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NATION BRANDING OF BANGLADESH: EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL AND THE PROCESS

Abstract

What is nation branding? What is it for? These conceptual debates remain food for thought for a growing number of scholars and practitioners in the current milieu. Nation branding is beyond product or destination branding, having a relation with identity, competitiveness, politico-economic and socio-cultural image, and reputation of a nation. This paper applies the nation branding model proposed by Simon Anholt to make a hexagon for Bangladesh to explore the country's potential for nation branding. Notably, it considers F. Msele's seven-step nation branding model to advance Bangladesh's nation branding process. The paper argues that success of branding Bangladesh will largely depend on practising a cohesive nation branding process. Efforts for branding Bangladesh need to be monitored, evaluated, and changed from time to time. The process has to be inclusive and backed by top leadership. The country needs to show that its idea is globally accepted (e.g., microfinance), the product is authentic (e.g., garments or pharmaceuticals), resource-capability-opportunity is growing, advancement is real (e.g., economic growth), and it is ready to be a "rising global stakeholder". Usual (e.g., population or poverty) or sudden (e.g., pandemic like Covid-19) events can affect the process of branding Bangladesh as its materialization takes time. In this context, branding Bangladesh, in upholding the nation's image and reputation, should be a long-term national policy, not a campaign for a particular agency (e.g., tourism board).

Keywords: Nation Branding, Country of Origin, Public Diplomacy, Destination Branding, Made in Bangladesh, Branding Bangladesh

1. Introduction

Wally Olins, a branding guru, glues nation with branding. Nation evolves with both rational and emotional factors, while branding is something authentic, who is what for.¹ Legacy nations or renowned city-states remain strategic in

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¹ Wally Olins, "Branding the Nation: The Historical Context", in Nigel Morgan, Annette Pritchard and Roger Pride (eds.), *Destination Branding: Creating the Unique Destination Proposition*, 2nd Edition, Oxford, United Kingdom: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann, 2004, pp. 17-25.

branding themselves. Countries like China, India, South Korea, Malaysia, etc., are emerging in the club. For many, the era of globalization (not goodbye globalization²) and changing balance of power have given them a space in people's minds, as they have started to sell authenticity.³ What is nation branding, or why it is; such questions are now becoming relevant. Though the concept is relatively new, its popularity is on the rise in contemporary world, especially since the dawn of the 21st century. Nation branding intends to assess, regain and continue to improve the image of a nation. Image is a perceptive indication not only for product quality but also for sentimental, identity and conceit oriented, and historical aspects of a nation. Simon Anholt, the leading scholar of nation branding, defines the concept as “a systemic process to align action, behaviour, investment, innovation and communication of a nation with a strategy to get a competitive identity.”⁴ The concept focusses on making a distinctive advantage to confront current national odds. Nation's image attracts talent, tourism, trade, investment, etc., to gain global economic benefit and add value to exports in the international marketplace, while nation branding is to have worldwide influence and standing along with a decisive competitive advantage.⁵

Once, Bangladesh was seen as a nation with poverty and huge population. The common practice was to be branded based on negative aspects. Global commitments and the distinct resilience characteristics of Bangladeshi people remained unnoticed for a long. A trend was to draw parallels for Bangladesh with states facing troubles and having a negative connotation.⁶ Unfortunately, people tended to overlook that Bangladesh, even with its scarcities and limitations, made tremendous development in various fields. Now, the government is determined to erase the negative perception attached to the country and develop a positive image.

Bangladesh has been well-known for its production of raw jute and microfinance. Recently, Goldman Sachs branded Bangladesh as “Next 11”, and JP

² Michael O'Sullivan, *The Levelling: What's Next After Globalization*, New York: Public Affairs Hachette Book Group, 2019.

³ Andy W. Hao, Justin Paul, Sangeeta Trott, Chiquan Guo and Heng-Hui Wu, “Two Decades of Research on Nation Branding: A Review and Future Research Agenda”, *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 38, No. 1, 2019.

⁴ Simon Anholt, “Nation-brands and the Value of Provenance”, in Morgan et al., 2004, op. cit., pp. 26-29.

⁵ Ying Fan, “Branding the Nation: Towards a better Understanding”, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2010, pp. 97-103; Syed Ferhat Anwar, “Building a ‘Nation Brand’”, *The Daily Star*, 20 February 2018.

⁶ Mamun Rashid, “Branding Bangladesh”, *Nation-Branding*, 06 May 2009, available at <https://nation-branding.info/2009/05/06/branding-bangladesh/>, accessed on 23 September 2020; Farhana Zamil Tinny and Bakare Akeem Soladoye, “A Qualitative Study on Scopes and Gaps in Re-branding Bangladesh Through Effective Communication”, *European Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 2019, pp. 27-36; Imran Hasnat and Elanie Steyn, “From “Bottomless Basket” to “Beautiful Bangladesh”: Nation Branding through Tourism and Public Diplomacy”, in Jami A. Fullerton and Alice Kendrick (eds.), *Shaping International Public Opinion: A Model for Nation Branding and Public Diplomacy*, New York: Peter Lang Inc., 2017, pp. 149-163.

Morgan’s “Frontier Five” included it. McKinsey and Company, a leading global consulting firm, projected that Bangladesh could become the “next China” in apparel sourcing.⁷ The country now ranks 39th among the global most valuable nation brands. Its brand value has increased from US\$ 208 billion in 2017 to US\$ 257 billion in 2018.⁸ Bangladesh is now regarded as a developmental role model globally for its tremendous socio-economic progress. With a steady growth rate during the last decade, Bangladesh is a growing economy in the Asia Pacific region. It is one of the largest foreign exchange earners globally and now being ranked in different socio-economic global rankings. It has also proved its aptitude and skills in disaster preparedness. The country is marching forward with some visionary agenda to be a global stakeholder. Hence, it must ensure that its international image and reputation can keep pace with its current progress in socio-political and economic spheres.

It was not so long Bangladesh took the initiative for nation branding. The country first launched a logo for its branding in 2008. The logo comprised a rising sun over the sea waves with a slogan “Beautiful Bangladesh” underneath. Since then, Bangladesh initiated a few slogans like “Digital Bangladesh”, “Bangladesh in Booming Progress”, etc. Whether these are for nation branding remains to be known. The Foreign Minister of Bangladesh said, “branding Bangladesh is a top priority. It is to focus on exploring the burgeoning market of the world’s major emerging economies to diversify export destinations. It calls for effective country branding abroad and developing a globally recognized Bangladeshi brand to create a niche for its products in the world market.”⁹ With such importance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) is tasked with building a positive image of Bangladesh.

For many, the nation branding practice of Bangladesh is at a nascent stage. It is to look from “our” as well as “audience” viewpoint. For the latter, Simon Anholt’s Nation Brand Index (NBI) is a recognized apparatus to fathom the appeal of a nation’s brand image along with assessing audience perception of the nation brand on six criteria, e.g., people, investment and immigration, export, tourism, culture and heritage and governance, usually shown by a hexagon.¹⁰ Against this backdrop, the paper aims to explore the potential and the process of nation branding of Bangladesh.

⁷ Achim Berg, “Bangladesh: The Next Hot Spot in Apparel Sourcing?”, available at <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/consumer-packaged-goods/our-insights/bangladesh-the-next-hot-spot-in-apparel-sourcing#>, accessed on 16 January 2021; Zahid Hussain, “Bangladesh: The Next China?”, *World Bank Blogs*, 17 January 2013, available at <https://blogs.worldbank.org/endpovertyinsouthasia/bangladesh-next-china>, accessed on 17 January 2021.

⁸ Ibrahim Hossain Ovi, “Bangladesh Ranks 39 among Global Most Valuable Nation Brands”, *The Dhaka Tribune*, 24 October 2018.

⁹ Shahiduzzaman Khan, “Promoting Bangladesh Brand at Home and Abroad”, *The Financial Express*, 19 January 2019.

¹⁰ Simon Anholt, “Anholt Nation Brands Index: How Does the World See America?”, *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 45, No. 3, 2005, pp. 296-304.

It uses Anholt’s model in making a hexagon for Bangladesh to explore the country’s potential in nation branding. Afterwards, the paper also applies F. Msele’s nation branding model to discuss Bangladesh’s nation branding process.

The concept of nation branding is still in the developing phase. Scholars and practitioners are working to construct a common conceptual understanding of the issue. The wide-ranging work of Simon Anholt¹¹ has given a comprehensive understanding of the concept, allowing scholars and practitioners to consolidate it further. Fan¹² has developed a conceptual framework to highlight the concept’s origin and different interpretations, helping to clarify some of the obscurities and misunderstanding attached to it. Teslik,¹³ through his work, has also tried to explain the concept and what it means for the foreign policy of a country. Ahn and Wu¹⁴ have analyzed how a nation’s art and cultural sector, two important aspects of branding a nation, is related to the country’s brand value. Some work has already been done on nation branding from Bangladesh’s perspectives. Earlier efforts of Tinne¹⁵ and Pathak¹⁶—by using Simon Anholt’s framework of nation branding—elucidated the potential of branding Bangladesh and how the country could build a strong brand image by exploiting those potentials. Hasnat and Steyn,¹⁷ Rahman,¹⁸ Hassan et al,¹⁹ highlighted the tourism sector

¹¹ Simon Anholt, *Brand New Justice: the Upside of Global Branding*, Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann, 2003; Simon Anholt, 2004, op. cit., pp. 26-29; Simon Anholt, “Public Diplomacy and Place Branding: Where’s the link?”, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 2006(a), pp. 271-275; Simon Anholt, “Nation Branding in Asia”, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 2008, pp. 265-269; Simon Anholt, “Why Brand? Some Practical Considerations for Nation Branding”, *Place Branding*, Vol. 2, 2006(b), pp. 97-107; Simon Anholt, “Some Important Distinctions in Place Branding”, *Place Branding*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2005, pp. 116-121; Simon Anholt, “Why ‘Nation Branding’ Doesn’t Exist”, *The Economic Times*, 14 April 2010(a); Simon Anholt, “Nation Branding: A Continuing Theme”, *Brand Management*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 2002, pp. 59-60; Simon Anholt, *Places: Identity, Image and Reputation*, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010(b); Simon Anholt, *Competitive Identity: the New Brand Management for Nations, Cities and Regions*, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

¹² Ying Fan, “Branding the Nation: What is Being Branded?”, *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2006, pp. 5-14; Fan, 2010, op. cit.

¹³ Lee Hudson Teslik, “Nation Branding Explained”, *Council on Foreign Relations*, 09 November 2007, available at <https://www.cfr.org/background/nation-branding-explained>, accessed on 27 November 2020.

¹⁴ Michael J. Ahn and Hsin-Ching Wu, “The Art of Nation Branding: National Branding Value and the Role of Government and the Arts and Culture Sector”, *Public Organization Review*, Vol. 15, No.1, 2015, pp. 157-173.

¹⁵ Wahida Shahan Tinne, “Nation Branding: Beautiful Bangladesh”, *Asian Business Review*, Vol. 2, No.1, 2013, pp. 31-36.

¹⁶ Koushik Prashad Pathak, “Effective Strategies to Rebrand Bangladesh: Application of Simon Anholt’s Hexagon Model of Branding”, *Journal of Business Studies*, Vol. XXXV, No. 1, 2014, pp. 15-29.

¹⁷ Hasnat and Steyn, 2017, op. cit.; Imran Hasnat and Elanie Steyn, “Towards a “Beautiful Bangladesh”: The Bleed-over Effect of Tourism Advertising”, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 2020, pp. 165-173.

¹⁸ Md. Wahidur Rahman, “Cultural Tourism and Bangladesh: An Overview”, *Bangladesh Research Publications Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 06-15, 2012.

¹⁹ Md. Kamrul Hassan, Mohammad Badruzzaman Bhuiyan and Md. Kamruzzaman, “Leveraging the Tourism

and how Bangladesh could brand itself by harnessing this sector. Tinny and Soladoya²⁰ illustrated the scopes and gaps of re-branding Bangladesh and stressed the importance of effective communication to reduce the existing gap. Kamal et al²¹ developed their study based on the argument that domestic products could help to brand Bangladesh globally. Nevertheless, these studies left many developmental and success stories of the country untouched, especially recent achievements that could help build a positive image globally. Besides, the scope of previous studies was limited in discussing the nation branding criteria and potential, leaving how Bangladesh could go further with the process. This paper attempts to fulfil those gaps.

The paper is qualitative in nature. It examines existing literature from different sources, e.g., government and non-government documents, academic journals, books, and newspaper articles. It also relies on in-depth interviews. Four interviewees have been purposively selected based on their expertise for the study. A major limitation of this paper is that it has not significantly addressed why different nation branding indices or models are not applied for Bangladesh, and is yet to enlist all attainments of the country. It also requires interviewing relevant more numbers of audiences to have an all-inclusive perception of contemporary Bangladesh. Including such kind of methodological criticality, this paper remains linking soft power and public diplomacy with the nation branding concept for Bangladesh in a comprehensive manner. A meta-analysis of existing studies (though inadequate on Bangladesh) can enable scholars and practitioners to identify factors affecting several aspects of branding Bangladesh. These are for further research.

For convenience, this paper is structured as follows, barring introduction and conclusion, it includes three main sections. Following the introduction, section two conceptualizes nation branding and elaborates Anholt and Msele's nation branding model. Section three develops a hexagon for Bangladesh, along with detailing the six elements of nation branding to explore the country's potential. Section four is on the nation branding process and branding Bangladesh, dedicated to stakeholders concerned. The fifth section concludes the paper.

2. Conceptualizing Nation Branding

The “nation branding” concept has its root in four different backgrounds of literature, namely Country of Origin (COO), destination branding, public diplomacy,

Sector in Bangladesh by Country Branding: An Exploratory Synopsis”, *Journal of Business Studies*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1, 2013, pp. 185-202.

²⁰ Tinny and Soladoye, op. cit.

²¹ Mushfeka Binte Kamal, Ruhul Amin and Cathy Bipasha Sarkar, “How Do Domestic Products Help Branding Bangladesh Globally?”, *Sonargaon University Journal (SUJ)*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2018.

and national identity.²² Unlike the first two discourses that focus exclusively on economic aspects, nation branding focuses on a nation's overall reputation and image at the global level by utilizing its resources and opportunities. In that sense, it differs from destination branding also, which, according to Simon Anholt, is a kind of sophisticated tourism promotion, and only a part of the nation branding concept.²³ Destination branding primarily aims at the tourism sector by attracting visitors from outside of the country (inwards direction), while nation branding fosters socio-political, commercial, and economic interests both at home and abroad.²⁴ Nation branding serves as an umbrella concept, under which further sub-categories of branding are developed.

Evolution of the concept of nation branding mainly emanates from socioeconomic and political imperatives, in which, a nation seeks greater global recognition, in addition to augment its financial prospects and international relations through effective branding strategies.²⁵ Nations have always been involved in some sort of branding activities without having the label of “branding” into it. According to Olins, nations are already de facto brands, and the concept is not new.²⁶ The novelty with the concept of “nation branding” is the term “brand”. Hence, before delving into the conceptual nitty-gritty of nation branding, it is imperative to shed some light on the concept of “branding”.

The concept “brand” is difficult to define due to its multifaceted connotation, especially within the scholarship of the marketing field. Anholt believes the definition of “brand” is still widely misunderstood, which can be elucidated from at least three different standpoints.²⁷ Firstly, a brand can be associated with a marked identity of a product (that includes its appearance, packaging, logo, livery, communications, etc.). Secondly, it can also be referred to the culture and orientation of the organization associated with the product. Finally, the concept could relate to the reputation of the product or the corporation perceived by its target audience.²⁸ Philip Kotler defines it as “a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors.”²⁹ According to Aaker, “a brand

²² Fan, 2006, op. cit.; Salah Hassan, “Nation branding: the Strategic Imperative for Sustainable Market Competitiveness”, *Journal of Humanities and Applied Social Sciences*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2019, pp. 146-158.

²³ Anholt, 2008, op. cit.

²⁴ Gyorgy Szondi, “The Role and Challenges of Country Branding in Transition Countries: The Central and Eastern European experience”, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2007, pp. 8-20.

²⁵ P. van Ham, “The Rise of the Brand State”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 5, 2001, pp. 2–6; Fan, 2006, op. cit.; Ahn and Wu, op. cit.

²⁶ Olins, op. cit.

²⁷ Anholt, 2005, op. cit.; Anholt, 2010(a), op. cit.

²⁸ Anholt, 2010(a), op. cit.

²⁹ Philip Kotler, cited in Rashid, op. cit.

is a multidimensional assortment of functional, emotional, relational, and strategic elements that collectively generate a unique set of associations in the public mind.³⁰ Thus, in a nutshell, the concept “brand” is generally associated with a product, entity, or establishment that has a unique, consistent, and well-recognized feature. The important question to ponder is, can the concept “brand” be linked to nation-states?

Since people already have a unique image and distinctive identity in their mind for almost every country in the world, it is believed that a nation does bear a brand characteristic. Fan believes, “a nation brand is the total sum of all perceptions of a nation in the minds of international stakeholders, which may contain some of the following elements: people, place, culture/language, history, food, fashion, famous faces (celebrities), global brands, and so on.”³¹ It aims to construct and sustain a country’s sound image and reputation, along with its competitiveness, that can be exploited as a crucial device in advancing and maintaining the nation’s soft power in the international arena. Hassanuzzaman views nation branding “as a field of theory and practice aims to measure, build and manage the reputation of countries.”³² Hence, it is fairly established that the country’s image along with its reputation stays at the crux of the nation branding objective, in which the country tries to exploit the branding techniques to uplift those objectives.

However, one thing to be cautious about while discussing nation branding is its comprehensiveness. Many scholars and practitioners have a very limited outlook of the concept and naively make an analogy with commercial or product branding. The concept of branding of a nation is much broader than marketing or advertising; rather, it is a deliberate effort to create distinctive characteristics of a country from others and elevate its competitive position to further many facilities in the areas like trade, tourism, investment, foreign affairs, etc.³³ As Steenkamp and Verlegh have mention, “a country image is not merely a cognitive cue for product quality, but that it also relates to emotions, identity, pride and autobiographical memories that transform country-of-origin into an expressive or unique attribute.”³⁴

Due to the novelty of the concept, diverse opinions can be found from different scholars regarding the issue. Gudjonsson says that a nation’s reputation,

³⁰ A. D. Aaker, *Building Strong Brands*, New York: Free Press, 1996.

³¹ Fan, 2006, op. cit.

³² Md. Hassanuzzaman, “Branding Bangladesh through RMG”, *Foreign Affairs Insight Review*, March 2015, available at <https://fairbd.net/branding-bangladesh-through-rmg/>, accessed on 27 September 2020.

³³ Virimai V. Mugobo and Wilfred I. Ukpere, “Is Country Branding a Panacea or Poison?”, *African Journal of Business Management*, Vol. 5, No. 20, pp. 8248-8255, 2011; Fan, 2006, op. cit.; Anholt, 2002, op. cit.; Teslik, op. cit.

³⁴ J. B. E. M. Steenkamp and P. W. J. Verlegh, “A Review and Meta-Analysis of Country-of-Origin Research”, *Journal of Economic Psychology*, Vol. 20, No. 5, 1999, pp. 521-546.

identity, attitude, and behaviour can indeed be changed by nation branding. It is about developing an atmosphere for a nation's brands to survive in the global market.³⁵ According to O'Shaughnessy and Jackson, "notion of the nation as a brand is accepted while others are sceptical about the applicability of branding concepts to nations."³⁶ Dinnie, to define nation branding, provides "reference to a nation's culture and a target audience in the minds of whom, nation brands are situated."³⁷ Ham claims, making a nation brand is a concern of the post-modern political system by projecting an effective image and maintaining a better reputation.³⁸ For Peterson, nation branding is a "state asset to rival geopolitics and traditional considerations of power...assertive branding by the states is to stand out in the crowd."³⁹ Olins opines that nation branding is to remould national identities and needs to be "firmly rooted in the reality and essence of a nation rather than being merely a creation of brand agencies."⁴⁰ Anholt and Lee argue that nation branding is to increase the competitiveness of a nation while positioning it on the global stage.⁴¹ Rendon and Szondi mark it to promote politico-economic interest at home and abroad.⁴² Nation branding accordingly works as a tool to grow and mature the soft power of a nation.⁴³

Despite varying opinions on the definition of nation branding, a summary can be drawn which will be taken into account as the operational definition of nation branding for this paper,

Nation branding is an asset for a nation to be politico-culturally and socio-economically competitive by building an appealing image and solid reputation that relates to the nation's identity, behaviour, attitude and soft power capability while positioning it at the international level.

³⁵ Hlynur Gudjonsson, "Nation branding", *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 2005, pp. 283-298.

³⁶ J. O'Shaughnessy and N. Jackson, "Treating the Nation as a Brand: Some Neglected Issues", *Journal of Macromarketing*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2000, pp. 56-64.

³⁷ Keith Dinnie, *Nation Branding: Concepts, Issues, Practice*, New York: Routledge, 2016, p. 4.

³⁸ Petervan Ham, "Branding Territory: Inside the Wonderful Worlds of PR and IR Theory", *Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2002, pp. 249-69.

³⁹ J. E. Peterson, "Qatar and the World: Branding for a Micro-State", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 60, No. 4, 2006, pp. 732-748.

⁴⁰ Wally Olins, *Corporate Identity: Making Business Strategy Visible through Design*, Massachusetts, United States: Harvard Business School Press, 1989, p. 13.

⁴¹ Anholt, 2007, op. cit.; Mi Kyung Lee, "Nation Branding and Sustainable Competitiveness of Nations", available at <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/d553/6e4a368edd303ee62ace8ae7a6e05db516b7.pdf>, accessed on 13 August 2020.

⁴² Jim Rendon, "When Nations Need a Little Marketing", *The New York Times*, 23 November 2003; Gyorgy Szondi, "The Role and Challenges of Country Branding in Transition Countries: the Central and Eastern European experience", *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, Vol. 3, No.1, 2007, pp. 8-20.

⁴³ Joseph S. Nye, *The Future of Power*, New York: Public Affairs, 2011.

2.1 *Elements of Nation Branding*

It is not easy to find a universally accepted model of nation branding due to the concept's uniqueness and the complexity attached to it.⁴⁴ A significant contribution to the studies of nation branding practice lies in Anholt's works in criteria based NBI.⁴⁵ Other practices are FutureBrand Country Index (FCI), Good Country Index (GCI), and Nation Branding Programmes (NBP) by individual states, etc. Some have, by now, initiated NBP to help build a good perception of their nations. In the early 21st century, Brand South Africa Project was launched. Likewise, Brand India was initiated to change audience perception about India. Some other states, like Egypt, Malaysia, have taken active NBP. Some have also created slogans [Destination Egypt, Truly Asia (Malaysia), Jump into Ireland, China like never before, etc.] and symbols to execute concurrent demands.

FCI looks at what changes a nation from a spot on a map to a place by asking views from respondents, who want to live, invest, visit, as well as purchase commodities and services from the specific nation. FCI 2019 re-ranks top 75 nations by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) estimated by the World Bank (WB) based on how respondents rate a nation's purpose-oriented (business potential, value system and quality of life) and experience-oriented (tourism, culture and heritage and made in [products and services]) dimensions.⁴⁶ Ranks are made based on the dimensions' scores. On the other hand, GCI values a nation's global contribution to science and technology, culture, international peace and security, health and wellbeing, prosperity and equality, planet and climate, and world order.⁴⁷

Anholt's NBI ranks a nation by its brand value. It regards predefined respondents' (twenty thousand, aged 18 years and above) views from selective countries to present a score on six criteria of a nation: people, culture and heritage, investment and immigration, export, governance and tourism. NBI examines 50 nations' images. It assesses the authority and appeal of every nation's brand image by measuring six areas of state capability, which together frame a hexagon for nation branding.

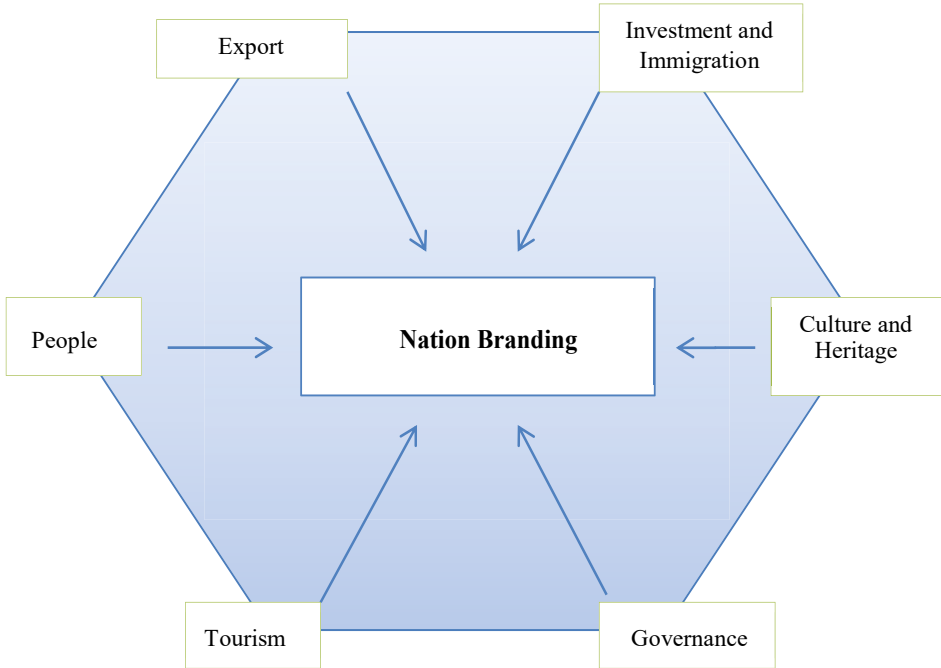
⁴⁴ Mugobo and Ukpere, op. cit.

⁴⁵ Anholt, 2010(b), op. cit.

⁴⁶ Future Country Index (FCI) 2019, available at <https://www.futurebrand.com/uploads/FCI/FutureBrand-Country-Index-2019.pdf>, accessed on 01 June 2021.

⁴⁷ "The Good Country Index", available at <https://index.goodcountry.org/>, accessed on 16 June 2021.

Figure 1: Anholt IPSOS⁴⁸ Nation Brand Index (NBI)⁴⁹



Export observes the appeal of a product or service and whether consumers look for these from a COO. Governance looks at the capability of a government, its impartiality, equality, justice to the people, people’s assessment of his/her government, and its global commitment to diverse issues. Culture and heritage measure people’s opinion about a particular nation’s long history, culture, and heritage, including its literature, films, music, art, sports, etc. People gauge a state population’s global image based on their capability, edification, frankness, approachability, affability, responsiveness, etc. Tourism sees whether a nation is preferable to tourists and attractions capture their interests. Investment and immigration look over a state’s capability to attract foreign investment, socio-economic advancement, capacity to attract people to study, work, and live in the state. These elements of nation branding constitute an integral part of developing a nation’s brand character. Countries may pick a bunch of elements or any one of them to develop their brand value and secure their distinct identity from others’ invasion.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ IPSOS is a multinational market research group with headquarters in Paris, France. Since 2008, IPSOS and Anholt have been jointly working on NBI.

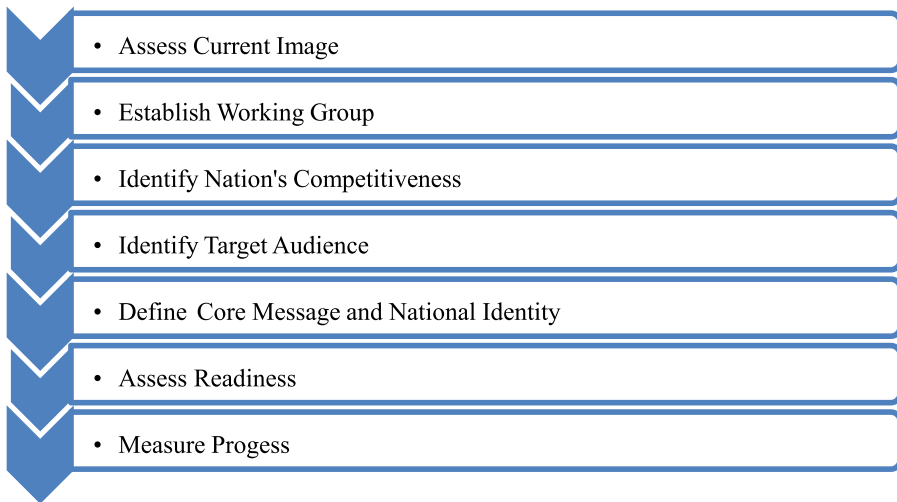
⁴⁹ Anholt, 2010 (a), op. cit.

⁵⁰ Salah Hassan and Abeer A. Mahrous, “Nation branding: the Strategic Imperative for Sustainable Market competitiveness”, *Journal of Humanities and Applied Social Sciences*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2019.

2.2 Process of Nation Branding

Academics and practitioners are still working for a universally agreed process of nation branding. This is owing to the conceptual originality and complexity of the concept. Hassan and Mahrous classify five steps to develop nation branding that includes: having a board for nation branding, making of strategic planning, and setting goals, narrowing ideas under the plans and goals, evaluating the present image of nation brand among audiences, as well as assessing and developing strategic situations.⁵¹ Torres also identifies a five-point process of nation branding. It includes: “having a central idea, stakeholder engagement, policymaking, taking digital identity in place, and marketing.”⁵² The two five-point processes are quite different in steps, but their end objectives are the same, i.e., branding a nation. Countries can internalize one or can combine the two according to their current state of nation branding. Msele provided another nation branding process that appears to be systematic.⁵³ Her seven steps of process are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Nation Branding Process⁵⁴



⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Jose Filipe Torres, in an interview on 19 August 2018, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=agWYoEjCdJA>, accessed on 09 August 2020.

⁵³ F. Msele, “A Critical Analysis of the Current State of Knowledge of Nation Branding”, Cranfield School of Management, available at <https://dspace.lib.cranfield.ac.uk/handle/1826/2699>, accessed on 01 April 2021, cited in, Fan, 2010, op. cit.; Mugobo and Ukpere, op. cit.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

This paper considers Msele’s model for discussing the process of nation branding for Bangladesh.

3. Branding Bangladesh: Exploring the Potential

This section describes each element of Anholt’s NBI to make a nation branding hexagon for Bangladesh to explore the country’s potential.

3.1 People

People of a state, its political and media celebrities, famous sports personalities, etc.,—how they are when abroad and cordial with foreigners at home—help develop their nation’s brand image. Bangladesh has been recognized by the global community as a peace-loving nation and unique instance of communal harmony and warm hospitality, where people from different religions, caste, and creed are peacefully co-existing. To the world, Bangladeshis are resilient and adaptive to different crises, courageous, committed to international norms and humanitarian approaches. Despite being one of the most vulnerable countries on earth due to exposure to multiple natural hazards, ranging from cyclones and storm surges, floods, droughts, tornadoes, landslides, riverbank erosion, and salinity intrusion to earthquakes, Bangladesh is now regarded as a leader in disaster risk reduction and a model for proactive measures in disaster management.⁵⁵ At the same time, it is leading global climate dialogues and currently serving its second term as chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) and Vulnerable Twenty (V20) Group.⁵⁶ All these illustrate Bangladeshi people’s perseverance, diligence in the face of disasters and their spirit of resilience for any sort of uncertainties. The country’s Liberation War was the epitome of bravery of the people, where they fearlessly fought against the Pakistani Military and sacrificed lives for the country’s independence. Age-old values and beliefs have made Bangladeshi people humble, diligent and optimistic, as well as enabling them to grow with sufferings. As a true nation-state, Bangladesh and its people are growing with cultural and social values and religious tolerance.⁵⁷

The number of renowned people of Bangladesh in their particular arena is not small. Though very few are well-known beyond Bangladesh, they have received global recognition. To name the few include Founding Father of the Nation

⁵⁵ Swarna Kazi, “Bangladesh’s 50 Years Journey to Climate Resilience”, *PreventionWeb*, 12 November 2020, available at <https://www.preventionweb.net/news/view/74702>, accessed on 09 January 2021.

⁵⁶ Climate Vulnerable Forum, “Bangladesh: Chair of Climate Vulnerable Nations’ Forum”, available at <https://thevcf.org/our-voice/news/bangladesh-chair-of-climate-vulnerable-nations-forum/>, accessed on 09 January 2021.

⁵⁷ S. M. Hanif, “Branding Bangladesh”, *The Executive Times*, 12 September 2012.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Rebel Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam, Fakir Lalon Shah, Hason Raja, Nobel laureate and proponent of microcredit Muhammad Yunus, Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, fashion designer and international entrepreneur Bibi Russell, film director Tareque Masud, cricketer Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, Mustafizur Rahman, famous table tennis player Zobera Rahman Linu, archer Ruman Shana and so on. According to Sabbir Ahmed, many Bangladeshis are well-known globally and representing the country in the outside world, thus helping improve the country's image.⁵⁸ Many Bangladeshi students abroad and Bangladeshi-origin skilled workers, doctors, and engineers, i.e., Non-Resident Bangladeshis (NRBs), are doing very well and have been rewarded on a high note, being the brand ambassador of Bangladesh. Abul Kalam Azad believes that foreign ambassadors and high commissioners, media representatives, foreign high officials, employees, and employers in different international organizations in Bangladesh also carry perceptions of Bangladesh, which are crucial in building a positive image of the country and reflect its people-centric idea of nation branding.⁵⁹ People in all strata of the nation are sports-loving. In the sports world, some players, even with several predicaments, have brought glory to the nation. Keeping the abovementioned personalities in front, Bangladesh has the scope to build a positive image worldwide.

3.2 *Export*

Export of Bangladesh, both goods and services, has traversed a long way since the country's independence. Export of human resources has given Bangladesh a wide range of recognition, and the country has been among the top 10 recipients of remittances in the world.⁶⁰ The apparel industry alone constitutes more than 80 per cent of the total export earnings of Bangladesh.⁶¹ The remaining exports include leather, jute, tea, fish, handicraft, dry food, digital device, pharmaceuticals, etc., with a global reputation. Being one of the largest suppliers of Readymade Garments (RMG) in competitive markets of the US and Europe and with its competitive labour cost, Bangladesh is set to be a potential place for global retail giants like Wal-Mart, Tommy Hilfiger, etc. "Made in Bangladesh" tags in RMG showcased in the US and European retail stores have helped build a perceived brand image of

⁵⁸ Authors' interview with Professor Dr. Sabbir Ahmed, Department of Political Science University of Dhaka, May 2021.

⁵⁹ Authors' interview with Dr. Abul Kalam Azad, former professor, Department of International Relations, Jahangirnagar University and part-time faculty, North South University, April 2021.

⁶⁰ Niall McCarthy, "These Countries are the World's Top Remittance Recipients", World Economic Forum, available at <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/05/infographic-what-are-the-world-s-top-remittance-recipients/>, accessed on 17 June 2021.

⁶¹ Bangladesh Bank, "Commodity-wise Export Receipts", available at https://www.bb.org.bd/econdata/export/exp_rcpt_comodity.php, accessed on 19 January 2021.

the country.⁶² Domestic labels, like Amber Lifestyle, OCode, Smartex, Sara, Rise, Sailor, Yellow, Menz Club, Cats Eye, Aarong, etc., are also expanding their footprint in the country's fast increasing fashion retail segment; an auspicious sign to brand Bangladesh's fashion industry through its local brands.⁶³ Branding in clothing is vital to have precaution against the growing price race and transform Bangladesh's backbone industry into a global image.

In addition to RMG, the "Made in Bangladesh" tag in the locally manufactured mobile handset is now to shine.⁶⁴ Recently, people are also searching for good-quality Bangladeshi handsets beyond renowned brands. This is something to noticed globally. Like Tata in India, some brands are for locals first, reaching out on the global stage. In partnership with Chinese company Dongfeng Motor Group Limited (DFG), Bangladesh Auto Industries Limited has taken initiative to produce electronic cars in Bangladesh and wished to reach out globally in the name of the Bangladeshi brand. Electronic car or gadget (e.g., smartphone) and brand (e.g., Walton⁶⁵) with the "Made in Bangladesh" tag can now go to global reach.

3.3 *Investment and Immigration*

Investment and immigration are two in one tag, which is highly relevant to any nation's branding endeavour. In addition to tremendous economic growth, in recent times, Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in areas like transition towards better governance, self-sustaining food production, empowerment of women, contribution to international peacekeeping, providing positive entrepreneurial and small business ecosystem, and social safety net programmes.⁶⁶ The country is already in lower-middle-income strata, graduated from lower-income strata in 2015, and targets to become a higher-middle-income country in 2031 and subsequently a developed nation by 2041. It is right on the track to graduate from Least Developed Countries (LDC) status to developing country status by 2026. The World Economic League Table 2021 by the Centre for Economic and Business Research (CEBR) projected that Bangladesh's economy would be the 25th largest economy in the world

⁶² Mohammad Navid Safiullah, "Branding Bangladesh", *The Diplomat*, 02 October 2017, available at <https://thediplomatinspain.com/en/2017/10/branding-bangladesh/>, accessed on 14 January 2021.

⁶³ Apparel Resources, "How Bangladesh Industry is Emerging in Fashion Retail", 12 March 2020, available at <https://bd.apparelresources.com/business-news/retail/bangladesh-industry-emerging-fashion-retail/>, accessed on 11 January 2021; Fakhrul Islam Harun, "Bangladeshi brands worldwide", *ICE Business Times*, 01 April 2014; Kamal et al., op. cit.

⁶⁴ "Made in Bangladesh' Smartphones to Rule the Roost Soon", *The Daily Star*, 28 January 2020.

⁶⁵ In the "Asian Brand and Leadership Summit" held in Dubai, Walton Motorcycles, Beximco Pharma and Shinepukur Ceramics were named as Asia's "most promising brands", for details, please see Harun, op. cit.

⁶⁶ Hasnat and Steyn, 2017, op. cit.; Hasnat and Steyn, 2020, op. cit.; Mark Tully, "Bangladesh: From a 'Basket Case' to A Robust Economy", *The Hindustan Time*, 24 October 2020.

in the next 15 years, outshining countries like Malaysia, Hong Kong, Singapore, etc.⁶⁷ Table 1 shows how Bangladesh’s economy has been growing since 2005, along with projected growth in next 15 years.

Table 1: The Size of the Economy of Bangladesh from 2005 to 2035⁶⁸

Bangladesh	2005	2010	2019	2020	2021	2025	2030	2035
GDP, local currency bn (constant price)	4,523	6,071	11,058	11,478	11,983	15,979	21,893	29,995
GDP, US\$ bn (constant price)	86	129	290	301	313	420	594	855
GDP, US\$ bn (current price)	69	115	303	318	338	488	760	1,203
Rank	57	59	42	41	41	34	28	25

Bangladesh is now focussing on attracting investment in hard and soft infrastructure. Construction of 100 Special Economic Zones (SEZs), Padma bridge, metro and underground rails, elevated expressway, electricity plants, deep-sea port, Karnaphuli tunnel, industrial park, and modernization of Chattogram and Mongla ports are few of many instances of ongoing projects of hard infrastructure. Not only infrastructure but also the manufacturing sector is accordingly going under a positive transformation. A deal has been signed in January 2021 to set a Hyundai car manufacturing plant in Bangladesh.⁶⁹ Royal Enfield, the UK’s famous motorcycle brand, has also shown interest to enter Bangladesh’s market.⁷⁰ There has been an increasing trend in FDI flow from 2009 to 2018 (illustrated in Table 2). Besides, Bangladesh is gradually becoming a key place in the market of shipbuilding and Western Marine Shipyard, which is attracting foreign investment. With a notion of “Digital Bangladesh”, the country is capturing telecom boom, thriving of online-based business done by mobile financial services. Tech giants like Amazon and Wal-mart are planning to enter Bangladesh; and, the former, along with Google, has already received their VAT registration.⁷¹ Different start-ups are growing. Mobile and internet users, online-based different services, export of Information Technology (IT), and mobile banking are increasing. Introducing web portal “*Tottho Batayan*”, mobile app “*Alapon*”, social and lifestyle app “*Kotha*”,⁷² e-passport, machine

⁶⁷ Centre for Economic and Business Research, “World Economic League Table 2021”, available at <https://cebr.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/WELT-2021-final-23.12.pdf>, accessed on 16 January 2021.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ “Fair Technology to Set up Hyundai Car Manufacturing Plant in Gazipur”, *The Daily Star*, 06 January 2021.

⁷⁰ “Royal Enfield motorbikes rev up for Bangladesh market”, *Prothom Alo English*, 18 January 2021.

⁷¹ Ibrahim Hossain Ovi, “Walmart and Amazon to Start Operating in Bangladesh in 2020”, *The Dhaka Tribune*, 08 September 2018; “Google, Amazon Register for VAT”, *The Daily Star*, 31 May 2021.

⁷² This app is introduced by Kotha Technologies Limited of Bangladesh and going to embark on a glorious maiden voyage from the country to Sri Lanka. It aims to be a continental superpower in social networking service. For more information, see Mahmudul Hasan, “Kotha App Spreads Wings to Sri Lanka”, *The Daily*

readable passport (MRP), smartcard, making of digital security law to oversee virtual misdeeds, establishment of hi-tech and software technology park, IT training and incubation centre, starting of digital device production and export are some developments, in which, investors have a close eye. In recent times, countries like Norway have expressed their interest in improving Bangladesh’s Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector.⁷³ Sayema Haque Bidisha believes that the achievements and development efforts of Bangladesh on the economic front have already been recognized by development partners of the country, which is a great advertisement for branding the country’s image worldwide.⁷⁴ The following table shows FDI flow in Bangladesh since 2009.

Table 2: FDI Flow in Bangladesh⁷⁵

Year	Foreign Direct Investment (in million US\$)
2009	700
2010	913
2011	1,136
2012	1,293
2013	1,599
2014	1,551
2015	2,235
2016	2,333
2017	2,152
2018	3,613
2019	1,597

Bangladesh’s power in attracting people for employment, residence, and education in the country is developing. For instance, the total Indian investment in Bangladesh was US\$ 3.11 billion in 2020, which is expected to reach US\$ 09 billion in the future.⁷⁶ The number of Japanese companies working in Bangladesh has tripled over the last decade.⁷⁷ Foreign nationals, by individual capacities or affiliated with multinational companies, are working in different development areas.⁷⁸ These certify that Bangladesh’s position to attract capital investment and talent is growing. This is

Star, 27 August 2020.

⁷³ “Norway to Support Bangladesh in ICT”, *The Daily Sun*, 01 July 2020.

⁷⁴ Authors’ interview with Dr Sayema Haque Bidisha, Professor, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka, May 2021.

⁷⁵ “UNCTADStat”, available at <https://unctadstat.unctad.org/wds/TableViewer/tableView.aspx>, accessed on 12 January 2021.

⁷⁶ “Indian FDI to Reach \$9b in Future”, *The Daily Star*, 23 January 2020.

⁷⁷ Jagaran Chakma, “Bangladesh: A Perfect Destination for Japanese Firms”, *The Daily Star*, 23 February 2020.

⁷⁸ Shamsul Huq Zahid, “Foreign Workers in the Country”, *The Financial Express*, 21 July 2019.

for the last ten years' development in a business scenario. Absence of uncertainty in the political climate and the government's bold initiative in developing mega infrastructure have helped boost the country's economy. As people's spending ability is rising, so is the growing domestic market. Consequently, Japan is likely to invest more in Bangladesh. The next five years are crucial. Infrastructure related all works are likely to be completed; hoping it will attract FDI from G-7 countries, particularly from Japan.

Bangladesh is also working on outbound investment for building a good image of the nation. Since independence, it has been receiving foreign assistance from development partners. It is now in the process to contribute to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) worth BDT 8.21 crore (approximately US\$ 968,000) for Somalia's debt relief.⁷⁹ Very recently, Bangladesh accepted Sri Lanka's request to provide the country with at least US\$ 200 million loans from its foreign exchange reserves under a currency swap deal.⁸⁰ These initiatives showcase the country's tremendous economic development in the last couple of decades that would uplift its image on the global stage.

3.4 *Culture and Heritage*

Culture and heritage are two of the most vital areas for Bangladesh to brand itself. Arts and culture, as part of the country's effort to branding, become handy in developing a certain nation's image and reach its desired brand vision.⁸¹ In the words of Abul Kalam Azad,

“Culture and heritage are a sort of testimony to reflect the distinctiveness of a particular destination or place made by both nature and human. With a unique geographical location, Bangladesh enjoys a diversified colourful heritage and culture...as long as Bangladesh maintains quality culture and heritage; their global outreach will help the country to brand internationally.”⁸²

The country's rich heritage is formed by its people and their lifestyle, land, rivers, and so on. Ancient civilization, monuments, antiquities and culture with hospitality and religious harmony have immensely contributed to the heritage of Bangladesh and beyond. According to M Badruzzaman Bhuiyan, the hospitality of Bangladeshi people is a distinctive cultural trait that, as a whole, represents a positive image of the country.⁸³ The Bangalee culture has also been enriched by

⁷⁹ Rejaul Karim Byron, “Bangladesh Comes to Somalia's Rescue”, *The Daily Star*, 06 February 2020.

⁸⁰ “Financial Assistance to Sri Lanka: Bangladesh's Economic Rise Lauded by Indian Media”, *The Daily Star*, 30 May 2021.

⁸¹ Ahn and Wu, op. cit.; Anholt, 2006(b), op. cit.

⁸² Authors' interview with Professor Dr Abul Kalam Azad, op. cit

⁸³ Authors' interview with Professor Dr M Badruzzaman Bhuiyan, Department of Tourism and Hospitality

the artistic expression of weaving, pottery, terracotta sculpture, etc.⁸⁴ It is nature, history, tradition, and custom that has given a unique shape to the country's cultural identity. Age-old tradition and culture of the country "are reflected in a diverse heritage, e.g., archaeological site, sculpture, stone and terracotta, architecture, archive, museum, library, classical music, song and dance, painting, drama, folk art, festival, sports, and ethnic cultural activity."⁸⁵ Bangladesh's culture is amply reflected through its various forms of music, drama, films, and artistic works. Traditional programmes like *Jatra*, *Pala Gaan*, *Jari Gaan*, *Sari Gaan*, *Kobi Gaan*, *Gazir Gaan*, and *Alkap Gaan* constitute a major portion of the country's domestic cultural traits, which is also enriched by a wide array of folk songs like *Bhawal*, *Bhatiali*, *Baul*, *Marfati*, *Murshidi*, etc. The small ethnic minorities of the country like Chakma, Marmas, Khasi, Tripuras, Manipuri, Murangs region also have their form of musicals, which are also an important part of Bangladeshi cultures.⁸⁶ A major aspect of Bangalee culture is its rich literature nurtured by then Muslim rulers' support in the mediaeval period. While Rabindranath Tagore is an indispensable part of Bangalee culture, the modern Bengali literature has also been enriched by the works of Kazi Nazrul Islam, Mir Mosharraf Hossain, Michael Madhusudan Datta, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and so on, whose literary contribution reached beyond the border of the country.⁸⁷ Their works are translated into quite a few languages and thus have a global outreach.

Not only literature, art and festivals have contributed immensely to Bangladesh's culture and heritage too. Renowned artist Zainul Abedin, followed by Quamrul Hasan, S. M. Sultan, and Shafiuddin Ahmed, has embellished national heritage.⁸⁸ Important festivals and traditions of the country, which have a global outreach, include *Pohela Boishakh* (1st day of Bengali new year), Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's historic 7th March Speech and the Language Martyrs' Day. Bangabandhu's 7th March Speech is now a part of the World's Documentary Heritage recognized by UNESCO.⁸⁹ 21st February is now recognized as International Mother Language Day. Other notable festivals include

Management, University of Dhaka, June 2021.

⁸⁴ Rahman, op. cit.

⁸⁵ S. M. Shamim Akter, "Country Report: Bangladesh - Governmental Mechanism for Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage", available at https://www.accu.or.jp/ich/en/training/country_report_pdf/country_report_bangladesh_02.pdf, accessed on 20 July 2020; Kausik Bandyopadhyay, "Cricket as Nationalist Obsession: ICC World Cup 2011 and Bangladesh as a Host Nation", *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2013, pp. 19-32; Rahman, op. cit.

⁸⁶ Rahman, op. cit.

⁸⁷ Embassy of Bangladesh, Doha, Qatar, available at <https://bdembassydoha.org/bangladeshi-culture.html>, accessed on 20 July 2020.

⁸⁸ Abdul Hamid, "Branding Bangladesh", available at https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1684326, accessed on 28 July 2020.

⁸⁹ "UNESCO Recognises Bangabandhu's 7th March speech", *The Daily Star*, 31 October 2017.

Bijoy Dibosh (Victory Day), *Shadhinota Dibosh* (Independence Day), as well as religious festivals like Eid-ul-Fitr, Eid-ul-Adha, Durga Pooja, Buddha Purnima, etc. These festivals mark the rich heritage and culture of Bangladesh.⁹⁰ Besides, every year, Bangladesh hosts *Biswa Ijtema*, the second largest Muslim congregation after *Hajj*, participated by Muslims worldwide. What is more, the culinary tradition⁹¹ of Bangladesh is distinctive and palatable, through which the country can brand itself in the global arena as well.

There are some archaeological sites representing early history of the country. Paharpur, Sitakot, Mainamati, Vasu-Bihar, Mahasthangarh, Kantaji Temple, etc., are a few to name. Bangladesh, throughout its history, embraces several traditions and cultures. It has been recognized “as a land full of nature’s bounties as evident from vast expanses of its lush crop fields, borders and hills covered with virgin forests, innumerable rivers and their tributaries, making it the world’s largest delta.”⁹² It has also been termed “as a land of emerald and silver, a garden fit for kings or a paradise among countries.”⁹³ Bangladesh has frequently enticed the then settlers, merchants, and conquerors. They have made the land a place of different races and cultures. These aforesaid, including food culture, diverse culture of tribal people, and games like world archery or cricket, can be agents of shaping outer perception about Bangladesh.

3.5 Tourism

Tourism in Bangladesh is yet to capitalize on potential, and the number of tourists visiting the country every year is undersized. However, the country has experienced a growing number of visitors every year since 2016 after the government declared the year as “Tourism Year” and took a three-year plan to promote its tourism sector. Bhuiyan finds that every aspect of tourism is present in Bangladesh that the country could utilize to attract tourists from worldwide.⁹⁴ Table 3 shows the number of foreign tourists visiting Bangladesh since 2015.

⁹⁰ Tinne, op. cit.; Hassan et al., op. cit.

⁹¹ According to Janine Chi, food plays an increasingly important role in how governments want others to imagine their nations. For details, see Janine Chi, “Consuming Rice, Branding the Nation”, *Contexts*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 2014, pp. 50-55.

⁹² Pathak, op. cit.

⁹³ Embassy of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, Jakarta, available at: http://www.bdembassyjakarta.org/bangladesh2013/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=55&Itemid=63&lang=id, accessed on 31 July 2020.

⁹⁴ Authors’ interview with Professor Dr M Badruzzaman Bhuiyan, op. cit.

Table 3: Number of Foreign Tourists Visited Bangladesh⁹⁵

Year	Number of Tourists	Per cent Increase Compared to Previous Year
2019	323,295	21
2018	267,209	12.5
2017	237,452	30
2016	182,469	-

Bangladesh, a riverine country, is a blend of forests, beaches, wilds, and monuments. In addition to river resorts such as nearby Padma and Jamuna and waterfalls in Sylhet, Bandarban and Chattogram, the country is a party to the Bay of Bengal. It has a long, beautiful beach. Sands, cliffs, waves of the beach and its fascinating view have made Cox’s Bazar an important tourist spot. Other beaches in Kuakata, Inani, St. Martin’s Island, Parki, and Patengha have also earned tourist interest. In that context, Bangladesh is working to be associated with the Asia Pacific Ocean Cruise. There are eye-catching hilly regions (e.g., Chattogram Hill Tracts) with not only scenic beauty but also habitats of different small ethnic minorities. These are considered tourist attractions. Another notable attraction is the Sundarbans, the largest single block mangrove forest in the world and a UNESCO world heritage site that is home to the endangered Royal Bengal tiger. Two other UNESCO declared world cultural heritage sites, Paharpur and Bagerhat Group of Monument, are popular tourist destinations in Bangladesh as well. Archaeological sites, like Mahasthangarh, Lalmai Mainamati, historical monuments and venerable shrines, Lalbagh Fort, Sonargaon, Ahsan Manjil, Shaat Gambuj Mosque, Hussaini Dalan, Dhakeshwari Temple, Wari-Bateshwar, etc., can be major tourist attractions. It is to note that Bangladesh has proposed UNESCO to include Mahasthangarh, Lalmai Mainamati, Lalbagh Fort, Halud Vihara, and Jagaddala Vihara in the world heritage sites list.

Some global actors marked Bangladesh as a tourist place in a positive way. Worldwide New7Wonders of natural campaign enlisted the Sundarbans and Cox’s Bazar among more than 440 sites from 220 states. With just 27 sites, Sundarbans was one of the final competitors. This has induced Bangladesh to continue a tourism-centric identity “Beautiful Bangladesh”. With cost-effective transport and lodging, geographic propinquity to tourist places like India, Bhutan or Nepal, Bangladesh has scope to become a transit tourist place. There is huge scope to increase investment, both in public and private platforms, in the tourism sector. Once the global economy recovers after the covid-19 pandemic, tourists and visitors in Bangladesh will undoubtedly rise. Bangladesh’s

⁹⁵ Bangladesh Tourism Board, cited in Sohel Hossain Patwary, “Bangladesh Draws 0.3m Foreign Tourists in 2019”, *The Daily Sun*, 13 January 2020.

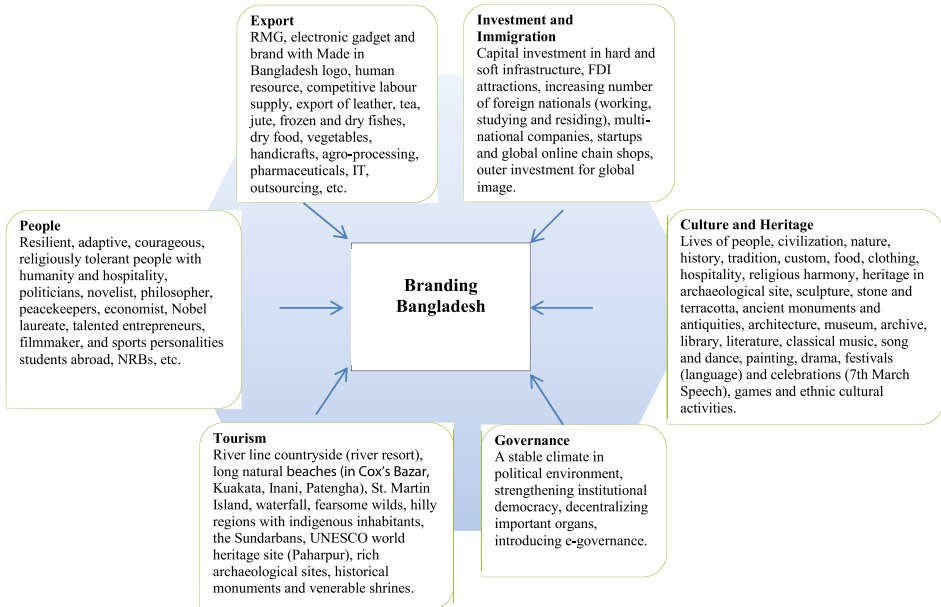
rich food culture is another major strength that can be exploited to pursue culinary tourism, which will help create a distinct brand identity for the country.

3.6 *Governance*

Governance, particularly good governance, helps a nation to improve its global image and reputation, and guides the nation-state to be branded positively. Unfortunately, the image of Bangladesh in its governance issue is yet to be impressive worldwide. It was ranked 115th in 2019 in the US-based World Justice Project (WJP), Rule of Law Index 2020. This indexing aims to rank and compare nations to express globally how the rule of law is practised and observed. It examines nations' performance on the rule of law based on some indicators. These are "constraints on government powers, absence of corruption, open government, fundamental rights, order and security, regulatory enforcement, civil justice, and criminal justice". In order and security, the performance of Bangladesh has improved. On the other seven, the situation has worsened. Even in the World Bank's governance situation survey conducted on the governance issue, Bangladesh's score has not been satisfactory.

There are, however, improvements that have been recognized globally. Democracy is yet to be robust, but for almost a decade, Bangladesh is experiencing a stable political environment and a steady government that has taken several sincere initiatives. Of those, strengthening democratic organs and promoting the concept of good governance are noticeable. Decentralization is in practice to spread out democracy at grassroots level. Also, the country is moving towards mobile and internet-based governance, i.e., e-governance. By using smart devices, e-governance is likely to provide government services at people's doorstep. Bangladesh's contribution to global governance is also reflected through its participation in peacekeeping missions. Peacekeepers deployed in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKOs) in different global destinations are viewed as a promoter of global peace. For long, the country has been vividly participating in UNPKOs and regarded as one of its largest contributors. Bangladeshi peacekeepers are now serving in some of the conflict hotspots, e.g., the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Lebanon, the Central African Republic (CAR), South Sudan, Mali, Western Sahara, and so on. The above-mentioned achievements are expected to help lessen the governance-related negative impression of Bangladesh and attain a good global image.

Figure 3: Nation Branding Hexagon for Bangladesh



4. Nation Branding Process and Branding Bangladesh

The paper employs the nation branding model of F. Msele to discuss the nation branding process of Bangladesh.

4.1 *Assessing Perception of a Nation*

It means evaluating what sort of achievements, existing qualities and visions a nation carries with for reinvigorating better perception and keeping bad aspects aside. Bangladesh can emphasize more on infrastructure development, steady economic growth, Millennium Development Goals (MDG) achievements, approaching towards middle-income-countries (MICs) or what is coming up next and perhaps filter out negative perceptions about poverty, natural calamity, sudden bad incidents, etc. Anholt opines that the image of a nation requires evaluating “whether it is known, to whom it is known and in what ways it is known (good or bad).”⁹⁶ Bangladesh is well-known for its cost-effective and youth workforces and even more for RMGs.⁹⁷ These can be branded positively.

⁹⁶ Mugobo and Ukpere, op. cit.

4.2 *Establishing Working Group*

This working group should be an arrangement of top-level governance promises, with public funding and relevant stakeholders, including citizens, which is to be guided by a coordinating body. The process of branding Bangladesh has to be preceded by its top leadership, the Prime Minister (PM), to facilitate the country's economic interests. The PM office can be the coordinating agency. Required tasks are to segregate, evaluate and streamline. For Bangladesh, representatives from communications ministries and public affairs departments can be included in the group to produce the list of country achievements and natural advantages. MoFA has a vital role to play in highlighting the appropriate image of Bangladesh through proper branding. Arranging international fairs is an effective way of showcasing a state's quality products and services to potential global consumers and audiences. Bangladesh has enormous opportunities to stand out among its peers in various sorts of fairs, e.g., international trade fairs at home and abroad. Exhibition in diverse platforms to value the "Made in Bangladesh" tag, promoting rich cultural heritage, business, and investment scopes through customized measures are also powerful ways of showcasing the country. Officials from external publicity division of MoFA, concerned public agencies (e.g., Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, etc.), and private organizations, like Bangladesh Brand Forum (BBF) can be tasked to organize various joint events.

In the working group, experts from different strata (e.g., print and electronic media personality, designer, innovator, national celebrity, filmmaker, influential business delegate, NRBs, etc.) can be appointed. In the words of Domeisen, "media, educators and representatives from sports and art associations should also be part of nation branding working group."⁹⁸ NRBs have the opportunity to modify preconceived negative stereotypes by taking Bangladesh's successes to the forefront. Students and researchers abroad, from their positions, have the scope to typify the country's image, whether good or bad. On the other hand, media's role is to have a close eye, especially on global media, to modify negative views and circulate positive aspects, highlighting the recent success of Bangladesh. Arranging media campaigns worldwide, organizing international events, creating a partnership with influential global leaders and leading tycoons, and teaming up with multinational organizations are few examples where media can play a significant role in projecting future Bangladesh.

⁹⁸ Natalie Domeisen, "Is there a Case for National Branding?", *International Trade Forum Magazine*, 2003, available at <http://www.forumdecomercio.org/Is-There-a-Case-for-National-Branding/>, accessed on 31 July 2020.

The nation branding process of Bangladesh needs to be inclusive. Nevertheless, how many stakeholders will form a working group that can be considered inclusive needs to be addressed with proper care. There must be a core working group, and under that, there may be different need-based working groups. Representatives of the working group(s) must think of practising public diplomacy for branding Bangladesh.⁹⁹

4.3 *Identifying Nation's Competitiveness*

It is vital to reach international markets, stimulate trade and FDI as well as attract tourists in a globalized world. For Vaknin, a nation often uses and leverages some factors to be competitive: natural (e.g., geographical location) and acquired (e.g., literacy, skills, quality infrastructure) endowments, risk mitigation (e.g., credit history, insurance available to investors or exporters), and economic prowess (e.g., economic growth, access to global credit).¹⁰⁰ Strengths of Bangladesh are cost-effective workforce; strategic location, regional connectivity and worldwide access; expanding domestic and competitive product market, investment location with 170 million population and moderate purchasing capability; competitive cost of energy; proven export competitiveness; liberal FDI regime; SEZs with investment-friendly policy, etc. Bangladesh needs to communicate such features and competitive advantages effectively to its target audiences.¹⁰¹ Simultaneously, it must identify some prospective industries, breakthroughs, and historic accomplishments for nation branding and storytelling.

4.4 *Identifying Target Audience*

It aims at gaining a good image through steady communication with concerned global stakeholders to let them know how good a nation is. For Anholt, it is to be associated with predefined nation branding purposes, e.g., trade and politico-cultural allies, export destinations, academics, business visitors, etc.¹⁰² Citizens are to be attached to nation branding, and their living standards must also be improved. It will help citizens truly feel proud of their nations. The success of nation branding relies, to a larger extent, on how perception-oriented differences in a nation between

⁹⁹ Nation branding and public diplomacy are not distinct concepts; the former is a part of the latter and vice versa. Image, identity and foreign policy management of a nation fall under the purview of public diplomacy that is increasingly being practised as a tool to nation branding. Public diplomacy tactics range from media to cultural and educational programmes. See also Gyorgy Szondi, *Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding: Conceptual Similarities and Differences*, The Hague: Netherland Institute of International Relations, 2008.

¹⁰⁰ Sam Vaknin, "Nation Branding and Place Marketing", available at https://www.academia.edu/5085899/Nation_Branding_and_Place_Marketing, accessed on 24 July 2020.

¹⁰¹ Chowdhury et al., op. cit.

¹⁰² Anholt, 2006(b), op. cit.

a native and a foreigner can be minimized. Inclusion of local audiences in nation branding is thus crucial in the context. They are expected to be brand ambassadors of their nations in the course of their interactions with investors, tourists or visitors. Bangladesh requires differentiating and positioning itself with regard to targeting audiences, e.g., which markets are to target? It needs to emphasize expanding its relations with the outer world, mostly on trade and economic fronts. In that context, regional opportunities and global outreach are both crucial while targeting and positioning Bangladesh in its branding.

4.5 *Defining a Core Message and Establishing Brand Identity*

These usually help a nation to clarify its brand value to its global audience.¹⁰³ Nations are not equally important to each other, and for that, developing a core theme for a nation targeting its vital audience is a must. Clarity, consistency and credibility need to be there while developing the core message. National identity, distinctive selling proposition and competitive strengths are to be reflected in the message. Citizens' desires are also to be honoured in such messages. As an instance, the South African slogan, "Alive with Possibility", is related to its "Proudly South African" and "Rainbow Nation" concepts. Fan states that a nation's brand has to have a unique and strong identity.¹⁰⁴ How external audiences perceive a nation matters on its identity.¹⁰⁵ Slogans, like "Proudly South African", "Incredible India", or "Cool Britannia" can uphold a nation's identity to external audiences. Each theme assembles several aspects of a nation that often uses historical and politico-cultural heritage, scientific advancements and recent successes to shape its unique identity. For instance, the Victoria Falls worked for Zimbabwe just as pyramids worked for Egypt. A nation with more than an identity may create misperception in the audience mind. For example, the US carries "an identity of a stable democracy, peace and harmony."¹⁰⁶ At the same time, it wishes to be known as a global economic and military superpower. Different identities need watchful targeting of the audience and synchronizing of core messages.

The next Asian tiger, the future leader of the world, the land of indomitable spirits, the emerging economy of the region, indomitable Bangladesh, Bangladesh lessons for the world, Bangladesh moving towards tomorrow, beautiful Bangladesh, digital Bangladesh, Bangladesh in Booming Progress—whatever messages the words bear, it is for positioning Bangladesh in the world. In that case, with a motto—the

¹⁰³ Mugobo and Ukpere, op. cit.

¹⁰⁴ Fan, 2006, op. cit.

¹⁰⁵ Ross Bond, "Belonging and Becoming: National Identity and Exclusion", *Sociology*, Vol. 40, No. 4, 2006, pp. 609-626.

¹⁰⁶ Mugobo and Ukpere, op. cit.

capacity of thinking global while preserving local heritage—meaning local brand to global outreach, i.e., gradual change, Bangladesh’s message has to have clarity and uniqueness, and it must be globally recognizable. Based on necessity, Bangladesh may adopt an umbrella concept, and under that, different core messages and related branding actions can be synchronized.

4.6 *Assessing Readiness*

It is an essential step in nation branding. It is necessary to fathom the country’s readiness to brand itself that requires adequate time and capital investment. A long-term vision and planning are essential to make nation branding a successful endeavour. Ideally, a country’s branding efforts need more than a decade to become fruitful and demand the whole nation, including its citizens, and business sectors, to be integrated. Campaigns on nation branding also demand sufficient monetary flows. Without properly assessing those, efforts to brand the country may not be successful. Bangladesh has already taken different steps to start nation branding that includes practising economic diplomacy to explore markets for its exports. The country is now in the process of developing a renowned nation brand to have a global position for its “Made in Bangladesh”. It so far has started the campaign on nation branding, listing achievements and natural advantages, finding core assets, showcasing exportable goods (with attractive trade facilitation instruments) and heritages to foreign delegates, showing documentaries on rich history and culture in exhibitions, taking part in international events (e.g., World Economic Forum [WEF]), starting advertising, direct marketing, personal selling, etc.¹⁰⁷ Through digital outreach by using frontier technologies like blockchain, Bangladesh is proving that youth are adaptive with such technological innovation to reap benefits from the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This may be the manifestation of the nation’s capability of branding digitally. Proper assessment of those initiatives will help the country to chalk out the plan of branding Bangladesh and make it effective.

4.7 *Measuring Progress of Nation Branding*

It aims at evaluating and making sure that the whole nation branding process is developing consistently with a predefined plan. As nation branding is quite a complex process and factors related to it may often change, Bangladesh needs to monitor the progress of the process constantly to have procedural and programme-oriented corrections from time to time.

¹⁰⁷ Harun, op. cit.

Despite being comprehensive in nature, Msele's model that has been used is not without limitations. The nation branding process of Msele is like a one-size-fits-all concept. It disregards sociopolitical, topographical and economic variations among states. It will not be practical to think that the same process can be applied to Australia and Bangladesh and bear equal fruits. Though Msele's process, compared to that of Hassan and Mahrous, or Torres, is quite inclusive, a weak side of the model is that it lacks a theoretical framework to support the process of nation branding in varied setups thoroughly.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, it is important for the country to take those limitations into cognizance while practising the nation branding process following the model.

5. Concluding Remarks

In a competitive world, every nation hopes to brand itself. Engaging in proactive branding is highly essential to be globally positioned and equally competitive. Whatever process a nation takes, it is crucial to monitor, evaluate, and change nation branding programmes if necessary. Nation branding needs desire, commitment, time, ample fund, coherent and continuous effort to be fruitful. Now, it is more than a necessity. Branding a nation like Bangladesh has already suffered long. It is due to the lack of comprehensive measures to portray a good image and reputation globally. Re-branding Bangladesh through highlighting the country's socioeconomic achievements is thus vital to change its image. The government of Bangladesh has begun to showcase its global attainments and competitive strengths to an increasing number of international audiences. Sharing a common goal or identity by keeping a core message in mind will help to brand Bangladesh and its uniqueness. Hence, Local audiences, e.g., civil society, professionals, business community or even citizens, are to own nation branding.

Believing that it is attainable, and Bangladesh is capable of repositioning itself from a good nation to a great nation. Commitment, hard work, and years-long desire are crucial to the belief. Usually, the more prominent the problem is, the more significant the opportunity remains. Bangladesh has to have a contingency plan. Like other emerging nations, it needs to go with its odds, e.g., poverty, population or pandemic. As branding needs relationship and trust through consistency, Bangladesh needs to prepare itself to exploit its untapped potential and available opportunities. Before that, it is crucial to meet a relevant need (both psychological and infrastructural), offering a superior value (how valuable it is in specific regards) and marketing the value of Bangladesh (globally or regionally at least) as a competitive brand. It is of paramount importance for the government to devise an effective yet

¹⁰⁸ Mugobo and Ukpere, op. cit.

recognizable (if possible) campaign of nation branding without any delay. When it comes to branding a nation, perhaps the most challenging task facing any destination is the quest for true differentiation. For that, the country needs to develop a true and distinct identity that will represent it globally.

A consistent process and a constant effort only can bear a fruitful nation branding for Bangladesh. Having a core message and maintaining a steady image to a diverse global audience are challenging. Building a good image or a better reputation for Bangladesh is quite tricky. Equally challenging is sharpening such an image among targeted stakeholders. Behavioural change and its internationalization are essential to modify the country's image. Every citizen of Bangladesh, from his/her respective position, requires playing an effective role in that regard. Everyone needs to hold an outlook that may create a change to facilitate a common aim of branding Bangladesh.

To sum up, upholding Bangladesh's image will be quite a challenging task. How the monetary constraint, inadequate institutions, inefficient management, natural and artificial adversities may interrupt branding Bangladesh can be the scope of future research work. Image or reputational issue ought to be a state policy of Bangladesh, not a promotional campaign for any particular agency. As nation-states are continuously searching for a global niche,¹⁰⁹ Bangladesh must have a branding approach at its policy level. State policies are to be aligned with the objectives of branding Bangladesh. Branding the nation can be intricate and take more than a decade to have visible outcomes, but there need to be constant efforts to make it a success.

¹⁰⁹ John Quelch and Katherine Jocz, "Opinion Piece Positioning the Nation-state", *Place Branding*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 2005, pp. 229-237.