

From Incubator to Ecosystem Orchestrator: A Strategic Framework for Public Sector Institutional Repositioning

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Abstract—Many emerging economies are at important operational inflection points with public sector incubators, driven by shifting policy mandates and growing socioeconomic pressures ^[1]. This paper explores in detail the journey of PRIME (Promotion and Incubation of Market-driven Enterprises) Meghalaya’s strategic evolution from a localised technology incubator to a state-wide ecosystem orchestrator during 2018-26. This study adopts a comparative brand audit approach, utilizing a diverse set of secondary institutional data, such as organizational records, financial records, digital analytics, event attendance data and stakeholder engagement records, to map PRIME’s evolution in identity management, communication strategy and institutional positioning across two developmental stages ^[2].

The empirical evidence reports a major structural change: Phase I (2018–2021), with urban, technology-oriented startup focus, with basic visual identity and formal administrative communication ^[3], was intentionally repositioned in Phase II (2022–2026) to multi-sectoral, inclusive and culturally embedded institutional framework ^[4]. This shift resulted in measurable institutional outcomes: applications increased to 4,500+ across cohorts, social media engagement grew to 13,411 followers across platforms, media coverage increased to 50+ mentions annually, and flagship event participation skyrocketed to 200+ attendees from pre-existing baseline below 100 attendees ^[5].

In this paper we propose the Public Sector Repositioning Framework (PSRF) ^[9] with four core integrated pillars; Purpose Coherence ^[6], Hybrid Marketing Architecture ^[9], Co-Innovative Storytelling ^[7] and Integrated Sub-Brand Management ^[8]. The framework is empirically grounded in the institutional experience of PRIME and provides generalizable principles applicable to public sector institutions in transformation in emerging markets. The key takeaways are human-centric storytelling as a strategic lever operationalised via beneficiary narratives ^[4], physical marketing dominance in connectivity-constrained geographies (₹14 Crore allocation vs. ₹2 Crore digital marketing ^[9]), and culturally specific sub-brand architecture exemplified through CM ELEVATE integration ^[7].

***Index Terms*—PRIME, Meghalaya; public sector branding; institutional repositioning; ecosystem orchestration; emerging markets; integrated marketing communications; cultural resonance; Northeast India; beneficiary narratives; stakeholder engagement**

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Institutional Context

In developing economies, entrepreneurial ecosystems rely on strategic interventions by the state to catalyze economic development ^[1], engender institutional trust among skeptical populations ^[2], and systematically fill infrastructural gaps that private sector actors will not fill ^[10]. The need for carefully designed and culturally responsive public sector support mechanisms in Northeast India in particular is underpinned by the geographic separation from major economic centers, uniquely heterogeneous socioeconomic realities and historically limited private sector presence and investment, and ethnically diverse stakeholder populations with varying risk orientations and cultural values ^[4].

Recognizing these regional imperatives, the Government of Meghalaya created PRIME (Promotion and Incubation of Market-driven Enterprises) as an institutional vehicle for systematic entrepreneurial ecosystem development. PRIME, with its headquarters in Shillong and operationalized since 2018, was conceptualised as a dual purpose vehicle – an incubation mechanism of the foundation and a systemic state level economic development catalyst simultaneously ^[5]. The mandate of the organization was to create a sustainable, inclusive and regionally based entrepreneurial ecosystem that would meet the needs of various stakeholders including urban technology entrepreneurs, rural craftspeople, agricultural innovators, women entrepreneurs and traditional business practitioners ^[11].

However, the public sector organizations operate in a dynamic and constantly changing environment. As state mandates evolve from provision to coordination of complex ecosystems, as political priorities change in response to stakeholder feedback and policy learning, and as the institutional demographic grows to increasingly heterogeneous and geographically dispersed stakeholder populations, public sector entities must dynamically recalibrate their marketing approaches, operational mechanisms, and institutional positioning frameworks ^[6].

1.2 Research Problem and Theoretical Gap

The private sector has well-developed corporate governance mechanisms and brand transition protocols for managing identity evolution ^[8]. But public sector organisations are often met by resistance and structural inertia ^[2]. State bureaucracies are intentionally created to ensure administrative stability, procedural consistency, and institutional continuity. This results in predictable service delivery but also constrains marketing agility, communication flexibility, and narrative innovation ^[9].

But the costs to institutions of a misalignment of organizational identity and external communication are high and multi-sided. This results in a series of negative consequences:

stakeholders are unclear about the target and the ability of the institution ^[3]; the effectiveness of the program is hampered by a lack of understanding and engagement from stakeholders ^[11]; even when programming is effective, policy objectives are not achieved; and the public trust, a fundamental asset for institutions and particularly valuable in the context of emerging markets, is eroded systematically ^[6].

In the early days of PRIME's implementation, a peculiar and operationally relevant dissonance was observed between the formal, top-down administrative communication style of the program (emphasizing programmatic deadlines, technical eligibility criteria, and bureaucratic processes) and the internal organizational vision to foster a vibrant, agile, and genuinely inclusive entrepreneurial environment ^[2]. Such a disconnect between espoused institutional values and actual communication practice risked constraining the effectiveness of PRIME just when it was most critical, during its most rapid expansion phase, when geographic scope was expanding and stakeholder demographics were diversifying substantially ^[11].

While contemporary public sector marketing theory and practitioners managing institutional transformation in emerging market contexts need systematic bridging of this identity-perception gap by a state-backed institutional entity during the process of geographical (from Shillong-centric to state-wide), sectoral (from technology entrepreneurship to multi-sectoral livelihood activities) and demographic (from urban professionals to rural entrepreneurs and tribal communities) expansion ^[1].

1.3 Research Objectives and Scope

This study is guided by three integrated and mutually reinforcing objectives:

Objective 1: To comprehensively evaluate the evolution of the brand and institutional positioning of PRIME Meghalaya from Phase I (2018-2021) to Phase II (2022-2026) and analyze the strategic factors, operational enablers, stakeholder effects and outcomes of this comprehensive repositioning ^{[11][6]}.

Objective 2: To systematically evaluate the effectiveness of PRIME's Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) strategy and financial allocation models to overcome regional digital infrastructure limitations ^[9]. This is an issue of analytical focus on the strategic mix of physical and digital engagement approaches and the strategic role of local intermediaries in institutional trust-building ^{[10][4]}.

Objective 3: To develop a scalable, theoretically grounded and empirically tested Public Sector Repositioning Framework (PSRF) based on lived institutional experience of PRIME Meghalaya, providing generalizable principles and actionable guidelines for similar organizations undergoing institutional transformation, policy change and stakeholder diversification in the context of emerging markets ^{[1][8]}.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1 Institutional Life Cycle Theory and Ecosystem Maturation Pathways

The evolution of entrepreneurial ecosystem lifecycle phases is predictable and sequential ^[1] and demands adaptive governance models, operational flexibility and systematic communication strategy recalibration. Employing a longitudinal institutional analysis, the authors create a theoretical framework that shows that organizations' brands and messaging strategies must be continually and intentionally, as a function of the maturity stage of their underlying entrepreneurial ecosystems. When the communication strategy is not aligned with the stage of the ecosystem, institutional disconnects occur that undermine the effectiveness of the program and stakeholders' trust ^[6].

In early stages of development institutions are mostly foundational structural pillars that provide the very infrastructure of incubation – provision of physical workspace, access to experienced mentorship, access to basic capital mechanisms ^[1]. At this early stage, institutional identity is appropriately narrow, focused and infrastructure-centric. Ecosystems become richer and more complex, as they evolve, more advanced in their sectoral interests, more heterogeneous in their categories of stakeholders, and more complex in their ecosystem needs. Institutions need to evolve in ecosystem orchestrators ^[1]. These evolved institutions act as complex coordination centers of multi-sectoral resources, reconciling different policy frameworks, aligning interests and views of different public-private stakeholders and creating enabling conditions for entrepreneurship in multiple sectoral and demographic categories at the same time ^[10].

Such an institutional lifecycle view is crucial for putting the PRIME evolutionary trajectory in proper context. The organisation was not a failure in the incubator stage rather successfully transitioned to a new institutional stage which required changes to brand identity, communication approach and stakeholder engagement models ^[11]. This is not institutional decline but institutional maturation, a critical transition that must be strategically managed to maintain stakeholder trust and ensure sustained program efficacy ^[6].

2.2 Brand Identity Architecture and Organizational Authenticity

The management and maintenance of public sector brand equity depends on a fundamental and non-negotiable alignment between the internal organizational identity and external communication image ^[8]. Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism is a well-known framework that defines six fundamental dimensions for brands to create meaning and resonate with their stakeholders: physique (physical and visual aspects), personality (human traits and voice), culture (organizational values and philosophy), relationship (interaction and engagement style), reflection (stakeholders' self-image and aspirations) and self-image (institution's self-perception and values) ^[8]. The systematic application of this framework to institutional contexts in the public sector highlights the crucial importance of coherence and consistency across all dimensions simultaneously ^[2].

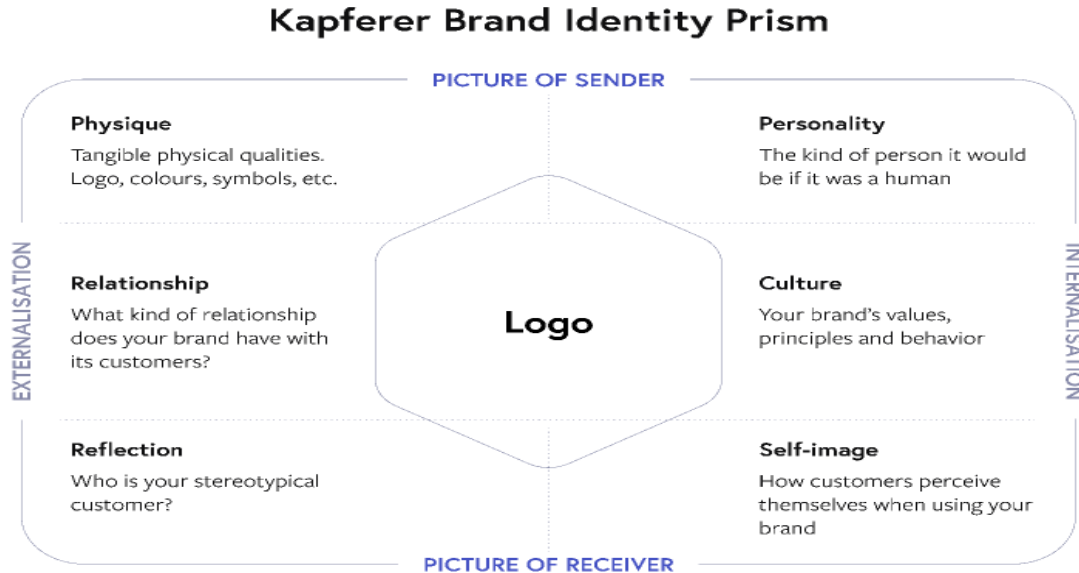


Fig. 1. Kapferer Brand Identity Prism model

The effective internal organizational operations must be reflected in and mirrored by outward communication if institutional credibility and stakeholder trust are to be maintained. Gaps between stated institutional values and actual administrative practices, coupled with rigid, impersonal, or bureaucratic communication outputs, systematically erode public trust and meaningfully limit program effectiveness [2]. Institutional legitimacy is diminished when stakeholders detect a discrepancy between organizations' professed beliefs and their actual operational behavior [6].

When the core mandate is actively and visibly lived through daily programming and direct stakeholder interactions rather than sitting as passive aspirational text in communications materials, organizations can stay authentically true to foundational purpose in the midst of massive operational transformations. This key difference between operational integration of purpose and rhetorical use of aspirations turns out to be decisive for understanding PRIME's successful repositioning journey [6].

2.3 Participatory Place Branding and Cultural Resonance in Emerging Markets

Developing or emerging markets place-based brands need to be intentionally developed with deep cultural relevance and a demonstrable stakeholder engagement to gain legitimate local standing and institutional trust [10]. The conscious co-creation of brand value propositions through interaction with local stakeholders as opposed to being imposed by centralized organizational hierarchies. Participatory approaches to place branding. This participatory approach is based on a fundamental respect for local agency and local expertise [4].

By using local stories and real-life experiences, we can establish far more trust in the community than generalized corporate marketing strategies driven from outside the community. Local stakeholders respond positively to narratives that are meaningful in their own contexts, values and aspirations; they respond cynically to standardized, centralized messaging that does not take into account local specificity ^[4]. This is particularly the case in an emerging market context where communities have largely experienced external institutions imposing top-down agendas without consulting local communities ^[10].

Meghalaya is ethnically diverse and has diverse cultural traditions, historical experiences, socio-economic realities and risk orientations that differ significantly across tribal groups, urban and rural areas ^[4]. Here, a standardized, one-size-fits-all marketing approach would not work: institutional credibility is fundamentally based on cultural specificity, active recognition of local agency and deliberate incorporation of authentic community narratives ^{[7][11]}.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION FRAMEWORK

3.1 Methodology and Analytical Approach

The study uses the comparative brand audit methodology to analyze extensive secondary institutional data which is directly sourced from the organizational documents and records of PRIME Meghalaya for the full analytical period from 2017 to 2026 ^[5]. The comparative analytical approach is based on well established brand audit frameworks as documented in the marketing and organisational literature and purposely adapted for the public sector institutional context, where standard corporate brand frameworks need to be adapted ^{[9][8]}.

3.2 Data Sources and Information Categories

The primary data sources for this in-depth study comprise a range of institutional categories: institutional annual reports and strategic planning documentation for both analytical phases ^[5]; financial data providing budget allocation, promotional spending patterns, and resource allocation decisions ^[9]; holistic digital analytics including social media statistics, follower growth patterns, and engagement pattern data ^[3]; institutional event data including attendance data, participant profile, and engagement outcomes ^[5]; press coverage and systematic media mention frequency data for both phases ^[11]; internal communication documentation including messaging frameworks, content strategies, and communication campaign materials ^[2]; stakeholder engagement data and institutional partnership documentation ^[7]; and application processing data including application inflow, applicant profile, and conversion metrics ^[5].

Systematically evaluated data categories comprised visual identity markers (logo design attributes, color consistency schemes, graphic standards); institutional messaging architectures (value propositions, core messaging topics, communication tone); communication channel inventories (primary channels used, content formats, engagement strategies); financial promotion appropriations (budget allocations per channel, spending trends, resource prioritization); and quantifiable awareness metrics (cohort application volumes, social media follower bases, media

mention occurrences, event participation counts). These categories were chosen deliberately based on the best practices for brand audit documented in the contemporary marketing literature [8] [2].

3.3 Analytical Timeline and Phase Division Rationale

The analytical period (2017-2026) has been deliberately divided into two distinct development phases each with its own operational mandates, stakeholder demographics and institutional capabilities:

- Phase I (2017-2021) : Building Brand Foundation & Initial Incubation Model - marked by the establishment of the foundational infrastructure, development of core tech-based program offerings, deliberate engagement with geographic stakeholders in the urban center of Shillong and its hinterlands, and initiation of institutional documentation processes [1] [5].
- Phase II (2022–2026): Strategic Scaling, Programmatic Integration and Ecosystem Repositioning - involves geographic scale-up to statewide operations across districts in Meghalaya, the addition of rural livelihood programs focusing on agricultural and traditional economic sectors, the formal integration of sub-brands (CM ELEVATE), deliberate communication repositioning to engage a considerably enlarged and varied stakeholder populace, and improved documentation practices [1] [5]. Such a time frame is consistent with theories on ecosystem maturation and the institutional life cycle [1].

3.4 Research Limitations and Data Constraints

The study acknowledges several important limitations. First, the research is based exclusively on secondary institutional data, no primary stakeholder surveys were conducted measuring perception and brand equity directly [11]. Second, this analysis did not include direct website traffic analytics in institutional records (indicated as N/A in quantitative tables), which limits the ability to measure digital channel efficacy [3]. Third, Phase I quantitative metrics are limited because of nascent institutional documentation practices during 2017–2021 [5]. Fourth, there is no comparable data from parallel state-led initiatives in Northeast India (Assam, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh) for comparative institutional analysis [1].

Such limitations, acknowledged in similar institutional research [11] [6], do not seriously undermine the validity of core findings, in view of the wealth of secondary institutional data that substantively prove the evolution of brand identity, the transformation of communication strategy and the repositioning of operations, empirically documented throughout the 2017-2026 period [5].

IV. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS AND INSTITUTIONAL FINDINGS

4.1 Brand Identity Evolution: Comparative Phase-Based Analysis

The institutional data reveal a profound and multidimensional structural change in the brand identity of PRIME across all analytical dimensions from Phase I to Phase II [6] [11]. This transition

was neither random nor incremental but a deliberate recalibration mandated directly by the expanding operational mandates, policy evolution and the demographic diversification of stakeholder populations ^{[1][7]}.

4.1.1 Phase I Brand Identity Characteristics (2017–2021)

The visual identity of PRIME in Phase I had basic design features and used inconsistent colors in its communication materials ^[5]. The institutional personality was consciously, strategically tech-forward and aspirational, pitched directly at the urban youth and the educated professionals scattered in Shillong ^[11]. The main institutional message is about innovation, entrepreneurial opportunity and economic growth; ideas that are particularly resonant in urban professional contexts of technological knowledge and global market awareness ^[2].

The institutional communication in Phase I was formal and motivational, in keeping with the bureaucratic institutional heritage but also with a view to projecting dynamism and a forward-looking stance ^[3]. Some stakeholders found the juxtaposition between form (formal) and content (aspirationally dynamic) to create a subtle tension that felt dissonant ^[6].

The target audiences were narrowly defined to include urban technology entrepreneurs with startup aspirations, educated youth with technology skills, and state government policy stakeholders involved in economic development ^[5]. The geographical coverage was restricted to the urban center of Shillong and its immediate vicinity and the coverage to the rural areas was minimal or nil ^[11]. The sectoral focus was entirely on technology and digital services, reflecting the global trends of entrepreneurship discourse rather than the actual economic base of Meghalaya ^[4]. Brand symbols drew on generic incubation imagery and startup culture visuals, without reference to locally embedded entrepreneurial examples from communities in Meghalaya ^[7].

4.1.2 Phase II Brand Identity Characteristics (2022–2026)

Phase II saw a complete overhaul of the visual and institutional identity architecture of PRIME ^{[11][6]}. The visual identity was improved by using a consistent colour palette and professional graphic standards applied uniformly across all platforms and materials, removing prior inconsistency and creating a recognizable institutional presence ^{[5][8]}.

Institutional personality was reconfigured at its core—from technology-centric aspirationalism to grounded, inclusive, and culturally cognizant institutional positioning ^[4]. The policy expansion under the CM ELEVATE scheme and absorption of rural livelihood initiatives dramatically expanded the target audiences to include rural entrepreneurs, nano-enterprises, traditional craftspeople, women entrepreneurs, and tribal communities across the districts of Meghalaya ^[7] ^[11] which directly drove the shift.

Most importantly, brand symbolism transformed dramatically from the abstract imagery of startup culture to the lived journeys of regional entrepreneurs embodying the true economic diversity of Meghalaya: Tengsrang Sangma (Jakop Footwear – leather products), Harador Khariong (Plant Parenthood – horticultural enterprise), Dr. Elvee Marbaniang & Siddharth Das

(Runo Health – health services), Dipankar Sarkar (Blue Print Creatives – design services), Jendrasing Kurkalang (cultural crafts – traditional arts) and Kynjai Mawthoh (hygiene products – manufacturing). Such people were not procured from external contexts but were nurtured internally by the entrepreneurship ecosystem of Meghalaya itself thus providing authenticity and local resonance ^[7]^[4].

The geographic scope expanded significantly to cover the entire state, including both districts and rural villages, and necessitated partnerships with local organizations and community leaders ^[10]. The sectoral focus has diversified considerably to embrace technology, handicrafts, horticulture, tourism, health and creative industries, reflecting the actual economic base of Meghalaya rather than global trends ^[4].

4.1.3 Identity Transition Mechanism: From Abstract to Narrative Branding

The most transformative dimension of PRIME’s identity evolution is the use of entrepreneur narratives as main brand symbols ^[7]. Instead of relying on abstract startup culture imagery, disconnected from the local context, PRIME strategically positioned the beneficiaries themselves as institutional representatives and primary brand ambassadors ^[4]. This approach reflects the “stakeholder brand co-innovation model” in which the beneficiary narratives are the primary means through which institutional value is humanized and legitimized for the various stakeholder populations ^[7].

Rather than institutional pronouncements defining PRIME as an institution to entrepreneurs, entrepreneurs increasingly defined PRIME through their own transformation stories and lived experiences ^[7]. This is a simple power shift from institution-to-stakeholder to stakeholder-to-institution, resulting in authentic credibility ^[4]. This approach explicitly targets the identity-perception gap identified in preliminary organizational audits, i.e. the disconnect between PRIME’s expressed aspirational values and its previous formal, bureaucratic communication outputs ^[2]^[6].

Identity Dimension	Phase I (2017–2021)	Phase II (2022–2026)
Visual Design	Basic logo; inconsistent color application; minimal graphic standards ^[5]	Refined visual identity; consistent color palette; professional graphic standards ^[5] , ^[9]
Institutional Personality	Innovative, aspirational, tech-forward ^[12]	Inclusive, credible, community-rooted, transformative ^[4]
Target Audience	Urban youth, tech startups, educated professionals in Shillong ^[5]	Rural entrepreneurs, nano-enterprises, craftspeople, women, tribal communities ^[7] , ^[12]
Core Values	Innovation, opportunity, economic growth ^[12]	Inclusion, sustainability, cultural preservation, ecosystem development ^[4]

Brand Symbols	Generic incubation imagery, startup culture visuals ^[9]	Lived entrepreneurial journeys: Jakob Footwear, Plant Parenthood, Runo Health ^[7]
Communication Tone	Formal and motivational ^[3]	Conversational, narrative-driven, emotionally resonant ^[4]
Geographic Scope	Shillong and urban centers ^[5]	State-wide district and village engagement ^[1]
Sectoral Focus	Technology, digital services ^[12]	Technology, handicrafts, horticulture, tourism, health, creative industries ^[5]

Table 4.1: Comparative Analysis of Brand Identity Evolution

4.2 Integrated Marketing Communications Strategy

4.2.1 Communication Channel Evolution and Transformation

The institutional evolution of PRIME from a one-way, disconnected broadcast to an integrated multi-platform ecosystem is consistent with the institutional evolution path described by Rehman et al., in their detailed study of IMC (Integrated Marketing Communications) adoption in public sector organizations ^[9]. This change is a smart adjustment to the changing market realities and stakeholder expectations ^[3].

Phase I Communication Architecture: PRIME communication was characterized by institutional fragmentation ^[3]. In addition, the use of Facebook posts on program deadlines, printed brochures on technical eligibility criteria, and press releases on administrative milestones resulted in a one-way flow of information from the PRIME organizational hierarchy to passive stakeholders with limited opportunities for dialogue or engagement ^[9]. The events had attendance of not more than 100 people and the media coverage was limited to state-level media with little reach outside Meghalaya ^[5].

These one-way communication models are successful in creating transactional awareness of program availability but are basically unsuccessful in creating emotional attachment or community investment in organizational purpose and success. A systematic empirical analysis of this issue is given by Drossos et al. ^[3]. Stakeholders know the institutional mission but are not directly part of it [2].

Phase II Communication Revolution: In this phase the communication approach of PRIME was essentially redesigned, from an architectural point of view ^[9]. PRIME continued to grow on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube and through partnership channels with national media houses, which provided more communication vehicles and reached geographically dispersed audiences ^[5]. The content was strategically shifted from transactional information (deadlines, eligibility, and bureaucracy) to transformational stories (entrepreneurial success stories, sector-specific development spotlights, behind-the-scenes impact documentation) ^{[7][4]}.

Flagship events now regularly attract more than 200 participants, double the Phase I baseline, indicating significantly increased public engagement and interest ^[5]. Most importantly, the institution received over 4,500 applications in cohorts, a conversion metric that indicates the

success of PRIME’s communication strategy in converting general awareness into specific entrepreneurial intent and action ^[7]. This is a successful operationalization of the communication strategy, in terms of behavioral outcomes ^[10].

4.2.2 Financial Allocation and Hybrid Marketing Strategy

The financial data reveals an informative strategic paradox between objectives of digital and physical interaction, and sheds light of how institutions adapt to the limits imposed by infrastructure ^[9], ^[4]. The way in which PRIME’s promotion was distributed provides a major insight into how the institution pragmatically addressed the particular infrastructure constraints of Meghalaya:

Budget Category	Allocated Amount (₹)
Total Annual Marketing & Promotions Budget	7 Crore ^[5]
Events, Workshops, Demo Days, Bootcamps (Cumulative)	14 Crore ^[5]
Digital Marketing (Social Media Ads, Website Maintenance)	2 Crore ^[5]
Printing & Design Materials	1.5 Crore ^[5]
Sponsorships & Media Partnerships	2 Crore ^[5]

Table 4.2: Financial & Promotional Budget Allocation — PRIME Meghalaya (2017–2026)

The imbalance in the direction of physical interventions (₹14 Crore) as opposed to digital marketing (₹2 Crore) is not negation of technology or institutional backwardness but is a nuanced strategic response to the specific infrastructural conditions and cultural milieu of Meghalaya ^[9] ^[4]. For a patchily distributed digital infrastructure, rural populations, low broadband penetration and historically risk averse populations sceptical of purely digital forms of institutional interaction, physical presence and direct in person engagement are the dominant and most effective mechanisms for building trust ^[10] ^[6]. PRIME strategically used local NGOs and traditional community leaders as key marketing intermediaries and cultural brokers to overcome the constraints imposed by digital infrastructure ^[4] ^[7]. PRIME did not try to reach rural populations directly through digital channels, but instead tried to build relationships with local trusted institutions already embedded in the communities, an approach that is directly in line with participatory place branding principles ^[10]. This hybrid approach is a pragmatic acknowledgment that regions ^[4] of structural and cultural diversity require different engagement mechanisms for different stakeholder segments.

4.2.3 Quantitative Performance Indicators and Outcomes

The efficacy of PRIME's strategic repositioning is empirically evident in quantitative performance metrics documenting successful awareness conversion and substantive stakeholder engagement ^[7], ^[5]:

Awareness Indicator	Phase II Recorded Data
Social Media Follower Growth (all platforms combined)	13,411 total followers ^[5]

Applications Received (Phase II across all cohorts)	4,500+ applications ^[5]
Annual Media Coverage & Press Mentions Frequency	50+ media mentions per year ^[5]
Event Attendance — Flagship Programs	200+ participants per event ^[5]
Website Traffic Data	N/A — not captured in institutional records

Table 4.3: Awareness Indicators & Performance Metrics — PRIME Meghalaya Phase II (2022–2026)

Together these metrics sum to a substantially growing institutional presence in both the digital ^[11] and traditional media environments ^[7]. Multi-channel brand exposure (social media followers across platforms 13,411 and media mentions 50+ annually) ^[5]. Importantly, the 4,500+ applications across cohorts are indicative that media attention does translate to real entrepreneurial interest and behavioral action — applications are an indicator of real commitment from stakeholders, not passive awareness ^{[7][3]}.

Demonstrates diversified and continued and growing real world engagement with community Event attendance skyrockets to 200+ for flagship programs ^{[10][5]}. The lack of website traffic information is a major operational opportunity for future institutional monitoring, digital analytics improvement ^[3].

4.3 Brand Positioning Evolution: From Incubator to Ecosystem Orchestrator

By Phase II, the positioning of PRIME had changed dramatically in terms of scope, depth and stakeholder engagement model [6]. The institution re-imagined itself from a startup incubator to an ecosystem orchestrator – a multi-sectoral hub that could bring together resources, policy, community institutions and economic opportunity across all of Meghalaya.

Positioning Dimension	Phase I (2017–2021)	Phase II (2022–2026)
Primary Stakeholders	Urban tech entrepreneurs, educated youth, policy makers ^[5]	Rural entrepreneurs, nano-businesses, craftspeople, women, tribal communities ^{[7], [12]}
Value Proposition	"Get support to build a startup" ^[12]	"Be part of Meghalaya's entrepreneurial transformation" ^[7]
Differentiator	Government-backed incubation hub in Northeast India ^[5]	Only multi-sectoral state-wide ecosystem hub—urban and rural ^[7]
Competitive Positioning	Against absence of formal startup support ^[5]	As ecosystem orchestrator beyond traditional incubation ^[1]
Policy Alignment	Meghalaya Startup Policy 2017 ^[5]	CM ELEVATE; rural livelihood schemes; Startup India ^[5]

Credibility Signals	Government affiliation; physical hub ^[5]	Documented impact; 4,500+ applications; media recognition ^{[5], [12]}
Geographic Scope	Primarily Shillong and urban centers ^[5]	State-wide district-level and village engagement ^[5]
Sectoral Focus	Technology, digital services ^[12]	Technology, handicrafts, horticulture, tourism, health, creative ^[5]

Table 4.4: Comparative Analysis of Brand Positioning — Phase I vs. Phase II

V. DISCUSSION AND THEORETICAL INTERPRETATION

5.1 Resolving the Identity-Perception Gap Through Authentic Alignment

PRIME's structural transition is an instance of a core institutional principle that holds wide applicability: organizations can be true to core purpose amidst dramatic operational change, provided that core purpose is actively and visibly lived through daily programming and direct engagement with stakeholders rather than languishing as passive aspirational rhetoric in communications materials ^{[6] [2]}.

In Phase I of PRIME there was a distinct disconnect between stated values and actual communications products with operational significance. The formal institutional messaging explicitly promised agility, innovation and entrepreneurial enablement; yet actual administrative communication remained procedurally focused – emphasising programmatic deadlines, technical eligibility criteria, application form requirements ^{[2] [3]}. This gap led to negative perceptions from stakeholders, who viewed PRIME as administratively competent in processing applications but lacking in cultural fluency and a human-centered orientation to truly understand and support entrepreneurship across the diverse communities in Meghalaya ^{[6] [11]}.

In Phase II, PRIME's communications to the outside were reoriented to align with the internal values of the organization, by deliberately shifting to experiential storytelling as the main mode of communication, and using beneficiary narratives ^{[7] [4]}. This strategic alignment directly reduced the identity-perception gap, creating institutional credibility with diverse stakeholder groups across geographical regions and sectoral categories ^[2]. Strong empirical evidence shows this alignment is successful: Phase II application inflow (4,500+ cohorts) and media recognition (50+ annual mentions) are far greater than Phase I metrics, indicating successful perception management and trust-building with wider populations ^{[5] [7]}.

5.2 Reactive Adaptation as Institutional Strength and Strategic Necessity

One important outcome of this analysis, and one that is somewhat counterintuitive, is that the evolution of the PRIME branding was not the result of a corporate marketing strategy that would have been planned through institutional foresight, but rather a reactive, adaptive response to policy change, programmatic scaling demands, and direct stakeholder feedback ^{[11] [6]}. As PRIME absorbed initiatives such as the CM ELEVATE scheme, geographically expanded across state

districts and engaged rural and traditional economic sectors ^[7] ^[1], it had to re-define its institutional identity consciously in order to maintain its credibility and relevance.

This empirical finding is consistent with the organizational observation that in emerging market contexts, brand identity needs to be fluid and responsive – it needs to be a co-created contract that evolves with changing policy demands and grassroots stakeholder needs rather than a fixed institutional asset ^[11]. This analysis does not read the evolution of the brand as evidence of strategic failure or lack of planning in the past. Instead, it is seen as strong evidence of organizational responsiveness and adaptive institutional capacity, both of which are especially important in volatile emerging market contexts ^[6].

5.3 Cultural Inculcation as Primary Institutional Legitimacy Driver

In multiethnic regions such as Meghalaya corporate style marketing and uniform promotional strategies often encounter latent skepticism and cultural resistance to centralized bureaucratic institutions ^[4] ^[10]. Communities that have been the subject of top-down agendas imposed by external institutions in the past without local consultation are often wary of new institutions ^[4].

By consciously employing cultural specificity and incorporating local legitimacy, PRIME was able to successfully overcome this structural trust barrier ^[4] ^[7]. PRIME's deliberate and strategic use of oral storytelling practices embedded in local culture, the incorporation of success stories based on local realities and aspirations, and formal participation of traditional community leaders as communication mediators and cultural brokers helped to change it from a perceived elite, urban-centric "Shillong construct" into a genuinely trusted, accessible, and regionally embedded state-wide ecosystem orchestrator ^[10] ^[4].

This shift is a sign of the proven success of participatory place branding approaches: local narratives and lived experiences generate significantly higher levels of community trust than generic corporate messaging derived from outside, and disconnected from local context and values ^[4] ^[7]. PRIME's ₹14 Crore spend on events and workshops (as compared to ₹2 Crore digital marketing) puts this insight into operational terms at the financial and organizational level: physical presence and direct community engagement are the primary mechanisms for trust building in connectivity-constrained regions with culturally specific risk orientations and preferences for personal interaction ^[9] ^[10].

5.4 Sub-Brand Integration and Institutional Identity Coherence

The successful combination of CM ELEVATE and rural livelihood activities with core PRIME institutional identity is an indication of sophisticated sub-brand architecture management and brand portfolio coherence ^[8] ^[7]. Rather than keeping these new initiatives as institutionally separate, which creates confusion around the institutional role and purpose of PRIME, the PRIME strategy was to bring them under a coherent institutional umbrella ^[7].

This approach allows for substantial sectoral and demographic diversity while maintaining consistent branding. Rather than attempting to squeeze all programs into the same communication templates, PRIME created flexibility within structure—allowing program-

specific adaptations while maintaining coherence of institutional identity ^[8]. This reflects best practice in multi-portfolio brand management where structured flexibility allows for programmatic responsiveness to changing stakeholder needs and policy priorities while avoiding dilution of core institutional identity ^[7] ^[6].

VI. CONCLUSION AND KEY INSIGHTS

The study traces the strategic evolution of PRIME Meghalaya (2017-2026). The paper traces the institutional evolution of PRIME Meghalaya from a location based technology incubator to a state-wide ecosystem orchestrator. The analysis suggests that successful rebranding of the public sector is not merely a matter of cosmetics. It requires a fundamental alignment of operational reality, communication strategy, cultural appropriateness and stakeholder engagement mechanisms ^[6] ^[11].

Empirical evidence suggests that public sector organizations in emerging markets need to focus on five key concepts:

1. Institutional authenticity is reflected in operational change where the core purpose is lived rather than written in aspirational text ^[6]. It was successful because the espoused values were consistent with the communication practice in PRIME's Phase II.
2. The communication strategy should be adapted to the limitations of the infrastructure and the cultural context ^[9] ^[4]. PRIME invested ₹14 Crore in physical events against ₹2 Crore in digital marketing, a pragmatic view of Meghalaya's connectivity landscape and the population's risk aversion.
3. The stories of the beneficiaries are more real and convincing than self-narration by institutions ^[7]. PRIME's use of entrepreneur stories drew a much higher level of stakeholder engagement than traditional promotional messaging.
4. The architecture of the sub-brands has to be well thought to guarantee the coherence of the identity ^[8]. PRIME CM BOOST Programmatic Diversity and Institutional Identity Integrated
5. The stakeholders' confidence level in new market settings is highly dependent on cultural particularity and community inclusion ^[10,4]. PRIME found that it was more effective to work through traditional community leaders and NGOs who act as marketing intermediaries, rather than direct institutional outreach ^[2].

The Public Sector Repositioning Framework (PSRF) offers generalizable principles for institutional transformation of similar organizations in emerging market contexts ^[1]. However this needs to be contextualized to the specific institutional context, policy environment and demographic of stakeholders.

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Appendix: Data Summary and Institutional Records

A.1 Phase I Performance Summary (2017–2021)

- Social Media Presence: Early-stage development; nascent digital presence with limited follower base ^[2]
- Application Inflow: Early cohorts; establishing entrepreneurial pipeline ^[1]
- Media Coverage: Limited; concentrated in state-level press ^[11]
- Event Attendance: Primarily below 100 participants for most events ^[3]
- Target Demographic: Urban professionals, technology entrepreneurs in Shillong
- Sectoral Focus: Exclusively technology and digital services
- Communication Approach: Administrative, deadline-focused, one-way broadcast ^[9]
- Budget Allocation: Foundational; emphasis on infrastructure development ^[5]

A.2 Phase II Performance Summary (2022–2026)

- Social Media Followers: 13,411 total followers across all platforms ^[5]
- Applications Received: 4,500+ across all cohorts—substantial increase demonstrating demand validation ^{[11], [7]}
- Media Mentions: 50+ per year—indicating sustained mainstream recognition and legitimacy ^[6]
- Event Attendance: 200+ for large-scale flagship events; 100+ for specialized programs ^{[10], [4]}
- Geographic Reach: State-wide district-level and village engagement across Meghalaya ^[1]
- Target Demographics: Rural entrepreneurs, nano-businesses, craftspeople, women, tribal communities ^[2]
- Sectoral Scope: Technology, handicrafts, horticulture, tourism, health, creative industries ^[5]
- Communication Approach: Narrative-driven, beneficiary-focused, multi-platform interactive ^[7]
- Budget Allocation: ₹14 Cr events; ₹2 Cr digital; ₹1.5 Cr printing; ₹2 Cr media partnerships ^[9]