

# Branding and Imaging of a Newly Developed Destination

VIKAS MOHAN

TEACHING ASSOCIATE, DR. AMBEDKAR IHM CHANDIGARH

---

**Abstract:** As the tourism industry grows so too does the competition between tourist destinations as they compete to attract visitors. The concept of Destination Branding offers countries a framework in which they can differentiate themselves from other destinations offering similar experiences. The promotional efforts of a destination branding strategy are the first points of contact many potential visitors have with the destination. This is the point where their perceptions and first impressions are formed. This paper assesses the destination branding efforts of Bungus Valley through its tourism promotional material. Bungus Valley does not have a defined destination Brand Strategy, so the material portrays a diverse range of activities that represent the complete Bungus destination experience. There are some shortcomings in the presentation of information that if not addressed can ultimately impact the first impressions of potential visitors.

**Keywords:** Destination branding, first impressions, tourism, Bungus Valley.

---

**BUNGUS VALLEY:** Bungus is a bowl shaped valley situated in the northern border area of Kashmir at about 10,000 feet above sea level.

Bungus Valley is a part of a unique eco-system with a distinct bio-diversity, which needs to be conserved in any planned development in the area. The valley with its ideal setting will surely capture the hearts and the minds of all visitors to the region. The approach to Bungus Valley, passing through various forest ranges provides an ample opportunity for those in the search of adventure. The Valley and the inhabitants living here in and the surrounding areas, provide a unique opportunity for the study and understanding of cultural and biological diversity, and the ways and means by which within a given environment a balanced relationship between the need of humans and their surroundings is fulfilled.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism, as defined by the World Tourism Organization in 1994, is the “activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one year for leisure, business and other purposes”. Since 1950 the international tourism industry has grown exponentially representing the world’s fastest growing industry. The tourism industry plays an important role in international commerce, with its revenue supporting the economies of several developing countries. In 2009, the World Tourism Organization reported export earnings of the international tourism industry as US\$ 852 billion (WTO, 2011).

Tourism is undeniably an important and profitable investment that countries around the world are starting to realize. This has contributed to the continued growth and development of the industry. As the industry grows so too does the competition between destination countries, as they compete to attract potential visitors. This competition has resulted in destinations rethinking their tourism promotion strategies.

Destination Branding provides the framework for the differentiation that destinations seek. In the same way that strong consumer product brands can influence behavior and perceptions, and create expectations of quality, so too can a positive destination brand establish the destination as a place worth visiting.

The destinations that have successfully implemented branding strategies understand the ways destination branding can “help bridge any gaps between a destination’s strengths and potential visitors’ perceptions” (Morgan et al, 2010, p. 65).

The material produced with a destination branding strategy is a way for potential visitors to form their first impressions of the destination. These first impressions are essential since they are most times the deciding making factor in the choice of where to vacation. The tourism promotional material – websites, magazines, brochures and advertisements – of a destination must not just list the available activities but capture the essence of the destination as well.

This paper is an analysis of the destination promotion efforts on Bungus, A virgin valley called Bungus Valley at an average altitude of 3500m, around 150 km from Srinagar this valley is about 20 km long and 15 km wide situated on the other side of Lolab valley. Postures of the Bungus valley have finest grass which is considered ideal for cattle grazing, the valley is supposed to have been discovered by a nomad while grazing his cattle in deep forests. Word Bungus is derived from joining two words ‘Bun’ which means forest and ‘Gus’ that means the grass .The valley with rugged terrains and the lush meadows is ideal for the jeep safaris.

Surrounded by Shamsberry Range and Leepa Valle, some areas of the valley are at a stone throw distance from the line of control between India and Pakistan. Connected by the bus service from Magam in Handwara town (district Kupwara), tourists are recommended to take assistance of tourism department or go to kashmir.com for the conducted tours. There is no adequate infrastructure for the overnight stay and the local transport to these places is not so regular. Therefore Tourism Department's assistance is highly recommended. Even Local travel agents are not aware of this place. Bungus is an upcoming destination that will soon see its place in the tourist map of the state thanks to INTACH J&K Chapter, Afford and JK tourism department teams for discovering this place and list it as a Future tourist destination. It is one of the virgin destinations where the avid travelers look forward to visit.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

A Brand, defined by the American Marketing Association, is a “name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition” (AMA, 2011).

Brands are “clusters of functional and emotional values that promise a unique and welcome experience between a buyer and a seller” (Lynch and de Chernatony, as cited in Dinnie, 2008, p.14).

The process of branding involves designing, planning and communicating the name and the identity, in an attempt to build or manage the reputation of the brand based on four different elements – brand identity, brand image, brand purpose and brand equity. According to Nandan (2005) brand identity relates to how the company strives to identify itself and “convey its individuality and distinctiveness to all its relevant publics” (p. 265). Brand image, as defined by Kotler is the “set of beliefs held about a particular brand” (p. 266). It is the consumer’s perception of the brand. The other two elements brand purpose and brand equity refers to the goals and value of the brand (Anholt, 2007, p. 5).

Baker and Cameron (2008) suggest that the goal of branding is to create an “emotional connection with consumers through the development of a unique personality or image for a product or service” (p. 86) and that it is a “two-way process that is developed with rather than to the consumer”.

### **DESTINATION BRANDING:**

As a concept, destination branding is still relatively new in terms of research and application of the framework, but as Anholt suggested tourism promotion has long been an element in the Competitive Identity framework. The two concepts go hand in hand as Nigel Morgan, Annette Pritchard and Roger Pride (2010) point out in Destination Branding: Creating the Unique Destination Proposition that “establishing a competitive identity must be the starting point for any destination manager or they run the risk of promoting a destination which fails to be memorable... in a tourist’s mind”.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

- Role of branding in simplifying choice making and shortening extensive problem solving.
- Role of branding in precise segmentation.
- Role of branding in countering intangibility.
- Role of branding in reducing risk associated with a perishable product.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research methodology followed in this project is "Observation Research method" (or field research). The data has been collected through observation and interaction with the locals and the development authority while visit to the place.

The secondary data has been collected from various sources:-

- Journals
- Newspapers
- Books
- Internet

### **4. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

A virgin valley called Bungus at an average altitude of 3500m, around 150 km from Srinagar this valley is about 20 km long and 15 km wide situated on the other side of Lolab valley. Postures of the Bungus valley have finest grass which is considered ideal for cattle grazing, the valley is supposed to have been discovered by a nomad while grazing his cattle in deep forests. Word Bungus is derived from joining two words 'Bun' which means forest and 'Gus' that means the grass.

To reach Bungus one has to go to Radha in any vehicle, which is about 40kms from the main town Handwara. After Radha there is no road to Bungus. It needs a trek for about 4 hours to reach Bungus valley.

During trekking you will pass through dense forests and hills also. After covering this journey you will reach the valley covered with trees and many streams flowing through the landscape. Gujjars come to reside in and outside Bungus to graze their animals in large pastures.

During winter heavy snowfall closes the hills through which you reach Bungus. The only transport in the valley is ponies. Bungus comprises a mountain Biome, which includes grassland biome with flora at lower altitude and taiga or coniferous forests at a higher altitude. The area also contains wetlands in the form of fresh water located within the valley.

Before planning to go to Bungus one has to get permission from the army officials from TCP camp located at Nowgam, Handwara. Bungus is highly security alert zone because of Indo-pak border nearby.

Over the years, this valley has remained unexplored but now it is coming up as one of the most exotic places of Kashmir. Just 48 km from District Headquarter, Kupwara, situated in the lap of Himalayan Mountains, Bungus is a part of a unique ecological area, comprising mountain and grassland with flora, Taiga or Coniferous forest. The Valley which is as beautiful as Gulmarg and Pahalgam, but less spoiled and more pristine is located in Handwara of District Kupwara. This valley is replete with natural vegetation and flowers of wild nature. The vast green plains look like natural tapestries, as if spread by divine hands. Extreme natural beauty, serenity, splendor are few synonyms associated with the majestic Valley of Bungus. It has been proposed to be developed as a Himalayan Biosphere valley by INTACH, on the following criteria.

The biosphere of the Bungus valley is being established to assure that an increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement, growing mechanization and ensuing development activities does not occupy and modify all areas within the valley, leaving no lands designated for preservation and protection in their natural condition. The proposed biosphere is being established as a design, the policy for securing the benefits of an enduring natural environment for the people of present and future generations.

One of the relatively unknown areas of Kashmir with vast tourism potential is the valley of Bungus. The valley which lies at an altitude of around 10,000 ft above sea level lies in the northern border district of Kupwara within the Handwara sub district. Occupying an estimated area of about 300 sq.kms the principal valley orally known as Bod Bungus (Big Bungus) consists of a linear elliptical bowl aligned along the east west axis. The valley is surrounded by Rajwar and Mawar in east, Shamasbury and Dajlungun mountains in the west, Chowkibal and KarnahGuli in the North Leepa mountains in the south.

A small side valley known as Lokut Bungus (Small Bungus) lies in the north eastern side of the main valley. Both the valleys comprise level green meadows surrounded by low lying mountains covered with dense pine forests (Budul).

### ON THE WAY A WELL KNOWN VILLAGE MAWAR:

The track leading from Pothwari towards Bungus is known as Mawar, so named after the Mawar stream, which flows in the area. This track can also be reached from Lawoosa, near Nowgam. A road is being presently constructed by the Beacon from Ki shtward (Handwara) some 3.3 miles ahead of Poshtawari, which as per local sources and officials is supposed to pass right through Bungus. The distance between Pothwari and Bungus stands at around 5.2 miles and comprises of gentle and steep mountain tracks passing through the surrounding forests. This stretch is made of pony tracks and in parts of a fair weather forest road used by officials of the forest department. The track is generally known by the name of Kahrasdooni top. From Kahrasdooni top, a circuitous descent followed by another stretch of steep ascent leads into a small meadow known as Pooshdoori. The meadow is located on an altitude of 8290 ft. above sea level. From Pooshdoori the track again descends into large linear meadow known as Nilwan. On one side of Nilwan Maidan lies a shrine of a Muslim saint known as Ziarat-i-Doodh Baba Saheb. The meadow is watered by the Mawar Nallah. Nilwan can also be reached from a narrow track following along the course of the Mawarnalah.

### EXISTING LAND USE AT BUNGUS:

Bungus valley comprises forest lands falling within the jurisdiction of Department of forests, Government of Jammu and Kashmir. The main meadow at Bungus is presently being used as a grazing ground by shepherds. The main Bungus valley falls within Langat block while the smaller side valley known as Chota Bungus falls partially within the Rajwad Block. The valley also contains numerous narrow mountain passes leading into it, locally known as Gallies. Some of the Gallies are also temporarily inhabited by the members of Gujjar Community.

### PROPOSED BUNGUS VALLEY BIOSPHERE:

One of the relatively unknown areas of Kashmir with vast tourism potential is the valley of Bungus. The valley, which lies at an altitude of around 10,000 ft. above sea level, lies in the northern border district of Kupwara within the Handwara sub district. Occupying an estimated area of 300 sq.kms (20x15km) the principal valley locally known as Bodh Bungus (Big Bungus) consists of a linear elliptical bowl aligned along the east west axis. Eco tourism is an increasingly popular form of tourism in which tourist's seek out wild and scenic areas such as mountains for an active and educational trip. Most of the tourists engaged in eco-tourism in Kashmir are from the North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand often venturing the unexplored areas of the developing world.

The prerequisite for development of eco-tourism is the identification of a natural biome, a condition that is easily met in Bungus Valley. Lying within the Trans-Himalayan area, Bungus is a part of a unique ecological area, comprising Mountain Biome, which includes Grassland Biome with flora at lower altitudes, and Taiga or Coniferous forest. The area also contains wetlands in the form of a Fresh Water Marsh located within the Bungus valley.

For the sustainable development of Bungus, it is proposed to allocate the area comprising approximately 300 sq. km as a part of a protected biome, under the name of Bungus Valley Biosphere. The biosphere will be divided into three zones:

**Core Zone:** Around 76 sq. km of area comprising Bodh and Lokut Bungus.

**Buffer Zone:** Comprising around 300 sq. km of area including surrounding mountain ranges of Shamsbari etc.

**Transition Zone:** Includes the settlement of Pothwari, Reshwari, and Nowgam where most of the supporting infrastructural facilities will be set.

Some activities proposed for the biosphere are as following;

- **Guided Natural Hikes**
- **Night-time Hikes**
- **Biodiversity Games**

### Project Description

It is expected that the setting up of the Bungus Valley Biosphere will result in a gradual increase in the number of tourists in the area. In order to cater to this expected visitor influx a number of supporting infrastructural facilities will have to be set up in the area. The proposed facilities are:

**Phase I**

- Guest Lodges within local residences
- Aaram Gahs
- Tourist Information Centre
- Improving Tracks / Trails and Construction of wooden foot bridges.
- Interpretation Centre at Bungus.

**Phase II**

- Landscaping and setting up of leisure spots at Reshwari-Pothwari stretch along the river Mawar
- Capacity building and research
- Chair lift from Mohuldhar to Bungus Gali (0.3 mile stretch).

The various projects will; be implemented in phases. It is presumed that the successful implementation of these projects would generate the much needed revenue for the local inhabitants of the area in particular and the state in general

**5. STRATEGIES**

- Leveraging the power of the brand name to cover the market more effectively. If the name of “Bungus Valley” is used as brand name for whole Kashmir, it would undoubtedly help the place with more tourist influx, that would eventually boost the economy.
- The brand name “Bungus” can be promoted exclusively through Product Branding Strategy as it can create its own identity and image in the mindsets of the people.
- With this Product Branding Strategy “Bungus” can target distinct market or customers because its positioning can be
- Precise &
- Unambiguous.
- Corporate brand strategy can also be used when it comes in making Bungus as the brand name.
- Haryana tourism corporation (HTC) has efficiently utilised Corporate brand strategy.
- JKTDC can take serious note of this which in future would help in making of “Brand Bungus”

**Product-Market Matrix**

Product			
NEW	Market Development <i>Brand extension</i> <i>Line extension</i>	Diversification <i>Brand extension</i>	
OLD	Market Penetration <i>Sub-branding</i> <i>Flanker brands</i> <i>Co-branding</i>	Product Development <i>Co-branding</i> <i>Ingredient branding</i>	Market
	OLD	NEW	

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- JKTDC should follow a proper strategy when it comes to the Branding of newly developed destinations like BUNGUS.
- JKTDC should join hands with private organizations which can spread a positive “word of mouth”.
- Travel agencies of the state should put Bungus in their itineraries, which would help more & more people to know about this virgin destination: Bungus Valley.
- JKTDC should follow its counter-partners like HTDC, HPTDC, etc. These Tourism Development Corporations have used the different Brand Strategies exceptionally well, that yielded positive benefits to the industry.
- JKTDC should make use of various important promotional tools that would help in the positioning of newly developed destination like Bungus Valley.

## **REFERENCES**

- Marketing For Hospitality And Tourism (Philip Kotler, John T. Bowen & James C. Makens)
- Destination Branding (Amit Kumar Singh)
- Greater Kashmir([www.greaterkashmir.com](http://www.greaterkashmir.com))
- Internet sources (Wikipedia, American.edu, etc...)
- Kashmir life
- Tourism Marketing (Manjula Chaudhary).
- [www.jammukashmirupdate.com/Oct\\_2011/Bangus.html](http://www.jammukashmirupdate.com/Oct_2011/Bangus.html).