Advertising Nationalism:

War Commemoration and the ‘Politics of Memory’ in Bangladeshi Print Advertisements

Kajalie Shehreen Islam
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Foreword

Dr. Kajalic Shehreen Islam has depicted an excellent image of the transformation and evolution in the politics and economy of Bangladesh by reviewing the types and contents of the advertisements, contributed by various organizations and individuals, published in the newspaper of Bangladesh on Independence Day and Victory day. Dr. Islam is a professor in the department of Mass Communication and Journalism of University of Dhaka. Additionally, she is engaged in research activities. The research mentioned earlier, which was conducted with the assistance of ‘Center for Genocide Studies’ of the University of Dhaka, is headlined as: ‘Advertising Nationalism: War, Commemoration, and the “Politics of Memory” in Bangladeshi Print Advertisements.

Three million men, women and children sacrificed their lives in the great liberation war of Bangladesh and at least two hundred thousand women were victims of heinous rape. Many officials of USA and the US-controlled organization World Bank conjectured that, after the two-hundred and fourteen years of tyranny and exploitation of British Empire and Pakistani Rulers, the newborn Bangladesh would never be able to recover from the wounds of the war of 1971.

Just Faaland and Jack R. Parkinson, two economists of United States of America, argued in their ‘Bangladesh: The Test Case of Development’ that, ‘Bangladesh is a critical and complex development even in the best circumstances. People are poor (Per capita income 50 to 70 dollars), population density is high and most of them are illiterate. This nation can become the test case for development. If development is possible in Bangladesh, it can be assumed that, it is possible anywhere in the world.

No doubt there was belittlement in the statement. Most possibly, there were more than one reasons behind this theory. Namely, authority of Pakistan declared in 1971, only the combined economy of East and West Pakistan can
preserve the nation. The economy of separate Bangladesh will break down. Secondly, according to the opinion of some economists of this region and all over the world, high rate of population growth will sabotage the economic growth of Bangladesh. Thirdly, Bangladesh as a nation, was born as a recipient of aid and will become more and more dependent in the course of time.

During and after the Liberation War, Henri Kissinger, National Security Advisor of US president Richard Nixon, ridiculed Bangladesh stating, ‘It will remain an international basket case’. No doubt, he conformed to the above stated opinions. In 1974, prime minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman made a speech in the General Assembly of UN in New York for the first time. After that, as he was invited by then US president Gerald Ford, he travelled to Washington DC. In a press conference in Washington, he stated in his speech, criticizing Henri Kissinger for making derogatory remarks on Bangladesh, ‘Some people ridicule Bangladesh saying it’s an international basket case. But Bangladesh is not a basket case. Its wealth has been looted for two hundred years. London, Dandy, Manchester, Karachi and Islamabad has been adorned and enriched with the wealth of Bangladesh. Still today, Bangladesh owns a lot of resources. We will show that we can stand on our own feet.’

Two groups emerged after that. One group believed that the economy of Bangladesh will be thriving in the next few decades, and the other group didn’t. The ‘Basket case group’ didn’t think or didn’t want to think that Bangladesh will be promoted from a less-developed country to a developed country in a very short time. To most people it was unthinkable that, before the golden jubilee, Bangladesh as a nation will reach per capita income of two thousand dollars (leaving India and Pakistan behind), achieve autonomy in food grain, reduce the dependency on foreign nations for development aid, construct Padma Bridge with her own funding, despite strong opposition of World Bank with more than 300 billion dollars. They also didn’t think that the number of students in educational institutions will exceed 50 million and the
quantity of male and female students will become nearly equal. Evidently, as Dr. Kajalie Shehreen Islam noted in her research, the spirit of the Liberation War was a great motivation for this transformation of Bangladesh in socio-economic field. Additionally, she skillfully presented the arrival of corporate economy which was developed for the sake of reality. Presenting the reflection of the transformation in politics and economy in Bangladesh in the advertisements published in top four dailies on Independence Day and the Victory day is certainly praise-worthy.

The brutal murder of the then president Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on 15 August 1975 witnessed an illegitimate transformation of Bangladesh to a State Power. Those who seized authority through this transformation of power kept pushing our country further away from the spirit of our Liberation War. This slowed down the country’s economic prosperity as well. Since the murder of Bangabandhu, the authority that remained in power for a consecutive 21 years kept attempting to introduce themselves as true “Nationalists”. They kept attempting to bring forward the ideal of “Bangladeshi nationalism” by prioritizing religious identities, which was entirely different from the concept of “Nationalism” stated in the Bangladesh constitution of 16 December 1972.

A popular slogan among the businesspeople of Bangladesh is “Bless yourselves by buying national products (Deshi Ponno Kine Hou Dhonno)”. For economic prosperity, domestic industries and a self-sufficiency in food resources are essential. Bangladeshi people realized that attaining these goals was never possible through Pakistan’s infrastructure. Therefore, they engaged themselves in the struggle for Independence and emerged victorious through immeasurable sacrifices. This transformation brought countless opportunities for domestic goods to be available in the market, which the entrepreneurs welcomed cordially. For product expansion, promotion is vital and advertisements work as a significant factor. The more the economy of a country prospers, the more the increase of economy-related in the media it discovers.
Similarly, the more the influx of news increases, the more it favors the entrepreneurs. This is true for Bangladesh as well. For many years, Bangladesh, overlooked as a “Basket case” by the west, has witnessed an increase of corporate houses and has reached almost one-tenth of a million non-governmental bank accounts with 10 million or more amount of money. As economy expands, the need for promotion also increases. This also affects advertising. Advertising in the media of Bangladesh is also rapidly expanding in quantity. However, the researcher has shown that big corporations are participating less and less in Independence Day and Victory Day. She has also shown that the contents of advertisements pertain less emotion and enthusiasm in post-liberation period. The research has encouraged having discussions and asking decisions about whether there should be certain rules and regulations for the contents of advertisements that represent these two important days of our nation, and whether it should be something like “only business purposes”.

Researcher Dr. Kajalie Shehreen Islam has worked with nearly seven hundred Independence Day and Victory Day advertisements of the following six years: 1972, 1978, 1988, 2008, 2018. The sample is prodigious indeed! In three of these years Bangladesh Awami League, who led us in our struggle for emancipation, was in power. In 1978 and 1988, Bangladesh was under martial law. During this time, Ziaur Rahman and H. M. Ershad were not only against Awami League, but also denied the spirit and values of our emancipation struggle of 1971. Ziaur Rahman removed secularism from the constitution with a martial decree. H. M. Ershad constituted Islam as the state religion. Both governments prioritized the private sector. They have helped expand the influence of corporate capital. State-owned enterprises had been weakened. The independence that gradually strengthened the pillars of our economy had been questioned in various ways. There was a popular slogan in Bangladesh in 1971 – “our country freed by the sacrifice of myriad martyrs, let’s build this country”. Can Bangladesh become self-sufficient in its economy depending solely on a free-market economy while ignoring the mighty spirit of 1971? The question inevitably arises.
Another year chosen for research was 2008, when the Caretaker Government, run by the military was in power and ideologically stood in the middle of Awami League and their axis powers.

Dr. Kajalie Shehreen Islam analyzed newspaper advertisements published on the Independence and Victory Days of 1972 and has found that they have given utmost significance to the promise of guiding the newborn country through the path of development. At the same time, they have tried to express that those advertising firms are also a part of this prosperity and are contributing in it as well. In that year a number of Indian firms published advertisements in Bangladeshi newspapers. The reason is feasible; it is because the memory of the contribution of India in the Liberation War was still fresh in people’s hearts. In addition, governmental and nongovernmental companies of this neighboring country wanted to sell their products in Bangladesh’s market.

In 1972, not much mention of their products have been found in the advertisements of various Bangladeshi firms. At the time, Bangladeshi products had been very few in number. Firms damaged in the Liberation War had not been opened yet.

The researcher analyzed advertisements of 1978 and showed that advertisements published on 26th March and 16th December, after seven years of our independence, were fewer in number than those of 1972. Those advertisements mention some qualities of the products of various firms. For example, razor blade, household items and soybean oil. Those ads are examples of how some domestic products were raising their heads high. ‘Moujaher Oshudhaloy’ (Moujaher Pharmaceutical Shop) says in their advertisement that the battle against hunger, poverty and sickness hasn’t been conquered yet. Their organization wants to emerge victorious in the battle against sickness.

Water Development Board (a governmental organization) has mentioned dealing with flood and the importance of irrigation in agriculture.
Neither governmental nor nongovernmental organizations have mentioned the father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman or his words. Businessmen had the sense that military rulers might not like that, rather they might face consequences.

Even after ten years, in 1988, Bangabandhu isn’t mentioned in ads. The number of advertisements is also less than that of 1972. However, the economy has progressed quite a lot and some companies have promoted their products through advertisements. During this time, a group of companies had emerged. Bhuyian Group of Industries describes their biscuit, clothes and edible oil in their advertisements. Ads of foreign companies have also been published. Semeter Exploration Limited, a company that was granted the job of hydrocarbon exploration, talks about working with the government for the development of mineral resources in their ads. During that time, nongovernmental organizations took initiatives in the housing sector, which were displayed in their ads. The construction of National Martyrs’ Memorial in Savar began earlier in that decade. Pictures of this Memorial, which is recognized as an architectural marvel, are displayed in the ads of some organizations.

During the Independence and Victory day of 1998, Awami League was in power. On these two important days, although the number of ads weren’t many, a drastic change could be seen in their content. The spirit of Liberation War has come back into the limelight. Bangabandhu has returned as well. Krishi Bank had pledged to form ‘Bangabandhu’s golden Bengal’. Two and a half decades had passed since our Independence. The private sector of our economy had been growing stronger. It was reflected in ads. Pan Pacific Sonargaon had proclaimed hosting a special “Bengali Buffet” in their ad.

It was 2008 and a special form of Caretaker Government was in power. The general election of 29th December was in preparation. Besides the economy, on Independence and Victory Day, politics also comes into the
limelight. Enthusiasts in participating in the election promoted ads as well. Dr. Kajalie Shehreen Islam has showed: *Janakantha* published 40 ads in their 26th March edition, which were published by politicians. They did it not for promoting any products. They knew of people’s passion for Independence and Victory Days. They were interested in being a candidate in the election and they had selected this day to introduce themselves. Another notable aspect of that year’s advertisement was the dominance of mobile phone companies flooding the market of telephone sector. Grameenphone was in a euphoria. Couple of other companies also entered the market. They spoke about internet access in addition to talking through phones. The companies were announcing internet packages to attract users and the medium was advertisements. They also used our passions associated with the Liberation War. Popular songs during the Liberation War were used as ring tones and in their ads.

That year Awami League emerged victorious unanimously and came to power. They won in 2014 and 2018 elections as well. During that time, our economy saw a new motion. Sheikh Hasina ignored the great hindrances imposed by the World Bank and decided to implement a project to build a massive infrastructure, the Padma Bridge, with our own financing. Bangladesh moved further away from the demeaning list of low-income countries. This was reflected in ads. Grameenphone collaborated with the daily *Prothom Alo* and celebrated 60 years of the Eternal Ekushe February. A company of the brand “Ponds” sponsored some ceremonies on International Women’s Day on 8th March and highlighted the day as “Ponds International Women’s Day” in millions of leaflets and banners. The newspaper advertised this event with this title. Corporate organizations also took part in significant events such as Ekushe Book Fair and Pohela Boishakh. Advertising agencies could realize that the ruling government was working in the spirit of the Liberation War and mass people are in full support of them. We can see the passion surrounding Padma Bridge in ads of cement and steel companies. We can also see an “advertisement war” among these companies, since they all proclaimed their products as being used in this projects.
Researcher Dr. Kajalie Shehreen Islam has also brought our attention to 2018 ads: when the corporate organizations became stronger and profit becomes their first priority. They were offering a “16% discount” in their ads on 16th December. Five-star hotels were inviting people to taste their special items on Independence and Victory days. In our dresses we could see the color of our national flag: red and green. Black and white dress are unanimously sold for Ekushe February; ads are many in number as well.

Since Sheikh Hasina formed a new government in January of 2009, many economic organizations have shown great care in their involvement with Independence and Victory days. The aptitude of pleasing those in power was very clear. In order to prove that they are patriotic and nationalist and they hold the passion and emotion of 1971, Independence and Victory days were significant occasions indeed.

It is natural that governmental and nongovernmental organizations will advertise. For this they may naturally prioritize significant days of the national life. However, the researcher has rightfully drawn our attention to the vitality of regulations. The eternal sacrifices of our Liberation War are inspiration for us all. How justified is using them indiscriminately for the sake of profit? “Selling nationalism” may be best for an organization, but can we support it from a moral perspective? There is an appeal from the researcher to impose precise laws and regulations, and it must be indubitably taken into consideration.

Ajoy Dasgupta
Former Head of Editorial Department
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About the Author

Kajalie Shehreen Islam is Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Dhaka. She completed her PhD in Media Studies and MA in Critical Media and Cultural Studies from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London and her MSS and BSS in Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Dhaka. Her research interests include political communication, and gender and media. Her work has been published in national and international books and journals including *International Journal of Communication* and Media, War & Conflict. Kajalie Shehreen Islam was also a journalist with *The Daily Star*, Bangladesh’s largest circulated English-language daily, as Feature Writer for the *Star Weekend Magazine* and later as In-Charge of *Forum*, a monthly publication of the newspaper, covering human rights, gender, politics and more.
I

Introduction

Over 48 years after independence, the War of Liberation remains a major subject of public discourse, policy and politics in Bangladesh. The ruling Awami League, which led the war in 1971, was brought to power in 2009 with a landslide victory largely based on an election manifesto which highlighted the issue of the war, and a promise to try the war criminals. The party has remained in power since. In the last decade, monuments and memorials, literature and film, have all paid tribute to the war, its martyrs and freedom fighters, while also constructing an image of the anti-liberation enemy Other. A Ministry of Liberation War Affairs has been established to, among other things, “uphold the spirit and ideals of the great war of independence” and “preserve the history and memories of the war”. The media – including the advertising industry – for its part, has played an increasingly significant role in war commemoration, reporting on, celebrating, or mourning events and occasions related to the war and its leaders with great zeal.

As Andrew Hoskins (2009) argues, memory is mediated in how the past is and is not recorded, preserved and represented in relation to the technologies, media and institutions of the day. In this context, this study critically engages with the notion of ‘politics of memory’ and mediated memory and examines the role of the media in the commemoration of Bangladesh’s War of Liberation. Specifically, it examines the evolving role of advertisements in the dissemination of messages of patriotism, nationalism, and eventually, corporate nationalism.

* The author is indebted to research assistant Hojaifa Al-Mamduh for his contribution to this work.
II

Historical Background

The Partition of India in 1947 created the two nations of Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan. East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, was situated 1,500 miles away and surrounded on three sides by India, but was made a part of Pakistan, based on its Muslim-majority population. But when Bengal/East Pakistan was neglected politically and economically by the West Pakistani ruling elite, discontent began to brew.

Following the declaration of Urdu as the nation’s lingua franca in 1948, the Bengalis, who made up the majority population, revolted. In the Language Movement of February 1952, several people lost their lives. Eventually, Bangla was given the status of one of the state languages along with Urdu in 1956, but the struggle for autonomy continued and grew. In Pakistan’s first national elections in 1970, East Pakistan’s Awami League led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman won an absolute majority in the National Assembly, but the West Pakistani military-bureaucratic elite refused to hand over the reins of power to the East Pakistani leadership. In March 1971, the Bengalis of East Pakistan, victims of political, economic, social and cultural discrimination, declared independence (Ganguly 2007, Khan 2006, Khan 1985, Thompson 2007, van Schendel 2009).

In the nine-month-long struggle that ensued, between one and three million Bengalis were killed\(^1\), including the targeted killings of intellectuals and professionals in the capital Dhaka two days before the Pakistani army surrendered. Between 200,000-400,000 Bengali women were raped during the war (Debnath 2009, Mookherjee 2006). Over 10 million people were left homeless. On December 16, 1971, the independent nation of Bangladesh was born.

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\(^1\) The official Bangladeshi figure is 3 million, but unofficial claims have been as low as 1.8 million. Official Pakistani figures, however, claim the number of casualties to be at 26,000 (Ganguly 2007, Sharif et al, 1988, van Schendel 2009).
How the war has been framed in the media, particularly the representation of war discourse and the construction of memory in advertising over the next five decades, is the subject of this paper.
III

The Politics of “Mediated Memory”

Eric Hobsbawm, in *The Invention of Tradition*, defines ‘politics of memory’ as an ‘exercise… in social engineering’ from above: ‘the history which became part of the fund of knowledge or the ideology of the nation, state or movement is not what has actually been preserved in popular memory, but what has been selected, written, pictured, popularized and institutionalized by those whose function it is to do so’ (1983: 13).

In this context, Ashplant, Dawson and Roper describe the study of war memory as being ‘concerned with its official orchestration and embodiment in ceremonial and physical reminders, and with the patterns of inclusion and exclusion that determine which aspects of collective and individual experience are admitted to public recall and commemoration’ (2009: 10). They argue that in the modern era, due to the centrality of war to the identity and symbolic continuity of a nation, it is the nation itself which is the ‘prime arena for the articulation of war memories and the mobilization of commemoration’ (ibid: 22). They refer to a ‘hegemonic framing of memory’, a ‘selective process in which the nation-state exercises its power to recognize and incorporate within its national narrative only certain war memories, whilst others are officially marginalized or forgotten’ (2009: 53) and that war commemoration is a vital moment in this process.

This paper will look at the role of the media in these processes. As Andrew Hoskins notes, ‘Memory (individual and collective and their varying intersections) is “mediated” in that how the past is and is not recorded, archived, accessed, retrieved and represented, is entangled with the nature, forms and control of the technologies, media and institutions of the day’ (2009:1).
IV

Advertising Nationalism

Benedict Anderson regards the entire concept of nation and the struggles of nationalism to achieve it as ‘imagined.’ According to him, the members of even the smallest nations will never know each other personally because it is only ‘in the minds of each [that] lives the image of their communion’ (Anderson 1997: 44). The community in which people regard themselves is non-existent. Anderson identifies language as one of the key factors contributing to national consciousness which he sees as a result of capitalism, print capitalism in particular, bringing together people in communities of millions sharing a ‘print-language.’

Eric Hobsbawm, too, sees both nations and nationalism as products of ‘social engineering,’ ‘invented traditions’ which he defines as ‘a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition’ (Hobsbawm, cited in Ozkirimli 2010: 94), a strategy employed by the ruling elite of any society to counter the threat of ‘mass democracy.’ According to Hobsbawm, in the face of social fragmentation and disintegration, the idea of ‘national community’ can bring social cohesion. This idea is developed and reinforced by primary education, public ceremonies and the mass production of public monuments. Thus, contrary to popular understanding, in Hobsbawm’s view, it is not the people who rise in nationalist fervour but states which create it (ibid: 95). ‘Nationalism is symbolic and cultural as well as territorial and political,’ not only a matter of politics, but of cultural and personal identity, notes Wang (2006: 190).

Anthony Smith (2001) states that the pursuit of nationalism encompasses various goals, including national unity, autonomy and identity, defining national identity as ‘the maintenance and continual reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths, and traditions that form the distinctive heritage of the nation, and the identification of individuals with that heritage and its pattern’ (Smith 2003: 25). Smith conceives of an ethnic community or ethnie – ‘a named and self-defined human population sharing a myth of common ancestry, historical
memories and elements of culture (often including a link with a territory) and a measure of solidarity’ (Smith 2006: 171-172).

Along similar lines, Michael Billig (2001) explores the notion of ‘banal nationalism’ – the ideological habits which enable (Western) nations to be ‘reproduced’ daily. Through ‘flagging,’ an ideological consciousness of nationhood is naturalised, made to seem like common sense. The media play a vital role here by routinely addressing its audience as members of a nation, instilling this ideological consciousness into citizens.

More recently, Silk, Andrews, and Cole (2005: 7) advanced the notion of corporate nationalisms to describe how state influence in the construction of national cultures ‘is being eroded by external, commercially driven, forces’ through which ‘the locus of control in influencing the manner in which the nation and national identity are represented becomes exteriorized through, and internalized within, the promotional strategies of transnational corporations’. They argue that:

As human civilization becomes increasingly corporatized, the nation and national culture have become principal (albeit perhaps unwilling) accomplices within this process, as global capitalism seeks to, quite literally, capitalize upon the nation as a source of collective identification and differentiation (Silk, Andrews and Cole 2005: 7).

Jackson (2013), too, elaborates on how, within the context of globalization, nations have increasingly become the object of both production and consumption, with citizens being transformed into consumers, and how this transformation is driven by corporate nationalism, a process that seeks to capitalize on the nation as a source of collective identification.

Similar to this, Weedon (2012) discusses the branding of nationalism, branding as a technique of capital accumulation and how individuals harness various forms of capital available through nationalistic discourses to construct particular forms of personal and collective identification. Like branding in general, ‘nation branding is “less about the consumption of a product than about the social relations, experiences, and
lifestyles such consumption enables” (Aronczyk and Powers 2010: 7 cited in Weedon 2012), and that, for marketers, ‘the very purpose of nation branding...is to inspire a sense of collective belonging to the nation-state’ (ibid).

Kobayashi (2012) points to the “global culture industry” where the nation is a representation of an “imagined community” ‘increasingly reproduced through contemporary mediascapes including magazines, television, movies, digital media, and advertising’ and to studies which found that ‘advertising serves as a driving force in the cultural reproduction of identity in relation to, for instance, the nation, gender, sexuality, race, and social class. He notes that ‘an analysis of corporate nationalism enables a critical inquiry into a contemporary articulation of the nation as a site of symbolic negotiations and struggles by various interest groups seeking to capitalize on national sensibilities, identities, and politics’ (Kobayashi 2012: 44).

This paper explores mediated memory in the context of advertising through the use of nationalistic discourse and shows how war-, independence-, and victory-related advertisements evolve from focus on development soon after the birth of Bangladesh, into eventually, a form of national branding or corporate nationalism.
The pedagogical project of making subjects into citizens is assumed not only by the state, but as well and increasingly, by the market, in an age of economic liberalization. The state seeks to utilize the rhetorical device of nationalism, through which local tradition is acknowledged while orienting individuals towards an indigenous modernity. But the state’s failure to carry through on the rhetorical possibilities of nationalism, and the resulting ossification of an increasingly official form of nationalism, strengthens market-led initiatives in this respect (Rajgopal 1998: 28).

While Rajgopal focuses primarily on the reformulation of religious imagery as a class-stratified sign system in contemporary advertising in India, this paper looks at the use of the themes of patriotism and nationalism in branding and consumer culture in Bangladesh. Similar to Raymond Williams’ (1980) notion of advertising as magic, whereby commodities are turned into glamorous signifiers, such as turning cars into a sign of masculinity, the paper illustrates how the magic of advertising in Bangladesh helps to turn words and images, products and services, into symbols of patriotism.

Some years after Rajgopal, Leela Fernandes (2000) went on to study the shift in public political discourses away from a focus on poverty reduction as a central objective of state policy and economic development to a growing public culture of consumption. Just as the early decades of economic policy in post-independence India were focused on the development of large scale industrial units and production in heavy industries rather than on the production of consumer oriented commodities
(Fernandes 2000: 614), so was national development in Bangladesh focused on economic development, on jute and textile mills, on water and gas supply, and on banks. Fernandes argues that such policies were linked to a specific image of a modernizing Indian nation, ‘one in which large scale dams and steel power plants “were the spectacular facades, luxurious in their very austerity, upon which the nation watched expectantly as the image of its future was projected”’ (Fernandes 2000: 613). These were icons of modern industrial development linked to a political culture constituted by public discourses on the need for the advancement of the rural poor in which the urban middle classes were relatively invisible until the nation underwent a striking shift in the context of contemporary globalization (ibid).

Mazzarella’s (2003) ethnographic study of globalizing consumerism also focuses on the rise of mass consumerism in India and the commodification of culture itself by advertisers whom he refers to as ‘cultural consultants.’ While he focuses on the Indian advertisers’ challenge of constructing the ‘commodity image’ as Indian (even when it’s not), this study looks more at how Bangladeshi advertisements invoke the audience to express their Bengali identity by consuming the products being advertised. As Mazzarella notes, some brands become the means to express one’s self-identity, whether that identity in fact exists or is an ideal self to which one aspires. Along with the factual, rational messages of advertising as being key to its persuasive power, emotional persuasion has proven to be just as important in building strong brand relationships, with commodities themselves being seen as emotional, where consumption is less about the utilitarian value of objects and more about their symbolic meaning (Heath, Brandt and Nairn 2006, Ilouz 2009, Mehta and Pervis 2006, Poels and Dewitte 2006).

From a somewhat different angle, Young (2005), in the context of America during the Second World War, distinguishes between the dual identities of Americans – ‘citizen consumers, sacrificing the acquisition of certain goods and tolerating rationing programs for the good of the nation,’ and ‘purchaser consumers, buying war bonds that they would use to buy new and improved fruits of industry after the war was over’ (Young 2005: 32). In the context of postwar America, Young cites Cohen’s combined concept of the “purchaser as citizen,” whose “[satisfaction of] personal
material wants actually served the national interest’. It may be argued that on days of national significance, advertisers in Bangladesh sell values of patriotism along with their products and services, associating their brands with the days in which events of national significance occurred.

While many advertising models and much research on brand personality and brand relationships have focused on the importance of the factual, rational message in advertising as being the key to its persuasive power, Heath, Brandt and Nairn (2006) have found that emotional persuasion is just as important for advertising in building strong brand relationships, as rational persuasion and the imparting of factual information. Heath, Brandt and Nairn go as far as to suggest that ‘those who want their advertising to build strong relationships between the consumer and the brand would be well advised to focus more attention on the emotional metacommunication – on the creativity – in their advertisements, than they do on the rational message communication (Heath, Brandt and Nairn 2006: 416).

Braun, Ellis and Loftus, in their study of advertising, autobiographical referencing and childhood experiences found that use of such referencing – for example, experiences with Mickey Mouse in childhood – ‘can cause consumers to focus less on rational product information and more on the feelings evoked by their recollected memories’ (2002: 1). Similarly, Bangladeshi advertisements which make references to the War of Liberation can potentially touch a chord with the audience, particularly those who participated in or were witnesses to the war, as well as their subsequent generations who grew up hearing about the war and the role of their loved ones.

According to Mehta and Pervis (2006), advertisers have long believed that advertising must arouse some emotion to be effective.

This affective response is important for two main reasons. First, the key to branding is the triggering of a meaningful emotional response, which is often, and perhaps always, the major benefit of using the particular product. Second, the process that consumers go through in deciding what brands to buy has a heavy emotion-based dimension to it. In both cases, advertising
can be an effective source of enhancement of these emotional responses (Mehta and Pervis 2006: 49).

Poels and Dewitte (2006) explore different types of emotions used in advertising and how to measure them. They distinguish between two types of emotions that operate on a continuum depending on how much cognitive processing they require before the emotion is constituted. At the left end of the continuum, are “lower-order emotions” – ‘spontaneous and uncontrollable emotional reactions’ which ‘mainly involve pleasure and arousal reactions that do not require to be cognitively labeled as a specific emotion’ (Poels and Dewitte 2006: 18). They state that advertisements which evoke a pleasure or arousal reaction will receive more attention, and ultimately lead to further focusing and learning about the brand’s benefits and, possibly, acceptance of the advertisement’s message. At the right end of the continuum are “higher-order emotions”, which depend on deeper cognitive processing of the situation. These types of emotions are more complex than lower-order emotions in the sense that higher-order emotions need to be consciously labeled as a specific emotion. Some basic emotions, such as fear, anger, and happiness, are situated somewhere in between lower- and higher-order emotions, state Poels and Dewitte. In the context of this study, higher-order emotions may be evoked through the advertisements discussed, such as emotions of patriotism and nationalism.

Illouz (2009) takes a semiotic approach to the study of emotions in advertising, suggesting that ‘material objects are suffused with semiotic codes that in turn carry emotional meanings’ (Illouz 2009: 380) such as how the diamond stands for ‘eternal love’ and the insurance company for ‘fatherly care’. ‘Consumption is thus less about the utilitarian value of objects than it is about their symbolic meaning’ argues Illouz and goes on to describe why emotions might play a crucial role in consumption:

If commodities are supposed to provide meanings and experiences – rather than sheer utilitarian satisfaction – then consumption becomes... suffused with emotionality: commodities themselves are not so much material objects
as they are cultural meanings that in turn provide access to emotional categories and experiences (Ilouz 2009: 380).

Commodities are ‘emotional’ in that consumer culture is characterized by the manufacturing of experiential consumer practices, that is, consumption of nonmaterial objects that are instead better viewed as forms of experiences, says Ilouz (2009) – for example, a cruise may signify relaxation, a football match, national pride. Similarly, several advertisements examined in this study have drawn upon emotions of respect for and remembrance of the martyrs of the war, pride in the independence gained and love for the nation.

‘Indirectness’ is one of the major characteristics of modern advertising. As Screti (2013: 305) notes, ‘Recent trends in advertising do not directly invite receivers to adopt or avoid a certain course of action; instead they merely refer to the most appropriate course of action. In the advertisements being studied in this paper, for example, many are not designed to sell their products or services though they do promote their brands. The majority of advertisements display the company logo, their slogan, and text and images related to the occasion – Independence Day or Victory Day as the case may be – around which they are being published.

Indeed, as Prideaux (2009) notes, advertising – due to its role in disseminating messages to diverse groups within a society – is one of the usages of nationalism by both political actors and private companies. But while a number of studies have established that advertising is used by governments, political parties, trade unions and pressure groups to portray national identities, companies are not traditionally regarded as actors having a major role in the construction of national identity, though there are implicit linkages within the nationalism/political science as well as marketing literature (Prideaux 2009: 618). Opinion on the role of companies varies, however, with some regarding companies as operating from purely economic motivations and thus not as actors with nationalist objectives, while others study the manner in which specific companies or industries use nationalism in advertising and ‘how brands use symbols of currently vogue expressions of nationalism in order to gain market share’ (Prideaux 2009: 619). According to Prideaux, ‘The strategies used by companies in their
advertising cause them to become participants, either actively or as an unintended by-product, in the broader national discourse (Prideaux 2009: 633).

This paper will discuss the representation of nationalism and its transformation into corporate nationalism through advertising on days of national significance in Bangladesh.
VI

Methodology

This study is qualitative and based on archival research. It has been conducted through framing analysis and discourse analysis of advertisements related to Bangladesh’s Liberation War published in four newspapers on Independence Day on March 26 and Victory Day on December 16 every decade since the nation’s independence. The years studied are: 1972 (the year after the war), 1978, 1988, 1998, 2008 and 2018.

Four leading Bengali-language newspapers have been studied. Dainik Ittefaq, established in 1953, and Dainik Sangbad, established in 1952, have been studied from 1972 to 2018, while Dainik Janakantha, first published in 1993, and Prothom Alo, first published in November 1998, have been examined from 1998 onwards. Ittefaq has maintained a certain standard and popularity over the decades, while the popularity of left-leaning Sangbad has declined to an extent. Janakantha is widely known to be aligned to the Awami-League government currently in power in Bangladesh, while Prothom Alo is seen as more neutral, bordering on anti-government, in the eyes of some.

The primary data for this project has been chosen through purposive sampling, allowing for a comparative study of four different newspapers over five decades and through different governments, including the post-independence Awami League government in 1972, a military regime in 1978, what is widely considered to have been a military dictatorship in 1988, the Awami League government in 1998, military-backed Caretaker Government rule in 2008, and the Awami League-led government, again, in 2018.
Framing analysis

Framing analysis has most commonly been used to study news, particularly political communication. Frames are ‘a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them’ (Perloff 2014). In the context of the media, Entman (2004) states that framing is ‘selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution’ (p. 88), and as such are composed of a problem definition, a hypothesized cause, a moral evaluation and a proposed remedy. Kinder (2007) notes that frames suggest how politics should be thought about, encouraging understanding of events and issues in particular ways and what, if anything, should be done about them. A common frame, for example, is the human interest frame, which personalizes, dramatizes and emotionalizes the news (Steimel 2010). Another common frame is that of conflict.

Framing analysis has been used less in the study of advertisements. Chang and Lee (2009), for example, have used it in their analysis of charity advertising and the influence of message framing and image valence on a charitable appeal. This study will use framing to identify the key themes used in print advertisements published on days of national significance in Bangladesh.

Discourse and its analysis

Initially a linguistic concept referring to ‘passages of connected writing or speech’, discourse was defined by Michel Foucault more broadly as ‘the production of knowledge through language’ (cited in Hall 2004: 346). Discourse consists of language as well as practice. It situates a topic in a particular historical context – and thus is subject to change – defining it, determining what is and is not to be talked about and how people should conduct themselves in relation to it, thus linking power to both the mind (knowledge) and the body (practice) (Hall 2004). ‘Discursive practices may have major ideological effects’, producing and reproducing unequal power
relations, ‘passing off assumptions (often falsifying ones) about any aspect of social life as mere common sense’ (Fairclough and Wodak 2004: 357).

In terms of media discourse, the media, as Khosravinik argues, play an ‘active, political role in cultural relations of power... active in the politics of sense-making (Khosravinik 2015: 72); or as Fairclough suggests, the media do not just reflect the preferences of the audience but ‘justify, preserve, rationalise, conceptualise and represent the interests of dominant groups’ (Fairclough 1993 cited in Khosravinik 2015: 72) thereby ‘play[ing] a crucial role in the persuasive production of dominant ideologies’ (van Dijk 1988 cited in Khosravinik 2015: 72). Garrett and Bell summarize the usefulness of the study of media discourse, including the media’s being a ‘rich source of readily accessible data’, but more importantly, the media’s ability to convey ‘social meanings and stereotypes projected through language and communication’ and to ‘reflect and influence the formation and expression of culture, politics and social life’ (Garrett and Bell, 1998: 3-4). As such, analysis of the media in relation to the production of war discourse and memory construction is important, and discourse analysis of advertisements a fitting method of study for this project.

According to Brian Paltridge (2012), discourse analysis examines patterns of language across texts, considering relationships between language and its social and cultural contexts, social identities and relations. As such, discourse analysis explores representations of the world, events and relationships; identities of the participants; and the relationships between them (Keller 2013). In the study of discourse, Screti (2013) has noted the importance of context and its inseparability from text which is also dealt with in this paper.

Following a Foucauldian method of discourse analysis (as outlined by Carabine 2001 and Keller 2013), this paper examines the advertisements published in Bangladeshi newspapers on the country’s Independence and Victory Days within their socio-political contexts. Close to 700 advertisements were collected for the purposes of this research. A coding sheet was designed, detailing the names of the newspapers, the dates and page numbers on which the advertisements were placed, the products or services being advertised, a summary of the text, including direct quotes of
poetry and songs, a description of the visuals, and the overall theme and focus of the adverts. In terms of analysis, along with a general overview of patterns in the advertisements, an in-depth analysis of text and images of two to four ads from each decade has been conducted. Themes, categories and objects of the discourse, discursive and inter-discursive strategies have been analysed, including absence/gaps, of what is not being said, when, and, arguably, why.

With regard to discourse analysis, however, it is important to note that ‘reality can never be reached outside discourses and so it is discourse itself [and not reality that is] the object of analysis’ (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002: 21). Indeed, context is all-important in the study of discourse, and, as Screti (2013) points out, can hardly be separated from text – ‘they are in a circular relation: they influence each other. But context also influences the meaning for the scholar, who is also part of the society within which the discourse is produced [and] without addressing the issue of context, the scholar will not be able to “understand” the discourse and its relationship with society’ (Screti 2013: 302). Thus it is important to understand the socio-discursive context (including the political and the economic) in which the advertisements being studied here, were designed, and what significance they had for the different time periods in which they were published, which will be discussed alongside analysis of the selected advertisements.

For this purpose, interviews with two members of two leading advertising agencies in Bangladesh – Adcomm, established in 1974 and Expressions Ltd., established in 1993 – have been conducted in order to gain insight into the practitioners’ perspective, how they view and use nationalistic discourses in their work, and whether and how these are politically influenced. Both respondents have taken on their positions in advertising agencies established by their parents and have over 20 years’ experience in the industry.

Interviews serve a number of purposes, but they are of particular relevance to this project because they help to understand the social actor’s experience, knowledge, and worldviews; enable inquiry about the past; and aid in verifying, validating, or commenting on information obtained from other sources (Lindlof and Taylor 2013), in this case, the advertisements
collected. For this study, interviews were a means of taking a second, subjective look into the advertising world and how it works, towards better understanding the data collected from the more objective and tangible advertisements available, as are discussed below.

It is important to keep in mind that this study is not from an anthropological but a communications perspective. As per Faye Ginsburg’s (1994) distinction, while an anthropological approach would have focused on people and the process of production of advertisements, a communications approach such as the one taken in this paper focuses on media texts and discourses. A more detailed ethnographic approach could be used to expand and enrich this study in future, but is beyond the scope of this particular paper. This study is also limited to print advertisements and can be extended to electronic media and digital/online media and advertising. As such, it is a critical study of the politics of post-war advertising, which can be applied to other post-conflict nations and cultures to see if similar trends have occurred. The paper provides insight into war commemoration in the context of a South Asian nation where war discourse is significant not only on national days but in the everyday, and its implications for nations and citizens in the present.
VII

From Advertising Patriotism to Marketing Corporate Nationalism

Arthur Asa Berger notes that, while advertising as an industry is often quite ‘avant-garde and bold in the techniques it uses’ (2015: 34), ultimately its impact tends to be conservative as it tries to maintain as much as possible the status quo. As such, advertising on days of national significance in Bangladesh is also heavily focused on the occasion, using it to demonstrate the various companies’ commitment to nationalism and branding themselves as patriotic in the process.

The common theme of nationalism runs through almost all the advertisements studied in every decade. What differs, is the types of companies which advertise over the decades, the themes on which they focus, and the political discourses and figures which they emphasize upon.

1972 – Dawn of a new era

In 1972, on the first anniversary of Independence Day and Victory Day and in the time of the newly-founded post-independence government led by the Awami League, there were several advertisements published – over 70 in the March 26 issue and over 90 in the December 16 issue of Dainik Ittefaq, and 27 and 49 in the March 26 and December 16 issues of the Dainik Sangbad respectively. In both newspapers, the greatest number of advertisements were placed by insurance companies, utility companies, industries such as jute, textiles, chemicals and steel, and a handful of government-owned banks.

An advertisement published on March 26, 1972 in the Dainik Ittefaq by the Great Eastern Insurance Co. Ltd. features a formidable looking Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, popularly known as “Bangabandhu” or “friend of Bengal” in a commonly used portrayal of him giving a speech, index finger raised, in the foreground of a circle which most probably signifies the rising sun and/or the red circle of the Bangladesh flag. The headline of the ad is also Bangabandhu’s most famous line from his legendary March 7 speech, just weeks before the declaration of
independence — “The struggle is for independence.” The body copy refers to this “fiery” speech, with a promise to build the nation on this historical day of bloodshed. Three months into liberation (on December 16, 1971), the spirit of the war is obviously still rife, not to mention the popularity of the man who led the people to their freedom, who was also the prime minister of the country at the time of publication of the advert. The company’s name and logo are at the bottom of the ad.

A Philips advertisement published in Sangbad on December 16, 1972, borrows its headline from Bengali poet Kazi Nazrul Islam’s popular revolutionary song “Tora shoh joyodhoni kor” (a call to celebrate). The illustration is of several hands raised in what may be celebration and/or protest. The body copy refers to “the day of freedom, the freedom of seven crore Bengalis from oppression, freedom which did not come easy but at the cost of the lives of three million people”. Again, one year into the gaining of victory, the advert seems to be vibrating with the fervour of the war, of rebellion, of freedom, and of victory. The company’s name and logo are in the bottom right corner.

The key themes of the advertisements published in 1972 — other than paying tribute to the martyrs and freedom fighters of the war — were development and a promise to build/rebuild/reconstruct the nation. We also see brands associating themselves with the victory of war. For example, Bangladesh Biman (the country’s national airlines), advertises itself by saying that with the independence and victory of Bangladesh came the new airlines, dedicated to the service of the people. A large image of the logo in the center of the advertisement is captioned “Symbol of victory”.

This year, and this year only, we also see a handful of ads placed by Indian companies, for example, an ad by India Foils Ltd., claiming to be “like an old friend [to Bangladesh]” and wishing the nation on Victory Day; and Harlalka Textiles Kolkata, paying tribute to a Birangona (“war heroine” — a title given to honor the women victims of sexual violence in wartime) who sacrificed herself by tying an explosive device to her chest and jumping in front of a tank and destroying it. Printing Indian ads in Bangladeshi dailies immediately after the war is presumably a reflection of not only India’s influence on Bangladesh at the time but also the latter’s gratitude for
the role played by the former in taking in millions of refugees during the war and aiding with its army in the last two weeks of battle. We only find reference to India in advertisements again in 2018, which will be discussed below.

Interestingly, 1972 is the only time – and in only one ad in *Dainik Ittefaq* placed by Bangladesh Railway – that secularism, one of the four major principles upon which the independence of the country was based, along with nationalism, democracy and socialism, is mentioned: “First Victory Day of independent, sovereign, secular People’s Republic of Bangladesh”. As the rest of this paper will reveal, the advertisements published on Independence and Victory Days focused initially on development and later on consumer culture rather than the actual founding principles on which Bangladesh’s independence war was based. Reference to secularism in particular is nowhere else to be found.

Common images used in the advertisements include the Bangladesh flag, the rising/shining sun symbolizing a new day/beginning/era, sketches and paintings of freedom fighters at war, the national flower lotus, rural imagery (villages, boats, etc.) which are an integral part of Bangladeshi culture and society, and images of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Very few images are of actual products that the companies sell, those that are, are also connected to the nationalistic theme. For example, an ad for four cigarette companies, published on March 26 in the *Dainik Ittefaq*, features a picture of a cigarette being played like a flute, accompanied by text about “New tunes for a new era” of economic reconstruction of the nation.
1978 – The war has ended, the struggle has not

In 1978, Bangladesh was under martial law following the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and most of his family members in a military coup in 1975 and a series of coups after that. In 1977, martial law administrator General Ziaur Rahman came to power through a national vote of confidence and went on to form the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the other major political party in the country, along with the Awami League.

In 1978, seven years after independence, the number of print advertisements published in newspapers is considerably less than the year after independence – 11 and 25 in the March 26 and December 16 issues of the Dainik Ittefaq, 17 and 11 in the Dainik Sangbad.

Whereas in 1972, ads highlighted Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the leader of the war and the role of the people in bringing independence, in 1978, we see a highlighting of the military. In an ad published in Dainik Sangbad on March 26, the image draws upon a famous picture by renowned photographer Naibuddin Ahmed depicting a cracked soldier’s helmet lying on the grass, with a flower growing through the cracks. Whether this is a positive reflection of the military regime at the time, or whether, especially because the ad was published in the left-leaning Sangbad the image of the cracked helmet was a subtle criticism of it, is difficult confirm. The accompanying text, “Tomake pawar jonno he swadhinota” (in order to attain you, oh independence) is a line from prominent poet Shamsur Rahman’s poem by the same name. The body copy again refers to the economic independence of the nation and the promised role of the company advertising it, a steel plant.

Focus remains on building the nation, economic development and progress, and paying respect to the martyrs of the Liberation War. An ad by Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Co. Ltd. compares the “proud light of victory” with the light provided by the company, both as being everlasting. Some ads feature images of products such as razor blades, household appliances and soybean oil, while others remain symbolic, such as the flag, flowers, and some abstract art depicting freedom fighters, breaking the chains of oppression, etc. A sense of continuing struggle is used by some companies. For example, Mojaher Oushodhaloy, a herbal
medicine company in an ad in *Dainik Ittefaq* on December 16, iterates that the war against hunger, poverty and disease is not over, and that the company is dedicated to taking the country forward by battling disease. An ad by the Water Development Board notes that economic self-dependence can be gained by countering floods and using irrigation. In this way, the war is tied into the development of the post-conflict nation. Notably, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is not featured in any of the advertisements in 1978 and it is not until the Awami League is back in power two decades later that we see his re-emergence. In fact, no political personalities are found to be featured in advertisements published in this year.

1988 – *Taking the nation forward*

In 1988, Bangladesh was under what is commonly accepted as a military dictatorship, led by General Hussain Muhammad Ershad, who also came to power through a military, but bloodless coup in 1982. There were 11 and 12 ads published on March 26 and December 16 in the *Dainik Ittefaq*, and eight and five ads published in the *Dainik Sangbad* respectively.

An advertisement published on March 26 in both the *Dainik Ittefaq* and *Dainik Sangbad*, placed by the government-owned Bangladesh Shilpa Bank, depicts a hand holding up an industrial wheel. The text, translated as “Independence, you are the profound hope of industrialization,” refers to another one of Shamsur Rahman’s poems called “Swadhinota tumi,” (You, independence), which addresses independence as a range of things related
to Bengali culture and society. The ad shows industrialization as one of the great promises of independence.

In this year, we see companies using the theme of independence and victory, but also advertising their products and services. For example, Bhuiyan Group of Industries has an ad in the *Dainik Ittefaq* with a headline about holding on to the independence gained and a visual of the war, but the body copy lists its biscuit factory, garments, oil mills, etc. One ad by Simitar Exploration Ltd., a mining company which works with the government, for the first time, congratulates the government along with the people, on the occasion of Victory Day in an ad in *Dainik Sangbad* with a picture of an exploration site. Similarly, an ad for Venus Real Estate carries the headline “Our Victory Day wishes to you – an apartment home for you”, has a drawing of an apartment building and details of the facilities available.

There are several ads for the cinema, one of them called *Jantrona* (pain/trouble) presumably based on the war, judging from the photograph used of a man bearing a flag and rifle. Real estate company advertisements begin to emerge during this time. Overall, while some ads focus on building the nation and on industrial development, most are still in remembrance/tribute to the martyrs and freedom fighters of the war.

A discursive shift begins to become visible. Bravery during the war, invincibility of the nation, and the ideals of independence in general are featured. Images, too, include those of armed freedom fighters, the sun, flowers, and we see the first appearance of the Sritishoudho – the National Martyrs’ Memorial which was built in 1982 – and the Aparajeyo Bangla sculpture – built in tribute to the freedom fighters of the war, over the years 1973-1979. These images are regularly featured in the following decades.
1998 – The beginnings of “chetona” (spirit)

For the year 1998, along with the Dainik Ittefaq and Dainik Sangbad, two more papers – namely, Dainik Janakantha and Prothom Alo – have been examined for this study. The number of ads is still relatively low, 10 and 19 in March and December of Ittefaq, 6 and 12 for March and December of Sangbad, 5 and 14 for Janakantha, and 13 for the December 16 issue of Prothom Alo (there is no March issue as publication of the paper began in November 1998).

While remembrance, and economic development and growth and progress of the nation remain key themes especially in the older papers, at this point, we begin to see more ads about the “spirit” (chetona) of the war of liberation, pride in the battle and victory, and about upholding the values of the independence war. A film poster, for example, advertises a film called Badla Nebo, or “We will seek revenge”, against “anyone who opposes independence”. Other film posters which have nothing to do with the theme of independence or victory also advertise the films starting with “bloody wishes on Independence Day”.

Whereas, before this, most ads were more designed towards branding the companies by their placing ads commemorating the war and Independence and Victory Days, in 1998, we begin to see linkages between these and actual products and services offered by the companies. For example, an ad placed by a security company called Protectus Ltd. in the daily Janakantha on December 16 associates its service with the war, with a poem in the ad claiming “Victory inspires the spirit of protection. We are the guards of victory, We keep you safe.” Real estate company Tropical Homes Ltd. relates its product/service to the theme of victory with the slogan “A victory… a commitment… a dream… a home”. Government-owned Rupali Bank Ltd. asks the reader to be a partner in the struggle for economic emancipation, bearing in mind the main spirit of the war of independence. A poster advertising a film called Goriber Shomman (Respect for the Poor), after wishing the audience on Victory Day, notes that independence has given us rights, democracy, and respect. Banks advertise based on the theme of economic freedom in relation to the nation’s war of independence. Herbal medicine company Shadhona Oushodhaloy
Ltd. claims that as citizens of an independent nation, good health is our desire. The five-star Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel promotes a special Bengali Buffet “with sonorous and soothing Bengali music” to celebrate Independence Day.

The whole notion of “chetona” arose arguably with the return of the Awami League to power under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in 1996. As the party which led the nation to independence under the leadership of “Bangabandhu,” the Awami League has always presented itself as the party of the Liberation War, and this has only increased with each of its tenures, now in its fourth. This is reflected in the public and political discourse, as well as in the media and in advertising. The issue of revenge also arises during this time, as the Awami League committed itself to the trial of war criminals, a promise it fulfilled not in its first tenure but in subsequent ones from 2009 onwards. As such, the pulse of the nation, especially regarding the War of Liberation, is reflected in the popular culture of the times.

In this political context, images of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman also re-emerge in the ads of the late 1990s. An ad for government-owned Bangladesh Krishi Bank states a vow to build “Bangabandhu’s Sonar Bangla” (the golden Bengal dreamt of by Bangabandhu), illustrated with a picture of freedom fighters holding up rifles.

Along with the reflection of the spirit of the war, advertisements begin to more directly link the theme of war, independence and nationalism with their products and services. For example, security companies claim to be protectors of the nation’s victory, and real estate companies somehow relate victory to commitment and the dream home. As Wang (2006) notes, consumers project national identity onto the products/services they choose or choose not to consume. As such, consumption becomes one of the social processes whereby national spirit is expressed, communicated, and made visible, and ‘nationalism becomes symbolic, communicative, and deeply personal’ (Wang 2006: 191).
2008 – Towards a “corporate nationalism”

In the year 2008 – during which time Bangladesh was being ruled by a military-backed caretaker government before the national elections at the end of the year – we see a rise in the number of ads published. *Ittefaq* carried 22 and 12 ads in March and December, *Sangbad*, 8 and 12 ads, *Janakantha* 13 and 7 ads, and *Prothom Alo* 28 and 27 ads respectively. Interestingly, in addition to the 13 ads printed in *Janakantha* on March 26, we see a new trend emerge, where over 40 ads are sponsored not by companies but by
individuals – mostly local politicians belonging to the Awami League – wishing the country a happy Independence Day, not publicizing any brand/product/service, but themselves.

Perhaps the most interesting trend that can be noticed in 2008, especially in the ads in *Prothom Alo* which ran the highest number of ads – are those placed by cellular phone operators. Bangladesh’s first cellular phone operator was licensed in 1989, with cell phone use gaining traction in the 1990s and becoming widely popular in the 2000s. This is also evident in the number and nature of cell phone operator advertisements in 2008.

A Grameenphone Telecom ad shows two or three people with arms locked – one hand looking visibly more aged than the others. Their faces are not shown, only their chests, one in a green T-shirt, one in a red T-shirt – the colors of the Bangladesh flag. The text says: “Independence is immortal – from generation to generation”. The product being advertised is Grameenphone’s “Amor SIM”, a SIM card, the name of which is, “amor”, meaning “immortal”. The payoff at the bottom of the ad says: “In the joy of independence, make your sim ‘Amor SIM’, which will never expire”.

This is an interesting advertisement on many levels. It draws upon the theme of independence through the text. It plays on a sense of patriotism by using the colors of the national flag. It evokes a sense of family and tradition by referring to “generations”. And last but not least, it uses the very important frame of immortality in the context of independence and applies it to the product – one that won’t “expire” and so is “immortal”, just like independence.

Another advertisement for Citycell One’s “Hello Tunes” (the tunes that ring on the phone of the person called) claims that “the songs that were the strength of the independence movement, will again bring life”. The abstract illustration is of (presumably) a freedom fighter holding up a rifle – the drawing is made up of tiny musical symbols. The payoff at the bottom informs the reader that registration for “Hello Tunes” is free, and that if one downloads two tunes, they will get one for free. Music did indeed play an important role during Bangladesh’s independence movement, and was used to motivate as well as entertain those who had gone to war. Using this frame
in relation to this history to appeal to both the emotions and the rationality of the potential consumer is a clever tactic.

Another cell phone operator, Banglalink, also selling similar products/tunes, declares, “Express yourself with unrestricted freedom”, and that “As always, Banglalink is with you in your expression of love for the nation”. This can ostensibly be achieved by using the company’s welcome tunes, setting patriotic songs as one’s ringtones, sending voice messages, etc. This is reinforced by drawings of a Srireshoudho, several Bangladesh flags, and birds flying free across the advertisement. As Tsai (2010) noted in the case of the United States post-9/11, here too, attempts are being made to transform consumption into a patriotic and political practice.

Yet another ad by Warid Telecom, whose slogan is “Be heard”, keeps it simple by stating in the headline in huge letters across an ad covering the lower fold of the newspaper – “Shonao swadhinota” (make your independence heard) – because, again, the way to express one’s freedom is by talking on the cell phone. Telecommunications company AKtel also advertises its latest packages saying, “Talk for less in this month of celebration”.

The above advertisements have two types of messages as discussed above (Heath, Brandt and Nairn 2006, Screti 2013) – emotional messages which draw upon the themes of independence, freedom, victory and patriotism; and rational messages, which state facts and information about the product or service being advertised. Such ads play on the notion of material objects as our ‘extended selves,’ where consumption is (shown to be) the process through which meanings such as national identity are created, communicated and circulated (Wang 2006: 190).

Besides advertising actual products and services, telecom companies also advertise projects they have taken up which focus on the Liberation War. For example, Grameenphone, in association with the daily Prothom Alo, placed an advertisement on Victory Day 2008 calling for letters written during the war which inspired the freedom fighters. Such advertisements, while not aimed at selling any particular products or services, contribute to the image-building of the company and brand as patriotic and nationalist.
Companies continue to brand themselves in relation to the spirit and values of the Liberation War/independence/victory. Concord Development Company takes the opportunity on Victory Day to advertise itself as the proud builder of the Sritishoudho (National Martyrs’ Memorial) in just 89 days (back in 1982), with a large picture of the monument accompanied by lines from a well-known patriotic song. Mutual Trust Bank Ltd. spells out what they believe in – united resistance against the enemy, the ability to hold one’s head high in the world, and the people’s (via the bank’s) contribution to protecting the independence and sovereignty of the nation. This is accompanied by an image comprising three generations of a family against a background of the Bangladeshi flag.

Also beginning to be featured in 2008 are social awareness-raising advertisements, for example, anti-drug campaigns by the Narcotics Control Department, information on agriculture sponsored by the Agriculture Information Service, and soil-testing by the Soil Resource Development Institute, etc. The ad by the Narcotics Control Department placed in almost every newspaper in both 2008 and 2018 – with a line of tribute to the martyrs and freedom fighters of the war, which has brought these ads in the purview of this study – is also a reflection of contemporary Bangladeshi society and the concerns which plague it. The year 2008 is also the first time we see the issue of women’s rights being highlighted – in an ad by the Women’s Affairs Ministry outlining women’s legal and social rights, health issues, etc. A photograph of the Aparajeyo Bangla split in the middle along with the accompanying text which talks about the Language Movement of 1952, the Liberation War of 1971, etc., highlights the importance of unity, including that of women and men in society. Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), an organization which works on corruption, claims in its advertisement placed on Independence Day that corruption is a barrier to fulfilling the dreams of independence, and that it is their Independence Day commitment to root out corruption. It may be noted that Bangladesh has been ranking as one of the most corrupt nations in the world for the last several years.

Another notable trend that starts around this time is offers and discounts – other than those of mobile phone operators – on the occasions of Independence and Victory Day. For example, Heritage restaurant’s
“Victory Day attractive offer” is kachchi biriyani (a mixed rice originating from the Muslims of the Indian sub-continent) for only Tk. 200. The product has no relation whatsoever to the occasion but the occasion is used to promote the offer/product and brand, in this case, the restaurant. Shoppers World asks its clients to celebrate Independence Day with a 10% discount and Diamond World with a 20% discount on its products from March 26-28. Other than a circle of hands with the green and red Bangladesh flag painted on their arms holding up an enlarged diamond flower, and the offer being valid from March 26 to 28, there is no relation whatsoever to the occasion but it is still used to promote the offer. On a more somber note, Premier Bank advertises its “50+ Account” with special facilities as “Not return, but respect” for the brave children of independence, senior citizens over 50 years of age whose generation contributed to the war and in gaining independence for the nation. An elderly man is shown looking nostalgically into a photo frame containing a photograph of men holding up placards in protest. According to the body copy of the ad, the package is for those whose contribution to the nation is endless, who led us by the hand to the Bangladesh we have today, and to whom we owe it to make their lives more comfortable.

A common frame this decade is that of the future generation, embodied in children bearing, wearing, drawing and painting the green and red Bangladeshi flag, and children’s hand prints in the colors of the flag. From advertisements for banks to steel companies, children are featured in the frame of a patriotic, nationalistic future generation which will take the country forward using the products and services of the companies being advertised. For example, an advertisement for Arab-Bangladesh Bank depicts a father and daughter coloring the Bangladeshi flag together, with the headline saying, “The meaning of independence is the resonance of its spirit from generation to generation”. A thought-provoking ad placed on Victory Day in the daily Prothom Alo by the newspaper itself consists of a large image of the parliament building in Bangladesh with light behind the building causing its reflection to appear on the lake in front of it. The headline of the ad calls for the light of victory to change Bangladesh, for the spirit of victory to light up the parliament, and for the fate of 15 crore people to change. It may be noted that it was at the end of December 2008
that the parliamentary elections were held under the military-backed caretaker government in hopes of a new and democratic government coming to power.

2018 – Personalizing the politics of memory

The year 2018 was an interesting year in Bangladeshi politics. After their 1996-2001 tenure, the Awami League returned to power in 2009 with a landslide victory. They won a second consecutive term in the 2014 elections, though the main opposition party did not participate in the polls and the Awami League came to power uncontested. The 2018 elections were held on December 30, thus the year leading up to the elections was interesting, politically speaking. In the end, the Awami League won its third consecutive term, amidst allegations of irregularities.

The interesting feature of advertisements published in 2018 across all four newspapers which were a part of this study is that almost all of them were placed by banks. Of the 14 ads published on March 26 in Dainik Ittefaq, eight are of banks, with a few others placed by government agencies
and of the 10 ads published on December 16, eight are of banks. It is a similar trend across the three other newspapers.

This year, in an ad placed by Standard Bank in Dainik Sangbad, Dainik Janakantha, and Prothom Alo, as well as in an ad placed jointly by four government banks (Sonali, Agrani, Janata and Rupali), there is the famous photograph of the surrender of the Pakistani forces to the Indian army by the signing of a treaty between Pakistani General AAK Niazi and Indian army General Officer Commanding-in-Chief Jagjit Singh Arora on December 16, 1971. After 1972, this is the first time we find the presence of India/the Indian army in any advertisement. Whereas, almost all other advertisements published over the years focus on the role of the Bengali martyrs and freedom fighters of the war, this photograph, for the first time, highlights the role of India in the peace process. If nothing else, this points to the positive relationship between the Awami League and the Indian government, which has been the subject of much controversy.

Offers and discounts continue to be advertised in 2018. An ad published on December 16 in both Janakantha and Prothom Alo, relates “Victory on the 16th, achievement on the 16th”, with a 16% discount on selected grocery stores with a Prime Bank-JCB card “in the month of victory, to spread the joy of victory”. Walton company’s “Victory celebration” is observed through a winter festival where purchase of a laptop comes with free accessories. Duranta Cycles relates victory with freedom of mobility, which the company provides people through its products.

The most frequently used images in advertisements regardless of the type of company or product/service advertised is the Sritishoudho, emblematic of the nation’s victory. Poems and songs are also used in several of the advertisements. Some are famous poems, such as renowned Bangladeshi poet Shamsur Rahman’s “Swadhinota” (Independence), and the song “Ek shagoro raukter binimoye Banglar swadhinota anle jara, amra tomader bhulbona” (We will not forget you who brought independence to Bengal at the cost of a sea of blood), “Mora ekti phool ke bachabo bole juddho kori” (We go to war to save one flower), “Ekti Bangladesh tumi jagroto janotar, shara biswer bishmoy, tumi amar
"auhonkar" (One and only Bangladesh, you belong to the awakened/rising people, the world’s amazement, you are my pride); while others are lesser known poems or newly written verses for the body copy.

Also in 2018, we see an increased personalization of politics. Not only is Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman featured in some ads, especially those placed by government agencies such as the Ministry for Health and Family Welfare, the Department of Family Planning, and the Bangladesh Shishu (Children’s) Academy, but the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, is featured in some ads as well. For example, an ad placed jointly by the four government-owned banks – Sonali, Agrani, Janata and Rupali – on March 26 is themed around the increased joy on Independence Day this year with Bangladesh having fulfilled the eligibility criteria set forth by the United Nations (UN) to be recognized as a developing country (graduating from a least developed country or LDC). Though the formal transition will occur in 2024, the milestone has already begun to be celebrated in Bangladesh, and, with development being one of the key discourses being propagated as a major achievement of and by the Awami League government, it is probably only fitting that such an advertisement feature an image of Bangabandhu and a smiling photograph of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.
VIII

Frames and Discourses

This study has found a number of frames and discourses in the advertisements published in national dailies on the Independence and Victory Days of Bangladesh in the last five decades. The most common and lasting frames are those of development, war/conflict, sacrifice, gratitude, patriotism, and, finally, a corporate nationalism. In all advertisements throughout the decades, the key theme has been the glorification of war, with little or no reference to the ravages of war.

In newly independent Bangladesh, the advertisements of the 1970s focused on national development, with a promise to build the nation, contribute to its economic development/progress/growth. As an advertisement placed by Ajax Jute Mills in both the Dainik Ittefaq and the Dainik Sangbad in March 1972 stated, armed struggle had ended, now the struggle was to rebuild the nation. Both text and visuals of most advertisements emphasized new beginnings, derived from poetry and song and symbolized through images of rising suns and fertile rural imagery. In 1972 and 1978, we see a dominance of government-owned companies, as well as smaller, local industries. There is also a trend of several companies, for example banks, advertising together, which does not occur in later years except for some government banks advertising as a group. In 1972, but not in 1978, we see the presence of India and Indian companies in the advertisements, which we do not in later decades. Similarly, after 1972 and the end of Awami League rule in 1975, there is no reference to the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman until the Awami League returns to power decades later. These two trends—or their lack thereof—point to the fact that the government in power, whether directly or indirectly, has a bearing on what advertisements will be published in the media and who will be featured in them.
Advertisements in the 1980s continued the emphasis on industrial and economic development, but also highlighted the strength and invincibility of the nation and the ideals on which the war of independence were based. There is no apparent personalization of politics in this era.

In the 1990s, we see greater focus on the spirit of the independence movement, pride in victory, and the importance of upholding the values of the Liberation War. It may be argued that this form of emphasis may have been derived, at least in part, in relation to the Awami League, which led the war of independence in 1971, coming to power again in 1996 with a renewed commitment to upholding the ideals and values of the war.

In the 2000s, we see greater commodification in terms of products and services advertised, for example, cell phone operators, but also in the linkages between the brands and the theme of independence and victory, with special packages and offers being promoted on these special occasions. This continues into 2018, with the greatest number of advertisements being placed by mostly private banks, as well as various government agencies. We see a gradual shift in advertising by government-owned companies, utility companies, and smaller local industries and companies in the 1970s to bigger, national and multinational companies in the 2000s. For example, from government-owned jute and textile mills, herbal and other small medicine companies advertising in 1972 and 1978, we see a dominance of ads by cellular phone operators and private banks in 2008 and 2018.

The sheer number of advertisements published during the different eras also showed a discrepancy, with the most ads published in the year following independence and from 2008 onwards. This could be a reflection of the politics, with the Awami League in power during these years, or the steadily growing market economy of Bangladesh in the 21st century, or a combination of both. In all advertisements throughout the decades, the greatest importance has been placed on remembering, expressing gratitude and paying tribute to the martyrs and freedom fighters of the war. This
obviously contributes to the branding of companies as patriotic, nationalist and pro-liberation – an image that has become increasingly important in Bangladesh. But there is also a noticeable discursive shift in focus – from being on the war, independence and nation-building, to emphasis on commodities and the freedom to purchase and enjoy in a consumer society. In the guise of, or using discourses of nationalism and promoting, for example, patriotic songs as cellular phone ringtones, etc., companies ultimately market their own products and services. Like the theme of love on Valentine’s Day, or religious festivals such as Eid, Independence and Victory Day, too, have become marketable days for corporate companies. This is most visible when products and services which have nothing to do with independence and victory, are related to these themes, for example, 16% discounts on December 16, or discounts on everything from food to diamond jewelry. In this way, these days of national significance become just like any other sale day, the goal being increased sales and profit.

In terms of presentation, there is a change in language and style over the decades. Whereas in the earlier decades, language was more complex, more creative and flowery, there was more use of poetry and song, in the later years, we see language becoming simpler, more direct, and, indeed, more commercial in the last decade.

Images used range from sketches and abstract paintings of freedom fighters at war, to typical rural Bangladeshi imagery in the 1970s and 1980s, with more focus on memorials and monuments such as the Sritishoudho and the Aparajeyo Bangla from the 1990s onwards. Some companies illustrate their products and services, while others, such as the cellular phone operators discussed above, use symbols of freedom and patriotism to illustrate the services they provide their clients to enable them to enjoy their hard-earned freedom to the fullest. We also see the presence and re-emergence of quotes and photos/illustrations of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and, in some ads, Sheikh Hasina, during the periods in
which the Awami League was/is in power, while other national leaders during other regimes were not found to be featured.

**Discursive Divides**

As Wang has pointed out, ‘The emotional power of nationalism draws not mainly from the prowess of the nation-state but more from the symbols in the nation’s depository of history’ (2006: 202). Howell (1991) has noted the importance of history, context, ideology and discursive formations, and in the case of advertisements specifically, ideological themes, narratives and images, arguing that ‘what gives any text or set of texts its effective meaning is the way it is inserted or articulated into this ideological complex’ (Howell 1991: 261). ‘Articulation is always a production. It is not a historical given. If there are no guarantees as to how texts, events, and practices are articulated together, and into broader ideological configurations, then there are always alternative articulations’ (Howell 1991: 269). Quoting Grossberg (1986), Howell talks about the politics of the everyday – ‘the ongoing struggle to forge links, to direct the identity of events, texts, and practices, to articulate the existence, meaning, and effect of such events, texts, and practices that are not guaranteed in advance’ (Howell 1991: 269). Similarly, in the case of advertising in Bangladesh, history and politics, more than anything, have determined the discourses to be used even in promoting commercial products and services, and these discourses have changed over the decades depending on the governments/political parties in power.

The use of history and historical symbols but through shifting discourses across different political regimes is evident in Bangladeshi advertising—not least because several media owners are also politicians and Members of Parliament, mostly aligned with the government. As Caldarola (1994) notes, meaning is never intrinsic to cultural artifacts such as media programmes, but assigned by producers, distributors, audiences, and in the case of mass media, policy makers (p. 67). The influence of politics on the
media and advertising industries is confirmed by some of the top advertising agencies.

In a personal interview with Nazim Farhan Choudhury, Managing Director at Adcomm Ltd., one of the oldest advertising agencies in Bangladesh, he stated that advertising has been a reflection of the politics of the nation. From the mid-1970s and throughout the 1980s, there was no reflection into the war of 1971, focus was on national development, and there was little to no focus on individual leaders in advertisements. With the advent of democracy, the 1990s was an optimistic decade for Bangladesh, with hopes in the new democratic (BNP) government, new ambitions, and belief in oneself, being some key characteristics of the people. When the Awami League came to power in 1996, conversations about the War of Liberation and what it meant to be Bangladeshi began to take place. In 2001, in Bangladesh, the BNP returned to power, and in the US, 9/11 happened. With the West’s focus on Muslim nations and people as just that – Muslim – questions of identity also became an issue among Bangladeshis – whether they were Muslim first or Bengali. Brands also picked up on this, says Choudhury. Multinational corporations, in having to compete with local brands and their nationalistic claim, began to focus on Bengali culture and identity, using everything from folk music to the electric guitar in their advertisements, for example, and highlighted Bengali (more than Muslim) as well as a global identity. In the culture scene, young musicians began to remix traditional Bengali music into fusion pop, underground bands incorporated Bengali love songs into rock, all of which were used in various advertisements. Everyone was promoting this narrative of Bengali culture, identity and self-expression. There was more use of the flag as a symbol of this. Telco AKtel rebranded itself as “Robi”, meaning sun in Bengali. With political violence, instability and the advent of a military-backed caretaker government in 2006-07, the country was divided right down the middle, says Choudhury, and the Bengali-or-Muslim question shifted to “Are you AL or are you BNP?” with AL being branded as Bengali-focused and BNP
as Muslim-focused. When the Awami League again came to power in 2009 in a landslide victory, this increased. The party/government focused on the war and the war crimes trial. They realized there were at least a couple of generations who hadn’t experienced the war firsthand and they needed to be made aware of it. According to Choudhury, they needed a symbol to rally everybody around, and while the flag belonged to everyone, Bangabandhu was their own and so became their trademark. Before this, businesses had stayed out of politics for the most part, but in the last 10 years, they have had to take sides, and understandably, most take the side of those in power in order to survive. And so board members of client companies specify that an image of Bangabandhu must be used in their ads, or that ads must be placed on Sheikh Russell’s (Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s younger son) birthday, with even banks owned by BNP leaders using smiling photographs of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in their ads, which must be featured on front pages of newspapers. Some companies take a middle ground, without featuring the personalities but by focusing on the development of the nation (as development is a major discourse of the ruling Awami League), or on sports, using cricket celebrities and victories to celebrate patriotism. In Choudhury’s opinion, nationalistic advertising will continue.²

In a personal interview with Tropa Majumdar, Director and Creative Head of advertising agency Expressions Ltd., she stated that advertisers in Bangladesh, where everything, including nationalism, is politicized, making it “vulnerable” and “biased”, corporate companies and advertising agencies have risen above this, albeit for their own business needs, to reflect a more neutral definition and discourse of nationalism. For the most part, nationalistic discourse in advertising will not depend on which of the two

² Nazim Farhan Choudhury, Managing Director, Adcomm. Personal interview. November 8, 2019, conducted at the Adcomm office in Tejgaon, Dhaka.
major political parties is in power. This is the positive side of corporatization in Bangladesh, asserts Majumdar. On a less positive note, corporate companies and advertisers are also selling nationalism, she says, noting, however, the need to distinguish between business or sponsorship and support. When companies support a theatre festival, for example, or conduct a program to collect letters written during the Liberation War, Majumdar believes there is nothing wrong with this social business as it is something they should be doing, as long as they don’t interfere or try to sell their products and services through such programs, even if it promotes their brand. However, if you need a company’s app to download patriotic songs or advertise a 16% discount for Victory Day on December 16 with companies capitalizing on the nation and nationalism to sell their products and services, this is “disgraceful”. Majumdar believes that the government should intervene. While there are laws and guidelines regarding the news media, the advertising industry in Bangladesh have free rein. There should be strict ethical guidelines on what can and cannot be used in advertising, especially in terms of the nation and nationalism. Also, media and communications educators, and intellectuals and civil society in general must play a role in creating this awareness of the spirit, values and pride in our war of independence and not capitalize on it for commercial purposes.\(^3\)

The analysis above, as well as the interviews, have revealed three things: one, that nationalistic-based discourse is a key theme of Bangladeshi advertisements published on its Independence and Victory Days; two, that these discursive constructions depend largely on the political context and the parties/governments in power; and three, that while a trend of corporate nationalism is evident, advertisers base their work on points one and two,

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\(^3\) Tropa Majumdar, Director and Creative Head, Expressions. Personal interview. October 29, 2019, conducted at the University of Dhaka.
i.e., using nationalistic discourse while keeping in mind the political context and the discursive shifts based on it.

Silk, Andrews and Cole (2005) write of the nation being ‘corporatized, and reduced to a branded expression of global capitalism’s commandeering of collective identity and memory’ (p. 7). Within the context of globalization, nations have increasingly become the object of both production and consumption, with citizens being transformed into consumers, and how this transformation is driven by corporate nationalism, a process that seeks to capitalize on the nation as a source of collective identification (Jackson 2013). In the case of Bangladesh, it may be argued that the nation is not only corporatized, but also politicized, and reduced to a branded expression of different governments’ and/or political parties’ versions of collective identity and memory, patriotism and nationalism. With the Awami League in power for the last 12 years, its “brand” of nationalism and nationalistic discourse are most dominant and contribute to constructions of the politics of memory. But, as long as the basic politics is adhered to, that is, acknowledging and highlighting the “correct” history, political figures and contributions, advertisers are essentially free to use whatever means necessary to promote their brands, products and services.
IX

Conclusion

As Leela Fernandes has argued in the case of India:

Visual representations of newly available commodities provide a lens through which we can view the ways in which meanings attached to such commodities weave together narratives of nationhood and development with the production of middle-class identity. If the historical emergence of modern nationalism has been linked to the rise of what Benedict Anderson has called ‘print nationalism’, the imagination of the nation in the more recent historical past is inextricably bound to capitalist technologies of visions (Fernandes 2000: 615).

This study, in its analysis of post-war to contemporary advertising in Bangladeshi newspapers has found a gradual shift from a nationalistic discourse focusing on nation-building to a nationalistic-based discourse connected to a growing consumer culture. This is probably to be expected in a country whose GDP per capita has risen steadily from 1972 (-13.974) to the present (7.864 in 2018). What is interesting is that not only has nationalistic fervor not declined with time, but has actually increased, and is being cleverly linked to the various companies, their products and services, even to a point of commodification of the actual notions of independence and victory, while also contributing to the construction of citizens’ identities as pro-liberation, patriotic and nationalist. As Rajgopal (1998) has pointed out, advertising is a reflection of how markets are being shaped, not only in terms of price and income segmentation, ‘but also and perhaps more importantly, in the aesthetic forms and rhetorical structures through which the attention of consumers is sought, and their desires aroused’ (Rajgopal 1998: 17).
“Mediated memory” has contributed to the “politics of memory,” with the audience focusing on only some aspects of the War of Liberation, such as paying respect and tribute to the martyrs and freedom fighters. History and its heroes, symbols and images, poetry and song, are all used to invoke a “banal nationalism”. The values on which the war was based, namely, nationalism, socialism, secularism and democracy, do not play a significant role in these representations. These complex themes are not the ones on which advertising companies choose to focus. They focus on the meta-themes of freedom and independence, which they can then relate to their products and services by suggesting that people use their freedom to avail them. By doing so, somewhere along the way, the focus on country shifts to focus on the client/consumer, and values of patriotism and nationalism morph into a form of corporate nationalism.

The study has also found that the political dynamics of the nation influence quite heavily expressions and demonstrations of patriotism and nationalism. While war, independence and victory related discourses are used, which themes are highlighted and which political figures are featured, depend largely on which party/government is in power.

This paper provides a critical study of the politics of post-war advertising, which can be applied to other nations and cultures to see if similar trends have occurred. It is, however, limited to print advertisements. In Bangladesh, as is the case around the world, broadcast media have developed in leaps and bounds in the last two decades, and advertising companies also focus their attention and investment on television advertising. Cellular phone companies in particular, as shown in this case too, have used television advertisements and the advantages of audio-visual media, moving images and touching music, widely, creatively and emotionally, focusing on the theme of the liberation war, nationalism and patriotism. Thus, such a study can be extended to electronic media and also digital/online media and advertising. In terms of cultural contexts,
comparative case studies can be conducted to see how war discourse is used in advertising in particular and in the media in general in post-conflict societies. In the case of Bangladesh, this year, with the 100th birth anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh’s independence in 2021, should prove even more interesting and rich a resource for research on advertising and the media in general in relation to the War of Liberation, commemoration and memorialization, and constructions of memory. As such, this study and extensions of it can contribute to the academic fields of history, memory studies, media studies and advertising. It can provide an understanding of war memories, remembrance and commemoration in the context of a South Asian nation where war discourse is significant not only on national days but in the everyday, and its implications for nations and citizens in the present.
References


CGS-Square Fellowship
An Initiative for developing the liberal future

Square today symbolized a name - a state of mind in the business world. From its inception in 1958, Square has today burgeoned into one of the topmost conglomerates in Bangladesh. Square started out as a small-scale pharmaceutical venture in 1958. By its fourth year square turned into a profit-making organization. During last 5 decades, Square has become pioneer in diversified fields of business starting from pharmaceuticals to healthcare, Textiles to Readymate Garments, Toiletries to Consumer Goods Information & Communication technology to media. Its present unassailable status is the outcome of its successful diversification. The relentless pursuit for excellence; the urge to never stand still, to never slow down and to never stop thinking, Square looks at the future with increasing confidence. Square intends not only to strengthen its strong local footings but also extend its global presence.

Square’s activity goes well beyond adhering to a business. As a socially conscious and responsible corporate body, Square is committed to the improvement of the society as a whole. Wellbeing of consumer, employee and society are the three foundation pillars of the values and principles of Square. To set an example worth emulating in the worldwide prevention of genocide, University of Dhaka Centre for Genocide Studies (CGS) and Square Toiletries jointly arranged a 3-year long Fellowship Program “CGS-Square Fellowship 2015-2017 to create awareness about this global phenomenon. Patronizing issues of the own boundary is one of the major activities that Square are willingly doing every day. Thus, we are keeping our foothold is not only cultural, recreational or sports rather issues like genocide that are quite important for showcasing the long history of our country thus widen our scope of understanding for the liberal future.

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