the current scenario and suggestion to make Bandarban a better place to visit.

Descriptive statistics are used to describe the basic features of the data in a study. They provide simple summaries of the sample and the measures; some demographic information in form of descriptive analysis is being portrayed.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics (Descriptive Analysis of Demographic Segmentation)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Age	50	2	4	2.8824	0.48507	0.235
Gender	50	1	2	1.2353	0.43724	0.191
Occupation	50	1	3	1.2353	0.5623	0.316
Income	50	1	6	3.9412	2.13514	4.559
Valid N (listwise)	50					
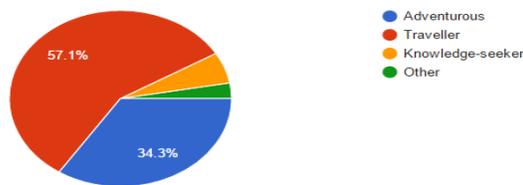
Figure 1. How do you perceive yourself when it comes to travel?

To identify the psychological phenomena of the respondent, they were asked –"how they would perceive when it comes to travel?" Here in the result "Travellers" and "Adventurous" are the two most dominating factors among the options. It clearly replicates that respondents are more to seek of thrill and exploring the country.

In the frequency analysis, the main focus was on the respondent's reaction towards travelling. It was quite surprising to observe that almost 93% of the respondents do love travelling. It can be a great breakthrough or advantage for tourism companies. Again to measure the psychology, the question asked to the respondents was on place. Natural beauty is the main reason for some of the people behind seeking the places where some of the people just do not bother of anything until the spot has a nice view. It means again "Natural Beauty" is a dominating factor here. The other factors which came out of their responses are - comfortable transports, good accommodation, affordability, security and good food.

The most of the respondents have a preference towards using bus services as transportation mode. A small portion of people supported a utilization of

cars. The time in which 46% tourists wanted to visit the place is during winter (October-January). 34% of respondents preferred to visit during spring (February-May).A small portion (9%) favoured summer time (June-September) and 11% suggested paying visit to Bandarban any time during the year.

Almost 48.6% respondents rated Bandarban's current image as a good tourist place. 25.7% suggested it as a very good place to visit and 25.7% as a average place. None of the respondents recommended it to have a bad or worse image. Most of the respondents visited Nilachol and Keukradong since these are two of the famous and beautiful destination places in Bandarban. In case of duration of holidays, 57% respondents supported Bandarban for a short term holiday destination. A major portion of the tourists did not vote for Bandarban while it comes to state it as one of the most beautiful tourist destination in Bangladesh. It clearly states that there are many other tourist destination places in Bangladesh which have more lucrative natural view than Bandarban.

5.   Recommendations:

From the survey, it was originated that 65.7% people seek rest and relaxation and 54.3% people seek fun while visiting Bandarban. Only 2.9% people visit Bandarban to meet their relatives and to attend workshops or seminars. However, no tourist place is out of short comes to some extent and Bandarban is a place that has some inadvertencies like accommodation, transportation, network system and security issues. To address these issues, following gestures are suggested which can make the conditions better.

Most of respondents have complained about the comfort of the journey. Bandarban is a hilly area with lots of uneven and rugged roads that make tourists uncomfortable during the whole journey. This problem can be solved by improving the situations of the roads. Various new and alternative transports can be introduced as an addition to the improvements. Again, local drivers charge more fair to tourists. This can be regulated by the government and local security agencies. Transportation is one of the main components of tourism supply chain management. So new firms have scopes to create more options for tourists and develop various transport facilities to attract more tourists towards Bandarban.

Again, most of the respondents suggested improving the accommodation systems while they were asked what kind of changes in near future they want to see in Bandarban. Being a rocky and hillside area, Bandarban has less numbers of comfortable and standardized hotels and motels which cost very high. This problem can be solved by creating more numbers of upgraded and standardized hotels and resorts with a reasonable price and assisted by tourist supportive facilities.

Network system is another issue that creates drawbacks while choosing Bandarban as a tourist place. Bandarban is surrounded by mountains and forests, which generates network disruption. Many tourists feel disinterestedness while planning for a vacation in Bandarban considering this issue. Telecommunications companies can help build the network infrastructure by establish more network towers in Bandarban. This approach will improve the network facility in Bandarban to some extent.

Many respondents suggested that the security of Bandarban should be stricter. Bangladesh has a brief history of political instabilities. To avoid this type of situations, tourists should frequently monitor the current situation and seek for travel consultant advices. Moreover, many tourists are targeted of pick pocketing, armed robbery and sometimes of abductions. Local security agencies and police stations should be more efficient to handle and check this type of incidents. The season preferred by most of the tourists is winter and they are more interested in short term holidays.

6.   Conclusion:

This research paper enlightened the factors while choosing Bandarban as a tourist place. This is a groundwork of the opportunities of Bandarban and the above recommendations suggest that how the overall environment of Bandarban can be improved. Bandarban has a vast opportunity to be the most prominent tourism sector for its natural environment. Effective supply chain management therefore, relies greatly on the success of relationship marketing. Tourism organizations need to consider tourists expectations and create options accordingly. Research into supply chain management in tourism has focused on the relationship between tour operators and tourists expectations. New packages might be created to widen the options to visit Bandarban. This also suggests nurturing the opportunities more by proper advertising, establishing delightful tourism supply chain management and providing high quality network, security and tourist supportive services.

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