

## Kashmir Tourism and Media Tools: A Study of Public Relation Techniques of Tourism Department

Asooda Ali

Employees in J&K Bank, India

### Abstract

The study is important because it will help to study the communication strategy of tourism department to reach out to the tourists – both domestic and foreign. The study will also show how tourism department public relation notes the tourism or what the strategies of the department towards tourism are. Besides an attempt has also been made to know that how many tourists' destinations were identified or throng open for the tourists. Besides how much Tourism Department of Kashmir is capable to enhance the tourism industry.

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### INTRODUCTION

Tourism is important and in some cases vital for many countries, such as France, Egypt, Greece, Lebanon, Israel, the United States, the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, Malaysia, Australia and Thailand, and many island nations, such as Mauritius, The Bahamas, Fiji, Maldives, Philippines and the Seychelles. It brings in large amounts of income in payment for goods and services available, contributing an estimated 5% to the worldwide gross domestic public relation product (GDP), and it creates opportunities for employment in the service industries associated with tourism. These service industries include transportation services, such as airlines, cruise ships and taxicabs; hospitality services, such as accommodations, including hotels and resorts; and entertainment venues, such as amusement parks, casinos, shopping malls, music venues and theatres.

Talking to Kashmir, which holds a significant place on the tourism map, it is essential to analyze its potential so far as the inflow of tourists and the resulting business is concerned. For decades, Kashmir has been popular with Indian and foreign tourists; but with the onset of turmoil in 1989, the number of tourists coming to Kashmir decreased until last decade when a huge rush of mostly domestic tourists started pouring into Kashmir. Different agencies associated with tourism have been trying to encourage this trend and as per the official<sup>1</sup> figures Valley hosted 5.72 lakh tourists in 2008, including 5.50 lakh domestic tourists and 22,000 foreigners. In 2009, their number rose to 5.77 lakh domestic tourists and 23,000 foreigners. The number of tourist arrivals in the year 2010 crossed all public relation previous records with 7.25 lakh visiting Kashmir, despite the four-month unrest that paralyzed the region in summer. And the popular winter sports destination of

Gulmarg, which was covered with a public relation pristine white blanket of snow, had around 500 visitors.

Around 700,000 domestic tourists visited in 2010 year in addition to 25,000 foreigners. This is a record that beats even the number of tourists we had before the beginning of the violence<sup>2</sup> and the figure does not include the thousands of pilgrims who arrive here each year for the annual Amarnath Yatra. In 2011, around one million tourists including thousands of foreigners in came to Kashmir, which has crossed all the public relation previous records. More than 5 lakh tourists have visited Kashmir up to 30th of June 2013. In the first half of 2013, more than 5 Lakh tourists have visited Kashmir.

Jammu and Kashmir adventure tourism offers the tourists with a wonderful opportunity to explore the vast terrains of the exotic Himalayan mountain ranges. Endowed with natural scenic beauty, Jammu and Kashmir is one of the most sought after tourist destinations of India. Apart from natural beauty, the unique landscape of Jammu and Kashmir also encourages one to find out one's inherent sporting caliber. Exotic Himalayan ranges, swift flowing rivers and vast stretches of green pastoral land republic relation present the beautiful state of Jammu and Kashmir. Jammu and Kashmir offers the tourists to choose from a plethora of adventurous sporting events of trekking, skiing, mountain climbing, river rafting, horse polo, Para gliding and Para sailing. The wide variety of sporting events of Jammu and Kashmir enables the tourists to experiment with their latent sporting zeal and sportsman spirit. The exotic landscape of J & K is blessed with many beautiful places that public relation presents the bounty of nature coupled with many adventurous sports. The high mountains of Jammu and Kashmir offer the tourists to trek along

<sup>1</sup> An official handout (public relation provided by the JKTD on 10<sup>th</sup> of May 2013)

<sup>2</sup> Interview with JKTD official on 10<sup>th</sup> of May 2013

the rough and rugged terrain of the Himalayan ranges. The swift flowing rivers of the mountainous regions public relation provide the adventurous visitors to engage in rafting. List of places of Jammu and Kashmir adventure tourism: Patnitop, Sansar, Kishtwar, Padum, Zangla, stondey, Sani, Phugtal, Zanskar, Rangdum, Sankoo, Drass, Suroo Valley, Basohli, Krimchi, Dal Lake and Wullar. As is dressed in the attire of a perfect sportsman, the tourists venture into the world of adventurous sports to find out their sporting potentialities. The Jammu and Kashmir adventure tourism offers the tourists to enjoy their sojourn into the exotic landscape coupled with unlimited fun and frolic. One of the most exciting and thrilling experience, the Jammu and Kashmir adventure tourism fills the tourists with unlimited enthusiasm and vigor.

#### **IMPORTANCE OF TOURISM FOR KASHMIR**

Tourism is considered as a backbone of the local economy as it has a strong multiplier effects along with agriculture, handicrafts. It is a vital source of income for those associated with it, who public relation provide different services to the tourists ranging from tour planning to their stay and travel within the valley. Often affluent people plan to visit places as tourists and so it becomes a good opportunity for the locals to do business with them. These services include tours and travel agencies, transportation enter public relation prices such as airlines, taxicabs, shikara walas, pony – walas, boarding and lodging facilities or hospitality services, such as accommodations, including hotels and resorts, houseboats, guest houses and huts and entertainment venues, such as amusement parks, gondola services, botanical gardens, tulip garden, skiing venues and so on. Tourism creates opportunities for employment in the service industries associated with tourism and has also been a supporting factor to other industries like Handicrafts, markets, silk industry or fruit industry.

Therefore, there is a great need to support tourism and popularize Kashmir as a tourist destination, so that the benefits that come along with it are able to support the locals. It is therefore, very important that those part of this industry take Kashmir to the rest of the world create such a reputation for it so that the number of tourists increases thereby contributing towards the overall development. This study has been conducted to analyze how the Department of Kashmir Tourism reaches out to the potential tourists and also see their effectiveness. This research study is aimed at studying their public relations techniques.

#### **SCOPE AND RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY**

Keeping in mind the role that public relation is playing for tourism industry of Kashmir, which is well – known tourist destination across the world, it emerged as an interesting area of study. The study is important because it will help to study the communication strategy of tourism department to reach out to the tourists – both domestic and foreign. The study will also show how tourism department public relation notes the tourism or what the strategies of the department towards tourism are. Besides an attempt has also been made to know that how many tourists' destinations were identified or throng open for the tourists. Besides how much Tourism Department of Kashmir is capable to enhance the tourism industry.

#### **OBJECTIVES**

Following objectives has been framed for the present study.

1. To study the communication strategies implemented by the Directorate of Kashmir Tourism for public relation promoting tourism
2. To find about what the different public relation techniques and tools are used for this
3. To study the efforts of the tourism department in making Kashmir a popular tourism destination.
4. To study the public relation problems faced by tourists vis – a – viz infrastructure and other facilities as these have a direct impact on the tourist inflow

#### **HYPOTHESIS**

In order to testify the above objectives the given hypothesis has been framed:

The concept and importance of Public Relations is unclear to the Tourism Department of Kashmir and their communication strategy needs serious in public relationovisation

#### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Kashmir is not subject to any verbal description, yet from time immemorial it has been a fascinating theme for authors, writers and poets for its God gifting bright beauty and charm. Though, some made bollywood films and tourism documentaries besides the great role played by the media made tourists to choose Kashmir.

#### **KNOWLEDGE ABOUT KASHMIR**

Almost all the respondents were having knowledge about Kashmir in one or the other way and the statistics confirm that almost whole number of the respondents use tourism pamphlets/ map in one or the other way. Another interesting correlation is with the income differentials – lower income groups accounting for fewer destinations while higher income groups accounted for more tourist spots.

#### **TIME SPAN OF TOURISTS IN KASHMIR**

Tourists visit Kashmir at different times. When asked about their public relation preferable time to visit here they responded accordingly. Most of the respondents visit here followed by visited returnees which already have visited in the Kashmir. Some visit here before May, 2013 and some after the month of May. From the study, it was observed that most of the respondents visit Kashmir for 10 – 15 days. However, time span for visiting Kashmir will definitely depend on one's leisure time and other factors. Thus, both internal and external factors will affect the time course. Also, it is quite visible than one stays here in Kashmir more than 15 days.

#### **TOURISTS FAVOURITE SPOTS**

Maximum numbers of tourists are attracted towards the famous Dal Lake followed by Gulmarg. Some are attracted to Pahalgam and Tulip Garden, while as least number of the respondents specified Verinag and Kokernag as their favorite spots.

#### **UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC RELATIONS**

Tourism<sup>3</sup> is a type of financial generator that offers employment, exposure and many other things to the people of Kashmir. Besides early entry of tourists in Kashmir this year 2013, the Kashmir has shown a lot of public relation progress from the perspective of media usage also. Now a day's almost every household is having access to different forms of media.

The researchers had to face many public relation problems in making the concept of public relations clear to his respondents. As is evident from the study the concept of public relations has not been public relation properly understood by majority of the tourists, though some of them were very familiar with it. Almost after many years, the concept of public relations still seems to be unclear to majority of the respondents.

#### **WHAT TOURISTS SAID ABOUT THE CONCEPT**

Public relations are concerned to the visitors, tourists, local people but the concept has been put in a very different manner.

"I<sup>4</sup> had never listened this term in context of tourism department of Kashmir nor I was informed about the public relation cell of tourism department before and I am hearing and had got to know it for the first time. He further added that the concept of public relations never existed to me". I<sup>5</sup> am very much aware about the concept of public relations cell that is meant for communication with those persons

who are in need of any sort of information. I think that the tourism department of Kashmir is in slumber as the tourists are not aware of their public relation cell, everybody finds it easy to ask the locals, cab drivers, shopkeepers about the hotel reservations, tourist spots, air tickets and many other things". "Public relation cell<sup>6</sup> is concerned to tourists, aliens to Kashmir and it can public relation provide a better picture of the communication".

#### **WHAT OFFICIALS SAY**

Our Department<sup>7</sup> has lot of issues but we don't know how we can deal with them. They need to be portrayed to the higher authorities so that they can be dealt in a better way. Media concerning these issues of the tourism department should be there so that these can be addressed public relation properly. The quote analyses that officials of the department don't know about Public relation techniques.

#### **VIEWED AS A TOOL OF DEVELOPMENT**

Though concept of Public relations is unusual, but it is viewed as a tool for the development as is evident from the study. People of this division as well as the tourists view public relation cell as an essential tool for development. This is an important fact from researchers point of view as majority of people don't know about the public relation cell of the department, but view it as a developmental tool. As stated above the concept of public relations was not clear to the majority of the respondents but once they were public relation provided with clear cut idea of public relations and its role, majority of the respondents then responded positively. Maximum numbers of the individuals believe that well developed public relation cell can be Tool for development and some of the respondents do not think so.

The maximum number of respondents that responded positively gave the reason of closeness for its role in development.

#### **NEED OF INTERNET**

Today is the world of information and technology, every work is now done through internet. Tourists in large number suggested the tourism department to make use of more and more internet besides giving ads in newspapers and any other form of media. In addition to public relation promoting the various destinations of Kashmir in the public relation print media, the tourism department<sup>8</sup> public relations public relation practioners should look into cyberspace – the Internet. It's everywhere, it's

<sup>3</sup> Shakeel Ahmad, Teacher Radniant Public School, Anantnag on June 2013

<sup>4</sup> Interview with a tourist, Sanjeev Sarkar on June 2013

<sup>5</sup> Interview with a secondary School Student of Delhi, Public relationiety Ieshwar on May 2013

<sup>6</sup> Interview with a tourist, Govind Singh on May 2013

<sup>7</sup> Telephonic conversation with Khurshid Aadil, employee of Tourism Department Kashmir on March

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Mainaki Chatterajj, Researcher at NDTV, Delhi

instantaneous - and it's increasingly the first place industry looks for breaking news. Any department Web site<sup>9</sup> is an ideal medium for posting corporate news and public relation production public relation promotions that would be of interest to tourist public relation prospects. Just keep it "fresh" so that your audience will be inclined to visit the site often. She further added that the department can also use Web site to in public relation prove and sustain communications with the media."

#### **INVOLVEMENT OF PUBLIC RELATION CELL**

I<sup>10</sup> would like to know more tourist spots of Kashmir and want a clear and developed public relation cell in the tourism department, it can play better role in future. The researcher found that majority of the respondents was of the same opinion. So, large number of respondent's voted the concept of non - involvement of tourism department as their reason. Some of the respondents gave other reasons for it. The respondents also believed that information cell/ public relation cell of tourism department is very important to them. It<sup>11</sup> can lash aliens/ foreigners with a rich and credible info. Furthermore it can focus on many developmental plans running here and public relation provides a healthy entertainment to the visitors.

#### **FOCUS ON**

Majority of the responses were of the opinion that tourism department should focus on opening of new tourist destinations and development while as other respondents talked about the issues related to information, accommodation, inquiry and credibility. Consequently, Kashmir tourism can be managed or controlled by one group, by combined groups, or of people such as cab drivers, tourist guides, Shikara waalas, Ponny waalas, women, children, farmer, fisher, ethnic groups or senior citizens opines a large number of gathering at Gulmarg, tourists hot spot.

Kashmir tourism<sup>12</sup> is still in its infancy stage but its beauty, scenery, lush green meadows, different vales here, various types of public relation prongs and many other things blessed by the nature needs to be highlighted so that the Kashmir will be considered among the top tourist destinations in the world. This all can happen when tourism department is having a fully fledged information cell or public relations cell, besides the employees are trained to handle or to answer the queries of the tourists who visit here. Such

things can pave way for better public relation progress and development of Kashmir.

#### **SUPPORT FOR KASHMIR TOURISM AND TOURISTS**

The researchers came to know that the individuals, cab drivers, members of the nongovernmental organizations, tourist guides, Shikara waalas, Ponny waalas, women, children, farmer, fisher, ethnic groups or senior citizens and locals are the public relation principal sources of support for tourism and tourists.

#### **REQUIREMENTS FOR BEING A PUBLIC RELATION PUBLIC RELATION ACTITONER**

A public relations cell requires certain skills that are helpful for people who work in public relations. These include a high level of communication skills, both written and verbal. A public relation person also must be adept at multitasking and time management. He or she might have some form of media background or training to understand how the media works. Organizational and planning skills also are important in public relations that too is lacking in the department according to the study.

A public relation employee must be able to work well under public relationessure. He or she must have the ability to answer a barrage of questions from the media and members of the public, but researcher find that the higher officials like Deputy Director Planning, Azmat Ali, in response of a question told in a drastic mode, "we don't know much about the figures of tourists visited here, go and collect the information from Secretariat." If the department comes under a verbal attack, it is the public relation section that must take control of the situation. The public relation section must effectively respond to the criticism to public relation to the department's reputation.

#### **IMPORTANCE**

A student by public relation profession says that departmental participation should be high rather than the public relation proxy advertising. Either they should be able to answer our queries by establishing any cell or they should close down their department. It is a best way for us to ex public relation press our misery. Public relation techniques are important even more than anything as if any department is having good communication deals with its customers, it is said to be one of the great achievements for the department. But we feel that this tourism department of Kashmir focuses more on money, how to make their masters happy by offering them free huts, free Gandola ride than to communicate with the tourists, how to behave with those persons who are in need of

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Aditi Bhatt, tourist from Chandigarh

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Deepti Malhotra, tourist from Delhi

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Salman Rizvi, entrepublic relationneur of Kashmir

<sup>12</sup> Walk and talk with Public relationofessor Muhammad Aslam, Baba Farid Institute of Technology, Dehradun

information or who have certain queries, said a group of tourists, waiting in a long queue for Gandola tickets at Gulmarg.

#### **WEAKNESSES**

The researcher also finds some interesting things besides according to the respondents, there are numerous weaknesses that tourism department should heal within the course of time. There is a poor coordination between the employees of the department, lack of training infrastructure-so that they can train their employees and could seek them public relation techniques.<sup>13</sup> Employees of the department are non customer friendly, besides there is no culture of perspective planning in State Department and they have no accountability in financial matters. No capacity of stakeholders for public relation providing better services to the tourists. The study shows that **there is lack of research, not enough tourism research that can help the department** to overcome from the weaknesses besides there is not any tourism policy that can remain confined to any point. A destination looks like the 100 year old destination that means no development of the destinations has been made so far by the tourism department as they (Tourism department) stressed only on few sites, which already are developed.

#### **DIVERGE TOURISTS**

It is also specified from the study that tourism department didn't bother to diverge the more and more tourists from specific tourism to other type of tourism like trekking, adventurous and other. There is also less diversion of tourists to new places as is evident from the study because most of the respondents said that they don't know about the new places/ spots of Kashmir. The most and the important thing, that the researchers find is the poor connectivity between tourists and the department as is clear from the above responses by the tourists. Besides, there are less public relation promotional activities by the tourism department of Kashmir than any other tourism department of other states of India like Rajasthan, Gujarat, Malaysia and Australia.

#### **TOOLS THAT CAN PUBLIC RELATION BE HELPFUL IN BETTER COMMUNICATION**

There are many tools and methods that tourism department of Kashmir can use to enhance the department's image. The tools that have been traditionally used include news releases and announcements that are sent to the media, newsletters that are sent to customers and appearances at public events, such as trade shows or conventions. With the

public relationoliferation of the Internet, tourism departments now can also use tools such as blogs and social media networks to accomplish their goals.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Most of the people feel that Kashmir Valley seems to be slowly and steadily restoring its lost glory that it held on the world tourism map leaving behind a forlorn history that was symbolic of lack of attention towards its beauty. The care and public relation praise that it deserved is returning back as is the inflow of tourists. Now that the misery of violence is paving a way back to the ecstasy of the bird song and mutter and murmur of gentle streams, people from around the world are flocking Kashmir again. While a part of work is done, there is some part of it that is left as a responsibility on the shoulders of the citizens of Kashmir. It's time not to look back but work together tirelessly in the making of a better tomorrow wherein Kashmir figures at the top of the world tourism map.

#### **PUBLIC RELATIONOGRESS IN RECENT YEARS**

Tourism in Kashmir has seen enormous public relation progress in the recent years with advancements in technology and opening of new destinations, catering to a wide range of tourists from all over the world. A robust economic growth, growing literate population and tourist spending power have contributed to an expanding consumer base for Kashmir and Kashmiris. The locals such as cabbies, ponny walaas, shikara walaas, common Kashmiris have also made significant inroads since 2009.

The media usage is increasingly rapidly day by day. This has given rise to the diversification of the tourists regarding the tourist destinations in Kashmir. The Kashmir is attracting large number of tourists from every corner of the world. Although the tourists entered late to this conflict zone (Kashmir) but it has seen a lot of public relation progress from last 10 years.

#### **ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF TOURISM DEPARTMENT**

The role and responsibility of tourism department doubles in a situation like Kashmir, it has not only to serve its basic fundamental duty of public relation providing the information but public relation providing it more transparently and fairly also has to serve the tourists and ensure the department is working for the betterment of the tourists as well as for the common masses. However in most of the cases the reach of department remains restricted to the major destinations and small destinations, undeveloped destinations are often neglected. At

<sup>13</sup> Shalini Malhotra, tourist from Delhi.

times not only some newsworthy items are not covered, but big issues are sidelined. Therefore new destinations quite logically remain away from the tourist flow being not involved. Despite poor infrastructure and planning of tourism department, the global exposure to Kashmiri seems to be increasing. This is evident from the study that more and more youth as well as the elder people are connected with the tourism through one way or another.

#### **NEGATIVE IMAGE OF KASHMIR**

People feel that the state of Kashmir is most often characterized either by media or through the hypocrisy of politicians as one of the regions with in public relation pregnable, in terms of security, difficult physical terrain. These factors have negatively impacted reach of developmental public relation programs and limited the flow of tourists.

#### **IMPACT ON OPENING OF NEW DESTINATIONS**

The opening of new tourist destinations like the Nagin Valley, Lolab Valley, Bangus valley, Drangyari valley etc is taking a heavy toll of tourists from every part of world. Belonging to these there is the concept of public relation techniques.

#### **TO WHOME PUBLIC RELATION SHOULD BE REACH OUT**

Public relations that operate in the department and are for the general public, about shower them with all kinds of information. This concept is new in Kashmir besides for the employees of tourism department and from the study it is evident that the department itself is lacking the knowledge to understand the meaning of public relations. During the last sixty years tourism is being used as a source to make the things better. Its stature is different now as compared to earlier times, due to the tourist inflow. The people of the Kashmir who used to work outside the state have now a day's access to almost earn their bread and butter. With every passing moment people are realizing the importance of tourism in Kashmir.

#### **WHAT NEXT?**

The study shows that more has to be done to guarantee the tourists, so that the number could get doubled next year. General feedback from the survey demonstrates that there is a need of direct participation of tourism employees in public relation promoting as well as defending their department against all allegations that tourists have leveled against them. Additionally, some respondents suggested that there should be any brand ambassador at the same time, to attract and keep the tourists. But at the same time, Director Tourism Kashmir, Farooq

Shah public relation praised the vale and said that Kashmir is itself a brand ambassador, it doesn't need any Brand ambassador to public relation promote itself.

#### **OLD IS NOT ALWAYS GOLD**

Although the issues are diverse and timely, respondents suggest that the style of public relation presenting pamphlets, documentaries is of old type according to their view. This might differ from one group to the other, depending on their educational and public relation professional background. The study shows that majority of the respondents of the questionnaire, who claim to be regular or casual visitors of Kashmir rated the public relation presentation of the pamphlets as bad. Thus, this shows that there is a variation among the opinions of tourists also. That is why there is a need of tourist segmentation while planning and implementing any type of pamphlet, advertise or any documentary, to determine what kind of message to which type of people and when to distribute or to show. Some respondents mentioned that instead of depending on expert's views and aftermath of any incident outcomes mostly, it would be better if the tourism department includes opinions and comments of ordinary people from the Kashmir, besides the researches carried by the researchers time by time. This is not to mean that expert opinions are not relevant; rather, they can give solid background to the tourism planning and communication.

#### **CONCERNING ISSUES**

It is evident from the study that eco- tourism and other type of tourism are still new in Kashmir, but are viewed as a tool for public relation progress and development. The locals as well as the tourists want more and more space should be given to the things concerning their issues. They want high participation from their side in this new form of public relations. Firmly speaking, the tourism department of Kashmir lacks in communication with the outsiders and is not able to answer the queries of tourists and so on. This all can be corrected once they make some changes in their public relation techniques.

#### **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The researchers came up with the following policy recommendations, after analyzing the findings of the research. The recommendations are results from the study and from the public relation professional and personal experiences of the researcher. The recommendations read as follows:

1. Make public relation cell active 24 – hours a day.
2. To regain the lost glory of famed hospitality and service.

3. Attract high spending international tourists to visit this region.
  4. Develop optimal infrastructure facilities.
  5. Develop tourist destination facilities of international standards.
  6. Move from seasonal to perennial tourism.
  7. Make wider usage of information technology to public relation prove means of communication- Tourism department of the Kashmir can get customers to their site by tagging magazine ads and advertorials with a specific URL. Readers are able to instantaneously visit a page or section that contains additional public relation product information, a PDF of a brochure and the location of a nearby distributor.
  8. Organize eco – friendly activities.
  9. Finally, don't over look your own email capabilities. You create your public relation messages on the computer. Your editors public relation your material for publication on their computers. Why not send your editorial material (and illustrations) from computer to computer via email? Reduce the paperwork for your editor (and yourself), and you may see your material in public relation print, sooner than you expected.
  10. Ecotourism is about uniting conservation, communities, and sustainable travel. This means that those who implement and participate in ecotourism activities should follow the following ecotourism public relation principles:
    - a. Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect.
    - b. Public relation provides positive experiences for both visitors and hosts.
    - c. Public relation provides direct financial benefits for conservation.
    - d. Public relation provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people.
    - e. Raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climate.
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