



STATUS AND FUNCTIONING OF THE DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS IN ENRICHING RURAL AND URBAN FOLKS WITH VITAL INFORMATION : A CASE STUDY OF BILASPUR DISTRICT-HIMACHAL PRADESH

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Abstract

This paper critically analyses the role played by Directorate of Information and Public Relations in disseminating the information to the rural and urban masses of Bilaspur District of Himachal Pradesh. As disseminating the needful information is one of the key functions of Public Relations the author tried to study the functioning of the Department of Information and Public Relations. This paper also studied what strategies the departments have adopted to reach to different strata of the society to achieve their desired goals. It also studied what are the social instruments the department used for the propagation to implement the government plans. It identified the gaps and difference of opinions among the public. This research paper critically examined the strength and weakness of the Public Relations department on varied fronts and also raised views on the working system in the various departments of Government and non-Government organizations.

Key words: *Mass Communication Vehicles, Print and Electronic Media, Media Personnel, Traditional Folk Media, Public Relations Tools.*

INTRODUCTION

Public Relations and ultimately it is Public Relations which become a causality of public confidence. Public Relations are honest communication. Good Public is doing well rather than just talking about it. Professional Public Relations practitioners throughout the world are working sincerely to save Public Relations from these propaganda makers who sometimes go under the disguise of Public Relations. Public Relations depend on news media to be precise, newspapers and periodicals. Through a series of news releases Public Relations keep national press, regional press, trade press, and broadcasting media informed of these developments. Major developments are normally announced through press conferences and press visits. Lately, Public Relations is making use of audio-visual media. Short films are exhibited to invited audiences and often made available to television.

Public Relations in Relations to communication which includes opinion formation and its measurement, business enterprise, internal Public Relations, external Public Relations, Government and politics, Public Relations in education, Public Relations and propaganda, ethical consideration and concepts and campaigns. In order to review the problematic areas related to various fronts on varied Public Relations, the author discusses the strength and weakness of the process and the procedure adopted by the 'media personnel'. He has also given an insight to the 'pit falls' which lie beneath the working system of 'Public Relations in the various departments of Government and non-Government organizations. The author also discusses the linguistic problem in the communication, which often gives a 'fallacious effects' on the people who interact with various departments. According to Nayyar, there are various constraints and problems with the media personnel who face challenge from the public, organization Government pressure groups and the executers. For external Public Relations Nayyar has received the reports on stock holders and the community, as a result has brought out with some of ameliorating points which may prove beneficial for the business persons and the stock holder community. Large business enterprise which employs a sizeable numerical strength of the people, who are located importantly within a given geographical area, should include a community Relations programme among their public Relations objectives and activities. Lastly, the author has emphasized on ethical consideration for developing the Public Relations with the political field, business field or any campaigning and advocacy programme for the people, belong to different socio-economic and business hierarchy.



In order to accomplish the external relations of Public Relations and its multiple objectives and the problematic areas, various senior managerial cadres has been recommended. In this context, research and development have been recommended. In this context, research and development can be helpful to ameliorate the quality of reporting and interviews. The research data can be beneficial for enhancing the credibility of media. The market research may help to enhance the new market avenues of the newspapers. Similarly, the communicative tools of Public Relations can enhance the quality of news management. The role of Public Relations is to diagnose the public affair problems, and employees and knowing the community and vice-versa.

In order to develop judicious Public Relations, the author has mentioned the benefits of specific plans, and tying Public Relations plans to the organization plans to get the desired results. Lastly, the authors have discussed the social aspects of industrial revolution; change in social belief and customs the culture and its changing position. They have also mentioned some of demographic factors for change in short term and long term conditions. It also includes change in demographic profile in relations to development and its changing effects on management in the present scenario.

That is why successful communication for good Public Relations is essentially the outcome of a complicated interplay of the principles of communication and virtues of Public Relations. Their information works in full knowledge of overall Government strategy and the activities of other departments, so that duplication in effort and timing is avoided. Successive administrations have therefore charged a Minister with the responsibility of securing sufficient co-ordination of information work at this level. At present the Home Secretary, assisted by one of the two Parliamentary Secretaries to the Civil Service Department, is generally responsible for the Government's information services. At the official level the co-ordination of the departmental information effort has been placed by the Prime Minister in the charge of his Chief Press Secretary, and is organized through a series of regular and adhoc meetings chaired by the Chief Press Secretary or his staff. Questions on overseas information services are answered by the Parliamentary under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

The internal arrangement of a department depends on the relative importance of the different aspects of the work, and the extent varies substantially between different Ministries. It is usual, however, for there to be four sub-divisions: the press office, the television and broadcasting section, the publicity section, and the intelligence or briefing section.

Traditional, Folk Media is a term used to denote people's performances. It describes folk dance, rural drama, and musical variety of the village people. This term speaks of those performing arts which are cultural symbols of people. Traditional folk media have been consciously persuaded to come out of their shell to give a personal touch to the otherwise impersonal mass media programmes. Traditional Folk Media are personal forms of communication, of entertainment. Since these arts are woven into the social and cultural fabric of the rural society, their role in educating the non-school population assumes significance. They have lived and grown with the rural people and so the rural masses, without any inhibition, get involved in their game and emerge more relaxed and better informed.

There are many advantages of traditional folk media for the purpose of informing and educating the rural illiterate. They are rich in variety and readily available and economically viable. They command the confidence of the rural masses as they are live. And above all they are in face to face situation between the communicator and the receiver of the message. In India, traditional folk media have been reckoned as successful mass-motivators. They inspire the masses during the times of stress and strain. These forms of art are a part of the way of life of a community and provide acceptable means of bringing development issues into the community on its own terms. Mass media have extended 'the area of coverage of a folk performance, while traditional folk media with their aspiring colour and costume, dance and music, have enriched the content of the mass media channels'. There is a tremendous wealth and variety in traditional folk media of India. Conventionally, the traditional folk



performances have been theme-carriers, usually carrying themes of morality. The rural drama, with its stock characters, has also carried across modern messages without, in any way hurting the community's traditional culture. Since these arts are woven into the social and cultural fabric of the rural society, their role in educating the non-school population assumes significance. They have lived and grown with the rural people and so the rural masses, without any inhibition, get involved in their game and emerge more relaxed and better informed.

BILASPUR DISTRICT AS PER 2011 CENSUS OF INDIA

Total population	:3,82,056
Geographical Area	:1,167 (Sq. Kms)
Density	:327 Per/Sq.Kilometer
Males	:1,92,827
Females	:1,89,282
Sex Ratio	:1000/981 Male/Female
Overall literacy rate	:85.67%
Male literacy	: 92.39%
Female literacy	:78.90%
Administrative divisions	:Bilaspur and Ghumarwin
No. of Tehsils	: Bilaspur and Ghumarwin
No. of Sub- Tehsils	: Sri Naina Deviji and Jhandutta
Development Blocks	: Bilaspur Sadar, Ghumarwin and Geharwin
Total number of villages	: 1,016
Parliamentary Constituency	: Hamirpur
Distance From State Capital Shimla	:85 Kms
Nearest Airport	:Shimla 85 Kms
Major River	:Satluj River
Culture	: Hindi,Punjabi,Pahari
Traditions	: Mixed
Economy	:Agriculture Based & Service
Languages spoken	:Hindi, Punjabi, Kahluri or Bilaspuri

The district Bilaspur lies between **31°12'30"** and **31°35'45'** north latitude and between **76°23'45"** and **76°55'40"** east longitude in the outer hills of Himalayas. It is bounded on the north by the Mandi and Hamirpur Districts, on the west by Hamirpur and Una districts, on its south lies Nalagarh area of Solan district. It is encircled on the east, north east by Solan and Mandi districts. It lies on both the banks of river Satluj which forms the boundary between Mandi and Bilaspur district from east to west is about 51km and maximum width from North to South is about 43kms. Bilaspur stands divided into two natural parts formed by the Satluj River. The district is mostly hilly and has no mountains of higher altitude from the mean sea level. The elevation of the lowest point is about 290 metres and that of the highest is about 1,980 metres. There are seven main ranges of Naina Devi, Kot, Jhanjiar, Tiun, Bandla, Bahadurpur and Ratanpur constituting the hill system. These have been so prominent that the erstwhile princely state at times used to be called '**Satdhar-Kahloor**', meaning Kahloor of the seven hills.

There are three famous valleys in the Bilaspur district. The Satluj Valley, the Chaunto Valley and the Danwin Valley. They are famous for its produce of maize, rice, sugarcane, ginger and wheat crops.

Rivers: Bilaspur district's main river is the Satluj. It was the river over which the treaty between the English and Maharaja Ranjit Singh of the Sikhs was signed in 1809. Several foreign travelers, William Moorcraft (1820-39) have left very interesting accounts of the river Satluj. Keonthal, Kuthar, Jubbal, Bhagat Bhajji, Mahlog, Mangal and Balson. Bir Chand, founder of the state, was followed in succession by Udhran Chand, Jaskaran Chand, Madanbrahm Chand and Ali Chand.



PUBLIC RELATIONS OF GOVERNMENT OF HIMACHAL PRADESH

A brief introduction The Department of Information and Public Relations since its Inception in 1954 has passed through various stages and has done its best to equip itself with what was essentially required to meet the challenges of times and thus make its presence felt through the optimum use of its potential. The main functions of the department is to disseminate the policies and programmes of the Government in the right perspective and to gauge and assess the reactions of the quarter concerned and keep informed the Government about their impact amongst the masses. Besides it also educates the people about various programmes launched for the welfare of the people by the Centre and State Government from time to time. This task is indeed a challenging one due to difficult terrain, remoteness of areas, and the inadequate reach of communication. With the advancement and in the wake of day-today new addition of latest technology in the field of communication and information this task has become all the more challenging. The Department of Information and Public Relations keeping pace with the times has emerged as a substantially dependable organisation which can undoubtedly deliver the goods and as such cope with the growing publicity demands and can ensure the uninterrupted flow of information to the beneficiaries of the State. Although the publicity cannot be measured in terms of money and goods, yet the department continues to perform from behind the curtain without the least intention to come on the forefront just to make other see the services it renders.

The Department of Information and Public Relations has adopted different strategies for different strata of society so that the objective they have assigned to themselves could be achieved in true earnest. For instance, the tools of publicity that are generally used in the urban areas are different than that of the tools that are used in the rural areas. The people of urban areas are comparatively more educated, more aware about the happenings on regional, national and international level because of the easy access to the print and electronic media. Their dialogue with each other is more subtle, analytical and the opinion they form after a thorough scan of events taking place in the information loaded world is too strong to waver whether it is in favour or against.

Whereas the people living in rural areas are more often than not guided or tutored by their collective unconscious (sanskars) stored at the back of their minds especially in the near absence of print and electronic media. Apart from this, they also depend upon the teachers or any other official posted in the village to know what is happening beyond the periphery of their village. That is how the ruralites form their opinion about the activities in vogue or being initiated for their welfare. And the people living in still the remotest areas bank highly upon the traditional media where the reach of print electronic media is a far cry.

Data collection was made on stratified random sampling method.

Survey: 100 respondents have been approached in each segment of the sample. The data for observation has been taken from the respondents including the students, employees, un-employed, housewives, labourers, businessmen, shopkeepers, farmers etc. Which are taken for the study? All these respondents have given their objective and subjective views on various problematic areas of 'Public Relations' keeping in view the various levels of 'Responsiveness' and their varied responses have been interpreted. The data has been collected from Bilaspur district and the data was interpreted and discussed as follows: Out of the total sample for district Bilaspur the percentage for male and female respondents was 70% and 30% respectively. Study shows the distribution aspects of occupational structure of the respondents, taken for the study. 21 % were students, whereas 28% of the respondents were in service. The unemployed respondents were 21%. The housewives were 13%. 2 % of the respondents belonged to ex-servicemen category. 14% of the respondents were farmers. Lastly, 1% respondents which were businessmen. In order to know the meaning of 'Public Relations', there were 42 % of the respondents, belonging to different categories, who have indicated their views as 'Relationship with Public', whereas there were 18% of the respondents who have observed that the meaning of 'Public Relations' was 'Publicity'. 14% of the respondents were of the view that Public Relations are aimed at, both relationship and publicity. On the other hand, there were none of the respondents, who have formed their views about public Relations as mode of image making, whereas the 21 % of the respondents have treated the Public Relations, as a source of 'entertainment'. On



the contrary, there were only 5% of respondents, who have not formed any opinion in this regard. According to study to ascertain the kind of duty performed by the 'Public Relations' department, the views of the respondents were quite diverse 27 % of the respondents have considered the functions of Public Relations as 'establishing a good Relationship between the Government and the public', whereas 31% of the respondents have opined that the function of the department was 'Publicity of the Government Policies'. Further, there were 2% of the respondents, who have considered 'Public Relations' as a source of entertainment for the public. On the other hand, 30 % of the respondents have expressed their views as 'Publicity for the political party and their associated leaders.' However, there were 10% of the respondents, belonging to different categories, who agreed with the option "all of these". In order to know the 'Field Visit' by the personnel belonging to 'Public Relations' department in a particular area, varied responses have been received from the respondents, belonging to different categories. In this context, there were 42 % of the respondents, who have confirmed that the personnel belonging to Public Relations Department usually paid regular visit to their areas. On the other hand, there were 41 % of the respondents, who have denied any visit by personnel belonging to Public Relations Department. Lastly, 17 % of the respondents have failed to form any opinion in this regard. In order to know the 'Frequency of Visit' paid by the personnel of Public Relations department, the study shows that there were 20% of the respondents, who have confirmed that the personnel pay their monthly visit to their respective areas. On the other hand, there were 7 % of the respondents who have pointed out that they usually pay visit once a year, whereas 25 % of the respondents, who have told that the personnel belonging to Public Relations Department, usually pay visit once in six months. Lastly, 48 % of the respondents did not respond at all in this regard. Regarding the visit to the Public Relations Department there were 33% of the respondents who gave their answers in affirmative, whereas 67% of the respondents have denied visiting the Public Relations Department referring significance of Public Relations Department role for making people aware of the development schemes, sponsored by Government. It has been observed that the 55 % of the respondents have admitted taking benefits from the development oriented programme. On the other hand, 33 % of the respondents have denied any beneficial services, rendered by the department. Lastly, a considerable number of respondents (12 %) have failed to form any opinion in this regard. While referring to, which deals with the possibility of improvement on finding the 'Pit-falls' in the development works/schemes, it has been observed that 54 % of the respondents have given answer in 'Affirmative'. On the other hand, 44% of respondents have given no answer denied on this 'perception'. Lastly, 2 % of the respondents have shown indifferent attitude towards this viewpoint. According to reviewing the benefits of the schemes it has been observed that 36 % of the respondents have been benefitted from the educational services. On the other hand, 54 % of the respondents have been helped financially by the Government Departments, whereas 5 % of the respondents have been benefitted by the Health Services rendered by the Government Health Department. On the other hand, the service, which includes family welfare, children and women welfare and other miscellaneous services, rendered by the State Health Department have proved helpful to 5 % beneficiaries in their respective areas.

CONCLUSION

In this context several region-based studies have proven that the department of Public Relations directly or indirectly plays a positive role in the changing the perceptions of the people regarding developmental projects. Whether the public is positive or narrow minded with regard to officials' association with the developmental work of the State is determined by the official of the Department of Public Relations. This study reveals that Department of Public Relations acts as a powerful link between the Government and the people in enriching vital information to both rural and urban masses through its agencies in regard to the development projects. It gives priority to the social media instruments for the propagation of Government plans. It will not be an exaggeration to say that the Department of Public Relations is the meter road of the functional Relations between the Government and the Public. The respondents have given both objective, subjective answers to the questions regarding the implementation of the Government plans which show that their opinions are diverse. This difference in the opinions of the public is due to their level of education, income, social and economic status. The authors also suggested as to how the Department of Public Relations can improve of functioning with respect to rural and



urban masses to receive vital information for the overall development. Through its healthy requests, Public relations can create an atmosphere of transparency, accountability, between the Government and the Public.

Regional studies have clarified that the Government utilizes the medium of rallies for rapid and effective connection with public. In these rallies the Government distributes pamphlets and other material of the developmental activities and also addresses the rallies. Media also is engaged for this purpose from quite some time the leaders of all levels have started utilizing the electronic social media which is broadly very impressive for one to one contact. Social media is especially, effective in urban area where as in rural areas it is less effective. However, means for the improvement of social media being developed. As a result the popularity of the conventional instruments of Public Relations is on the declining.

Hence, it would be pertinent to draw conclusions from the examination of the study which indicate a considerable subjective view on functioning of 'Public Relations' department and the responsiveness of the people, belonging to different strata of society. According to some of the respondents, the functioning of Public Relations Department is up to the mark; whereas a considerable number of respondents have pointed out some of the 'pit-falls' in the functioning of the Department for 'publicity services rendered' for the state sponsored schemes and development programs periodically executed in their respective areas. It also includes some of rating measures which may prove as corrective measures for further improvement in the functioning of 'Public Relations Department' in accordance with the changing scenario in Himachal Pradesh. Overall the functioning and performance of the Department of Information and Public Relations is quite satisfactory.

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