

Public Relations in India

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Part 1: Background information

Capital City: New Delhi

Major Cities: Mumbai (Bombay), Kolkata (Calcutta), Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad



Official Languages: Hindi (national language; 41 percent of the population), Bengali, Telugu, Marathi, Tamil, Urdu, Gujarati, Malayalam, Kannada, Oriya, Punjabi, Assamese, Kashmiri, Sindhi and Sanskrit.

English is also a widely spoken associate language, used for business and political communication.

Type of Government: Federal Republic

Location: South Asia, between Myanmar (formerly Burma) and Pakistan, bordering the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal.

Currency: Indian rupee (INR)

Culture:

According to Geert Hofstede, India's society ranks high on the Power Distance Rating at 77 on a scale of 100. This means that less powerful members of organizations and institutions accept and expect power to be distributed unequally.

Most of India relies on a caste system to help them to understand their roles in society. There are four actual tiers (varna) to India's caste system, along with two tiers that are ranked outside the varna. The four varna are Brahmins (priests), Rahanyas (warriors), Vaisyas (farmers, merchants) and Sudras (laborers and artisans). The two ranked outside the four varna are the Harijans (the "untouchables") and the Adivasis (completely outside the caste system).

India is predominantly Hindu. According to the CIA World Factbook, 80.5 percent of the Indian population practices Hinduism. This is a major factor in the country's caste system and in the Power Distance Rating on the Geert Hofstede scale. This also means that a large number of Indians are vegetarian and abide by the statutes of a patriarchal society.

Part 2: Overview of the public relations industry

According to the Global Alliance for Public Relations, the public relations industry in India employs about 10,000 people in 700 firms across the country. But a lack of

education and formal training has resulted in some shortages of trained workers. Each year, between 90 and 150 students from various educational institutions enter the public relations field.

Public relations in India tends to carry a negative image, and some professionals believe that practitioners are to blame because of their lack of self-regulation. Public relations is also seen as tactical rather than strategic and is taken seriously by a small number of large organizations. The industry is gaining recognition as a profession, though, and practitioners are working to earn a positive image in India.

Modern public relations practices began in India in the 1940s when many companies started offering public relations services, and other large companies, such as Tata Motors and Tata Communications, India's largest telecommunication provider, opened public relations departments. The Public Relations Society of India (PRSI) was established in 1958, and the economy reforms in the 1980s allowed for the growth of public relations agencies. Melcole PR, Indian Public Affairs Network (IPAN) and the Taj Hotel's Good Relations were opened during this time.

Today, international agencies such as Ogilvy Public Relations, Weber Shandwick, Hanmer & Partners and Genesis Burson-Marsteller have offices in India. 20:20 Media is an independent firm that was opened in 1989 and specializes in technology public relations.

Indian public relations, like that of the rest of the world, has a large number of women professionals. Many believe that, because India has a patriarchal society, women face negative stereotypes and a rougher professional road than their male counterparts. Others disagree, though, claiming that women in India are provided equal rights and opportunities.

Some suggest that journalists and public relations practitioners have a more symbiotic relationship now than they did in the past. There are still some newspapers that try to make money from public relations professionals. For instance, the Times of India Group operates a private agreement system where it takes stake in a company, then offers that company advertising and editorial access.

India has 2,500 daily newspapers (the 300 in English are the most influential), 80 news channels (of 350 cable and satellite channels), 50 FM radio stations (expected to grow to 300 within the next year), three news agencies and thousands of magazines. Some of the newspapers include *The Times of India*, *The Hindustan Times*, *The Deccan Herald*, *The Telegraph* and *The Indian Express*. There are also seven business papers: *The Economic Times*, *Financial Express*, *Business Standards*, *The Hindu Business Line*, *Mint*, *The Financial Chronical* and *DNA Money*. The news channels that India receives include CNN, BBC and CNBC.

While public relations practitioners in India agree that ethical rules would help the profession's image, they do not agree that a code of ethics is truly necessary for

practitioners themselves. They are also unsure how to implement such a code. Even with PRSI, a code of ethics is not present in the country. PRSI primarily offers a professional network providing resources for public relations practitioners.

Part 3: Overview of public relations as it relates to students

Students of public relations are expected to have a greater knowledge of the industry on an international scale. Many companies operate globally, and students must possess the understanding to work in multiple countries and cultures.

Indian professionals view university degrees as a way to gain greater social mobility and as a stepping stone to high-level careers. While some of the educational institutions in India are considered among the best in the world, there are still some smaller universities that lack basic infrastructure. There are more than 400 universities in India, which are controlled indirectly by the Ministry of Human Resource Development.

Some students in public relations programs in India are encouraged to gain work experience before they graduate. When students move on from their higher secondary education, many go on to three-to-five-year universities where they prepare for professional careers. Once they complete that level of education, they may move on to a post-graduate institution, which may take up to three years to complete.

Many public relations instructors in India use their own professional experience to teach. There is a lack of local public relations research, which results in many professionals borrowing concepts from the West to form the basis of public relations education and practice.

There is no student organization similar to PRSSA in India, but students may join PRSI as student members.

The Symbiosis Institute of Media & Communication: Pune

The Symbiosis Institute of Media & Communication (SIMC) is a part of Symbiosis International University. SIMC offers undergraduate degrees in mass communications and postgraduate degrees in specified areas of communication, including public relations and advertising.

Madurai Kamraj University

Madurai Kamraj University was established in 1966 and is a teaching and research university offering courses in all areas of study. The University started a master's program for public relations in 1998, which is a part of the department of journalism within the School of Information and Communication Sciences. It also offers students job-oriented training programs to help them gain experience in the field in which they plan to work.

School of Broadcasting and Communication: Mumbai

School of Broadcasting and Communication: Mumbai offers certificates (degrees) in all areas of media and communications, including advertising and strategic planning. They also offer a master's degrees in advertising and public relations and provide students with conceptual knowledge of the public relations industry, supported by an intensive two-month field-training program. The students in this program also analyze various forms of media in their learning.

Resources Used:

The CIA World Factbook (www.cia.gov/librarby/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/in.html)

Geert Hofstede Cultural Dimensions (www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede_india.shtml)

RELS 303 (Hindu Religious Traditions, Western Kentucky University, taught by Dr. Jeffrey Samuels)

Global Alliance for Public Relations (www.globalpr.org)

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