

DESTINATION BRANDING THROUGH LEVERAGING OF TECHNOLOGY: A CASE STUDY CONDUCTED AT SOUTHERN HERITAGE COAST BARISHAL DIVISION OF BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

The incessant advancement of technology and globalization has ushered cut thought competition among peregrination spot. Barishal, well-known for its cultural heritage and inborn beauty, has vast propensity to emerge as an ensuing tourism hub. Anyway, effective destination branding popularizes a strategic approach that integrates technology, green tourism practices and stakeholders' cooperation. This article explores the way for technologically tracking like Geographic Information Systems (GIS), digital marketing, and balanced tourism platforms, which may be utilized to increase the branding and advancement of Barishal as a premier tourist destination for the world travelers.

Key word: Heritage tourism; Destination branding critically; Green tourism practices

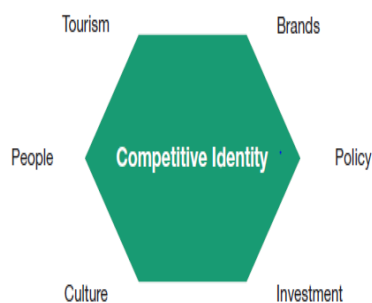
Introduction

Destination branding is gambit in shaping peoples mind and eye-catching travelers to a specific location. Barishal, a region rich in historical, cultural, and natural attractions, has struggled with different challenges such as poor transportation, lack of infrastructure, and inadequate marketing. This research excavates the role of technology in overcoming this obstacle and positioning Barishal as a supreme and ecotourism destination.

Methodology

This research maintains and adopts a qualitative method, analyzing existing executive summary, case studies, and technological paradigm applicable to tourists spot branding. Focused insights are drawn from successful instance in international tourism and adapted to the context of Barishal.

Explanation of destination branding: A destination's image is as vital to its success as a corporate brand is in the marketplace, shaping perceptions and decisions of key stakeholders like investors, tourists, and governments. In a competitive global market, a positive reputation fosters trust, eases engagement, and drives economic, social, and cultural progress, while negative perceptions hinder growth.



The hexagon of competitive identity



Brand at the core of all marketing activities

Strong destination branding builds valuable brand equity, reducing promotional costs and enabling sustainable development. However, maintaining a positive image requires continuous innovation and alignment with stakeholder expectations, emphasizing long-term growth over short-term promotion.

What is a brand?

A logo is a symbol that gains recognition through consistent use but cannot fully represent a destination's brand values without becoming cluttered. Its power lies in being attractive, recognizable, and impactful, as seen with Spain's *el sol de Miró*. While slogans and imagery can enhance branding by reflecting a destination's essence, they are not brands themselves. All design elements-logos, slogans, imagery, and style-should align with and flow from the destination's brand to convey its values effectively.

A destination brand reflects a place's appeal for leisure, conferences, and incentive travel, which NTOs actively promote. Visitors traveling for personal or unavoidable business reasons are less influenced by NTOs but can shape a destination's reputation through their experiences, potentially becoming advocates or critics when they share their views.

Strategy for Branding Barishal



BRAND LOGO

SLOGAN: BARISHAL: Welcome in Barishal for peaceful stay, passing with nature and recalling forever!
(Developing the Brand Identity)

Brand culture: Spirit of independence, vibrant local gastronomy, fairs, cultural events, and historic sites like Bibichini Shahi Masjid, Padri Shibpur, and Rajapur Saturia Palace are Known for hospitable people, high literacy rates, and its title "Granary of Bengal" due to rich agricultural production. Population: Male 49.99%, Female 50.01%. Religion: Muslim 86.19%, Hindu 13.10%, Christian 0.63%, others 0.08%. Weather: Max temperature 35.1°C, min 12.1°C, annual rainfall 1955 mm.

Brand character: "Rice, Canals, and Rivers make Barishal." Honest, simple people, including Rakhain tribal communities. This is Home to Bangladesh's largest river port.

Brand name: Barishal the heritage Coast.

Brand image: "Barishal The heritage Coast"-A blend of historical and scenic attractions.

Main products of Barishal needs to be excavated: Kuakata is truly a virgin beach-a sanctuary for migratory winter birds, a series of coconut trees, sandy beach of blue Bay, a feast for the eye. Forest, boats plying in the Bay of Bengal with colorful sails, fishing, towering cliffs, surfing waves everything here touches every visitor's heart. The unique customs and costumes of the 'Rakhine' tribal families and Buddhist Temple of about hundred years old indicate the ancient tradition and cultural heritage, which are objects of great pleasure Kuakata is the place of pilgrimage of the Hindus and Buddhist communities. Innumerable people arrive here at the festival of 'Rush Purnima' and 'Maghi Purnima'.

Main attractions of Kuakata: Kuakata, known as *Sagar Kannya* (Daughter of the Sea), is a scenic gem on Bangladesh's southernmost tip. Located in Patuakhali district, it spans 30 km in length and 6 km in breadth, 320 km from Dhaka.

Highlights

- **Natural Beauty:** A picturesque blend of sandy beach, blue sky, Bay of Bengal waters, evergreen forests, and coconut trees. Famous for its unique views of both sunrise and sunset.
- **Tourist Season:** Popular year-round, especially in winter.
- **Cultural Experiences:** Visit Rakhain tribal communities, 200-year-old wells (*Kua*), and fishermen villages for fresh Hilsha fish.
- **Adventures:** Fishing trips with locals and nearby spots like Gangamoti Reserve Forest and Fatra's Chor.
- **Heritage:** Buddhist temples, Rakhain traditions, and Hindu-Buddhist pilgrimage festivals like *Rush Purnima* and *Maghi Purnima*.

Why visit?

Kuakata offers a unique blend of serene nature, vibrant culture, and adventure, making it one of the world's most captivating beaches.

Transportation at Kuakata: Kuakata's transportation system is inconvenient due to narrow, zigzag roads and numerous ferries, causing delays of 2-3 hours on routes to Patuakhali or Barishal. If bridges replaced ferries, travel time could significantly reduce. Around 30 buses, including 6 BRTC buses, operate on routes connecting Kuakata to Patuakhali, Barishal, Khulna, and Dhaka, with travel times ranging from 3 to 20 hours.

Tourism development challenges: The poor transportation system is a major obstacle. The Kuakata-Kalapara-Patuakhali highway is in bad condition, with slow construction progress, narrow roads, loose bricks, and large potholes. Ferries are poorly maintained, with landing areas often submerged during high tide. These issues discourage repeat visits and lead to negative recommendations. Urgent improvements, including new ferries, pontoons, and gangways, are essential for tourism development.

Horinghata: A forest area in Borguna district, Horinghata is famous for roaming deer and occasional sightings of the Royal Bengal Tiger. The name "Horin" (deer) reflects its wildlife-rich environment.

Shonar Char: Located 32 km from Barguna, ShonarChar features lush green estuaries and beautiful beaches. Known for its serene atmosphere, visitors can enjoy safe bathing, sunrise, sunset, and sea travel through deep forests, making it a unique natural destination.

Laldiar bon: Situated south of Patharghata Upazila, Laldiar Bon is surrounded by sea, rivers, and estuaries. The forest is home to diverse wildlife, including birds and red crabs. Despite being a small beach, its natural beauty captivates visitors, especially during the dried cultivation period from September to November.

Bibichini historic Shahi Masjid: The Bibichini Shahi Masjid, located in Bibichini Union, Barguna, is a historic mosque built in 1659 AD during Emperor Aurangzeb's reign by Hazrat Shah Neyamat Ullah (R:). Reflecting Mughal architecture, it measures 33 feet square with 6-foot-thick walls of Mughal-era bricks. Nearby are the graves of Shah Neyamat Ullah (R:), his daughter Cinibibi, and Isabibi, after whom the village is named. The Department of Archaeology has restored this heritage site.

Char Kukri Mukri: Known as "Dwip Kanya," this natural wonder in Bhola boasts mangrove forests, diverse wildlife, and scenic sea views. It is home to deer, monkeys, buffalo, and numerous bird species. Accessible via Dhaka-Barishal-Bhola by road and a short boat ride, flights from Dhaka and Chittagong are available seasonally.

Sher-E-Bangla Memorial: Located in Chakhar, 32 km from Barishal, this site honors Sher-E-Bangla A. K. Fazlul Huq, a pioneer of Bangladeshi politics. Attractions include his residence, a museum, F. H. College, and Sher-E-Bangla Medical College.

Padri Shibpur: A Christian-majority village settled by the Portuguese in the 18th century, featuring a historic Roman Catholic Church. It is 30 km from Barishal town.

Mirjagonj Shahi Mosque: Built in 1465 by Sultan Barbak Shah in Barishal, this mosque is a relic of Muslim rule. Abandoned for 120 years due to invasions, it was rediscovered and is located 25 km from Patuakhali.

Durga Sagor: Situated 11 km from Barishal, this lake, created in 1780, features a forested hill resembling a small island, adding to its scenic charm.

Kirtypasha palace: Kirtypasha Palace was in the name of King Kirty Narayana. Ramjibon sen was the founder of Kirtypasha palace. Rohini Roy and Tapon Roy are the jewels of this family. Steamer dock, Rohiniganj is a contribution of Rohini Roy. With this, there is a hospital that is older than Jhalokathi district hospital. Co-mortal sign also is here. The grave of Rohini Roy re-made. Family Shiva mandir and a Shiva stratus here present. Kirtypasha village is located about 4/5 km. away from Jhalokathi town.

Jibanananda Das and Rajapur's Heritage: Jibanananda Das, the celebrated nature poet, found inspiration in the Dhanshiri River, famously writing, *"I'll come again to the bank of Dhanshiri river in this Bangladesh."* Born on February 17, 1899, in Barishal, his ancestral home was in Goupara, Bikrampur. His parents were Sattyananda Das and Kushum Kumari Das. The Dhanshiri River flows through Rajapur, Jhalokathi, in southern Bangladesh. Rajapur is also home to the historic Saturia Palace, a 300-year-old Mughal-style architectural marvel with gardens, ponds, and a grand gate spanning 100 acres. The village is also linked to Sher-e-Bangla A. K. Fazlul Huq, the "Tiger of Bengal," who spent his childhood in Chakhar, Barishal.

Technological Tools in Destination Branding

Geographic information systems (GIS): GIS technology jerks methods to format and analyze Barishal's diverse attractions. A GIS-based platform can:

- Highlight key tourist spot like Kuakata Beach, Sundarban's fringes, and cultural landslide
- Offers real-time updates on accessibility, weather, and events.
- Facilitate data-driven decision-making for eco-tourism development.

Digital marketing and social media: Harnessing digital marketing strategies can amplify Barishal's reach:

- **Search engine optimization (SEO):** Ensures high visibility on travel-related searches.
- **Social media campaigns:** Platforms like Facebook can showcase Barishal's unique features through visually engaging content.
- **Influencer partnerships:** Collaborating with travel influencers to highlight local experiences, such as fresh Hilsha cuisine.

Smart tourism platforms: Smart tourism integrates Internet of Things devices, mobile applications, and Artificial intelligence to enhance the visitor experience:

- Interactive mobile apps offering virtual tours of Barishal's attractions.
- AI-powered chatbots to provide real-time info on accommodations, dining, and transport.
- Digital task at focused locations for seamless navigation and booking.

Sustainable tourism practices: It is a cornerstone of effective destination branding. Barishal can:

- Promote sustainable resorts and transport options.
- Implement waste management systems in tourist-heavy areas.
- Educate local communities and visitors about keeping things normal practices.

Considerations

- 1) Only few beach side resorts are available right now. Therefore more resorts are required for successful branding campaign of Resort Tourism in Kuakata.
- 2) Fatrar char is currently abandoned and thus has to be developed before being branded as a separately themed island.

Nine branding principles to be implemented for “Barishal: The heritage Coast”

1. Keep it simple: one big idea is the best.
2. Mass-produced word of mouth (PR) builds brands.
3. Focused brands are more powerful than diffused brands.
4. Somehow, some way, you have to be different.
5. The first brand in a category has a huge advantage.
6. Avoid sub-brands at all cost.
7. Quality is important, but not as important as the perception of quality.
8. Be consistent and patient. Building a strong brand takes time.
9. Put your brand definition in writing, otherwise you'll get off course.

Drivers for Success:- A successful destination brand is a valuable asset, dependent on key factors:

- **Credibility:** The brand must fulfill its promises to meet customer expectations and maintain a positive image.
- **Deliverability:** Over-promising should be avoided; the brand's promise must be tested for on-ground feasibility.
- **Differentiation:** A unique positioning is essential to avoid imitating other destinations.
- **Powerful Messaging:** Effective brands convey compelling values and personality traits that resonate with the target audience.

SWOT Analysis of tourism of Barishal

To assess Barishal's potential as a competitive tourist destination, a SWOT analysis is essential for identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This will aid policymakers in creating a strategic roadmap for its development.

Strengths

- Exceptional natural beauty (tropical sea beaches, rivers, lakes, flora, and fauna).
- Pollution-free and terrorism-free environment.
- Rich historical and cultural heritage, including Liberation War landmarks.
- Friendly, honest locals, especially in Kuakata.

Weaknesses

- Poor transportation and communication systems.
- Limited and costly accommodation options.
- Inadequate marketing of tourist sites.
- Travel delays due to ferry crossings to Kuakata.

Opportunities

- Government and stakeholders can develop organized tourist infrastructure.
- Enhanced transportation, including luxury buses, boats, and helipads.
- Awareness and training programs for policymakers and local communities.
- Cost-effective accommodations and improved security for tourists.
- Job creation and improved local living standards.

Threats

- Competition from well-established destinations (e.g., Cox's Bazar and Goa).
- Poor coordination among stakeholders and communities.
- Misconceptions about tourism among locals.
- Environmental degradation due to unsustainable tourism practices.



Jibonanda das er mama bari



Sunrise at Kuakata



Char Kukri Mukri



Kirtypasha Palace



Bibichini historic Shahi Masjid

Challenges and Recommendations

Challenges

- **Infrastructure Deficiency:** Narrow roads and insufficient transportation options bar tourist mobility
- **Limited Digital Literacy:** Many local stakeholders gape the skills to engage with advanced technologies
- **Resource Constraints:** Financial limitations bar large-scale implementations
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Recommendations

1. **Public-Private Partnerships (PPP):** Collaborate with private investors to fund infrastructure and technology based projects
2. **Training Programs:** Conduct workshops to train local communities in digital marketing and sustainable practices
3. **Policy Support:** Advocate for government policies that prioritize tourism development and technology adoption
4. **Pilot Projects:** Start with small-scale initiatives, such as a GIS-based mapping app, before scaling up

Case Study: Branding Kuakata as “The abstinent Coast”

Enhancing Kuakata’s Tourism Potential

Kuakata is known for its **rare sunrise and sunset views over the Bay of Bengal**, highlights Barishal’s tourism prospects. A strong branding strategy should include:

- **Smart Signage:** Multilingual digital displays for tourist guidance.
- **Mobile App Features:** Augmented reality (AR) narrating Kuakata’s history and landmarks.
- **Sustainability Campaigns:** Beach clean-ups and eco-tourism promotions.

However, Kuakata’s transportation and infrastructure face major issues due to improper vehicle parking along embankments and highways, leading to inconvenience and unhygienic conditions. To resolve this, a dedicated bus stand with modern facilities should be built. Additionally, introducing modern steamer and speedboat services would enhance accessibility to nearby attractions like Gangamotir Forest and Fatrar Forest. Floating pontoons near Kuakata could further improve waterway connectivity. While Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) has promoted Kuakata through posters, detailed travel brochures covering attractions, transport, accommodations, and entertainment are essential. As tourism remains Dhaka-centric, BPC should prioritize Kuakata’s development to establish it as a major destination.

Conclusion

The objective of the research is to discover the beautiful location of Barishal to establish as a premier tourist destination. The researcher also tries to identify the co-relative factors that satisfy tourist interest and outlook. Lack of exact planning, lack of bonding among administration and others organ, lack of transportation and lack of accommodation facilities are the major problems of tourism at Barishal. To overcome these problems Bangladesh Government should take initiatives by establishing a good transportation system, tourism training institutions, establishing tourist zones, announcing Wi-Fi zone in the tourist destination. By integrating ultra-modern technologies with sustainable practices, Barishal may overcome its current challenges and emerge as a leading tourist and traveler’s destination. Expected Strategic branding nominated and supported by GIS, digital marketing, and smart tourism platforms will not only enhance the visitor experiences but also drive economic growths and cultural preservations, that is to say, sustainable tourism practices. The insights from this research provide a roadmap for policymakers, stakeholders, and tourism professionals to collaboratively transform Barishal into a model for destination branding in developing regions.

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