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Crafting Public Narratives: A Holistic Overview of Directorate General Public Relations Punjab

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ABSTRACT

This article delves into the dynamic landscape of public relations (PR) and underscores its pivotal role in contemporary socio-economic contexts, with a specific emphasis on the Directorate General Public Relations (DGPR) of Punjab. PR emerges as a strategic discipline crucial for shaping positive relationships, managing credibility, and influencing public opinion in both the public and private sectors. Within the government sector, the article highlights PR's integral role in promoting accountability, transparency, and public trust. The author also discussed its function as a facilitator for effective communication between government organizations and the public, playing a vital role in disseminating policies, managing crises, and bridging the gap between the ruling class and the general public. A focal point of the study is the Directorate General Public Relations of Punjab, providing a comprehensive overview of its historical evolution, operational mechanisms, and the challenges it encounters. The author also discussed the rich historical context and contemporary applications, accentuating the enduring significance of PR, particularly as embodied by the DGPR, in shaping public perceptions and maintaining effective communication channels in both government and private sectors.



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1. Introduction

Effective communication is essential in today's socio-economic environment for forming public opinion, establishing credibility, and cultivating favorable connections between stakeholders and organizations. As a strategic discipline devoted to managing and preserving these vital connections, public relations (PR) emerges (Shamsan & Otieno, 2015). To build and maintain positive relationships between an organization and its various publics, public relations as a field includes a wide range of activities. Customers, staff members, investors, governmental entities, and the general public are a few examples of these publics. PR's versatility across industries and its unique applications in public and private sectors both demonstrate its dynamic nature.

Public relations is essential to promote accountability, transparency, and public trust in the government sector. Government organizations communicate with the public, manage crises, and disseminate information through public relations techniques (Androniceanu, 2021). In the public sector, effective communication is essential to disseminating policies and initiatives and bridging the gap between the ruling class and the general public.

On the other hand, public relations plays a distinct role in the private sector and is firmly ingrained in the cutthroat business climate. Businesses use public relations (PR) to improve the perception of their brand, fortify their bonds with customers, and negotiate the complexities of a dynamic marketplace. In the private sector, public relations encompasses product launches, reputation management, and crisis management (Ni, A. Y, & Wart, 2015).

Similar to other regions of the world, Public Relations was practiced in one form or another thousands of years ago in the regions that make up modern-day Pakistan. Rocks and specifically designed monuments were used by the rulers of the South Asian subcontinent to deliver royal proclamations and decrees and/or to showcase their accomplishments (Bose & Jalal, 2022).

Near the modern city of Mansehra in NWFP, a rock bears the royal decrees of Ashoka (about 300 B.C.). The ruler wanted to maintain a steady line of communication with the populace to foster continuous communication, which was the fundamental motivation behind these engravings on rocks and monuments (Mariam, 2014). Even today, a PR professional's primary responsibility is to foster understanding between his organization's target audience and the general public.

History reveals that the Muslim sub-continental kings of South Asia appointed Waqa-i-Nawees (scribes) around India to keep them informed about the public's attitudes and opinions as well as the general condition of affairs in the nation. These scribes recorded information so that the emperors would be informed of the significant events taking place in their province or region. The scribes, who reported to the king directly, kept tabs on the conduct and overall demeanor of the regional and provincial governors and officials, including army commanders (Mariam, 2014).

From the aforementioned instances, Public Relations has a lengthy history in the regions constituting modern-day Pakistan, and certain individuals have been engaged in activities that remain integral to the entire job description of a PR practitioner in these areas, including addressing issues of gender discrimination in Pakistan (Jamshed, 2021). However, it is now widely recognized that the extensive use and application of public relations activities commenced at the beginning of the 20th century when several British companies began employing PR tactics to enhance product sales and establish a positive reputation for their enterprises (Bardhan & Patwardhan, 2004).

In the following study, the author has provided a comprehensive overview of the office of Punjab's Directorate General Public Relations, placing a special emphasis on its historical evolution, operational mechanisms, and the challenges it encounters.

2. Historical Evolution of Public Relations in Pakistan

The fascinating history of public relations (PR) in Pakistan reflects the socio-political and economic changes that have taken place in the area. With its roots in the post-independence era, PR in Pakistan has experienced a dramatic transformation as it has adjusted to the shifting circumstances of the country.

2.1. Post-independence state of public relations

According to Mariam Ikram (2014), non-Muslims who chose to stay and work in India at the time of India's independence made up the bulk of the professionals engaged by PR firms in both the public and commercial sectors. Although the provincial governments of Pakistan established public relations and communications offices, its non-Muslim employees also went to India. As a result, the Pakistani government was forced to prioritize updating and improving the provincial departments of public relations and information while also establishing Radio Pakistan, the Department of Advertising, Films, and Publications, and the Press Information Department at the federal level. The lack of certified and trained people made this a difficult endeavor.

2.2. Advancement in Pakistan's Public Relations

Every succeeding Pakistani government has understood the value and necessity of influencing public opinion through PR and publicity (Melissen, 2005). As a result, the operations and duties of the PR and information departments eventually grew to encompass numerous new fields. Under two different headings, a brief description of the PR/publicity network that now exists in Pakistan and its operations is provided, namely: Official PR and publicity, Internal PR/Publicity, External PR/Publicity, and Non-official PR & Publicity.

3. Internal PR & Publicity

The Federal Government conducts internal PR/Publicity through the following organizations:

3.1. Press Information Department (PID)

One of the most important and effective government organizations, it effectively communicates with working journalists, newspapers, and magazines in addition to conveying the government's goals, policies, and development projects (Mezzera & Sial, 2010). Other notable responsibilities of this department include conducting research, producing official advertisements, and writing the first drafts of speeches that will be delivered by the president and head of state of the nation (Prime Minister). Additionally, it compiles a daily press summary for the nation's top officials that contains key news events as well as editorial comments, editorials, essays, and letters to the editors on issues of interest to the whole country.

3.2. Directorate of Films and Publications (DFP)

The Directorate of Advertising, Films, and Publications, as it was named until the middle of the 1960s, was regarded as one of the government's most successful PR/publicity departments (Qadeer, 2006). However, this department was unable to maintain its former important and prestigious position after the arrival of TV in 1964 and the transfer of the advertising wing to the Press Information Department. However, it continues to play a crucial role and is an expert in producing documentaries, news documentaries, newsreels, and various publications (Mariam, 2014). It produces several regular

journals in addition to publishing well-researched, well-documented content on matters of national importance, including an Official Handbook that shows development in several sectors and is distributed both inside and outside the nation. In summary, DFP is a major supplier of publicity and informational materials, including pictorials, both inside and outside the nation.

3.3. Pakistan National Centre (PNC):

The Pakistan Council was the name given to the department when it was founded in 1964. National Integration, but due to the demands of the moment and the establishment of an independent state of Bangladesh, its name was changed to Pakistan National Centre in 1972. On topics of national importance, the Centre organizes lectures, seminars, symposia, and panel discussions. It has 30 branches and call centers, one in each of Pakistan's major cities and towns. Every Center features a well-stocked library whose membership is available to all Pakistanis (Mariam, 2014).

It identifies the country's main issues and offers potential solutions. Up until the early 1970s, it was a very successful and efficient organization, but nowadays it appears to have succumbed to apathy and indifference.

3.4. Radio Pakistan:

On December 19th, 1972, Radio Pakistan transformed an associated department into a corporation. In a nation where more than 70% of the population lacks literacy, this is one of the primary public relations/publicity organs of the government. The company airs newscasts in both national and regional languages as well as programming designed to increase public awareness of various concerns (Hussain, 2012). For the vast majority of people, particularly those who reside in Pakistan's rural areas, it serves as their sole source of amusement.

4. Pakistan Television Corporation (PTV):

In 1964, when the television Promoters Company began airing test broadcasts, it made its debut in Pakistan. In 1967, the business changed its legal form to a limited corporation and adopted the name Pakistan Television Corporation. The Corporation has offices in the provincial and federal capitals, respectively. The Corporation is a wholly owned and managed government corporation. Through its programming, television in Pakistan has become the most effective medium for changing the desired attitudes of the populace over time (Mariam, 2014).

The PTV had a monopoly up until 1990, but it is now up against fierce competition from Network Television Marketing (NTM), a commercial company that began broadcasting regularly on July 17, 1990, after gaining the necessary rights from Shalimar Recording Company. As of May 30th, 1996, NTM was broadcasting content from 10 stations spread across Pakistan's major cities (Hussain, 2012). The establishment of NTM has sparked healthy rivalry in the realm of mass entertainment, and as a result, both networks' programming has significantly improved.

5. National Press Trust (NPT):

Two daily newspapers in English, Pakistan Times and Morning News, and two daily newspapers in Urdu, Mashriq, and Imroze, were published by the National Press Trust to support the nation's strong journalism traditions, shape public opinion, and maintain a favorable attitude toward the government's policies (Mahmood & Tahir, 2021). The Pakistani government resolved on March 27, 1991, to privatize all NPT newspapers except the Pakistan Times following its privatization agenda. The Pakistan Times was transferred to a private group on May 22, 1996, as a result of a following conference in January 1994 that voted to privatization all newspapers without exception.

6. External PR/Publicity

External PR/primary publicity's objective is to promote a positive image of Pakistan, its people, and its culture abroad. It also strives to increase public understanding of several subjects, including Pakistan's policy objectives, efforts to promote socioeconomic development, and efforts to maintain internal peace.

Additionally, it attempts to increase awareness of Pakistan's policy goals, efforts to promote socioeconomic prosperity, and initiatives to advance both internal and global peace. Even if these are not the main objectives, efforts are made to market products made in Pakistan, promote tourism, and boost foreign investment in Pakistan. The responsibility for maintaining Pakistan's favorable public image is on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Pakistani diplomatic missions abroad (Mariam, 2014).

7. Public Relations of the Private Sector

Pakistan's private sector PR is still in its infancy. Most medium- and small-sized enterprises, trade associations, and industrial organizations don't have a well-defined PR strategy. Wherever PR sources are present, the focus seems to be on gaining inexpensive publicity and cultivating connections with media representatives. Some companies' public relations divisions also create commercial films, place advertisements in reputable publications, print pamphlets, booklets, brochures, annual reports, house journals, and so forth. However, PR specialists in the private sector frequently exhibit a general reluctance to employ original or psychological strategies that can lead to better and quicker outcomes. Some PROs are unable to pinpoint the PR demands and objectives of their company and provide the next actions for project implementation (Mariam, 2014).

However, one learner only through experience gradually acquires maturity in counseling/management. Some organizations' management believes that a PR professional's only responsibility is to portray "the boss" or to carry out errands for him or the business. They believe, like other contemporary outlets, that having a PRO is respectable, yet they appear hesitant to give him or her any significant responsibilities within the company. In the private sector, PROs are typically not trained or qualified for such jobs, and anyone who is deemed unnecessary by the company is given this role. Despite a lack of interest, the future of public relations in business is largely positive. The management now fully understands that in today's environment of intense competition, an organization must not only be efficient but also have its efficiency acknowledged by the target audience (Avery & Graham, 2013). Additionally, it is widely understood that PR is crucial for both businesses and governments that take office and remain in charge of affairs until they have the support of the populace. Therefore, by launching appropriate public relations campaigns designed to persuade the public that their motto is the greater good or the welfare of the people and that their programs, policies, and products are superior to those of their competitors, both the government and enlightened industrial/commercial organizations attempt to maintain the public opinion in their favor. As a result, the value of PR professionals has grown in Pakistan, both in the governmental and private sectors. Soon, all major organizations in Pakistan will have an effective PR program run by someone relatively senior in the organization, as is the case in industrialized nations.

8. Directorate General Public Relations of Punjab

The heartbeat of Pakistan resonates in its largest province, Punjab, adorned with five rivers, a dense population, and a historical moniker as "the granary of the East." Covering an expansive 205,344 square kilometers, Punjab stands as the second-largest province in Pakistan after Baluchistan, encompassing 25.8% of the country's total land area (Punjab Portal). This vast region features flat terrains with some steep areas in the extreme north and south-west, a desert belt known as Cholistan in the southeast, and the Potohar plateau adjacent to the mountains.

The province is crisscrossed by the Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, and Sutlej rivers, collectively constituting the major rivers of Pakistan. Home to 110 million people, Punjab boasts some of the nation's largest cities, including Lahore, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, Multan, and Gujranwala.

Maintaining effective communication services for the government of such a sizable province presents a formidable challenge. The Directorate General Public Relations (DGPR), established in the early 1940s and upgraded to its current status in 1984, plays a crucial role in the governance sector. Recognizing the significance of e-governance in delivering good governance, the Punjab Information Department (DGPR) has embraced technological advancements. E-government utilizes the Internet as a platform for information exchange, service delivery, and business transactions with the public, businesses, and other government branches (Yadav & Tiwari, 2014). It offers a strategic approach to enhance overall governance, promoting inclusive growth, accountability, openness, and efficiency.

Over the past three decades, declining public trust in government has prompted the exploration of strategies such as e-government to improve public opinion and confidence (Tolbert and Mossberger, 2006). Restoring public faith in government is a contemporary governance challenge, and e-governance is positioned as a solution to enhance transparency and service delivery, ultimately rebuilding trust (Levi and Stoker 2000).

E-governance holds the potential to enhance the delivery of various public services, enable online transactions, and facilitate better communication between the public and the government (Thomas and Streib, 2003). The Punjab Information Department (DGPR) leverages social media, a prominent tool in the e-governance landscape, to engage with the public effectively.

The DGPR employs social media platforms such as Twitter (@DgprPunjab) and Facebook (DGPR Punjab) to disseminate information, build a two-way communication network, and enhance public engagement. Recognizing the transformative power of social media, the Punjab Information Department utilizes these platforms strategically to convey messages from the Punjab government and foster direct interaction with the citizens. DGPR, Punjab is utilizing social media for the following purposes:

9. As a tool for Good Governance

Social media, according to Hansen et al. (2011), “is a collection of internet technologies aimed at promoting social interaction.” Practically, "social media" refers to a group of web-based applications and services, such as blogs, microblogs (like Twitter), social sharing platforms (like YouTube, Flickr, and Stumble Upon), and social networking tools (e.g., Facebook, MySpace). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as a social structure where technology grants communities—rather than institutions—the power, as well as a collection of free, nimble tools that enable users to communicate, network, share information, and co-create content. According to Bertot et al. (2010), “Social media has four major potential strengths: collaboration, participation, empowerment, and time. Social media is collaborative and participatory by its very nature as it is defined by social interaction. It provides the ability for users to connect with each [other] and form communities to socialize, share information, or achieve a common goal or interest. Social media can be empowering to its users as it gives them a platform to speak. It allows anyone with access to the Internet the ability to inexpensively publish or broadcast information, effectively democratizing media. In terms of time, Social media technologies allow users to immediately publish information in near-real time.”

In three ways social media helps the Government Information Officers (GIOs) to work toward a better governance system. Following are;

9.1. As a Mass Influencer

Social media has revolutionized the way people worldwide access information, connect with elected officials, and engage with government institutions. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and blogs have become integral tools for communication, offering citizens new avenues to interact with friends, family, businesses, and government entities. Research indicates a significant shift in information consumption, with 31% of internet users in the USA relying on social media, including blogs and online videos, to stay informed about governmental events (Smith, 2010). In Pakistan, Facebook dominates as the most widely used social networking site, followed by Google, YouTube, and Twitter. The statistics reveal a growing trend of increased internet and social media usage, with 6% of Pakistan's population actively engaging with social media platforms in January 2014 (Hussain, 2014). Facebook emerges as the preferred choice, with the majority of users falling in the 18 to 34 age group.

Globally, the impact of social media is evident, with 42% of the global population accessing social media monthly, primarily through mobile devices. Between 2017 and 2018, there was a 13% increase in global social media users, with Central Asia and Southern Asia experiencing the highest growth rates (Wearesocial). Facebook stands out as the most widely used platform globally, with 91% of the world's population using it (Vincos, 2018). Pakistan's high mobile phone usage rates, coupled with a 161% increase in mobile internet usage in 2010, underscore the country's significant presence in the digital space (Khan, 2011). Despite challenges like information noise, social media offers a wealth of knowledge and resources that government employees can leverage for improved service delivery. However, effective use requires filtering and managing the vast amount of data available to make it reliable and practical (Golbeck, Grimes, & Rogers, 2010). To sum up, the global phenomenon of social media has permeated Pakistan's digital landscape, reshaping how citizens and government entities communicate. The statistics reflect a growing reliance on social media platforms, particularly Facebook, highlighting the need for government officials to adapt and engage with citizens through these evolving channels of communication.

9.2. In Improving Service Delivery

Focusing on improving public services is one of the key components of sound governance. Similar to how government information officers in other nations have been doing it, the Directorate General of Public Relations of Punjab is making it possible. Government officials, according to Bertot, Jaeger, and Hansen (2012), aim to make better use of these resources to enhance services and communications with residents, particularly with underrepresented and hard-to-reach demographic groups. For better emergency management, public safety, and overall quality of life, there is a need and possibility for identifying and addressing problems in real-time. Critical events of interest, like earthquakes, flash mobs, protests, etc., can be recognized as increases in the amount of social media, for instance. By examining social media streams to find significant patterns and trends, it is possible to identify, monitor, and address concerns for public safety or general quality of life such as traffic and air pollution (Kavanaugh, Yang, & Xie, 2012). According to Opsahl, Sakaki, Okazaki, & Matsuo (2010), "Early incident detection via Twitter and other social media has been successful, and the response time can often be even faster than official sources (e.g., earthquake reporting). Such monitoring techniques can also be applied to the spotting and trending of epidemics, which require more extensive and dispersed monitoring." Examples of this would include the first case in each school district, a rebound in illness cases, and long-term planning for local management. Social media can be used to continuously monitor the effectiveness of control measures and propaganda, for example, to determine whether the public is supporting the vaccine distribution plan, objecting to it, or providing authorities with more information about any inconsistencies or gaps in the program's administration.

9.3. As a gadget to determine the public mood

The patterns and themes of debates among social media users over time, according to Kavanaugh, Yang, and Xie (2012), could give officials information about the opinions and moods of the community that cannot be gathered through conventional methods (such as phone or mail surveys) for several reasons, including the prohibitive cost and restricted reach of traditional methods as well as the constrained window of opportunity for influencing or mitigating events. The fact that no conventional method can offer information in real-time is perhaps most significant for emergency management. Before, during, and after data collecting as well as the months-long analysis that follows, surveys demand a significant amount of time and effort. Second, survey operations come with substantial expenditures, making them particularly challenging in light of the decreased and shrinking resources of governments at all levels.

A survey's final result depicts attitudes at a particular moment in time. Although periodic surveys can be used to track progress, this is not a popular practice, increases expenses significantly, and frequently misses key constituent groups.

It is through these methods the Punjab Information Department is doing an excellent job in terms of enhancing the service capability of the Punjab Government.

10. DGPR in the sector of Policy Making

The creation of public policy significantly affects every human being that resides on Earth. It is on government workers to uphold the laws that legislators pass. They affect every citizen's life, including how and when we vote, where we can park, and what constitutes a crime. Everything is dependent on the approach the state takes toward its inhabitants. Public policy is a series of choices made by government agencies and representatives to solve issues in the real world. According to the OECD, "A priority for governments should be to build a policy-making process conducive to trust. Concerns over the undue influence of vested interests over decision-making have led to increasing demands for more transparency and a greater commitment to safeguarding the public interest." Efforts to guarantee that the policy-making process is open, inclusive, and fair would improve the quality of policy decisions. And this is where the Directorate General of Public Relations helps the Punjab Government by maintaining cordial relations with public sector institutions that include print and satellite media, and, by monitoring the public reaction to various programs of government.

The Directorate General of Public Relations (DGPR) of Punjab helps the government of Punjab in the following areas of Policymaking.

10.1. Public Sector Communication

The Public Sector, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (1998), is "enterprises which the Commonwealth Government, State/Territory, and local Governments, separately or jointly have control over. It includes local Government authorities and all Government departments, agencies, and authorities created by, or reporting to, the Commonwealth Parliament and State parliaments." Members of political communities at various levels of government collectively own, fund, and control the public sector organizations. Taxes, which residents at the local, state, and federal levels pay to the government in exchange for necessary services, are the source of funding for the public sector (Boyne, 2002). In contrast to the private sector, which is governed by market forces, the public sector is governed by political forces and the political system, including changes in political party leadership (Van & Van, 2009). Before the advent of social media, there was a dearth of research on public-sector communication (Graber, 2003). However, public sector communication plays a significant role in democratic societies' policies, initiatives, and activities. It is considered that knowledgeable citizens can engage in policy discussions and public judgments and make logical conclusions (Thomas, 1995). It's interesting to note that the

majority of studies on public sector communication (Édes, 2000 & Mancini, 2006) have an emphasis on institutional or country-based government communications and practices.

These studies show that information and communication specialists regularly carry out tasks like keeping tabs on media coverage, briefing and counseling politicians, managing media relations, informing the public directly, disseminating information throughout the administration, creating communication strategies and campaigns, and compiling data on public opinion (Lee, 2007). According to various academics, Bertot, Jaeger & Hansen. 2012, “social media has opened up several opportunities for public sector communications, including democratic involvement, engagement, coproduction, and crowdsourcing.” Social media is helping Punjab's public information officers build participatory dialogue and give people a voice in conversations regarding the creation and implementation of policies. It can be used to involve the public in the creation of government services by including both people and public personnel in coproduction processes. Collaboration is an initiative in which public service organizations (PSOs) and citizens work together to develop new public services or enhance existing ones by soliciting feedback through online discussion boards (Valentin, 2020).

10.2. Government and Media Relationship

The nature of media relations, particularly the interaction between journalists and public information officers, has long been studied by public relations and journalism professionals. The relationship has been labeled as "symbiotic" and "antagonistic" (Ledingham & Bruning, 2007). Even while new technologies are beginning to undercut the media's role as an intermediary for government communication with the public, it still plays a critical role in this process (Williams, 1999). Depending on the specifics of each relationship, the nature of the relationship differs on an individual basis. Public information officers (PIOs) in state governments and journalists have a special bond that distinguishes it from the connection between public relations professionals and journalists in the private sector. According to McCollough (2015), “PIOs are public servants who must provide information to citizens about the work of their respective state agencies upon request, while private sector practitioners have the latitude to selectively provide information to the public. Journalists who cover state government, specifically, provide primary conduits through which PIOs can communicate to the public”. As stated by McNair (2004), “Monitoring media coverage of public affairs, briefing and counseling political officials, managing media relations, disseminating information directly to the public, sharing information across the administration, developing communication strategies and campaigns, and researching and gauging public opinion are typical responsibilities of a public information officer in Central and Eastern Europe.” They are also a key source of information for citizens who want to find out more about the procedures used by their state governments. Public Information Officers are thus playing their part diligently in providing a ground on which media persons and the Punjab Government collaborate regularly to discuss the effects and challenges regarding the future policies and the public programs that are in the warehouse of government.

10.3. Informing and Counseling Politicians

Politicians and other senior Punjab government representatives receive information regarding media reports that they would be expected to act upon from the DGPR department. Career civil workers and politically appointed DGPR information officers carry out this function. These officers also guide the communication aspect of the policy ideas. Edes (2000) claims that “this entails giving guidance on how to treat certain subjects (e.g. how to frame an issue, when and where to raise it, with what journalists to speak about it, and on what terms).” Information officers support ministers in difficult or unpleasant situations where they might wish to avoid answering questions and try to assess how the general public might react to potential communication strategies. Public relations representatives frequently find themselves in the situation of urging their ministers to engage with the media more. Although there are

still hazards involved with such interactions, they do lessen the likelihood that journalists will become more aggressive in their inquiries and critical in their reporting if they are refused access to officialdom. For instance, in Bulgaria, information officers submit drafts of press releases with decision documents intended for the Council of Ministers, and a communications expert attends high-level meetings. Government communication goals and concepts have been outlined in policy statements from some central and eastern European nations. (Runnel, Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, & Reinsalu, 2009).

Senior information officers must maintain constant connections with the highest-ranking members of their ministries and establish a reputation as competent, dependable counsel on communications issues. When this is the case, they have a greater chance of influencing these issues and gaining the support and cooperation of other public employees. All these efforts of DGPR led to the formation of sound policy-making by the Punjab Government.

10.4. Researching and Assessing Public Opinion

One of the major challenges that any government faces before formulating any public-related policy is how the public reacts to it. And what is the public perception regarding the particular policy? The government of Punjab tackles this problem by taking the services of the public information officers of DGPR. According to Alisauskiene (1998), “feedback gathered through polling, distributing questionnaires, hosting public hearings and roundtable talks, and setting up focus groups can provide helpful information regarding the perceptions, wants, and desires of the general public.” These many methods help public information officers determine which information is relevant to which audiences and how they like to receive it. These strategies can be used by political leaders to better match the goals of the general public with public policies. These comments reflect the opinions of the general public regarding the proposed laws and policies.

11. DGPR in Image Building of Punjab Government

As an information department of the Punjab Government, the office of DGPR has been doing essentially well since its formation. Proficient officials, trained employees, working in a conducive environment, with freedom of doing the job, and a strict transparency mechanism define the credibility of the Directorate General of Public Relations of Punjab. For rapid dissemination of long-term and short-term policies of the government, DGPR plays an important role by using different channels such as press, media, and ministry and by using technology. It’s because of their big role in uplifting the governance of Punjab that, when it comes to government performance, Pakistan's province of Punjab is regarded as being at the top (PILDAT, 2015). DGPR is also contributing beyond its capacity in the image building of the Punjab Government. However, still, there is still a lot to be learned from how the information department of other countries is doing in projecting their state and government internationally and domestically.

The following passages possess the above-mentioned study and analysis of the role and challenges of DGPR in the arena image building that will serve the purpose of the literature review. And contribute to enhancing the performance of DGPR in the Image Building of the Punjab Government.

12. Branding the Image by Public Diplomacy

The process of image-building for a government is a collective endeavor involving the media, government officials, and the public, as stated by Lang (1983). The perception of a government is shaped through reciprocal interactions between the public, elected officials, the government's information department, and the media. In this intricate dance, the Punjab Information Department (DGPR) plays a pivotal role in branding the Punjab Government, especially in the face of challenges posed by social media and the dissemination of fake news.

Branding, defined by the American Marketing Association (1960), extends beyond a mere name; it encompasses a sophisticated collection of ideas, associations, and experiences intended to identify and differentiate goods or services. Aaker (1996) provides a more nuanced definition, describing a brand as a multidimensional assortment of functional, emotional, relational, and strategic elements that collectively generate a unique set of associations in the public mind. However, it is crucial to distinguish between nation branding and the image-building of the government. Nation branding, as proposed by Olins (1999), is not about creating or remolding national identity but altering external perceptions of the country. The goal of nation branding is to align the nation's perception with its reality, closing the gap between external perceptions and the nation's actual state (Just & Crigler 2000).

In the realm of image building, public diplomacy emerges as a powerful tool. Public diplomacy, often referred to as "people diplomacy," involves government-sponsored and non-government initiatives aimed at consistently communicating with the international public to create a favorable perception of the nation (Joseph S. Nye, 2008). Cull (2009) identifies key areas of public diplomacy work, including listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy, and international broadcasting.

Public diplomacy, as an integral component of image building, allows a government to not only brand the nation internationally but also promote a positive image domestically. Different nations, based on their economic and cultural circumstances, seek diverse sources to construct their public image. For instance, China has invested heavily in public diplomacy initiatives, establishing ancient institutes and creating a Public Diplomacy Division in its Ministry of Foreign Affairs to showcase its development and cultural values (Hall, 2012).

Similarly, other Asian countries like Malaysia, India, and Japan have established public diplomacy departments to respond to China's efforts and enhance their global image (Hall & Smith, 2013). Mediated public diplomacy, such as advertorials—paid advertisements with a presentation resembling traditional newspaper content—becomes a crucial medium for influencing public opinion (Golan, 2013). Russia, under Putin's administration, has strategically used official government communications, electronic broadcasting, and unconventional agenda-building strategies, including advertorials and op-eds, to promote its foreign policy goals and national brand (Elaeva, 2011).

In the context of Punjab, the DGPR harnesses the potential of social media, particularly Twitter and Facebook, to engage with the public, disseminate information, and shape the government's image. This proactive approach is crucial in an era where opposition parties leverage social media and fake news to influence public perception negatively (Mahmood & Yasin, 2019). The image-building of the Punjab Government is a dynamic process involving various stakeholders. The Punjab Information Department (DGPR) navigates these complexities by employing branding strategies, leveraging social media, and actively participating in public diplomacy efforts to shape a positive perception of the government both nationally and internationally.

13. Soft Power; A Vital Source of Image Building

In international relations, realists traditionally emphasize material capabilities for power, particularly military strength. However, the rapid global transformation challenges conventional assessments of power. The emergence of a "hazy power space" requires new approaches, considering the increasing speed and complexity of outcomes (Beck, 2005). Soft power, the ability to influence without coercion, gains importance in this evolving landscape (Gallarotti & Giulio, 2011). Soft power involves shaping social relationships and structures, creating positive perceptions through policies, deeds, and intrinsic characteristics (Hall, 1997). Nations, like India, strategically leverage soft power, emphasizing cultural diversity and democratic values for global influence (Khan, 2020). Conversely, Pakistan, tainted by its portrayal as a problematic state due to terrorism, is working to improve its image through public

diplomacy and soft power initiatives, recognizing the importance of a positive global perception (Khan, 2020). In this context, public diplomacy becomes crucial, allowing democratic states like Pakistan to use soft power for the benefit of the nation and gain public confidence (DGPR's role).

14. Image building using media outlets

The DGPR, as the informational wing of the government, plays a crucial role in stabilizing the democratic system and building positive international relations. Beyond soft power initiatives, DGPR effectively utilizes various media outlets, including traditional and social media, to shape the image of the Punjab Government. Traditional media such as print magazines, newspapers, TV, and radio, while making the public passive, are still valuable channels for information dissemination. However, the advent of social media has revolutionized mass media, empowering people to express their opinions openly. Social media allows the public to engage more freely, decide on content, and share opinions effectively (Wagner, 2010).

Social media serves as an open platform for direct interaction between the public and the government, enabling participation in the political sphere. Studies show that frequent social media users are more likely to be politically and civically involved (Wibhey, 2010). It acts as a backbone for various activities, including promoting social movements, advertising public policies, criticizing or analyzing government policies, and disclosing corrupt actions.

The revolutionary potential of grassroots movements and the long-term power of social media in politicization should not be disregarded (Morozov, 2011). Social media becomes a powerful tool for raising public voices against corruption, preventing illegal activities, and increasing awareness of government behavior and intentions. Initiatives like the network anti-corruption initiative leverage social media as a platform to report government misconduct, making oversight more accessible and cost-effective. The Internet and social media advancements contribute to holding dishonest public officials accountable.

15. Challenges and Issues Confronting DGPR

There are many challenges that DGPR like their counterpart information departments of other countries have been facing while performing their functions. Following are a few of the problems that public information officers also known as GIOs (Government Information Departments) often face.

15.1. Immature Media

Public employees responsible for communications face significant challenges in transition environments, especially in Central and Eastern European nations. The media landscape in these regions is often less professional than in Western Europe, adding complexity to the daily tasks of Government Information Officers (GIOs) (Edes, 2000). Several factors contribute to the challenges faced by GIOs. Financial struggles of many publications in transition countries create uncertainty for reporters' job security, leading to situations where ethical standards may be compromised. Journalists often lack clear ethical or professional guidelines, failing to verify information or seek opinions from relevant individuals. Articles frequently include the opinions of authors or editors, unproven rumors, and claims, with some publications prioritizing sensationalism over fair and objective reporting.

Unlike Western nations, the press in these regions may not feel obligated to promote civic virtues or raise awareness of public policy concerns. Newspapers often have strong ties to specific political parties or philosophies, potentially leading to biased reporting. Media owners may exert pressure on employees to align reporting with their financial and political goals (David, 1992). Some media professionals may abuse their rights, acting irresponsibly.

Despite these challenges, there are positive aspects. Nearby journalism schools and renowned media outlets, including the efforts of DGPR, emphasize ethical reporting practices and a commitment to objectivity. This suggests that, despite persistent challenges, concerted efforts are being made to uphold journalistic standards and promote responsible reporting in the face of a complex media environment in the region.

15.2. Lack of Experience and Expertise

Information officers generally put in long hours, receive low pay, and receive no orientation or training. Systematic training programs are, in fact, all but nonexistent. It is not overstated to say that a new GIO is given a desk and instructed to go to work in a cramped, congested, and inadequate office. Information offices that provide suitable policy and procedural standards are uncommon. These challenges, along with others mentioned below, explain why the most skilled and ambitious GIOs are moving on to positions in public affairs in private businesses, and at PR firms.

There aren't many educational possibilities that are specifically related to a GIO's job. Some colleges and universities offer public relations and communications courses, although they are typically designed for students who plan to pursue more lucrative positions in the private sector. The majority of centralized Eastern European nations lack a professional association for government communicators and limited networking opportunities that would allow GIOs to interact with and learn from their peers on a professional level (Edes, 2000).

15.3. Secrecy and Political Influence

In Africa, Central and Eastern Europe, including the context of Punjab, the legal and administrative framework for publishing government information often falls short, leaving space for political maneuvering and bureaucratic discretion. Despite formal efforts to enhance transparency, institutional attitudes may impede the execution of measures, reflecting influences from the Soviet era. Organizations controlling state-run media programming, including the Directorate General of Public Relations (DGPR) in Punjab, may not always operate independently, as political entities, typically parliaments, often have the power to designate their members.

The lack of a robust legal framework can lead to forceful tactics by senior authorities to suppress or alter unfavorable reporting (Edes, 2000). Government Information Officers (GIOs), including those in the DGPR, may find themselves caught in conflicts between political figures and the media, receiving instructions to avoid certain publications. Legislation restricting public access to official documents, combined with lenient libel laws favoring politicians, can impede journalists, including those working with the DGPR, from conducting thorough investigations into government operations.

Negative habits from the totalitarian era persist among politicians in Central and Eastern Europe and Punjab. Press conferences may be delayed, and politicians may use tactics like suggesting tax increases on publications. Politicians may pressure GIOs, including those in the DGPR, to align with their views or party positions rather than reporting objectively on government actions. Unlike Western European countries, where distinctions between political and non-political roles in the media are clearer, Central and Eastern European nations and Punjab face greater challenges in resisting such influences.

The communication gap extends to public administration, where GIOs, including those in the DGPR, struggle to obtain information from colleagues in other departments due to compartmentalization, secrecy, and a lack of job stability. GIOs may learn about significant decisions and policies within their institution through the news rather than direct communication. The overall atmosphere, marked by ominous entrances and poorly labeled areas, contributes to a sense of distance between citizens and

government offices. The need for institutional and cultural changes is evident in Punjab and other regions to enhance transparency, communication, and accountability.

15.4. A Need for an Inclusive Approach

Practitioners held the view that public relations initiatives in Pakistan are typically launched for the sole purpose of influencing the internal public, who are unaware of these public relations activities. Additionally, the media public is seen as the most significant public, and it stands to reason that the role of media relations is more commonly used in Pakistani PR. This missing component of PR efforts for the internal public should be understood by organizational management and public relations experts. To improve their organization's external image, the officials of Punjab's DGPR must comprehend the significance of overcoming internal communication problems and information leakage (Masood, 2017).

15.5. Focus on one Figure

A significant problem for many professionals working in Pakistani public sector PR units is unrealistic boss publicity. Practitioners emphasized the necessity to concentrate on the organizational image rather than the boss image and believed it to be a waste of time and resources. Most practitioners blame their political and administrative superiors for centuries of this boss publicity, but if they did not educate their superiors by using their professional platforms and knowledgeable opinion, they would continue to be a part of the issue (Masood, 2017). This issue was brought up by other individuals at the DGPR office as well. A department tasked with representing the government as a whole should take an inclusive stance rather than concentrating on specific people.

16. Policy Issues

Processing digital government principles and functions requires a variety of new rules, policies, laws, and legislative changes to handle electronic activities like digital transactions, electronic cataloging, freedom of information, data protection, cybercrime, rights to intellectual property, and copyright claims. Dealing with the digital government necessitates entering into a contract or digital agreement, which must be protected and acknowledged by well-structured law that safeguards and protects these kinds of operations. Laws governing e-business and e-government are still lacking in many developing nations. To secure, among other things, the privacy, security, and legal acceptance of electronic interactions and electronic signatures, protections must be established and legal reforms must be made. As a result, governments everywhere must focus on creating a public key infrastructure that will ensure secure interactions between businesses and people. Overall, DGPR is doing good in the handling of social media alongside print and electronic media. But still, there are a lot of issues to be addressed if one wants to gain the full advantage of delivering the message of government by using social media.

17. Cooperation and Partnering

The development of digital government necessitates collaboration and partnerships between public and private organizations at various levels—municipal, regional, and national. However, achieving cooperation is challenging, as governments often resist open and transparent institutions to maintain their hegemony. In nations with a history of dictatorship, political upheaval, or corruption, public trust in government is often lacking, posing a hurdle for effective eGovernment participation.

Boosting public trust is crucial for fostering public-private partnerships, with information departments playing a significant role in bridging these relationships. The Directorate General of Public Relations (DGPR) needs to reassess its working models and devise strategies to promote collaboration initiatives. Effective marketing is key to the success of any venture, emphasizing the importance of communication strategies for the DGPR. Collaboration between the public and private sectors is essential to address

government resource gaps. The private ICT sector can contribute technical expertise and infrastructure support, while universities can provide necessary staff, learning programs, and training for government employees. Other government departments and agencies can also contribute to data and knowledge exchange, resolving issues with interconnected activities and processes.

A "new" growth theory emphasizes cooperation in knowledge-based development programs, underlining the need for coordinated efforts. An example is the State of Andhra Pradesh's initiative to computerize administrative divisions, requiring coordination among various ministries and departments, including the national informatics department, social welfare department, and tax department. Despite geographical separation, these entities collaborated to ensure seamless online service delivery (Bhatnagar, 2001). Such instances highlight the importance of effective collaboration and coordination in the successful implementation of digital government initiatives.

18. Leadership Management

Leadership has special problems in the public sector. Expectations for reforms and leaders are muddled by shifting and murky visions (OECD, 2001). Every fresh and innovative idea or initiative is fueled in large part by leadership. Since the launch of social media, it has become a complex process, accompanied by high costs, risks, and challenges for DGPR to brand the image of the leadership that is considered to be the face of any government. It takes a strong leader who can encourage, persuade, include, and support other groups and institutions while also comprehending the true costs and advantages of the project. Before, during, and after a project's implementation, leadership is required. Leadership is required at all stages of the project: before it begins, to explain the idea, and the model, and raise awareness; during it, to manage change and support the project; and after it, to commit to the initiative's necessary adaptation. To overcome organizations' innate reluctance to change, gather the resources necessary to better management, and create and uphold the organizational commitment to new ways of conducting government, top leadership engagement and clear lines of accountability are essential (McClure, 2001). There has become a huge challenge for information and press departments, like DGPR Punjab, to save the leadership of the government from attacks from opponents in a highly polarized society. Smarts and creative ideas to transcend this challenge are the needs of the time.

19. Conclusion and Suggestions

The state of public relations in Pakistan, as described by Khan (2001), faced challenges from its founding, with a lack of experienced professionals and the slow development of public relations divisions. The country's history of military administrations hindered the establishment of solid foundations for public relations. The industry struggled due to an anti-democratic culture, with governments using public relations strategies for personal gain and political motives rather than fostering thoughtful discussion (Razi et al., 2020). Despite the challenges, practitioners argued that Pakistan's public relations standards were comparable to those of advanced countries. However, they criticized unprofessional conduct, lack of personnel, media and boss exploitation, ineffective PR apparatus, management comprehension issues, limited awareness of social media use, and bureaucratic operation in the public sector. Challenges included the use of social capital, recognition of public relations as a management function, creation of a national narrative against terrorism, adoption of technological advancements, emphasis on internal public, and management of unrealistic boss publicity.

The Directorate General of Public Relations, Punjab, has served as the spokesperson and media wing of the Punjab government for decades. Its duties include representing the government's viewpoint, issuing timely reports to the media, and promoting government actions through electronic media. The challenges faced by DGPR include low internet penetration, telecommunications infrastructure constraints, lack of budget allocation, digital divide, and skills and security concerns. Public relations professionals in public

relations firms possess the latest understanding of strategic communications management but face limitations in the public sector. Restricted authority and third-party status hinder them from engaging in true strategic public relations. While progress is seen with the introduction of social media and e-government, there is a need for careful consideration and training within government media organizations, particularly DGPR, to enhance the profession of public relations in Pakistan.

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