

## **TOURISM AND COMMERCIAL NATIONALISM**

### **ABSTRACT**

Tourism is a place for articulating intercultural exchange and social interaction. Many nations have used tourism as a medium for assertive expressions of cultural authenticity and national identity. This exploratory study applies critical discourse analysis of interviews and icons, images and texts used in the tourism media to examine the discourses that inform the mobilisation of the markers of national identity in tourism. It argues that the use of national symbols in tourism is an example of commercial nationalism in which the 'nationalist' narrative is mobilised to challenge the conditions that undermine the perceived national autonomy. The paper provides some useful insights into the tensions of tourism when negotiating the political realms that lie outside the state structure.

Keywords: commercial nationalism, national identity, critical discourse analysis (CDA), Nepal.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

There has been an increased interest in the study of tourism and nationalism in the last two decades (Pretes, 2003; Park, 2010; Palmer 1999; Frew & White, 2011). Many studies of tourism's role in nationalism are located in specific cultural geographies and are informed by Anderson's (1991) theory of a 'nation' as an 'imagined community' (see Pretes, 2003) or Smith's (1991) 'bounded entity' (see Pitchford, 1995; Park, 2016). Barring some exceptions (Causevic, 2019; Zhang, Xiao, Morgan and Ly, 2018; Zhang, Fong, Li and Ly, 2019), most studies overlook the fact that tourism's relationship with nationalism takes place as 'part of a larger global economy, ...is not so easily bound to any one place, region or nation' (O'Dell and Billing, 2005, p.17). As a marketable entity the politico-commercial elements of nationalism enshrined in tourism's narrative of a nation are not less important but are largely left under-explored in tourism scholarship. This is surprising, as scholars have viewed tourism not as an isolated activity alone, but as a commodity, that objectifies material culture, people and places for the purpose of the global market (Meethan, 2001).

The existing studies of tourism's interface with nationalism do not provide their articulation of nationalism within the context of international political economy or globalisation (Timothy, 2019). Such omission suggests an uncritical acceptance of the view that globalisation harbours a utilitarian conception of market rationality and competitive individualism (Spyridakis, 2018), and that globalisation makes the national and political boundaries messy by putting the market above all other forms of social and international engagement (Harvey, 2005; McGuigan, 2016; Steger & Roy, 2010; Dunn, 2017; Springer, Birch & MacLeavy, 2016). Even amidst diverging viewpoints on the role of globalisation, there is an established line of inquiry that globalisation and assertive nationalism can go hand in hand and that they both reinforce and reconfigure national feelings and identity (Delanty and Kumar, 2006; Guibernau, 2001; Halikiopoulou and Vasilopoulou, 2011; Holton, 2011; Pryke, 2009; Roudometof, 2014; Smith, 2007; Tønnesson, 2004, Billig, 1995).

Though some studies have provided articulation of the role of globalisation and its implications for cultural identity, tourism scholarship has not fully appreciated the above relationship between globalisation and nationalism. This is unusual given that nationalism scholars have appreciated the centrality of western capitalism in the theorisation of nationalism (Anderson, 1991; Gellner, 1983, Nairn, 1977). For example, both Gellner and Nairn agree that nationalism is actuated by the uneven development of capitalism that strives towards making a political and national unit congruent. More recently, scholars have argued that the increasing sway of international market forces and the rise of identity politics has instigated a drive towards retuning national identities, making nationalism an important aspect of current forms of globalisation. This has been the domain of commercial nationalism which is interested in the study of how nation-states exploit the global economic context to channel the assertion of unique identity and capture international attention. Given that tourism is a crucial force that shapes globalisation, this paper applies the concept of commercial nationalism to explore the discourse produced in national symbols and icons in the international tourism promotional media of a small developing country, Nepal.

The notion of commercial nationalism has great relevance in tourism because it recognises the importance of markets, commerce, and consumption in the process of nation-building. The concept builds on the work of classical modernist scholars of nationalism such as Gellner (1983), and Nairn (1977), who have associated the origin of the nation to industrialisation and modernisation. The proponents of commercial nationalism take the view that in many parts of the world the partnership between globalisation and the neoliberal political and economic transformations has marketised the state forms of governance, which has encouraged nationalist ideological formations into becoming a commercial entity (Volcic & Andrejevic, 2016). The above process has steered a situation in which nationalism

has entailed corporate thinking and patriotic emotional ideas harnessed to marketing goals. This has brought together commercial and 'national' ambitions. Since tourism is very strongly tied to international marketing, the perspectives of commercial nationalism help us to provide a deeper analysis of the manifestation of the above form of nationalism.

Gaining insights into the narratives that apprise the debate over the 'appropriation' of national symbols in tourism can inform tourism academics, governments, tourism practitioners and other cognitive disciplines. For tourism academics this paper provides insights into the tensions in international tourism when negotiating the political realms that lie outside the state structure and national society (Maignashca & Marchetti, 2013; Flint, 2003). It helps government officials to understand the social and political repercussions of tourism which can be useful when calibrating the 'national' element in the selection of symbols and images, and in designing tourism promotion and other associated media. For practitioners, it helps them understand the 'national' sensitivity when carrying out tourism promotional campaigns, as it exposes the fact that tourism promotion cannot be 'independent of the political process and cannot be value free' (Hall & Jenkins, 1995, p. 3). Most importantly, the elucidation of the exchange between tourism and nationalism helps other academic disciplines such as sociology, political science and cultural studies to understand the complexity between tourism and the socio-political context within which national narratives are intertwined.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature concerned with the links between tourism and nationalism has engaged with all three dominant approaches to the study of nationalism: modernism, ethno-symbolism and primordialism. Coinciding with the views of modernism, tourism scholars argue that, like nations and nationalism, tourism emerged between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe as a result of the development of an industrial society that fostered the emergence of a mass culture and a common national consciousness (Grenier, 2005; Kosher, 1998). Many tourism scholars take the view that domestic tourism played a significant role in the creation of such national consciousness or 'imagined communities' (see Anderson, 1991). Both Shaffer (2001) and Pretes (2003) show how tourism in late nineteenth century USA was instrumental in affirming the political, economic and ethnic ideals of the American nation, and in the formation of American national identity. This view emphasises nationalism as a homogenising process and does not fully appreciate the existence of diverse culture and identity in the formation of a nation.

Other tourism scholars advance the ethno-symbolism variant of nationalism (Smith, 1986, 1991) by emphasising that the cultural identities of human groups play a prominent role in their articulation of nation, and relies on the argument of tourism as a form of cultural expression (MacCannell, 1999; Rojek & Urry, 1997; Urry, 1994). They have shown that the icons and imagery of tourism play a role in the articulation of national culture and identity (Palmer, 1999; Pitchford, 1995, 2008; Light, 2001; Pritchard and Morgan, 2001; Henderson, 2002). Similarly, Palmer (1999) argues that the signs and symbols of the nation that run through the discourse of heritage tourism are interrelated with the elements of national identity. Palmer (1999) agrees with Smith (1991) that symbols and icons used in tourism act as signifiers of the nation as a community with common beliefs, an historic homeland with a common culture, which essentially is part of a national identity.

The third strand of nationalism is represented by primordialists who argue that shared ancestry, territorial roots and common language play an important role in the creation of national identity (Shils, 1957; Van den Berghe, 1981). Except Wood (1998) and Van den Berghe and Ochoa (2000) this approach has not received much attention from tourism scholars studying nationalism. Primordialists argue that urbanisation and industrialisation undermine the condition that breeds ethnically, culturally and linguistically homogeneous groups' desire for nationalism. The above view is of little significance in tourism because if

international tourism has grown to the current scale, it is made possible by the infrastructure created by globalisation and the international political economy. There is an agreement amongst scholars that globalisation and neoliberal economic policies form the main context in which the national and the commercial are reformulated (Volcic & Andrejevic, 2016). For example, in discussing 'reconstructed ethnicity' MacCannell (1992) argues that pressures from western tourism culture have pushed many destinations to restoration, preservation and recreation of ethnic attributes.

Other tourism studies fall outside the main domain of nationalism theories discussed above. This is dominated by those studying discourses of tourism representations (Mellinger, 1994; Pritchard, & Morgan, 2001). Others, for example, Lepp, and Haris, (2008) apply Judith Butler's theory of gender as improved performance to show how tourism officials perceive tourism as an activity to construct and 'perform' a positive national identity to show Uganda as a secure, politically stable part of the global community. Some tourism studies have examined how national identity is 'reconstructed' vis-à-vis a larger neighbour with which it has troubled relations, for example, Hongkong and Macau vis-à-vis China (Zhang, Xiao, Morgan and Ly, 2018 and Zhang, Fong, Li and Ly, 2019) and South Korea vis-à-vis Japan (Park, 2016). Other tourism scholars have explored the agency of tourism to see how heritage sites engage with nostalgia and neoliberal norms to promote the 'new' values of shared humanity and antifascism (Čaušević, 2019). Though all of the above studies appreciate the 'international' element in the articulation of national identity in tourism, they do not provide insights into the exploitation of the commercial entity of tourism.

The above neglect of the commercial sphere of tourism is not surprising as some scholars agree that the trend toward the articulation of nationalism together with market liberalism and commercialism challenges the idea that globalisation involves the demise of the nation. In effect there is a strongly expressed view that globalisation has triggered a more assertive expression of nationalism. For example, Giddens (1994) argues that national communities have responded to the homogenising nature of globalisation by adopting a stronger national sense (cf Sabanadze, 2010); according to Giddens 'the revival of local nationalisms, and an accentuating of local identities, are directly bound up with globalising influences, to which they stand in opposition' (1994, p.5). Giddens' position is that the forces of globalisation advance a universal global identity which neglects the cultural differences of global societies, bringing about a challenge to the questions of national culture, authenticity and uniqueness. However, in many instances localities have responded very vigorously to this pressure by adopting a stronger sense of national identity. Interestingly, existing studies of nationalism expressed through tourism do not fully consider the centrality of globalisation in their analysis.

The lack of engagement with globalisation in the study of tourism and nationalism is unusual given that there is a rich literature on the political economy of tourism; and an emerging literature on the geopolitics of tourism. Both concepts are roughly premised on the proposition that the global landscape is structured into various nation states and is informed by agendas and discourses that are represented in various forms. However, the political-economy perspective is primarily concerned with the nature of state involvement in tourism (Sharpley and Knight, 2009; Elliot, 1997; Chambers & Airey, 2001; Dodds, 2005; Bramwell & Meyer, 2007; Krutwaysho & Bramwell, 2010) and puts much emphasis on markets and inequalities. The geopolitical angle considers tourism merely a recipient of the consequence of international geopolitics and does not take into account the agentic role of tourism (Dijkink, 2006; Bhandari, 2019; Hall, 2017; Mostafanezhad & Norum, 2016; Mostafanezhad, 2018; Gillena & Mostafanezhad, 2019). However, it has been argued above that in an interconnected world the question of domestic adjustments to the provocation created by tourism's engagement with international forces cannot be overlooked (Hall, 2017).

The above gap in tourism scholarship can be negotiated through the application of commercial nationalism. This concept is grounded in the view that in the existing state of globalisation the expression of nationalism is commercial, in which state agencies play a key role. According to Volcic and Andrejevic (2016), this is advanced in two ways: first, through media organisations who are embracing the logic of commerce and finding ways to blend it with the mobilisation and exploitation of nationalist sentiment; and second, through the state-sanctioned forms of nationalism where state agencies use commercial entities and strategies to advance the national identity. While many scholars have ignored governments' role in the expression of nationalism under the premise that the values of neoliberalism advance the distancing of government from direct policy interventions in business and economy, commercial nationalism is concerned with the new constellation of inter-relations between the nation and the global and the 'national' response to economic and cultural shifts related to international capitalism (Koch, 2020).

It is noticeable that the question of tourism's place in articulating commercial nationalism has not received much attention from tourism scholars. There is one edited volume (White, 2016) that studies commercial nationalism in tourism which appreciates that the narrative of tourism has a deeper meaning that is imbued with a political and ethical content. The work explores commercial nationalism as a consequence of governmental strategy and hegemonic power (White, 2016); however there is a lack of empirical evidence, for example, local voice and engagement is largely absent. Additionally, the chapters are predominantly focussed on the dynamics and complexity of nation branding (Wang, 2017). Though there is some convergence between commercial nationalism and nation branding, they are not necessarily same. Nation branding is broadly interpreted as an extension of public diplomacy and is a largely apolitical that targets external markets to establish a specific image of national identity (Kerrigan, Shivanandan and Hede, 2012; Sun and Paswan, 2011 ). However, commercial nationalism is more than a creation of a positive image: it is extensively related to the promotion of national identity through commercial means.

This study is theoretically guided by critical discourse analysis (CDA) and takes the view that symbols, icons, texts, narratives and talks used in tourism media produce a discourse of national identity. The approach resonates very well with the idea of de Cillia, Reisigl and Wodak (1999) who state that national identities are discursively produced, reproduced, transformed and deconstructed by means of language and other semiotic systems (also see Galasinska, 2006; Zhang, Xiao, Morgan, and Ly, 2018). The debate on the primacy and the application of CDA is diverse and is represented by various schools of CDA, such as the Essex school (Laclau and Mouffe, 1995), the East Anglia school (see Fowler, Hodge, Kress and Trew, 1979), the Lancaster school ( see Fairclough, 1995) and the Loughborough school (see Billig, 2000) amongst others. However, they all are interested in ideologies and power relations involved in discourse and provide useful insights into the way social and political inequality and domination are reproduced through discourse.

The application of CDA is appropriate because unlike most of the earlier discussed approaches to the study of identity politics, commercial nationalism does not attempt to strive for, or secure, national independence but is concerned with how the concept of nation is sustained, maintained and represented in a commercial entity to build a shared sense of national belonging (Skey, 2009). This study is interested in texts, narratives and discourses deployed in tourism media to reify a nation as 'real' and how some differences are made salient to create a divide between 'us' and 'them'. The centrality of signs and images in contemporary societies has been established by Lash and Urry (1994), who argue that such objects are infused with meaning and are involved in the routine production of a new 'invented communities' (for 'invented traditions' see Hobsbawm, 1999). According to Lash and Urry (1994), such communities are discursively conscious, have the power to challenge the old notions and are involved in the symbolic expression of new meaning. For Lash and Urry (1994), this is a new social movement. In this sense, commercial nationalism is a social

movement that uses the system of the media representations in tourism in a way that defines signs and symbols of identity and thereby advances national identity.

This study analyses the narratives produced in tourism promotional media such as images, symbols, videos, and conversations to understand the discourse that informs them. This is because discourse analysis believes that images, texts or words do not speak for themselves, but they are a form of mediated cultural products, which according to Hannam and Knox, are 'part of wider systems of knowledge which may set the limits for, or discipline, everyday life' (2005, p, 29). This is highly relevant in the study of nationalism because according to the modernist approach, the idea of 'nation' is a modern ideology and movement that tries to connect with the 'mass sentiments' of the designated population through slogans, ideas, symbols and ceremonies amongst other. The central interest of CDA is to understand ideologies embedded in discourses (Fairclough, 2008; Wetherell, 1998). Thus, the purpose of the study is to identify and recognise the ideologies enshrined in the discourses produced in tourism to find out how they intermesh between 'national' and the political.

#### RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHOD

The aim of CDA is to systematically explore the relationships between discursive practices, events and texts and their wider social and cultural structures and processes to assess how relations of power shape them. Fairclough (1989, 1995) suggests that the operationalisation of CDA consists of three interrelated processes of analysis that are associated with following three dimensions of discourse: first, the object of analysis, for example verbal, visual or both; second, the processes by which the object is produced and received by human subjects; and third, the socio-historical conditions that govern these processes. Fairclough further advises that these dimensions can be examined using text analysis, processing analysis, and social analysis respectively, though it does not matter which analysis is started first. This study included the examination of all three dimensions of discourse looking at three sources of data - visual, textual and the social context. The three sources of data applied in this study allowed the researcher to approach the discursive phenomena from a variety of perspectives and interrogate the problem in a variety of ways in accordance with the principle of triangulation which is strongly advocated by Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl and Liebhart (1999).

The study began with social analysis since discourse is largely the function of the social and political context of a society. The commercialisation of tourism in Nepal was a royal project as it was initiated by a personal interest from a member of the royal family in the 1950s, and the business of tourism largely remained under the control of the royal family and Kathmandu-based elites until 1990. During this period tourism became the main protagonist in constructing a singular Nepali 'national identity' and represented Nepal in a way that bolstered the invincibility of the institution of monarchy (Bhandari, 2018). However, after the adaptation of neoliberal economic policy, a large number of public sector units were privatised leading to large job losses and unemployment, creating a massive rejection of neoliberalism. Nepal's communist parties exploited the situation to bolster support for their agenda and intensified public display of their anti- America, anti-West, and anti-globalisation stance as testimony of their nationalist stand. They established anti-neoliberalism as a marker of Nepali nationalism. For example, the election manifesto of the governing communist party states that, 'neoliberal capitalist democracy does not resolve the problems facing the working class' (CPNUML, 2013).

The announcement of the Visit Nepal Year campaign that was a very neoliberal project of attracting foreign investment and international visitors amongst its aims was a notable development, especially as the campaign was under the helm of Nepal's first communist majority government that came to power on the strong manifesto of their nationalist election campaign. The context for this study is the design and selection of the promotional logo for celebrating Visit Nepal Year 2020 led by the new government. Following the announcement

in 2017 that Nepal was celebrating the mega-promotional campaign in 2020, a call went out for the design of the campaign logo with the requirement that it should reflect the 'culture and ethos of Nepal'. However, when the final logo was selected out of 145 entries, it received a great deal of public attention and condemnation from tourism stakeholders who expressed their concerns that the symbols and icons used in the logo did not exemplify Nepali national character or advance its nationalism strongly.

Data collection at this stage included the study of logo, texts, videos and images and the nature of public engagement with the campaign in the Facebook page. A total of 89 Facebook posts were studied from January 2018 until March 2020. This period was chosen because there were aggressive digital marketing campaigns as a result of Nepal's emphasis on Visit Nepal Year 2020, which was finally called off in March 2020. The decision to include social media in the analysis was taken in order to understand the opinion of a much wider public and their perception of the campaign. The inclusion of the logo in the analysis was informed by the view that contemporary communication is the function of the integration of different semiotic modes and that any critical reading of the text must not ignore its interplay with visuals (Fairclough, 2001). The above assessment is reasonable as both CDA and semiosis interconnect with other elements of social life and consider unequal relations of power in the process of exploitation and domination of some people by others (McHoul, Rapley, 2001). The visual data were analysed using the 'signifying system' proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1990). Thus, the design, selection and placement of icons and images were critically analysed to explore what information value they represented.

The third three sets of data included responses from the tourism policy community and industry stakeholders on images, icons and texts used in the logo. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants who were members of the logo selection committee, and other officials at the Visit Nepal Year 2020 campaign: former administrative heads at the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation and the Nepal Tourism Board, (NTB) and private sector stakeholders in tourism. Semi-structured interviews can shed light on a pre-determined topic so were used to explore and synthesise issues arising from analysis of non-textual data. This stage of data collection applied two sampling methods. The first category of sample was contacted using the snowball sampling method. After initial contact with a member of the logo selection committee, the researcher was able to contact other members, facilitated by the first participant. The selection of the second category of respondents was chosen by the researcher who has a long association with Nepali tourism industry as a former employee of Nepal's nodal tourism agency. All interviews were done in Nepali, which was transcribed and translated to English by the researcher on the same day.

It is useful to note that the sampling method for the interview participants was tuned to achieve 'issue homogeneity' (Corfman, 1995) and as such the participants were similar in their responses responded in a similar way to the research question: for example, since all belonged to the tourism community they had similar attitudes, opinions and values concerning the role of tourism promotion. However, in order to triangulate data, it was ensured that the sample was diverse in terms of age, gender, education, and the organisation they represent. This allowed triangulation via data sources which according to Guba (1981) can increase trustworthiness. Additionally, according to Shenton (2004), applying diversity in data sources through the inclusion of informants within several organisations or a wider spectrum of professional fields helps in minimising bias that might arise through local factors peculiar to one institution or subject area.

Final interviews were done with 21 individuals using face-to-face and online platforms. Sixteen interviews were conducted in Nepal in April-May 2018 at the following venues: ten in local restaurants and six in respondents' offices. The rest of the five interviews were done at various periods between then and August 2020 over Skype and Zoom. Questions discussed in the interview consisted of their opinion of the campaign, primarily to solicit their views on

the appropriateness of existing representations of Nepal in tourism, the designing of the logo and on the use of the national flag in the tourism campaign. The interviews lasted 30-60 minutes. All interviews were written in hand notes which were later expanded on the same day. Synopses of the main points from the interviews were communicated to the interviewees to verify they represented their main points. 14 participants agreed with the researcher's notes, 3 interviewees did not verify, despite various attempts from the researcher to get a timely response from them. The study complied with the ethical principles of carrying out research and the participants were provided with a participant information sheet and all interviewees were asked to sign a consent form before the interview.

The analysis of interview data began with the textual description, or discourse structure. At this stage, the thematic representations of nationalistic ideologies in the interview text was particularly focused upon. The thematic representation here suggests that the researcher particularly looked into the topics or patterns that represented the nationalistic ideologies, for example, the researcher paid attention to the identity symbols deployed in text to express Nepali nationalism. In order to achieve this, the analysis in this part used Fairclough's (1992) concept of 'overwording'. The researcher looked into how participants use different words of same semantic domain and also the use of metaphor to convey the ideals of Nepali national identity. In the next stage of analysis, interpretation of all three sources of data was carried out, which involved the articulation of the interface between both visual and textual description and provided a social explanation for them. The researcher explored various links between the data to ascertain the discursive manipulation of power and ideology in the analysis.

In CDA, researchers are expected to be reflexive and consider the multiple meanings of data or text in context whilst also considering how that discourse is meaningful to researchers and its effects on their scholarly practice (Bischoping & Gazso, 2021). This means that the use of positioning in discourse analysis must consider how researchers' own biographies are constructed in relation to discourses. It is important to note that the researcher is a Nepal tourism scholar whose formative intellectual development took place during highly debated national discourses on globalisation in the 1990s. The researcher started their professional career in tourism at an institution that was established as a neoliberal project in the country. Similarly, all the participants in the study have been in the Nepali tourism industry for more than two decades and were fully aware of globalisation discourse in tourism. However, for the last decade the researcher has now been employed in a higher education institution in the UK and is familiar with academic discourses in western scholarship, both on tourism and on the society and culture of Nepal. Thus, the interpretation presented in the following sections reflects the researcher's own biography and engagement with academic discourses in tourism and nationalism.

## **FINDINGS**

Discourse of nationalism in the design of the logo

The findings show that there was strong emphasis on the nationalistic element in the logo selection committee. Significantly, the participants viewed globalisation as a threat to Nepal's distinctive cultural identity and took the logo as an opportunity to reassert Nepal's place in the international marketplace. According to participants, the logo originally submitted by the designer did not show the national flag and Mt Everest (insert Fig 1 around here). The two mountains used in the background were Mt. Ama Dablam and Mt. Machhapuchre.

According to the artist whose design was selected,

As an artist I see the aesthetic side of mountains and Mt Everest does not stimulate me.... the beauty of a mountain cannot be judged by its height alone. Both Mt. Ama Dablam and Mt. Machhapuchre are beautiful mountains and perhaps for that reason they are the most photographed Nepali mountains by the tourists. I wanted to capture that in the logo.



Interestingly, the selection committee whose duty it was to ensure marketing considerations in the design and selection of the logo wanted to add the image of the Nepali national flag and Mt Everest to the logo, arguing that they symbolised the nation. Their position was that unlike Mt Everest, Mt Dablam is not a national icon and does not occupy a strong place in the imagination of the Nepali nation. Mt Everest represents Nepal's unique identity and can complement Nepal's tourism destination image. According to respondent (R19),

Mt Everest and Nepal are synonymous. Mt. Everest is the biggest symbol of Nepali national identity. In this age of a globally interlinked world where most countries are competing on somewhat similar products, Mt Everest helps Nepal stand out from the rest of the world.

One member (R1) mentioned that some members of the selection committee wanted to include a map of Nepal in the logo, which was not agreed upon, including by the artist and the coordinator of the committee.

There was a proposal from some members to include map in the logo saying the map reifies the Nepali nation. Their other contention was that since the government of Nepal's official seal has an image of map in it, we should also include a map in the logo. However, I convinced the committee to withdraw map that it would not look good in a tourism promotion campaign and no other country does it.

This is also endorsed by a participant (R9) who gave the following justification for proposing the national map in the logo,

We wanted the map because it endorses Nepal's existence as a nation. It is more important for us because we are in the middle of two giant countries, and protecting our territory is paramount to protect our nationalism. The representation of map in the international promotional logo would have been a very helpful to unite the three geographical regions: mountains, hill and the Terai within Nepal and internationally it would have made a strong claim to our place in between the two giant neighbours.

The above examples illustrate how those in power manipulate power to reproduce and communicate their version of Nepali nationalism notwithstanding the existence of alternative discourses that inform them. Mt Everest has the iconic significance in the psyche of common Nepalis and is a potent symbol of Nepali nationalism (Bhandari, 2018). When the central bank of Nepal began searching for a replacement for the King's images in Nepali bank notes after the Monarchy was suspended in 2006, Mt Everest became the obvious choice. However, it is not unchallenged. Mt Everest also symbolises the contested side of Nepali national identity that is largely dominated by the cultural landscape of the highlands, overlooking the other provincial heritages of the nation. Similarly, maps are socially produced discursive tools, playing an important role in the cultural production of a nation. The attempt to include a map in the logo by the selection committee members reasserts that maps, like other cultural symbols, are a form of discourse and the production of a map in a state-owned international promotional campaign is an important way to maintain its authority over space and its territory (Batuman, 2010; Hu, 2007; Monmonier, 1996).

With strong political backing from the leadership at the Ministry of Tourism, another suggestion to include the Nepali national flag in the logo was made. A participant (R2) stated,

Since our national flag is very unique and distinctive, we felt it would be good if we could create a sub-brand that can help identify Nepal. It is an international campaign and the existence of the flag is an opportunity to promote our nationalism.

A selection team at the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) comprising members from the tourism industry and external experts forwarded the finalised logo to the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Civil Aviation. When the revised logo (insert Fig. 2 around here) was unveiled, a flood of

comments started to pour in on all social media platforms and through emails. According to participant (R2) the main items of feedback were that the flag was given a 'low profile', mountains were misplaced, and that the use of lowercase 'n' in the logo undermines Nepal's status as an independent, sovereign nation and should be replaced with more prominent uppercase 'N'. Other commented for more inclusion in the logo. For example, some of the reactions to the logo on Facebook are presented below,

'Promotional logo for Nepal must depict Himalayas, Buddha, safari (wildlife) and rich cultural features, and (for me) this logo only covers the Himalayas.'

'...Everest should stand-alone not with Fishtail (Macchapuchre) ... there is no ethnic vibes and varieties of culture, geography.'

'Everest should be on the east and Machhapuchre on the west, isn't it?'

Another comment stated,

It would have been better if Macchapuchre was used in the logo. It shows the mountain which is on the right side Mt Everest (referring to Ama Dablam). This mountain is less known than Macchapuchre... and that Nepal's flag seems to be copied from internet...why is Nepal's 'N' not capitalised?

Social semiosis of the changes in the logo at different stages suggests important ideological affirmations sought in the final logo. The separation of the flag from letter 'l' of Nepal was intended to give the flag a separate and independent status within the logo, helping the flag make a more assertive statement of the Nepali nation. Similarly, the placement of images or items on the left and right can convey special meaning, for example, the more important item is placed on the right. The change of the position of Mt. Everest from left to right tries to relocate 'the nation' in a more important place. In addition, the capitalisation of 'N' in Nepal functions in a similar way to that of 'nominalisation' (see Billig, 2008): it symbolises Nepal as an 'entity', a sovereign unit. All three changes were ideological, driven by the desire to put the 'nation' at the centre, very similar to what Billig (1995) claims as 'flagging' the nation. All these changes are attuned to reassert the dominant discourse of national sovereignty and integrity that has remained an important element of Nepali national consciousness. However, given the enormous number of further comments, the logo was revised one more time and published (insert Fig. 3 around here).

The justification for the Nepali national flag and other symbols by the participants suggested a neoliberal logic in which the participants regarded nation or national identity as an exploitable entity. Exploring the relationship between the state and the nation as a result of neoliberal reforms during the 1990s, Harvey (2005) argues that states have become competitive entities in the world market (also see Eriksen & Jenkins, 2007, Lash & Urry, 1995). According to Harvey, neoliberal states have struggled to secure loyalty from their citizens and have resorted to some sort of nationalism to survive. The above use of national discourse in the case of Nepal endorses this because there is a general agreement that since the adaptation of the neoliberal economic model Nepal has experienced a rise of various forms of nationalism (Bhandari, 2018).

'Nationalising' tourism and challenging globalisation

Examination of the Facebook page of the Nepal Tourism Board suggested a number of examples of promotional activities driven by strong nationalist intent, complementing the sentiment of the tourism stakeholders as seen in the previous section. For example, in 2019, the Board posted on Facebook a call for a national flag video contest, calling for videos narrating the story behind the Nepali national flag and 'how it complements Nepal's historical, geographical, ethnical and emotional values'. In the same year it unveiled on Facebook a new brand identity for Nepal, focussing on a distinctive red 'tika', a red dot worn by Nepalis on their forehead, which, according to the designer, had a nationalist intent and

was inspired by the national flag (Pant, 2019). More recently in 2020, through a Facebook post the Board announced a collaboration with the Nepal Army to produce a video called the 'unification trail', highlighting the route taken by the 'founder King of Nepal'. According to the NTB the trail 'gives visitors an opportunity to walk along the path... taken by Prithvi N Shah (Nepal's founder king)...on his mission to unify Nepal in...'

The reference to nationalistic sentiment either in text narrative or in images is very conspicuous in tourism promotion and social media. The narrative of the winning video of the national flag competition is intended to produce an official version of nationalism. For example, the video posted on Facebook narrated,

...Nepal was divided into many small kingdoms... a new king ... had an ambition to unify all the Kingdoms...his new unified kingdom was called Nepal...a new flag for this unified kingdom was created...officially declared as a national flag of Nepal in the new constitution. This official flag now has several meanings associated with it...The crimson red of the flag is the national colour of Nepal and it also represents the brave spirit of Nepali people whereas the blue border symbolises peace and harmony...because Nepal was never colonised the flag has remained unchanged to date and is the only flag in the world with a non-quadrilateral shape.

The above examples constitute the dominant version of Nepali nationalism, which concerns the ruling class's efforts to arouse nationalist sentiment based on their interpretation of the nation. This version specially refers to the state-sponsored nationalism that espoused cultural homogeneity premised on the dominant hill culture, largely adhering to Hindu religious values, which has been consistently challenged by the Tibeto-Burman communities. However, the participants' views present Nepali nationalism from a perspective that does not account for an alternative discourse of the Nepali nation. The justification for the Nepali national flag and other symbols by the participants tries to legitimate existing power relations and social structure. Though there is a strongly emerging discourse that challenges the dominant version of the Nepali nation, it does not find any place in the above narrative of the video. For example, the existing Nepali national flag has been interpreted by some people as a symbol of a mono-cultural Nepali identity. In 2009 there was a strident debate on changing the national flag in Nepal's constitutional assembly, the main accusation being that the flag was representative of Hinduism and did not represent Nepal's socio-cultural and religious diversities.

Similarly, the video used words and phrases that supported the dominant discourse: the reference to words such as 'dreams', 'unified', 'brave', are an effort to legitimise the annexation of smaller kingdoms during Nepal's 'unification'. In more recent years, the unification or annexation has become a contentious issue in Nepal and many ethnic groups have been protesting that this as a case of imperialism and a reason for ethnic subordination in Nepal, due to which the practice of marking the King Prithvi N Shah's birthday as a public holiday has been stopped. The use of official version of Nepali national narrative in the promotional media confirms to Volcic and Andrejevic (2016) who suggest that commercial nationalism subsumes the discourse of national identity produced and sanctioned by the state.

Importantly, there are some references to external elements in the video through the use of words such as, 'never colonised', and 'peace and harmony'. On one level, these words are outward-oriented and try to establish the existence of Nepal vis-a-vis the 'external' other or the world. However, in another sense these words can be interpreted as an assertion that Nepal was never a 'dependent' country and would never be so. This strongly suggests its unwillingness to be subsumed by the global economic ecosystem. Similar views are also seen in the expression of a participant, who stated,

We have become a very touristified country. People in the western countries see us through the pages of travel websites and tourist brochures. If you carefully see these

tourism outlets what makes Nepal a nation is missing...you don't see Nepalis in the images, there is no Nepali script used. All it has is a false association with Shangri-la that has so much stereotyped us as a destination that our real (i.e. national) identity has completely become invisible. Mt Everest and our unique flag in the logo is a reclaim to that. (Participant R7)

When reminded about some of the challenges to the national flag, a participant who was involved with both the design of the logo and in the organisation of the national flag video competition gave comments which noticeably included highly emotive language. The respondent (R5) stated,

Our flag is not only our official representation, but it is also a part of our lifestyle. We have cultural and religious significance with the flag, for example, we keep them in temples or religious ceremonies. You will see them during festivals. Our flag has been one important thing that keeps all Nepal distinctive from the rest of the world. So, it is important to keep our flag in the international promotional campaign, every nationalist Nepali should be proud to have our national flag in our tourism promotion.

The above two quotes show that by challenging the forces that are threatening state representation, the use of nationalistic symbols and images is intended to make a statement rejecting the normalising shifts of globalised international tourism. As the participants' statements suggested, the national symbols were deployed with the expectation that the representation of who you are in the tourism promotional media is also an assertion of who you are not. This in another sense is a realisation that a nation has no social existence unless it is distinctive within the international community. The assertion of this distinction was made through a strong anti-globalisation or anti-west rhetoric seen in the responses of the participants. A participant stated (R10),

Until the late 1990s Nepal was promoted with a tagline 'A world of its own'. It was a good way to assert our cultural uniqueness. The forces of globalisation (read neoliberalism) have attacked our authenticity and distinctiveness. Our promotional focus then shifted to mountains and the western conceptualisation of nature. It is thus important that we should use every opportunity to reiterate our uniqueness and, in my opinion, our national flag does that very effectively.

Another participant (R5) stated,

The western countries are trying to destroy our identity through the deployment of tourists and globalisation. We should also use tourism as a two-edged sword to defy that and instead apply tourism to advance our national identity.

Data presented above indicate the contradicting discourses of globalisation. On one hand, the celebration of the international promotional campaign Visit Nepal Year 2020 is a strong endorsement of Nepal's fully-fledged participation in globalised international tourism and the convergence of cultural and economic systems. On the other hand, the participants' quotes above suggest a more forceful denial of this homogeneity through the defence of their cultural identity and more assertive promotion of authenticity and national identity in the logo and the ideology it represented. Participants' views suggested that when it comes to fighting against the stronger external challenges such as the homogenising tendencies of globalisation, they believed the Nepali national symbols such as the national flag or Mt. Everest strongly assert Nepali's uniqueness and national identity. This attests to the views that globalisation is a form of discourse that provides a stage for transnational constructions of social imaginaries, or shared worldviews, where people are given the power to act or 'to imagine otherwise' (Yang, 2006 p. 208 ) and to shape their worlds.

## DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

This study has shown how the commercial appeal of tourism has been used to reiterate the existence of nation through the use of potent symbols of Nepali national identity. The

participants in this study unilaterally agreed that tourism should be used as a force to establish our place in the imagination of the international community. The use of national signifiers in tourism demonstrates that the 'nationalist' narrative enshrined in identity symbols is used as a means to challenge the conditions that undermine the perceived national autonomy and subjectivity of the nation's identity in globalised tourism. In effect the deployment of national symbols in tourism is a nationalist resurgence and a resistance against externally defined impositions, namely the forces of globalisation.

The paper also provides insights into the tensions of international tourism. The use of national symbols is, in a way, a negotiation of the transaction between the exogenous forces of global markets and endogenous local aspirations (Chang, Milne and Fallon, 1996). To the participants, globalisation is understood as an institutional political process leading to the homogenisation of national culture and their support for the use of national symbols in tourism can be interpreted as a means to resist the threats of globalisation. This is interesting because there is an existing apprehension that owing to globalisation the commercial use of 'signs and spaces' has become pervasive and ubiquitous which has led to meaninglessness and homogenisation (Lash and Urry, 1994). This study has suggested that on the contrary the 'subject' of modernity, that is, modern nations have not been destroyed and devoid of identity but still have a strong agentic role – in the form of a new social movement.

Unlike many other social movements that challenge the state's structure or are autonomous of the state, commercial nationalism engages strongly with state structures. It draws with the official narrative of the Nepali nation and deploys 'national' sentiment through icons, imagery, texts and narratives to challenge the 'external' forces and assert the social existence of Nepali nation in the international community. The participants' strong anti-globalisation opinions, defending the use of the national flag in the logo, suggested their aspiration for the distinctive place of the Nepali nation in the international marketplace. This social movement is associated with the recasting of meaning and a restatement of the political space of the community through the highly mediated production of 'imagined communities' in the pages of tourism promotional tools.

The paper makes a useful contribution in exemplifying the role of tourism in the expression of identity and belongingness through the application of commercial nationalism. It challenges the notion that there is an inverse reciprocity between the commercial and the nationalistic sides of tourism. Despite strong globalising influences, tourism's commercial potency is deployed both in a symbolic and materialistic way to express a wider ideological and discursive consciousness of the nation and nationalism. The articulation of commercial nationalism is not just the locus of a particular form of imaginary identification, but is driven by the objective to advance nationalist discourse through a new socialised form of national belonging. This form of national belonging tries to restrain competing claims that challenges established national imagination. Though it is expressed through marketised forms it does have a strong aesthetic value in instilling a sense of nationality and identity as illustrated in the views of the participants in this study.

The above conclusion suggests that there is a strong element of heterogeneity in globalisation. The main source of this heterogeneity, according to Appadurai (1996), is the 'global cultural flows' that de-establishes the homogenising tendencies of globalisation in the heterogeneous world by creating a fear of cultural absorption by polities of larger scale. He further states that the nation state exploits this fear by posing it as more real than it actually is, resulting in a response which encourages assertion of their cultural identities in a more forceful way by those societies. This study attests to Appadurai's (1996, p.33) five dimensions of 'global cultural flows' and suggests that the source of commercial nationalism is 'mediascapes' and 'ideoscapes', which produces a discourse that reaffirms the ideology of

the Nepali nation and nationalism through the complex repertoires of images and narratives through tourism promotional media.

Commercial nationalism attempts to transform 'consumers into particular kinds of national subjects' (Volcic & Andrejevic, 2016, p.6). This idea concurs with Lash and Urry (1994, p. 54) who argue that the subjects of contemporary society are mediated by aesthetic 'expert systems' such as travel and tourism, suggesting that the signs and symbols of tourism provide a medium for the reflection of the position of self vis-à-vis the nation. This has a huge relevance to national governments in deploying tourism's commercial power in the design and delivery of social solidarity projects and instilling national unity. However, what is equally important to note is that the 'national' connections that participants make with the signifiers of the Nepali nation are not necessarily shared by visitors who are the ultimate intended consumers of the logo and the promotional media. On this point it would be imperative for future scholars to know how the 'national' discourses in tourism media are interpreted and consumed by tourists.

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