Exploring Opportunities and Challenges of Destination Branding of Pokhara

Subash Malla*

[1]*Assistant Professor, School of Business, Pokhara University,
PhD Scholar Pokhara University
Corresponding Author Email: subash.malla@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT

The tourism industry is one of the fastest growing industry and has been a key factor for economic growth in several developing countries. But in the present era of globalization, due to rapid technological changes and increased global competition, destinations are now also directed towards branding themselves to deliver the correct brand image in the global arena. Pokhara has been the pioneer tourism destination and the market leader destination in Nepal. Due to the unique and stunning view of mountains, lakes and other natural, cultural as well as cultural amenities, Pokhara has been the first choice of tourists coming to Nepal and so it has been living with its self-made destination brand. This research has been carried on the same background to find the real essence of destination branding in an exploratory approach using In-depth Interview as the methodology of data collection. The opportunities and challenges of destination branding of Pokhara have been discussed using the various determinants. 5 experts were taken as the key informants from diverse fields in order to get the valid and reliable data. The research has provided with some framework of destination branding of Pokhara under the brand name 'Paradise Pokhara' and tagline/slogan 'Nature, Culture and Adventure'.

Keywords: *Brand image, destination branding, place branding, Pokhara, tourism*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has been the fastest growing industry in the present world having one of the largest share in the economic activity round the world. One in ten jobs (10.3 %) in the world is currently in Travel & Tourism, with the sector creating one in every five new jobs (WTTC, 2022). This industry is the contributor of 7.6 percent of the global GDP in the year 2022, which was up to 10% before COVID-19 pandemic. (WTTC, 2019 and 2022). The year of 2023 has been a year of recovery for the tourism sector in post pandemic era. As per UNWTO World Tourism Barometer 2023, the overall tourism industry has reached its 87 percent of recovery till September and is expected to be recovered by 90 percent by the end of 2023 (UNWTO, 2023). The above mentioned data clearly shows that the world is rapidly moving in the race of tourism in this era.

The importance of tourism and the entry of many new destinations into the market have forced all to emulate and compete in the battle at a global level to win many tourist market. A strong country brand can for example increase tourism and other businesses, encourage investments, create visibility and build positive perceptions of the country, which all are positive components in order to increase the economic turnover in a country. (Fetcherin, 2010). This intense global competition in the tourism industry has created some invisible forces for the destinations to develop strong, unique, and competitive destination brands.

Generally speaking, destination branding is the marketing of tourist destination with the objective is to sell the attributes of the destination in the global market. It delivers the distinctive features of the destination along with the unique taste that generate value to the tourists visiting the destination. It can be defined as 'a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the place; furthermore, it conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the place; it also serves to consolidate and reinforce pleasurable memories of the place experience' (Ritchie and Ritchie, 1998).

This definition is termed as one of the first and most cited definition by many researchers. This definition relates very much to Aaker's classic brand definition that defined brand as 'a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies the seller's good or services as distinct from those of other sellers' (Aaker, 1991).

The term 'Destination Branding' has just been discussed from last 3 decades intensively, but it was in use from the ancient civilization. Nations have always branded themselves through their mythology, anthems, symbols, flags, currency, names and so on. We can take examples

of birds and examples that have been branding countries such as Eagle symbolizes United States, Dragon symbolizes China, and Kangaroo symbolizes Australia. On the similar way monuments have also been helpful for destination branding, for example Eiffel Tower is used to brand France, The Great Wall symbolizes China, The Great Pyramids has been denoting Egypt and Taj Mahal has been communicating. Other various features has been deep in our mind to find the first impression of the destination such as Land of Himalayas denotes Nepal, City of Lights means Paris, City of Sky Scrapers denotes New York whereas Fuji Mountain & Sakura flower denotes Japan and so on.

On the same background, Pokhara is one of the most popular destinations of Nepal from last half century. It is situated almost on the central location in the map of Nepal having specific infrastructures related facilities such as airport, road network, all kinds of vehicle service, hotels, motels, restaurants, power supply, drainage system, sewage system etc (Upreti et al., 2013).

Pokhara is the midpoint of three major highways of Nepal; namely Prithvi Highway (Pokhara-Kathmandu) having access to country's capital city, Siddartha Highway (Pokhara-Sunaulai) having access to India's Baorder and Bhupi Serchan Highway (Pokhara-Baglung/ Mustang) having access to China's Boarder. It has domestic airport having regular flight to major touristic destination of Nepal namley Kathmandu, Chitwan, Manang, Mustang, Bhairahawa whereas Pokhara International Airport have started its operation but still is unsure about its complete operations.

Pokhara is largely known for its unlimited natural beauty, cultural attractions, social cohesion, harmony and mutual respect as it is the meeting point of migrating Mongoloids and Aryans from Himalaya mountains and Terai regions of Nepal whose presence have made Pokhara valley attractive from cultural point of view. The mosaic of caste and ethnicity, religion and identity where different ethnic groups like Newar, Kshetri, Brahmin, Gurung, Majhi and Muslim are major communities who have been staying with harmony and cooperation for longer time (Upreti et al., 2013).

Having enriched with 9 lakes, 3 mountains higher than 8 thousand meters, good weather, many historic and cultural places, adventure sites and also nice hotel, resorts etc., it attracts the visitors regularly. This is not only the beautiful destination but is also the gateway for many famous other destinations such as Annapurna Circuit, Mardi Trek, Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve, Mustang, Manang and many other homestays.

So, the city having such a numerous attributes hand in hand has obviously much more opportunities and even challenges too for its branding as the best destination in global market. The market positioning of this destination will play a great role in economic growth of not only the individuals of Pokhara but also of Gandaki Province as well as whole nation. Also, the well-functioning of Pokhara International Airport is also determined on the number of tourists Pokhara can attract and for that also the destination branding of Pokhara is needed in a detailed and best way.

But till date, there is no any organized and systematic effort for the destination branding of this pioneer destination. Some of the efforts of marketing have been done by private sector as well as Nepal Tourism Board but it isn't enough for branding Pokhara. In fact, the well-planned and focused destination branding is needed. This study has been carried in order to find the gap of the same background of less effort of branding Pokhara.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term destination was derived from the Latin word 'destinatio' meaning the final point of travelling (Milicevic, 2016). Now destination has been defined by most of the tourism experts as the place with attributes that attracts the tourists. On the same way, Pike (2008) defined a destination as a geographical space accommodating the existence of a cluster of tourism resources and being less of a political boundary. Furthermore on the definition given by Periera et al. (2012) destination is the combination of tourism products and services consumed in the destination and constitute the tourists' integrated experience.

The concept of branding was coined from 1950s (Pike, 2010) however the term brand appeared during the 1970's in marketing papers. In the present era, brand and branding are the core issues in marketing. The definition given by David Aaker (1991) is taken as milestone in the branding sector and so is most widely accepted till this date. As per the definition, the primary role of a brand is to 'identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors.'

It the past period, branding was focused on the products. Now, as time is passing by, the same principals of branding goods are applicable for the branding of services too. The notion of branding has recently started to expand into places as well as tourism destinations and became subject to research in the field of tourism (Tasci and Kozak, 2006).

Although branding has been a concept used by marketers since the late 1980s, destination branding is a relatively new development. The published research relating to destination

branding also were emerged from end of 1990s (Pike, 2010). The first two journal article on destination branding appeared in 1998 from Pritchard and Morgan (1998) and Dosen, Vranesevic and Pritchard (1998). In 1998, branding within the context of tourism destinations started to gain visibility with destination branding the focal topic at that year's Travel and Tourism Research Association's Annual Conference (Blain, Levy & Ritchie, 2005).

Similarly, in 2002, Morgan, Prichard and Pride published a booked entitled "Destination Branding: Creating the unique destination preposition", which is taken as the first book ever on explaining the issues and concepts of destination branding. (cited from Van, 2015). Despite all of these comprehensive works, our knowledge of destination branding remains still poorly understood and is often misunderstood by practitioners.

Ritchie and Ritchie (1998) is the first scholar who defined the term "destination brand". As per the definition given by them, it is "a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination". Furthermore, it "conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination which also serves to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience".

Tourism destinations will have a short lifecycle if they don't manage their products and services properly (Kotler, et al., 2006). In order to be widely recognized, destinations don't need to have some spectacular attractions like the Eiffel Tower or Great Wall of China, it is more important that the existing attractions are managed properly and innovatively and in accordance with the current destination management trends (Kotler et al., 2006).

This lack of DMO control over the entire visitor experience may contribute to the underdevelopment of destination identities and lead to the perception by the general public that destinations are not brands (Morgan, Pritchard, and Piggott 2001). So as the competition for tourists and their expenses continues to increase, it follows that a definition of destination branding should include the concepts of destination image and competitiveness.

Table 1

Examples of Some Branding Tagline/Slogan of Destinations

Destination	Tag Line/Slogan	Source
New Zealand	100% Pure New Zealand	Tourism New Zealand
Australia	There's Nothing Like Australia	Australian Tourist Commission
Malaysia	Malaysia Truly Asia	Tourist Development Corporation of Malaysia

Spain	Everything Under The Sun	Spanish Tourism Board
Thailand	Amazing Thailand	Tourism Authority of Thailand
Indonesia	Wonderful Indonesia	Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy
India	Incredible India	Ministry of Tourism, India
Bangladesh	Beautiful Bangladesh, The Land of Stories	Bangladesh Tourism Board
Nepal	Naturally Nepal, Once is not Enough	Nepal Tourism Board
Bali, Indonesia	The Island of Gods	Bali Tourism Board
Izmir, Turkey	The Frontier City of Turkey	Izmir Development Agency
Kerala, India	God's Own City	Kerala Tourism Development Corporation

This shows that brand image of these countries or destinations within these countries are attracting the tourists. This gives clear vision that the tourism sector can be the tool for economic success only if the brand image of the destination can be handled properly by the destination. So, in order to explore the destination branding of Pokhara, this study is carried on.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research design used in this research is based on an exploratory nature. This study is totally based on the qualitative data fueled by In-depth Interview. The finding from qualitative source has guided the whole research since it is taken as the most important method for the research based destination marketing or destination branding.

Many researchers believe that qualitative study is the preferable methodology for these sorts of research as they "provide a fairly robust indicator of the overall direction of people's behaviour and especially attitudes" (Smith and Fletcher, 2001). In-depth interviews is taken as most effective qualitative tools as they have the advantage of allowing researchers to generate detailed pictures through encouraging respondents to express their positions freely (Siemieniako, Glinska and Krot, 2014). One of the principal reasons for the use of interviews rather than questionnaires is to uncover a diversity of responses, whether or not these have been anticipated by the enquirer (Gao and Knight, 2007).

The study was based on the In-Depth Interviews with 5 Key Informants from multiple stakeholders of tourism of Pokhara having at least 5 years of experience in the related field. These stakeholders represented five different sectors namely: Nepal Tourism Board, Tourism Sector Organization Official, Tourism College Principal, Tourism Journalist and finally Tourism Researcher/Teacher. Each of these interviews was of about 1 hour using semi-structured open ended checklist.

The details of the Key Informants are as provided below:

Table 2

Key Informants of the Study

S. No.	Name of the Key Informants	Sectors of Selection
1.	Surya Thapaliya	Former Manager, Nepal Tourism Board Province Office, Gandaki
2.	Dilli Prasad Gautam	Past General Secretary Pokhara Tourism Council, Past President, NATA Pokhara)
3.	Prakash Regmi	Principal, Nepal Tourism and Hotel Management College, Pokhara
4.	Deepak Pariyar	President, Pokhara Tourism Journalist Forum
5.	Bishnu Timilsina	Faculty Member, BMTM, Janapriya Multiple College Researcher, Pokhara Research Centre
Total		5

Note: Field Survey, 2023

This study has used primary data using a self-administered open ended checklist. The responses from the experts (key informants) were concluded as the findings of the study. For assuring the correctness, all the interviews were recorded and transcribed after listening then time and again while preparing the final results.

The reliability of the data depended primarily upon the respondents. To overcome the limitation of the interview the clarity of the purpose and implication of the study was unveiled. The checklist was developed in order to collect the information as more as possible under the rigorous supervision of various stakeholders. The information from literature review was also taken into reference crosschecking and triangulation of the data collected from the key informant interview.

For the purpose of analysis, the data presentation, the experts were coded in the codes as EXP 1, EXP 2, EXP 3, EXP 4 and EXP 5. It was done so, in order to maintain the personal privacy of the experts due to the view given in the study. The content analysis of the findings was done by preparing the transcript of the audio interview. From the transcript of the audio interview, the coding of the findings was done. The coded information was further categorized in different themes and sub-themes.

RESULT S AND DISCUSSION

Pokhara has been explored as a destination by the mountaineers who arrived here during 1950s and later. The review of the early visitors has gradually turned Pokhara from a mere place to a destination to visit and spend time. On the continuation of these, many other scholars, visitors, marketers, journalists, reporters, writers as well as bloggers have done many efforts to make Pokhara developed as destination. This is termed as a unique destination of mountains, lake, hospitality, nature, culture and adventure all over the world (EXP 2).

Pokhara as an unique destination

People visit Pokhara to experience joyful holiday in the place with the amalgam of nature will modern amenities of adventure, fun and recreation. It is almost on the central part of Nepal with accessibility from most of the part of country by road or by flight. It is only 200 km far from capital Kathmandu by road whereas air distance is only 25 minutes, where the only international airport of Nepal is located. After the next international airports will start its operation in Bhairahawa and Pokhara itself, Pokhara will be more assessable (EXP 5).

Pokhara is also the destination with 3 Top-Ten mountains all over the world: Dhawaligiri, Manaslu and Annapurna. It is the city from where a tourist can experience the panoramic view of all these mountains in the same row (EXP 2) in 180 degree (EXP 5) or even from the roof of the hotels or house in Pokhara including another stunning mountain Machhapuchhre (Fishtail) (EXP 4).

It is one of the rare cities from where a person can see the reflection of mountain on the lake (EXP 2). It is also the warmest city from where you can see the mountains so near (EXP 5). It can also be termed as the city from where you can see the mountains wearing only T-shirts (EXP 2). The next part of this city is that even a person on wheel-chair can observe Top-Ten Mountains from Pokhara, which is not possible for any other Top-Ten Mountains (EXP 3).

Furthermore, it is the gateway for various treks such as Round Annapurna trek, Annapurna Santuary trek, Ghandruk-Ghorepani, Mardi Himal trek, Jomsom-Muktinath, Nar-Phoo, Dhaulagiri round, Dolpa treks, Machhapuchhre Model trek, Millennium trek etc. (EXP 1).

On the same way, Pokhara is also recognized as the city of freshwater lakes including Phewa, Begnas, Rupa, Dipang, Maidi, Khaste, Gunde and Niurini. On the same way, the city has enough number of hotels, restaurants, bars, clubs etc. with classic as well as modern amenities. It is also one of the cleanest and greenest cities comparing to any other big cities in Nepal (EXP 4). So it is well established as a leisure break for the visitors.

Pokhara also have Gandharva culture, one of the musical community who plays the popular musical instrument Sarangi (EXP 2). Sarangi music is popular in Nepal as well as internationally due to its tune as well as some popular artists including Jhalakman Gandharva, whose home town is also Batulechaur, Pokhara. So, it can also be one of the attractions for Pokhara.

On the same way, geographically, Pokhara is the destination on the central location of other various popular destinations of Nepal. Only towards 200 km east, one can find cultural and historical Kathmandu, towards 200 km south, the birth place of Lord Buddha, 200 km south from the next highway, another stunning and hot destination Chitwan and about 150 km north the cold and snowy as well as religious destination Muktinath, Mustang or Manang. On the same way, the 200 km west is the unexplored part of Nepal. Pokhara can be easily accessed from China after the roadway from Korala boarder opens, which is on the progress. So, it can also be termed as the central destination joined with many other destinations (EXP 1).

It is also the destination for nature lovers, bird watching lovers, adventure lovers and sports lovers. 90 percent of all the adventure amenities such as trekking, boating, ultra-light, mountain flight, paragliding, zip-liner, bungee jump, sky diving, hot air balloon, cannoning, rafting etc. are found in Pokhara (EXP 3). Similarly, the biggest and most beautiful stadium Pokhara stadium, with mountain view is also in Pokhara including other sports activities such as football, cricket, golf, tennis, triathlon, paragliding etc. (EXP 5). In fact quality domestic and international tourists come to Pokhara for sports, bird watching as well as adventure activities. So we can conclude that Pokhara is still a virgin city to develop it as tourism destination (EXP 4).

Brand Image of Pokhara as Destination

During the In-Depth Interviews taken for this study, all of the five experts had same view that Pokhara has to go for destination branding. As per the view of all the experts, the destination branding is the best place branding this city can go for due to its tourist appealing unique amenities.

Destination image is associated with the pride that a place represents. The pride of Pokhara is not so much associated with trade, industries or notable history. In fact, Pokhara is the best blend of nature, culture and adventure (EXP 5). So, destination branding is the obviously and undoubtedly the best way Pokhara can go for.

Pokhara is an incredible city from where one can experience lake, mountain and adventure. The image of majestic mountains with their reflections in lake is the best brand image of Pokhara (EXP 5). Many domestic tourists have one song on their mind that represents the brand image of Pokhara: '*Fewa Taal ko aangan ma lai lai Machhapuchhre Chhaya*' (English translation: The reflection of Machhapuchhre in the lap of Phewa lake) (EXP 1).

Similarly, many of the mountaineers have image of Pokhara as the 'Lap of Annapurna' as it is the first mountain above 8,000 meter height summited by any human being. Similarly Pokhara is also the gate way to famous treks (EXP 1).

Beyond that culture can also be the next image of Pokhara. Pokhara is also the meeting point of migrating Mongoloids and Aryans from the Himalayan mountains and Terai regions of Nepal whose presence has made the Pokhara valley attractive from a cultural point of view (IFC, 2016). It is the place of cultural diversity where cultural evidence of many ethnic groups such as Gurung (Tamu), Magar, Newar, Brahmin, Chhetri, Gandharva, Majhi etc. can be observed along with their customs, food, festivals etc.

The biggest number of Gurung ethnic community stays in this surroundings, which can be one of the brand building tool, which can also be associated with Gurkha (the internationally renowned army, named from the place Gorkha which is about 80 km far from Pokhara) (EXP 1).

Due to nationally as well as internationally famous Gandharva music, Sarangi can also be the most prominent cultural brand image of Pokhara (EXP 2).

In fact the uniqueness of this city can make it a globally competitive destination. Many travel magazines has already presented it in their Top Lists round the globe (EXP 2). But first it should learn more from domestic tourism before going forward for international tourism (EXP 4). So, as a destination, it should position itself as most attracting brand for both domestic as well as international tourists.

All of the experts have their view that Pokhara shouldn't be late to brand itself. In the past days, Pokhara was the first choice destination for everyone including celebrities but gradually the trend has been shifted. After establishment of Federal Republic Nepal, the accessibility towards various undiscovered destination is rapidly going on. After operation of various new highways including Madhya Pahadi Lokmarga (Mid-Hilly highway) and Kaligandaki corridor, Pokhara will no more gateway for as many destination as it is today (EXP 3). On the other hand, after operation of Pokhara International Airport, it will bring big number of tourist to Pokhara, which will consist both the opportunities as well as challanges. If this big number of tourists will be unsatisfied that will have bigger impact on the tourism industry of Pokhara (EXP 4). So concluding it, Pokhara should have to go for destination branding in efficient way for the betterment and sustainability of the tourism industry.

Proposed Destination Branding for Pokhara

During the In-Depth Interview, the experts were asked about the various aspect and tools of destination branding of Pokhara. The responses have been compiled below drawing the conclusion of the proposed destination branding framework of Pokhara, which was also one of the study objective.

Brand Name: Out of five experts, other all experts expect EXP 4 put their verdict for "Paradise Pokhara" as the most effective brand name of Pokhara as destination brand. As per their view, "Paradise Pokhara" has been already established as brand name of Pokhara informally due to the best blend of lake, mountain, greenery, adventure and culture.

But EXP 4 purposes the brand name of Pokhara as "Natural Pokhara" as it is the gateway to natural treks, itself a clean and green city and also the retirement destination of many Nepalese, Indian and even Europeans (EXP 4).

Logo/Symbol : Machhapuchhare and Annapurna Mountain with Phewa Lake is the common logo/symbol purposed by all the experts that represent Pokhara. Beyond that EXP 1 and EXP 3 has verdict that there anything that represents Gurung Cultural symbol will be good to add in the logo. Furthermore EXP 4 wants to add hills and some adventure denoting symbol such as paragliding or ultra-light in the destination brand logo of Pokhara. On the same way, EXP 3 wants to add the national flower of Nepal Rhododendron (Laligurans) which is abundantly found in the nearby hills of Pokhara whereas EXP 2 wants to include Sarangi as a part of logo that represents Gandharva culture in Pokhara. On the same way, the designer should be aware in the fact that the logo shouldn't be too clumsy with many symbols (EXP 2).

Tagline/Slogan: Three out of five experts EXP 3, EXP 4 and EXP 5 put their verdict on the tagline "Nature, Culture, Adventure" as the best for Pokhara as the perfect blend can be noticed here. On the same way, EXP 1 has opinion that "A Happening destination" can be the perfect tagline as it is the destination for each and every sort of tourists. Similarly, EXP 2 gives his argument that any suitable tagline that can represent lake and mountain (*Taal* and *Himal*) will the best for Pokhara as it is the brand image of this destination.

Brand Positioning: On the brand positioning matter, there is alike different between the experts but the major theme is likely to be the same. All of these experts have their verdict on making the destinaion for all sorts and age groups of visitors. EXP 3 wants to position Pokhara as 'Family destination', EXP 1 as 'Happening Destination' and EXP 5 as 'Adventure and holiday destination'. In all these opinions, the destination appeals for every sort of visitors.

On the view of EXP 2, Pokhara should be positioned as the 'Trekker's Gateway' as it is well recognized by most of the European and USA tourists on the same way (EXP 2).

The verdict of EXP 4 is a bit different. Pokhara should be positioned as the holiday and family destination of every age group for domestic tourists and the tourists of neighboring countries India and China now for at least one more decade and only should approach to other market segment. Still Pokhara have to develop and learn more in the sector and going directly to the global arena can lead to unsatisfied experiences of the visitors (EXP 4).

Promotion Tools: The present age is the age of Information Technology and so, all the experts gave their verdict on choosing the digital marketing promotion as the best tool to promote the destination. On the digital platform also, audio-visual advertisement has fast and best performance (EXP 2). Short clips about the destinations with major points or the link of informative website can be made for better result (EXP 5).

Similarly, EXP 3 have his opinion that the promotion of Pokhara should be done in the international market using Red Bus in London or China or the advertisement in global media such as BBC, CNN, Chinese televisions etc. (EXP 3). He also has appreciated the efforts of promotion campaigns launched by Deepak Raj Joshi, CEO of Nepal Tourism Board in his tenure.

EXP 5 further finds that the promotion events & campaigns inside and in other cities or countries have also good impact in the tourism of Pokhara. Similarly, as per EXP 1, word of mouth is the best way of promotion and so the experience should be generated the best one for the better and sustainable promotion. Beyond that, as per him, the promotion activities of NTB is enough

The opinion of EXP 4 is a bit different. Talking on the successful case study of New York city, he puts forward that the attractive posters and paintings of major sites, mountains etc. can be placed on the in major places and City bus of the cities, which can be helpful in creating the brand image in the mind of the visitors (EXP 4).

Proposed Framework of Destination Branding of Pokhara: On the light of the above mentioned destinations, the following sort of framework can be proposed for the destination branding of Pokhara.

Table 4

Proposed Framework of Destination Branding of Pokhara

Brand Name	Paradise Pokhara
Logo/Symbol	Machhapuchhre mountain with hills and Phewa lake, boating, paragliding, ultra-light and Sarangi
Tagline/Slogan	Nature, Culture and Adventure
Brand Positioning	Pokhara for all sorts of family and holiday package. But it should be positioned now as the best destination in South Asia targeting India and China.
Promotion Tools	Digital marketing with audio-visual contents.
	Colouring the appropriate paintings in the open walls of schools, colleges and public places demonstrating the brand image contents of Pokhara.
	Painting the city bus, deluxe bus, national permit trucks and taxies with the brand image conents of Pokhara.
	Effective events in Pokhara to attract the tourists.
	Determining brand colour of Pokhara and painting it in the places as far as possible. Sky Blue (denoting paradise, clean, clear) or green (denoting nature) can be the perfect brand colour for Pokhara.
	Constructing the monuments of the components of brand image in major squares (chowks) such as Machhapuchhre (Fishtail), Paragliding Statue, Ultralight, Boats, Sarangi etc.
	Visit Pokhara campaigns in major cities of Nepal, India and China.
	Different national and international competitions in regular basis to promote the various aspects of destination brand of Pokhara.

Challenges of Destination Branding of Pokhara

Pokhara as a destination has got many sorts of opportunities, which have been discussed in various topics above. There is great possibility for this destination to be furthermore developed

as one of the best destination in this region. But like other various sectors, destination branding of Pokhara is also not so easy to carry on. Some of the major challenges pointed by the experts are as mentioned below:

- The service side of tourism sector of Pokhara is always a problem. Service should be up to date in tourism industry for better experience of visitor, which lacks in Pokhara (EXP 5). The quality of human resources and their management is almost in the traditional way till date. Service sector staffs should have attitude of service first, respect to the guest, appropriate dress, politeness in the behaviour etc. not only in the hotels but also in every sector where tourism sector has impact (for eg. travel agency, transportation etc.) should be changed for good branding (EXP 4).

- Lack of well-trained human resources and their retention is also another challenge (EXP 5). Most of the hospitality sector even now also is dependent on the trainee manpower (EXP 4). Once, they learn the way to deal with the tourism sector up to some level, they want to go for foreign employment for better income opportunities.

- From last few decades, Pokhara as a destination is mostly selling the same amenities such as Phewa lake, Lakeside, Sarangkot sunrise, Davi Falls and some caves. The amenities should be added as well as nearby destinations should be integrated with Pokhara for making the experience of the visitor better (EXP 5). Various amenities and satellite destinations in Kahundanda (Sunset destination), Lekhnath (Begnas), Rupa, Baglung (Panchakot), Parbat, Myagdi (Tatopani: Hot water springs), Tanahun, Syangja (Homestay), Gorkha (Historical sites), Palpa etc. can be integrated with Pokhara. These destinations along with some new trekking routes such as Royal Trek, Millennium Trek etc. should be made vibrant (EXP 2). Lack of these may also leave some challenges for Pokhara for competing in global arena as other destinations have been working hard to increase the length of stay in the respective destinations.

- Concentration of investment of tourism industry in Pokhara in very little geography of Lakeside, which can also create problem of overcrowding in future (EXP 5). Similarly, the overconcentration of all the investment on the same place is also risky as per the various investment principles.

- Rivalry situation between the various local points and amenities of Pokhara has also created confusions to the visitors (EXP 5) such as unhealthy competition between hotels, rivalry situation between homestay and hotels etc. (EXP 2). The strategic alliances

between various amenities and destinations can only create better experience to the visitor in Pokhara.

- Selection of the perfect expert to handle destination branding of Pokhara as well as consulting on this matter regularly is also the next challenge. In fact budget to hire them isn't the challenge in this globalized world but the commitment of stakeholders can be challenge (EXP 3). But government and stakeholders should make appropriate policy to address this issue (EXP 4).

- Being the capital of Gandaki province as well as gateway of various other destination, it is expected that large number of that sum will visit Pokhara. Also Pokhara will be more accessible after the full fledge operation of Pokhara International Airport, Korala boarder and 4 lane Siddhartha and Prithvi Highway (EXP 1). At this situation, management of mass tourists can be the next challenges Pokhara is expected to face in near future.

- The cultural aspect of Pokhara is deteriorating gradually (EXP 4). The impact of westernization has made the ethnic culture of Nepal extinct in the present time. The cultural aspect is now only showcased in the form of the dance in restaurants or homestays (EXP 1). This can also be a matter of the cultural uniqueness in the branding of Pokhara.

- There is also problem in the policy dialogue of the tourism sector from the top level up to local level, which is faced by Pokhara too. Most of the tourism policies, programmes as well as documents including the most important 'Tourism Policy 2065' are made without or nominal participation of the representatives of the tourism sector (EXP 3). Due to the result, the private sector lacks the feelings of ownership with these policies. So, the government sector should be tourism friendly with the active participation of every stakeholder for every sort and level of policy dialogues.

- The negative news in media is also the next challenge for the tourism development of Pokhara. Making people aware is one good thing but reporting only the negative aspects and not making the positive side as news is the problem of media. Some negative sorts of regular reports in media such as news about the risk of sinkhole, sex tourism, encroachment of Phewa Lake, pollution on the lake, rapid growth of water hyacinth in the lake can harm the brand in long term (EXP 1). The positive efforts to fix these problems also should be the agendas of news report.

- There is always the question of sustainability in the tourism sector. The benefit can be received to the longer time period along with from the quality tourists if the sustainability

issues are taken in considerations (EXP 1). But due to rapid construction of higher buildings, increasing crowd and unmanaged urbanization of Pokhara, the sustainability issue can be a great challenge in near future for Pokhara as a destination (EXP 4).

• The foremost challenge of Pokhara in the present time is in fact the lack of visionary and eminent leader in the tourism sector of Pokhara (EXP 2). Due to the deficiency of the same, Pokhara is lagging behind in the ideology and policy formulation in the national level.

After Pokhara will be go through destination branding, the cost of living will be high and some low class people will be suffering (EXP 4). This may create some challenge in the financial as well as equality situation of the people in Pokhara, so the situation should be pre-analyzed and solved in time to get rid of this challenge.

CONCLUSION

Pokhara as a destination is the tourism pioneer as well as market leader of tourism industry of Nepal. The tourism in Nepal was started from mountaineering sector and the first successful summit was done of Mount Annapurna, which is in Pokhara. It was also the first mountain above 8 thousand meter height summited by human beings in the earth. So, Pokhara stands with that pride in the tourism of Nepal.

From the in-depth interviews accessed in this study, it can be concluded that Pokhara should go for destination branding due to its tourist appealing amenities rather than any other associated pride within. The destination branding of Pokhara can appropriately done under the brand name "Paradise Pokhara" which is in fact informal brand name for Pokhara form long time in national as well as international arenas in various media writings.

To ensure the destination branding of Pokhara, the destination should go for a collaborative approach with its nearby destinations like Kathmandu, Chitwan, Lumbini, Muktinath and Janakpur etc. Similarly, it should be connected with the nearby points of Kaski and the nearby district to add up with various amenities that Pokhara can offer to the visitor. Long term strategic alliance can also be created for making mutual benefit of both the parties.

On the same way, Pokhara should position itself as "The Happening Destination" under the tag line "Nature, Culture and Adventure". The market segment of the positioning should be South Asia targeting India and China as the major visitors to Pokhara. The operation of Pokhara Regional International Airport can add more benefit for promoting the destination.

The destination branding should gradually be shifted towards higher end tourists rather than mass tourism. Mass tourism goal can be fulfilled by the operation of various accessibility means such as international airport, domestic airport as well as improvised and newly added road networks.

Furthermore, the promotion activities of Pokhara as a destination should also be focused towards the same market segment. So the campaigns, events, international advertisements as well as promotional activities should now be directed on the same market segment to meet the goals of higher end tourists as well as sustainable destination.

In this way, Pokhara has to position itself as the 'Best Destination in South Asia' to experience fun; spend leisure and holiday, sports, MICE and family trips. This can only make the fulfillment of long term goals of the tourism sector of 'Paradise Pokhara'.

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