

Our Journey to India

Today's India and the Systematic Wonder

Mehdi Bagherian

India is changing rapidly in all fields. The growth rate of 9.2% of gross national product in fiscal year of 2006-2007 is big enough to hold a national celebration.

There is evidence that by amending some rules and principles and some major political and economic and even cultural changes in its 59-year history, India has reached a relatively good state. According to World Bank's report, India will be the fourth economy power in 2020. It is predicted that till that year the per capita income will increase four times. 26% population who live below the poverty line will decrease to 13%.

Here is a question that who has the responsibility of image making of India? To whom belongs today's credibility of India?

It is obvious that India's public relations and pr agencies especially public relations experts and practitioners have played an important role in the country image making as one of the world economy power. «Emergence and presence» is what public relations experts and practitioners should really pay attention. Paying attention only to good performance and result is not enough, presenting is important too.

There's no doubt that in all discussed matters, the role of public relations is of growing importance as one of managerial critical task. Nowadays India's pr practitioners are looking for new tools which produce more credibility for their country.

Today, public relations receives more attention as an effective communicational tools. Additionally, concentration on public relations programs and an increase in investment on public relations activities instead of mere advertising are signs of change and development.

Large public relations companies in Bombay, Bangalore, New Delhi, Calcutta, Madras, Heydar Abad, Pune, Ahmad Abad and other cities has contributed substantially to the expansion of importance of public relations in India.

Public relations in India is active in many fields which includes preparing yearly reports, managing web sites and publications, writing speeches, credit management, crisis management, preparing communications strategies and long term planning.

Most popular public relations agency in India

- 2020 PR(<http://www.2020india.com/>)
- Adfactors(<http://www.adfactorspr.com/>)
- Core PR(<http://www.corepr.com/>)
- Corporate Voice Weber

Shandwick(<http://www.webershandwick.com/globalnetwork/locations/index.cfm/cityid,44.html>)

- Genesis BM(<http://www.genesispr.com/>)
- Good Relations(<http://www.goodrelations.co.in/>)
- Imprimis(<http://www.imprimispr.com/>)
- Integral PR(<http://www.integralpr.com/>)
- IPAN(<http://www.ipan.com/>)
- Lexicon(<http://www.lexicon.in/>)
- Ogilvy(http://www.ogilvyindia.com/how/opr_main.asp)
- Perfect Relations(<http://www.perfectrelations.com/>)
- Positive Communications(<http://www.positiveindia.biz/>)
- Quik Relations(<http://www.quikgroupindia.com/>)
- Rediffusion(http://www.rediffusiondyr.com/rdyr_pr.htm)
- Sampark(<http://www.sampark.com/>)
- Text100(<http://www.text100.com/>)
- The Practice(<http://www.the-practice.net/>)
- Vaishnavi(<http://www.vaishnavi-india.com/>)

10 features of India's public relations

- 1- understanding the power of public relations, communications, and promotion;
- understanding credit management: improving the image of country, image of organization and company, personal image (the role of pr practitioners in changing India to one of the fastest developing countries)

- understanding crisis management and long term planning of public relations and dynamic communications as
 - a part of business and trading strategy
 - a decision making tool in management
- 2- development of and concentration on public relations programs, promotion and communications under the title of «corporate communications»
- 3- performing public relations considering the intensive competition, cost decrease, development and consistency of its effects (social relations management)
- 4- engagement of public and private public relations agencies in many different fields
- 5- changing in the way of obtaining information and use of the Internet, electronic and interactive media
- 6- benefiting from consultation with public relations practitioners to make distinct communications strategies and tactics for producing meaningful communicational packs
- 7- developing professional training courses and advanced training system aiming for updating information and identifying internal and external audiences
- 8- developing new sources of information; public relations practitioners in India are considered themselves one of the new source of information and this very fact has changed the quality and quantity of information to an important factor
- 9- understanding the needs of customers and foreign media considering cultural and social values
- 10- clarifying the importance and necessity of executing economic and social amendments for people with the help of public relations practitioners and agencies without using the exaggeration factor (human oriented public relations)

The secret of India's public relations development

As Gopal Sutar, professor in Manipal University, posed this question in 2005 that why public relations has been recognized so suddenly and tardily in India, there are different reasons for this slow transition. In the past, senior managers in India hesitated about accepting public relations as a managerial decision making tools. They didn't consider public relations important enough to be a part of their business strategy. They were not sure about the effectiveness and efficiency of public relations as a solution provider and when everything was controlled by the government and there was no competition, image was not important at all. Additionally, most professionals in India in the past- some of them still exist- have not been trained properly and therefore through their unprofessional performance were not able to prove that public relations and image making could affect the success of an economy unit. The economic enlightening process which was started in 1991 by Manmohan Singh- the then Minister of economy- has changed the conception of competition in business. By this fundamental change, public relations emerged.

- Visit with the head of India Public Relations Association

In our visit to India which has been formed following the 3rd International PR Conference in Iran, Professor Ujjwal Chowdhury, the head of Symbiosis College, had arranged excellent programs for visiting New Delhi, Pune, and Bombay. Visiting Dr. Ajit Pathak, the head of India Public Relations Association was one of these programs. He is been appointed to the headship of the Global Alliance of Public Relations and Communication Management in 2007 for a year.

As we all know, the presidency of professional associations are periodic and for one year in every parts of the world. In fact the members of board of directors are given an opportunity to show their abilities. In India this one-year opportunity is given to efficient people. But in our country the presidency of pr associations and constitutions are inheriting and part of the unsuccessfulness of Iranians' pr associations are due to this fact.

Visiting Dr. Pathak in one of the best governmental hotels in New Delhi was an excellent experience and I hope through carried out coordination, the cooperation between Iran and India develops meaningfully.

- Visit with the students of Symbiosis College and the speech of Pro. Chowdhury

I have recently participated in the 3rd International PR Conference in Iran, held on 15-16 Nov. in Tehran.

What we think about different things in the world is often formed through media which is not necessarily true. Reality is what is obtained through multiple sources of information. The images of other countries in our minds are made by BBC, CNN, etc and all these media are dominated by western sources. I don't mean that whatever western sources say is false. I mean they look at the issues only from their own point of view. This is every society's right to prepare its reports according to its point of view. For example what we all think about Iran is war and nuclear weapons. We think that wherever we set foot in Iran, we will see a nuclear bomb, but when I traveled to Iran and walked in the streets of Tehran and Isfahan, the only thing I saw were hospitable and peaceful people who treat each other friendly and this has changed the whole idea I had about this country.

Our tour leader explained me that Iran is planning to attract more tourists. The images we have of countries are not necessarily the reality. We are interested to know more about Iran. We need communications and our understanding is limited to our communications.

- The speech of Mehdi Bagherian for the students of Symbiosis College

From my point of view, Iran's public relations has improved noticeably on all dimensions during the last decade. Reinforcing scientific events contributed substantially to the growth of public relations. Holding conferences is one of these events that changed the outlook of managers who used to regard public relations as an advertising and ceremonial tool.

Furthermore, we were successful in presenting Iran's public relations to the world of public relations community and participated actively in some public relations global events. At present, we are in attendance at some professional and scientific events which are all the result of such conferences.

In international level, part of our activity is presenting a real image of Iran to the world. The people who are invited to deliver speech in the conferences are the representatives of public opinion. Therefore, I believe that what is happening in the world is the «war of public opinion». Image making and showing the real Iran, considering the media capacity, require a large investment, because establishing communication with public opinion could influence and lead people to understand the realities of our country. Therefore it could be said that public relations is the key to the success of an organization, a person or a country.

- Interview with Indian Express

Although the arrangement of this interview was not quite satisfactory, it was effective in presenting Iran's public relations.

Mehdi Bagherian referred to the new tendencies and attitudes of public relations and cooperation of Iran and India's public relations. He also emphasized on the role of public relations in strengthening the economy of a country.

"Image-Management Internet Group is quite successful in presenting and image making of India and I update the information about India mostly through this group." Said Mehdi Bagherian, the manager of Kargozar PR Institute.

□ Fields of Cooperation

- holding joint training courses and workshops by Iranian and Indian pr experts and practitioners
- producing public relations, marketing, advertising software jointly
- holding scientific- training tours

□ Proposal for founding the Asia Public Relations Association (APRA)

Asian countries, considering the common cultural background and strong presence in the region markets due to their potential and actual economy power, are in need of powerful professional tools and conceptual and professional cohesion which is in the process of forming by the efforts of colleagues in Iran, India, and Malaysia.

□ Reflections

Traveling to India has had good reflections in electronic and print media. Some of Indian newspapers in addition to interviewing published stories about these visits. Electronic media also broadcasted the visits expansively.

Google transmitted the news under the title of "Google News Alert for: Public Relations". Some pr weblogs have cooperated in transmitting this news. Many colleagues also expressed their ideas in Image Management News Group.

Rajewari Iyer, the head of PRCI (Heydar Abad) wrote in a letter to the head of Image Management Group: it is very interesting to know that this group benefits from professionals overseas. This unique group has the potentiality for unifying all countries. Mr. Mehdi Bagherian from Iran has acknowledged the efforts and credibility of this group.

Srini Vasan, the head of Image Management writes: dear friends, I'm glad that Iran and India are cooperating to develop public relations through this group. Mr. Mehdi Bagherian, in his visit to India, spoke at Symbiosis College which is an important communications college. Mr. Mehdi Bagherian and the head of Symbiosis are both our members. Beyond the borders, this group has united experts in different countries.

- Bagherian reports about the present state of Iran's public relations

Public relations in Iran goes back to five decades ago. It has its ups and downs but has always grown steadily. Here is a brief report of the present state of public relations in Iran which I hope to be useful.

1- Training

Establishing Press and PR Higher Institute in 1961 by Keyhan Institute was the first step in training public relation professionally and at present there are more than 15 universities and higher education centers that teach field of public relations.

Allameh Tabatabayi, Azad Islamic University, Tehran University, Imam Sadegh University, Practical- Scientific University, IRIB Faculty, and News Faculty are among these higher educations centers which offer bachelor degree in pr and MA and PhD in communications. There are also short training courses by Ministry of Culture, Governmental Management Center, Tehran Jihad Daneshgahi, public and private organizations and public relations institutes.

Holding international conferences on public relations aiming for exchanging experience and achievements, among other programs, are following up from 2004 by the world prominent pr experts. These conferences besides exchanging experience and information updating play an important role in the country image making. With the assistance of such conferences, many foreign invitees found out how western media judge spitefully and the real Iran is presented as it is.

Using educational technology is one of the projects, following up by pr private institutes and corporations in Iran.

Publishing scientific articles in international pr journals by Iranian experts presents pr achievements and shows the role of pr in the process of sustainable development.

2- Literature on public relations

Twenty eight books on public relations have been published from 1966 till 2004 in Iran. From 2004 till now seventeen other books have been added to this collection and by publication of «Public Relations Encyclopedia» the literature of public relations entered a new phase. Besides introducing public relations theories, this book contains useful information about international geography and past and present state of public relations which in this regard, Iran holds an important position in the region.

Publishing five pr journals under the titles of «Kargozar Public Relations», «PR Research», «the Eighth Art», «Public Relations», and «Public Relations Technology» has added richness to the literature on public relations.

3- International Communications

At present, international communications in the area of public relations has been broadened and therefore, besides presenting our achievement to the experts of other countries, we are benefiting from their experience. On the other hand, presenting a positive image of Iran- considering the bad publicity our country receives from western media- is one of the developing achievements.

Establishing relations with different Asian countries including pr national and international associations and corporations, publishing articles in international journals and other professional steps are taken for the same reason. Founding Asia Public Relations Association (APRA), launching PR Internet Network in Asia, and publication of Asia Public Relations

Encyclopedia are the future projects, we hope to perform through consultation with pr experts of other Asian countries.

4- The future of public relations

Public relations in Iran, due to the full support of pr experts and companies, is expected to have a secure future. Moving toward professional and audience oriented public relations that act as the pivot point of development is the main feature of today's public relations of Iran. Iran public relations is at the service of development and social welfare. This fact shows the real and constructive role of public relations.

Naming a day for public relations in Iran and preparing and ratifying a code of practice for public relations are the signs of the importance of public relations and its role in sustainable development.

□ Acknowledgement

- It behooves us to acknowledge the efforts of Pro. Ujjwal Chowdhury who arranged this journey.
- The visit with Dr. Ajit Pathak, the head of India Public Relations Association, and his wife in one of the best governmental hotels of New Delhi was memorable.
- visiting the College of Foreign Languages and the meeting with its sociable chief is unforgettable. He gave my wife a very beautiful bunch of flower for the first visit of a couple to the college. I would like to thank him for his kindness.
- The grace and patience of Ashish Sharma, Social Communication Manager of ICONS Media, and his wife, Sonia Sharma, were matchless. They will be soon our guests in Iran.
- visiting Mohammad Reza showed us the truth and dignity of Iranian students' life in Pune. Mohammad Reza is an Iranian who is born in India. He was so pure and kind and did us many favors. I thank all of them.

References:

- 1- new principles, techniques and attitudes of public relations, (vol. 1), Mehdi Bagherian, Kargozar Publication, 2004
- 2- new principles, techniques and attitudes of public relations, (vol. 2), Mehdi Bagherian, Kargozar Publication, 2004
- 3- Image- Management News Group
- 4- The consequences of economy amendments in India, Donyay-e-Eghtesad News paper, 2006, No. 1138
- 5- Indian Express News paper, 2006