

Tourism Marketing Challenges in Bangladesh

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Abstract: Though tourism sector of Bangladesh is perceived as very potential, the desired success has not been achieved in the last decades. Among the key factors for such backwardness, poor marketing performance has been identified by many researchers. This study was devoted to exploring the major challenges of the marketing tourism sector of Bangladesh. The triangulation approach has been used to carry out the research. Based on a structured questionnaire 390 respondents have been interviewed. Besides, an in-depth interview of 28 active stakeholders has been conducted. Required statistical tools and content analysis methods have been used to analyze the data. From the secondary sources, relevant data and information have also been incorporated. Most of the tourist spots are running under threats for different economic and natural aggressions. To protect those natural and heritage resources the absence of laws and its enforcement are the major challenges. Diverse pollution, centralization of everything, outbound trend, less effective promotional activities, non-identified potential market and many other issues have been traced out as the challenges for the sector. Establishing DMOs for the major tourism areas, giving budgetary and policy support to them, setting proper STP strategies and designing effective promotional tools can help to overcome these challenges in the long run.

Keywords: Tourism, Marketing, Bangladesh, Challenge, Tourism marketing.

1. Introduction

Bangladesh is usually perceived as a potential country for tourism development. Not only the mass people, active stakeholders of this sector bear the same attitude. They have uttered it frequently in public seminars and other discussion sessions. If this claim and belief would be true, are the achievements of the last five decades satisfactory? Different studies show that the outcomes are not mentionable. Then simply the question arises, what are the underlying causes of such backwardness? Undoubtedly many factors play a critical role behind such backwardness. A good number of studies have been conducted to understand the nature of the problems and to gain desired success in future (Ahmmed, 2013; Ali & Mohsin, 2008; Al-Masud, 2015; Hassan & Shahnewaz, 2014; Sarker & Begum, 2013; Sarker, 2014; Zahra, 2012). In that case, ‘tourism

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marketing' has been identified as a significant role player by the concerned researchers and active stakeholders.

To conduct this study, the researchers were interested to be introduced with the overall challenges of tourism marketing in Bangladesh. To address the key issue three objectives were set. Those are:

- (i) To explore the current scenario of tourism marketing in Bangladesh;
- (ii) To find out the bodies involved in the tourism marketing tasks; and
- (iii) To identify the major challenges of the marketing tourism sector of Bangladesh.

The concerned issues have been revealed and presented in the following sections.

1.1 Tourism Marketing

The intensity of competition, in all forms of business, is increasing all over the world. It is making the efficient and effective usage of 'marketing activities' inevitable to gain desired success (Tsiotsou & Ratten, 2010). For this reason, the modern marketers are being compelled to design the most effective marketing tools, techniques, and strategies. By nature the marketing of tourism products is much more challenging than the physical goods (Smith, 1994). The characteristics of those challenges are not the same in different destinations. As a growing economy, Bangladesh is also passing through a set of complex tourism marketing practicalities (Ali & Mohsin, 2008).

Tourism marketing can be understood as a systematic and coordinated effort exerted by NTOs (National Tourism Organizations) and other bodies to optimize the satisfaction of the tourists, by considering its sustainable growth (McCabe, 2014). Today, the life of mass people is highly influenced as well as affected by the marketing activities. It is said that the evidence of marketing activity surrounds us like the air we breathe and take for granted (Fyall, Morgan, & Ranchhod, 2009). For this reason, to operate any business successfully the usage of marketing has become unavoidable. The tourism sector of Bangladesh is not out of this trend as well. Generally five main sectors of travel and tourism (hospitality, attractions and events, transport, travel organizers and intermediaries, and destination organization) are taken into consideration in this regard (Fyall, Morgan, & Ranchhod, 2009). To get expected results, the tourism marketers must address all of the areas appropriately so that no loopholes can make the entire efforts futile.

1.2 Scenario of Tourism Marketing in Bangladesh

Today, most of the companies use marketing as a powerful weapon to achieve their organizational goals. Even the not for profit organizations have given much attention to the marketing functions. By nature, tourism has some characteristics which demand special care to market its products. Current marketing scenario of tourism sector in Bangladesh can be explained in the following way:

Product: Though small in size, nature has gifted Bangladesh a good number of natural resources. Besides, our earlier generations have established enormous historical and cultural resources (Horaira, & Devi, 2021). For this reason, the experts perceive that Bangladesh has huge potential for tourism development (Wahab & Majumder, 2011; Ferdaush & Faisal, 2014;

Mondal, 2017). But for many practical reasons she has not been able to ensure its maximum (or even desired) utilization yet. Most of the cases, the inherited resources are simply kept abandoned with less (or even without) care (Rosy, 2022; Ali, & Mohsin, 2008). If its potentiality would be realized properly, the tourism sector could be a significant role player in the socioeconomic development of Bangladesh (Bhuiyan, & Alam 2014). Only having the raw materials (or its supply) is not enough to grasp business benefits in this era of strict competition. Rather adding required value is much needed to make a product more attractive to the target consumers (Kotler, Bowen, Makens & Baloglu, 2017). In Bangladesh, the tourism related supplies (in most cases) are not efficiently converted into tourism products. As a result, the possibility of getting benefits from the sector is being untouched or wasted. Recently some initiatives have been taken by the responsible offices but those seem inadequate by the concerned stakeholders.

Beside the basic attractions, lack of fun or amusement activities is strongly felt in most of the tourist spots of Bangladesh. When visiting a new place, the tourists try to enjoy it as much as possible. On the other hand, the natural and cultural attractions can be visited only at day time (favorable conditions are also needed). But after reaching the spot, if they want to pass some quality time through fun and entertaining activities, generally no organized arrangements are kept for them. Here, most of the tourism product developments have been based on natural, cultural and historical resources. In many other countries, they have emphasized on creating (man-made) tourism attractions. The main reason is natural or cultural products can not be developed overnight (Turtureanu, 2005). But the amusement park, theme park, science city, museum, zoo, or Cineplex can be established where and when felt necessary. These products can attract different segments of the tourists. So the number of such items (especially near the existing spots) must be increased.

Tourism products are classified in different ways. The industrialist nations in tourism business have taken tourism business into a sophisticated level. But countries like Bangladesh are classifying tourism products in gross categories. From that point of view, Bangladesh is enriched with natural, historical and cultural resources (Rahman, 2012). Overall, there are good numbers of supplies but those are not properly developed as tourism products yet (Hassan & Shahnewaz, 2014). Besides, as a riverine country, it has a wider scope of developing water-based tourism products. Most of the existing products are not suitable for international tourists (Nekmahmud & Hassan 2021). For many days, the necessity of 'exclusive tourist zone' is felt but the progress is not mentionable yet. As the mass tourism tendency is high (Kalam & Hossen 2018)), the international tourists do not feel comfortable to visit most of the tourist spots. So offering additional attractions for them is highly needed. To enhance the overall brand image as a tourism destination, diverse product development always plays a very significant role.

Pricing: Overall price level of Bangladeshi tourism products, even a few years back, was much competitive in the international standard. During travel to Bangladesh, the foreigners would feel that the products and services are much cheaper here. Now the situation has been changed (Islam & Majumder 2015). The domestic tourists, in many cases, consider it as unnecessarily expensive (Rahman, 2012). For example, the hotels and resorts of tourism areas do charge high room rent and costly catering services. As per the costs of support services (e.g. salaries of the employees, house rent, price of used commodities), the charges must not be so high. For this reason, many

domestic tourists become demotivated to visit the local spots (Hai & Chik 2011). Rather, they do feel that by adding a little extra money, they can easily fly to renowned spots of Nepal, India, Sri Lanka or even Malaysia. Charging high prices in local spots is encouraging domestic tourists to fly abroad. The pricing issues are not integrated properly by any body which has negative impacts on tourist psychology (Khan, Islam & Hassan, 2020). Without minimizing the gap, it will be tough to rein in the outgoing trend of the Bangladeshi tourists. For this reason, the service providers should consider the 'pricing' issue, as one of the key challenges, in a more realistic way.

Place or Distribution: In case of infrastructure development, mostly are done to serve the mass people. Generally the infrastructures are not developed to support tourism ventures (Zahra, 2012). For example—All over the country, the road communication and transportation systems are not tourism friendly. On the other hand, many tourist attractions are not developed and communicated yet to the potential tourists and tour operators. As a result, they are not aware enough to visit or promote those virgin places (Hamid & Akter 2008). No specialized and passionate middleman, at home and abroad, has also been developed to take the tourism products of Bangladesh to its potential market. Moreover, tourism is not considered yet as the mainstream business in Bangladesh. The networks among the domestic and international tour operators, to promote the spots of Bangladesh, have not been developed yet. The interactions between government and private sector are not well established as well. For these reasons, the distribution of tourism products is not well organized. The tourists find the scope of traveling to the spots at their own will, no authority continuously motivates them to visit the place. If it would be more planned and carefully managed, the pace of the tourism development could be more dynamic.

Promotion: The overall arrangement for regular promotion is not adequate, organized, or even continuously taken care of. These tasks are not clearly assigned to any devoted team or authority. Lack of international connectivity is highly felt by the experts and experienced tourists. In this era of digital connectivity, regional, international, and global network building is highly required. To do so, the public and private sector should work together (Tinne 2013). But this integration has not been noticed yet. In fact, who is responsible for promoting the tourism sector—this is a great dilemma—in Bangladesh.

Private investors do it on a very limited scale which has no mentionable impact on the overall scenario. On the other hand, government bodies do it in a very occasional and inconsistent manner. When the competitors are always trying to reach the potential market by using different promotional tools, the irregular drives of Bangladeshi tourism can achieve little or none. A clear and vision oriented promotional campaign can boost tourism of a particular destination (Hudson & Thal, 2013). For example—different provinces of India hire international consultants and use celebrities to endorse their tourism products. It gives a consistent reminder to the target groups which bring positive outcomes in the long run (Cohen, Prayag & Moital, 2014). The overall scenario of promotional activities is like the following:

Advertising: Tourism of Bangladesh is always absent in the international media. Efforts of the concerned bodies are not also mentionable. Some occasional television commercials are noticed. For example—During the World Cup Cricket 2011 an advertisement (School of joy) was released. But it is not clear for whom, why the advertisements are suddenly telecasted. Before

promoting the spots, the service providers must be ready or well equipped to provide quality services to the customers. An integrated as well as continuous approach is needed to get desired results from advertisements within a given time (Kavoura, 2014). Voluntarily some media do it as part of their CSR activity. But to win in the competitive environment, the clearly identified and accountable authority should be attentive toward regular as well as credible advertisements. To motivate the domestic tourists, no regular advertisements are noticed.

Publicity: Print and electronic media do it regularly at their own interest and plan. In the case of print media, as the readers have much interest in traveling, most of them have a weekly page for sharing tourism relevant news, feature, opinion, and articles (Hasan, 2005). Some voluntary groups do it through social media (basically in Facebook and YouTube). Few web portals are also seen that promote tourism issues voluntarily. But those are not properly taken care of or supported (or even integrated) by anybody. So in many cases, after some days they become reluctant to maintain the group or page. Some public relation instruments are also used to cover the celebration of different occasions and special days of the concerned bodies like UNWTO, UNESCO, and MoCAT. On the other hand, sharing practical experiences of the tourists is a normal tendency. Even many of them feel it as a social obligation during the tour (McCabe, 2014). This powerful tool should be attempted to direct properly by the destination managers. Study shows that the consumers are more enthusiastic to share negative experiences than the positive ones (Morgan & Ranchhod, 2010). So if not taken proper steps to flow it positively, simply negative ones will be more viral.

Sales Promotion: Public and private organizations do it separately according to their own plan. No integrated or coordinated initiatives are noticed. For example—Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation does it occasionally for their motels and package tours. Other hotels and restaurants do it as per their own budget and schedule. They don't receive any directive or support from the concerned bodies. On the other hand, few international tourism fairs are organized by the responsible authorities that have a negative impact on domestic tourism. Because those events help the international tour operators to collect Bangladeshi tourists to visit their destinations.

Direct Marketing: Some industries use direct marketing effectively to gain desired success in their business operations (Xiang, Pan, & Fesenmaier, 2014). This is a very effective tool for the tourism industry as well. The distinguished hotel, motel, resort, and restaurant do it regularly. But those efforts are not highly connected (or linked) to the tourism development initiatives of Bangladesh. From the NTO, like many other nations, no such initiatives are noticed. Moreover, digital marketing is also used by the competitors of the international tourism market (Fyall, Garrod, & Tosun, 2007). But from Bangladesh perspective, till now it is not properly used in the tourism sector.

Process Management: During the tour generally the tourists do not bother who is supposed to perform the task. They simply expect the services will make the tour memorable. So, the relevant tasks must be developed in an integrated manner. To ensure customer satisfaction, the process must be easy, convenient, and credible. In the case of the private sector, some institutions are trying to maintain it but the public sector organizations are far away. Besides, till now the development of this sector is 'domestic' customer oriented. By considering the expectations of the international tourists, no mentionable development steps have been taken. In many cases,

tourism services (e.g. booking, ticketing, and payment) are processed manually. To make it digitized some steps have been taken but those are comparatively ‘complex’ in nature.

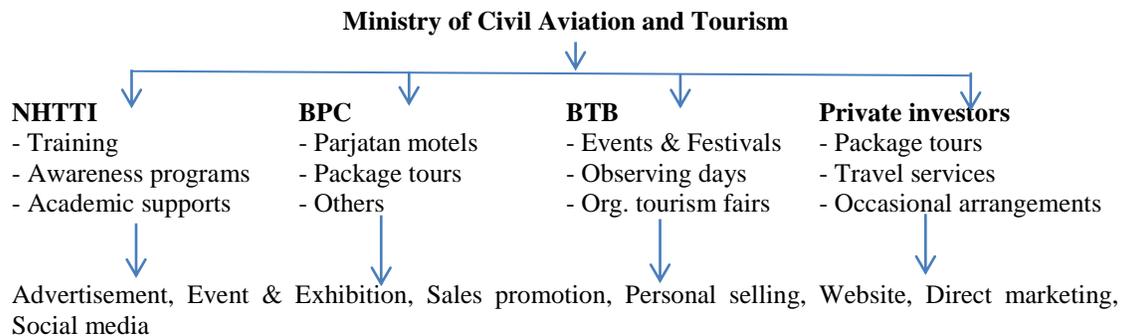
Physical Evidence: Most of the natural resources are kept as it is found. No mentionable steps have been taken to develop those like the competitors of neighboring countries. To offer any product to its target market, it must be developed according to the expectations of the tourists. Most of the cases, this task has not been done effectively. Besides, lack of cleanliness is apparent in the tourist spots. In most of the public places, the lack of cleanliness creates disturbance for the visitors. Even the tourist attractions like Kuakata sea beach, Volagonj stone quarry, Natore Rajbari are not properly taken care of. The local administration shows the causes of limited budget and shortage of manpower to decline their responsibilities.

People: Most of the jobs in the tourism sector are not considered here as prestigious. For this reason, the skilled people of this sector prefer to work abroad; less skilled manpower stays here for a long time. Even the number of such manpower is inadequate to meet the future demand. The existing workforces are not well trained for providing the specialized services as well. Human resources of this sector are not properly organized under any particular authority. No plan is taken to produce a certain number of skilled people for this industry within a given period of time (Hamid, 2019). No renowned training center or institution has been established to produce skilled manpower for this sector. There are some courses or academic programs but most of them are certificate oriented. They can do little to help the hospitality and tourism sector of Bangladesh.

1.3 Responsible Bodies for Tourism Marketing in Bangladesh

Selling products to a customer once in lifetime should not be the target of a marketer. In that case, the programs must be developed in such a way that the tourists become satisfied and feel better to visit the destination again. It is said that marketers should work for creating loyalty (McCabe, 2014). Now the question is: who is supposed to do that for the tourism sector of Bangladesh? In most developing countries, the government has to do everything for the development of the tourism sector. All departments work together to achieve the goals. For marketing, the government normally does funding; private sector sponsors to the events.

Figure I: Tourism marketing organizations of Bangladesh



Three bodies are somewhat related to the tourism marketing activities in Bangladesh. Those are: Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism (MoCAT), Bangladesh Tourism Board (BTB), and

Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC). NHTTI provides support to produce skilled manpower to the industry. As a national tourism organization now BTB should play the key role. But for their lack of manpower, budget, or even field level experience—they are not in a comfortable position. On the other hand, BPC has vast experience working on it but now they have been totally involved in business operations. Moreover, as two separate entities are working under a single Ministry, most of them are interested to work on civil aviation; the employees of the tourism section are less interested to plan and execute for long term success.

2. Research Methodology

The study was exploratory in nature. Primary and secondary both data have been collected. In case of primary data, qualitative and quantitative data have been used. Based on a structured questionnaire a survey has been conducted. As the population size is unknown, by using the accepted formula, the sample size has been determined as 384. Reserve questionnaires were kept 16. So data have been collected from 400 respondents. But for some problems (e.g. incomplete, marked several options, giving all the same answers) 10 questionnaires have been rejected for incompleteness. So the sample size has been 390.

From the four leading tourist areas of Bangladesh an equal number of respondents has been taken. The areas are: Cox’s Bazar, Sylhet, Khulna, and Dhaka (Sonargaon). Simple random sampling method has been used to select the respondents. To gain more insights, in-depth interviews have been conducted on 28 active stakeholders. They represent businessmen, researchers, local government representatives, journalists, tourist police, and others. The outcomes of the questionnaire survey and the in-depth interview have been integrated properly. To analyze quantitative data, statistical tools of SPSS software have been used; for the qualitative data, the content analysis method has been used.

Table I: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Gender	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid percent</i>	<i>Cumulative percent</i>
Male	236	60.5	60.5	60.5
Female	154	39.5	39.5	100.0
Age category (years)				
Up to 30	228	58.5	58.5	58.5
31-40	75	19.2	19.2	77.7
41-50	58	14.9	14.9	92.6
Above 50	29	7.4	7.4	100.0
Education				
Up to Secondary	27	6.9	6.9	6.9
Higher Secondary	54	13.8	13.8	20.8
Degree/Honours	231	59.2	59.2	80.0
Masters or above	78	20.0	20.0	100.0
Occupation of the respondents				
Govt. job	29	7.4	7.4	7.4
Private sector	103	26.4	26.4	33.8
Self-employed	81	20.8	20.8	54.6
Others	177	45.4	45.4	100.0
Main purpose of the visit				
Family tour	226	57.9	57.9	57.9
Official visit	21	5.4	5.4	63.3
Study tour	88	22.6	22.6	85.9

Others	55	14.1	14.1	100.0
Length of this tour				
1-2 day(s)	170	43.6	43.6	43.6
3-4 days	154	39.5	39.5	83.1
5-6 days	60	15.4	15.4	98.5
More than 6 days	6	1.5	1.5	100.0
Number of participant(s) in this tour				
Alone	9	2.3	2.3	2.3
2-3 persons	84	21.5	21.5	23.8
4-5 persons	142	36.4	36.4	60.3
More than 5	155	39.7	39.7	100.0
Used accommodation/housing facilities				
None	74	19.0	19.0	19.0
Hotel/Resort	230	59.0	59.0	77.9
Friend & Family place	76	19.5	19.5	97.4
Others	10	2.6	2.6	100.0
Average monthly income of the respondent				
Below 25,000	186	47.7	47.7	47.7
26,000-50,000	110	28.2	28.2	75.9
51,000-75,000	52	13.3	13.3	89.2
More than 75,000	42	10.8	10.8	100.0
Does the respondent keep separate budget for annual tours?				
Yes	136	34.9	34.9	34.9
No	186	47.7	47.7	82.6
Never thought	68	17.4	17.4	100.0
Overall frequency of tour (each year)				
Irregular	186	47.7	47.7	47.7
1-2 times	156	40.0	40.0	87.7
3-4 times	39	10.0	10.0	97.7
4 times +	9	2.3	2.3	100.0
International tour experience of the respondent				
Yes	123	31.5	31.5	31.5
No	267	68.5	68.5	100.0
Total	390	100.0	100.0	

3. Challenges Marketing Tourism Products in Bangladesh

Marketing of tourism is reasonably different from many other traditional goods and services. In developing countries like Bangladesh, integration among the marketing initiatives is the most challenging factor. Absence of a strong body for integrating the elements of tourism marketing is clearly evident to the practitioners. As a result, no one takes the ultimate responsibility of failure. The budgets are inadequate; no assessment of the taken initiatives is done by any authority. For this reason, the money is being spent but organized outcomes are not enjoyed by the tourism sector of Bangladesh.

3.1 Challenging factors of tourism marketing

The experts think that one of the most important and challenging issues affecting travel and tourism marketing is to understand where the tourists come from and what their travel patterns are (Hu, 1996). In the case of Bangladesh, no such research activities are operated to understand these issues. Based on some assumptions, the initiatives are taken which can not bring the desired success. Today the tourists consider at least four things: Cost of traveling, Value of the

accommodation, Quality of the restaurants, and Evening activities or night life (Kotler, Bowen, Makens & Baloglu, 2017). If one of these is weak, the total outcomes of the marketing programs become less effective. Moreover, tourism exists only as information at the point of sale, and cannot be sampled before the purchase decision is made (Soteriades & Avgeli, 2007). It is also said that tourism is a larger system rather than a simple economic exchange process between business and consumers (Jamrozy, 2007). So special attention is needed to address these distinctive challenges. The respondents were asked to give their opinion on some challenging factors (found from the literature review) on a five point Likert scale. The outcomes are as follows:

Table II: Challenging factors for the of tourism marketing in Bangladesh

Description	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Key tourist attractions are running under threats	390	3.4795	1.01826
Various pollutions cause tourist dissatisfaction	390	3.5821	.93059
Weaknesses of Acts/rules are understood/felt	390	3.6641	.93627
Existing laws are not properly executed	390	3.7385	.78763
Current promotional tools are not effective	390	3.3744	.92847
Travelling in this spot is much expensive	390	3.0436	1.05170
Attraction of the spot is gradually decreasing	390	3.2385	1.05726
Competitive domestic spots are being more attractive	390	3.3974	.88895
Visiting foreign spots are being more attractive	390	3.6513	.94389
There is no scope of giving feedback/complaint	390	3.4487	1.00189
Alternative scopes of amusement are reducing the appeal of physical traveling	390	3.5769	.92827
Valid N (list wise)	390		

Source: Primary Data

The rules and regulations related issues have gained much attention to the respondents. They think that there are noticeable weaknesses in relevant rules and regulations (3.6641). Either no Law or have major loopholes in the existing rules and regulations. Besides, the laws are not properly executed by the concerned bodies (3.7385). After that the trend of visiting foreign spots is increasing (3.6513) which has a negative impact on our tourism sector. Besides, the pollution (land, air, water etc) are causing dissatisfaction (3.5821) of the tourists. Alternative scopes of amusement (Internet, TV, Cineplex, Gaming zone etcetera) are creating apparent challenges (3.5769) for the tourism sector. Most of the respondents think that the key attractions are running under threats (3.4795). About half of them perceive that the promotional tools are not effective at all. On the other hand, the cost of traveling is not beyond their perceived level. Even the attractions are satisfactory (3.2385) and their fascinations are not being faded away toward the spot.

3.2 Other Challenges of Tourism Marketing in Bangladesh

From the published documents and opinion of the active stakeholders some other important challenges have been identified. Those are summarized below:

3.2.1 Development, Maintenance, and Support Services of Tourist Spots

Various development projects are taken regularly by the government. Infrastructure is one of the priority agenda of such development. But generally tourism does not get attention in such projects. As a result, in most cases, the transportation systems to and from the tourist spots are not well developed (Ahmmed, 2013). Besides, lacks of required development, ensuring its cleanliness, absence of proper maintenance are felt by the visitors. Managing pressure of mass tourists in the forest based or eco-tourism zones (Alam, Furukawa & Akter, 2010), stopping the beggars, and aggressiveness of the small traders become irritating. Sometimes they have nothing to do but leave the spot with dissatisfaction. In that case, negative word of mouth is generated. Potential tourists become negative or reluctant to visit that place. Nowadays the tourists have a positive attitude towards paying extra or following special rules and regulations to respect the environmental issues (Amin & Jahan, 2014). But those are not being used to ensure sustainable development of the tourist spots in Bangladesh.

The corporate bodies spend huge amounts of money to promote their own brands. In this case, the responsible organizations for tourism development suffer from limited budget and other policy support (Hassan & Burns, 2014). Even most of the allocations are spent for the routine expenditures (e.g. office rent, salary of employees, maintenance). In spite of having huge unemployment problems, the shortage of skilled and trained manpower is strongly felt in this sector. Even huge investments in resorts and hotels are not getting desired success for this reason. There are few institutions here which provide training on hospitality and tourism related skill development. The owners of hotel, resort, restaurant, travel agencies have expressed their deep concerns on this issue.

The scope of access to the information of the tourists is increasing rapidly. They can review and compare the alternative destinations by using smart phones. In this situation, to draw their attention, new products must be offered regularly. In the case of Bangladesh, the attractions are basically natural or historical. As India—enriched with wide natural diversity—is our neighbor; Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives are not so far away, it is really tough to keep the domestic tourists inside or attract international tourists based on these traditional products. The competitor tourism destinations work hard to improve their attractions. For this reason, they are creating artificial attractions so that the tourists can pass time with pleasure in the visited place. Even most of the private investors of Bangladesh are reluctant on this issue.

Development of the tourism sector of any country—especially the developing and underdeveloped countries—highly depends on the foreign investments. As they have much experience in working with the international tourism community, they can develop the right products and promote to the international tourism market. When they invest, at their own interest, they find the appropriate market and take all measures to attract them. Though they do these tasks at their own interest, in the long run, it helps to make the international tourists interested toward the destination.

3.2.2 Identifying Market and Ensuring its Satisfaction

No pragmatic research has been conducted to trace out the tourism resources of Bangladesh. To step forward, at first a destination should do it. With the expert personnel the survey should be carried out all over the country so that a detailed tourism map can be developed. Till to date we

have very little tourism data which should not be especially in this era of digital connectivity. The tourism places should be presented in such a way that any stakeholder can get the overall and detailed information about the spots and plans of the management in near future. Today the competitors are offering customized products according to the desire of the target market. Even which market we would like to grasp in future, the target is not clear. For this reason, the product development, its pricing, and promotional initiatives are not being very effective. The examples of Foy's lake and Bichnakandi can be taken into consideration. Through required development of layout, presentation, and physical evidence, Foy's lake is generating mentionable revenue each year. On the other hand, Bichnakandi is kept abandoned and the government is getting nothing from such a huge natural resource; the tourists are also being deprived from enjoying maximum benefits.

3.2.3 Outbound Trend of Bangladeshi Tourists

Many travel agents offer packages to visit India, Nepal, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia which are very lucrative. It encourages the outgoing tendencies of Bangladeshi citizens. The newspaper reports say about six lac people have visited outside Bangladesh in the Eid vacation of June, 2019 (Bangladesh Post, 2019)! Most of them have gone abroad for tourism purposes. From a small country like Bangladesh, undoubtedly it is a huge number. It also indicates that the trend of traveling of Bangladeshi people is increasing. On the contrary, for the lack of proper planning and promotional activities, we cannot attract international tourists. No mentionable initiatives are taken to encourage both groups to visit this beautiful land. If Bangladesh would take part in the international tourism fairs, at least the potential market would be aware about the tourist attractions of Bangladesh.

3.2.4 Community Involvement and Their Contribution

A place becomes popular when the local community feels high involvement toward the attractions. Through the development of a spot when the local people become economically, socially, and culturally benefitted—generally they do all out support. Otherwise, they become reluctant or even to some extent, create barriers to the development of the spot. On the other hand, the practice of taking all decisions centrally is a great problem in developing countries. As all decisions are taken centrally, the reality is ignored in many cases. Besides, the regional administration and local community do not feel their high involvement with the upcoming project.

4. Policy Suggestions

The first and foremost important task is to find out a specific organization that will be totally responsible for the marketing tasks of the tourism sector of Bangladesh. Then assigning the right people in the right place should get the priority to move forward from the stagnant situation. Besides, based on the findings of the study the following issues can be taken into consideration:

- The government tourism agencies should be empowered with proper budget allocation and other support services. BTB should be converted into an active organization. For marketing tasks they must be the sole authority. All other bodies should assist them. Its structural change is also needed. Expert and passionate professionals should be included in this board.
- The destination management organizations (DMOs) should be formed for the most visited (Dhaka, Chattagram, Sylhet, Khulna, and North Bengal) areas of Bangladesh.

Autonomy to plan and execute the relevant issues of those geographic areas must be assigned to them. Top management will provide them the policy and budgetary support. Besides, they will evaluate the performance and give required directions.

- A rigorous study should be conducted to sketch the actual market scenario including its competition. Segmentation, targeting, and positioning strategies should be applied based on the study findings. Future demands should be assessed clearly to set short, mid, and long term plans. Domestic market should get priority in this phase. Steps should be taken to rein in the outbound trend of the Bangladeshi tourists. In the case of the international market, India, China, and the UK can be the initial targets.
- To pass quality time for the tourists, the destinations should offer adequate alternative amusement options. All people must not like the same product. So to make their time meaningful, the number of man-made attractions in each spot should be increased.
- Regular and consistent promotional activities must be operated through diverse media. To enhance interactions with the active stakeholders, initiatives should be taken. Organizing different contests and offering attractive incentives might enhance the pace of such activities. Otherwise, the negative word of mouth will take place which will have long term negative consequences.
- Before moving forward for tourism marketing, the answer of some questions must be found: Who are our potential customers, what are their demands, which destinations are offering their desired services at a competitive price. Otherwise, trying to do marketing in the sector will be like ‘a ship without radar.’
- To enhance community involvement, decentralization must be encouraged. Proper planning should be made to incorporate the local inhabitants with the development initiatives. It should be ‘win-win venture’ in all destinations. Besides, to draw attention of the potential tourists, the spots could be designed and presented in a more attractive way. It adds value and safety and security of the visitors are ensured.
- International investors of this sector should be invited to invest in Bangladesh. If they come here, their international networks will help us to enter into the appropriate international market. Besides, taking part in the international tourism fairs in our target countries will give better results. Besides, NRBs should be connected in different ways so that they feel comfortable to visit their homeland.

5. Conclusion

The key challenges of tourism marketing in Bangladesh are not properly identified yet. To do so, at first the policymakers have to realize the scope of potential contribution of this sector. Besides, the nature of competition is always changing. To gain real insights, rigorous studies should be conducted. Based on the findings—short, mid and long term detail plans must be made. To ensure integration of the efforts, BTB must be empowered through restructuring and support services. Decentralization of planning and its execution is highly needed to get better results. Fair competition among the different regions of Bangladesh can bring better outcomes. Otherwise, the challenges will enhance in upcoming days and the opportunities of being benefited from the sector will be under-utilized.

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