

Competitive Identities of South Asian Nations: A Content Analysis of Embassy Websites in the USA

Dr. Rahnuma Ahmed*
Aditi Shams**

Abstract: *The goal of this study was twofold: (1) to examine how competitive identities (i.e., culture, brands, policy, people, investment, and tourism), as mentioned by Anholt (2007a; 2007b), of South Asian nations were presented in their embassy Websites in the USA to enhance the brand values of the nations and (2) to test whether the competitive identities were presented in a similar (or dissimilar) way across the Websites. A content analysis on the embassy Websites of seven Southeast Asian countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) was conducted. The results showed that the contents of Websites lacked contents on competitive identities. Furthermore, the current study found no significant differences in the manifestation of competitive identities on the embassy Websites. These results are important as it demonstrates that immediate steps should be taken in order to create effective brand message by presenting the competitive identities. In addition, the current research will provide an initial premise for future researcher to work on nation branding in this region.*

Keywords: *nation branding, competitive identities, South Asia.*

How your country stands in comparison to other nations matters significantly (Anholt, 2007a). The very idea of branding nations has become an integral part of government policy to increase foreign direct investment, tourism, export, skilled workforce, worldwide political influence, etc. (Dinnie, 2008). Therefore, any government, as a representative of its people and institutions, tries to create and present positive identities of the nation to generate favorable perceptions or images in the mind of the people around the world (Anholt, 2007a). As stated by Anholt, one of the key responsibilities of government entities is “to try to build a reputation that is fair, true, powerful, attractive, genuinely useful to their economic, political and social aims, and honestly reflects the spirit, the genius and the will of the people” (2007a, p. 477). In other words, building a good brand of the nation is integral to any government’s job.

A major share of such nation branding goals can potentially be achieved by a nation’s embassy activities and contribution in foreign affairs (SRana & Chatterjee, 2011). An

* Guest Lecturer, International Business, University of Dhaka, Email: rahnuma.ahmed@ou.edu

** Assistant Professor, International Business, University of Dhaka, Email: aditishams@du.ac.bd

embassy can play an important role in promoting trade and investment, acquiring technology, managing aid, exchanging culture, initiating and enhancing partnership on behalf of the developing countries' people, government, business and institution (SRana & Chatterjee, 2011). Therefore, any embassy, as a powerful actor on behalf of its people, government, business and institution, has good opportunity to create a positive brand image for the nation (Anholt, 2007a; 2007b; Dinnie, 2008; SRana & Chatterjee, 2011). This scenario is particularly true for a developing country's embassy situated in a developed nation (SRana & Chatterjee, 2011).

The Competitive Identity Hexagon, developed by Anholt (2007a; 2007b) is one of very few frameworks that provides a conceptual background for analyzing which competitive aspects of a nation (both developed and developing) create a strong nation brand, and how to develop, maintain and retain a competitive identity of a nation (Alton, 2007a). According to Anholt (2007a; 2007b), a nation's brand is created and enhanced by utilizing the competitive identities (i.e., culture, brands, policy, people, investment, and tourism) of the country. Anholt also argued that it is inevitable for any country to identify, analyze and enhance such identities on a regular basis (2007a; 2007b). The major objective of the current study is to identify whether and how such competitive identities were presented in the Websites of South Asian embassies in the USA. Anholt's Competitive Identity Hexagon, indeed, is an appropriate framework for the current study, as the framework focuses on all the issues that an embassy should deliver to foreign nations (Nömm, 2007). Although this framework was used as an index to rank world's nation brands, it has almost never been used to analyze embassy as a unit and digital Websites as platforms. Considering the importance of the framework in assessing nation branding, the current research filled this gap.

It is worth-mentioning that one way of communicating nation's competitive identities is via embassy Websites (SRana & Chatterjee, 2011). In this era of digital communication, Web presence is crucial to illustrate the appealing, positive and attractive sides of a nation (Karson, 2005). Embassy Websites, indeed, are the official Web representations of embassies (SRana & Chatterjee, 2011). From marketing stand point, Websites is one of the effective ways to advertise brands online (Karson, 2005). Therefore, this study focused on South Asian nations' embassy Websites as an important online communication platform to present the competitive identities of the nations. To the best of researcher knowledge, earlier research has rarely addressed these issues. Insights and results from this study would significantly add value to the current continuing scholarly and practical discussions on nation branding in South Asian area. By stating the status of the embassy Websites, the current research will provide an initial premise for future researcher to work on nation branding in this region.

Defining Nation Branding

Although a marketing term, the concept of branding in recent years is widely being applied to the arena of public diplomacy in order to treat a nation as a brand (Kemming & Humborg, 2010). From marketers' perspective, a brand is "name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition" (The American Marketing Association, 2016). From consumers' perspective, on the other hand, a brand consists of distinctive features (Macrae, Parkinson & Sheerman, 1995) and values (both functional and emotional) (Lynch & de Chernatony, 2007; Macrae, et al., 1995) which provide the consumers with an inimitable experience and develop a meaning of that brand in their mind in a conscious or intuitive way (Macrae et al., 1995). However, when marketers use the word branding, it indicates that they are involved in a process of differentiating their goods, services or ideas from those of the competitors (Dinnie, 2008).

Once attaching the concept of a brand to a nation, instead of mere good, services or ideas, it is defined as "the unique, multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences" (Dinnie, 2008, p. 15). As a nation is not a product/service or an idea in economic term, it concerns multiple factors, such as historical, cultural, political and economic, ethnic, and geographic, as well as other various factors (Anderson, 2007). It should be noted that this definition provided earlier posits nation-brand in two-fold nature: observable manifestation of nation-brand (i.e., attributes used by the promoters) and perception of nation-brand in peoples' mind (i.e., attributes used by the target market) (Dinnie, 2008). The concept of nation-brand is important as "growing parity among nations in terms of products, destinations, technologies or cultural particularities evokes the needs of self justification and distinction for places just as it had for product brands in the commercial marketing realm" (Csaba, 2005, p. 141).

When marketing communications techniques are used to promote a nation-brand, it is referred as the process of nation branding (Fan, 2006). To be specific, nation branding is the application of "the tools of branding to alter, confirm or change the behaviour, attitudes, identity or image of a nation in a positive way" (Gudjonsson, 2005, p.285). Nation branding involves a wide variety of objectives, such as attracting tourists, encouraging foreign investments, enhancing exports, attracting skilled workers and talents, reducing inflation rate, restoring nation's credibility, rising worldwide political influence, enhancing international partnerships (Dinnie, 2008), differentiating between nation's past and, gaining better recognition in the world (van Ham, 2001), etc. These objectives, in a combined way, differentiate nation branding from destination/place marketing, or tourism marketing.

Two important concepts of nation branding involve: identity and image. Although there exists no precise meaning or definition of the notions, Dinnie (2008) considered a very simple, yet forceful, understanding of the terms, “identity refers to what something truly is, its essence, whereas image refers to how something is perceived” (p. 42). According to Stock (2009), the image of a nation is peoples’ “ideas, beliefs and impressions” that they develop about a nation on the basis of available information around them (Stock 2009, p.102). The later referred as “the features presumed to be central and relatively permanent, and that distinguishes the nation from other nations” (Stock 2009, p. 102). It should be noted that, although different, the concept of image is closely associated with the identity. According to the national image framework, developed by Fan (2008) based on Brown’s (2001) work, the management of nation image is depended on management of national identity, followed by “reference points, constructed image, current projected image, and desired future image” (Ahn, & Wu, 2015, p. 159).

Although there is no agreed upon thoughts on what national identity should include, Dinnie (2008) tried to present the most fundamental features, including “a historic homeland, common myths, historical memories and a common mass public culture” (p. 4) Furthermore, the rise of supranational legislation originating from regional economic integrations (such as, EU, ASEAN, etc.) initiated two more features of national identity: “common legal rights and duties for all members and a common economy with territorial mobility for all members” (Dinnie, 2008, p. 8)

It is hard to tell exactly to which directions national branding should go. In other words, it is not much clear regarding what should be utilized to present nation’s identity and build positive nation image. It can consist of a variety of approaches. Based on a review of 750 academic studies on nation branding, Papadopoulos and Heslop (2002) identified a wide range of approaches and standpoints on nation branding, including, promoting tourism, culture, national heritage, exports, reputation and political influence, improving product and country image, attracting foreign investment, capturing foreign work skill and merit, etc. However, Simon Anholt’s national brand hexagon, later revised as competitive identity hexagon, provided a useful framework to address this issue.

Nation Brand and Competitive Identity Hexagon

In 2002 Simon Anholt developed a framework called “nation brand hexagon” for assessing nations’ brand (Anholt, 2005). Since April 2005, this hexagon has been used to calculate the nation brand index (NBI), which measures and rank the national brand value of 50 nations worldwide (Aronczyk, 2013). Anholt argued that a nation’s brand value is determined by six major components of capacities of national competence: exports, governance, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, people and tourism (Anholt, 2005). Based on further conceptual analysis on this hexagon framework, Anholt later used the term “competitive identity (CI)” instead of “nation branding” and revised a

few terms in the hexagon (see figure 1) (Anholt, 2007a; 2007b). According to him, this hexagon has more to do with the competitive factors of nation branding that makes a nation competitive worldwide, especially in terms of global reputation and competition instead of the economic and marketing approach of a brand (Anholt, 2007a). He argued that such competitiveness is developed via six areas of a nations: tourism, brand (replaced the term export), people, policy (replaced the term governance), culture (changed the term culture and heritage) and investment (replaced the term investment and immigration) (Anholt, 2007a; 2007b).

As stated by Anholt, “tourism” is stated as “the loudest voice” of nation branding procedure. This area is generally accompanied with large budgets and skilled marketing competency (Anholt, 2012, p. 24). Generally *tourism* refers to people’s willingness to visit the country based on the target countries, natural beauty, historical places, historical buildings and monuments, cultural attractions, city and urban attractions. In most cases, *tourism* is considered as the most important dimension on *competitive identity* hexagon, as tourism can have major influence in the mind of the tourists. Niesing (2013, p. 53) states that, people’s perception about a country may change once they visit the place. In building competitive identity of a country, *tourism* is thus given the utmost importance. Next, “brand” refers to mainly the “country of origin effect” (Neilson, 2013). *Brand* mainly represents each nation’s competency and significant contribution in producing products (e.g., Switzerland’s competency in manufacturing wrist-watch), services (e.g., information technology outsourcing in China or India), and ideas (e.g., USA in science and technology innovation) (Anholt, 2007b; 2012). Such goods, services and ideas act as powerful ambassadors of the country of origin (Anholt, 2007b). Neilson (2013) also noted that country of origin have a long-standing impact on building nations image in consumer’s mind.

People is treated as a nation’s competitive assets. How a country’s *people* is perceived as the outside world also helps build a country’s competitive identity. *People* of a country are generally assessed by their friendliness. This dimension involves high-profile personnel (e.g., political leaders, business leaders, actor/actress, sport personality etc.) but also the general people (e.g., students, workers, professionals) (Anholt, 2007b). As mentioned by Anholt, this dimension also includes “how they behave when abroad and how they threat visitors to their countries” (Anholt, 2012, p. 24). Next, the hexagon includes “policy” which is referred as “the policy decisions of the region’s governments, whether it is foreign policy which directly affect us, or domestic policy which gets reported in the international media” (Anholt, 2012, p. 24).

“Culture,” on the other hand, plays a role in creating nation’s competitiveness by manifesting nation’s historic homeland, common myths, historical memories, common mass public culture (e.g., sports, archeology, language, music, literature, food, drink,

historical sites) (Dinnie, 2008). Anholt (2006, p.25) states that *culture* as portrayed in entertainment industries, for example Madagascar can affect audiences perceptions around the world about the country.

Lastly, Anholt argued for nation's "investment" state, which may include "the way region or country solicits inward investments, recruitment of foreign 'talent,' and expansion into the country or region by foreign companies (Anholt, 2012, p. 24). According to this model, nation's competitiveness to enhance nation brand value can be accomplished by evenly utilizing all these assets, rather focusing on a specific one (Anholt, 2007a; 2007b; 2012).

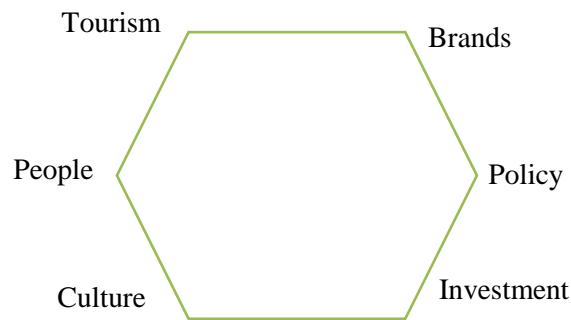


Figure 1: Competitive Identity Hexagon (Anholt, 2002)

Research questions

Based on earlier discussion this study posed following research questions.

How the competitive identities, as stated by Anholt (2007a), were used in South Asian nations' embassy Websites in the USA?

Method

Sampling

A content analysis on the embassy Websites of Southeast Asian countries was conducted for this study. Embassy webpages were accessed during the period from December 2015 to January 2016. Bhutan was excluded, as the country does not have any diplomatic relations with the USA and therefore, there exists no diplomatic presence of Bhutan in the USA as of year 2015 (U.S. Department of State, 2015). No content that is linked with other Web pages is considered, as it is not a part of embassy Website. In addition, this study considered only the textual contents of the Websites and no images, videos or audios were considered. Lastly, this study did not include the "media coverages or press releases of the embassy" categories for two reasons. First, media coverages were linked

and directed toward the page of media. Next, Embassy's press releases often include huge amount of archive data, considering which would be out of the scope of this study.

Themes and Unit of Analysis

Websites' content categories (subcategories, if available) were considered units of analysis. This study examined each categories and subcategories to find whether Anholt's indicators of competitive identity (i.e., culture, brands, policy, people, investment, and tourism) were presented in the embassy Websites.

Operationalization

As almost no previous studies were found to analyze contents via Anholt's competitive identity hexagon, this study developed a codebook with appropriate operationalization. Coders looked for six themes in each categories and subcategories of Website contents. First, in the case of tourism, they search for contents that is directly linked with promoting anything (e.g., culture, place, heritage, etc.) of the country for attracting tourists (Anholt, 2007a). If the main objective of the content is not tourism, it did not come under this theme. Next, any content category or subcategory that talked mainly about the products, services and ideas, originated in that very nation, was considered under the theme titled brand (Anholt, 2007a). When nation's star personalities were mentioned in relation to promoting and branding the country, it was considered under the title people (Anholt, 2007a). In addition, when the quality of a nation's manpower, such as talent, skill, hospitality, efficiency, etc. is mentioned or discussed in general to present nation's competencies, it also came under the theme of people (Anholt, 2007a). Any policy discussion of government was considered the theme titled policy (Anholt, 2007a). It may include a variety of policy issues, such as export, immigration, study abroad, child adopting issues, etc. The theme of culture included any mention or discussion about nation's historic homeland, common myths, historical memories, common mass public culture (sports, archeology, language, music, literature, food, drink, historical sites, etc.) (Dinnie, 2008). It should be noted that if it is clearly stated that any element of culture was presented for tourism purpose, it was included in tourism theme, rather in culture theme. Lastly, any content that is directly connected to promoting investment opportunities in the nation, came under the theme investment (Anholt, 2007a). It included not only monetary investments in physical business but also investing in manpower of the nation (Anholt, 2007a).

Coding procedure and Intercoder Reliability

Content analysis requires subjective judgments of the coders concerning the underlying themes and codes. These decisions may cause issues of reliability of the theme and operation zed code. In order to assess the reliability, the coding procedure was conducted by three coders. Themes for coding were discussed and revised via several sessions with

the coders. They coded all the data independently and showed 98 percent agreement level. The author made the determination where the coders disagreed (in 2 percent cases). Cohen's *kappa* was used for assessing intercoder reliability (Cohen, 1961) and an online utility, called ReCal, was used to calculate the intercoder reliability coefficient for all levels of data. The value of Cohen's *kappa* obtained scores ranging from .85 to 1.0 (see table 1). As suggested by previous studies, any score of *kappa* higher than 0.75 is considered excellent (Fleiss, Levin, & Paik, 2013).

Table 1: Attributes of Nation Brand and Competitive Identity: Frequency, Chi Square Test, and Inter-coder Reliability Results

Attributes	Culture	Brands	Policy	People	Investment	Tourism	Total
Afghanistan	10	0	4	1	1	15	31
Bangladesh	22	6	4	1	1	5	39
India	10	0	2	0	2	7	21
Maldives	5	1	1	0	1	2	10
Nepal	23	1	4	1	5	50	84
Pakistan	4	1	1	0	1	27	34
Sri Lanka	4	0	0	0	3	20	27
χ^2	28	14	21	7	21	42	42
<i>p</i>	.26	.30	.28	.31	.28	.24	.23
Kohen's Kappa	0.95	0.87	0.85	0.94	0.89	0.96	1.00

Results

Frequency of Anholt's Competitive Identity Indicators

With regards to the first research question, the study examined how different themes of Anholt's competitive identity hexagon were portrayed in the embassy Websites of South Asian nations in the USA. Simple frequency analysis of the coded items was conducted to answer this question.

Afghanistan. In the case of Afghanistan, the study results (see table 1) show that the country used all the themes except brand in its embassy Website. In the terms of frequency, the Website highly emphasized on tourism (48%), followed by culture (32%) and policy (13%). The Website talked less about people (3%) and investment (3%) and nothing about its brands.

Bangladesh. Culture (56%) was the prominent theme of the embassy Website of Bangladesh. Brands (15%), tourism (13%) and policy (10%) were discussed more frequently than people (2.5%) and investment (2.5%).

India. Culture (48%), followed by tourism (33%), was the most frequently discussed theme in the embassy Website of India. Whereas policy (10%) and investment (9.5%) were presented with lower frequency, brand and investment were not discussed at all.

Maldives. The Embassy Website of Maldives discussed culture (50%) most frequently, while it did not mention anything about the people of the nation as a competitive resource. Next tourism theme (20%) was discussed, followed by brands (10%), policy (10%) and investment (10%). People were not discussed at all.

Nepal. Embassy Website of Nepal focused on tourism (60%) as a prominent theme of competitive identity, followed by culture (27%). The frequencies of other themes in contents were low: investment (5%), policy (4%), people (1%) and brands (1%).

Pakistan. Tourism (79%) was also the dominant competitive theme for Pakistani Website, followed by culture (12%), brands (3%), policy (3%) and investment (3%). The Website did not discuss about people as the nation's competitive identity.

Sri Lanka. The frequency of the theme titled tourism was high in Sri Lankan embassy Website, followed by culture (15%) and investment (11%). It did not discuss anything on brand, policy and people.

Additional Insights: Regional Similarity

With regards to the second research question the study examines whether the representation of competitive identifies is different or similar among the nations' embassy Websites. To answer this research question, the study performed chi square test. The results are shown in Table 1, which indicate that there exists no statistically significant difference for any of the items.

Discussion

Significance of Anholt's Competitive Identities

One of the major aims of this paper was to find out whether South Asian embassies brand their nations according to Anholt's model of competitive hexagon, an epitome in the nation brand area (Csaba, 2005). Two points are important to reiterate here to forward this discussion section. First, Anholt argued that in order to build a competitive identity of a nation, the best possible representation should comprise of six major competitive assets of a nation (culture, tourism, policy, people, brand and investment) (2007a; 2007b). Second, the representation should be done in a balanced way to achieve the most positive perceptions (Anholt, 2012).

With regard to the first point, the present study found that, none of the Website, indeed, turns out to be a good example of utilizing Anholts theoretical model in building “competitive Identity”. Despite of possessing competitive advantages in brand and investment (Bhagwati, Bhagwati, & Panagariya, 2013), Indian Website, for example, did not mention anything about those. Pakistan, in the same way, did not highlight its people and Sri Lanka also did not indicate its brand, policy and people.

Secondly, competitive identities, in most of the cases, were not presented with equal weight. Interestingly, culture and tourism were the most frequently used theme throughout each Websites, while other themes were used in a moderate to low level. The frequency gap between these two themes (culture and tourism) and other themes was also huge. This situation may uphold two matter of concerns. First, placing too much emphasis on the tourism or culture and too little attention in other areas (sometime no attention at all), deviated South Asia from presenting top nation identities on the platform. According to Anholt (2007a), such representation, if created and maintained for long, will jeopardize nation’s brand value in the long run. Next, this can be a matter of concern, as it reflects that the Websites are being used more to brand the country as place than to brand the nation as whole. From theoretical perspective, it is important to distinguish nation branding from destination or place branding. A place branding, as Zenker and Braun (2010) point out, is all about “a network of associations in the consumers’ mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioural expression of a place, which is embodied through the aims, communication, values, and the general culture of the place’s stake-holders and the overall place design” (p. 5). Therefore, place branding is focused on outward (Olins & Hildreth, 2011), whereas nation branding is inward focused and connected with nation-building or reconstituting nations via “ideology and praxis” (Kaneva, 2011).

Therefore, the findings of the study may indicate that the contents of Websites lack clear conceptual ideas and strategic approach regarding nation branding and therefore, lagging behind to achieve the benefits of it. Also, partial representation of a nation’s identity is not worth presenting, as it cuts the competitive strength of nations (Anholt, 2012). Therefore, the contents of the Websites need to be reconsidered to convey the six identities in a more or less equal way, as argued by Anholt (2012).

In addition to gathering a descriptive representation of Anholt’s “Competitive Identity” in South Asian nations on embassy webpages in US, this study attempts to find out how different (or similar) the portrayals of themes (i.e., culture, brands, policy, people, investment, and tourism) were in the embassy Websites. It was interesting to find out that there existed no significant differences in the manifestation of competitive identities on nations’ embassy Websites. In other words, they used the themes with almost similar frequencies. This result is interesting, because it theoretically shows all the South Asia

nations put almost the same weight for the same theme. This situation can be explained by the nations' shared historical background, especially in the case of cultural theme. All south Asian nations have a rich culture and most of them are historically originated from Indian subcontinent (Bose & Jalal, 2004). Many of their origin of language, dresses, and religion are same (Bose & Jalal, 2004). Tourism, on the other hand, is also an integral focus of majority of the South Asian nations (especially, Nepal, India, Sri Lanka and Maldives) (Iqbal, 2006). However, it was also interesting to find that there were no significant differences between bigger economic power like India and smaller nation like Nepal with regard to presenting competitive identities of brand and investment. According to the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI), a comprehensive tool that measures the microeconomic and macroeconomic foundations of national competitiveness, the ranking of India (71) and Sri Lanka (73) is higher than the rankings of Nepal (102), Bangladesh (109), and Pakistan (129) (Schwab, & Sala-i-Martin, 2015). This may indicate how embassy Websites of more competitive nations are underutilizing the opportunity of creating more brand value via the platform.

Research Limitations and Future Avenues

Although it is hard to replicate Anholt's hexagon model in reality, it is a useful paradigm and criterion for assessing nation branding. The significance of this model lies in its strength of manifesting a nation in a balanced way (Anholt, 2012). The present study examined how this model is practically implemented in representing the South Asian nations in the USA via their embassy Websites. The results showed that the contents of Websites lacked contents on competitive identities. Furthermore, the current study found no significant differences in the manifestation of competitive identities on the embassy Websites. These results are important as it demonstrates that immediate steps should be taken in order to create effective brand message via presenting the competitive identities. In addition, this study would also help future researchers on nation branding in South Asian area, as there exists almost no literature that tells us what the current practices look like. It would help them to move forward the scholarly work based on Anholt's framework in future.

As with most studies, the current one possesses several limitations. First, this study only examined the embassy Websites' message attributes (i.e., competitive identities) regarding nation branding. Future studies are required to examine the nation's image. In other words, how these identities are perceived by people should be tested. Second, the generalizability of this study is limited, as it was conducted only on embassy Websites. In order to understand how embassy can enhance nation branding, more comprehensive studies are required, including online (social media, blog, online media, etc.) and offline (press releases, bilateral, etc.) means of communication. Further, in order to get the actual meaning of the contents, a qualitative discourse analysis and/or historical analysis would

be more meaningful in addition to content analysis. Future researches can be conducted on such issues.

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