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Branding of Hotels and Restaurants with Local Names as Resistance to Global Culture in Pokhara

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the recent trend of branding the hotels and restaurants with local names in Lakeside of Pokhara, Nepal. The place is a major tourist hub that targets both domestic and foreign tourists, using buildings, hoarding boards, language and ambience of restaurants and hotels that have set up their business with western cultures. The unique standpoint of local branding has ignited this study with thirst to know the answers of the questions such as what has tempted the entrepreneurs to local branding, if such branding resists the global cultures and creates unique business space. Using purposive and convenient sampling method, the participants have been selected. Following ethnographic research design, the field was observed and the participants were interviewed along with the library study for the theoretical concept of branding, globalization, localization, and glocalization. Analysis of data is thematic. This paper argues that there are multiple reasons behind branding the tourism businesses with local names but they ultimately create a local cultural space for business. Such cultural space resists global cultures and maintains local cultural identity. Yet the created local space is not purely local.

KEYWORDS: Branding, global culture, glocalization, local names, resistance

INTRODUCTION

Branding has high value in the field of business. There are various purposes of branding such as attracting customers, informing the customers about the services,

displaying identity, creation of business space, and many others. There are various ways of displaying the branding such as the combination of words, the calligraphy, the use of colors and lights, the use of sketches and photos, and so on. No doubt, branding aims at the success of business. Bonnici (2015) argues that the objective of branding strategy is "to create brands that are differentiated from the competition, thereby reducing the number of substitutes in the marketplace" (1). The success of business cannot be measured only in terms of money. More than financial success, some brandings aim at maintaining local cultural identities, resisting the global culture. This paper analyzes the recent trend of branding the tourism business in Lakeside of Pokhara with local typical words and argues the trend of branding with local names ultimately creates local cultural space and resists the global culture. Such trend maintains local identity and eases to create unique business space.

If visitors come to Lakeside, they can see lots of brandings that use local names. Many studies show that there was branding with local names in the past, but those names were in common Nepali words. But recently there are brandings with the use of typical local names that are rarely used in everyday lives. A foreign visitor does not understand the name. There arises a question regarding the reasons behind such naming of their business. Visitors come across the modern concrete buildings as they look around. Most of the brandings and hoarding boards are written in English. Tourist guides talk to the tourists in English. From the streets, modern dining spaces are visible in restaurants. The visible setting of Lakeside seems dominated by global culture i.e. language, buildings, dining spaces, hotel rooms, and menus. Amidst the domination of global culture, the use of typical local words to brand the tourism services, particularly hotels and restaurants has ignited this study. Thus, the study aims to get the answer of the questions such as what has tempted the businesses to brand with local names, if such branding resists the global culture, and if such branding creates unique business space for them. The study is limited to restaurants and hotels of Lakeside as the place targets the tourists both from within and outside the country and dominantly has western features in the areas such as language, food, buildings, dining space, food menu and amenities in them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The studies of the branding of tourism business in Lakeside, Pokhara have not been found yet. There are studies about the branding in connection with various areas of business, but they do not deal with the use of local names in the cultural context of Nepal. However, there are studies regarding the concept of branding, globalization, and localization. This section briefly talks about representative studies on branding and theories regarding the brand names. Jamaluddin et al. (2013) state that branding should match human life styles and preferences. To achieve a success, they argue that branding should build on people's psychology. Bastos and Levy (2012) talk about the history of branding and argue, "In the second half of twentieth century, the branding concept expanded in terms of both application and thinking" (357). This means that branding carries specific value and should attract the customers. In the case of the flow of culture from one place to another, Apaddurai (1900) argues that culture has flow in the process of globalization but the process cannot be fixed. He argues that globalization intends to homogenize the culture whereas the process of homogenization also gives birth to resistance from the local. Appaddurai (2012) further states that the process of the

localization is not the easy one and can be maintained through the "performance, representation and action" (179). In a similar way, Featherstone (1996) states that the tension between the global and the local gives birth to the concept of glocal. This means that the global culture and the local culture are found in conflict and they get merged. This merger gets the name glocal. Roudometof (2016) is of the opinion that glocalization has autonomy, which can be studied independently. From the above discussion, it can be concluded that resistance from the local arises when globalization tries to homogenize. Therefore, the study of resistance from the local is a phenomenon that deserves a serious study. On the other hand, if we take branding as a representation of human life style and values, branding must have a connection with culture that may be either local or global. Branding, that is why, is a subject of study in relation with identity and culture. Such relation of branding and culture that this paper attempts to analyze makes this study significant. Moreover, lack of study on the branding trend of hotels and restaurants of Lakeside area of Pokhara leaves a plenty of spaces for further research to make it new and the original one.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This study has chosen hotels and restaurants of Lakeside area of Pokhara to study the use of local names in branding as cultural resistance due to two basic reasons. One is the area targets both local and foreign tourists and the local names are unfamiliar to the foreign tourists. Another reason is the local names that stand quite different in the circumstance such as the place is dominated by global cultures. To understand the motives of the business entrepreneurs and the tourists, the study has chosen ethnographic research design for the study. Data was collected through participant observation, interview, field visit and the documents of the business like brochures, menu, etc. Since the exact number of businesses with local names is not available, seven hotels and restaurants, and five tourists were selected for this study through purposive and convenient sampling method. The participants from the business services, namely, *Duna Tapari* (leaf plates) Restaurant, *Bhatti* (inn) Restaurant and Bar, *Byanjan* (recipe), *Dunga* (boat) Restro and Lounge Bar, *Vardan* (blessing) Resort, *Tuki* (small lamp) Resort, and *Kuti* (hut) Resort and Spa are given the codes P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7 respectively. The tourist participants get the codes P8, P9, P10, P11, and P12 to maintain the secrecy of their names as per the request of two participants. The observation of the field and interview were the research tools to collect the data for the study. The interview was the semi-structured one. It was done using different interview question lists for the owners and the tourists. To make the study reliable and valid, the topic was selected after the study of theories regarding globalization, localization, glocalization, and branding. The ethnographic study has given the first-hand information. Since the questions raised in the problem are answered during the study, the study proves itself a reliable and valid one. The analysis of the data is the thematic one. The results have been discussed under the themes such as merits and demerits of local names, customers' response, resistance to global culture, promotion of culture, and display of identity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Description of the Site

Duna Tapari is a restaurant being operated in a two-storied building that looks like a traditional Nepali home. By using traditional Nepali *chulho* (cooking stove) and dining place, it tries to offer a local atmosphere along with food served in *duna tapari* (leaf plates). *Bhatti* Restaurant and Bar has local name, but does not offer much traditional flavor except Nepali food. *Byanjan* gives traditional look to modern building with the use of carved woods, stones, and white painting on rough surface that many traditional Nepali buildings feature. *Dunga* Restro and Lounge Bar is more like a modern restaurant. Only the name makes it a Nepali restaurant. *Tuki* Resort has modern building. Only by keeping *tuki* (small lamp) at various places, which provides a traditional theme. *Vardan* Resort has buildings that look like traditional Nepali architecture. One is made of stone and another is made of bricks. Both types of buildings are quite common in the Nepali context. Moreover, maximum materials used in the buildings and in the rooms are locally made. *Tuki* Resort and Spa has a multi-storied modern building. From its entrance, it tries to create a local atmosphere with artistic wooden works that look like a Nepali art.

Thematic Presentation of Data

During the field visit, observation, and interview, an open interaction took place. The owner participants shared their experiences and stories from the establishment of their business to recent happenings. The tourist participants also told their wants and expectations as a traveler. The results of the study are discussed below under the following themes:

- Merits and Demerits of Local Names,
- Customers' Response,
- Resistance to Global Culture, and
- Promotion of Culture and Display of Identity

Merits and Demerits of Local Names

All the owners of business opined that branding of the tourism business services with the local names is their strength. Their branding looks unique and original. The customers remember the names of business easily as the names are unique. The business name becomes a topic of discussion among the friends and relatives. Their conversation further moves to the services that they get in hotels and restaurants. The participants agree that branding is a sort of advertisement of their business. They believe that the reflection of culture and history in the brand name is a strong part of their business. This strength draws attention of the customers and makes the place to visit again and again. Interestingly, the participants do not mention any weakness of the local names.

The guest participants also have similar views. All five participants agree that they find the local names attractive. P11 says, "I like to stay in the hotel that has local names because I expect such hotels also provide facilities that have a flavor of local culture" (Personal communication, June 14, 2023, my translation). P10 also has a similar view. He believes that "Local names attract me because I aim to understand and experience the local culture during my travel and the local names obviously reflect the

local culture" (Personal communication, June 14, 2023, my translation). The responses of the guests indicate that the local names attract the customers because they expect to know about the local during their travel.

The response of participants that branding of tourism business has only the positive sides that makes us understand why Lakeside of Pokhara recently witnesses a plenty of numbers of tourism business services with the local names. The use of local names has turned out to be a key to attract the customers and "the aim of economic progress is achievable through it because such branding gives authenticity to the business" (Parajuli, 2023, p. 13). Those tourists who seek for originality of the land and the culture enjoy the service with its local features. If the business offers an authentic local culture and hospitality, the business obviously creates a noticeable space for itself among other similar types of hospitality businesses.

Customers' Response

All the participants have the same experience that branding has made the customers happy. The customers get curious to know the meaning of the local word. They ask the meaning of words and try to connect the meaning of the word with the service, food and ambience. P2 says, "Lots of foreign tourists ask for the meaning of the local words and even want to see the object the word refers to. Even some Nepali guests get curious to see the object after which the branding is made" (Personal communication, June 12, 2023, my translation). His hotel, that is why, has kept *Tuki* (small traditional lamp) in different decorated forms. Regarding the response of the customers, P3 shares her experience with the researcher: "These days only a few customers ask the meanings of the words. They instead search the internet for the meaning of the words" (Personal communication, June 13, 2023, my translation). One of tourist participants is more concerned with local culture and music rather than the food. P10 states, "The names do not excite me much, but the names invite me" (Personal communication, June 14, 2023, my translation). Such customers believe that the local culture really invites them.

The tourists from abroad are less interested on the local food. They fear that the unfamiliarity to the local food might make them sick. P11 and P12 have this fear. In a week-long stay, they tasted the local food only two or three times even knowing that the local food is both healthy and tasty. P8, a tourist, from India has also this fear. He says, "I want to taste the local food, but there is fear of being sick. So, I order the food that suits me" (Personal communication, June 19, 2023, my translation). But such tourists choose hotels and restaurants with the local names to experience other local cultural features such as art, ambience, dance, and music.

The interest, inquisitiveness, and attention of the customers indicate the added value of branding businesses with the local names. Of course, the local names engage the customers in one's business. They get knowledge about local cultures, history and identity. Moreover, the interest from the local customers to know more about their own local culture reveals the branding of local names help maintain the cultural values by making the young people know about their own culture.

Resistance to Global Culture

All the participants believe that branding of local names resists the global culture. Tourists get eager to understand the local words, the meanings, etymology and

cultural significance. Some of them find the local words difficult to remember and some find difficult to pronounce. Still, they get engaged with the local words. Tourists take photographs of local objects. Some buy them to take to their homes. One of the participants shares his experience: "Visitors from Brazil and China have made documentary of my restaurant. Some foreigners even want to take *duna tapari* [plates made of leaves to serve food] to their homes for display" (P1, personal communication, June 11, 2023, my translation). Another participant forwards a nationalistic thought behind the use of local objects and features in his resort. He clearly states, "My motive is to offer a Nepali look and tastes as it is Nepal" (P5, personal communication, June 16, 2023, my translation). He seems to resist the process of globalization by offering local tastes and look.

The tourist participants give the opinion that branding of local names globalize the local. They argue that culturally rich country like Nepal should provide local hospitality together with the local names. P12 argues, "Unless and until a country promotes its culture in tourism, a country cannot create its identity in international forum" (Personal communication, June 19, 2023). The guest participants confirm that the use of local names and offering of local hospitality is good for both tourism industry and maintaining cultural identity. Using the local names and offering local tastes and ambience evoke identity. Under the context of sheer domination of globalization, the promotion of local names resists the global culture and globalizes the local.

Promotion of Culture and Display of Identity

All the participants give the opinion that branding of the local names not only displays a local identity, but also promotes a local culture. P3 connects the use of local names with the people's faith in religion and astronomy. She reveals, "People keep the local names as they have been suggested by fortune tellers" (Personal communication, June 13, 2023, my translation). The fortune tellers recommend the initial Nepali alphabet to name the business. The owners decide the name with a hope that such name will bring success to their business. Such branding is not due to the intention of resisting the global culture, but still it resists globalization and promotes cultural identity.

P5 and P1 strongly think that branding the local names is beneficial as such names give an authentic feel to the guests. P5 argues, "The process of globalization goes on but ultimately the local wins the battle" (Personal communication, June 16, 2023, my translation). He shares his experience with the researcher that tourists want to take the taste and culture of the places that they visit. In a four-day stay, a tourist wants to taste a local food at least twice. Some of them even take local liquor. P5 believes, "The local name along should be supported by local taste and ambience. Such combination creates good opportunity for success in tourism business" (Personal communication, June 16, 2023, my translation). He is strong in his opinion that the offering of local features in hospitality helps succeed in business and maintain the identity.

The tourist participants agree that tourism business should sell the local taste and flavor. As tourists, they love to experience new culture, different life styles and new people. P11 and P12 believe that the local names might create a minor problem of not being able to understand the meaning of word and its pronunciation. But it is not a hindrance. P10 believes, "New words develop inquisitiveness" (Personal communication, June 14, 2023). There are lots of tourists who want to experience newness during the

tour. They love to enjoy all the new items. The positive aspects of branding with the local names are of high importance. The local name to business gives economic growth that leads to satisfaction. At the same time, it is also a promotion of local culture. From the perspective of identity and originality, such business services are the strength of a nation as such practice transfers cultural properties to the next generation. Cultural identity creates authentic space both within the place of its origin and outside the country.

Discussion

From the interaction with the participants and the field visits, the motives behind the temptation of branding with that local names are clear. The temptations include success of business, resisting global culture by maintaining the local cultural identity, and getting stuck with the traditional beliefs. The owners have understood the psychology of the tourists that they love to experience new taste, new people and cultures in a new place. For the success of business, it is mandatory to attract tourists and the first step of attracting them is through the attractive branding of their services. The use of local names in branding gives unique quality. It becomes the center of attraction for the tourists both within and outside the country. Tourists visit the place, talk to the friends about the name, and even do volunteer advertisements by taking photographs and making recommendations. To satisfy the customers, the business services have offered local tastes and flavors. Some have offered much local hospitalities whereas some have offered a few.

Though some entrepreneurs take the help from fortune tellers to name their business, the names definitely have cultural denotations because such names should carry the faith of the owners. Those, who have intention of resisting global culture, brand their business with the local names. They have a strong attachment to their culture that the ambience in their hotels and restaurants are full of local art, locally made objects, and traditional decorative items. Though the reasons vary, the names ultimately create a local cultural space. All the owners have agreed with a point that the local names have given a sort of cultural authenticity to their business. The tourist participants view that the local names invite them to visit the place again and confirms the opinion of the owners. Tourists' activity such as asking the meanings of local words, their desire to see the objects the words refer to, their desire to buy such goods, taking photographs, and making videos about local culture denote the fact that tourism business services having the local features ultimately turn to create a cultural space. Such creation of local cultural space gives birth to a local terrain through the performance and representations. This local terrain has a conflict with the global culture. It resists the global culture, but at the same time it points out to the need that both the local and global culture should move together in this age of globalization.

CONCLUSION

Human beings, by nature, have desire to develop new cultures. At the same time, they also love their own culture. Our culture is not solely what we have inherited from our ancestors. The generations have left and added many behaviours and skills to the culture that they have inherited for a long time. Culture in every society is now affected by the process of globalization. Mixing of cultures is a part of human civilization.

Therefore, knowing and adopting good cultures from others is an acceptable phenomenon. But if one feels one's culture is threatened by the borrowed culture, resistance is inevitable. The recent trend of branding tourism business with the local names in Lakeside, Pokhara is resistance to the global culture. The tourist area like Lakeside is almost full of global cultures. The English language dominates the communication. Buildings are modern. Menu is full of foreign dishes. The ambience in restaurants and hotels is western. When there is such a domination of the global culture, the resistance arises because the local entrepreneurs feel their culture as threatened. However, it is not an organized resistance, it is spontaneous and it has taken the form of trend.

The tourism entrepreneurs have transformed their love for their culture to the success of business by creating an authentic cultural space. Yet their businesses are not purely local. Their buildings are modern. They even serve foreign food to the tourists. They have given options to the tourists if they want local taste and hospitality, or the taste and hospitality of the choice of the visitors. The entrepreneurs seem to have realized the fact that both the local and global cultures should go together. The theorists are correct to argue that the process of glocalization takes place when the local and global culture take the mode of conflict. After all, business should move ahead. All types of tourists should get services. Mixing the global and local features seem desirable as well. The resistance to global culture has ultimately given birth to glocalization. But still a challenge to the global culture through the local branding has created a local cultural space. This space maintains a local identity that is beneficial for the entrepreneurs, tourists, tourism industry, local culture and the country itself.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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