Planning public relations programs and developing the hospitality sector

–roles and mechanisms–

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Abstract:

The hospitality and tourism sector constitutes a strategic pillar for many countries, given its importance in boosting national income and developing the local and global economy, as well as in strengthening cultural and civilizational identity. Furthermore, given the growing interest of contemporary hotel establishments in public relations whose remit has expanded beyond the traditional tasks of promotion and communication to integrated strategic planning and programme management, this research paper aims to reveal the role of public relations programme planning as a strategic necessity that contributes to improving the quality of hotel services and gaining public loyalty at both internal and external levels, whilst seeking to achieve development and leadership for the hospitality sector.

Keywords: Tourism public relations; planning; public relations programs; hospitality sector.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism and the hotel industry are two sides of the same coin. Given the importance of the hotel sector in the development of the tourism sector, the hotel industry has today become one of the most dynamic sectors, particularly in light of the geopolitical, economic and technological transformations the world is currently witnessing, where reputation management has become a key factor in economic value. In this context, the importance of public relations is highlighted**.**

Within the hotel industry, public relations is not merely a communications function, but rather an integrated strategic management discipline, grounded in strategic planning and systematic scientific research in the design and management of public relations programmes, with the aim of achieving the organization's strategic objectives and gaining the long-term trust of its internal and external audiences, and to build the organisation's identity, particularly given the competitiveness of the sector, where the brand and the mental image shaped by public relations in the hotel industry directly contribute to booking decisions and increasing the number of guests arriving at the hotel. This research paper therefore seeks to shed light on the functional role of public relations programme planning in the development of the hotel sector, and we pose the following question:

- What is the role of public relations program planning in the development of the hotel sector?

2. The Concepts:

2.1 The Tourism Public Relations:

Modern public relations has been the focus of researchers and specialists, given its growing importance in organizations of all kinds, particularly in the tourism and hospitality sectors. Public relations represents a communication activity undertaken by any organization, aimed at building positive relationships with internal and external audience (Hamid, 2024) It is also viewed as a planning function, as its programs are not implemented

spontaneously but are based on careful studies and systematic research aimed at diagnosing crises that the organization may face (Alaq, 2009).

From this perspective, the planning dimension emerges as one of the most important components of successful public relations, as it enables the organisation to build bridges of trust and gain public support,

This is the primary objective it seeks to achieve: however, this objective can only be realized through conscious, deliberate and focused managerial efforts capable of utilising communication resources efficiently to ensure harmony between the organization and its environment.

- In the field of tourism and hospitality, public relations acts as a link between the organization and its customers, contributing to the building of the hotel's image and forming the basis for media programmes and campaigns aimed at both internal and external audiences. (Daghim, 2014)

Consequently, contemporary public relations in the hospitality sector is a strategic tool that fulfils multiple roles, from welcoming and seeing off guests and residents, to promoting the hotel's services and amenities, as well as preparing plans and designing programmes aimed at connecting the hotel organisation with its audience; and is therefore a managerial function that builds and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between the hotel establishment and its audience, thereby helping to gain trust and foster loyalty.

2.2 The public relations programs:

A program refers to the operational mechanism through which the strategic plan is implemented and made practically applicable (Mureden, 2020), and thus it can be said that a program is a set of practical activities that translate the organization's vision and its short or long term strategic objectives ; through it, the manner in which the organization communicates with its internal and external audiences is determined, as well as the method of building its reputation and brand image, whilst taking into account the surrounding environmental, social and economic changes, Consequently, the success of any public relations program depends on the clarity of its objectives, the precision of its plans, the realism of its potential, and the competence of those responsible for its implementation.

2-3 The hotel industry:

The hotel industry is defined as an economic and social entity based on the pooling and organisation of human and financial resources within an integrated framework, with the aim of producing and marketing hotel services for consumption, whether in the domestic or international market (Al-Antil, 2000).

It can be said that the hotel industry is a service sector, with a specific architectural character, which provides services such as accommodation, food and entertainment, amongst others, in return for a fee paid by the guest, within a specified period of time. Regardless of its ownership structure whether public or private the sector seeks to provide services that meet customer needs and stimulate demand for them, and is greatly influenced by the quality of the service provided, as well as the manner in which it is presented and marketed within the tourism market.

2_4 The public relations program planning:

Organizations that do not rely on strategic planning face numerous difficulties and problems, such as: ambiguity and misunderstanding regarding the organization and its activities, and the random targeting of programs at non-target audiences using haphazard methods. Planning ensures the prediction of future conditions and the precise identification of the driving forces required to achieve this future vision. « The importance of strategic planning has emerged in the context of modern management concepts, such as management by objectives and management by objectives and results' (Edderar & Al Ddendani, 2020).

- Planning is defined as the process through which an organization forecasts its future and develops tactics to achieve that future (Barghouth, 2007)
- Based on the above, it can be said that planning is a proactive process through which strategic objectives are set and preparations are made to face the future, taking into account the available circumstances and resources that enable the organization to achieve its desired objectives; consequently, planning encompasses This involves setting objectives, analyzing the target audience, identifying the necessary communication channels, as well as determining the programme's timing, implementation, monitoring and

evaluation, and subsequently analysing the results and assessing the extent to which the desired objectives have been achieved.

3. Mechanisms for planning public relations programmes in the hospitality sector:

The process of planning public relations programmes in the hospitality sector is an integrated process aimed at achieving effective communication with various audience groups. Regardless of the nature of the programme or the timeframe for its planning, this process requires the adoption of structured mechanisms that ensure sound planning, effective implementation and an objective evaluation of results, through these mechanisms, the appropriate methods are identified and the target audience is carefully selected, enabling the hotel to build a positive image and strengthen relations with its surroundings. Consequently, the process of planning public relations programs in the hospitality sector is carried out through the following:

_ Gathering the necessary information about the hotel:

This aims to collect the necessary data and information about the hotel from various perspectives, and this process includes familiarizing oneself with the organization's general policy. (Mohammed Al Fateh, 2017)

- Setting objectives:

The planning process begins with defining the general and specific objectives that the hotel organization seeks to achieve, whether these relate to improving service standards, increasing profits, or raising occupancy rates. (Hamid Abdul-Nabi Al-Anzi, 2013).

- Study and analyzis of the hotel operating environment:

This involves conducting a field study of the actual working conditions within the hotel, alongside an analysis of the external environment and its potential impact on internal operations. This analyzis helps to identify the hotel's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the opportunities and threats it faces. (Mowaffaq Abdul Jabbar Al-Hamiri, 2016)

- Audience analyzis: Identifying the target audience for public relations programs, in terms of age, gender, socio-economic status, and other factors.

- Programme formulation:

The programs forms part of the hotel's overall strategic plan, which in turn seeks to achieve long term objectives: consequently, formulating effective programs enables the hotel to achieve excellence and leadership in the tourism sector.

- Selection of methods: At this stage, the appropriate methods for implementing the program are selected.
- Assessment of material and human resources: This involves dividing tasks and determining the specific budget for program implementation.
- Program implementation:

At this stage, tasks and roles are assigned to those responsible for implementing the programs, ensuring they fully understand the tasks entrusted to them and their responsibilities in program implementation.

- Monitoring and evaluation:

The process of implementing the strategy requires continuous monitoring and control systems to track developments and changes that may occur in the organization's environment. Whilst some working environments are characterized by relative stability, others are marked by uncertainty and constant change that is difficult to predict, Therefore, the organization cannot rely on the stability of its environment; rather, it must be prepared to review its implementation programs, strategies and even its objectives**.**

3.1 The Importance of Planning Public Relations Programmes in the Hospitality Sector:

There is no doubt that planning is of paramount importance, particularly in modern organizations, as it enables the creation of a systematic roadmap for the organisation's operations and the definition of its long-term objectives. The role of strategic planning in the hospitality sector is therefore as follows:

- It improves effectiveness by focusing on the right things; this ensures that defined objectives are achieved, whilst saving time, money and effort. (Gregory, 2010)
- Developing plans for public relations programs ensures that both internal and external audiences are provided with information about the hotel, and allows for the consideration of diverse perspectives when determining its

policy, thereby affirming the management's social responsibility. (Shiba, 2015)

Consequently, planning public relations programs in the hospitality sector is becoming increasingly important in the competitive environment of the contemporary hotel industry, where service quality alone is no longer sufficient to ensure customer loyalty and sustained success; rather, the approach to communication and the management of relations with internal and external audiences now play the most prominent role in achieving excellence for the hotel, Consequently, planning contributes to improving the quality of hotel services through the following:

- Developing proactive strategic plans to address crises and challenges facing the hotel that affect its reputation, whether these are natural crises or malicious media rumours from opposing parties.
- Directing financial and human resources towards achieving short-term objectives, which in turn contribute to achieving strategic goals, such as planning for the expansion of the hotel or adding new leisure facilities designed to provide comfort and enjoyment for guests.
- Planning also helps to anticipate customers' needs and desires by studying the hotel's external environment and monitoring public opinion and trends.
- Planning enables hotel organisations to keep pace with global changes, particularly technological developments, and to leverage digital services in marketing their offerings, as well as in designing and implementing digital programs and other initiatives.
- Planning enables a reordering of priorities; whereas traditional management focuses on increasing the hotel's financial revenue, strategic management is geared towards building identity and reputation, and gaining the long-term trust of its audience, by improving service quality, attracting new markets, and fostering positive engagement with the community in which it operates.
- Enhancing the value of internal relationships by resolving staff issues and conveying their concerns to senior management, and developing their skills through training programs, benefits and other initiatives, which positively impacts performance levels and the hotel's identity.

4_ The role of public relations planning in the development of the hospitality sector:

The hospitality sector is no longer limited to supporting tourism; rather, it has become a cornerstone of the economy due to its interconnection with various economic and service activities. Hospitality establishments have become a strategic component of the modern tourism system, which has prompted many countries to focus on major hotel investments by constructing modern, state-of-the-art hotels that meet international standards of service and quality, reflect the level of urban and organizational development of communities, and contribute to highlighting their civilised image (Rahma, Al Alwan, & Al Dardaka, 2017).

The planning of public relations programmes is an integrated process undertaken by the public relations department of any organization, regardless of its nature, and is considered of great importance, particularly as it facilitates communication with the organization's audience and the building of good relations with them, « and given the importance of the hotel and tourism industry » Given the importance of the hotel and tourism industry, and the diversity of its sectors, many have called for the adoption of a scientific approach and strategic planning for hotel and tourism programs in order to identify and study all the potential and resources available in a given region" (Kafi, 2014) as studies have shown that « the number of tourists is expected to reach 1.8 billion international tourists by 2030, which is approximately 5 million tourists per day; consequently, hotels will need to provide impactful, sustainable and rewarding experiences in order to ensure their survival and continuity, (Youri Sawerschel, 2020) and to rethink their services and offerings." In the current era, the hospitality sector witnessed a remarkable recovery in 2025, and forecasts indicate the growth of the tourism and hospitality market. The travel and tourism sector is expected to grow by 5.8% annually until 2032, exceeding the global economic growth rate of 2.7%, Meanwhile, the sectors of business and leisure tourism, luxury tourism, and medical and wellness tourism continue to reshape hotel offerings to meet the needs and expectations of contemporary travellers (Lüthy, 2025). These shifts are

attributed to the interplay of several interrelated factors, most notably technological innovation, changing consumer preferences, and an increasing focus on sustainability principles, which presents hotel organisations with new opportunities to enhance guest experiences and consolidate their position in a market characterized by intensifying competition and sustainable growth.

- The success of modern organizations depends on their effectiveness in achieving their strategic objectives. In the hospitality sector in particular, the public relations department plays a pivotal role in the sector's development by planning and implementing programmes in accordance with integrated, ongoing strategies based on a systematic, scientific approach, aimed at connecting the organization with its internal and external audiences by providing them with information, procedures and policies through various media channels whether traditional, digital on social media, or events, amongst others whilst monitoring public trends, opinions and suggestions and focusing on these when developing future plans and programs. Public relations programs are integrated with the organization's overall objectives, achieving short-term goals which in turn contribute to the hotel organization's strategic objectives, by contributing to the provision of qualified human resources in accordance with the competencies and specializations required by various departments and divisions, as well as coordinating efforts related to recruitment, appointment and training, managing staff records, and overseeing health and safety programmes, in addition to acting as a link between staff, management, government bodies, trade unions and other relevant parties (Khalifa, 2015). It also seeks to build the hotel's reputation by correcting misconceptions and addressing rumours and negative publicity to which the hotel is exposed. From this perspective, there is a growing need to develop hotel services so that they are better suited to guests' capabilities and better able to satisfy their needs and desires,

This gives the hotel greater opportunities to compete within the tourism and hospitality market. Hotel services encompass various aspects that highlight the importance of the human element in the service delivery process, as the latter relies primarily on the human touch that distinguishes the hotel

experience. The human factor is one of the most important attractions for guests due to the staff's expertise and efficiency in performance, making it a key focus in the development of hotel services (Mashadani, 2017).

The service model encompasses all the fundamental characteristics that distinguish it, such as: the level of performance, the manner of delivery, and the speed of completion, in addition to the general and specific atmosphere in which the service is provided, and the manner of its use (Mashadani, 2017).

Consequently, the planning of public relations programs can contribute to the development of the hospitality sector through the following:

- Identifying the requirements and opinions of the public dealing with the hotel tourism establishment, both domestically and internationally.
- Presenting the establishment and its tourism activities in an appropriate manner designed to attract the public's attention.
- Developing integrated media programs through which efforts and resources are directed towards achieving media objectives to reach the target audience, promoting tourism services and products, and fostering trust and understanding between them. (Abawi, 2016)
- Developing and implementing visit programs tailored to the importance and preferences of tourists, their nationality, their schedule, and the places they wish to visit.
- Studying general trends in the local and international hotel market to identify the factors influencing public opinion regarding tourism and society's tourism assets, and formulating management policies and programmes in line with these trends. (Abawi, 2016)

We can conclude from the above that the planning of public relations programs is a key function undertaken by a hotel's public relations department, as strategic objectives cannot be achieved without the development of public relations plans and programs. Consequently, the planning of public relations programs contributes to the development of the hospitality sector through the following:

- **Increasing revenue and developing the hospitality sector:**

Effective management of public relations programs contributes to increasing the number of guests visiting the hotel and attracting new customers, as well as gaining a competitive edge by developing services to keep pace with modern changes, and by promoting the hotel's services and benefits to customers through professionally planned media and promotional campaigns.

- Internal Coordination and Organisation of the Hotel:

Planning public relations programmes, distributing tasks, coordinating between departments, directing material and human resources, and aligning staff objectives with the organization's overall goals enable the achievement of the program's objectives. This is in addition to strengthening internal relations by taking into account staff opinions and concerns, and building bridges of trust through training, leisure and benefits programs, amongst others. As the quality of hotel service is directly linked to staff performance, this has a positive impact on service standards and strengthens job satisfaction, thereby contributing to the hotel's excellence and leadership.

- Building the hotel organisation's identity:

The guest acts as an ambassador for the hotel brand; consequently, the quality of the hotel services, as well as the tourism and leisure programs provided by the hotel, represent the benchmark for a unique experience, thereby strengthening the hotel organization's identity within the tourism market.

- Supporting and developing the local community:

Planning public relations programs contributes to the development of the tourism and hospitality sector, and consequently to the development of the local and global economy, Furthermore, recent studies indicate that the distinction of hotel establishments depends on the extent of their responsibility towards the community in which they operate. Public relations management contributes to the sustainability of the establishment through social responsibility programs, such as: environmental protection, rationalising consumption, supporting associations, offering benefits to local residents and promoting seasonal events, etc.

- Supporting innovation and leveraging technological developments:

This is achieved by drawing on the experiences of luxury hotels, and collaborating with stakeholders, tourism agencies, and local community organizations to create innovative and contemporary services, as well as utilising smartphone applications, self-booking systems and artificial intelligence in the implementation and evaluation of programs, which currently represent a benchmark for the quality of hotel service, brand building and the shaping of the organization's image.

Based on the above, it can be said that planning public relations programs as an integrated and ongoing management function contributes to the development of the hospitality sector by creating and building lasting relationships with its audiences, characterized by reliability and harmony, enhancing the organization's reputation and supporting its competitiveness, which in turn has a positive impact on the economy as a whole.

5. CONCLUSION:

Public relations within the hotel industry has become an indispensable function in the growth and development of the hospitality sector. As a strategic management function, it carries out activities and develops programs to provide the public with all relevant information, policies and new services relating to the organization. Consequently, the success and development of a hotel organization depend on its constant readiness to plan its programmes, define its strategies, and adopt objectives that are suited to the nature of the rapid changes in its internal and external environment. A hotel organization that possesses mechanisms for continuous monitoring, flexible strategic planning of public relations programs, and their effective management, is better able to face challenges and capitalise on new opportunities, thereby enhancing its competitive position and sustainability.

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