

Analysis on the Role of Public Relations in Tourism: A case study of Santiniketan (UNESCO World Heritage Site) and the Birbhum District of State of West Bengal, India

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Abstract

With the advancement of globalization and the improvement of people's living standards, the tourism industry has developed rapidly and has become one of the important pillars of the global economy. As tourism has become the world's largest industry, competition is becoming increasingly intense. Many practical problems have emerged in the development of tourism. As an important part of the tourism industry, tourism and public relations have become exponentially important. Tourism-public relations not only help to enhance the image of tourist destinations, but also promotes the sustainable development of the tourism industry. Public relations, as a management philosophy and art, as a modern business concept and skill, will provide guidance services for the future development of tourism in all aspects, whether from image design and positioning, internal and external communication and coordination, or system management and development, it will promote the development of tourism in a healthy, sustainable and stable direction. This paper aims to explore the connotation, role and application of tourism public relations in the development of tourism in Birbhum, in order to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for the healthy development of the tourism industry.

Key Words: *Public Relations, Tourism, Communication, Coordination, System management*

The Connotation and Characteristics of Tourism-Public Relations

Tourism-public relations is the specific application of public relations in the tourism industry. It involves the information dissemination and interaction between tourism entities (such as tourist attractions, travel agencies, etc.) and the public. The core goal of tourism-public relations is to establish and maintain a good image of the tourist destination and enhance the public's awareness and trust in tourism entities. Its main characteristics include: the two-way nature of information dissemination, the importance of image building, and the sensitivity of crisis management.

With the rapid development of social economy and culture, tourism has become an indispensable part of people's lives and even a special way of life in modern society. This way of life in turn promotes social interaction and gives social relations a richer connotation. The second half of the 20th century was an era of vigorous development of the tourism industry, which has become one of the largest industries in the world. The healthy and stable development of the tourism industry has increasingly attracted people's attention and research. Looking at the development of the tourism industry, it is found that the particularity of tourism products determines that public relations are in perfect harmony with the tourism industry, and public relations play a vital role in the development of the tourism industry.

The role of tourism public relations

1. To enhance the image of tourist destinations through effective public relations strategies. To enhance the popularity and reputation of tourist destinations, and to enhance the public's yearning for and identification with tourist destinations.
2. To enhance the public's understanding of tourism products through public relations activities, disseminate tourism product information,

help the public understand the characteristics and advantages of tourism products, and thus increase their willingness to buy.

3. Responding to tourism crisis events when a tourism crisis occurs. Timely and transparent public relations methods are used to deliver accurate information, reduce negative impacts and restore public confidence.
4. In the promotion of sustainable development of the tourism industry through tourism public relations. To promote the harmonious development of the tourism industry and society, and achieve a win-win situation in economic, social and environmental benefits.

Public relations (PR) is a vital tool in the tourism industry for numerous reasons, including:

- **Building brand awareness**
PR helps build trust with potential travelers and shape a positive image for a destination.
- **Promoting attractions**
PR can promote activities, restaurants, events, and attractions to increase the number of visitors.
- **Facilitating communication**
PR helps to facilitate communication between tourists, policymakers, and local communities.
- **Managing reputation**
PR is important for reputation management and mitigating negative impacts during a crisis.
- **Promoting sustainable tourism**
PR can promote sustainable tourism by emphasizing responsible travel and respect for local cultures and environments.

Objectives

The objective of this paper is to demonstrate the importance of Public Relations work in the Tourism industry in Santiniketan and Birbhum and to defend its role for its practical application.

- To mark out the relevance of Public Relations in the promotion of tourism in Santiniketan as practiced by different travel and tourism organisations.
- To evaluate the comparative relevance of Public Relations in the three, though seemingly independent but interrelated industries- tour operators & travel agencies, Accommodations and Car rental companies.
- To evaluate the relative significance of Public Relations in comparison to other advertisement media – social media, electronic media and print media.

Tourism is a sunrise industry and rapidly growing sector in Santiniketan and Birbhum. Increasing number of domestic and international tourists and the increasing availability of global communication are contributing to boost it up.

As we have mentioned above, the survival and development of tourism organizations are limited by the external public environment. Good external public relations are conducive to the healthy and steady development of tourism organizations. Here, the crucial points on the close relationship between consumer public, media public and tourism organizations need to be underlined.

Consumer Public

Under the market economy, the products or service of tourism enterprises can only be marketable if they can satisfy tourism consumers. If tourism enterprises ignore the interests of their consumers, they will inevitably fail. Therefore, tourism enterprises must adhere to the principle of market orientation (i.e., consumer orientation), establish the business philosophy of 'consumer first', and be owned and governed by consumers. It can be said that actively carrying out public relations activities with the consumer public and properly handling the relationship with various types of consumers is the only way for any tourism enterprise to succeed. Good consumer public relations help tourism enterprise to create a good sales environment. Under the market economy, with a stable source market, the products or services of tourism

enterprises will be transformed into certain economic benefits. Therefore, establishing a good relationship with the cast number of tourism consumers can encourage tourism consumers to form a good impression and evaluation of tourism enterprises and their products or services, improve the place's popularity and reputation in the market, attract more potential or actual consumers, and thus enable tourism enterprises to have a good business environment.

Media Public

Establishing a good relationship with the media and the public is the public relations goal that every tourism organizations strives for.

- a. Good media-public relations help win the support of news organizations and their staff for tourism organizations, so as to form a good public opinion environment. The quality of tourism organizations' relations with the media-public determines the quality of the public opinion environment of the organization. If the relationship with the media-public is harmonious, the organization will easily gain the recognition of public opinion. If the relationship between the two sides is not good, then the public opinion of the organization will not be ideal.
- b. Good media-public relations are conducive to the effective use of various mass communication methods to expand the tourism organization. Mass communication is the best means for tourism organizations to achieve large scale and long-distance public communication. With the help of modern electronic, printing and other communication technologies, mass communication can copy a large amount of information and transmit it to countless people at the fastest speed and in the largest scope.

First, we need to recognize the importance of media. The biggest feature of media is that it can spread a certain information to many people at the same time, in order to establish connections with or leave impressions on a large

number of people at the same time, because the press is the representative of public opinion in the minds of ordinary people and has a relatively objective stance. The dissemination of public relations through the media may even be more effective than the direct dissemination to the public by the public relations personnel of the organization or enterprise itself.

Secondly, one needs to be good at dealing with media. The nature of journalism requires the media to make friends with all walks of life and establish communications. The hotel public relations department can use its identity as the hotel spokesperson or external liaison to maintain regular contact with editors and reporters and establish good working relationships and harmonious personal relationship.

The case study of Birbhum

This paper takes the public relations practice of a famous tourist attraction as an example to explore the application of tourism public relations in actual operations. The scenic spot enhances its image by holding various public relations activities, such as press conferences and cultural festivals, and uses social media platforms to interact with the public and disseminate scenic spot information. When a crisis occurs, the scenic spot responds actively and successfully resolves the crisis. Through these practices, the scenic spot could achieve good economic and social benefits.

Tourism can bring many economic and social benefits, particularly in rural area. West Bengal is known as the cultural capital of India. It has vast physical as well as cultural diversities that can draw considerable number of tourists from home as well as abroad. Unfortunately, West Bengal could not develop itself up to its level and thus other states of India drawing greater number of tourists than West Bengal. West Bengal draws only about 3% of domestic tourists and 6% of foreign tourists of India.

A tourism circuit around Tarapith, Bakreswar, Kendua and Santiniketan needs to be developed and thrust should be on heritage protection. Overall tourism infrastructure in these places should be reinforced. It is high time to

develop Public relations to develop heritage tourism in this region.

Since the opening up of economy in 1991, the government has taken a huge initiative to promote growth in the tourism sector. Even government had advanced many incentives to develop better infrastructure to improve the tourism industry throughout the country. Tourism is the second largest foreign exchange earner in India. The tourism industry employs a large number of people both skilled and unskilled. Tourism is the largest service industry in India with a contribution of 6.23 percent of the national GDP and 8.78 percent of the total employment in India. Hotels, travel agencies, transport including airlines benefit a lot from this industry. Tourism promotes national integration and international understanding. It generates foreign exchange. It promotes cultural activities.

In 2005 the Indian Tourism Development Corporation started a campaign called Incredible India to encourage tourism in India. The slogan of this campaign is Athithi Devoh Bhabho. For better growth the department divided different places in different sections like spiritual tourism spa tourism eco-tourism and adventure tourism.

Ecotourism is a sub-component of the field of sustainable tourism. Ecotourism's perceived potential as an effective tool for sustainable development is the main reason why developing countries are now embracing it and including it in their economic development and conservation strategies. Ecotourism, as an alternative tourism, involves visiting natural areas in order to learn, to study, or to carry out environmentally friendly activities, that is, a tourism based on the nature experience, which enables the economic and social development of local communities. It focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, its landscape, flora, fauna and their habitats, as well as cultural artefacts from the locality.

With the growth of the urban professional middle class, tourism in India is flourishing. Many states have taken necessary steps to promote tourism. Goa promotes water sports like sailing, scuba diving and rafting. Kashmir offers the

pleasure of winter sports like skiing and mountaineering.

Tourism in India has vast potential for generating employment and earning large sums of foreign exchange besides giving a fillip to the country's overall economic and social development. Much has been achieved by way of increasing air seat capacity, increasing trains and railway connectivity to important tourist destinations, roads connecting important tourist centres and increasing availability of accommodation by adding heritage hotels to the hotel industry and encouraging paying guest accommodation. But much more remains to be done. Since tourism is a multi-dimensional activity, and basically a service industry, it would be necessary that all wings of the Central and State governments, private sector and voluntary organisations become active partners in the endeavour to attain sustainable growth in tourism if India is to become a world player in the tourist industry.

Max Mueller has rightly said these lines about India-

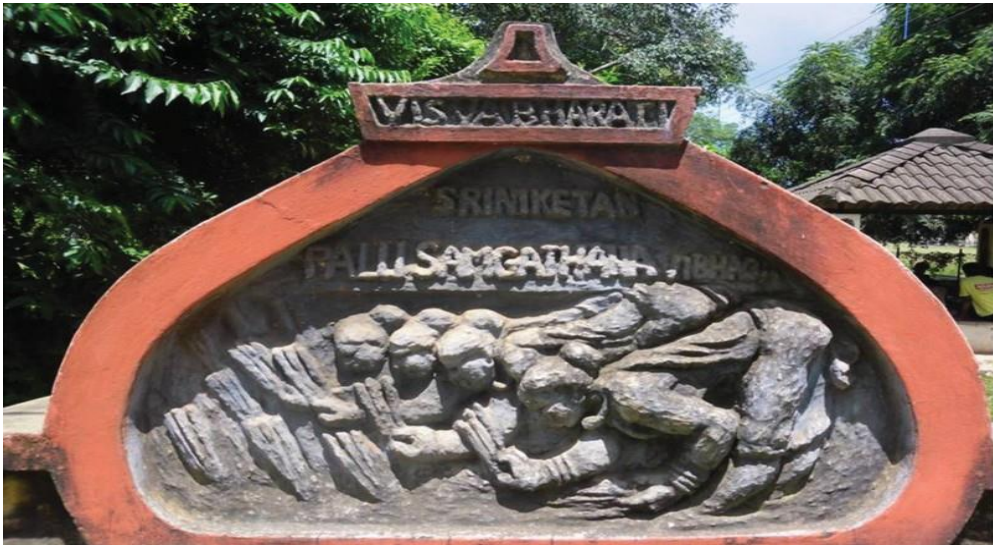
"If we were to look over the whole world to find out the country most richly endowed with all the wealth, power and beauty that nature can bestow in some parts a very paradise on earth I should point to India."

Sriniketan



Santiniketan in 1924 but was shifted to Sriniketan in 1927. The Lok-Siksha Samsad, an organization for the propagation of non-formal education amongst those who had no access to usual educational opportunities, was started in 1936. Siksha-Charcha for training village school teachers followed next year.

Places to Visit: The Landmarks of Visva-Bharati



Upasana Griha

Inaugurated in 1891 is the sanctum sanctorum of Visva-Bharati. It is a site of the Brahmo Upasana and is marked by empty space within to indicate the immanence of the Brahman who is all pervading. Every Wednesday, students, faculty and visitors gather for the Upasana with songs, readings and hymns creating an atmosphere of tranquility and peace. Various important prayer meetings are also held at various times of the year. Some of Rabindranath Tagore's most important lectures were delivered as addresses in the *Upasana Griha*.

Uttarayana Complex

Two mud houses were built earlier on the northern limits of the asrama. In 1919 on his return from Shillong, Rabindranath started living in one of these leaving

Dehali, a dwelling-house in the asrama. According to *Santiniketan Patrika* of 1326 B. S., Rabindranath on his return from Shillong started to live in a new house on the northern fields of *Uttarayana*.



Kalo Bari or the “Black House”

The significance of *Kalo Bari* is not merely that it is a mud-building of large size; rather, its significance also lies in the fact that its walls are adorned on the exterior with tar-coated clay-reliefs ranging from copies of famed examples of sculptures across world art to purely innovative and original compositions

executed by the students of the institute themselves. The *Kalo Bari* is therefore something like an artist's sketch-book in three-dimensions, where students live through their daily moments in a harmonious balance between art-historical references and the sheer delight in creative practice.

Khoai: Shanibarar Haat

Khoai is a geological formation of small canyons resulting from constant erosion caused by wind and water. The Khoai Santiniketan region in Bolpur is characterised by a patch of dry forest of Sonajhuri (*Acacia Auriculiformis*) trees on an eroded landscape of red laterite soil. This unique look of the forest was immortalised by Rabindranath Tagore in many of his compositions. The Sonajhuri forest in Khoai is surrounded by the famous Kopai River (Tagore's Amader Choto Nadi) on one side and Ballavpur Forest and Bonerpukur Adivasi Village on other sides.

Amar Kutir

Amar Kutir is a Society for Rural Development. It is mainly a Handicraft manufacturing and selling organization. Amar Kutir was founded by Susen Mukhopadhyay in the early 1926, which was closed down by British Government for political activities in 1932. During this period, Amar Kutir was raided by the British rulers and Mukherjee was put behind bars till 1937, and the activities of Amar Kutir came to a halt. During his years in prison Mukherjee met several revolutionary leaders, notably Moni Ganguly and Pannalal Dasgupta. From 1938 when the British government relaxed its rules and started releasing many of the revolutionaries from prison, they started living and working in Amar Kutir. They were instrumental in organizing night classes and spreading political ideas amongst the rural masses. When the Second World War broke out in 1939, many of the revolutionaries left Amar Kutir and were directly involved in organizing peasant movement in the villages. Many of them were active during the Quit India movement in 1942.

Tarapith

Tarapith, a holy religious place, is situated in a village Tarapur under Rampurhat Police Station of Rampurhat Sub-Division in the district of Birbhum.

It is said to be so called because the eye ball (*tara*) of Sati fell here. Others say that Tarapith is not a *pith* but the place owes its sanctity to the fact that the Sage Basistha here worshipped the Goddess Sati in the form of Tara. The common local opinion is that it is really a Pith and Basistha selected this place for worshipping Sati because it was a pith.

It is visited everyday by a good number of devotees. Here pilgrims constitute a vast chunk of domestic tourists.

Bakreswar

The village Bakreswar in Suri Sub-division is situated 18 kms South West of Suri, the district headquarter of Birbhum. The place is renowned for "HOT-SPRING" and has historical importance as holy place for the existence of "SHIVA LINGAM". There is a number of hot springs with cold springs in close proximity to them. They all discharge into a rivulet which runs past and joins a small stream about 200 yards from the temple. The hot springs at Bakreswar are reputed to cure numerous chronic ailments.

A big Mela is held every year on the day of Shiva-Ratri.

Patharchapuri

Patharchapuri is the precedence of the Mohammedan Saint Hazrat Data Meheboob Shah Wali famously known as "Data-Baba" who is reported to have died in 1299 B.S. corresponding to March, 1892 A.D. He is famous for his Sufi Thoughts. It is said that he was gifted with miraculous power and used to cure dangerous diseases by applying ashes of dust. His tomb in the village is frequented by many visitors every year. A large Fair locally known as "Data Saheber Mela", perhaps the largest in the region, is held in Patharchapuri village in the month of Chaitra (March-April) every year, commemorating the death anniversary of Data Saheb.

Lakhsof pilgrims assemble in the fair during the occasion.

The Road Ahead

The tourism industry will continue to maintain a rapid development trend. Against this background, the role of tourism public relations will become more prominent. We believe that future research directions should focus on the following aspects: First, in-depth research on the communication mechanism of tourism public relations and explore more effective communication methods and means; second, focus on the development of tourism public relations in the digital age and study how to use new media platforms to enhance the image of tourist destinations; third, explore the application of cross-border cooperation in tourism public relations and seek broader cooperation space; fourth, strengthen theoretical research and practical exploration of tourism crisis management and improve the ability to respond to crises. Through continuous in-depth research and exploration, we will better play the important role of tourism public relations in the development of the tourism industry and make greater contributions to the sustainable development of the tourism industry.

Review of literature

Scitovsky (1976) introduces the concept of “skilled consumption” as a result of his pursuit for justification of leisure motivation. The concept goes significant in view of the fact that the market is witnessing the emergence of the “skilled consumer.” **Linder (1970)** points out that it is largely the capability of the retailer or the public relations professional as engaged in big organizations to sell information that the customer requires about the products available as some customers will be willing to pay for inclusive tours. **Doyle & Cook (1980)** infer that the structure of retailing is increasingly determined by consumer markets. It has been the shift from generalization to specialization in retailing that has resulted in the creation of outlets intended for particular consumer values and life styles. **Holloway and Plant (1988)** pin point that the main selling tool for holidays is the travel brochure produced by suppliers, which can cost 1 pound

to produce, with between five and eight copies of a brochure required to generate a single sale. **Kendall and Booms (1989)** while emphasizing on the functions of a travel agent indicate that information provision is the most important function. **Gilbert (1990)** asserts that destinations should attempt to become “status areas”, rather than a “commodity area” one, in order to improve their image, loyalty and economic benefits. **Chon (1992)** highlight that tourists perceive the destination as a brand comprising of a collection of supplies and services, before visiting they develop an image about destinations as well as a set of expectations based on previous experience, word of mouth, press reports, advertising and common beliefs. **Poon (1993)** proposes a marketing strategy based on the concept of “flexible specialization”- permanent innovation and ceaseless change, to enable tourism organizations to improve their competitiveness. **Ritchie and Crouch (1993)** have developed a comprehensive model for tourism organizations, which can be analyzed further to include the entire range of factors affecting the competitiveness of the destinations.

Hypothesis

- In the contemporary corporate world , public relations have turned out to be an important instrument in the promotion of service oriented industries such as tourism, hotels and airlines.
- There exists a positive correlation between public relations and promotion of the service sector and tourism.
- Public Relations carry relatively more important as a promotional tool than other media elements.

Conclusion

Tourism Public Relations is an important support for the development of the tourism industry. It is of great significance to enhance the image of tourist destinations and promote the sustainable development of the tourism industry. This article analyzes the connotation, role and application of tourism public relations in the development of modern tourism industry, and combines case analysis to reveal the important role of tourism public relations in the tourism

industry. With the development of the tourism industry, tourism public relations will face more challenges and opportunities. Further studying the theory and practice of tourism public relations to provide strong support for the development of the tourism industry is the need of the hour.

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