Brand Power and the Politics of the Seam: A Marketing and Public-Relations Analysis of Global Value-Chain Governance, Purchasing Practices, and Reputational Risk in Bangladesh's Ready-Made Garments Sector

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ABSTRACT

Bangladesh's Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector is conventionally analyzed as a problem of trade policy and labor economics. This paper argues that it is equally, and increasingly, a problem of marketing, advertising, and public relations. Global apparel value chains are buyer-driven: lead brands exercise structural power not through ownership of production but through control of design, orders, pricing, and, critically, the communication channels through which garments reach consumers. Using a qualitative, literature-based case-study method, this paper reframes the political economy of Bangladesh's RMG sector through five marketing-communication lenses: (1) purchasing practices as a failure of value-chain communication; (2) crisis communication and corporate reputation management following mass-casualty industrial disasters; (3) corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication, greenwashing, and the consumer authenticity gap; (4) country-of-origin branding of the "Made in Bangladesh" label; and (5) stakeholder activism and digital transparency movements. The analysis shows that the sector's low-wage "race to the bottom" is sustained not only by trade rules but by asymmetries in brand communication power, and that sustainable upgrading requires coordinated action in purchasing practice, crisis communication ethics, CSR message authenticity, and nation-brand strategy. The paper concludes with integrated marketing-communication and public-relations recommendations for brands, factory owners, the Bangladeshi state, and international buyers.

Keywords: global value chains; purchasing practices; corporate social responsibility communication; crisis communication; greenwashing; country-of-origin branding; stakeholder theory; Bangladesh; ready-made garments; fashion marketing

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh's Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector is the world's second-largest apparel exporter, generating more than 80% of the country's export revenue, contributing roughly 11% of gross domestic product, and employing over four million workers, most of them women [1], [2]. The sector is routinely studied as a case in trade policy, industrial relations, and development economics. Yet at its core, the RMG sector is a marketing-channel phenomenon: it exists because global apparel brands and retailers (H&M, Zara, Walmart, Gap, Primark, and others) design buyer-driven value chains in which sourcing, pricing, and product positioning decisions are made in London, New York, and Stockholm while manufacturing risk is displaced to Dhaka and Chattogram [1]. Understanding why the sector generates simultaneous economic growth and human security deficits therefore requires tools not only from political economy but from marketing channel theory, corporate communication, and public relations.

This paper undertakes a discipline-shift: it takes an existing body of political-economy analysis of Bangladesh's RMG sector and re-reads it through the lens of advertising, marketing, and public relations scholarship. The central claim is that the sector's central tension, export growth alongside labor precarity, is mediated at every stage by communication. Purchasing practices are themselves a form of channel communication (or its failure).

Industrial disasters such as the 2013 Rana Plaza collapse are, from the perspective of the brands involved, above all crises of reputation and image [3], [4]. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) reporting by apparel brands is a communication artifact whose credibility is contested by scholars of greenwashing [5], [6]. The country label "Made in Bangladesh" functions as a country-of-origin cue that shapes consumer perception and willingness to pay [7]. And grassroots movements such as Fashion Revolution's "Who made my clothes?" campaign are, in effect, a stakeholder-driven public-relations counter-offensive against brand silence [8].

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 develops a theoretical framework combining global value chain (GVC) governance theory, stakeholder theory, and crisis- and CSR-communication theory. Section 3 outlines the qualitative method and its limitations. Section 4 summarizes the sector's economic context. Section 5 presents the core marketing-and-PR reframing across seven themes. Section 6 offers integrated marketing-communication recommendations, and Section 7 concludes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Global Value Chain Governance as a Marketing-Channel Problem

Gereffi's foundational distinction between producer-driven and buyer-driven commodity chains identifies apparel as the archetypal buyer-driven industry: large retailers and branded marketers, rather than manufacturers, set the terms of production through decentralized networks of contract suppliers [1], [9]. Gereffi, Humphrey, and Sturgeon later refined this into a five-fold typology of value-chain governance (market, modular, relational, captive, and hierarchical) determined by the complexity of transactions, the ability to codify product specifications, and supplier capability [2].

Bangladesh's RMG sector sits predominantly in the captive quadrant: suppliers are highly dependent on a small number of powerful lead firms who dictate price, lead time, and compliance standards while retaining the flexibility to switch suppliers at low cost [1], [2]. From a marketing-channel perspective, this is a case of extreme power asymmetry between channel captain (the buyer) and channel member (the factory), in which the captain's control extends not merely to product specification but to the communicative framing of the entire chain: what gets disclosed to consumers, and what does not.

Structural Power and Stakeholder Communication

Susan Strange's concept of structural power (the capacity to shape outcomes through control of production, finance, security, and knowledge structures rather than through direct coercion) remains a live analytic tool in international political economy [10]. Applied to marketing, structural power operates through control of the knowledge structure: brands control what consumers know about supply-chain conditions, and this informational asymmetry is itself a competitive asset. Freeman's stakeholder approach to strategic management offers a complementary marketing lens, arguing that a firm's legitimacy and long-run performance depend on managing relationships with all parties who can affect or are affected by its objectives, including workers, unions, NGOs, and consumers, not only shareholders [11]. Read together, Strange and Freeman suggest that a brand's reputational capital is partly built on selectively communicating with, or strategically not communicating with, different value-chain stakeholders.

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Crisis Communication, Image Repair, and CSR Communication Theory

Public relations scholarship offers three further theoretical tools deployed in this paper. First, Benoit's image repair theory identifies the discursive strategies (denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, mortification) organizations use after an offensive act damages their reputation [12]. Second, Coombs' situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) argues that the appropriate crisis response strategy should be matched to the level of attributed organizational responsibility and the reputational threat a crisis poses [13], [14]. Third, the growing literature on CSR communication and greenwashing examines how firms manage the gap between sustainability claims and sustainability performance, and how consumers detect and penalize perceived inauthenticity [5], [6], [15], [16]. Together, these frameworks allow the RMG sector's recurring industrial disasters and its CSR reporting practices to be read not simply as ethical failures but as identifiable, theorizable communication strategies with predictable stakeholder consequences.

Table 1. Theoretical Frameworks Applied in This Paper

Framework	Key source(s)	Core concept	Application in this paper
GVC governance theory	Gereffi [1]; Gereffi, Humphrey & Sturgeon [2]	Five governance modes (market, modular, relational, captive, hierarchical) set by transaction complexity and supplier capability	Positions Bangladeshi factories as captive suppliers to buyer “channel captains”
Structural power theory	Strange [10]	Power exercised through control of production, finance, and knowledge structures rather than coercion	Explains brands’ control over what supply-chain information reaches consumers
Stakeholder theory	Freeman & McVea [11]	Firm legitimacy depends on managing relationships with all affected parties, not only shareholders	Frames workers, unions, NGOs, and consumers as communication stakeholders
Image repair theory	Benoit [12]	Discursive strategies (denial, evasion, corrective action, mortification) used after reputational damage	Explains brand responses to Rana Plaza and related disasters
Situational crisis communication theory (SCCT)	Coombs [13]; Coombs & Holladay [14]	Crisis response should match attributed responsibility and reputational threat	Evaluates whether brand crisis responses were proportionate to the harm caused

Research Questions and Method

This paper addresses three research questions. RQ1: How do the purchasing and pricing practices of global apparel brands function as a form of (failed) value-chain communication? RQ2: How have marketing, advertising, and public-relations dynamics (crisis communication, CSR messaging, country-of-origin branding, and stakeholder activism) shaped both the reputational trajectory of Bangladesh's RMG sector and the material conditions of its workforce? RQ3: What integrated marketing-communication strategies could reconcile brand reputational interests with sustainable development outcomes in the sector?

The paper uses a qualitative, interpretive case-study method, synthesizing secondary sources: peer-reviewed literature in international political economy, marketing, and public relations; industry and NGO reports; and reputable business and trade press. This method is appropriate for a conceptual reframing exercise of this kind but carries clear limitations, discussed in Section 7: most importantly, the absence of new primary data (surveys, interviews, or content analysis of brand communications) means that claims about consumer perception and brand strategy are drawn from existing empirical studies rather than generated afresh.

Sector Context: A Brand-Dependent Economy

The origins of Bangladesh's RMG industry lie in the late 1970s, when export-oriented industrialization strategy intersected with the global Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA), which created incentives for firms in quota-restricted countries to relocate production to quota-free Bangladesh [17].A 1978 partnership between Bangladesh's Desh Garments and South Korea's Daewoo Corporation established the country's first fully export-oriented garment factory and transferred both production technology and marketing know-how [17].

When the MFA expired in 2005, predictions of Bangladeshi decline proved wrong: the sector instead consolidated its position as the world's second-largest apparel exporter, with the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) emerging as a powerful intermediary between factory owners, the state, and global buyers [1].

Yet the growth narrative conceals a communications and distribution paradox that is directly relevant to marketing scholarship: export revenues tripled between roughly 2010 and 2023 while employment remained essentially flat at around four million workers, a pattern of "jobless growth" consistent with automation in a sector still positioned by its buyers primarily as a low-cost "cut-make-trim" assembler rather than a full-service, design-capable supplier [18]. Figure 1 illustrates this widening gap between export revenue and employment over the period.

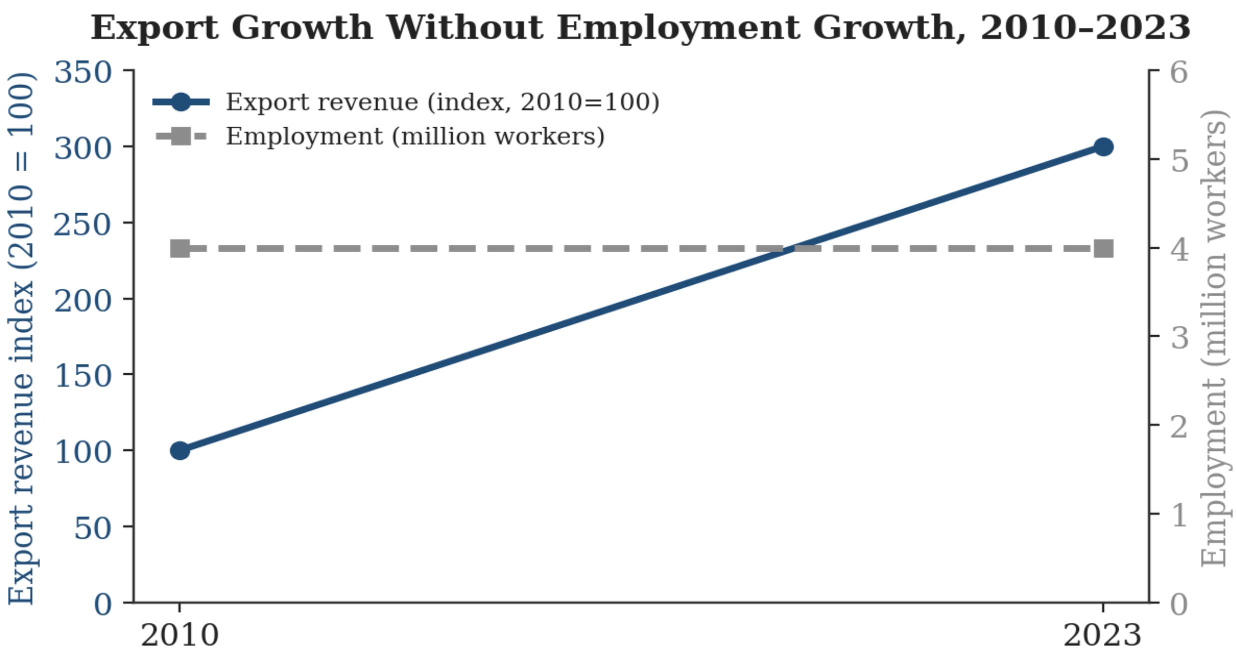

Figure 1. Export revenue growth outpacing employment growth, 2010–2023, illustrating the sector's “jobless growth” pattern.

The 2025 minimum wage of roughly USD 113 per month (about USD 0.80 per hour) falls well short of independently estimated living-wage benchmarks of around USD 300 per month, even as the sector accounts for 84% of Bangladesh's total exports [19]. Figure 2 sets the statutory minimum against this living-wage estimate.

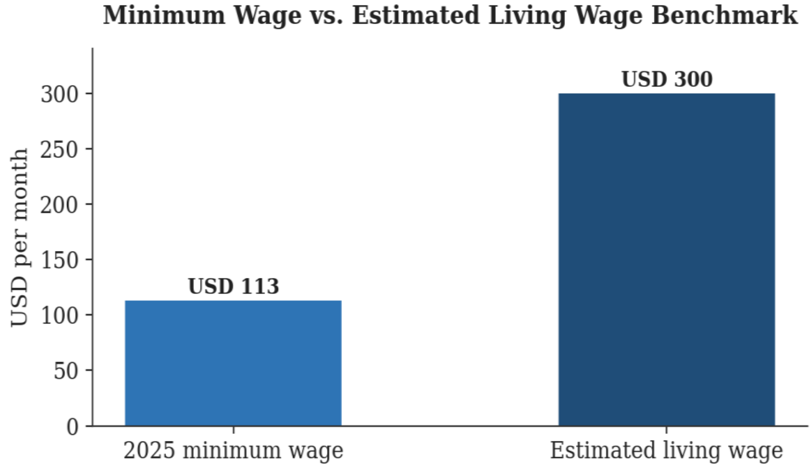

Figure 2. Gap between the 2025 statutory minimum wage and the independently estimated living-wage benchmark.

This concentration (over 60% of RMG exports go to the European Union and roughly 20% to the United States) leaves both the Bangladeshi economy and the brands that source from it acutely exposed to demand shocks and policy shifts in a narrow set of foreign markets, as COVID-19 demonstrated when brands cancelled an estimated USD 40 billion in orders globally [3]. Figure 3 breaks down this export-market concentration.

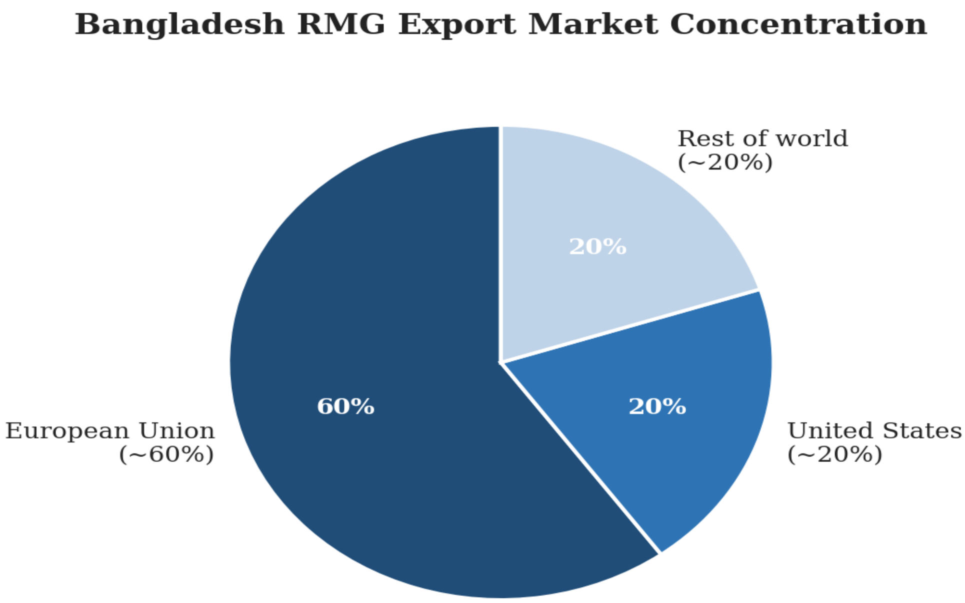

Figure 3. Concentration of Bangladesh's RMG export markets across the European Union, the United States, and the rest of the world.

Table 2 consolidates these sector-level indicators for reference.

Table 2. Key Indicators of Bangladesh's RMG Sector

Indicator	Value	Source
Share of national export revenue	> 80%	[1], [2]
Contribution to GDP	~ 11%	[1], [2]

Workers employed	> 4 million (majority women)	[1], [2]
Share of total exports (2025)	84%	[19]
2025 minimum wage	~ USD 113 / month	[19]
Estimated living wage benchmark	~ USD 300 / month	[19]
Export share to European Union	> 60%	[3]
Export share to United States	~ 20%	[3]
Orders cancelled globally at COVID-19 onset	~ USD 40 billion	[3]

Findings and Discussion: A Marketing and Public-Relations Reframing

This section reframes Bangladesh's RMG sector through five marketing-and-PR lenses, sketched conceptually in Figure 4 and outlined in Table 3, before each is developed in turn in Sections 5.1–5.5.

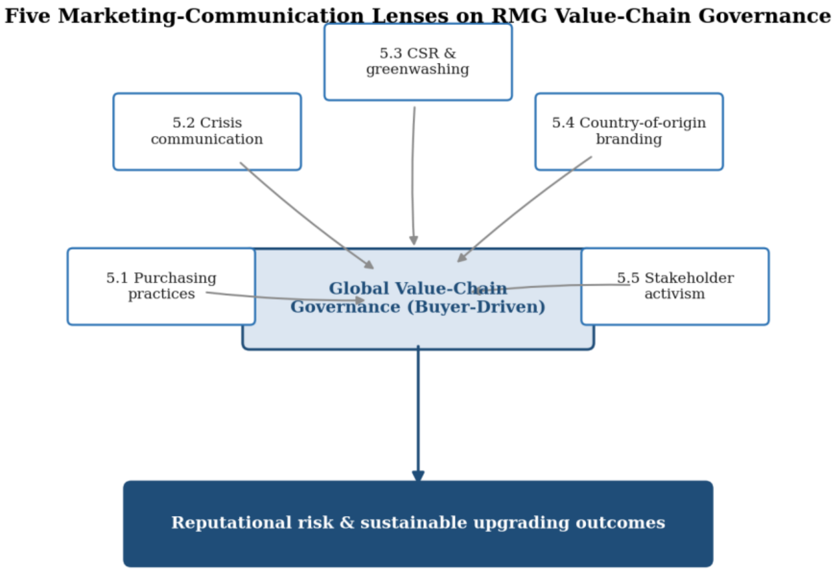

Figure 4. Conceptual map of the five marketing-communication lenses applied to buyer-driven value-chain governance in this paper.

Table 3. Overview of the Five Marketing-and-PR Reframing Themes

Section	Theme	Core mechanism
5.1	Purchasing practices	Price and lead-time squeezes function as a failure of value-chain communication
5.2	Crisis communication	Post-disaster image-repair strategies tested against SCCT predictions
5.3	CSR communication & greenwashing	Gap between published sustainability claims and verifiable performance
5.4	Country-of-origin branding	“Made in Bangladesh” as an under-leveraged nation-brand asset
5.5	Stakeholder activism	Digital transparency campaigns filling the disclosure vacuum left by brands

Purchasing Practices as a Failure of Value-Chain Communication

Anner's empirical study of Bangladesh's garment export sector documents a "price squeeze" and a "sourcing squeeze": lead firms pay progressively lower unit prices to suppliers while simultaneously demanding shorter lead times and higher order volatility [3]. From a marketing-channel perspective, this is best understood as a communication failure embedded in contractual practice. Following the 2023 minimum-wage increase in Bangladesh, roughly 79% of buyers did not raise the prices they paid suppliers, forcing factories to absorb the increase or default on the legally mandated wage. This is a case in which the brand's public communication (support for "fair wages," published in CSR reports and supplier codes of conduct) diverges sharply from its private channel behavior (refusal to adjust purchase price to reflect the cost of compliance), precisely the authenticity gap that greenwashing scholarship identifies as corrosive to brand trust once it becomes visible to end consumers [5], [15], [16]. Anner's comparative work on the Indian garment sector demonstrates that this predatory purchasing dynamic is not unique to Bangladesh but is a structural feature of buyer-driven apparel value chains generally, rooted in growing power asymmetries between lead firms and increasingly commoditized supplier bases.

A related communication failure concerns supply-chain disclosure. Ahmed and Arun's study of modern-slavery disclosures by UK corporations sourcing from Bangladeshi RMG factories finds a persistent gap between formal transparency reporting (required under instruments such as the UK Modern Slavery Act) and the underlying "continuum of labour exploitation" it is meant to reveal [20]. Disclosure, in other words, functions in practice as a compliance-communication ritual rather than as an instrument of genuine accountability, a finding directly relevant to public-relations theory on symbolic versus substantive corporate communication.

Crisis Communication and Corporate Reputation: Rana Plaza as a Watershed in Fashion Public Relations

The April 2013 collapse of the Rana Plaza building in Savar, which killed more than 1,100 garment workers producing for over twenty international brands, is widely treated in the public-relations literature not merely as a humanitarian catastrophe but as a defining case of multi-firm crisis communication [4]. Comyns and Franklin-Johnson's theoretical analysis of "collective crises" (crises in which many organizations simultaneously bear some responsibility) finds that firms with a prior history of similar incidents tended to adopt defensive strategies and delayed communication, and that, counter-intuitively, accommodative (apologetic, responsibility-accepting) strategies produced greater reputational damage than expected in a collective-crisis setting, because responsibility could be diffused across the full set of implicated brands. This is a direct empirical test, in a fashion-industry setting, of Coombs' situational crisis communication theory, which predicts that response strategy should be calibrated to attributed responsibility and reputational threat [13], [14].

Sádaba, SanMiguel, and Gargoles' comparative analysis of Rana Plaza and the later Bravo Tekstil factory crisis in Turkey catalogues the specific image-repair strategies Benoit's framework predicts: denial (Benetton's initial statement that none of the companies involved were its suppliers, later undermined by a photograph of its label in the rubble), evasion of responsibility (emphasis on sub-contracting complexity), and, eventually, corrective action through participation in the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh and the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety [4], [9], [12]. The episode illustrates a broader principle in crisis-communication theory: denial strategies that are later contradicted by physical evidence (a label, a shipping manifest) generate a second-order credibility crisis on top of the original event, a lesson with direct implications for supply-chain transparency policy discussed in Section 5.5.

CSR Communication, Greenwashing, and the Consumer Authenticity Gap

A substantial and growing body of marketing scholarship examines how fast-fashion brands communicate, and how consumers evaluate, sustainability and labor-standards claims. A systematic review of 80 peer-reviewed studies on sustainability communication in the fashion industry identifies four dominant thematic clusters: corporate communication and reputation; digital and social-media communication; CSR and sustainability messaging; and transparency versus greenwashing, with the review noting a persistent imbalance toward discourse analysis and away from empirical verification of the claims being communicated [6]. Experimental consumer research reinforces this picture: a scenario-based study of 267 fast-fashion consumers found that higher perceived CSR engagement significantly increased purchase intention, particularly when paired with higher price points (consistent with the idea that price itself functions as a credibility signal for ethical claims), but that this effect coexists with a well-documented "ethical consumption gap" in which affordability dominates ethical concern for lower-income consumers [15]. A parallel study of Spanish fast-fashion brand communication found that consumers perceive greenwashing across all major brands studied, and that this perception intensifies precisely when consumers actively seek out sustainability information or attempt to purchase sustainable fashion, meaning that increased brand communication about sustainability can, paradoxically, increase rather than decrease consumer skepticism if it is not matched by verifiable practice [16]. Beard's earlier analysis of the branding of "ethical fashion" likewise found persistent consumer confusion about what constitutes a genuinely sustainable or ethical apparel brand, a confusion fast-fashion marketers have at times exploited rather than resolved [7].

Labeling and willingness-to-pay (WTP) studies add empirical precision to this picture. Dickson's early study of "No Sweat" labels found that only a small, identifiable segment of apparel consumers would alter purchase behavior based on a labor-standards guarantee, and profiled that segment demographically and psychographically [17]. Hustvedt and Bernard's auction-based WTP study similarly found that adding labor-related information and brand identity to apparel products changed consumer willingness to pay, but that the effect interacted strongly with brand trust, meaning the credibility of the messenger, not only the content of the message, determines whether ethical claims translate into commercial value [18]. For Bangladesh's RMG sector, the practical implication of this literature is that CSR communication about factory conditions, wages, or safety compliance is unlikely to shift purchase behavior at scale unless it is paired with independently verifiable evidence and delivered by sources consumers already trust, a standard the sector's current, largely brand-controlled CSR reporting infrastructure does not consistently meet [5], [6], [20].

Country-of-Origin Branding: "Made in Bangladesh" as a Contested National Brand

Country-of-origin (COO) effects (the influence of a product's national provenance on consumer attitude, perceived quality, and willingness to pay) are among the most extensively studied constructs in international marketing [7]. "Made in Bangladesh" functions as a COO cue attached to apparel sold by Tommy Hilfiger, Gap, Calvin Klein, H&M, Giorgio Armani, Ralph Lauren, and Hugo Boss, among others, yet the label itself is largely invisible to end consumers: it is subordinated to the brand name on the garment, meaning Bangladesh's manufacturing achievement generates limited direct nation-brand equity even as the country's reputational risk (through disaster coverage) is highly visible. Industry commentary has explicitly framed Bangladesh's 2025 slide to third place in global garment exports, behind Vietnam, partly as a branding and marketing-communication failure rather than a purely cost-competitiveness problem, arguing that Bangladeshi manufacturers have under-invested in communicating their environmental and social-compliance improvements, including the country's globally leading concentration of LEED-certified "green" garment factories, to international buyers and consumers.

This represents a clear opportunity for nation-branding strategy of the kind theorized in international marketing: a coordinated, government- and industry-backed communication campaign positioning "Made in Bangladesh" around verified compliance and environmental performance could differentiate the country from lower-cost, lower-compliance competitors, converting a reputational liability (association with the Rana Plaza disaster) into a reputational asset (association with post-disaster safety-accord compliance and green manufacturing). Realizing this potential, however, requires exactly the kind of independent verification and message discipline that Sections 5.2 and 5.3 show has been historically inconsistent.

Stakeholder Activism and Digital Transparency Movements

Where brands have been slow to communicate proactively, civil-society actors have filled the vacuum with their own public-relations campaigns. Fashion Revolution's "Who made my clothes?" movement, launched in direct response to Rana Plaza, exemplifies a stakeholder-driven communication strategy that inverts the traditional brand-to-consumer information flow: rather than brands disclosing supply-chain information voluntarily, consumers are mobilized via social media to demand disclosure directly, tagging brands publicly and using the resulting media attention (the campaign's organizers report reaching over 150 million people globally through social and traditional media in a single campaign week) as reputational leverage [8]. Recent scholarship on transparency-focused mobile applications finds that such tools reframe fashion consumption as an act with political content, embedding ideologies of consumer rights and self-optimization into what were previously private purchase decisions [8]. This activist infrastructure functions, in effect, as an informal, crowd-sourced auditing and public-relations mechanism operating in the space left by inconsistent brand and factory disclosure, reinforcing the theoretical point that in the absence of trusted first-party communication, third-party and stakeholder communication will fill the gap, often on terms less favorable to brands than proactive disclosure would have been.

Trade Policy as Strategic Communication: GSP+, Tariffs, and the Digital Product Passport

Trade instruments themselves increasingly function as communication and signaling devices in the apparel marketing channel. The European Union's GSP+ preferential trade scheme conditions duty-free market access on demonstrated compliance with international labor and human-rights conventions, effectively acting as a macro-level "ethical label" applied to an entire exporting country rather than an individual brand [1]. The 2025 imposition of US tariffs of 20–37% on Bangladeshi apparel, even as RMG exports to the United States grew 18.64% to USD 6.42 billion in the January–September 2025 period on orders placed before the tariff announcement, illustrates how geopolitical signals can override brand-level communication strategy entirely, redirecting sourcing decisions regardless of a supplier's compliance record. Figure 5 sets the scale of the 2025 tariff increase against the sector's continued export growth to the US market over the same period.

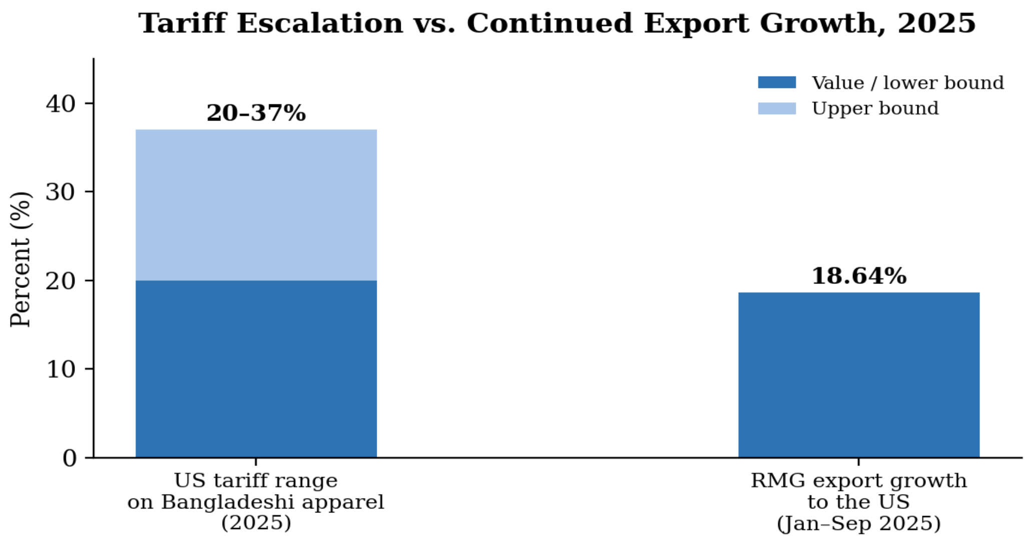

Figure 5. US tariffs imposed on Bangladeshi apparel in 2025 alongside continued export growth to the United States over the same period.

Looking forward, the European Union's Digital Product Passport (DPP), introduced under the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation and scheduled for phased implementation in textiles from 2027–2028, will require standardized, product-level disclosure of material origin, environmental performance, and supply-chain data accessible to consumers, repairers, and regulators alike. From a marketing-communication perspective, the DPP represents a structural shift from voluntary, brand-controlled CSR narrative toward mandated, verifiable, product-level disclosure, precisely the kind of independently verifiable information that the greenwashing and WTP literature identifies as necessary to convert ethical claims into consumer trust and purchase behavior [15], [16]. Bangladeshi manufacturers and BGMEA face a strategic choice: prepare data infrastructure now to meet DPP requirements and use early compliance as a differentiating marketing asset, or treat it as a compliance cost to be managed reactively once binding, a choice with direct implications for the country's future country-of-origin positioning discussed in Section 5.4.

Internal Marketing and Employer Branding: Labor Relations as a Communication Problem

Marketing scholarship distinguishes external marketing (communication to consumers) from internal marketing (communication to and among employees), and treats employer brand (an organization's reputation as a place to work) as a legitimate strategic asset. Bangladesh's RMG sector's internal communication failures are well documented in the political-economy literature under different labels: state-tolerated suppression of independent trade unions, a labor inspectorate vulnerable to corruption, and a factory-owner class with substantial political influence that lobbies against wage increases [1], [20]. Reframed through an internal-marketing lens, these are failures of two-way stakeholder communication between management and the workforce that is nominally the sector's core "brand ambassador" resource: absenteeism rates of 8–12% attributable to health and family stress, and periodic factory-wide protests that halt production and trigger order cancellations, are consistent with a workforce that management has failed to engage as an internal stakeholder rather than simply as a variable cost input [1]. International Labour Organization reporting on the sector over 2016–2023 documents the persistence of these dynamics even as formal compliance auditing has expanded, again illustrating the gap between symbolic compliance communication and substantive labor relations.

Integrated Marketing-Communication and Public-Relations Recommendations

Building on Sections 5.1–5.7, four coordinated recommendations follow, addressed to the distinct actors identified in stakeholder theory [11].

For global brands and retailers: Align purchasing-price communication with CSR communication. Brands that publish supplier codes of conduct promising living wages while simultaneously refusing to adjust unit prices to cover mandated wage increases create the exact discourse-practice gap that greenwashing research shows consumers increasingly detect and penalize [3], [5], [15], [16]. Binding, price-inclusive purchasing agreements (of the kind proposed after the 2020 order-cancellation crisis) should be treated as a reputational investment, not only a cost.

For factories, BGMEA, and the Bangladeshi state: Invest in an independently verified, coordinated "Made in Bangladesh" nation-brand campaign built around post-Rana Plaza safety-accord compliance and the country's leading position in LEED-certified green manufacturing, rather than allowing the country's international image to be defined reactively by disaster coverage.

For brands managing crisis and CSR communication: Apply situational crisis communication theory proactively rather than reactively: pre-commit to accommodative, verifiable response strategies for supply-chain incidents before a crisis occurs, since post hoc denial strategies that are later contradicted by physical evidence compound rather than mitigate reputational damage in collective-crisis settings [4], [12], [13].

For international regulators and civil society: Accelerate the shift from voluntary CSR narrative toward mandated, product-level, third-party-verifiable disclosure exemplified by the EU Digital Product Passport, since the consumer-behavior literature indicates that voluntary brand disclosure alone is insufficient to overcome consumer skepticism once greenwashing perceptions have taken hold [15], [16].

Table 4. Integrated Recommendations by Stakeholder

Stakeholder	Recommendation	Rationale
Global brands & retailers	Align purchasing-price communication with CSR communication; adopt binding, price-inclusive agreements	Closes the discourse-practice gap that greenwashing research shows consumers detect and penalize [3], [5], [15], [16]
Factories, BGMEA & the Bangladeshi state	Build an independently verified, coordinated “Made in Bangladesh” nation-brand campaign	Converts safety-accord compliance and green manufacturing into nation-brand equity rather than reactive disaster coverage
Brands managing	Pre-commit to accommodative,	Post hoc denial strategies later contradicted by

crisis & CSR communication	verifiable crisis response strategies before incidents occur	evidence compound reputational damage [4], [12], [13]
International regulators & civil society	Accelerate the shift from voluntary CSR narrative to mandated, product-level disclosure (e.g., EU Digital Product Passport)	Voluntary disclosure alone is insufficient once greenwashing perceptions have taken hold [15], [16]

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This paper's principal limitation is methodological: it is a qualitative, secondary-source reframing rather than an original empirical study, and its claims about consumer perception, brand strategy, and message effectiveness are therefore drawn from existing studies conducted primarily on European and North American consumer populations rather than generated through new primary research on Bangladesh-specific brand communications. Future research should pursue (a) a content analysis of the CSR and sustainability communications of the specific brands sourcing most heavily from Bangladesh, benchmarked against the Fashion Transparency Index; (b) primary consumer research testing whether "Made in Bangladesh" functions as a distinct country-of-origin cue independent of brand identity; (c) a systematic content analysis of crisis-communication strategies used by brands implicated in Bangladeshi factory incidents since Rana Plaza, coded against Benoit's and Coombs' typologies; and (d) primary research with Bangladeshi factory workers on internal communication and employer-brand perception, a population almost entirely absent from the existing marketing literature on this sector.

Table 5. Future Research Agenda

Direction	Focus	Suggested method
(a)	CSR and sustainability communications of brands sourcing most heavily from Bangladesh	Content analysis benchmarked against the Fashion Transparency Index
(b)	Whether “Made in Bangladesh” functions as a distinct country-of-origin cue	Primary consumer research independent of brand identity
(c)	Crisis-communication strategies used by brands implicated in factory incidents since Rana Plaza	Systematic content analysis coded against Benoit's and Coombs' typologies
(d)	Internal communication and employer-brand perception among Bangladeshi factory workers	Primary research with factory-worker populations

CONCLUSION

Bangladesh's RMG sector is conventionally framed as a case study in the political economy of global value chains. This paper has argued that it is equally a case study in marketing, advertising, and public relations: buyer-driven governance structures are sustained through purchasing-practice communication (or its absence); the sector's most consequential reputational events have been managed, well or badly, through identifiable crisis-communication strategies; CSR reporting operates under the same authenticity constraints documented across the broader greenwashing literature; the "Made in Bangladesh" label represents an underexploited country-of-origin branding asset; and the gap left by inconsistent brand disclosure has been filled by stakeholder-driven transparency activism. None of this displaces the underlying labor-rights and trade-policy analysis developed in the political-economy literature; rather, it identifies communication as the connective tissue linking purchasing decisions made in corporate headquarters to wage outcomes on factory floors in Dhaka. A sector transition from a volume-based, cost-minimizing model to a value-based, resilience-maximizing one, as called for in the broader development literature, will depend as much on how that transition is communicated, verified, and trusted by consumers, regulators, and workers as on the underlying industrial policy itself.

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Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

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