

PR in the Travel and Tourism industry

Research Paper

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Abstract

The following paper concerns how Public Relations Internally and externally work in the travel and tourism industry. First, the introduction paragraph gives an overview of tourism fields and the types of jobs that PR practitioners possibly engage in. The second section retrieves the historical contexts of tourism and the evolutionary changes of work from traditional PR until now. Next, the paper will explain the skills or other advanced training that PR professionals ought to handle in the travel and tourism industry. After talking about the criteria of PR tourism, I mainly focus on talking about advantages and disadvantages based on the status quo especially after the outbreak of the pandemic. In addition, this paper will introduce the potential prospect of tourism. Finally, I address some personal interests and my interpretation toward the growth of the tourism industry and conclude the significance of the PR tourism industry.

PR in Travel and Tourism

Overview

According to Sallot (2013), “the travel and tourism industry involves a multilayered, overlapping, and interlocking distribution system of sellers and buyers of travel products” (p.g. 2). Thus, Deuschl (2005) states that the four components in the travel and tourism industry are hotels, restaurants, transportation, and destinations/tourism attractions. These four categories essentially apply to travel suppliers, transportation carriers, travel agencies, which geographically relate to districts, cities, regions, and countries. Public Relations in travel and tourism have significantly facilitated their products in terms of strategic communication between travel companies and customers. These PR practitioners utilize modernized media toolboxes such as press releases, digital campaigns, social media profiles, etc to optimize the companies’ images and also connect with the target audience on a direct basis. However, the outburst of COVID-19 essentially has changed the tourism industry, strictly reduced traveler mobility causes the shutdown of some hotels and restaurants, limited seat availability of transportation, and tourist capacity on sightseeing. This incident brings challenges to economics in the industry and reinforces the skills of the specialization in PR.

History

According to Eric Cohen(1972), the historical concept of tourism could be traced back to the 18th century when warriors, pilgrims, merchants traveled for pursuing entertainment and education outside their original areas (cited in Sallot, 2013). At that time, the services of tourism started to prosper and are subdivided into more detailed practices such as providing board and lodging, building the infrastructures that boost the local merchandise market, promoting their own business throughout broadcast media, etc. Media gatekeepers confirmed that the press had

more important roles than advertisements because they persuaded journalists that tourism could carry much economic and political clout (Deuschl, 2005). At that time, PR, as a driven-force of earned media, was used for attaining the converge of tourism in traditional print and broadcast media including newspapers, magazines, TV, and radio. Later on, mass media has transformed their communicative channels into more digitally accessible outlets due to the development of the World Wide Web. Meanwhile, no matter PR agencies or in-house services, these PR practitioners' jobs in the travel and tourism industry also have explored new routes of interacting with the clients. For example, Sallot (2013) states that PR professionals not only work for organizations as brand image builders but also take into account the mutually beneficial relationships with travel buyers. As a result, those PR professionals are able to effectively gain the consumers' trust in terms of social media intimacy to convey to them the messages of the sellers.

Skills or Advanced Training

PR specialists in tourism will dive into tracking tendencies of the travel and tourism industry overall in order to seek the first-hand information of travel agencies and observe the audience's responses. One of the advantages of working in this career specialization is obtaining tons of opportunities that fulfill any type of specific field that PR professionals are interested in (Page & Parnell, 2021). It opens up to a variety of people and minimizes the barrier to entry without rigid criteria of job categories. For example, since social media have had a strong presence in people's lives, some PR campaigns such as scheduling musical festivals, updating interactive services online about hospitality are more likely to link with internet technology, digital planning, programming, UIUX, etc. Thus, PR practitioners always work with clients from all around the world; therefore, having open-minded world views and cross-cultural values is

significantly important to communicate with travel organizations. Besides their first language, they also have a need of speaking at least 1 or 2 languages proficiently in order to contact global clients. In this case, the travel and tourism industry encourages PR professionals to be adept at different approaches to perform the diverse organization-branding. Furthermore, Page and Parnell also state that external factors such as environment and incidents usually have impacts on tourism, which may inflict the image of corporations and even the entire industry. Therefore, it also requires PR professionals to be resilient to crisis events and proactive to consider social ramifications so that they are versatile enough to reckon with the challenges of emergencies. For example, the current pandemic seems to reshape the tourism industry, which is highly imperative to advanced training for PR professionals and those people who are about to gain employment in this career area.

Advantages and Disadvantages

A lot of services industries have fallen into chaos since the outbreak of the pandemic. The year 2020 marked an unexpected turning point in the global travel and tourism industry. The PRWeek 2020 Premium Salary Survey (2020) lists that the median salary for PR practitioners in travel and tourism/leisure is \$83,000, which ranks the second-lowest among art entertainment, education, and financial services, food and beverage, government/public service, healthcare/pharmaceutical, industrial/manufacturing, technology/internet fields. This indicates that PR professionals in the travel and tourism industry are not highly paid positions compared to other PR areas. There is no doubt that the pandemic pessimistically has inflicted the loss of revenues in the tourism industry and caused the tourism business to stagnate in terms of increasing cancellation of international flights and drastic decline of tourists up to now. Some countries even closed their borders to avoid much traveler mobility in transportation. Restaurants

generally close the dine-in services and provide take-out or delivery instead. The hotel construction is also affected by the deferred projects and low hotel occupancy rate. Due to the inactive outside resources for travel agencies, PR personnel also confronted the dilemma in the inconvenience of transferring elaborate information of travel suppliers and attracting consumers about destinations. In this case. According to Uğur and Akbiyik (2020) in the article *Impacts of covid-19 on global tourism industry: A cross-regional comparison*, “The shock affects both the demand side (restrictions on freedom of movement, border closings, guests' fear of infection) and the supply-side (closure of accommodation and catering establishments as well as leisure facilities used for tourism)”.

Apart from disadvantages, the pandemic also unexpectedly stimulates the virtual innovation of PR in the tourism industry, which relies much effectively on digital communications to enhance the services of hotels, restaurants, transportation, and tourism attractions. First, Loh, et al (2020) stated that the hospitality fields attempt to improve the housing, ownership, testing and contact tracing, digital equity, and transportation, especially for those underserved populations to provide adequate guidance and resources on the websites. Then Weltman, et al claim that there are online interactive activities or campaigns such as VR projects have conducted to “reshuffle the competitiveness” in the PR tourism industry. Therefore, these actions trigger a more beneficial environment for confronting the pandemic.

Future

The prospect of the PR tourism need of adding effective strategies and building larger branding profiles for the industry and country. Sarin(2020) criticized that some tourism organizations have a trend of only maintaining individual PR instead of concentrating on the insight analysis of upholding the corporate social responsibility and building a meaningful

profile to the whole industry or country in the long-run. Therefore, it is essential to establish corporate shared values to people and add meanings to its larger stages.

Since 2020, even though the travel and tourism industry has sharply endured the challenge of complying with pandemic protocols such as stay-home order and keeping social distancing under the COVID-19, the demand for the travel and tourism practices becomes skyrocketing because limited access to outdoor resources would surprisingly usher in broader prospects and opportunities toward travel products.

Personal Interest

In my opinion, the career path in PR tourism can be interesting and complicated for me in the future because the blast of the pandemic triggers new opportunities and positions in the tourism market once the epidemic ends. There will be no static daily routine in this job. PR tourism requires employees not only but also to consolidate their expertise. The demand for tourism products will rebound but engaging in tourism might be a risky decision due to the uncertainty of anticipating how COVID will play out in the next few years. I am still looking forward to seeing the growth of the tourism industry. In conclusion, PR tourism significantly is a great choice for me to consider as one of my career paths and I am willing to overcome the challenges of the pandemic in this adventurous journey.

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