

Bangladesh brands

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Consumer perception of the word "brand" is usually associated with quality. In the western world, with the variety and options available, it is the concept of brands that help consumers decipher and match their needs to that of the products available in the market.

Asian countries, particularly our own Bangladesh, use other sensibilities rather than simply resorting to quality. The inclination of most Asian nations to their culture is inherent to their way of life and it is no different when it comes to our own version of "retail therapy."

In most Asian countries, we see culture is a phenomenon that is adapted by the residents. Such forms the basis of our "cultural branding" in Bangladesh. The Bangladeshi brands are representative of our culture, our preferences and most importantly, our identities. In Bangladesh, whether it is "Bogra's doi", "Comilla's rashmalai," "Hajee's biriani," "Fakruddin's kachchi or "Tangail's cham cham", we can immediately relate to each product and relate it with our culture and our roots as memories from yesteryear to the present day all come flooding back.

Innovation is the key to the global marketing world. The more you invent new ways of doing things and the more technology savvy the product is, the more is its demand in the market. This is a clear distinction from most of our local brands. Every district of Bangladesh has its specialty, be it in sweetmeat, handicrafts, agricultural produce, or even fish, and this is what the common man finds himself relating to. These are interests and beliefs that have been passed on from generation to generation.

For instance, when it comes

to handicrafts, 'Aarong' has made its mark in the Bangladeshi market and even those visiting from abroad know that it is the landmark for getting traditional artwork and crafts. The "nakhshikantha" and "jamdani saree" is a particular favourite for most tourists, as it is a rare display of intricate artwork. Such handiwork is said to be rare, as the world has moved onto efficiency and most processes are automated, there are still brands that are labour-intensive and require a lot of creative attention. Inspired by 'Aarong', we today have new brands like 'Jatra' 'Shada Kalo' and 'Deshal'; although they may not be as big as Aarong.

One example of the use of technology would be the initiation of Grameenphone. In true Bangladeshi tradition, that too has a rich history unlike any other seen abroad -- the first mobile phone for rural women -- whereby women empowerment took on a whole new meaning. Grameenphones were first distributed to women entrepreneurs who partook in the micro-finance scheme developed by Grameen Bank. They would use the phones of getting in touch with markets and operate as sellers themselves or as middle-women. The popularity of the Grameenphone's cellular phone caught on and supply began growing till today where Grameenphone is the leading mobile telecom company in Bangladesh with millions of subscribers. It has come a long way from when the target group was only rural women. Similar with the case of esteemed vernacular daily 'The Prothom Alo' or most-circulated English daily, The Daily Star.

Brands were originally developed as labels of ownership. However, today it is what they do for people that matters much more, how they reflect



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A night-time view of an Aarong billboard in Dhaka. Aarong has graduated into one of the country's most popular fashion brands.

and engage them, how they define their aspirations, represent their personality and protect them from greed or misdeeds. Powerful brands can drive success in competitive and financial markets, and indeed become an organisation's most valuable assets. Aromatic soap entered the market with strong brand positioning as a 'halal soap'; however, it lasted for a very short period of time. On the other hand, Unilever's Lux soap has been occupying the mind space of their target market for a long time, and is still has strong market share with continuous investment in branding.

Another example of local

brand is 'Otobi'. Who could have imagined that furniture making can turn a small company into the producer of world class furniture?

The social stigma associated with inferior brands sometimes may prove to be a disqualifying factor when it comes to making that final purchase. One must properly comprehend that the use and understanding of brands differ from country to country. Hence, it is essential that if comparisons must be made, then it should be done on a platform taking into account differences in perceptions.

In the final analysis, it is based on perception that peo-

ple purchase and consume what they do and that is something that marketers must be in tune with in order to meet demand with supply. From the Bangladesh perspective, it can be seen that the choice is based on not only what is of popular demand but items which are passed down traditionally from generation to generation.

The process of sustaining the brand image is an ongoing process which marketers have to take into consideration. This may pose to be a similarity between nations all over the world when it comes to the brand that they refer to in the local and international context,

whereby the continued popularity of a particular item in comparison to the many available in the market must be sustained. To ensure sustainability of the brand, the companies must avoid controversies that may arise from their products, image, leadership, the company itself or their 'how side' of doing business. Thus, cultural practices, quality and preferences, the need for familiarity and unrelenting image building gives an acute understanding to the power of brands in our consumer societies.

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G20 can't control commodities, but rates would

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Nicolas Sarkozy thinks he has radical ideas for the G20 to address volatile commodity prices, stopping just short of guillotining traders. A world burdened by inflation in oil, other commodities and food may share his frustration. The president hopes the French and other Europeans will, too. But dividing the world's commodity trades between the "commercial" and the "speculative" ones isn't easy. This means G20 finance ministers may realise little in their discussion on the matter -- even though Sarkozy is right that speculation in commodities is part of the price problem.

The speculation reflects loose global money and the perhaps exaggerated appeal of the commodities story. The amount of assets under management in commodity funds has exploded in the past decade, rising 60-fold, according to Barclays Capital. For investors the happy story is based on fast growth in developing countries, rising demand and potential constraints to supply. Throw in global warming, too. Paul Krugman, the Nobel Prize-winning economist, has, calling soaring food prices the first sign of "the disruption we'll face in a warming world."

But the inconvenient facts argue against that. Despite extreme weather this year the International Grains Council still expects global grain production to be 8.7 percent higher than it was four years ago. All the more affluent but hungry new mouths in the world economy have indeed caused demand to rise but by a similar 9.7 percent over the same period. Global grain stocks are up by 43 percent in the past four years. Production has easily kept up with demand. It is probably the huge amount of fresh money invested in commodity funds that has tended to



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A man holds a placard, reading "Sarkozy, EU, Ouattara united to starve farmers," in reference to French President Nicolas Sarkozy, the European Union and Alassane Ouattara, who has been internationally recognised as the legitimate winner of the November 28, 2010 presidential elections, during a meeting of coffee and cocoa producers to denounce EU economic sanctions against Ivory Coast.

drive prices up.

Guido Mantega, Brazil's finance minister, appears to think so. Although Brazil is largely a beneficiary of high commodity prices, he is "totally" against any Sarkozian trading curbs. Mantega argues that commodity prices will correct when developed economies pick up and

tighten their monetary policy.

The tightening is more necessary first, however, in fast growing emerging economies. China's broad money supply rose by a fifth in 2010 but came down to an annual growth of 17 percent in January. As developing countries tighten, commodity prices may begin to ease. There may

already be some tentative signs of that. The G20 might see anti-speculative merits in conventional monetary medicine rather than in Sarkozy's mooted punishments.

The author is a Reuters Breakingviews columnist. The opinions expressed are his own.

India's ambush marketing defeats cricket chiefs

REUTERS, Mumbai

Cricket's popularity in India and the huge revenue it generates is hampering the governing body's efforts to crack down on ambush marketing there, said experts before the World Cup started.

The tournament, organised by the International Cricket Council (ICC), co-hosted by India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, started on Saturday. The final is on April 2.

Ambush marketing refers to companies promoting their brands or products by associating them with a team, league or event without paying for the privilege.

It is the biggest bugbear for official sponsors at sporting events whose outlay often runs into tens of millions of dollars.

"In a country like India, where there is so much money that's generated from the game, it is difficult for the ICC to come down very heavily or enforce those rules strictly on the players or the companies," said columnist Ashok Malik, an expert on the business of sports.

Recently, Indian cricket captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni was rapped by the ICC for promoting and endorsing the products of Sony Corp and Aircel, which are not official sponsors of the Cup, according to unconfirmed media reports.

The ICC has signed firms such as Reliance Communications, PepsiCo, Reebok, Hero Honda, Emirates, Yahoo, Castrol, MoneyGram and Hyundai Motors India as official sponsors.

In October last year, the legal head of the ICC had issued a stern warning saying players indulging in ambush marketing would be excluded from participation in the World Cup.

However, media reports said Dhoni was only given a written warning for promoting Sony and Aircel, although the global cricket body declined to confirm this.

Latika Khaneja, director at Collage Sports Management, a firm that handles endorsement deals for several Indian cricketers, said there was generally a seven-day cooling off period for non-sponsors to take their advertisements off before the event begins.

The responsibility to do so should lie with the company and not the sports person, Khaneja added.