CHAPTER FIVE

Marketing Problems of the Tourism Industry in Bangladesh

5.1. Lack of Proper Infrastructural Facilities
5.2. Resource Constraints
5.3. Inadequate Attention of the Government
5.4. Absence of Appropriate Management
5.5. Absence of Marketing Principles
5.6. Absence of Effective Control over the Marketing Activities of the Firms
5.7. Lack of Enough Destinations and Exclusive Tourism Products
5.8. Problem of Standardization and Quality Control
5.9. Underdeveloped Channel of Collection Network
   A. Small Number of Tour Operators
   B. Inefficient National Airlines
   C. Insignificant Role of the Travel Agents
   D. Shortage of Professional Guides
5.10. Higher/Unreasonable Prices
5.11. Inadequate Promotion Campaigns
5.12. Misperceptions of the Potential Foreign Tourists about Bangladesh
As evident from the analyses of the findings, in reality the tourism industry in Bangladesh is essentially at its infant stage. Therefore, the marketing activities of the industry are subject to a lot of limitations or constraints. In this chapter, the marketing problems of the tourism industry are identified and discussed on the basis of the literature survey and perceptions of the respondent foreign tourists as well as the tourism firms.

5.1. Lack of Proper Infrastructural Facilities

Bangladesh lacks proper infrastructural facilities which hamper the marketing activities of the tourism industry. The conditions of highways, railways and domestic airways are dismal. In terms of the road density per 100 square kms. of the agricultural land area, Bangladesh's position is lower than that of Korea, Malaysia and Srilanka in the Asian countries (as shown in the table - 2.3 of chapter two). The road density in Bangladesh in terms of per 100 population is also lower than that of India and Korea, as shown in the table mentioned above. The airways or the railways do not connect some important destinations such as the Sundarbans, Dublar Char and Kuakata. These destinations are not even connected by the improved road networks. With regard to the transport services, 37.62% of the respondent tourists have considered it as very bad or bad. On the other hand, 29.70% of the respondents ranked it as very good or good along with 27.27% as fair, as presented in the table - 3.14 of chapter three. They have also made several comments which can be stated as "transports are not as comfortable, timely and safe as we expect". In the case of Dhaka City, most of the historical buildings are located in the old Dhaka areas where the roads are congested and traffic jams are regular phenomena. The city tour for the stopover passengers within the limited time period becomes difficult due to traffic jams. Therefore, many tourists do not wish to bear with the problems/troubles of the city tours in such congested areas and traffic jams of the old Dhaka areas. The tele-communication system in the destination areas of Bangladesh is also very inefficient. The tourists would like to
keep contact with their family members and/or relatives while they are in the destination areas of Bangladesh, but its tele communication system is not helpful. With regard to power supply, Bangladesh terribly suffers from load-shading, low voltage and power cuts over a long period. Therefore, the foreign tourists are also forced to suffer from such situations. They often go back to their countries with rather unpleasant experiences of Bangladesh’s tourism.

5.2. Resource Constraints

Being a nationalized organization, BPC’s development projects are directly financed by the government. The GOB has not contributed a significant amount of financial assistance to the tourism sector so far. “Since inception till 1983-84 only Taka 16 crores has been granted as loan to the BPC. During the annual budget of 1995-96, Taka 1 crore only has been allocated for the BPC”\(^1\). The government’s contributions in other years are also more or less the same. GOB is also not in a position to allocate enough funds in the national annual budgets and development projects. Therefore, BPC cannot undertake projects for the development of new attractions, establishment of parks and gardens, conservation of tourist spots, arrangements of improved transport facilities, etc. Resource constraints also hamper the introduction of quality services, establishment of effective distribution network, implementation of large-scale operation, adoption of enough promotion programmes and performance of other marketing activities. All these, in turn, affect the exploitation of the full potentials of the tourism industry in Bangladesh.

5.3. Inadequate Attention of the Government

The GOB has not given proper attention to develop the tourism sector of the country. It is almost as if the sector is not taken seriously\(^2\). The development plans


\(^2\) ibid
of the government have not given the required importance to this vital sector. The Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism consists of few officers and employees. They do not keep any record of the tourism-related information (for example, grade-wise number of hotels, restaurants, travel agents, etc.). Accordingly, the tourism industry in Bangladesh suffers from the Government's inadequate attention and preferential treatment what it actually deserves.

5.4. Absence of Appropriate Management

The managements of the tourism firms (NTO, TOs, TAs, Airlines, Hotels, Restaurants, Museums, Zoos, Parks, Gardens, etc.) in Bangladesh are below the level needed to ensure relatively better performance. These firms are run by the people most of whom do not have any academic degree in or training on tourism. Moreover, the Government appoints the top executives on deputation to the nationalized tourism firms. These people are not usually found to have any professional skills in tourism marketing. Therefore, due to the lack of necessary academic backgrounds and professional skills of the executives, tourism firms in Bangladesh fail to formulate and adopt effective marketing strategies and attain optimum performance.

5.5. Absence of Marketing Principles

Different tourism firms operating in Bangladesh do not completely follow marketing concept in their marketing activities. Particularly, they do not seem to analyze the issues affecting tourists' satisfaction, emphasize the factors influencing tourists' decision making, consider the changes in tourists' behaviour and run their businesses on the basis of the principle 'profit through customer satisfaction'. Marketing mix strategies of the tourism industry in Bangladesh appear to be less integrated. The tourism firms in Bangladesh donot equally emphasize all the mix elements and donot run on the basis of balanced or integrated marketing mix decisions. They donot arrange the products/services as per the needs of the
customers or they cannot ensure the proper role to be played by the channel members. There are also some inappropriateness in setting prices as well as designing promotion campaigns. Even there is lack of perfect understanding of the composition of marketing mix among the executives of the different firms of this industry. The marketing techniques adopted by different tourism firms are still less advanced and, hence, less effective.

5.6. Absence of Effective Control over the Marketing Activities of the Firms

No tourism firm excepting Biman Bangladesh Airlines has any separate marketing department to perform and control the marketing activities. Even the national tourism organization, Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, does not have any separate marketing department to handle its marketing activities. The commercial department of the Corporation handles and controls the marketing activities with its other regular activities. This makes the control over their marketing activities less effective, and reduces the performance of the industry as a whole and affects the growth of market to a greater extent.

5.7. Lack of Enough Destinations and Exclusive Tourism Products

The tourism industry in Bangladesh, with its limited resources and destinations, is not in a position to offer enough alternative destination-packages for the potential tourists. In fact, Bangladesh has got nothing from the world famous ingredients like Nayagra Water Fall, Delhi Red Fort, Agra Fort, Tajmahal, Iefl Tower, Mount Everest, Hanging Garden of Babylon, Pyramids of the Egypt or China Great Wall. Even the country does not have any exclusive artificial tourist zone or spot which may attract the foreign tourists to visit Bangladesh and satisfy them properly. Therefore, a good number of the visiting foreign tourists have to go back to their countries with a low level of satisfaction.
5.8. Problem of Standardization and Quality Control

About 36.63% of the respondent foreign tourists considered facilities, quality of services and comforts as below the expected levels. In designing tourism services, the marketers face a major challenge of standardization and quality control of their services. The marketers of Bangladesh tourism industry are also of no exception from this challenge. As a tour or a cruise programme comprises a compendium of different components of service mix and as these components are not homogeneous, problems lie in maintaining equal standard for all these components. Further, the delivery of tourism services is made by human beings and due to the presence of the human factor in the delivery process, tourism services are prone to human errors and chances are always present to affect the standard or quality of the tourism services. The accommodations, restaurants and transports in the destination areas also do not meet the requirements of the visitors.

5.9. Underdeveloped Channel of Collection Network

Bangladesh tourism industry is at the initial stage of development. Therefore, the development of the channel of collection network is also at its primary stage. The number of wholesalers and retailers in Bangladesh is not sufficient to build up a strong base of the channel of collection. Besides, Bangladesh is situated in a-region which is, to some extent, remote from the major source countries of North America, Europe, Japan and Australia. Moreover, efficient distribution of tourism services and easy accessibility to the destination are not possible due to the backward transport system. Again, the conditions of tele-communication and internet facilities are also at the primary stage. Therefore, the development of centralized reservation system for effective distribution is not possible at this stage. The underdeveloped channel of collection network is defined in terms of A. Small Number of Tour Operators, B. Inefficient National Airlines, C. Insignificant Role of the Travel Agents and D. Shortage of Professional Guides
A. Small Number of Tour Operators: There are a few tour operators (about 30 out of which 17 are TOAB-members) dealing with package tours and river cruise programmes in the country. Most of them are concentrated in the capital city of the country. This number is not sufficient to offer competitive products and render quality services efficiently to the tourists.

B. Inefficient National Airlines: Biman, the national airlines in Bangladesh, is facing serious constraints like shortage of modern aircrafts, ill fleet-planning, bad image, irregularities of flight schedule, delays in take-off, lack of professional executives and absence of better management. Kamal and Chowdhury noted that management fails to offer better services compared to most of its competitors. Pannell Kerr Forster Associates' report addressed it as a poorly run low cost carrier catering almost exclusively to the ethnic market. The report also mentioned that Biman does not have a very good reputation among the tour operators and they perceive it as a problem carrier with poor service but competitive rates. The airline also has not paid much attention to motivating overseas tour operators and travel agents to act as promoters of Bangladesh’s tourism. Moreover, BPC executives argued that the overseas offices of Biman do not play an adequate role to disseminate information and distribute information materials among the potential tourists and motivate them to visit Bangladesh. All these affect the national airlines performing the role as a channel member of the tourism industry and have made the same inefficient.

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5 Ibid, P. 20
C. Insignificant Role of the Travel Agents: The travel agencies in Bangladesh do not emphasize the sale and distribution of package tours, river cruise programmes, hotel rooms, railway tickets, etc. Only the few are engaged in booking of hotel rooms, package tours and river cruise programmes. Most of the travel agents in Bangladesh use to sell air tickets on behalf of the airlines. Some of them are also involved in manpower export activities. About 80.19% of the respondent tourists (as presented in the table - 3.14 of Chapter Three) have mentioned that the travel agents have been of no use to them.

D. Shortage of Professional Guides: There is also an acute shortage of professional guides in Bangladesh. As per an estimate made by the TOAB president, there are about 20 professional guides most of whom are associated with different tour operators in the country. This number is not sufficient to meet the needs of the tourists and the industry. These guides are not also reasonably well trained (as indicated in Chapter Three).

All these have hampered the development of an efficient channel of collection network for the tourism industry in Bangladesh.

5.10. Higher/Unreasonable Prices.

Some of the tourism firms set prices which have no relation with the quality of the products offered or the services rendered. These firms usually set prices with a view to earn supra-normal profit in the short term. The standard and star hotels in Bangladesh are found to charge high prices for their rooms and food items. Hasan and Chowdhury also noted that the room rates of the top graded hotels are high⁴. Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation and other private tour operators also set excess

prices for their tour programmes and river cruise services. A good percentage of the respondent foreign tourists also perceive the tariffs/prices of accommodations and guided package tours as much higher than those in other neighbouring countries like India and Nepal. The mean scores on the reasonableness of prices of these two components, as shown in chapter three, have been estimated 2.91 and 2.92. This implies that the prices are quite unreasonable. Auto-rickshaws and taxis in different towns and cities in Bangladesh do not use any meter to read the exact fares. This gives the drivers an opportunity to claim excess fares. The shop-keepers of the items favourable to and purchased by the foreign tourists do not hang any price list in their shops and exploit the privilege to cheat the foreign visitors by charging higher prices.

5.11. Inadequate Promotion Campaigns

Channel members as well as the prospective tourists in the source countries are not well aware of the attractions and other tourism-related arrangements in Bangladesh due to the lack of enough target-based promotion campaigns. Due to resource constraints, Bangladesh tourism industry can not launch enough promotion campaigns to motivate the prospective tourists to visit Bangladesh. BPC and some tour operators publish and distribute some souvenirs, brochures, travel guides, hotel guides, handbooks, tourist maps, posters, folders, etc that do not reach the potential customers properly. The quality of the printing papers is also not good. Pictures illustrated there are not attractive, scenery are not visualized properly and geographical locations of the spots are not described rightly. Moreover, the published materials of both the BPC and the tour operators are not properly distributed among the potential tourists. They are not even available at the Bangladesh diplomatic missions abroad, Biman’s overseas offices, international tour operators and overseas travel agents’ in the source countries. These are not even, unfortunately, easily available in the local bookshops, newspaper stalls and foots paths.
5.12. Misperceptions of the Potential Foreign Tourists about Bangladesh

Perceptions of the potential foreign tourists largely depend upon the tourism arrangements in that country. Available information on the destinations, experience and impression on the attractions of the visiting foreign tourists and effective promotion activities of the industry also help build up perceptions about and image of the destination country. It is understood that the prospective foreign tourists do not currently hold positive perceptions about Bangladesh as a tourist destination. These misperceptions are partly due to the government’s failure in formulating proper policies and partly due to the lack of implementation of right marketing strategies by different firms of the industry. Desperate projection in the international media has also turned the destination as a country of poverty, a place densely populated by poor people, a nation with political unrest and a low-lying deltaic region regularly affected by floods and cyclones. All these have eventually created a bad image among the intermediaries and potential tourists of the source countries. Some more negative aspects including sanitation problems, uncomfortable ground level transports, insufficient accommodations in the destination areas, insecurity of movements, lack of pure drinking water and hygienic foods, etc have also affected the image of the country as a tourist destination. Therefore, the misperceptions of the potential foreign tourists and the resulting perceived bad image of Bangladesh before the arrival are serious constraints of the country’s tourism industry to carry out its marketing activities.

The above are the most crucial problems faced by the tourism industry in Bangladesh in its marketing activities.