

Service With Commitment Progress With Pride: Role And Challenges Facing By The Public Relations Of Southern Railway's Towards The Image Building Process

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ABSTRACT

Southern Railways a massive multifaceted setup with an enormous taskforce for passengers and cargo trains. Southern Railways has been rendering eomanser vices for over fived ecadesin the field of passenger transportation. In such a corpus transportation network, always a disruption between the organization and the public. So, there's a possibility for tarnishing out the image of the Southern Railway. This is often where the crucial role of PR comes into play. When a deleterious incident occurs in the railway, then the sole responsibility comes to PR to maintain the image and also facing the various challenges from others and also reach the pubic with facts through promulgation in mass media and also in social media. After the advent of ICT tools in image build, the PR department making full use of ICT and make it easier to reach out to the public to conveys the very fact without any delay and the Southern Railway image build are greater than before. Looking towards the event of the Southern Railway to serve the people during this way the image building activity of the general Public Relations department involves the fore. Carrying over 1.5 million passengers per day, the passenger traffic indexofSouthernRailwaysissteadilyontherise. So the role and challengesfaced by the PR department of Southern Railway is to protect the corporate image of Southern Railway.

Keywords: Southern Railways, Public Relations, Image Building, Digital Public Relations.

1. INTRODUCTION

Indian Railways (IR) is the largest railway network under single management in the world. IR is often called the 'lifeline of India' because it provides a source of livelihood to s large number of people. It brought long-distance travel within the reach of an average Indian. IR is also the largest employer in the world, directly employing about 2 million people (as in 2006). In addition to this, it is estimated that it provides indirect employment to over seven million people. One survey in the early – 2005s revealed that one every ten Indians depended on Indian Railways for his/her livelihood, directly or indirectly. IR carries, on an average, 16 million people across the country every day. Indian Railways also has the

distinction of housing the Public Relations department for the first time, in the history of India.

Southern Railways was inaugurated on 14th April 1951. It serves the southern portion of the Indian peninsula consisting of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, the major portion of Karnataka, a small part of Andhra Pradesh, and the union territory of Pondicherry, making up 9.33 percent area of the country. Traversing 6,729 route kilometres, the Southern Railway's contribution in promoting tourism is significant. Several tourist spots, places of hoary historical and cultural interest, industrial belt, and scientific importance are essentially linked by the network system of Southern Railways. Besides, Southern Railways are passenger-oriented. With 'passenger care' as its motto, Southern Railways has been rendering yeoman services for over five decades in the field of passenger transportation. Carrying over 1.5 million passengers per day, the passenger traffic index of Southern Railways is steadily on the rise. In the year 2005-2006, the passenger traffic touched 500 million. Successfully coping with the manifold increase in passenger traffic in recent years, Southern Railways has introduced a host of initiatives to ensure hassle-free, comfortable, and quick transit of passengers. In deference to the perennial demand for long-distance trains, point-to-point inter-city trains, convenient overnight trains, and superfast trains, several new services have been introduced in recent years.

According to priority to safety, security, punctuality, and cleanliness, Southern Railways have upgraded passenger transportation on various fronts in recent years. Major gauge conversion projects undertaken in recent years have led to the expansion of the Southern Railways network and augmentation of its carrying capacity.

Role of Public Relations in terms of strategic communication process

Transparency is a crucial tenet of public management. Public Relations could even be a selection of organization task which supports to create and continue the communication, sympathetic, recognition, and collaboration between an organization and the world at large; More even PR involves in the managing of problems and issues; assist the administration to stay up-to-date and aware of the public opinion, interest and helps to anticipate the trends by using the research and ethical communication methods. (Harlow 1976)

Thorough knowledge of the transport industry in its entirety is essential to know the importance of PR during this industry. Transport isn't only a serious industry by itself but also one that holds the key to all or any other industries. During these times, transport assumes great importance, as people not only travel but also transfer goods and cargo from one place to a different. The modes of transport are said to comprise primarily: Each system has its role to play within the transport map of the country. Management of those transport systems not only poses the most important challenge to the discipline of recent management but also demands distinct techniques and skills in handling colossal traffic, of both men and material. Any mismanagement within the transport system could end during a crisis affecting millions.

The public sectors like The Indian Railways, The Indian Airlines, The Shipping Corporation of India and State Road Transport Corporations are the public sectors which provide transport to the people in India. According to the British Institute of public opinion, "Public Relations are a thoughtful and continuous work to sustain common understanding between an organization and the public". Reddi (2009:4) describes Public Relations as a mission, services, products, reputation, and gain public understanding through a two-way communication process between the corporation and its publics. Goldhaber in 1986 summarized Katz and Kahn's Public Relations as Feedback, Balance, Input,

Transformation, Interdependence, and limits. The headway of data and communication technology has brought into the planet a digital era with the emergence of the latest media like Twitter social media.

Nowadays social media is increasingly employed by the community and may support various activities. This condition has also encouraged a replacement approach to PR activities referred to as online PR (online PR). This digital PR activity is an extremely important addition to traditional PR activities, Grunig (2009) argues that new media has the prospective to practice PR more strategic in global context. Grunig and Hunt's work echoes the previous work of Edward Bernays in his book "Crystallizing Public Opinion" (1923) which suggested that effective PR required two sides to the goals and objectives of a corporation that would always predict the expansion of charitable trust and private interests. Until now, Grunig and Hunt's PR models has been widely quoted by PR scientists and practitioners (Kriyantono, Amrullah, &Destrity, 2017).

Digital PR may be a unique thanks to promoting a corporation, product, or service, to extend visibility during a virtual environment. By using online PR, the audience has the chance to interact with the organization and to receive immediate responses, effective and interdependent communication (Petrovici, 2014). Cutlip and Center (2009) argue that future PR can directly reach their audience, can establish one-to-one relationships quickly and interactively, more flexible and economical than within the world or offline PR (Ruliana, 2016). In today's digital world it is important to modernizes the business and services, so the role of Public Relations adopt the digital. So the social media undertake the Public Relations strategies and play an integral part in successful of any companies. There are lot of issues in practicing Public Relations in the online world. Social media are no longer true gatekeepers because digital era has empowered everyone can post a note on a company. The role of Public Relations in this digital era are the same as its traditional role, but more intense and critical in this digital age because of the image building of a reputed organization.

Role and Challenges Facing by the Public Relations Department of Southern Railway's in Image Building Process

The ultimate goal of Public Relations is predominantly to induce the civic, stakeholders, associates, workforces and others to build an image about the establishment, governance and services. Public Relations is a collective activities include working with the press, discourse at consultations and employee communication. Public Relations Department of Southern Railways should effort more on the development and sustainability of the among the public in the process of image building.

Keeping the public abreast of the developments on the Railways through the print, electronic and Social media is the primary responsibility of the Public Relations wing. Organized publicity campaigns and media related activities are fundamentals to the growth of a corporate organization. The Public Relations department is engaged in various activities such as media coverage, publicity campaigns, participation in exhibitions, publication of various publicity materials like press release, brochures, newsletters and posting in social media etc. Besides all these, it also maintains a record of media feedback. The Public Relations department of Southern Railways plays a boundary role by functioning at the edge of the organization, serving as a liaison between the organization and the external groups and individuals. It is here that the General Systems theory comes into play.

The Public Relations department as has been already mentioned, is constantly involved in the task of disseminating information about Southern Railways to its target publics. Only factual

and authentic information is conveyed to the public. Thus the Public Information model holds good in the context of Southern Railway. The Public Relations department seeks feedback from the public through the media and conveys it to the pertinent department for immediate action. The grievances of the public are also addressed to, in the process. The PR department of Southern Railways can thus fall under the Two-Way asymmetric model category. Since communication is not fully reciprocal and since the power relationships are not balanced between the organization and its publics, the southern Railways has still not reached the stage of Two-Way symmetric model.

The Public Relations department provides colourful and appealing posters to the railway authorities. The posters, which are stuck in the railway station, appeal to the public and they seek the cooperation of the public in maintaining the cleanliness of the railway station. The Public Relations department also has an indirect role to play in the maintenance of railway station. News items relating to the lack of cleanliness in the railway station is brought to the notice of the General Manager by the Public Relations department. The right guidance is given to the concerned department for the maintenance of railway station by the Public Relations department only.

The Necessity for More Prominent Transparency

Trustworthiness is a fundamental for public sector organization, and for Public Relations department it would be foremost duty. Without credibility the communication impels by any organization every time it makes concerns and it's difficult to revive the organization reputation. The press release is both informative-dealing with train operations and development oriented-highlighting the achievements and innovations in the various facets of railway activities. Any sign of a new train, commencement of a new project, and such other news items are conveyed to the most important functions of the Public Relations department of the Southern Railways. The press releases keep the public abreast of day-to-day railway working. The department keeps the media always informed about the various activities and developments happening in the southern Railways through press releases. Dissemination of information to the traveling public is the primary responsibility of the department. The basic function of the Public Relations department is the regular and routine issue of press releases. Not only concentrating on the press releases in mass media even more information is required one every sets taken by the Southern railways it's not an easier task to reach the public and make them to access it. There's always growing social demand for the southern railways, especially companies should be more systematically transparent in offering the any kind of information, details and approaches that shape their image building and standardized when a crisis situations occur. So the aim is that stakeholders can make their pronouncements with full knowledge of the cause and uses the social media as tool to reach out the public in a transparent way. Indeed, social media can play a vital role in an effective Public Relations stratagem. Social media provides an inimitable opportunity to resolve glitches in real-time and give facts in real-time. So the Southern Railway's Public Relations concentrating online on all platforms and react in a strategical way to process the image building.

Inspire through Archives

Maintaining press clippings is among the regular functions performed by the Public Relations department of Southern Railways. The clippings pertinent to the Southern Railways appearing in the various regional and national newspapers are neatly cut, pasted and sent to highest administrative head of the division, that is the General manager for his perusal. He goes through the press clippings and marks it to the concerned department for

remedial action.

Promoting a Competitive Market

In Southern Railways, the Public Relations department is the spokesperson of the organization. Every department for their development activities, have to function within a framework of rules. For example, a lot of materials have to be procured before constructing a new building or laying a new line. These materials can be obtained only on a tender basis. Such tender materials for all these above mentioned development activities will be routed through the Public Relations department only.

Building Brand Relevance

As part of the organization's image building exercises, the Public Relations department of the Southern Railways participates in various national, regional and local level exhibitions. Railway pavilions at the various tourist/trade fairs across the country have been attracting vast crowds every year. Southern Railways participates in the India International Trade fair(IIT) exhibition held in New Delhi every year at international level. At state level, it participates in the Tourism Trade fair held in Chennai, organized by the Government of Tamil Nadu. It also participates in the district level exhibitions held in the state. For example, Southern Railways participates in the exhibition held in Madurai annually, during the Chittirai festival period.

All these exhibitions communicate to the people of the country; the various development activities being undertaken by the organization for the benefit of the people. The progress in the railway network will also be communicated to the public. The various innovative features that have been brought about by the railways will be showcased to the public for their information during such exhibitions. This will keep them informed about the progress being made by the organization. Exhibitions are one of the very effective communication tools of the Southern Railways, which help in projecting the image of the organization.

The Necessity for Tolerability

Issuing rejoinders is one of the most crucial functions carried out by the Public Relations department of Southern Railways. If some incident is wrongly reported, the Public Relations department immediately issues a rejoinder, clarifying the incident. In certain cases, where the report is found to be true, for instance, if there is a complaint from a passenger about the lack of basic facilities like water in a particular train, then such instances are brought to the light of the mechanical department for remedial action, which will be taken immediately. The remedial action taken will be promptly reported to the media by the Public Relations department, for the media has to clarify the same to the public. Rejoinders are therefore necessary and are issued to counter wrong and distorted reports appearing in certain sections of the press. Similarly, complaints and grievances appearing in the columns of press are taken up for immediate action.

Recognizing the Significance of Communication

No publicity campaign is complete without publicity literature. During development functions like the introduction of a new train, the evolution of a new system, inauguration of a new broad gauge section, multi-coloured informative folders, brochures, posters, leaflets, handouts and other such publicity materials are published by the Public Relations department. Such publicity materials highlight the salient features of the development project like the cost of the project, the duration of the project, importance of the project to the general public, the extent to which the project can promote tourism and trade and commerce etc. The publicity materials will also help in establishing the fact that whatever is

being done is solely in the interest of the public. The publicity materials are published in English, Tamil, Hindi, Kannada and Malayalam.

Boosting Prominence Through Press Conference and Press Meet

Arranging for press conferences and press meets is another very important function of the Public Relations department of the Southern Railways. There are set guidelines for press conferences and press meets. The Chief Public Relations Officer (CPRO) of the Southern Railways is the spokesperson of the organization, other than the General Manager (GM) who speaks to the media directly. If the GM wants to speak to the Media or if a reporter seeks an appointment with the GM, the Public Relations department becomes the intermediary. Nobody in the organization can speak to the media directly, bypassing the Public Relations department. The flow of information is therefore channelized through a single department. Before imparting information to the media, the CPRO verifies it with the concerned department to avoid wrong reports in the media.

Reaching Eminence with Facility Visits

Once in a way, the Public Relations department of the Southern Railway arranges for press visits or conducted tours for media persons within the system or to other railway divisions or zones. This is to help them in gaining first-hand account of Railway activities. The year before last, the Public Relations department of the Southern Railways had taken media persons of Chennai to Konkan Railway Corporation as part of the conducted tour to look at the anti-collision device, installed as a measure of safety. The visit generated large publicity for Konkan Railway in the Chennai region.

Effective Image Building Through Media Relations

Maintaining media relations is another very crucial function performed by the Public Relations department of the Southern Railways. AIR Doordarshan, various satellite channels and the press give a wide coverage for all significant railway events. All the important press releases are flashed on the radio and television networks for the benefit of public. Informative programmes, inclusive of interviews by senior railway officials are broadcast/telecast on the AIR and TV for the benefit of public. Wider ranges of topics including railway operations and social awareness themes with regard to passenger security are given adequate publicity by media. All these make maintaining media relations critical. Arranging press tours will also help in developing interpersonal relations with the media people. Developing good relations with media helps the Public Relations department in maintaining the image of the organization. It is also fundamental to the growth of the corporate organization.

The Public Relations department maintains good media relations. Whenever the media people approach the Public Relations department, they talk to the concerned department and get the correct information. Only when the Public Relations department of any organization provides accurate information to the media, it can be in the good books of the media. Public Relations is all about telling the truth. The department never tries to kill any news item. Any genuine criticism from the media, any criticism in the right spirit, any criticism based on facts is always welcomed by the Public Relations department. The criticism is taken to the concerned department; it is rectified and then clarified by the department through the same column. Complaints and grievances appearing in the columns of the press is taken up for immediate action. If the criticism is found to be false, the Public Relations department immediately issues a rejoinder and denies and refutes the statement and informs the media. It ensures that the media carries the corrected message the following day.

Insight through Passenger Friendly Publication

Every year, the Public Relations department of the Southern Railway publishes the passenger friendly publication, which is the railway guide or railway timetable. It is released every year through a press conference. The railway guide provides details about all new trains, about increase in frequency of the trains, change in the accommodation or capacity of various trains and all such details that would be required by the traveling passengers and the public. The minister in a special press conference releases the railway guide. Around 120-140 press persons attend the press conference, which generates wide publicity. In the process, the department also performs the function of procuring advertisements required for the timetable or guide. The new Southern Railway timetable "Trains at a Glance", created a record by making its way into the 'Limca Book of Records' for its user-friendly features, innovative design and colour coding scheme. For the fourth time in succession, Southern Railway was entrusted by the Ministry of Railways with the task of designing the 'Trains at a Glance' all India Railway Timetable of which one million copies were printed and distributed all over the country.

Strategic Messaging and Elevating Awareness

The Public Relations department of the Southern Railway is also responsible for the publication of advertisements in the various media. Healthy publicity through appropriate media channels is necessary to promote the corporate image of the establishment. Advertisements are released in the national and regional newspapers and magazines. During important official functions like inauguration of new schemes and new trains, the various elected representatives like the Member of Parliament (MP), Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA), various other Union and State government ministers are invited. Advertisements are issued for such official functions well in advance, highlighting the salient features of the project and mentioning the names of the prominent personalities inaugurating the project. Such advertisements carry a lot of news value as they communicate to the general public, the developments in the railways industry. The department issues all tender notifications, railway line laying ads, train inauguration ads. Train timings are also published frequently by the Public Relations department of Southern Railway to help its passengers. Besides focusing on developmental activities on railways, the advertisements also serve to educate the traveling public on safety issues such as level crossing at unmanned gates and carrying of inflammable articles in train etc. The department thus issues several public service advertisements. Safety advertisements are issued during Diwali. Advertisements that communicate the risks involved in footboard travel is also issued.

Creating a strong In-house communication

Public Relations department of the southern railways is in charge of bringing out the newsletter of the organization meant for the employees. It is also considered as In-house journal. The newsletter is meant only for internal circulation. It is a quarterly publication. It consists of all the significant events and activities that have occurred in the past quarter of the year. It also highlights the achievements of the employees of Southern Railways.

Inspiring through Speeches

The department of Public Relations is also assigned with the responsibility of preparing speeches for honourable ministers and general manager during press conferences and press meets. This is also one of the most important functions of the department of

Public Relations of the Southern Railways.

Enhancing Tourism

An In-Rail System exists in place for foreign tourists and Non-Resident Indians, where the passengers can buy tickets at one station and travel throughout the railway network of the nation. The passes are valid for specific periods like 30, 60 and 90 days. Such passengers will get preferential allotment of accommodation in all trains. They get special treatment everywhere. Separate supervisor will be in charge of issuing tickets to them and all trains will have special quota earmarked for foreign tourists and Non-Resident Indians. Even in case of waiting list, special preferences will be given to them, since their passes have validity for limited periods and since they should complete their tour within this period. Besides this, all major tourist destinations are connected by rail routes, which will definitely help all tourist in general. Special posters are displayed on trains and railway stations describing tourist spots that are present on the railway route. This will inform the tourist about the tourist destinations and will tempt them to visit those places.

Moreover, the Southern Railway Public Relations department also publishes information about all the tourist spots covered by its rail routes in the passenger-friendly railway guides too. This will also inform and tempt the various passengers to visit those tourist's destinations. It is the Public Relations Department of Southern Railways serves as a link between the organization and its publics. The department plays a key role in protecting the corporate image of Southern Railway.

2. CONCLUSION

The need for PR in a public sector transport undertaking like railways is all the more essential as it is a "Service Industry" wholly owned by the public and dealing with millions of passengers. For an effective image building the Public Relations department of Southern Railways can bring employee relations also under its purview and need to be invited in the making of in-house journal. An important aspect of transport management is the management of passenger relations by providing required transport information. This will ensure wider reach and it will help in image building of Southern Railway.

This information alone keeps the public fully informed about the transport network. Concentrating further on Public Service Advertisements (PSA's) of Southern Railways can be converted into quickies (short films) and aired on the televisions present in the railway stations. Any communication gap between transport management and the passenger leads to anxiety and confusion. Regular surveys need to be conducted among the passengers by the Public Relations department to find out their grievances and needs. In this context, it is the basic function of the transport management to provide timely and correct information about the movement of persons and goods. The Public Relations department uses the Public Announcement System (PAS) present in railway station to educate the passengers on safety aspects. Employee contributions in the form of short stories, articles, poems etc. Positively the Public Relations play a vivacious role in Southern Railway by creating the right environment and understanding between the Management and its publics.

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