

Branding Of Bonsai in Bangladesh: An Empirical Study

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ABSTRACT : *Bonsai is the only form of living art which have been around for 1,000 years now and it all started its journey in China. Bonsai was introduced in Bangladesh during 1990's. A bonsai artist combines creativity, knowledge and imagination to create a piece of art. With its growing popularity as an artistic and spiritual display more and more people became interested in learning this form of art. Not only this, there are people who have aesthetic need for buying a piece of artwork of Bonsai for personal and business purposes. Bonsai branding is an efficient way to show potential customers for market development in Bangladesh. The paper is focusing on utilization of branding tools for the unique living art for getting a stronger foothold in niche market. Defining unique selling position and consideration of methods to communicate key messages to desired audience of Bonsai is the focal point of the research. Objectives of the research are: to find out the factors that influences buying behaviours of bonsai customer, create a strong perception in customer's mind as a brand, market development factors of bonsai arts , factors Influencing the demand for bonsai arts through promotion tools and benefits of bonsai branding as a piece of art.*

Field of Research: *Branding*

Keywords: *Brand, Brand Experience, Aesthetic Need, Brand Strategy.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Bonsai is a form of living arts. This form of unusual art started its journey from China and gradually developed in Japan. The invention of Bonsai art set its footprints in Bangladesh back in 1990's. Bonsai has become a part of aesthetic element in Bangladesh. When an artist creates a bonsai, it requires the imagination of a poet, painter's creations, a designer's sculpture and gardener's knowledge to develop a unique piece of art. This form of art contains all its aesthetic elements, which can enhance country's pride, identity, economy, employment and so on. For the purpose of developing a more focused market for Bonsai's, it can be branded. The form of arts can play a vital role in encouraging and supporting the cultural development of a country (Ariuzzaman, Shudepto 2010).

Providing a country with the resources for cultural enrichment gives its people exciting opportunities to explore and expand their culture, identity and commerce. It increases pride and improves quality of life by encouraging reflection building awareness of new ways of seeing the world and incorporating beauty into the functionality of everyday life.

The effects of art are not always tangible, but like economic development, has a decided influence on the quality of life. Moreover, attracting, retaining and inspiring talented people to be in the creative profession can improve economic competitiveness as well as opportunities for artistic expression. The bonsai arts represent an industry that generates jobs and support the local economy. The arts are a catalyst for tourism, and encourage growth and creativity in communication and entertainment (Johnson, LD 2009). Unlike any other position in the corporate job, this area creates the acceptance of women in the society and therefore the opportunity for employment equivalent to male (Gutner, T 2005). Various institutions are encouraging education in bonsai arts, which creates an awareness of quality as a key value of the country. The study of art, thus, encourages people to analyse, interpret, and evaluate artworks and to study the cultural roots. The idea of cultural borrowing has converted into cultural adaptation. It has been said that, unlike any other elements of culture, the bonsai art was not in the focal spot in Bangladesh as in some other countries.

General people were not that aware of and interested toward the art till 1990. At that time a few people had ideas about it. But now the scenes are a bit different (Hirshman, EC 1983). More people are becoming interested in this art form some people felt need for the collection of it when exposed to this arts and some are found to be very eager to do business in this area. So, people related with this arts and its business felt need for applying branding strategies to create awareness, persuade, attract people.

Although the bonsai artists are not business people who work for profit, it has been observed that, for past few years, they are involved in selling and promoting activities for their arts in addition to focusing on various non-profit tasks. For this area, Firstly branding can be used. Then publicity, public relation, direct marketing and the advertising are used as the successful sales and promotional tools. Here, not only artists but also the other organizations and individuals who are involved with arts are focusing on the branding strategies like carefully targeting customers, integrating various tools of promotion and setting prices considerably for successful selling of the arts. So, it can be said that the bonsai art industry is not a not-for-profit area anymore.

Proposed study would provide a better assessment of these implemented strategies, which would contribute to select the option(s) for future branding, selling and promoting direction for bonsai arts. This proposed study would contribute valuable inputs to these people to select options to ensure successful selling of bonsai arts.

II. JUSTIFICATION FOR THE RESEARCH

From the past few years, bonsai art has become a fundamental area to increase the aesthetic value. And so, it has become important for artists and the people or organizations who are involved in this business to implement branding strategies to increase sales or profit from this area which was not in centre of attention till 2003-04. This project aims to help new artists and training centres by focusing on the ways for implementing branding strategies - identifying profitable customers, ways to keep customers coming back, alternative avenues for selling, creating an impressive image, building name recognition, sales and publicity tactics and identifying factors that influence buyers to purchase the living form of artwork.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

THE ART OF BONSAI –ORIGIN

One group of researchers suggested that the origin of bonsai may have began with the healers who used to travel and collect leaves and other extracts of particular trees for healing purposes. From this idea it is being speculated that bonsais origin to India or Egypt. However it is believed; that bonsai was not invented only for healing and portability.

Another group of researchers suggested that the art of bonsai started back to 2,000 years in China (Otto, H 2010). A famous bonsai researcher Will Heath suggests, “that since the bonsai craft involves growing miniature trees indoors in pots, it was actually started form the practice of gardening which dates back to the time of Babylon’s famous hanging gardens. However, China has also contributed immensely to the development of this particular form of art, and in the process, popularizing it as well.”

From the point of view of a different group, it was referred that though the art form originated in China but it was developed in Japan. During the 13th century it became a trend for Japanese to collect and pot wild trees and form miniatures (Berger, PL, Thomas L 1966).

A bonsai (pronounced “bones-eye”) is literally a “tree in a pot,” which further imitates, in miniature, the appearance of an old tree in nature. Old specimens in nature, unlike juvenile trees, have compact rounded tops, and horizontal or drooping branches, which make them, appear aged and graceful (Don, K 2011). There are three sizes of bonsai, ranging from under 5 inches to about 30 inches in height. The artists creates there art pieces with plant which are compatible to the environment of a specific country. Not all plants are equally effective as bonsai. To produce a realistic illusion of a mature tree, all parts of the ideal bonsai - trunk, branches, twigs, leaves, flowers, fruits, buds, roots - should be in perfect proportion with the size of the tree.

BONSAI IN BANGLADESH

The journey of bonsai in Bangladesh started in 90’s. At that time a few people started practicing it as their personal hobby. In 1999, Bangladesh Bonsai Society (BBS) was established which started a formal training sessions and identifying the talents of the Bonsai artist of Bangladesh. Bangladesh still has a long way to go in terms of creating international standard bonsai. Bangladesh Bonsai Society holds a yearly exhibition to exhibit the work of the bonsai artists here and of course, to promote the art among the general public. The craft of bonsai needs a lot of patience and a lot of artists were giving up on it. BBS started motivating them and generates interest in the mind of people. In a Environment like Bangladesh this art can be very much lucrative. Many native species of trees can be beautifully transformed into bonsai, using the proper techniques, and one does not have to necessarily import specific trees.

MEMBERSHIP AT BANGLADESH BONSAI SOCIETY

Bonsai is a form of art and Bangladesh Bonsai Society is preserving this art form. Controversies are rife in this craft, with widespread concerns about the supposed mutilating of tree and hindering its natural growth. Md Borhan Hossain Kakul, training director at Bangladesh Bonsai Society says: "This art is not killing any plant, where many other forms of art do."

"The artist here is blending his or her thoughts with the growing tendency of a tree without stopping the growth through any unnatural synthetic way. Only trimming is required to achieve the desired image that the artist has in the mind." Regarding the general trimming of trees Kakul says: "We trim our big trees once a year to achieve better growth. If that is not considered wrong, how can bonsai be wrong?"

To be a member of Bangladesh Bonsai Society:

- A person has to fill in a form with the organization.
- Bangladesh Bonsai Society will call you during their training once or twice a year.
- The training duration is 2-3 months, one class in weekends (10 classes).
- After attaining the basic training one can also go for advanced level workshop with the organization.
- The basic training cost is Tk3,000.

MARKETERS OF BONSAI

The marketers of Bonsai comprise of three sectors: the non-profit, commercial, and informal or volunteer sectors (McCarthy et al). Non-profit sector consists of organizations that have formal non-profit status. Nearly all fairs are nonprofits. Although these organizations often rely on volunteer support and may also have profit-making entities generating "earned income" for the institution, such as cafes and gifts shops, they depend heavily on philanthropic contributions and are "mission driven" as opposed to profit driven. Commercial firms in the arts system include such event management firms and architecture firms who are responsible for landscape creations. Their underlying objective is profit making. Informal or volunteer sector represents a large and not well-understood segment of, indeed, the entire arts system. This sector includes-Local crafts fairs; artists' collectives, amateur classes, and work produced by individuals on their own who do not expect to make a living from their work. It includes small organizations that rely primarily on volunteer efforts and backyard potters, etc.

MARKET DEVELOPMENT OF BONSAI ARTS

According to Marshall and Forrest (2011), art buyers may be roughly classified into three general categories based on their motivation to buy arts. First is the buyer whose personal, subjective experience motivates the desire to have a particular work to maintain the experience evoked in him or her by the work of art? Second is the collector who seeks to accumulate an array of representative works style or theme. The third buyer category is the investor who buys in anticipation of rising market value as the artist becomes more widely recognized. Such investors may be pure speculators, although well informed regarding art markets, or they may be collectors and market "manipulators" who, as well known collectors, purchase a significant portion of an emerging artist's portfolio and then use their reputations as collectors to promote the artist and so enhance the market value of their purchases (McCraken, G 1988).

In case of Bonsai collector we have first two criteria's of buyer existence in Bangladesh. The buyers who have personal interest in the art form are those people who want to have their own creation of a spectacular picture of a tree or a floral landscape on canvas, which one may gaze at over many an hour, there is, however, no substitute for the real deal. Roof top or balcony gardening, in this case, provides an easily accessible way to relishing greenery in big cities. For the second criteria the event management and architectural firm's collects different types Bonsai's to complete their projects and impress clients.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DEMAND FOR BONSAI ARTS

A number of factors influence patterns of demand in the aggregate. Although most empirical studies focus on who participates rather than why they participate, the following factors have been used to explain changes in participation patterns: (McCarthy et al):

- Socio-demographic changes, e.g., changes in the size and composition of the population
- Changes in taste, e.g., preferences for the arts and specific styles of art
- Changes in the stock of individual experience with the arts (arts education, prior experience, and knowledge)

IV. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND ISSUES

The prime objective of the proposed research is to analyse the branding strategy taken for the bonsai art markets and to classify the art customers in the context of Bangladesh. However, the specific objectives are outlined below.

- To categorize marketers as well as markets or people who are interested in the context of Bangladesh;
- To understand the branding strategies of this unique artworks in local as well as international perspective;
- To identify the factors that influence the demand of buyers for the bonsai;
- To identify the new potential strategies for the success of a new artist or organizations who want to be involved in this business;
- To provide insights about the innovative issues/factors that needs to be addressed for future development of this industry.

V. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY FOR THE STUDY

As no baseline study on Bangladeshi bonsai arts has been made prior on this issue, it is envisaged that the research will include a practical research element to investigate questions raised in the study. For this study, mainly qualitative data is being considered. The study is primarily target at exploring as well as evaluating the strategies to create a market for bonsai artist and create a new stream of brand.

For the empirical research, an experience survey is being conducted. Respective people from Bangladesh Bonsai Society, individuals/organizations collectors and most importantly the bonsai artists, are being interviewed and their strategies are being examined. Mainly, the result is used to know effective way to market and brand this sector, which will help for further growth of the industry, and for creating the centre of attention among the neighbour countries.

SOURCES OF DATA

Data is being collected from both primary and secondary sources. Therefore, literature review and focus group discussion– both approaches are being applied for the study. This study has involved interviews with various role players and stakeholders in the respective sectors, including bonsai artists and other related practitioners.

Available literature and other published material are being consulted, including catalogues, promotional material and journalism, and extensive Internet searches. To discern the evolution of branding strategies used for bonsai, secondary sources books and journals – are being reviewed. Interviews with bonsai artists, related organizations contributed for identifying the current marketing strategies.

SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

The approaches for collecting data are considered when selecting the sample for detailed study. Respondents have been drawn from the bonsai art sector. Stratified sampling is being adopted for sampling design.

The first level of stratification includes a) artists, b) organizations.

And the second level of stratification comprise of customers – direct as well as indirect. For this stratification, demographic factors (educational experience, gender, home support) as well as the psychographics factors (social class, lifestyle) and other behavioural factors (benefits sought) also need to be considered.

DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES AND ANALYSIS PLAN

Data is being collected in two steps:

A focus group discussion is being conducted with a group consisting 8 people. It included bonsai artist, individual collectors, intuitional collectors, trainers of this art and respective people from the organizations related with this living art form. They were asked about their perceptions, opinions, Ideas, beliefs and attitudes towards bonsai art and its prospects in Bangladesh. Three types of questions were moderated to create an environment to get the feedbacks.

Firstly, the participants were introduced to and make them comfortable with the topic of discussion with *Engagement Questions*.

Secondly, with the help of *Exploration questions*, the main ideas and themes were discovered.

Thirdly, the *Exit questions* were utilized to check to see if anything was missed in the discussion.

Additional texts were added as the research proceeds.

VI. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

As Bonsai is an form of living art, a Bonsai marketer is an artist whose “brand” is not just a label, a logo, or a signature—instead, it is one of the most powerful marketing tools that what he or she is branding, exactly. Good branding for Bonsai is the act of becoming known for something that the group of Bonsai creator actually does, above any other competitor. As an individual Bonsai artist, it is very likely that he doesn’t have an established brand like large companies do—which means if an individual artist wants to gain customers, he must create a brand of own. To be a branded Bonsai marketer, it should be focused on attracting customers. Bonsai is an art and the artwork must beg to be touched which immediately says something unique, and connects with potential buyers more than just a logo.

Some brand phrases are too generic, too vague to set the product apart. A Bonsai marketer can call themselves the “Best Bonsai art in the country” but so what? Who compared the art to whom? Does that even connect with potential buyers? Therefore, it requires something tangible for people to remember as a living art of the world. Bosai is the art of miniature creation of adult. “The Bonsai marketer who provides a most miniature version of adult plant guarantee.” The brands speak directly to the customers’ interests while setting up as different from the norm.

To be brand Bonsai marketer, something unique or otherwise notable about Bonsai work that’s worth mentioning to someone is very important. Its needs to then don’t just mention it—shout it from the rooftops by using communication tools.

Effective Bonsai marketers constantly reinforce public awareness of their brands to achieve long-lasting recognition. Own brand should encompass something unique about their Bonsai work so that potential customers learn to recognize the style. In the Bonsai art world, to create a bonsai creator personality is important to explain him and his Bonsai work in a short, powerful sentence which similar to branding of wedding photographer style.

HOW TO CREATE A STRONG BONSAI BRAND?

The creation of an effective brand starts with identifying target customers. In case of bonsai artists the target customers are individuals who are interested towards collection of this living art form and organizations who are interested to use this form of art in their assignments (event management firms and architecture firms).

Secondly, the bonsai art and its creations must be refined as simple as possible.

Thirdly, it needs to be promoted significantly and constantly.

For the purpose of creating an appeal and creating a brand some steps can be followed:

1. The best possible thing offered should be focused. To do so, the core competencies should be identified. The USP (Unique Selling Proposition) should be highlighted.
2. Create your own key phase compatible with your core competencies. The message should be concise and it should be lucrative.
3. A symbol or logo can be created to reinforce the message visually. It will reinforce the key statements.

EFFECTIVELY OF PROMOTION OF THE BRAND

Bonsai is from of art which most people continue as a hobby. If an artist wants to make it a profession and convert his profession into a brand, s/he needs to communicate. This means putting your brand on everything you create. The artist may take help from e-mails, websites, and promotional items etc. There should be well-balanced mix of online and offline promotion. Create something which will grasp art buyer’s attention. Highlight the brand in local art circles online on Twitter and Facebook, and anywhere else where you interact with others. Give your piece of art a global appeal with artistic creativity. The possibility of branding of such a unique art form is endless.

As artist might use the following tools to identify potential buyers, representatives and professional contact who can refer you to other people. Various Blogs, Twitter, Facebook can be utilized for the purpose of promotion. By utilizing these communications tools, it is possible to start developing a brand strategy.

The ways artists market themselves has changed and continues to do so. Online galleries are interesting avenues. The number of artists on some of the sites can be overwhelming. Self-promotion, utilizing the communications tools can help to create awareness and reach towards a broader market. Selling work online is becoming more established and will no doubt continue to thrive. A bonsai artist might sell his masterpiece on Bikroy.com, Kaymu.com, Akhoni.com, Priyoshop.com, BDhaat.com etc.

BENEFITS OF BRANDING A PIECE OF ART

Bonsai is capturing attention of a specific segment of customers. If the bonsai artist can promote his creations under brand name there might be various benefits associated with it. A good brand name can make a big difference in your success. Branding is advantageous because it creates an image of the product. If an artist can create a line of plants under a brand name it will result *Brand Familiarity*. It can turn into preference, insistence or advocacy. In the long run the target customers can remember having seen or heard of the brand which refers to *Brand Recognition*. Bonsai fills up the aesthetic needs of people and sometimes it might be bought as the collector's hobby. So it might result in creation of *Brand Preference*. The satisfied customers of bonsai's might refer to others with creates *Brand Advocacy*.

BRAND DEVELOPMENT, DESIGN, DISCOVERY AND RESEARCH

With great visualized design of bonsai and proper brand development, a bonsai artist can get a better return on investment. Marketing materials must be prepared effectively in order to compete. Review the marketing plan and establish brand standards that will be applied to all marketing materials: Brochures, Posters, Vehicles, Inserts, Exhibit booths, and other printed and designed materials about the bonsai works. Brand development of bonsai is a combination of i) Creativity and ii) Brand Development Strategy.

□ CREATIVITY

The creative in bonsai products helps emit the emotion for brand. When it comes down to it, artists need to communicate the technical know-how of the products. Creativity is an important factor in consideration of:

- To get marketing structured by creating logos, iconography, color schemes, design style, and overall continuity to define business.
- Usability of a website is also focus the way to show creativity for the business development. Custom websites with a strong focus on visual design, easy navigation, and quality content about the bonsai is important.
- Print materials help to ensure all non electronic communication (business cards, brochures, trade show materials, mail campaigns, magazine ads, postcards, etc.) which match the rest of marketing materials. Continuity and consistency of the design are to be ensured to establish the brand.
- Video adds personality to that message. From concept to completion, marketers create clean, simple videos for target customer to use within their websites and online marketing.

□ DEVELOPMENT

Identity and image are concepts with key roles in any brand development. Identity and image describes a brand from different perspectives. Identity is the artist's perception of the brand and image is the target group's perception. The identity precedes image in brand development, because the company needs to have a clear identity before it can be communicated to a niche target group (Kapferer 1997, p.94). The strategies for effective brand development for targeted bonsai customers are:

- For responsive development, technology is an amazing thing for the blessing of mobile phone which enables the targeted customer to up date and available to anyone anywhere 24/7. Having a proper mobile strategy, in a lot of new product features, means having a responsive website. Target customers want the ability to access all data from their laptop on their phone - and responsive development gives them that.
- Search engine optimization is tied to strategy that focuses to development of the website properly to be able to increase visibility. Website is hand coded to make sure that the setup is promoted the product content properly. Utilizing website statistics, marketers can learn from how things are currently working to be able to improve things moving forward.

- Utilizing content management system, bonsai marketer can give target customers the freedom to provide their opinion in an easy to use environment. However, marketer should take every effort to increase environment security, file organization, as well as ensure automated full-site back-ups.
- Target customer is everywhere. It is important to develop your social media strategy to help engage customers through Facebook, Instagram or Twitter.

THE BRAND IDENTITY MAKES PEOPLE THINK IN A CERTAIN WAY ABOUT YOU AND THE BUSINESS

Having a clearly defined brand image is essential to your long-term success. Here are four basic steps in creating a brand image:

i. BE UNIQUELY VALUABLE

It is very important to be able to define some ways in which you can be uniquely valuable to your clients, and then communicating that unique benefit in a way that's easy to remember and clearly understandable. Your perceived value is what creates loyal customers who will choose your product or service over others.

ii. STAND OUT

Differentiate from your competition. Examine your competitors carefully and look for the key selling points and the basic "promises" they make. Decide what differentiates your company, product or service from this competition. What "promise" will your brand make. Be uniquely innovative in this region.

iii. DRIVE YOUR CORE MESSAGE HOME

This should consist in a single idea, which will become the focus of all your external communications. All your marketing tools should revolve around this central message and theme.

iv. LIVE UP TO YOUR PROMISE

All the previous steps mean absolutely nothing without getting this last step done.

VII. CONCLUSION

The people of Bangladesh are specially people living in Dhaka are becoming more concern about focusing on their hobbies as well as their lifestyle. In their busy metro life they have a tendency to create there own scenic view of a forest or a greenery in there roof top or veranda. Roof top or balcony gardening provides an easily accessible way to relishing greenery in big cities. More and more people are giving a space for having a bonsai garden. It is capturing an aesthetic need in the life of people. This study can be helpful for the new bonsai artists or organizations to establish several strategies to create a brand of bonsai's. The identification of different target markets can be identified and the techniques might be helpful to influence more people towards this form of art. Two new segment of business can be identified which can be promising. Firstly, new institutions can be established to train people to learn this art. Secondly, the bonsai artists can brand their creations under a brand name and be associated with collectors, galleries, event management firms and architectural firms to sell it. Moreover, this study would also provide insights what innovative issues/factors need to be addressed for future development of this industry. Though research in the branding of this area is narrow and not integrative, but this qualitative research may lead to stimulate more systematic future research.

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