

MY ROLE AS PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER IN THE BEST UNDERTAKING TAUGHT ME BUSINESS WITH THE PURPOSE

¹Manoj Suryakant Varade

¹PRO, BEST, Mumbai

ABSTRACT

BrihanMumbai Electric Supply & Transport Undertaking popularly known as **BEST** was formally set up as “Bombay Tramway Company Limited” in 1873. Initially horse driven trams were started and an electric tram-car thereafter. First bus ran on 15th July 1926 in Mumbai, which was welcomed by the people, just as the electric tram. BEST has taken several initiatives to serve its commuters and electricity consumers in a better way.

BEST has seen major ups and downs sustaining its uniqueness throughout the country while providing two uninterrupted essential services like Electric Supply and Transport for citizens of Mumbai even during calamities like Corona and even competitions from private players like Ola, Uber as well as Share a Taxi/ Rickshaw. It is known as one of the lifelines of Mumbai.

This paper analyses the measures and efforts taken by the Management of BEST to provide the safe Public Transport service to urban commuters dealing with increasing traffic congestion due to growing number of private vehicles on the road along with uninterrupted Power Supply to the Consumers at the optimum reasonable cost while doing the business, though facing financial crisis. BEST has a history. I had an opportunity to work as a PRO in this company. While working as PRO, I strongly realised that each business has a purpose.

Keywords – Public Relations, Business, Social Purpose

INTRODUCTION

As a PRO, I was responsible for managing the communications public affairs level welfare and focusing on the image of the best I have built and maintain the relationship between best undertaking and its public.

Role of PRO:

1. To create and implement PR strategies

Previously only BEST bus and Taxi or Rickshaw was only modes of public transport. Later share taxi and share rickshaw operations came into existence, which has created a major competition to BEST buses.

Therefore, there was a need to plan operative changes for bus operations in a strategic way. Accordingly, BEST has implemented rationalisation of bus routes for major long distance routes; which not only has curtailed the delay in running time during peak hours but has also resulted in increased passenger patronage.

Simultaneously, reduction in the bus fare attracted more commuters towards BEST. Moreover, introduction of modern tools like digital ticketing and Chalo smart card has also improved passenger patronage of BEST.

Secondly, BEST was the only Electric Supply providing licensee for the people within old island city limits. However, the situation has been changed after adopting a policy by the government that providing the freedom to every licensee company to supply electricity in

Mumbai. This has created a tough competition to BEST by private players like Tata Power, Reliance Power etc.

Though, an uninterrupted power supply is an USP of BEST; it was also necessary to maintain the competitive rates of electricity tariff, to survive in the competition for BEST along with dealing problems like distribution loss, theft of energy etc.

2. Identify characteristics of customers and provide service:

Time is more precious than gems for commuters as well as consumers of Mumbai. BEST has launched Chalo Application which provides facility to commuters to check the exact time of arrival of bus and plan their schedule accordingly. Even people can purchase their tickets, passes through this App. Chalo card has also been introduced for cashless travel.

BEST has introduced its own App. 'Mi BEST' providing online payment facility to electricity consumers along with Paytm and ECS through banks.

3. To share the information with Internal as well as External Public:

Public Relations Officer is an official source of information for any organization and therefore, dissemination of authenticated information to avoid chaos of noise is the duty of a PRO. The information is circulated through internal circulars, House Journals for employees and officials.

Arranging Press Conferences or issuing Press Releases for dissemination of information regarding bus operations and electric supply for knowledge of commuters and consumers through Print, Electronic and Digital media.

4. Use various tools and media channels for advertisements:

BEST has used own buses, bus shelters Kiosks to promote various facilities provided to the commuters like digital ticketing, cashless travel, Bus pass schemes, Super Saver plans etc.

BEST has also used social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to disseminate the information regarding introduction of new bus routes, rationalisation of existing routes etc.

5. Act as a Spokesperson:

Built and maintain image of an organization is the prime duty of any PRO. It is therefore necessary for a PRO, to provide authenticated information along with statistical data and photographs about that organization to its Public directly or through media as per required situation.

6. To track trends in the market:

PRO is named as 'Eyes and Ears' of an organization, which means he should keep himself always updated about the industry he is working as far as competitors, market trend etc.

7. Keep building relationship:

PRO acts as a bridge between the organization and its Publics internal and external both. Maintaining inter departmental relations helps him to get not only statistical data but also during internal crises like agitations, Morcha, Strikes etc. Likewise maintaining good relations with Media, NGOs, and Opinion leaders helps him during major accidents, power failure etc.

8. Corporate Communication:

Corporate Communication is a widely extended form of PR which accommodates Advertising, Marketing, Public Relations and Marketing Communication particularly in corporate organizations.

LITERATURE REVIEW-

Role of Public Relations in Business

Nawaz Ahmed opines that the business world is a combination of ideas, emotions, and lingering thoughts, making it crucial to have the ability to understand and anticipate them. Thousands of ideas and opinions can be shared, which is the role of PRO professionals to stay on top of it all. PROs act as the visual storytellers of your business, crafting and continually refining its image over time. The customers will perceive the business through their perspective and the image which has been created. The true art of public relations lies in knowing how to make them appreciate, connect with, and desire what you're presenting. (Nawaz Ahmad, 2016)

By analyzing insights from scientific articles, one can explain the various ways and roles in which public relations professionals contribute to organizational decision-making. This addressed the first research question, which has been discussed further. Regarding the second research question, it is observed that how the topic has evolved in the literature over time. During the earlier years of study period, much of the focus was on determining the impact PR practitioners have on decision-making and thereafter into the specific ways in which PR contributes to decision-making processes.

PR professionals are supposed to influence decision-making facilitating dialogue between the organization and its internal and external stakeholders by enhancing understanding of the communication aspects within those processes. When communicating decisions, PR professionals act as responsible disseminators, enriching the information and ensuring the outcomes of decisions are clearly conveyed to all relevant publics providing counsel on matters such as corporate ethics, crisis communication, social responsibility and public affairs.

Rogers and Blenko (2006) described about how do the roles of PR practitioners relate in decision-making? In the IT literature, for example, the roles of facilitator and analyst have been emphasized, along with participation in decision-making (Belton and Hodgkin, 1999). What roles are commonly reflected in the public relations literature? Among those linked to decision-making, the most attention has been paid to participating in decision-making, though the precise impact of PR practitioners has been debated. The role of PR in highlighting the importance of environmental monitoring and educating decision-makers about the communicative elements of decision-making has also been widely discussed. Another key role mentioned is recommending, which includes consulting and proposing directions related to corporate social responsibility, ethics, crises, and public affairs. Additionally, providing input is frequently discussed, although not as Rogers and Blenko (2006) define it as offering input as a stakeholder, but rather facilitating the consultation and co-production process with all stakeholders. This role involves arranging opportunities for participatory decision-making, as advocated by Gregory, McDaniels, and Fields (2001), in which stakeholders are directly involved in sense-making and negotiations through value-focused thinking. The role of agreeing to decisions or having veto power was not highlighted. The role of implementing decisions relates to executing public relations activities and being a responsible disseminator of organizational decisions by interpreting and explaining them to stakeholders.

The four main clusters identified are advisor, participant, facilitator and disseminator. These four clusters identified each focus on distinct aspects. However, it's important to highlight that they are not exclusive or fixed. Practitioners may combine different roles, which can evolve over time. These roles, as outlined in the wheel model, are essential for fostering organizational legitimacy, addressing stakeholder perspectives, enhancing understanding of the communicative elements of decision-making, supporting a balance of interests, and explaining decisions that have been made.

This provides an overview of the ways PR practitioners contribute to organizational decision-making, based on a review of existing literature. The roles emphasized by different authors varied. Some focused on the impact PR practitioners have on decisions, while others highlighted their role in facilitating participatory decision-making processes. Ultimately, four primary roles emerged from the literature: participator, advisor, facilitator, and responsible disseminator. The power of decision-making can be seen as a dynamic combination of roles, influenced by individual competencies and situational factors.

The extent of impact and the mix of roles will vary among practitioners. Therefore, we conclude that these findings may prompt practitioners to reflect on their own roles in organizational decision-making. Some may currently occupy only a few roles and may consider developing additional ones. By consolidating the roles identified in the literature, a more comprehensive understanding of how PR practitioners contribute to decision-making has been created. Since a single decision may require multiple roles, this necessitates a broad skill set and expertise in PR. Familiarity with these decision-making roles allows for a better grasp of the overall process, enabling PR professionals to contribute to a more transparent and effective decision-making and communication process.

On a broader level, suggestions can be made about the potential impact of PR on decision-making. Notably, opportunities for further enhancing PR's impact are found in the advisor and participant roles, where practitioners can work to improve understanding of emerging issues, conflicting interests, and, leveraging their boundary-spanning role, help extend problem-solving to a wider range of stakeholders. These represent new challenges for organizations in a rapidly changing environment, which are difficult to address without strong communication contributions to decision-making processes.

Though, the systematic search method and testing different sets of keywords, only research on decision or policy-making related to public relations or organizational communication was not possible. The analysis indicates that PR is increasingly recognized as an important part of organizational decision-making. By synthesizing various studies, a more complete understanding is gained of the ways PR contributes to decision-making. However, much of the literature tends to focus on the general role of PR practitioners in organizations and their decision-making influence, often from a normative perspective, leaving some tasks within decision-making processes unclear. For example, current research does not fully address how PR professionals contribute to ethical decisions and actions within organizations (Kang et al., 2012).

Since 2006, scholars have placed greater emphasis on understanding the different ways PR influences decision-making processes, particularly in the areas of facilitating decision-making and communicating decisions. Although some authors have acknowledged the need for further investigation, the findings suggest that more detailed research is needed to understand the evolving contributions of PR to organizational decision-making. Further exploration would reveal the specific benefits PR can bring in this area.

Through examining how peer-reviewed literature addresses PR's contribution to organizational decision-making, four key roles were identified: participator, advisor, facilitator, and responsible disseminator. Further exploration of these roles may also provide insights into the education, experience, temperament, management orientation, and job design necessary for PR professionals to become respected participants in the dominant decision-making coalition within their organizations, ultimately enhancing the quality of decision-making processes. By contributing more to organizational decision-making, PR practitioners can solidify their strategic position. This study also opens up opportunities for further investigation into the tasks and skills required to effectively contribute to such processes. (Markus Mykkänen, 2015)

PR scholars and professionals ready to use different concepts to evaluate the effectiveness of public relations. Organizations are the social entities, goal-oriented systems that are intentionally structured and connected to both internal and external environments. The primary focus of any organization is to operate effectively and achieve its goals and objectives. An organization cannot function effectively without efficient communication, which is the core function of public relations. Additionally, public relations roles are crucial for promoting organizational success and establishing a strong brand. PR practitioners may serve as communication managers, overseeing and integrating communication activities, or as communication technicians, primarily focused on creating and writing messages. This study also explores the idea that every PR practitioner can play both the role of a communication manager and a communication technician.

Moreover, this research highlights that every organization should recognize the importance of these functions to enhance their business, increase brand awareness, boost employee engagement, and influence local or federal regulations. Organizations can benefit from having skilled PR practitioners who contribute to achieving organizational goals. For example, internal relations practitioners, investor relations specialists, media relations experts, government relations professionals, and research specialists all play important roles. In smaller organizations, a few specialists may handle multiple roles, while larger organizations may require specialized practitioners for each area. (Ghorzang, 2020)

BUSINESS WITH PURPOSE

The maximum number of consumers, employees, and investors want to engage with, work for, and invest in companies that have a strong, positive sense of purpose. However, there may be a significant "purpose gap" as many companies claim to have a purpose, but it is not integrated within their business. It is either unknown to their employees and customers or doubtful by their employees and customers. Who has successfully navigated this gap? This research highlights on how companies like Ben & Jerry's, Nike, Novo Nordisk, PepsiCo, and Unilever have developed and implemented a "social purpose" with a commitment to address major social issues through their operations, products, partnerships and social issue campaigns.

These examples may be considered "success stories," with some minor setbacks, there is no guarantee that their social purpose will be maintained in the future. In *The Enlightened Capitalists*, Jim O'Toole presents case studies of companies founded with a social purpose, from Robert Owen and JC Penney to Edwin Land (Polaroid) and Anita Roddick (Body Shop). However, he refers to these as "Cautionary Tales of Business Pioneers Who Tried To Do Well By Being Good." Why the caution? Some of these companies, along with many others now forgotten, were overtaken by competitors, failed to keep up with new technologies, and, as O'Toole notes, "Successor CEOs almost always gutted the original

culture, dismissing the very values that had made their companies successful." We've seen this with Unilever, which lost its way after the death of its visionary founder and almost undermined the social value of its acquisition, Ben & Jerry's. Thankfully, Ben & Jerry's social mission was revived, but in 2017, it seemed Polman's good work might be undone when Kraft Heinz made a \$143 billion hostile takeover bid for Unilever.

To Wall Street's surprise, Unilever rejected Kraft Heinz's offer. On the surface, this appeared to be a clash between two different business models. For example Unilever's long-term value creation versus Kraft Heinz's focus on constant cost-cutting. Experts called it a "battle for the soul of capitalism." History proved Unilever's decision to reject the bid was wise—over the next two years, Kraft Heinz's share price fell 70%, while Unilever's rose about 50%. Reflecting on this, Polman remarked, "Some people think greed is good. But over and over, it's proven that ultimately generosity is better." Since then, many companies have stopped quarterly reporting, top CEOs have spoken out on social issues, and Polman's vision of business as a "force for good" has gained traction. Over 7,350 Business Corporations are legally required to create a "public benefit" for society and/or the environment while still making a profit.

These examples show, having a social purpose isn't just for Business Corporations or companies targeting socially-conscious consumers and investors. But beware while declaring a social purpose means nothing or can be more harmful; if it is not genuinely integrated into the business and brand through hard work and complete dedication. (Mirvis, 2023)

There are some evidences supporting the Fink/Mayer hypothesis that purpose-driven businesses can outperform their competitors. However, the implications for "corporate governance", which refers to the relationship between shareholders, directors, and senior managers in managing organizations, are not clear for many reasons.

- i) The mechanisms through which business purpose is created and influences financial performance will determine how, if at all, business purpose affects organizational structure and whether it conflicts with the traditional understanding of corporate form, including the corporation's "objective." If purpose-driven performance is driven by middle managers or salaried professionals rather than senior leadership, the traditional corporate structure with its conventional objectives may still be the most appropriate. Further research could reveal that in some companies, purpose-driven high performance is fueled by boardroom commitments to non-shareholder interests, or may conflict with the goals of investors focused on short-term share price growth. If this is the case, it would offer further justification for such companies to operate as benefit corporations, where long-term goals can be clearly defined and monitored.
- ii) Equating "business purpose" with "corporate objective" is a mistake. "Business purpose" is a characteristic of business enterprises, regardless of how they are organized. In contrast, "corporate objective" is better seen as a feature of a specific enterprise form and does not describe what businesses actually do on a day-to-day basis. Failing to distinguish between these two concepts makes it difficult to have a meaningful discussion about which organizational form is best suited for a particular business.
- iii) Attempts to alter the traditional corporate structure to support purpose-driven businesses could lead to several significant challenges. As previously mentioned, a revised structure may not be compatible with "Type 1" firms that follow Milton Friedman's model. Additionally, even purpose-driven "Type 2" businesses and

"Type 3" trade-off social enterprises may not require or desire a more socially oriented corporate form. Furthermore, if "Type 2" or "Type 3" companies do need a more socially focused structure; the benefit corporation model is already available, reducing the need to modify the traditional corporate form. One advantage of the growing use of benefit corporations is that it alleviates the pressure to alter the traditional structure.

Finally, the term "corporate purpose" is often ambiguous and misleading. Sometimes it refers to a specific business's mission or purpose, such as Google's mission statement: "Our company mission is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful." At other times, "corporate purpose" refers to the attributes of the corporate form, which I refer to as "corporate objective." Most confusingly, people sometimes mistakenly equate these two meanings, assuming that "corporate objective" and "business purpose" are inherently the same. However, this is a misunderstanding. There is no inherent connection between the two. Many purpose-driven businesses operate effectively as traditional corporations, where the "corporate objective" is to enhance the company's value for the benefit of shareholders, while others may prefer a benefit corporation structure. This confusion about the two concepts obscures one of the most important questions in business law today: What legal form is best suited for purpose-driven businesses, and why? (Rock, 2020)

CONCLUSIONS:

Through my journey of 34 years of service with the BEST Undertaking, I realised that until employees understand the purpose of the organisation; they cannot contribute organizations whole heartedly. Therefore, every organization should boost employee engagement; recognize the importance of skilled PR practitioners who contribute to achieving organizational goals to enhance their business and increase the brand awareness.

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