



Nation brand of Nepal

Building a nation brand image of Nepal based on cultural events and festivals.

Sushil Gautam

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Supervisor (Arcada):	John Grönvall
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Abstract	
<p>The purpose of this research is to find suitable techniques to apply media management in the nation brand building of Nepal, keeping its cultural events and festivals as the core brand-value. This thesis outlines community involvement in nation brand building process. Nation branding is a new field in branding that has direct relation with tourism. Semi-structured interview with seven different media professionals, working for the national and the international media, is conducted to explore the usability of media management in the cultural events and festival-based nation branding for Nepal. A thorough analysis of the finding has provided a framework to foster the Nepal brand image. The Nepal Tourism Board, the concerning authority for tourism industry in Nepal should take into consideration the '6C approach' described in this thesis.</p>	
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	4
1.1	AIM OF THE STUDY.....	5
1.2	RESEARCH QUESTION	6
1.3	METHODOLOGY	6
1.4	ETHICS AND PRIVACY OF DATA.....	8
1.5	VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY	9
2	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	10
2.1	CURRENT STATUS OF KNOWLEDGE	12
2.2	IMPORTANCE OF NATION BRAND IMAGE.....	13
2.3	NATION BRAND, COMMUNITY AND EVENT RELATIONSHIP.....	14
2.4	COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN NEPAL'S CONTEXT.....	16
2.5	MEDIA MANAGEMENT AND NATION BRANDING	17
3	FINDINGS.....	22
3.1	CODING.....	22
3.1.1	<i>Correlation</i>	23
3.1.2	<i>Communication</i>	25
3.1.3	<i>Collaboration</i>	28
3.1.4	<i>Commercialization</i>	30
3.1.5	<i>Creativity</i>	32
3.1.6	<i>Correction</i>	34
4	ANALYSIS	36
5	CONCLUSION	41
5.1	FURTHER WORK	42
	REFERENCES:.....	43
	BOOKS AND RESEARCH ARTICLES:	43
	ONLINE.....	44
	APPENDIX 1:.....	47
	<i>A brief introduction of interviewees:</i>	47
	APPENDIX 2.....	48

1 INTRODUCTION

Nepal is the oldest nation in South Asia (Basnet, 2012) and also one of the oldest nations in the whole world. The country with a population of approximately 30 million, is sandwiched between China and India which are the world's second and seventh largest economies (O'Brien, 2017) and the two most populous countries in the world. (CIA, 2017)

Despite the oft-repeated slogan of 'widespread natural resources, breath taking landscape, stunning sceneries, charismatic mountains, Mount Everest, miscellaneous flora and fauna and variety of culture, birth place of Buddha and Hindu pilgrims destination' - in political speeches and articles, the international media mostly covers Nepal's negative features such as gross-underdevelopment and widespread poverty.

Despite its location between two of the most rapidly growing nations with huge populations, Nepal's tourism industry has not been able to capitalize on the growing wealth of its neighbors. An armed conflict between the Maoist rebels and the government forces hampered Nepal's tourism sector severely from the late 90's to early 2000's. The civil war officially ended in 2006 after a comprehensive peace accord was signed by rebel leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal and the then time prime minister late Girija Prasad Koirala (Policypaper, 2013). Since this momentous event, the tourist industry has not been able to pick up its pace.

Natural disasters have also been unfortunate obstacles that have hindered the tourism industry. In 2015 a catastrophic earthquake of 8.3 magnitude hit Nepal northern district Gorkha and killed approximately 8000 people and displaced hundreds of thousands of people, destroyed infrastructures and creating a chaotic environment (CNN, 2015).

Despite all the setbacks, Nepal's tourism sector contributed 8.9% to its GDP in 2014 (Basnet, 2016) and has created about one million job opportunities according to World travel and tourism council (Travel and Tourism, 2017). Hence, tourism is an important industry for both economic and social development for a developing nation like Nepal.

Gaurav Pathak and Yan Zhi Hun of Nanjing University of science and technology have mentioned that 'Nepal is a tourism capital of south Asia having a 60 year of handling

tourist experience.’ Nepal has experienced a 10% growth in the tourist arrival growth rate in past 6 years. Nepal has got some unique features, such as it has the highest summit know as Mount Everest and 8 out 14 of the world’s 8000 meter summits are located in Nepal. According to (Dhakal G. *et al.*, 2016), this is making it one of the tourist magnets:

Naturally niche (23.23% of landmass is protected with 10 national parks, reserves and conservation areas). Nepal has a unique and wide diversity (103 ethnic groups, 93 dialects, 2% of all the flowering plants in the world, 8% of birds, 4% of mammals on earth, 1 of the world’s 15 families of butterflies, 600 indigenous plants, 319 species of exotic orchids)

Besides political turmoil and natural disasters, the lack of a clear brand positioning is another major problem Nepal’s tourism. Recently Nepal has adopted a federal republic constitution in 2015 abolishing monarchy by a peaceful revolution. It is no longer a centralized democracy, but rather 7 federal states that enjoy a form of semi-autonomy.

1.1 Aim of the study

The Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) is a national organization, established in 1998 under the Nepal Tourism Board Act (1997) to promote Nepal as an attractive tourist destination (NaturallyNepal, 2018). Despite having the potential to become a major tourist destination of the world, Nepal is having a crisis in the nation brand positioning. A number of tourist attractions exist in Nepal. However, there is distinct lack of focus in how the NTB work with the areas suitable for brand positioning and how these areas could contribute to attracting tourists. This thesis aims to study the role and the advantage of the activities of the ‘communities’ for tourism and the general international branding of the country of Nepal.

The government of Nepal has made an ambitious vision in 2009 to welcome two million tourists and to create one million tourism-related employments by 2020 (Tourism vision, 2020). However, between 2013-2015 the tourist arrival rate has decreased, and in 2016 a total of 753 002 tourists visited Nepal. Similarly, the number of tourism related jobs is about 500 000 (Turner, 2017), when fewer than three years remain to meet government’s target to attract 2 million tourists.

There are several reasons why the tourist arrival rate has fallen. In my opinion, a lack of proper brand positioning has been one of the biggest problems with Nepal's tourism industry. The lack of proper branding has contributed to not meeting the government target to attract tourists from abroad. So, the aim of the thesis is to develop branding strategies that would help Nepal define its nation brand, as one of the most attractive tourist destinations. The thesis also tries to explore the ways of establishing an association between the nation brand and other products exported by Nepal. This may positively influence in purchase decision making process.

1.2 Research question

Nation branding, place-branding and city-branding are the relatively new fields in the branding stream. The terms do not have a clear-cut definition yet and the questions about of how to achieve them need a lot of creativity.

Nation branding is a multi-faceted topic. It heavily deals with various dimensions such as natural resources, unique culture, people, history, landscape, etc. of the country. Among them, the people are the most important aspect because they are the brand ambassadors of the nation brand as well as bearers of both the positive and the negative brand image. Cultural events too are valuable assets to promote a nation's image. Moreover, the role of the media in understanding a nation and its culture cannot be underestimated. Therefore, it is important to explore and understand the relations between the local community, cultural events and the media. Thus, we formulate the research question for this thesis as:

'How can local cultural events and festivals be applied in the branding of Nepal as a tourist-friendly nation?'

1.3 Methodology

The semi-structured interview is the most suitable method in this research due to its qualitative nature. Nation branding, as is already mentioned, has many facets. Multiple stakeholders may have different view towards the core value of the nation. Quantitative data from different stakeholders with having perceptions, professions and hailing from

disparate institutions are hard to correlate and, therefore is difficult to sum up to get the whole picture.

Silverman (2006) has cited Bridget Bryne's suggestions on semi structured interview and its usability is directly related in this research. He suggests,

Qualitative interviewing is particularly useful as a research method for accessing individuals' attitudes and values – things that cannot necessarily be observed or accommodated in a formal questionnaire. Open-ended and flexible questions are likely to get a more considered response than closed questions and therefore provide better access to interviewees' views, interpretation of events, understandings, experiences and opinions...(qualitative interviewing) when done well can achieve a level of depth and complexity that is not available to other, particularly survey-based, approaches.

I decided to interview several media and communication professionals. The media sector is one of the most important stakeholders in nation branding. The media sector is a bridge between the local community and the state. They are responsible for making and spreading news that has direct impact in promotion of different cultural events. Also, since the research question of this thesis includes media management, media and communication professionals are of prime importance to dig out the ideas for the nation branding process based on cultural events.

In total seven different journalists, editor, advertisement maker and communication scholar were selected and contacted via Facebook. Interviewees were given the interview questions along with a list of cultural festival in approximately 15 days in advance to prepare. The list of the cultural events and festivals is provided in Appendix B section of this thesis.

Selected interviewees and the media and communication institutions they represent are as follows:

1. Phadindra dahal - BBC Nepali service
2. Santosh Ghimire - Chinese news agency Xinhua
3. Jyoti Devkota - Setopati global edition
4. Abhaya Pandey – Creative freelance director
5. Bishwas Hamal - Gundruk post english news and blogging site
6. Bhuwan Pokharel – Freelance writer
7. Dr. Nirmala Mani Adhikary – Communication scholar, Kathmandu University.

The interviews were conducted via Facebook messenger and each interview lasted for approximately 45 minutes. Interviewees were provided with a list of cultural events celebrated in Nepal throughout the year and interview questions are as follows

1. How can the places in Nepal that have tourism value, be promoted along with cultural events and festivals?
2. How can the local communities be mobilized to promote their cultural events and festivals?
3. What are the roles of the state in increasing tourists' participation in cultural events and festivals?
4. What are the possible weaknesses in cultural events and festivals that jeopardize the Nepal's nation brand image?
5. What are the roles of the Nepalese media when minimizing risks that emerge from the weakness in cultural events and festivals?
6. How could Nepal's cultural events and festivals benefit from the proximity of Chinese and Indian cultures?
7. How could the Non-Residence Nepalese Association promote the Nepal's cultural events and festivals and help the country's image and brand abroad?
8. How is it possible to apply the principle that 'money attracts money' in regard to the local cultural events and festivals?
9. How do the cultural events and festivals and the product that Nepal exports, promote interchangeably?

The pilot interviews were first conducted with three media students to test if the interview questions were understandable.

1.4 Ethics and privacy of data

All the interviews were recorded using mobile device with interviewee's permission and the interviews were conducted in their leisure time to not hamper their working time. I took notes as well during the interview. A brief introduction of the interviews, with their consent, is given in appendix of the thesis.

They have been involved in various cultural events and festivals observed in Nepal. Their personal as well as professional observation and experiences has given thorough understanding of cultural events and their importance in national branding process.

One of the interviewees asked not to quote him if it is sensitive issue because of his agency's ethical guideline. I have considered his request. Dr. Nirmala Mani Adhikary provided written interview because of his personal reason.

1.5 Validity and reliability

The netnography approach was used for the selection of the interviewees. As the branding process is all about communication, the interviewees for this thesis are media professionals thus providing an insight of ground reality of Nepal's possible brand building process based on cultural events and festivals. They have dealt with such events at a personal level as well as professional level which are important to understand the value of such events and festivals in nation brand building process and issues such as: what kind of discussion often takes in media, what are the possible affect in community level etc. Because of their participation, contact with the concerned authorities and multidisciplinary stakeholders.

The sampled interviewees are from Nepal from almost similar cultural background thus it lacks viewpoint of people from heterogeneous society such as Nepal. Perhaps the possibility of biased opinion towards one's own culture also should be in consideration.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

What is brand? Without understanding brand in properly place branding or nation branding is impossible to understand because place branding is more complex in nature than just a brand.

In a widely accepted definition of brand, it is anything than distinguishes from other product. “A brand is a name, a term, a sign, a symbol, a design or a combination of these and it can be expressed in many different ways.” (Kotler *et al*, 2001). In much of contemporary marketing literatures, states, nations, places and cities are viewed as similar to goods, making them suitable for branding. Branding of place or nation or city means to differentiate it from other to promote tourism and investments. Place-branding is more complex than product-branding. According to Dinne 2004 (cited in Kaplan *et al* 2008)

It should be noted that place branding is a more difficult and complex process as compared to branding of goods and services, due to the fact that this process involves many factors and associations to consider, such as geography, tourists attractions, natural resources, local products, residents’ characteristics, institutions, and infrastructure.

Hence place-branding refers to the process of marketing strategies of a place emphasizing its uniqueness of geography, local products, local culture, natural resources etc. According to Kaplan *et al* 2008,

It is a process of designing, planning and communicating the name and identity of a country in order to build or manage its reputation with the aim of increasing a country’s international profile, which results in projecting an image that is recognized and respected world-wide. As in marketing, it aims to promote customer loyalty by association.

France is famous for perfumes, Germany is famous for the art of manufacturing and technology and Spain is famous for its sea beaches. These are basic examples of nation brand. As it is already mentioned, place branding or nation branding is a complex process, countries in these examples do not only have perfumes, technology and beaches but history, culture, people, religious, geography and politics also exist but some unique feature are more easily distinguishable from other countries that makes them famous. In the long run the unique features become an image of the country. The making and communicating process of a nation’s image is in fact a nation branding.

Anholt and Hildreth (cited in Brian J. Hum 2016) developed the concept of the nation brand hexagon. A country's image is made up of several factors represented in the hexagon, namely, tourism, exports, people, governance, culture and heritage and investment.

Place marketers often draw similarities between a nation's brand image with corporate brand image rather than with a product brand because of multiple associations as well as its abstract nature. An appropriate brand positioning or brand image is the core of its success. Both have people at the core of the factors affecting their brand image. For example, people's movement from one place to another is known as tourism, the 'export' takes place when people produce, a huge number of people are involved to form the government in democratic societies, culture and heritage are often man made and people are the one who invests to make profit. Hence, in a nation brand the people are at its core.



Figure 1: Illustration of factors affecting Nation brands by Simon Anholt.

Similarly, corporate brand image keeps employees and management at its core. Kaplan *et al* (2010), notes that

The growing body of literature on corporate branding may also extend frontiers for place branding research. For instance, corporate branding literature often notes that the corporate brand image is mainly based on the values, behaviors and characteristics of the organization's employees and management (Schultz and De Chernatony, 2002; Hulberg, 2006; Keller and Richey, 2006), which indicates that the perception of a place brand and related constructs may similarly rely on the values and attitudes of the citizens.

Both brand images have kept people at its core. This thesis also aims to develop a nation brand positioning keeping people at its core, borrowing ideas from corporate branding. Many place branding scholars have pointed out the importance of residents or people in place branding process and considered them as a significant stakeholder of place branding/ nation branding.

2.1 Current status of knowledge

In literature the terms 'Place branding', 'destination branding', 'destination management', 'nation branding', 'city branding' etc. have been used often to denote and differentiate the branding of geographical territory to another. Though it has not been studied systematically the notion of place branding has existed throughout the history in international arena as well as in Nepal's domestic context. It is well known that as the nations are formed, they have tried to differentiate from other nations. As circumstances have changed, their identities have also changed.

Ales Kalandides has listed various thought regarding nation branding or place branding such as

there is still large disagreement on what place branding is about, something that leads many to reject it as non-existent (Anholt, 2010), counter-productive (Kearns and Philo, 1993) or tautological (Parker *et al.*, 2001).

French academic Michel Girard opposed the idea of nation branding. According to him, states and corporate agencies are totally opposite entities from the branding perspective. He further opines that the branding and rebranding of a consumer product even corporate agency is normal, but whereas a state cannot be branded or rebranded. But a thought provoking counter response has been provided by Wally Olins (2002) with substantial historical evidence, claims that France has been rebranded many times in accordance with its social and political changes.

As it mentioned by Kaplan *et al* (2010), a total of 766 publications on place marketing and branding have been published between 1952 and 2001, making it a major field of study today. These publications include subjects of nation branding, place branding and region branding.

When the USA and the UK suffered setback in nation brand index in 2016, the creator of nation brand index Simon Anholt commented,

It is a country's perceived impact on the world that affects its global reputation, far more than its assets or achievements – and this is what we are seeing here. Those countries that are perceived as being world influencers are suffering following a year of ongoing international conflict and humanitarian issues.

Based on his comment it is clear that nation branding is not a onetime task and even the world's superpower needs to keep maintaining its brand image to keep its influence over other countries.

Cassinger *et al* (2017) have noted “However, there is still no conceptual agreement on how place brand identity is built and communicated citing Ruzzier and de Chernatony allowing various conceptual frameworks to discuss in this topic.” Several scholars have presented various ideas on forming a nation brand associating social and cultural factors such as mega-sports event (Brandon *et al* 2017), cultural diplomacy (Hurn, 2016), gastronomy (Leng *et al* 2014), geography (Méndez 2013) etc. Hence, these ideas also allow a discussion on small scale cultural events and festivals, which can potentially be a core foundation for nation branding and even allows further expanding of the brand's dimensions.

2.2 Importance of nation brand image

Positive nation brand image has vital effect in tourism, export, immigration, investment and in some scholars' opinion it leverages soft power. Most of nation brand literatures are often related to tourism, whose promotion is also the prime target of this thesis. “The majority of place branding studies exist in the realm of destination branding, which are fundamentally tourism-oriented” (Walmsley and Young, 1998 cited in Kaplan *et al*).

Brand awareness, in general, drives the product selection process. Thus, nation brand awareness also influences the decision of the potential visitors to make it the first priority. For example, a sea beach lover from Finland will likely select Spain rather than Germany because of its fame for beaches, which is also driven by the nation brand campaign with the slogan of ‘Everything under the Sun.’

Besides enhancing tourism, nation brand image may also have influence in decision making process to purchase certain product. For instance, perfumes made in France gets better reputation and likely to be purchased by consumers than the perfumes made in Russia. Similarly, the cars made in Germany have better reputation than the cars made in Australia. The label “made in” is in fact the part and parcel of the nation brand image which influence in product purchase decision making process.

The COO “made in” label, a legal requirement in some instances, remains a marketing tool to leverage strong country images for products. (Tseng *et al* 2011)

Hence nation brand image or identity may have positive impact in both tourism and export

2.3 Nation brand, community and event relationship

According to Braun *et al* (2013), multiple definitions for place-branding have arisen and several scholars note that no single accepted definition currently exists, (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005; Hankinson, 2004), but there are fundamental ways of differentiating places based on their unique features. Community in the other hand is the most important stake holder as well as both giver and receiver of values and benefits of nation brand. The community, by definition, is a group of people living in a locality and shared common interest. As already mentioned, the people or community are central to every factor affecting the nation brand image.

Event is defined as “A thing that happens or takes place, especially one of importance” by (Oxford dictionary, 2017). Events can be anything such as cultural, political and financial, sports, exhibition etc. A number of studies have been conducted associating event and place branding or nation branding. Sports event Sport mega-events and nation branding: Unique characteristics of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, South Africa (Knott *et al* 2017), mega event and destination brand: 2010 Shanghai Expo (Yu *et al*

2012), effectiveness of a communication model in city branding using events: The case of the Taiwan Lantern festival (Lee *et al* 2016), major event and city branding: An evaluation of Liverpool as the 2008 European Capital of Culture (Yi-De Liu, 2015), much more than sports: sports events as stimuli for city re-branding (Herstein *et al* 2013) are case examples of case studies of various cities/nation associating large scale also events known as mega event.

Event draws media attention, gathers community and stakeholders, promotes local business and promotes brand awareness of the place in both national and international stages depending on the event's size and importance. A single event has various effects in local culture, economy, tourism and infrastructure. According to Knott *et al* (2017),

The chief executive of the South African World Cup 2010 Organizing Committee, Danny Jordaan, states, [The World Cup] is about nation building, it's about infrastructure improvement, it's about country branding, it's about repositioning, it's about improving the image of our country, and it's about tourism promotion (Allmers and Maennig, 2009, p. 500)

Nation brand is connected with the community or people of the nation/place and events organized in such places. Despite an effective brand positioning and the adoption of good brand management strategies, if the corresponding authorities do not include its community as a significant stakeholder of the branding, then the brand success is unlikely to happen. Likewise, if the unique culture or a noteworthy identity of the local community or people of the nation are not reflected in the nation brand, the whole branding process may not succeed.

The success of a nation brand or place-brand is not limited to making a logo and a slogan; it must reflect the unique features of the place, integrating its people and should have proper brand communication in both the national and the international arena. With the emergence of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram, the importance of people has increased like never before. People not only play a role to design the nation brand but also communicate it using their own social networking sites.

Braun *et al* (2013) have listed three types of brand communications:

1. The primary communication, which could be described as the city's actions themselves, including the architecture and real place offerings as well as the city's behavior.
2. The secondary communication, which includes formal communication like all forms of advertising or public relations;
3. and the tertiary communication, which refers to the word-of-mouth generated by the residents of a city.

The residents or community or people, whatever the term is given, are the brand ambassadors of the place brand/ nation brand. Individually created content and utilization of social media to communicate is in fact more cost effective for brand communication than paid advertisement through the mainstream media, which is even more suitable for cash-strapped nations or emerging cities.

2.4 Community involvement in Nepal's context

The concept of nation brand and place-brand do not just exist in academic papers but is also an integral part of local culture of Nepal as reflected in some well-known aphorisms. There are popular sayings regarding different places that function as branding. '*Nepal gaye kapal sangai*' meaning 'Going to Nepal with hair' and '*Burma gaye karma sangai*' meaning 'Going to Burma (Myanmar) with *Karma* (Hair)', 'Lhasa (Tibet) is full of gold' etc are used by the general population. Similarly, the notion of place branding is also reflected by the fame of products of those areas, such as '*Khokana*' is famous for mustard oil, *Palpa* district's *Dhaka Topi* (Nepalese skullcap), *Bhojpur*'s *khukuri* (traditional Nepali curvy knife), *Makawanpur*'s wooden utensils etc. Local communities have tried to promote the name of certain places relating them to their respective quality products. But despite the existence of place branding/nation branding concept in local communities, systematic studies to promote Nepal's tourism with suitable brand positioning have not been implemented yet by corresponding authorities, notably the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB).

The NTB is a national organization, established in 1998 under Nepal Tourism Board Act (1997) to promote Nepal as an attractive tourist destination (Naturally Nepal, 2018). Currently it is using ‘Naturally Nepal once is not enough’ as a slogan in its official website. Though, the website has a there is a section for upcoming events and festivals, which are prominently presented as an identity of the nation, they are not reflected in the brand positioning. Morgan *et al* (2004) points out “traits such as ‘friendly’, ‘natural’ and ‘contemporary’ are popular hoped-for descriptors but they hardly help to build an engaging or aspirational brand.” The NTB should have realized that the country’s geography, natural resources, flora and fauna, wildlife, etc. are all-natural occurrences. In this sense the term ‘Naturally’ can be used for every country around the world. Therefore, it fails to provide a unique identity. Moreover, it does not offer any emotional values, nor does it emphasize any unique dimension of Nepal. Caldwell *et al* (2004) suggested that nations should focus on the emotional and representational dimensions of their brands, which the NTB has completely ignored while creative Nepal’s nation brand.

It is already mentioned that the community/people are one of the most important stakeholders in nation branding. In case of Nepal, the community forestry program is regarded as one of the most successful forest conservation effort. It was started in 1957, involving the local communities to preserve and utilize the forests (Community Forestry in Nepal 2015). To date 11 000 communities are managing 30 percent of Nepal’s forests. Similarly, community is involved in managing schools also known as community school. A total of 28 057 schools are in being managed by the community (Education Nepal 2015). But in case of nation branding process, importance of major stakeholder that is ‘community’ is seemed to have been overlooked.

2.5 Media management and nation branding

Planning, organizing, directing and controlling process in media industry is media management. By the definition media management and nation branding share common characters. Without the proper media management nation branding process cannot take place. Media is arguably the lifeline of any kind of brand.

Wilenius (2009) states,

the media industry has changed dramatically over the past few decades. Since the 1990s the social functions of the media have increasingly taken a backseat to market-driven interests and activities. In many senses the media industry has become a business in much the same way as the exchange of other goods and services.

The branding of tangible products, services, destination or even nations is not possible without proper media management. Wilenius (2009) also says ‘media company owners and managers had increasing powers to decide what kind of media content to show to people citing various scholars.’ It is important here to note that nation branding process is a positive stereotype making process. Therefore, a successful nation brand cannot be achieved without the proper application of media management. A nation brand manager should ideally have the knowledge of the possible impact of media contents in the brand image thus allowing one to control and manage potential threats.

“Social media channels are inexpensive, user-friendly, scalable internet and mobile-based technologies that allow for the sharing of user-generated material” (Sigala and Marinidis, 2009). The rise of social media, also known as electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), has given opportunity to create media content transmit them, from the sender and to the receiver without any complex media organizational structure and financial burden.

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube are flooded everyday by user generated content on a wide variety of subjects. It is an opportunity as well as a threat to a nation brand manager. In comparison to traditional media such as newspaper, television and radio, social media is far more inexpensive, easy to use and the content can be spread to a wide audience immediately. But, anyone who has an internet connection can access and create content and spread it also; any kind of information that may not be in favor of the brand image could pose a threat.

Labbaika (2015) has cited (Yan, 2011) bachelor’s degree thesis about the effective use of social media in destination branding, summarizing the nine goals of branding in social media into three major points:

1. Build a sense of membership with consumers
2. Encourage acceptance of brand value

3. Encourage consumers to engage in communication and promotion

These pithy goals of branding in social media are directly applicable in nation branding as well creating a guideline for nation brand managers. One of the four external factors that lead brands to use social media is of its 'Viral nature' as noted by Georgios *et al* (2014). They say,

Another factor that was mentioned is the viral nature of social media platforms. Digital managers definitely desire everyone to talk online about their brand. They know that social media are the best place for spreading the brand name.

Many of them gave examples on how this may happen: Facebook applications 'Like' or 'Share' buttons, and re-Tweet options are some of the ways for making a brand's message or name very quickly known.'

There is a clear interconnectedness between the media management and nation branding processes; both share similarities at their fundamental level. Media, either a social media or traditional one, is an inseparable tool to create awareness of the brand and nation brand awareness is the first step one can do to attract potential tourists. "Tourism is an 'information-intensive industry', whereas social media is information-abundant and therefore both are relevant with each other" (Gretzel et al., 2000). Hao (2010), emphasizing the role of communication, writes "everything a brand does is communication. It is impossible not to communicate"

Beside the traditional media, a huge number of Nepali citizen are using the social media platforms. In fact, according to the Nepal Telecommunication Authority, social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube are the major driving factor behind 18.22% increment in Internet subscriptions in 2016-2017. (Post Report, 2017) A report published in February 2017, by The Kathmandu Post, the largest English daily, reads Nepal has 14.18 million internet subscribers, which is 56% of the total population. A rough calculation shows that more than ten million Nepali people are using Facebook and more than a million are using YouTube.



Figure 2: Social Media Stats in Nepal. Source: Globalstats, 2018

A growing number of social media users, if utilized in proper way, can be an inexpensive and significant tool to support nation branding for a financially weak country such as Nepal. Social media facilitates connection between small communities that organizes cultural events to the large population of potential tourists around the world.

In contrast, a single bad news may hamper nation's image causing a decrease in tourists' arrival; thus, media management is of prominent importance in nation brand management.

Country	Jän.17		Feb.17		Mär.17		Apr.17		Mai.17		Jun.17		15.Jul.17		Total	
	Arrival	Departure	Arrival	Departure	Arrival	Departure	Arrival	Departure	Arrival	Departure	Arrival	Departure	arrival	Departure	Arrival	Departure
India	10547	11588	11196	10291	12729	12766	14595	12993	20011	17711	20118	20467	3853	3601	93,049	89,417
China	9727	9051	9499	10923	10458	10699	8601	8545	7309	8790	6490	7633	2006	1754	66,415	69,291
USA	5626	5229	5847	5053	8294	7587	7578	7955	6499	6805	6317	6227	1530	1884	41,691	40,740
Srilanka	329	292	7069	6790	10434	10433	1070	1028	404	388	301	285	122	67	19,729	19,283
United Kingdom	3395	3146	4363	3617	6,434	5,209	6,558	7,561	3,052	4,585	2,593	2,801	1049	716	27,444	27,635
Thailand	3981	4289	8388	8593	6455	6239	2206	2283	562	653	345	440	108	64	22,045	22,561
Myanmar	2748	2667	5285	5257	0	1	2483	0	122	154	51	93	28	20	10,717	8,192
Republic Of Korea	4579	4557	3585	3692	2810	2654	2436	1976	1746	2365	1867	1931	465	608	17,488	17,783
Australia	2735	3013	2386	2581	3141	2715	3707	3950	1692	2538	1532	1494	321	459	15,514	16,750
Germany	1014	1132	2243	1226	4192	3269	3891	4834	1380	2436	779	1142	234	224	13,733	14,263
Japan	2027	2481	2935	2516	3586	3885	2252	1980	1329	2034	955	1123	336	240	13,420	14,259
Bangladesh	2028	2447	2124	2140	2901	2739	2758	2471	2349	2719	3	674	815	12,837	13,331	
France	942	909	1566	1109	2697	2027	3451	3550	1203	2185	852	1105	455	218	11,166	11,103
Canada	911	764	1305	1005	1784	1576	1693	1774	1117	1568	667	926	184	161	7,661	7,774
Malaysia	1121	995	1333	1329	1858	1822	1833	1584	1169	1447	988	1112	334	310	8,636	8,599
Netherlands	577	818	1100	664	1498	1336	1732	1555	655	1400	388	581	287	105	6,237	6,459
Spain	478	554	748	488	913	911	1397	1291	706	1043	607	609	469	246	5,318	5,142
Italy	511	911	694	444	821	865	1308	1219	682	946	431	471	113	122	4,560	4,978
Bhutan	1274	1172	1019	987	2045	1898	549	571	564	570	575	755	220	167	6,246	6,120
Taiwan	709	551	775	874	827	858	584	715	591	623	390	425	248	219	4,124	4,265
Russia	378	457	611	363	1115	820	1916	1280	589	1641	217	383	56	67	4,882	5,011
Belgium	1	0	344	263	726	504	808	918	252	505	265	184	191	75	2,587	2,449
Singapore	358	479	444	465	801	785	821	598	610	745	449	569	50	80	3,533	3,721
Isreal			254	135	994	275	1054	1034	214	874	99	158	21	29	2,636	2,505
Denmark	265	214	382	207	649	541	656	774	238	402	123	206	42	48	2,355	2,392
Vietnam	238	172	979	982	815	885	363	209	161	282	111	145	41	64	2,708	2,739

Table 2: Countrywise tourists' arrival. Source: Nepal Tourism Statistics, 2017

India and China, the two neighboring and most populous countries of Nepal, are economically booming. The two also share some cultural similarities with Nepal. They are major tourist exporters to Nepal as well as in the global context. Similarly, the European and the North American countries together with Japan, Republic of Korea,

Israel, Australia and Russia fall under technologically advanced countries, with high internet penetration and massive social media usage. Cultural events and festivals organized by the local community could be a big attractor of the people of these nations to countries like Nepal, if they are informed about them. Social media provides a platform for community to come together to organize these events. It also helps to create media content based on these activities and then to disseminate them to a wider population abroad. Therefore, this thesis highlights importance of media management, involvement of local community, cultural events and festival in the nation branding process for Nepal.

3 FINDINGS

This chapter deals with the findings of interviews I conducted with seven journalists and media professionals who have worked for the national or the international media organizations based in Nepal and abroad. The interviewees have been involved in those cultural events and festivals, the proposed key element of nation branding process for Nepal, both in professional and in individual levels. They are thus well-suited for presenting insights from several dimensions.

It is said that the journalists are the ‘voice of the voiceless’ and the fourth estate of the state. Thus, their perception illustrates general issues related to these events and festivals in nation brand making, they help dig out the weaknesses of such endeavor, and provides possible ideas to resolve them. Since media is an important stakeholder in a nation brand and they are responsible for making and spreading opinions at national and international levels, the NTB should take these ideas into consideration.

3.1 Coding

The nation brand concept is still at the beginning phase. “No well accepted conceptual framework has been established and brand scholars admit it” Cassinger *et al* (2017). Because of its multidisciplinary relationships, the coding process became a difficult task. In order to make a foundation for cultural events and festival-based nation brand, I have mapped the interview result with corporate brands characteristics. (Trueman *et al.*, 2004) have compared city brand with the corporate brands and have found many similarities between the two. Balakrishnan (2009) has said “the City brand work as umbrella brand for a portfolio of leisure, investment, tourism, and multiple stakeholders.” I have tried covering both of scholars’ opinions here during the coding process. At first, I read the interview’s note and went through the audio tape to generate a preliminary code. Then compared one interviewee’s answers against others’ in the same question to verify if the code’s suitability. Finally, I combined the codes into six different categories.

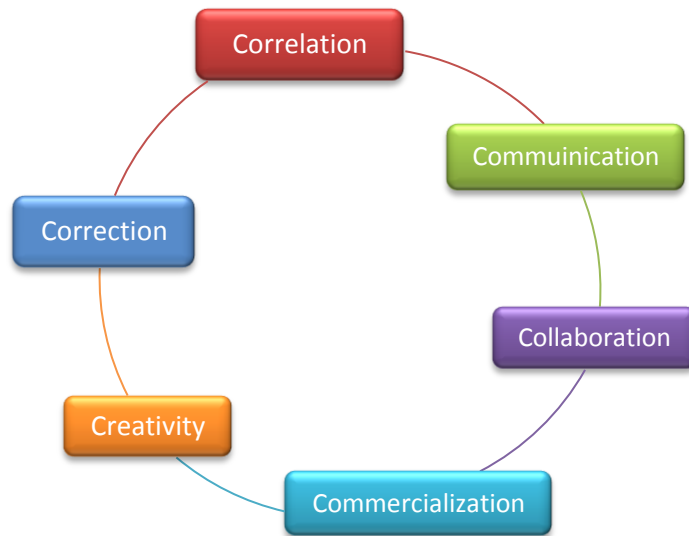


Figure 3: Finding of interviews on nation brand building process based on cultural events and festivals, 2018.

3.1.1 Correlation

Every interviewee agreed that cultural events and festivals can be one of the most important identities in nation branding for Nepal because of their quantity and quality. Nepal has more than 40 cultural events and festivals, with long histories, cultural and religious values. This means that there is a huge diversity within comparatively small geographical location. These events bring local communities together for a common purpose – Dr. Adhikary has stated,

Cultural events, especially in the countries like Nepal that has very long history and civilization, naturally connect people of various walks of life to particular place(s). For example, whenever the season of *Swasthani Puja* comes, people instantly remember the *Shalinadi area*.

Shalinadi is the name of a river that has both religious and cultural value for the Hindus. Every year during the *Swasthani puja* season that lasts for a month, devotees tend to make pilgrimage tour to this area. Likewise, on the day of the *Saraswati puja*, students go to visit a temple located at *Swoyambhu* also known as the *Monkey Temple*, in west of Kathmandu. Though the festival is celebrated nationwide, the celebrators tend to congregate on the particular temple from the *Swoyambhu* area. The cultural events or the crowd of students' pilgrimage tour to the *Swoyambhu* temple is a huge content for media.

There is also a traditional ritual to start a writing practice for young children on the same day. This is often covered by the national media.

Mahashivaratri is also a well-known as a festival related to the Hindu God Shiva, which attracts more than two hundred thousand *Yogis* and Saints from India and Nepal to the Pashupati temple in Kathmandu. It is the holiest shrine for the Hindus and one of the UNESCO's world heritage sites. More than a million visitors and devotees visit the temple on the same day.

Beside commercial ventures many social and cultural institutions voluntarily establish stalls on the location to serve the devotees on that day. The festival has become a junction for cultural and social institutions, commercial ventures, media houses and devotees. BBC Nepali reporter Phadindra dahal has personally written a long coverage of the festival says “the Pashupati Temple especially its historical and cultural importance is significantly covered by the international media as well. Personally, I have a done a long story about it.”

The Dog's festival is celebrated nationwide in Nepal presents a unique feature of both cultural and religious value. But the very festival is regarded as a festival to thank man's best friend. The founder and editor of the Gundruk post, Bishwas Hamal has noted -

Recently the dog festival also known as *Kukur Tihar* in Nepali is getting huge popularity internationally. There is no doubt the dog is one of the most favored pets worldwide. Even the popular site 9gag has published a long feature article with attractive photos about this festival.

Indeed, 9gag's site is popular among youngsters has more than 38 million followers in its Facebook page to date. A single dog festival that has exposed Nepal's name with a positive message to more than 38 million people worldwide literally, free of charge can be considered indeed a great success for Nepal's brand exposure. This kind of exposure does not only give a straightforward description of the dog festival, but attractive pictures portrays unique cultural value that may appeals people to visit the place;

Comments and feedbacks allow further discussion and give an opportunity to establish a contact between the potential tourists and the tour agencies. In this regard Dr. Adhikary further says:

There are scripturally authentic, social institutional mechanisms and popular practices that connect various places with unique cultural events. Virtually all the places having tourism value in Nepal also have cultural value too.

Similarly, *Buddha Jayanti* or the birthday of the Lord Buddha is another important festival that triggers various cultural events nationwide. The day instantly reminds of Lumbini, the birth place of Buddha located in the southern parts of Nepal. Similar events take place in the Swayambhu and the Bouddha Stupas in Kathmandu. All these places are listed in the UNESCO's world heritage site. Buddha Jayanti is the holiest day in Buddhism, the second largest religion in Nepal and the fourth largest religion in the world and it attracts both domestic and international visitors to those places.

Biwah panchami is another festival celebrated by the Hindus. Though this festival is celebrated nationwide at a small scale, it has huge significance in Janakpur, an ancient city located in the south eastern parts of Nepal. The festival day is considered as an auspicious to get married since it is celebrated to commemorate the wedding of the Hindu God Ram and the Goddess Sita.

Similarly, there are festivals for certain communities. *Jitiya parva* is celebrated by the Tharu community from the southern part of Nepal. *Tamu Lhosar* is celebrated by the Gurung community. *Falgunanda Jayanti* is celebrated by the Kirat community. *Jatra* loosely translated as street show or cultural events that takes place on the street of a particular place, on the other hand are also organized at the local level. Some *Jatra* such as the *Indra Jatra* – a chariot pulling festival along with cultural processions is attended by the president of Nepal along with the ministers, the foreign diplomats, the civil and the military officials gets significant coverage from the national media.

3.1.2 Communication

In any kind of branding whether it is commercial, corporate or nation, it is mandatory to reflect the core value of the brand by its stakeholders such employees and local communities or residents. In the nation branding practice, reflection of the core value of the brand to the nation's inhabitants, is important to consider in order to meet the vision.

The NTB has given significance to cultural events and festivals in its official website. However, the brand slogan does not match the content it provides.

In their slogan, the NTB uses 'Naturally Nepal' which is suggestive of natural landscape, flora and fauna to promote Nepal's brand image. However, a huge number of pictures depicting cultural events and festivals are used for promoting Nepal. The nation brand slogan and the message it is trying to deliver are not well integrated with the website contents.

Similarly, local communities enthusiastically participate in some events and festivals, but they do not promote the whole nation brand image intentionally. In the other words, cultural events and festival organizing committees are scattered and do not have unified goal to promote nation brand image with the help of the events they are organizing. In this regard, Jyoti devkota, editor of Setopati Global edition compares with Iceland's community practice and says "In Iceland I noticed even on the water tap it was written that Iceland produces clean water as Arabic countries produce oil. You can drink the water with no hesitation."

The drinking water shortage is a huge problem that even developed cities are facing nowadays. In contrast, Iceland has given value to fresh and clean water production. It has included fresh water in its core identity and has put effort to convey the nation brand message to its population. As is already mentioned, in nation brand practice no well accepted conceptual framework has yet been established. There is no black and white answer as to whether the fresh water can be an identity for the nation brand or not. The important point here is the core value of the brand is conveyed the communities effectively. In contrast to Iceland's nation brand practice, neither the NTB nor the local communities seem to be aware of the importance of brand communication of the core value in the context of Nepal. Dr. Adhikary, further says,

Local community is always eager to promote their cultural events; hence, there is always an advantage with that. Meanwhile, they need facilitation in the promotion strategy, event management and service delivery. Some specialized agencies, like Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), should facilitate them in this regard.

Dr. Adhikary admits that to some extent NTB has collaborated with some cultural events but not in adequate amount. The major problem is the lack of clear brand vision. The NTB does not seem to have a clear in brand vision, nor the awareness about the core value of Nepal's nation brand. Nepal based Chinese news agency Xinhua's reporter shares his experience as, "NTB provides Nepal's miniature version of *Khukuri*,

temples and the Bouddha Stupa as souvenirs to foreign visitors for free. I have got some of them before my tour to India.”

The NTB has implicitly acknowledged the importance of Nepal’s cultural events and festivals in nation brand image but has not been able to make a strategic brand keeping them at the core. Moreover, branding process is also a communication process.

Phadindra Dahal says that Nepali media are not giving importance to such festivals and events. Most of the print media and electronic media seem to be covering only the political news. A handful of news from such festivals and events covered with priority by the national media. In contrast, International media mostly tend to cover the negative news about Nepal.

Santosh Ghimire in this issue says that “Nepali media professionals and journalists do not have a proper understanding of the importance of such cultural events and festivals in Nepal’s overall tourism development.”

The rise of the social media has given possibility for the local communities to promote their cultural events and festivals. In fact, they are already doing so by posting photos, videos and other information in Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. However, they are not guided by a common strategic vision. The NTB has not integrated local organizing committee into the strategic brand communication process.

Abhaya Pandey says,

When the state does not have enough financial resources for standard ‘Public Relation’ and advertisement campaign, social media platform could be the best alternative. Today some YouTubers or Vloggers have millions of subscribers; the NTB should invite them to participate in cultural festivals.

This seems to be the best solution for an inexpensive advertisement campaign. There are many channels related to hobbies, pets, colors, dresses, foods and dances with reach to millions of subscribers. They are comparatively inexpensive than to advertise in the international TV channels and they are inexpensive than hiring the Hollywood celebrity as a brand ambassador. The NTB should grab this opportunity. The dog festival, for example, can be content for the pet related channel. *Mahashivaratri* and *Buddha Jayanti* can be content for spiritual channels. Similarly, there is wide variety of foods is consumed on the festivals; they can be the contents for channel related to culinary.

3.1.3 Collaboration

As is already mentioned, nation branding involves multidisciplinary stakeholders. It is important to collaborate with all those stakeholders related to the core value to form the nation brand. In this thesis, local communities have been identified as the prime stakeholder with whom the NTB should collaborate. There are several local community institutions those are formed to celebrate the festivals as well as to organize cultural events. They are first formed, then they organize cultural events and they are dissolved after they have fulfilled their purpose. All these are done with the NTB's acknowledgement. Abhay Panday stresses that:

NTB should publish a calendar targeting such events and festival. It should include name of the places, name of the organizing communities, etc., so that it would be easier for a potential visitor, commercial ventures and media to coordinate their activities.

NTB should strategically collaborate with all the concerning authorities and it should play a role to facilitate and; promote such events. Dr. Adhikary also admits the same and adds, "In some places collaboration with local communities is taking place. But it is not in an adequate amount."

If travels and tours agencies scattered all over Nepal came under one single nation brand slogan, then it would be an effective and inexpensive marketing campaign for Nepal's tourism industry. To the date, they are also promoting Nepal's tourism industry depending on their product positioning, marketing channels and resources. However, if such agencies came into collaboration with the NTB, then they could develop strategies, which, while promoting their own agencies, may automatically popularize Nepal's brand image internationally.

Phadindra Dahal suggests not only collaborating with local communities, travel and tours agencies but also with national and international educational institutions. He states:

In Tribhuwan University and its affiliated institutions, students' enrollment in culture and history subject is in decline. Without proper education in culture and history, Nepal's brand image based on cultural events and festivals may face huge challenges in future.

Hence, NTB needs to take an initiation to provide scholarships to motivate students to study history and culture; it is not only Nepal's domestic issue. There are many values

and rituals within the culture faculty. International students and scholars should be invited or provided incentives to study or to conduct researches in this field so that it would work as a 'PR'. This also helps in expanding the literature related to Nepal's cultural events and festival.

Non-Resident Nepalese Associations popularly known as NRN is another significant collaborator whose contribution in Nepal's brand image can be important. Brand scholars admit that every individual engaged in corresponding organization, institution, place or nation are the brand ambassadors of the respective entities. Hence, thousands of NRN's members scattered in 62 countries are Nepal brand's ambassadors. Santosh Ghimire in this regard says, "NRN should be less political and more culture oriented which may help in the promotion of Nepal's cultural events and festivals worldwide."

His remark here highlights the importance of NRN in the nation branding process. The cultural upbringing of NRN's members is rooted in Nepal. No matter which country they are living in, if the association keeps the core cultural value of Nepal at its center, a huge number of foreign nationals; those who come in contact with it, are informed easily about Nepal's cultural events and festivals. Interestingly, in some countries, such as Australia, NRN-Australia is already taking a lead role to exhibit Nepal's traditional dresses in the Australian day parade, making a headline in the Nepalese media. But again, because of lack of a proper strategy, it is not as efficient as it could be, Abhaya Panday admits.

Dr. Adhikary in this regard adds:

There can be innovative ways to attract and persuade people to feel knowledgeable about Nepal and make them visit different places here. For instance, they can organize teaser events abroad corresponding to some specific events in Nepal.

Collaborations with nationally and internationally recognized institutions are equivalent to getting free advertisement for Nepal brand abroad. This is because, it is possible to get Nepal's brand image exposed in every news content the collaborating partner creates.

Bhuvan Pokharel in this sense adds:

Nepal's some festivals such as the dog festival, the crow festival, the cow festivals and the serpent festival have notion of animal rights and the importance of their conservation. There are international organizations working for animal rights, environment etc.

Indeed, such international organizations have better access in international media platform. Every year they make headlines in recognized newspapers and TV channels. The NTB has enough ground to collaborate with them.

In this regard Jyoti Devkota adds, "because of the Indian lobby, the UN has declared 21 June of every year as the International Day for Yoga. Now whoever practices Yoga is familiar with the term India."

3.1.4 Commercialization

The multidisciplinary nature of nation brand includes commercial concerns as well. A nation's brand recognition and brand awareness definitely affects in its commercial environment such as import preferences, leisure destination, investment, and skilled labor's choices and so on. Though commercial concern of nation brand image is well accepted, the interviewee's opinions regarding the utility of the commercialization of cultural events and festivals themselves seem to be divided.

Some interviewees argued that commercialization of cultural events and festivals may negatively affect its traditional and unique cultural identity thus decreasing its attraction to tourists from different cultural background. But some interviewees argued that without commercialization such events and festivals may not sustain themselves in the long run. Sooner or later, the cultural value should be linked with commercial value as well, so that local communities perform it again and again. Freelance creative director Abhaya Panday on *Shivaratri* festival gives an example,

A number of commercial ventures and stalls are opened in nearby location on this day targeting the huge crowd of visitors.

It is obvious that commercial ventures are attracted depending on their target market. Cultural events and festivals gather celebrators and visitors who can be potential customers.

Holi festival also known as festival of colors is being slowly changing the way it is celebrated these days. Local youth clubs often organize the *Holi* festival, whose participation requires payment of entrance fees. Supporting this idea Jyoti devkota states, “Churches perform many educational and philanthropic activities by accepting donation or conducting charitable programs. Without fund-raising program, they cannot run such educational and philanthropic activities.”

During the fund-raising program some are hired while others work as volunteers. Yoga has cultural value, it also has historical roots in Nepal. Local communities should organize Yoga training program on the National Yoga day. Phadindra Dahal says:

the NTB should produce and publish “culture guide”. Tourist guide in Nepal has provided the knowledge of the cultural events and festivals at the surfacial. If they started training session to produce culture guide, youths may see more opportunity in cultural events and festivals.

Similarly, there are many goods and services are used in cultural events. For example, *Bhai Masala* (Dry fruit packets) is given to brothers by sisters on *Bhai Tika* festival. An interviewee doubts if those dry fruit packets are produced in Nepal. Most of them are imported from India. Though the festival comes once a year, it has a huge demand and has potentiality for commercial activities.

On *Naag Panchami* or the Serpent Festival, it is a tradition to stick a picture of artistic depiction of serpent on upper part of the door. Those posters are also imported. Santosh ghimire indicating this kind of commercialization says,

NTB has provides miniature of traditional Nepali tools as a souvenir. They should include Nepal’s cultural and festivals related items as well.

If NTB published and sold such posters for *Naag Panchami*, celebrator’s houses along with Nepal’s nation brand slogan, a huge number of people who are brand ambassadors, are reminded about the core value of Nepal’s brand image thus integrating them in strategic branding process.

Bhuwan pokharel argues:

If the local community had a feeling of ownership of the cultural events and festival and they believed it's their identity, they would possibly see commercial scope within such festivals. It is duty of the state to teach them the importance of cultural events and festivals in overall Nepal's economic and social development.

“Local community should have feelings of ownership of the cultural events and festivals. Whether they want to exploit such events for commercial purpose or not, it's entirely up to them”, says Jyoti Devkota.

There are a number of products exported from Nepal. No matter what they are, they convey Nepal's brand image. The NTB should identify such products that can directly link with cultural events and festivals so that the product and the nation brand's core value promote each other. Bhuwan pokharel in this regard says:

Nepal is the only country where the dogs are worshipped, celebrated during acknowledging them as the closest friend of mankind. Nepal's *Chhurpi* (Hard cheese) for dogs are being exported. The NTB should grab this opportunity by linking the dog's food and the dog festival so that Nepal's brand image is exposed in every possible way.

Abhaya pandey suggests that the NTB should develop a brand slogan along with a logo resembling Nepal's cultural events and festivals and negotiate with the exporters to use them on the products. It is practiced in some other countries to print a certain logo to identify that the product was actually manufactured in the country (Australian Made, 2016). Similarly, readymade clothes, tea, herbal and agricultural products, handicrafts, carpets etc are exported from Nepal. The NTB should search possibilities to depict Nepal's brand nation value in such items.

3.1.5 Creativity

That creativity is essential within the media exposure, was the consensus among the interviewees. But it is difficult define creativity in a small chapter. There are number of school of thoughts regarding creativity. In case of cultural events and festivals, it is essential, not only for media exposure but also in helping such events to sustain in the long run.

People tend to have interest in the superlative and the hyperbolic phenomenon that are longest, shortest, tallest, biggest, smallest etc. Abhya pandey suggests, “In order to get international media exposure in a positive way, residents of Nepal should perform cultural events and festivals in such a way that drags people’s attention.”

He further adds, “Australian gay parade is well advertised because of its magnitude. People around the world come to participate in it.” He provided an example of the song ‘Gangnam style’ as a suitable example of creative work.

The cultural events already give a ground for creativity. The dog festival should not be celebrated indoor only, and in the same way every year because it may decrease in its attraction. One has to come up with some creative idea. Keeping its core cultural and religious value intact, there could be competitions in various topics such as the dog’s running competition, the dog’s photo competition, the largest dogs’ parade, the most beautiful dog etc. If the NTB initiated such events, the dog festivals may attract international media attention as well as increase in foreign participants.

Phadindra Dahal gives example of creativity in *Newari* festivals.

There is a lot of room for creativity the *Newari* festivals. Special food is served in depending on festivals. They can make a video on how to prepare such food. How to prepare the dresses they wear? How to dance in such events? Language, songs, music, etc.

A single cultural festival has particular dances, songs, foods, drinks, dresses, games, ornaments, performances and rituals. They are limited within the *Newari* community. They should make video tutorial, make a documentary, publish books, and develop a mobile application etc. related to these aspects. This is a simple example for a particular festival and it can be applied in other many such events.

Bishwas Hamal adds, “Creation of cartoon characters and memes is also an effective way to promote such events in today’s digital era.”

The creative activities within cultural the events and festivals can have positive impact in many ways. The residents are reacquainted with their own cultural values. People are also motivated to explore their own creativity when they see others being creative. Thus, they try to promote their own cultural events in their unique ways.

Creative performance of the same cultural events attracts media attention, giving an opportunity of free advertisement. Similarly, creative work grabs the attention of social media users who make it is possible to get likes and shares, thus promoting overall nation brand awareness.

To the date Nepal holds the Guinness world record of the largest flag demonstration. The performance that took place in Kathmandu was widely covered in the international media as well. It was a creative work with community participation. It did not have the state's direct involvement nor was the NTB a part of it. Some creative and enthusiastic people made the news headlines around the world (Donnelley, 2014). The NTB should learn lesson from such events and apply similar ideas cultural events and festivals.

3.1.6 Correction

Cultural events and festivals are performed by people. Human beings make mistakes which is natural. But to not to learn a lesson and correct such mistakes or weaknesses subsequently hampers overall nation brand image. There are some weaknesses in cultural events and festivals which need to be addressed. Similar to the brand maintenance in corporate brands and product brand practice in general, the nation branding process should also include a mechanism to maintain the brand image over time.

Santosh ghimire gives an example of Bhaktapur's *Bisket Jatra* (Traditional chariot pulling festival). "Tourists did not get proper information about the *Jatra*. Traffic was in complete chaos. Intoxication and fight scared them."

These incidents are related to the cultural events and festivals. Most of the interviewees gave similar examples. If the NTB wanted to posit Nepal's brand image based on cultural events and festivals, these practical problems should be addressed and corrected. Otherwise the core value of the nation brand is overshadowed by the mismanagement.

The NTB should provide proper information about the festivals. Where does it take place? How it is conducted? How long does it take? What is allowed and what is not? What are the means of transportation? What are the possible charges etc.?

The NTB should not expect the tourists to find such information by themselves because, on one hand it is aspect of 'customer care' and on the other hand, the tourists are from a wide variety of countries/cultural backgrounds. There could be linguistic and cultural barriers. Therefore, it is the NTB's duty to provide such information in the English language, the language which is accepted as international communication language by the government of Nepal. The NTB should take an initiative to establish a channel to supervise the possible mismanagement in cultural events and festivals because it is directly related to nation's brand image. Usually it takes a long time and energy to address such problem because of bureaucratic and administrative hindrances. These are the practical mismanagement issue. Dr. Adhikary highlights possible weaknesses that hampers Nepal brand image in other way. He says,

The incongruence between the value systems, rituals and worldviews of the wider audiences and the locals may create undesirable brand image. Cultural events should be understood within their own framework and underlying value system. Otherwise, there is always a danger of stereotyping and dismissive over simplifications.

Although some cultural events and festivals have the notion of animal rights; such as the cow festival, the dog festival, the crow festival and the serpent festival; there are some festivals where animals are slaughtered. For example, the *Gadimai* became a spotlight for international media spreading a negative brand image. The festival that takes place every five years at a particular place, overshadowed other more frequently celebrated festivals where animals are worshiped and presented as a symbol of harmony.

Nepali media in such cases should provide information in congruence with local cultural sentiments and value system so that it could be a reference for the international media thereby reducing possible generalizations and stereotyping. Today compared to earlier times, the youngsters are not as keen to celebrate domestic cultural events and festivals. There are some news-paper articles have portrayed the decreasing trend of participants and claim that especially the youngsters are losing interest in such events. Highlighting this issue Jyoti Devkota says:

Today's Youngsters do not feel proud on their own cultural heritage. Some of them think modernization is copying other's culture blindly. They are misguided. The state or the concerning authority should guide them in proper way; Otherwise the whole Nepal loses its cultural heritage that will severely hampers Nepal's heterogeneous cultural identity.

4 ANALYSIS

The nation brand building process is not a onetime action. It needs consistency in its core value. Yet human nature is such that; we keep looking for new thing most of the time. It is difficult to find someone who prefers the same thing every day, expects it to be everywhere and at every time. Therefore, there are wide variety of products, services and corporate agencies to address such ever changing human desire. It is both an opportunity as well as a threat to the nation branding scholars. Hence, creating new ideas to exploit the opportunities and making this field challenging enough to mitigate the threats in the area where the nation brand managers should focus on.

Although the nation brand building process does not have any concrete framework because of its multidisciplinary interrelationship among different areas, it somewhat shares some similarities with both the product branding process as well as corporate branding process.

The NTB, although partially funded by the state, does not have enough financial and human resources to rent the spaces in international TV, magazines and newspapers frequently nor can display advertising billboards in its target markets. Developing a brand strategy keeping its cultural events and festivals as its core brand value and integrating the local community around it for promotion is one of the best approaches for nation branding according to the interviewees' opinion.

Correlation, Creativity and Communication are important in nation brand image promotion. Mt. Everest has international recognition because of being the tallest mountain in the world. But despite being listed as one of the UNESCO's world heritage sites and having all the features for tourist destination, *the Basantapur Durbar Square*, does not have such international recognition. Obviously, the place does not promote itself. It is someone knowledgeable about its existence and importance to present it the whole world. It is the NTB's duty to do so. But the problem is that the NTB does not have enough resources to do so. Therefore, the NTB must be creative and leverage the local community for its promotion. Again, the question is why would the local community go there every now and then, just to take pictures and make videos? The Correlation part discussed earlier chapter attempts to find a solution to the problem.

The *Kumari Jatra* and the *Holi* festivals take place around at the same place where the *Basantpur Durbar Square* is located. Not only the local communities but people from nearby place towns often make a visit during such events. The activities they do for the events can have positive impact in promoting the *Basantapur Durbar Square* as well. The photos and videos they post in Facebook, Instagram, YouTube comes together with the *Basantpur Durbar Square* and its cultural significance. There is always a possibility to tag those media in the official pages of the heritage site. A single day's event generates hundreds of social media content spreading to hundreds of thousands of people.

This is a simple example how correlation between the places that has touristic importance and the cultural events and festivals can be exploited in nation branding. The interview results suggest that NTB should make a chart to establish the relationship between the places and the events. This is an example of correlation between manmade structures and cultural events. According to Dr. Adhikary's argument, there are many other places where similar correlation with cultural events can be established.

Similarly, *Vivah Panchami* can be an occasion to promote Janakpur, a southern city in the south of Nepal. A huge number of local communities as well as pilgrims visit the temple on that day. The pictures and videos posted in social media unknowingly promote the *Janaki* temple and its surrounding of region from the ancient *Mithila* civilization.

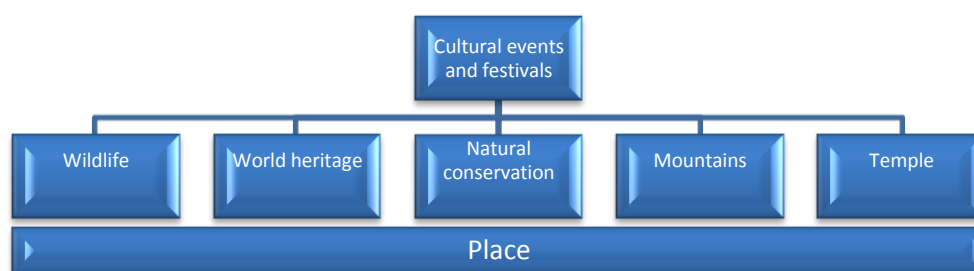


Figure 4: Correlation between cultural events and festivals, and places along with its possible tourist-attraction.

This way the NTB should make a chart correlating historical and cultural heritage to events and festivals. There may be a question regarding efficacy and possible reach of such content created by local community.

The creativity section discussed in earlier chapter number 3.1.5 deals with this issue. Abhaya Panday, Phadindra Dahal and Bishwas Hamal insisted in utilizing creative approaches that may allow for free-of-cost advertisement.

Abhaya Panday has given the example of creative work of a song and said that

South Korean song ‘Gangnam style’ is a simple example of this kind of creativity. It is one of the most watched video of all that times in YouTube. The single video successfully showed Korean houses, streets, dresses, people etc. to the billions of people around for free of cost.

From the communication point of view, the content was distributed to billions of people because of single creative idea. The social media has generated opportunities that never existed before. The creative and the effective use of social media can promote a nation brand image much more efficiently than the traditional media.

Although the Korean language is predominantly spoken only in South Korea and North Korea, the song was popular among youngsters from many non-Korean speaking countries. It has established an example that a creative work has a possibility to cross cultural and political boundaries. Similarly, Nepal’s cultural events consist of art, music, dances, dresses, foods etc. Any kind of interesting creative work may reach billions of audiences without any cost. All that needed is an effective use of the social media. Thus, “community should promote creativity within their cultural events and festivals including foods, dresses, dances, songs etc.” as Phadindra Dahal stated in earlier Chapter.3.1.5.

Since there are many cultural events and festivals across Nepal, individual creativity to promote each cultural events and festivals may not effectively promote overall Nepal’s overall brand image. That is why the NTB should collaborate with the local community and the committee that is responsible for organizing such events. Every creative work, either it be a song, dance, food- related video, or a street performance, produced to promote such events should carry a single tagline or slogan that represents the core value of nation brand.

The role of the NTB is very important here, it should prepare a single tagline or a slogan that represents Nepal's cultural events and festivals and motivate local communities to apply it in their creative work.

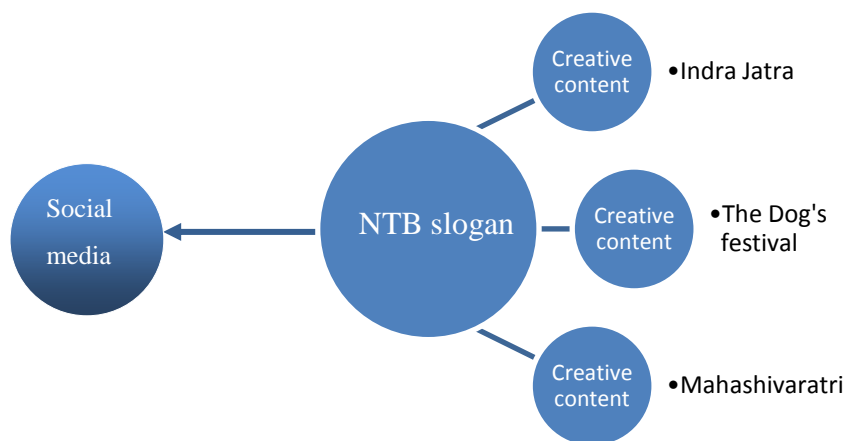


Figure 5: Independent creative content and NTB's slogan.

Suppose a *Newari* music video, which is performed in *Kumari Jatra*, a festival celebrated by the community in Kathmandu, with a content of traditional newari dress and food, staged in *Basantpur Durbar Square* got a popularity same as the Korean song. There would be a huge promotion of overall nation brand image if it consisted of slogan of core brand value. As it is mentioned in earlier Chapter 3.1.5, Nepal has about ten million Facebook users and a million YouTube account holders that provides a possibility to create a creative content and promote them in the social media.

The NRNA has members in 62 countries at the moment. The association's member consists of both Nepali citizens and foreign nationals of Nepali origin. They do celebrate Nepali cultural events and festivals even in foreign lands. This is an opportunity for the NTB to foster Nepal's brand image since it is said that they are the cultural ambassadors. Depending on the country they live, they have knowledge of the local language. They can produce creative work in the local language that has even better influence in over the corresponding countries. In Chapter number 3.1.3 Dr. Adhikary's statement carries similar sentiments. The NRN's members know more about the local culture, local people and the local language. They may have group or community pages, University circle or colleagues that allow them to select the language, medium, tools and technique to foster Nepal's brand image.

Besides involving communities in the nation brand building process, the NTB should endorse ‘YouTubers or Vloggers’ as it is suggested by Abhaya Panday, since they are inexpensive but has a huge reach in the social media. Taking an example of Bhuwan Pokharel in previous Chapter 3.1.3, a cultural event known as the *Bol Bom* procession is suitable in the Travel Channel.

Pet related channel is suitable for the dog festival, the crow festival, the serpent festival and the cow festival. The *Teej* festival is suitable in channel targeted to the Women. Such events are repeated every year. This means the nation brand image can be exposed many times within a year through multiple channels for relatively low cost.

There is always a possibility of some misunderstanding between the domestic cultural events and the tourists from different cultural background that may create an undesirable brand image. The NTB should frequently be in contact with the national media professionals to communicate the underlying value system so that it could be the official source of reference to the international media. In Chapter 3.1.3, Phadindra Dahal pointed out that,

In Tribhuvan University and its affiliated institutions, students’ enrollment in culture and history subject is in decline due to the decreasing enrolment in culture and history studies, there will be a lack of scholars who understand the ground reality of value system.

Without such scholars, national media will not be able to communicate the proper knowledge and the cultural value of such events and festivals to the residents. That may decrease the participants and celebrators thus hampering the core nation brand value of Nepal. “Therefore, the NTB’s officials should be farsighted and start providing scholarships to the students to motivate them to study culture and history subjects. At the same time, it should consider creating ‘culture guide’.” As it is, suggested by Phadindra Dahal in Chapter 3.1.3.

There is always possibility of mismanagement in such events that creates negative brand image. The NTB should be in contact with such large scale cultural events and festival to monitor the management and continuously take feedback. There is a special police unit called ‘Tourist police’ within Nepal police. Similar to this system, the NTB should present its officials in such events to maintain nation’s brand image.

Although the cultural events and festival-based core brand image has economic value and could play a potential role in Nepal's economic development, but it should not take such events and festivals as a means just to generate income but also promote Nepal's identity to the world. In corporate branding practice, every individual working for the corporation should resemble the core value of the brand. Similarly, Nepal's residents as well as non-residents should take such events and festivals as their 'inseparable identity.' It is also a duty of the NTB to motivate people in participation and celebration.

5 CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the tourism industry is one of the major industries that can help to develop Nepal economically. Despite having several attractive tourist destinations, Nepal is still not able to welcome an adequate number of tourists. As it is already 2018, the government's ambitious target to welcome 2 million tourists by 2020 does not seem like it will be met at this pace.

Nation branding is a relatively new branding topic. Several scholars have argued that nation brand image is directly related to the tourism industry. The nation brand awareness motivates the potential tourist to visit the country.

The NTB, that is responsible to promote and facilitate tourism industry in Nepal, does not have enough resources to advertise in the well-known international media. On the other hand, it is still not able to establish a clear positioning of Nepal's brand image. What is Nepal? Going through its official site does not have a clear answer to this question. The pictures used in its sites, its logo and the brand slogan convey entirely different messages. On the other hand, the local community, who is de facto beneficiary of brand image and the major stakeholder, has not been involved in the brand making process at all.

I argue that the local community should be given emphasis for nation branding process. No matter how much money the NTB spends in the advertisement to promote the mountains, if the local community is not welcoming, its effort goes in vain. No matter how beautifully the lake or river is advertised, if the local community does not conserve it, it will not last for long.

The NTB should involve the local community in the nation branding process. It should use the community's unique identity as a core value of the nation brand. When the community sees their face in overall Nepal's brand image, they will be motivated to promote Nepal's heterogeneous country with a number of unique cultural events and festivals. The cultural events and festivals, celebrated by the people of 103 ethnic groups, 93 dialects definitely give a wide variety of cultural experiences. Such events have the potential to bring them all together in a common place.

The people of 103 ethnic groups and 93 dialects do have possibility of different food, dresses, cultural songs, and way of life. So, there is potential to combine them in for creative ways and make something attractive to the tourists. The rise of the social media has given an opportunity to connect to the entire world at almost free of cost. Creativity is one of the major elements in a media content which will draw the attention of people far and wide, causing them to be watched, shared and tagged in a viral manner.

What would happen if more than 10 million people are involved to promote their cultural events and festivals through social media? This will, in effect, crowd source the job of the NTB at almost zero cost. The opportunities are endless here. Hence, the NTB should understand the growing capabilities of local community with social media and the value of cultural events and festivals in order to integrate them in Nepal brand image making process. To specialize in the nation brand image creation, the NTB should establish a 'Nation brand Desk' which revise the brand logo and slogan so that they are more coherent, collaborate with the stakeholders, motivate the local community to promote cultural events and festival in creative ways and supervise such the organization of such events and festivals to maintain the brand image.

5.1 Further work

There is no well accepted conceptual framework for nation brand building. Nation branding has multidisciplinary stakeholders. It is not clear how to posit an element of a nation as its core value. This thesis has presented the cultural events and festivals to be used as the core value of nation brand. The culture consists of many different rites and rituals, food, dress, art, languages, etc. It further generates a question that how does such varieties of cultural elements work as a sub-brand under a single nation brand? These kinds of questions may be addressed in further research.

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Appendix 1:

Figures

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Figure 1: The Nation brand Hexagon©Simon Anholt
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Figure 2 : Social Media Stats in Nepal. Source : Globalstats, 2018
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Figure 3: Finding of interviews on nation brand building process based on cultural events and festivals,
(Gautam S., 2018)

Figure: 4. Cultural events and places correlation chart. Gautam S., 2018.

Figure 5: Independent creative content and NTB's slogan. Gautam S., 2018.

Tables :

Table 1: List of cultural events and festivals. Source: Nepali calendar 2018.

Table 2: Countrywise tourist arrival. Source: Nepal Tourism Statistics, 2017
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A brief introduction of interviewees:

Bhuwan Pokharel

Freelance writer
Former media worker
Kantipur media group

Bishwas Hamal

Editor and founder
www.Gundrukpost.com

Jyoti Devkota

Global edition editor
www.setopati.com

Abhaya Pandey

Creative Freelance Director

Phadindra dahal

Journalist
BBC Nepali Service

Santosh ghimire

Journalist
Chinese news agency Xinhua

Dr. Nirmala Mani Adhikary

Communication Scholar
Kathmandu University

Appendix 2

S.N	Event/Festival	Date	Location
1	Shree Swasthani Purnima	2nd January	Shalinadi, Kathmandu
2	Maghe shankranti	15th January	Nationwide
3	Sonam Khosar	18th January	Kathmandu
4	Saraswati puja	22nd January	Kathmandu
5	Mahashivaratri	13th February	Kathmandu and nationwide
6	Ghyalpo Lhosar	16th February	Kathmandu
7	Falgu Purnima	1st March	Kathmandu and hill area
8	Falgu Purnima	2nd March	Terai area
9	Ghode jatra	17th March	Kathmandu
10	Ram Nawami	25th March	Nationwide
11	Mahavir Jayanti	29th March	Nationwide
12	Nawa Barsha	14th April	Nationwide
13	Mata tirth aunsi	16th April	Nationwide
14	Buddha Jayanti	30th April	Kathmandu, Rupandehi
15	Dahi chiura khane din	29th June	Nationwide
16	Saune shakranti	17th July	Nationwide
17	Khira khane din	31st July	Nationwide
18	Naag panchami	15th August	Nationwide
19	Janai Purnima	26th August	Nationwide
20	Krishna Janmashtami	2nd September	Lalitpur and nationwide
21	Kushe aunshi	9th September	Nationwide
22	Haritalika teej	12th September	Nationwide
23	Rishi panchami	14th September	Nationwide
24	Bishwakarma puja	17th September	Nationwide
25	Indra jatra	24th September	Kathmandu
26	Jitiya parva	2nd October	Terai area
27	Ghatasthapana	10th October	Nationwide
28	Fulpati	16th October	Nationwide
29	Maha Ashtami	17th October	Nationwide
30	Maha Nawami	18th October	Nationwide
31	Viajay Dashami	19th October	Nationwide
32	Kaag tihar	5th November	Nationwide
33	Kukur Tihar	6th November	Nationwide
34	Laxmi Puja	7th November	Nationwide
35	Gobardhan puja	8th November	Nationwide
36	Bhai Tika, Mha: puja	9th November	Nationwide
37	ChhaTh parva	13th november	Terai area
38	Tulasi Biwaha	20th November	Nationwide
39	Falgunanda Jayanti	30th November	Eastern Nepal
40	Biwah panchami	12th December	Nationwide
41	Dhanyapurnima, Urvyali	22nd December	Nationwide

Table 1: List of cultural events and festivals, Source: Nepali Calendar 2018.

Note: The celebration date may vary because of differences in Gorgerin and Lunar Calendar. These are all traditional festivals, not to be confused with music festival such as Jazz music festival, rock music festival etc.