

**Public Relations in the Exciting World of Travel and Tourism**

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Within today's society, the practice of public relations is one of the most important concepts in the process of building a corporation. It is so important that a company creates a brand for itself and forms a strong relationship with the target audience. Corporations can tend to struggle if it does not have an excellent PR team that is able to reach its public successfully through many different media platforms. As defined by PRSA, “public relations helps an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other. Public Relations broadly applies to organizations as a collective group, not just a business; and publics encompass the variety of different stakeholders” (PRSA). The main goal in PR is to communicate a strong message at the right time, in the right place, and to the right audience. In the travel and tourism industry, public relation is a key promotional tool that is practiced to effectively reach the public.

The travel and tourism industry has steadily grown for many years, but it was not until recently that it became one of the fastest-growing sectors in the world economy. Although the industry ranks third behind chemical and fuels, it is ahead of agricultural goods and automotive products (UNWTO 2018). It is one of the major segments of international commerce and helps developing countries create a strong source of revenue. According to the World Economic Forum (WEF) of 2019, in 2018 the industry helped generate 10.4% of the world’s gross domestic product (GDP) and currently employs over 10% of the world's workforce, about 319 million people (WEF report 2019). Many underdeveloped and poorer countries rely on and greatly benefit from this industry because it usually produces large profits. As travel and tourism continue to expand, the competition between countries does as well.

In the World Economic Forum’s (WEF) Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report of 2019 titled, “Travel and Tourism at a Tipping Point”, a statistical data chart of 140 different economies shows that Europe and Eurasia remain the most powerful continents in this industry.

Within this report, it is discovered that Spain continues to hold the top performer position for the third consecutive year, while the United States resides in fifth. Europe continually dominates the travel and tourism industry because of its countless number of famous cultural resources, historical monuments, and beautiful museums. Additionally, poorer countries found in Sub-Saharan Africa maintain their positions at the bottom of the data chart due to the “historically lower levels of economic development, the region continues to face difficulties in health and hygiene, overall infrastructure and the effective selling of cultural and business travel” (WEF report 2019). The travel and tourism industry intends to keep flourishing as more countries develop, airplanes advance, new travel agencies are discovered, and PR tactics evolve.

When most people in the world think about traveling or tourism, they will likely think of a plane, specific city, or attractions such as monuments and museums. Human brains are wired to have the natural desire to travel the world and experience things they never have before. The tourism and travel industry, “whether it’s a nation promoting a heritage or a small town promoting an annual festival, has one single goal: attract travelers and tourists”(Page & Parnell 2021 pg. 304). Public relations is a vital component when trying to acquire the audience's attention and create a desirable tourist attraction. Although this process does not happen overnight, there are many strategies that PR professionals have adapted to intrigue the world's attention. Some of these tactics include story placements in magazines/newspapers, advertisements, brochures, flyers, billboards, video news leases online or on TV, and creating a strong online presence in the world of social media. PR is so much more than just appealing to visitors, it helps the tourists get to their destination safely and shape an experience they will never forget once they arrive (Page & Parnell 2021 pg. 304). Public relations practitioners are universally dispersed throughout the industry’s four major sectors—hotels, restaurants,

transportation, and destinations/tourist attractions—to captivate every target audience's attention. These sectors have developed over a great amount of time to create modern-day PR travel and tourism.

Throughout history, public relations has not always been a large component of the travel and tourism industry. “While the main principles of forming relationships with media and consumers to promote a travel brand, product, or destination have held steady over the past decade, methods for reaching consumers have continuously evolved” (PRWeek Krietsch 2008). The prominence of travel industry PR has amplified beyond imagination only within the past twenty years. This is all thanks to the invention of the internet. Back in 1998, travel and tourism corporations pitched ideas to journalists by mail or fax. When the internet and email were finally created, the industry began to flourish and developed at an extremely fast rate. It has allowed for many increased opportunities to sell and promote travel as well as a rise in the popularity of boutique and independent hotels (PRWeek Krietsch 2008). One example of the industry's growth can be portrayed through the well-known cable TV channel, CNN. This corporation usually devotes considerable amounts of time to industry news, but now there are cable channels exclusively devoted to travel and food. Additionally, every Friday, *USA Today*, America’s largest-circulation daily newspaper, publishes an extensive travel section, along with national newspapers such as *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* (Deuschl 2016). In today’s world, there are now thousands of specific sections for travel and tourism in many different social media outlets and entertainment corporations.

One historical day that tremendously impacted the travel and tourism PR industry was the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Many Americans were hesitant to leave the country and spend any money so PR professionals had to adjust their strategies for reaching consumers. In the years

after 9/11, as the web expanded so did the rise to more options for destinations and air travel. With the increase in globalization and internet use, public relations professionals had to adapt their work to accommodate Americans' desires to visit an array of places around the world (PRWeek Krietsch 2008). Although things were looking up for this booming industry, it suffered immensely from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Considering these corporations are built on encouraging people to experience new destinations in person, a pandemic can do nothing but harm. With many travel restrictions in place, the role of tourism PR had to completely transform their techniques in grasping consumers' attention (PR Daily 2021). While the travel and tourism PR industry is still recovering from the impact of COVID-19, it is slowly making progress and learning new communication tactics.

In addition, there are many great advantages and perks that come with working in the travel and tourism PR business. From working for airlines and cruise lines to hotels and theme parks, there are so many amazing different types of institutions and experiences offered in this industry. Working for different tourism establishments such as travel agencies, resorts, hotels, attractions, etc., is extremely rewarding and brings many new opportunities to life. PR practitioners in travel and tourism are constantly meeting new people, traveling to extravagant destinations, and sharing all the amazing experiences that their job has to offer (PRSA Jacques 2014). While this job seems to offer everything and more, there are a couple of disadvantages to working in this profession. One major downside of working in travel and tourism PR is that events such as 9/11 and the COVID-19 pandemic can occur out of nowhere and put jobs on a complete pause.

Natural disasters or illness-related breakouts can happen so suddenly and there must be a prepared backup plan in case of this emergency. Certain defining moments can destroy a

company's reputation and finances, so an alternative method is required. Considering there is such a large number of employees hired for travel and tourism institutions all over the globe, there is also a wide variety of consumers from all types of ethnicities and races. With that being said, some dilemmas this industry comes across are “unhappy workers and threats of unionization at hotel properties, protesting special interest groups in theme parks, illness outbreaks on cruise ships, accidents and terrorist attacks on airlines” (Crisis Experts 2020). Crisis management in this specific profession is still developing and changing as the world evolves. In the future, this enterprise will adapt new disaster strategies and rebuilding techniques that will help in case of an emergency. As the business continues to expand, the desire to travel to places that have never been seen before or luxury small islands will rise. Travel and tourism PR professionals will begin to generate larger tourist attractions in smaller destinations instead of all of the hot spots, big cities. This will make these new places very enticing and create a new revenue stream. Furthermore, this industry still has plenty of growth and rebuilding to do in the near future.

Every type of public relations practice whether it is fashion or tourism uses similar tactics and strategies to reach the consumers' attention. “Along with advertising and marketing, public relations consultancy plays an important role in promoting and shaping a favorable image of brands, creating a desire to travel, persuading consumers to purchase tourist products and services, increasing engagement with target audiences, and more... public relations can effortlessly provide greater connections with audiences by communicating key messages in the right channel at the convenient moment, and moreover, is largely inexpensive when compared to advertising campaigns.” (Sherlock Communications 2019). Many travel and tourism corporations capture the target audience's eye by creating social media campaigns, rich and

engaging content, targeting press tips and media coverage, and participating in fairs and organizing events. While many PR industries share similar communication activities, the travel and tourism industry is so special that it allows for their employees to frequently vacation all over the globe and still make income.

This production of PR is so unique and different from all others because it provides far-fetched, real-life experiences and hands-on communication. Oftentimes while working for this industry, it won't even feel like a job and instead just a hobby communicating with others. There are so many learning experiences to gain from and new relationships to form in this workforce. Travel and tourism is the face of luxury and pleasure so it is important that all employers must be dressed appropriately and have the necessary skill sets. Other than having a college and high school degree, it is also very helpful that travel and tourism PR professionals speak more than one language, have video and photography experience, have exemplary communication and presentation abilities, and can form strong relationships with consumers to draw their attention. In addition to these essential skill sets, four components that will help PR professionals properly reach consumers and please them, include using PR tools, targeted messages, audiences and media, and crisis communication management.

Overall, the travel and tourism public relations industry is outstanding and provides countless opportunities and experiences to employers. This profession requires lots of traveling all over the world so this allows faculty to meet tons of unique and interesting people. Personally, this career path is very intriguing to me. I would love to travel the world, experience things I never have before, and form relationships with humans of all ethnic backgrounds and races. This career path contributes so much to its employers and helps underdeveloped countries make a profit. There are so many benefits to working for travel and tourism that it outweighs any cons.

Although I would love to work in this industry, my main goal is to work for the fashion & beauty public relations industry. In addition, public relations in the travel and tourism industry continues to expand, structure new communications strategies, plan crisis management tactics, discover new vacation destinations, and learn from past mistakes.

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