

Public Relations Management After COVID-19 Lockdown: A Case Study of Wuhan, China

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Abstract: The aim of the research study was to understand the effectiveness of the public relations strategies of crisis communication and how impactful they were for saving the image of Wuhan city after the pandemic. Wuhan was hailed as the epicentre of Corona virus infections as the initial infections have spread from this place. Thus, the image of this prominent city was maligned not only towards the local and national audience, but the international audience as well. Thus, the Wuhan government took up most of the necessary public relations strategies to restore the image of the city among the national and international audience. This paper has intrinsically dealt with the opinions from the different sample population on the effectiveness of the crisis communication done by the PR strategists of the Wuhan government. From most of the respondents it has been found out that Wuhan government and its public relations strategies were wholly operated through the digital medium and this has helped in restoring the image of the image to greater and effective extent. Through the disposition of information through different social media networking sites like Facebook and Sina Weibo, the PR strategists were able to provide information on the improvements in the city condition and the reduction of infection in Wuhan along with other positive news articles. However from the respondents it has been also found that, including lesser opinion from the public, decrease in the participation of the common mass in the information dissemination process by the Wuhan government has decreased the effectiveness of the image restoration PR strategy in the Wuhan city. The research study concludes that while the PR crisis communication and its strategies have been helpful towards restoring the image of the city, there are still some loop holes that needs to be fixed.

Keywords: Public relations, lockdown, Covid-19, Image restoration, reputation management, crisis communication, government, post lockdown Wuhan image.

1. Chapter1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

Wuhan was the epicentre of the Corona Virus Disease in the year of 2019. The city was being hailed by the international press as the city where the virus originated from. Due to this the city faced backlashes not only from the international press, but the city image was severely maligned among the residents of Wuhan as well. Wuhan had a different trajectory of the lockdown and the recovery measures undertaken by the government in order to improve the image of the city was also different[1]. The lockdown brought into the city acted as watershed, but the city image was significantly suffering as the infections and death ratios in the city kept on increasing. However, after the period of 76-day isolation, it can be said that the economy and city image of Wuhan promptly began improving. While the economic curve witnessed a positive slope due to the different economic activities being brought on track. The image restoration process helped in improving the image of the city among the residents (Zhang et al., 2015). The study has been undertaken to understand and examine the effectiveness of the city's public relations activities undertaken by the government to improve the image of the city among the citizen. The study further sheds light on the perception of the common mass how effective the public relations were in safeguarding the image of the city.

1.2. Background of Research

On 30th December 2019, the Wuhan Municipal Commission of Health issued two documents online patients

are suffering from pneumonia while the causes for it remains unknown which has happened the City's South China Seafood Market. On 31st December, the Wuhan Municipal Commission of Health made it public that, 27 such same cases have been registered in the city. Further, on 30th January 2020, the World Health Organization declared the Covid-19 as the epidemic and a public health emergency of international concern and warned the rest of the world to take precautions (Hua and Shaw, 2020). As there was no effective vaccine available for the virus, social distancing measures started to be followed in Wuhan and everywhere else in China. The Chinese government, therefore, implemented a series of large-scale interventions to contain the epidemic[2]. Wuhan applied the strictest measures in terms of the complete lockdown on the entire population from 23rd January 2020. All kinds of transportation facilities were stopped and 9 million people were stagnant. It was one of the most significant steps that could be taken during the spread of the infection as Covid-19 was having unparalleled impact on the human society (Dogra et al., 2020). Due to this the government of Wuhan along with the Chinese government came up with different PR strategies in order to restore the image of the city among the masses. This was being increasingly done in order to keep the anxiety and uncertainty among the masses at bay. The City's measures to save its image started not after lockdown but synchronous with the policy to blocking of the virus. The example of Wuhan's actions to improve its public relations was related to building two emergency specialty field hospitals, namely, Leishenshan and Huoshenshan in Wuhan. Specifically, the publicity department live-streamed the construction process on Weibo to show people the 'Chinese speed' and divert their attention

from the City's ignominious actions to conceal the emergence of the virus at the beginning. All the other PR strategies like propagating the tie up with WHO on vaccination were highly circulated to save the image of the city.

1.3. Research Aim and Objective

The research aims at examining the effectiveness of the Wuhan's public relations management after the lockdown. Further the aim includes understanding whether the city image was restored due to the different PR activities being undertaken by the PR professionals at Wuhan.

The objectives of the research are as follows:

To examine the different measures taken by the PR professionals to restore damaged city image

To understand the effects of the PR measures undertaken at Wuhan city

To comprehend the ways the citizens of Wuhan perceived City's measures related to public-relations management

To understand whether the PR activities of Wuhan can teach the other metropolises to draft their PR programs towards image restoration of the city

1.4. Research Questions

The research questions are as follows:

1) What measures relevant to public relations has Wuhan municipality taken to restore the damaged city image?

2) What are the effects of these measures?

3) How do Wuhan residents think about the City's measures related to public-relations management?

4) Can Wuhan's experience after lockdown teach metropolises in other countries a lesson? Or can other cities duplicate Wuhan's measures to alleviate the Pandemic's impact?

1.5. Research Rationale

Wuhan's image on the world map was severely hampered as information got sensationalized by the national and international media regarding the city being the epicentre of Corona virus invention[3]. Additionally, some media also flooded their news channels with the information that, in some definite science labs of Wuhan, Chinese scientists invented the Corona Virus for mass destruction. This impacted the image of Wuhan city. In response to the maligned city image among the international and national audience, the government of Wuhan came out with different public relations strategy for city image management and restoration process. As stated by Ferguson et al. (2018), public relations strategy are undertaken by PR professionals to improve the reputation of the organization, city or celebrity in order to have a clean and reputed brand image. Thus the PR professionals of PR government came up with several PR strategies like social media and other media vehicles to improve the image of the city. PR strategies and their effectiveness regarding image restoration or reputation management has been dealt in infinite number of studies till date. However, the rationale behind conducting this research is, all the research done till date have dealt with PR strategies used for short crisis with short-term solutions. This research particularly deals with the image restoration of Wuhan city after the pandemic had hit the city. The recency of the topic helps in making the research much relevant. In addition to this, the research also considers the perception of the people on the impact of the PR strategies conducted. The information on the perception of the mass regarding the effectiveness of the PR

strategies conducted will help the PR professionals of Wuhan government to make necessary changes to increase the impact of the strategies and accelerate the process of image restoration and damage control[4].

The recency of the event that is Corona virus is another rationale for conducting this research. There are ample number of research that that been done on ways to improve image of the city when some governmental policies goes wrong. However, this research is different and helps in identifying the impact of the PR strategies that can be useful for image restoration among the pandemic is over. This research paper has huge significance for the future. Future PR professionals will be able to understand and acknowledge the PR strategies that can be undertaken to restore the image of the city. On the other hand, the research is significant for the academicians as well. As different PR frameworks are included in the research, this will help them in understanding the effectiveness of different frameworks of public relations and how it can be used in professional context. Further, other cities facing the wrath of the pandemic and maligned city image can find it helpful to use the PR strategies in their nation in order to revive the reputation damage done due to Corona Virus outbreak.

1.6. Structure of Research study

For the completion of the research study, the entire documentation will be divided into five parts. The contents of the 5 parts and the design of the study is as follows:

Chapter 1: Chapter 1 introduces the research to the audience stating the aims, objectives and describing the rationale of the research

Chapter 2: Chapter 2 deals with the pre-drafted literature drafted on the research topic. This section of the research is crucial for the completion of the research as it helped in analyzing the data well.

Chapter 3: All the methods for collection and identification of data are done in this chapter. Research methodology contains information on sample, size, research approach, philosophy and other methods included in the study.

Chapter 4: Chapter 4 contains the data analysis portion of the research study. All the data gathered from the different data collection methods are analysed in this section providing insights on qualitative and the quantitative data collected.

Chapter 5: Findings and discussion are done on in the fifth chapter of the research study. All the information obtained from the data collected are collated with the existing literature to provide findings on the research objectives set,

Chapter 6: this chapter consists of the concluding parts of the research study. Thus all the findings and analysis are concluded in this section giving the research a definitive direction. Further, future scope of the research is also stated here[5].

2. Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter includes reviewing of the previous literature on public relations management after the Covid-19 lockdown in Wuhan and in China overall. The chapter initially discusses the key terms and concepts used while describing previous works. Following this, the PR management of China during the coronavirus pandemic has been discussed wherein the measures are taken by the Chinese government to manage its public relation were highlighted. The perspective of the

Chinese citizens regarding the measures China is taking to curb the pandemic has also been focused on in this chapter where it is discussed whether the public still has faith in the Chinese government or is losing faith. Next to this the way China has maintained health communication with its PR agencies and the news channels in the digital platform has been talked about along with the disaster of public relations China is facing with western countries. Finally, the chapter has also talked about the ways in which China used censorship as a part of its public relations strategy to cut the PR crisis communication so that China is no longer supported in a negative light and the citizens gain faith in the government strengthening the public relations. The other strategies used by the Chinese Government have been discussed to understand the managing strategy of the government in a phase when the entire world was pointing against China. After having researched earlier that reaches the gaps found has been discussed to understand the areas which are needed to be explored in the current paper to shed light on the public relations management after the Covid-19 lockdown in China[6].

2.2. Key terms and concepts

Public relations management is the identification of the internal and external public and maintains a positive and healthy relationship with them for the benefit of the organisation. Next, PR crisis occurs when there is the negative flow of event and information about a particular business organisation that affect the public opinion negatively. Another term used in the chapter is censorship which is suppression or so as to say the prohibition of a part subject which is considered to be politically unacceptable as it might pose a threat to the security of the people of the country. Another term called Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) has also been used in this chapter. The CAC is the office of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission whose central role is to regulate and censor internet posts, comments and other activities happening over the digital platform.

2.3. China's PR management for Covid-19

In 2020, at the end of January, China became in the spotlight of the entire media world due to the spread of the pandemic coronavirus having its root in Wuhan, China. The spread of the dangerous coronavirus has forced millions of people not only in Wuhan but also in the whole country to stay home since government has issued a mandatory administrative regulation (Zhu, Wei & Niu 2020)[7]. Two months later, Wuhan and entire China started doing things for public relation management in order to reverse the unfavorable situation caused by the large-scale outbreak of the virus and fix its reputation which has been damaged by the perception that Wuhan, China is the source of Covid-19. The response of China towards managing its public relations have eventually proven to be quite effective because administrative regulation did work in controlling the virus from further spreading. The municipal government has decided to implement a full lockdown in Wuhan and Hubei and it enacted partial lockdowns for a population of nearly 750 million (Vontobel 2020). The local government, in order to maintain its PR management, strategized new ways to keep communicating with its citizens. Later, China also announced that there was no new transmitted case of the virus domestically, yet there still was a dispute over the news. In order to maintain a more robust strategy, the country banned

the entry of foreigners despite their residential status or their visa class since foreigners are at a greater chance of bearing the virus to the country (FMPRC 2020). After this situation, China went on some domestic PR campaign to celebrate its success of having restricted the spread of the virus, while the other countries were still descending into major chaos so as to fight the virus. As a part of its public relations strategy, the country has provided assistance to nearly 150 other countries as well as four international organizations helping them to fight off the novel coronavirus, as reported by the China International Development Cooperation Agency (Kurtzer 2020). However, it was observed by Urdinez (2020), that the massive campaign of China for managing its public relations after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, which included donations of some medical equipment, did not achieve the expected results. In the G-20 summit that occurred last year over video-conferencing technology, the president of China displayed their PR strategy in the attempt to attract the reins of all the international response, and thus it showcased the expertise of China in combating the virus (Vontobel 2020). Further, it was also revealed at the meeting that China had set up certain Covid-19 knowledge centres online so as to provide information about the virus and how to stop its spread to all other nations[8]. This way China has strategized its public relations by portraying its initiatives for the public not only of Wuhan or China but also of the rest of the world.

In fact, China's public relations management for promoting the image and reputation of countries and cities damaged by the Covid-19, was constantly being challenged. This is due to the fact that anti-Chinese sentiments have been an uprising in many international countries mainly after the Covid-19 emergence (Kavalski 2021). More than delivering words of sympathy, China has to take more actions for strengthening its PR strategies. Although PR companies in China are continuously engaged in protecting their people which include workforce and customers. They are doing so by stabilizing the supply chain of different companies and by ensuring that enough cash and liquidity are available to citizens.

2.4. Chinese citizens on PR Crisis during Covid-19

In China, the public relations crisis holds the potential to get escalated quickly as a result of the public influence on social media, the cultural sensitivities, growing national pride and also censorship of media in the country (Golden 2021). During the first quarter of 2020, some people in China were predicting that some unprecedented event was about to occur. Eventually, thousands of public messages with outraged sentiments started to appear on different social media platforms of China. These messages asked the Chinese government if they were covering any other outburst just like the Sars virus (BBC 2020). The BBC has not noticed that the information does not flow smoothly and the local government is concerned to a certain extent about the panic caused by the information, which has led to a crisis of trust between the people and the government. The government credibility then started to weaken, as the public realized that while the country was facing a major disaster, local government of China did not do well enough in positively react to it[9]. In the months of January and February, a large number of media have begun to pay attention to and report on the pandemic outbreak in Wuhan. This led to the government being blamed by citizens and the PR crisis was in the highest position in the scale of

trusting the government (Zhang et al. 2021). The frameworks of crisis communication are seen to be a way that can analyse the response of the narratives through the handling of the Covid-19 emergency by the PR agencies of the country. The BBC (2020) believes that President Xi's absence in the media has caused public anger. Such a view is neither supported by actual research, nor does it conform to the real situation at the time. Under the panic of the spread of the virus, the government's public relations strategy is difficult to achieve results. As the pandemic spread from Wuhan to other regions of the country, the tension between the central government, other cities and Wuhan was strengthened. While assisting Wuhan in fighting against the virus, the central government also hinted a criticism of Wuhan's municipal government in the low efficiency against the pandemic. So far, the anger of the people turned to the excessive control of information in the early stage of the pandemic in Wuhan. Just a few weeks after the backlash at the government threatening the public relations management of Wuhan, the government stepped up censorship of posts and comments on the pandemic on social media platforms (Moynihan & Patel 2021), but it is indeed very hard to tell whether the censorship is aimed at cracking down on the rumor and misinformation that has a destructive power during pandemic. With this, the local government from Wuhan stated employing certain crisis management strategies to combat the backlashes it has been facing from the public and other nations. The government then began to consider relaxing its strict censorship of speech in favor of truthfully reporting the situation of the pandemic, which was portraying that the situation improved. This strategy however is typical of the other strategies that the Chinese PR agencies followed to control their damaged image [10]. In the Covid-19 case, the local government took initiatives to minimize the damage the crisis has done, by rebuilding the crisis reporting strategies. A special hospital construction was done in 10 days in Wuhan (Hariharan 2020). This signaled the capability of the government to deal with the crises and thus manage the PR crisis during Covid-19, in an effective manner.

2.5. Health Communication through PR agencies and news media

The quick spread of the coronavirus disease has already cost great public attention in China. Along with it several heated discussions about the Chinese government and also about the Chinese mass media which includes the different PR agencies of the country started to report certain irrelevant information about the spread of the virus in China and also in the rest of the world (BBC News 2020). Many effective public health measures are becoming essential to get implemented at places in order to avoid the complete breakdown of the public health system. In this regard, the Chinese media had a crucial role to play in conveying to the public the updated regulations and policies from the Chinese authorities in order to maintain healthy public relations with its citizens. In 2020, during the first quarter, there was no vaccine available for the citizens, therefore it required each citizen to be aware of the deadly disease and the harm the novel coronavirus can cause (Liu et al. 2020). Moreover, the preventive measures, as well as the hospital available in the local areas, should be kept in concern by the citizens. Under the circumstances at the time, the lack of in-depth understanding of the virus by the entire medical profession and ordinary people, the unpredictable consequences of the pandemic, and the lack of public authority medical information made the entire society very

anxious about the virus. This also led the citizens to make a panic purchase of essential medical supplies and also let them try certain unnecessary and detrimental medical solutions (Liu et al. 2020). Such actions from the public require the PR agencies and the mass media to disseminate the activities which are related to public health concerns so as to help the public authorities as well as the Chinese government to understand better the health conditions that are posed by the coronavirus. In this way the public can gain relevant health-related knowledge and training which can help them to combat the menace. It has been observed that instead paying attention to the development of the domestic pandemic situation, China's mainstream media emphasizes reporting on the information of the virus itself and health information that people could do to prevent themselves from the virus (BBC News 2020)[11]. This indicates that the media in the outbreak did not challenge the public relation and the authority of the government through specific reports on the pandemic, but played a significant role in serving the whole society to solve and defeat the virus. Few authors have observed that the Chinese mass media has conveyed certain misinformation that induced and negative psychological effect within the public of anger, fear and sadness (Su et al. 2021). Therefore, it is required for the PR agencies and the mass media to figure out the relevant news themes to be provided to the mass so as to enable the public to stay alert about the coronavirus outbreak having to maintain less mental pressure. This way the government can manage its public relations and the crisis situation can be handled effectively with the help of the mass media (Su et al. 2021). It is also the duty of the mass media and PR agencies to ensure that they report accurate information during the time of emergency rather than spreading misinformation to the public. Overall, it can be said that PR agencies and mass media serve the role of public health function as the news reports of changing rates of cases can directly affect public opinion about the government and also affect the public relation management with it. This way the citizens can remain alert about the coronavirus transmission and change their habits accordingly therefore the Chinese PR Agencies and the news media will not be reportedly lagging behind in reporting the major developments about the Covid-19[12].

2.6. China Public Relation Disaster with the Western countries

Just when the world was convinced without enough scientific evidence that the coronavirus pandemic had its root in China the public relation of the country especially Wuhan started to get ruptured with that of the western countries, which evolved into an important means for western countries to carry out political attacks and economic sanctions on China. The dangerous widespread disease spreading throughout the western countries has turned the leaders of the countries against China being in the leadership position. However, just a few months before the pandemic started the western countries were fine with Beijing and thought that the trade war of the US with China was nothing but a mere political disorder (Verma 2020). There are other reports which found that countries like Turkey, Netherlands and Spain are angry at the Chinese government and the Chinese trading partners for receiving faulty medical equipment to be used for the covid-19 emergency. Further, it has been observed that the Dutch health ministry recalled around 600000 face masks that were made in China (Rapoza 2020). These facts depict that the

public relations of China with the western countries were not manageable during the lockdown phase. Another report stated that the Chinese movie theatres were being shut down just after a week of being reopened. The US Senator Tom Cotton commented on this saying that the pandemic situation is not getting under control however the Chinese government is constantly projecting that COVID cases in the country have gone down (ANI News 2020)[13]. The citizens of the western country along with the leaders are still confused and are trying to figure out how to combat the disaster. However, they are not being able to fully trust China in this matter this way the public relations of China with its partnering countries have gotten weak during the situation and even at the present time the trust of the Western countries in China is at stake. The western countries opposing questions as to how the epicenter of the coronavirus Burhan as well as entire China has managed to get away with the disease with just about 81000 cases whereas Western countries like Italy has still not reached the peak coronavirus situation and in the US the pandemic effect has just started (Rapoza 2020)[14]. The longer the disease stays in the US and other Western countries the more it is turning out to be a disaster of public relations for the Chinese government. The economy of the Western countries is in lockdown and they are suffering a free fall. Just as the citizens of the Western countries are seeing the pandemic situation getting unfold, the response of China towards the pandemic is treated by the western countries with skepticism. The western countries feel that China got away from the disease unscathed while leaving the other countries in a dangerous position. The head of the Bretton Woods Research Vladimir Signorelli, stated that repairing the global trust for China and managing its public relations might come at a price. He further adds that the Chinese government should willingly participate in larger trade negotiations with the western countries since China would not want to lose any more of its market share which it already has due to its unhealthy public relations with the western countries (Rapoza 2020). After watching the public relations position of China with the western countries it can be stated that the Western countries have started to become less ambitious about investing and being in China after the lockdown. The attitude of western countries shows how difficult it is for China to repair its public relations with other countries. The fact that The Chinese government is able to control the epidemic at home but has little responsibility for controlling it in other countries provides an excuse for policy failures or inefficiencies in other countries.

2.7. Censorship and constructive journalism

During the first quarter of 2020, The content management of public coverage and discussion of the pandemic in mass media and new media was strengthened, which in Western perspective represents Chinese government reinforce the censorship on media as a PR strategy. However, the information shortages and possible information blackouts by local governments in the early stage started to experience some unfamiliar as well as deeply unsettling sensations from citizens among the nation (New York Times 2020). Public concern about the virus and the soaring number of infections have rendered censorship ineffective and counterproductive to the resolution of the pandemic[15]. Sooner the news about Doctor Li Wenliang, who warned the citizens in social media about a new virus that was going to emerge but he was accused by the police force for spreading rumours and

disturbing social order (Zhong et al. 2020b). The death of Li Wenliang finally aroused public concern and anger about the government's excessive censorship of social media. The public hoped to obtain transparent information related to the pandemic. In order to divert the public's attention and appease the public's anger, the mainstream media was asked not to report excessively in-depth coverage of Li Wenliang and set the agenda again of fighting against virus as the main theme (Zhong et al. 2020a). Some scholars believe that the government's censorship of media information and agenda setting during the pandemic period is actually an attempt to maintain its power and maintain its dominant position of the Chinese Communist Party (Yeophantong & Shih 2021). Such arguments are not objective, because in fact many criticisms related to local governments can still be made through social media. To a certain extent, the central government also uses citizen expressions on social media to implement supervision of local governments' fight against the virus.

Understanding the government's censorship in the public relations management process from the perspective of constructive journalism can help transform a Western perspective. The concept of constructive journalism originated from the appropriation of positive psychology, whose research areas involve resilience, virtues, strengths, happiness, post-trauma recovery and positive emotions (McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2018). Consecutive journalism emphasizes that news production should satisfy the PERMA model of positive psychology, that is, news should evoke Positive emotion, focus on Engagement rather than alienation, connect social Relations rather than divide society, construct the common Meaning of social groups, attaches great importance to solutions and accomplishment and does not stop at the stage of figuring out the situation (McIntyre, 2015). The above model shows that constructive journalism could reconstruct all aspects of news production from a positive perspective. Therefore, the government's management of public relations at the level of information and news censorship can be regarded as providing guidance in producing constructive news to the public media. Because the rapid spread of the virus has caused panic and anxiety throughout the entire society, the mass media and new media may face the risk of making the situation worse rather than better by providing unverified and unethical information[16]. Under such circumstances, if the mass media and public opinion environment can produce valuable, action-oriented information that is conducive to the resolution of public health emergencies under the unified guidance, it will play a very significant role for the entire anti-pandemic work. At the same time, city image and public relations are just by-products in the process of calling audience's positive psychology. To understand the government's censorship system from the perspective of fighting the virus more efficiently and protecting more lives from the impact of the pandemic, using the concept of constructive journalism, the moral value of censorship and PR strategies is worthy of deep reflection.

2.8. Strategies to manage a PR crisis during lockdown

The United States and other Western countries have been continuously accusing China of hiding the extent of the Covid-19 pandemic during its early stages (Jia & Lu 2021). It is however not sure whether it is part of the PR strategy of the Chinese government or whether a more transparent flow of

information from China would have prevented the country to be portrayed in a negative light. Moreover, whether the transparency about the situation could also prevent the outbreak from spreading into raising global health concerns [17]. Some reports however suggest that the strategy of the Chinese government to curb the information regarding the pandemic was not only to prevent its citizens and citizens all over the world from panicking and debunking all the damaging falsehoods domestically (Yu, Li & Dong 2021). However, the strategy of curbing the information was seen as a public relations management process to make the virus look a little less severe so that people would not go panicking around and the authorities could be seen as more capable to maintain its PR. Urun, a big data service company of China makes software that is used by the Chinese local governments to monitor the discussions going on over the digital media now also manages the armies of online comments and commenters. With the help of this software from the company, the Chinese government has been able to effectively strategize its PR management to the system of censorship (Zhong et al. 2020a). The system used by the government is refined, coordinated, organized as well supported by resources from the state as commented by the research scientist Xiao Qiang, from the School of Information University of California and the founder of the China Digital Times. He further said that the system from Urun is not only used for deleting something rather it is used to construct narratives and make them viral, targeting a huge scale audience (Zhong et al. 2020a). International opinion can also be influenced actively using such software which can help the Chinese government to strengthen the public relations with the western world keeping itself in a positive light. The Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) during the lockdown started to receive links related to the coronavirus articles which had to be promoted to the local news and social media (Rodrigues & Xu 2020). The Chinese government however strategized which links should be featured on the digital media news sites and which should not, along with the time for which they should remain online, concerning its Public Relations management. This has been another pure strategy of the Chinese government which was followed during the lockdown and also post the lockdown scenario in Wuhan and China. The news channels were also asked to not play up about the donations as well as the purchase of medical supplies from Western countries which could backlash China's procurement efforts as the virus had started to spread abroad (Rodrigues & Xu 2020). Local inspection offices were set up and they were given the responsibility to keep a check on the local website and any post that is found to violate the regulations are to be supervised and rectified as well. A quarterly scorecard was being maintained to evaluate the performance of the local online platforms in managing their content in which local websites were found violating the norms by publishing certain illegal information related to the coronavirus pandemic (Zhong, Raymond et al. 2020a)[18]. These measures were a part of the PR strategy as followed by the Chinese government during the lockdown of 2020 and are somewhat still managed in the present times to help the citizens keep faith and loyalty over the Chinese government. Although these studies have indeed shown some measures taken by the government in censorship and public relations management, such views that over-emphasizes the politics and power behind may ignore that a large part of the public relations management from Wuhan and China is to reverse the

stigma of China in the international community. A bad image of the country for the world and a bad image of Wuhan for China is not conducive to the resolution of the pandemic and the long-term development of the country and city. Therefore, it is too subjective to say that PR strategies during pandemic is completely serve the political objective of the Chinese government and CCP.

2.9. Research Gap

The main gap found in the earlier researches is that researchers have not discussed thoroughly the management of public relations of China in the post lockdown time. Moreover, all the researchers have focused mainly on the strategies used by the entire country rather than having any information about how Wuhan manage its public relations with the Chinese citizens during the lockdown and even after the lockdown. Apart from this the perspective of the citizens on the strategies used by China to maintain its PR after the lockdown has not been highlighted in any research earlier rather, they have focused on the viewpoint of Chinese citizens about the government during the lockdown period. Further, no research has been done on the relation of China with western countries after the lockdown and whether China is still in a leadership position according to the western countries remains unclear. The effect of the censorship as a PR strategy has not been explored and it is not known whether the public has taken the censorship strategy in a positive light or not.

3. Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1. Introduction

Research methodology includes all the techniques and process of data collection and analysis that helps in effective completion of research study. Thus it can be said that, the chapter of research methodology forms the backbone of the research after literature review. The different components included in the research methodology chapter are research approach and philosophy, research design and tactics, data collection methods, information on analysis frameworks used and finally ethical considerations[19]. Additionally all the components used in the study are provided with proper justification in this chapter. In this research study, interpretivism and deductive techniques have been used. Further, surveys, interviews and posts from different social media platforms have been considered for collecting data. Lastly, SPSS, thematic and textual analysis has been considered along with convenience non-probability sampling techniques.

3.2. Research Philosophy

Research philosophy deals with nature, source and development of knowledge and simply can be defined as the process of how the data will be collected analysed and used for coming up with effective results (Chowdhury, 2014). From the research onion, philosophy is the first research technique that needs to be decided. Research philosophy can be segregated into categories and they are pragmatism, positivism, interpretivism and realism. Among the all four categories, interpretivism research philosophy has been used for deducing the data obtained from the respondents. The justification for using the interpretivism philosophy is it works effectively will small sample size and in-depth analysis can be gained through it which is again helpful towards

getting the perfect outcomes for the research questions. In addition to this, the interpretivism philosophy complements investigations that are qualitative in nature. Therefore, the insights gained from the interviews and textual analysis can be properly analysed using the interpretivism philosophy. As stated by Ryan (2018), the justification for using the interpretivist approach is, it integrates human interest into the study. Further, authors that are inclined towards the interpretivism philosophy assumes that the access to reality is through the social construction of consciousness, instruments, human emotions and shared meanings (Schwandt, 1994). Thus using this approach it will be easier for the researcher to understand the effectiveness of the PR campaigns for changing the city image among the residents of Wuhan[20]. The greater inclusion of human participation and interests in the study makes it evident that interpretivism approach will be best fit for it. There are few disadvantages of using this particular research philosophy as well. Interpretivism does not work with large sample population as it depicting the emotions into one collaborative results becomes difficult. However this limitation do not impact out research study and thus can be disregarded.

3.3. Research Approach

Research approaches can be broadly divided into two large segments known as inductive and deductive. For this research study which tends to bring out the effectiveness of the PR campaigns to up-lift the image of Wuhan among its citizens, the deductive approach has been used. As stated by Yu (2015), research approaches can be defined as the path that is taken by the researcher to deduce the data that has been obtained. Further, researcher chosen their research approach according to the outcomes they have presumed. In case some stated hypothesis needs to be proved, the deductive approach is chosen. On the other hand, in case the some new observations are required to be presented to the audience, the inductive way is chosen. From both the inductive and deductive approaches discussed, it can be said that both are reciprocal t each other. The choosing of the deductive approach for this research study is justified due to many reason[21]. Firstly, in deductive approach there is proper alignment of data put in every section of the study (Pandey, 2019). The data collected from the respondents is deduced according to the knowledge gained from the literature studies. This helps the research to have a lucid flow of information and analysis in the research study. PR campaigns are often used for crisis management. From this knowledge, we can assume that PR campaigns by Wuhan government shall help in uplifting the image of the city towards the citizens. Further, in deductive approach there is proper hypothesis testing included which helps in meeting the objectives set without providing any irrelevant information (Azungah, 2018). However on the other hand, some authors have claimed that deductive approach limits the scope of the research and does not bring in new observations and trends among the society. This limitation is somewhat true, however it is not impactful enough to distort the findings of this research study.

3.4. Research Strategy

Data can be collected with the help of various methods. Further, the data collection or research strategies so called can be divided into two broad groups and they are primary and secondary. For this research study, both primary and secondary data collection methods has been used. For the

primary methods, the research strategies used are survey and interviewing different people (Jenkins, 1985). On the other hand, textual analysis will be done on the different Weibo or WeChat posts and messages, and media coverages of China Central Television's reports regarding government PR campaigns posted in order to improve the image of Wuhan city. The justification of using both the primary and secondary technique is: it will help in gathering statistical inferences and emotional reactions to the PR campaigns conducted by different sources. Surveys would be conducted among the residents of Wuhan in order to understand their perceptions and reactions towards the PR campaigns. Further, this will help in getting a collective result on whether the campaigns have been successful or not. On the other hand, interviews has also been conducted (Terrell, 2012). Through the interviews, getting data on emotional connect of the campaigns with the audience and their reaction can be properly recorded[22]. This ensures the researcher to get an overall idea on the effectiveness of the campaigns held. On the other hand, textual analysis of the WeChat and Weibo posts have helped in understanding the different elements used in the campaigns. While interviews and surveys provides perceptions of people from a smaller scale. The usage of Weibo posts and the comments obtained from them helps in understanding the perceptions in large scale. Thus without taking into a large sample scale, different opinions from people can be obtained from indulging into textual analysis of different posts on social media networks.

3.5. Research Method

Research methods include both the collection and analysis of data. However in this section of research methodology, research methods include the analysis technique only. As stated by () selection of proper research methods is crucial for obtained effective results for the outcomes drafted for any research study. Research methods on one hand can be segregated into mono, multi methods (Palvia et al., 2004). On the other hand, it is categorised into qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. As survey, interview and textual analysis of social media posts and images are done for collecting data, mixed research method has been used which included both qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods. From the survey as mostly numerical data has been obtained, it was feasible to analyse through quantitative methods. Further, qualitative methods has been used for deducing the data gained from the interviews and textual analysis. Qualitative data analysis methods helps in deducing effective insights from the in-depth responses of the participants and further has helped in providing effective answers to the research questions drafted for the research study.

3.6. Research Tactics

Research tactics includes the data collection methods[23]. For this research study, both primary and secondary data collection methods have been considered. Primary data collection primary helps the researcher in collecting numerical data. On the other hand, the secondary collection is primary based on gathering of facts from different journals, books, websites and from different digital content. Provision of both primary and secondary data in this research study has helped gathering data from different perspectives (Chilisa, 2019). In secondary data collection, there are not provisions for human participation. Due to this pandemic, collecting primary data was a difficult task. All the primary data from

the respondents was collected through online methods. For surveying, the survey forms were sent to the respondents on their respective email ids. While for the interviews, prior appointment was taken from the respondents and the interviews sessions were held with the help of Google meet. Further, logging on to WeChat and Weibo portals, different images of PR campaigns conducted by the government of China were collected for performing textual analysis on them. Additionally, for the interviews, the semi-structured interviews was selected. The reason for selecting survey as a research technique was, it helped in gathering different insights among people, based on some definite variables. Further, the technique of surveying made the data collection method hassle free. The respondents were cooperative and provided us with the responses on time. However, the survey technique is not enough to get emotional insights of the sample population (Denscombe, 2017). Thus, interviews were conducted among focus groups. Managers of different PR organizations were interviewed. Interviewing PR expertise helped in understanding the effectiveness of the PR campaigns from an expert point of view. Interviewing the PR professional was helpful in understanding the shortcoming of the PR campaigns as well which provided a new tangent to the research outcomes. Further as the research sample size was small and to broaden the horizon of the study, textual analysis of the different Weibo and WeChat posts were also considered. Considering the data gained from the different social networking sites, it become easy to understand the impact of PR campaigns among a larger section of society. This not only helped in providing a collective response from a larger section of the society, but helped in saving time as well. All the research tactics used complimented each other[24]. From the insights and responses gained, some reciprocation were observed. However, as the deductive approach is used in the study, it helped in gathering all the facts together and provide a uni-directional outcome for the study.

3.7. Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Sampling technique is research refers to the process of selecting individuals members or subset of a population so that effective statistical inferences can be from them which estimates the characteristics of the entire population (Saunders et al., 2007). From the probability and non-probability sampling methods, the non-probability convenience sampling method has been chosen for this research study. The justification for choosing the convenience sampling method is, it helped in considering the sample who can be convenient reached and contacted. Further. PR is a commonly used term in the contemporary society, thus, getting insights from randomly selected people is not difficult. 70 students from different post-grads colleges related to media stream has been selected as the target audience for collecting responses from them. On the other hand, 5 managers of reputed PR firms in Wuhan has been contacted to get insights from them. The name of the organizations cannot be disclosed due to privacy concerns. All the data collection was done using the online media. While the survey was conducted using the website named, Wyx.cn, the interviews were done through Zoom calls. The online collection of data was done due to the pandemic. However, it was a smooth process of data collection which helped in timely collection of data as well.

Overview of the Participants included in the survey

Age	18-25 years
Gender	All three gender, Male, Female and others
Location	Wuhan
Occupation	Student
Income	Not employed or part-time employees
Level of Education	Graduates and above

Overview of the Participants included in the interview

Age	31-50 years
Gender	All three gender, Male, Female and others
Location	Wuhan
Occupation	Employed in service sectors
Income	\$1000 dollars and above
Level of Education	Post graduates

3.8. Research Questions

Research questions are based on the research objectives formed for the research study. The different objectives formed for the study are as follows:

Around Wuhan's public-relations management after COVID-19 lockdown, I intend to unfold this study by primarily asking the following questions:

1) What measures relevant to public relations has Wuhan municipality taken to restore the damaged city image?

Visibly, the local government has made efforts in tourism, health care and consumer spending. For instance, the Provincial Government launched a free-entry policy to attract visitors to Hubei. This question is designed against portraying and analysing specific policies.

2) What are the effects of these measures?

Some measures might work well, while some might not. For example, over 3 million people visited Hubei about a week after it waived entry fees at tourist sites for Chinese visitors, according to local authorities. What about the other policies? This question is matched with the first question, and the answer to it will present the influences of Wuhan's acts to restore the city.

3) How do Wuhan residents think about the City's measures related to public-relations management?

I will ask Wuhan citizens' opinions on their city's public-relations management measures to appraise them from a residents' perspective. An online questionnaire will be distributed to collect data.

4) Can Wuhan's experience after lockdown teach metropolises in other countries a lesson? Or can other cities duplicate Wuhan's measures to alleviate the Pandemic's impact?

This question is significant because of Wuhan's particularity. Chinese cities' characteristics in politics and economy mean that metropolises in other countries cannot and shall not duplicate Wuhan's policies. Instead, they must take their contexts into consideration and frame their own measures accordingly[25].

The survey conducted among the participants includes nearly 10 questions which also includes some basic demographic questions. On the other hand, the interviews conducted among the focus groups contains 6 themes of topics that works towards collecting effective responses

regarding the research topic. Further enough scope has been provided to the interviewees to open up and talk about some additional insights as well. All the questions asked in the interview have been made open ended. Additionally, Likert scale has been mostly used for the questions asked in the survey. Lastly, for the textual analysis, 6 posts from the Weibo and WeChat has been considered for fulfilling the objectives of the study.

Themes considered in the interview and surveys are as follows:

- Knowledge on PR campaigns on Wuhan’s city image after the pandemic

- Perception of the audience about the campaigns on image restoration

- Positive impact of the PR campaigns

- Negative impact of the PR campaigns

- Effectiveness of the PR management techniques for image restoration

- Analysis whether the campaigns can be used as models by different cities in China and worldwide

- Recommendations on the improvements that can be included in the campaign

3.9. Analysis Framework

Analysis framework provides information on the analytical models that will be considered for analyzing the different data collection from the various data collection process. This research study includes collection of data from different primary and secondary sources. Thus, different analysis framework has been included in the study. For the primary data gained from the surveys, the SPSS framework has been used to get statistical inferences. In the SPSS framework, greater stress has been given to the correlational element to derive a proper relationship among the different variables included in the study (Denscombe, 2017). On the other hand, for the interviews conducted among the PR professionals, thematic analysis has been considered. Different themes provided below have helped in conducting effective outcomes for the research study based in the insights provided by the respondents. Grounded theory was considered for thematic analysis done.

Key themes included in the analysis are as follows:

- Knowledge on PR campaigns on Wuhan’s city image after the pandemic

- Perception of the audience about the campaigns on image restoration

- Positive impact of the PR campaigns

- Negative impact of the PR campaigns

- Effectiveness of the PR management techniques for image restoration

- Analysis whether the campaigns can be used as models by different cities in China and worldwide

- Recommendations on the improvements that can be included in the campaign

Lastly, as secondary data from WeChat and Weibo has been considered, the information gained from the digital podiums have been analysed using textual analysis methods. This has helped in deducing the images as well as the comments provided in related to the post. Using of all the three analysis frameworks have helped in proper deduction of insights gained from the different respondents.

3.10. Ethical Considerations

Research studies are easier to conduct when ethical principles are strictly followed throughout the completion. For the completion of the research study, different ethical considerations has been followed[26]. Further, I have taken special precautions to safeguard the dignity of each participant and the responses provided by them. As this study contains high-scale human participation for collecting responses, thus before collecting responses consent forms have been forwarded to each participants. After getting back the signed consent forms, the interviews and surveys were conducted among the sample population. All the consent forms collected have been kept secured with password protected PDF documents so that the anonymity of the participants is not disclosed to any third party. Additionally the responses provided by the respondents have been kept within password protected documents in order to ensure it is not used for any external study project by any third party. The data will be deleted after the research is completed. The data collected from conducting surveys and interviews will be exclusively used for the completion of this research study. Further, it cannot be published by any other researcher without prior permission from the primary sources. In all the questions asked for survey and interview, no personal questions, questions related to religious sentiments and political emotions are included. Further, participants have been provided with full freedom in case they do not want to answer any particular question. Lastly, all the data provided in the study are true and unbiased. All the analysis done for the data collected are not manipulated to twisted according to the desired outcome of the research. Statistical figures derived from the surveys and interviews and further textual analysis have been analysed using the knowledge from literature reviews and other authors to avoid any kind of biasness or manipulation.

4. Chapter 4: Data Collection

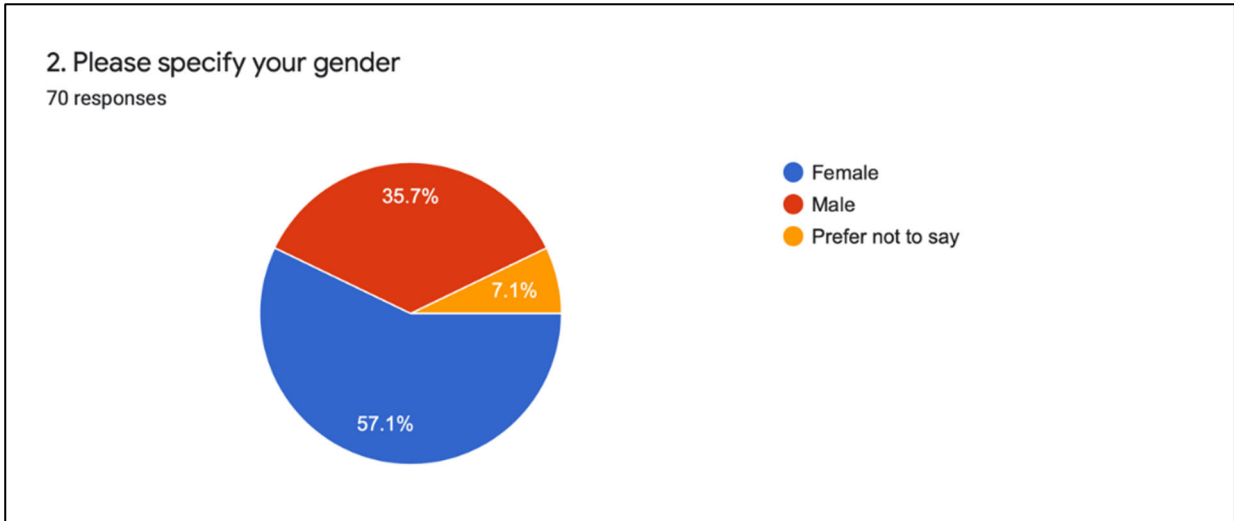
4.1. Data collected from survey

4.1.1. Introduction

Data collection is one of the integral parts that leads to the completion of the research study. For collecting the data, it is required potential respondents are identified. For conducting the survey, 70 students from different post-grads colleges related to media stream has been selected as the target audience for collecting responses from them. As the data was collected during the pandemic, the questionnaire was sent to the respondents via google forms via forwarding them a link in their personal email IDs. A week’s time was required to collect the data from the respondents. After the collection of data, it was projected in forms of tables and charts in MS excel in order to analyze it with ease[27].

1. Please specify your gender

Elements	Percentage	Number of Responses	Total Respondents
Female	57.1%	40	70
Male	35.7%	25	70
Prefer Not to say	7.1%	5	70

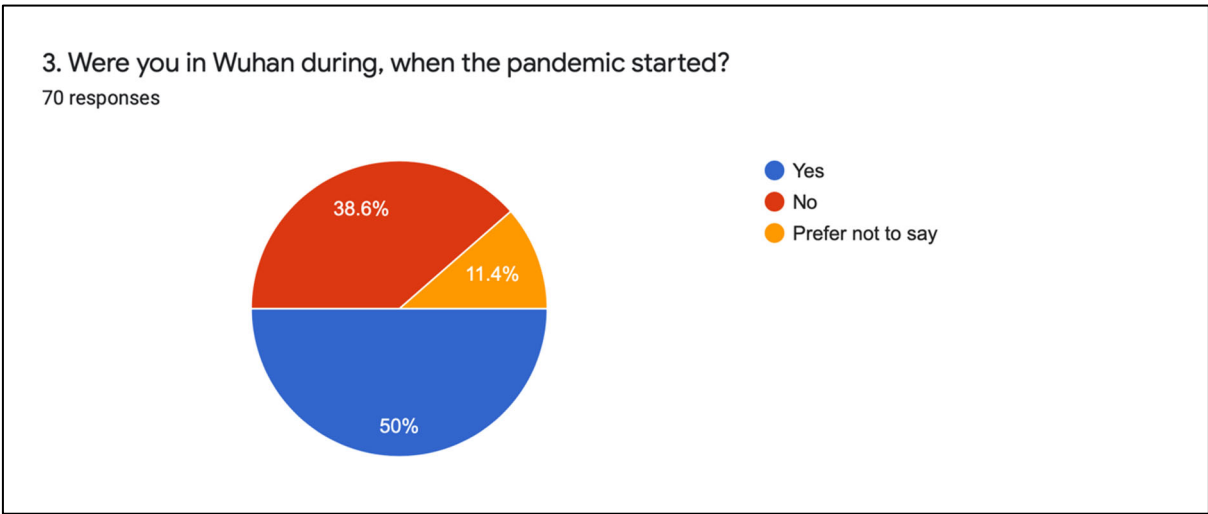


This survey would not require to know the age of the respondents taking part in the survey as respondents who were selected belonged to students studying in post-graduation courses. However, the gender related questionnaire was included in the survey. The question related to gender helped in understanding females, males and the other gender in the society do get influenced by the public relation techniques introduced by the government to design the image of the city. Further, no gender biasness was followed during choosing of the participants for the survey. The question in gender do not add significantly to the core findings of the research study. However it has been put for

maintaining the ethical considerations and standard norms of completing a successful research study.

2. Were you in Wuhan during, when the pandemic started?

Elements	Percentage	Number of Responses	Total Respondents
Yes	50%	35	70
No	38.6%	27	70
Prefer not to say	11.4%	8	70



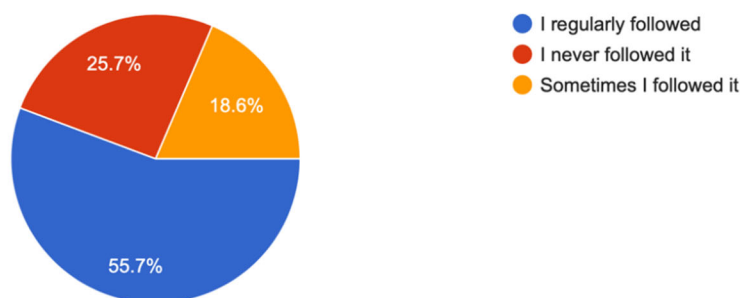
3. Wuhan’s Government was constantly engaged in disseminating information about Covid-19 updates in

their official website. Did you follow it?

Elements	Percentage	Number of Responses	Total Respondents
I regularly followed	55.7%	39	70
I never followed it	25.7%	18	70
Sometimes I followed it	18.6%	13	70

4. Wuhan's Government was constantly engaged in disseminating information about Covid-19 updates in their official website as part of it PR activities. Did you follow it?

70 responses

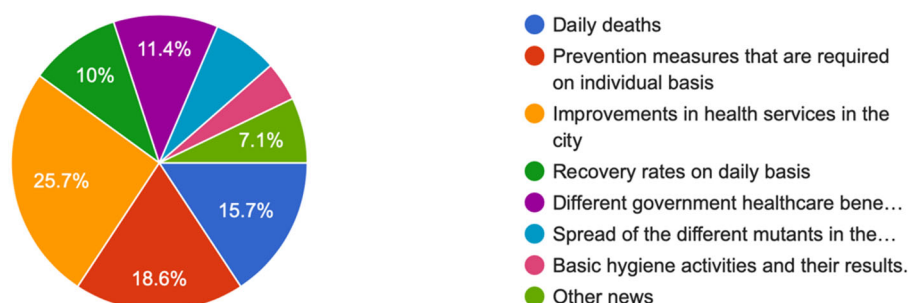


4. During the Covid-19 pandemic, according to you, which segment of information was mostly circulated by the PR departments of the city?

Elements	Percentage	Number of Responses	Total Respondents
Daily deaths	15.7%	11	70
Prevention measures that are required on individual basis	18.6%	13	70
Improvements in health services in the city	25.7%	18	70
Different government healthcare benefits for patients	10%	7	70
Different government healthcare benefits for patients	11.4%	8	70
Spread of the different mutants in the city	7.1%	5	70
Basic hygiene activities and their results.	4.3%	3	70
Other news	7.1%	5	70

5. During the Covid-19 pandemic, according to you, which segment of information was mostly circulated by the PR departments of the city?

70 responses

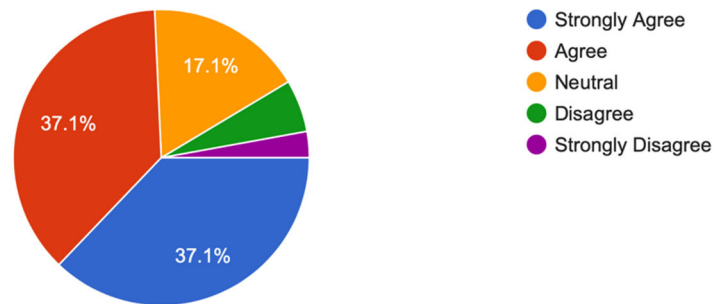


5. Do you think, government has provided considerable effort in means of its PR measures to safeguard the image of Wuhan during the pandemic?

Elements	Percentage	Number of Responses	Total Respondents
Strongly Agree	37.1%	26	70
Agree	37.1%	26	70
Neutral	17.1%	12	70
Disagree	5.7%	4	70
Strongly Disagree	2.9%	2	70

6. Do you think, government has provided considerable effort in means of its PR measures to safeguard the image of Wuhan during the pandemic?

70 responses

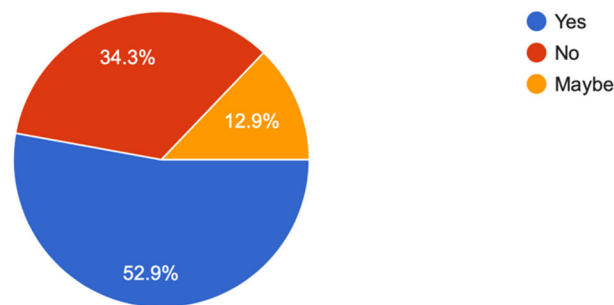


6. Wuhan's PR indulged into disseminating different information during the pandemic. Do you think they have positive effective on city's image?

Elements	Percentage	Number of Responses	Total Respondents
Yes	52.9%	37	70
No	34.3%	24	70
Maybe	12.9%	9	70

7. Wuhan's PR indulged into disseminating different information during the pandemic. Do you think they have positive effective on city's image?

70 responses

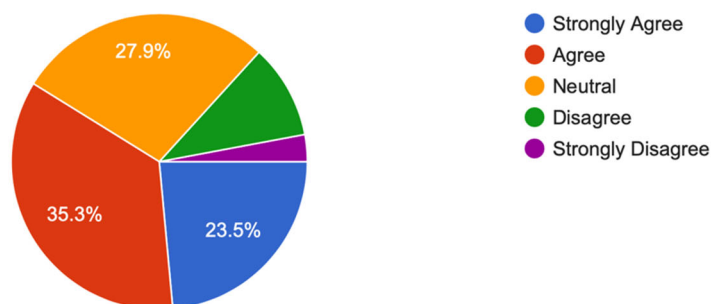


7. According to you, where the public relation activities by Wuhan's government for image restoration were well-managed?

Elements	Percentage	Number of Responses	Total Respondents
Strongly Agree	23.5%	16	70
Agree	35.3%	24	70
Neutral	27.9%	19	70
Disagree	10.3%	7	70
Strongly Disagree	2.9%	2	70

8. According to you, where the public relation activities by Wuhan's government for image restoration were well-managed?

68 responses

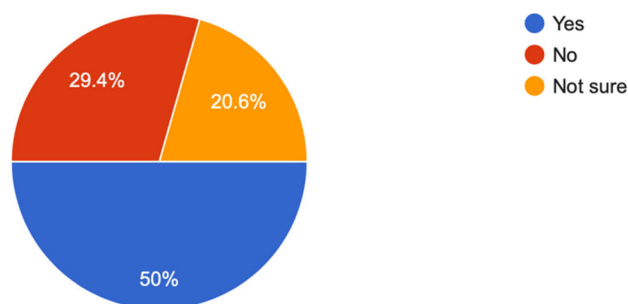


8. Were the PR strategies used by Wuhan's government effective enough for altering your opinion regarding city's improving condition

Elements	Percentage	Number of Responses	Total Respondents
Yes	50%	34	70
No	29.4%	20	70
Not Sure	20.6%	16	70

9. Were the PR strategies used by Wuhan's government effective enough for altering your opinion regarding city's improving condition during the pandemic?

68 responses

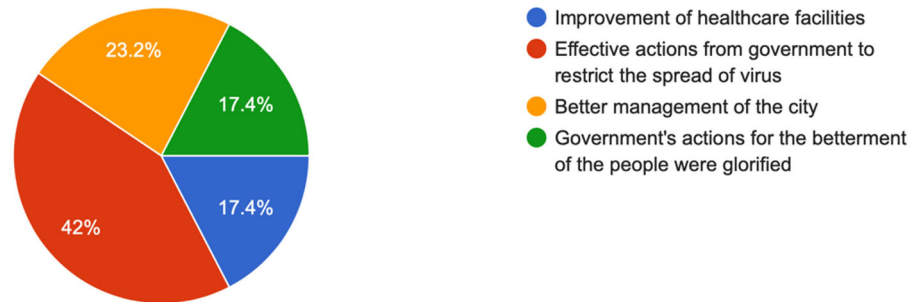


9. According to you, which aspect of Wuhan's image was restored due to the PR activities of Wuhan's government?

Elements	Percentage	Number of Responses	Total Respondents
Improvement of healthcare facilities	17.4%	12	70
Effective actions from government to restrict the spread of virus	43%	29	70
Better management of the city	23.2%	16	70
Government's actions for the betterment of the people were glorified	17.4%	12	70

10. According to you, which aspect of Wuhan's image was restored due to the PR activities of Wuhan's government?

69 responses

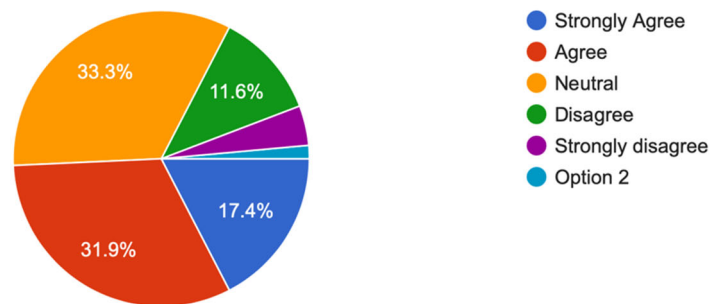


10. Do you agree to the fact that, Wuhan's government has been active in restoring the image of the city after the pandemic?

Elements	Percentage	Number of Responses	Total Respondents
Strongly Agree	17.4%	12	70
Agree	31.9%	22	70
Neutral	33.3%	23	70
Disagree	11.6%	8	70
Strongly Disagree	4.3%	3	70

11. Do you agree to the fact that, Wuhan's government has been active in restoring the image of the city after the pandemic?

69 responses

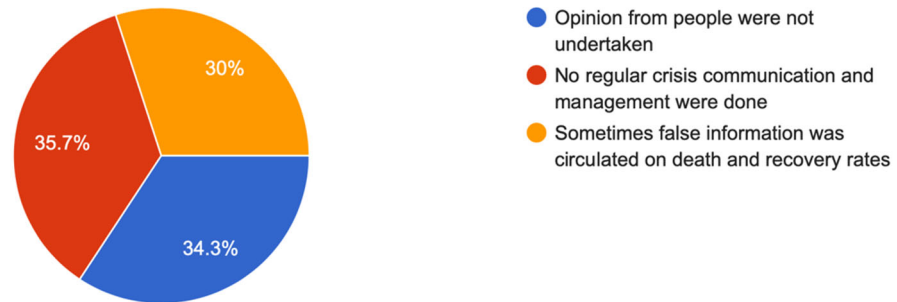


11. According to you, what was the category that was missing from the PR campaigns of Wuhan's government directed towards alleviating the image of the city?

Elements	Percentage	Number of Responses	Total Respondents
Opinion from people were not undertaken	34.3%	24	70
No regular crisis communication and management were done	35.7%	25	70
Sometimes false information was circulated on death and recovery rates	30%	21	70

12. According to you, what were the categories that was missing from the PR campaigns of Wuhan's government directed towards alleviating the image of the city?

70 responses

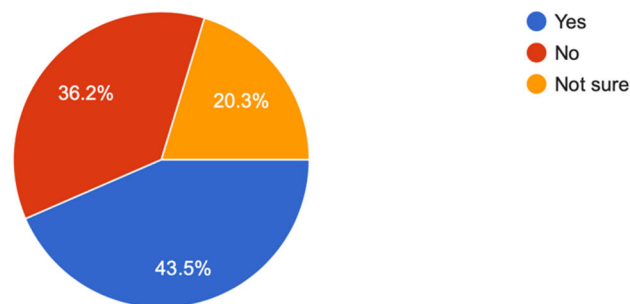


12. Can other cities going through the pandemic learn from the PR procedures undertaken by Wuhan's government?

Elements	Percentage	Number of Responses	Total Respondents
Yes	43.5%	30	70
No	36.2%	25	70
Not Sure	20.3%	14	70

13. Can other cities going through the pandemic learn from the PR procedures undertaken by Wuhan's government?

69 responses

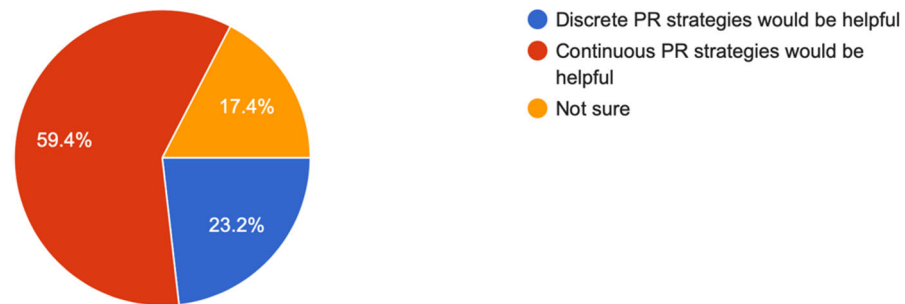


13. Even after the pandemic, will discrete or continuous PR efforts are required to restore the image of Wuhan by the government of the city?

Elements	Percentage	Number of Responses	Total Respondents
Discrete PR strategies would be helpful	23.2%	16	70
Continuous PR strategies would be helpful	59.4%	41	70
Not Sure	17.4%	12	70

14. Even after the pandemic, discrete or continuous PR efforts are required to restore the image of Wuhan by the government of the city?

69 responses



4.1.2. Summary

A collective notion on the primary data collected brings out the fact that, public relations have the capacity of positively building the image of the city which has been maligned due to numerous reasons. In this research study, we have gained mixed responses on the effectiveness of using public relations activities by Wuhan government to reconstruct the image city after the pandemic. Concluding on the responses gathered from the survey it can be said that the government initiatives had a positive image on the perception of the respondents that government PR activities led to improved city image among the respondents of Wuhan. However some shortcomings were also identified.

4.2. Data collected from Interview

4.2.1. Introduction

In addition to the survey conducted among the students to get better insights and perception on the research topic, interview was conducted among 5 media professionals in order to understand the impact of the public relations activities on the improved city image of Wuhan among the residents of the city. All the interview sessions were conducted through Zoom calls as physical contact was restricted. Additionally, prior appointment was fetched from the respondents before scheduling the interview sessions. From the opinions gathered from the media professionals, it can be understood that there are mixed responses on the effectiveness of the public relations activities undertaken by the Wuhan government on city image restoration process.

Interview Transcripts

Question 1: The PR sector of Wuhan's government has been active towards image restoration of the city as the pandemic is slowing down. What are your comments on it?

Respondent 1: I think the PR strategies of Wuhan and its government has been pretty effective.

Respondent 2: We as the private PR agencies have worked day and night for instilling hope among the people of Wuhan even after the pandemic is almost over. Along with this, the PR of Wuhan government has provided news from different facets of the society to work for image restoration of the city.

Respondent 3: The discrete nature of Wuhan's government PR was not fascinating and effective in my opinion. I think the government and its PR agencies did not do much towards restoration of Wuhan's image.

Respondent 4: As the pandemic started a lot of speculation

did the rounds the Corona Virus was man-made and was developed in a lab at Wuhan. This images ruined the city image not only nationally but internationally as well. Since then the government of Wuhan has been consistent in managing the image of the city through various PR activities.

Respondent 5: The PR tactics of Wuhan's government has helped in image restoration. But more effort is required from both private and public PR agencies

Question 2: What effect did the PR strategies from Wuhan's government create on the residents and the society at large?

Respondent 1: People of Wuhan restored their hope on the government due to the PR communication done by the government of the city. This lead to improvement in the communication with the public and restoring their faith in the government and other public bodies.

Respondent 2: I think the PR of Wuhan's government have followed the situational theory in developing their PR strategies and this has helped them in communicating better with the public. Due to the information disseminated by the PR of Wuhan, the people of Wuhan had their faith restored and this resulted into restoration of the city image.

Respondent 3: I do not think there has been considerable information disseminated to the public as a part of the PR measures by the Wuhan government regarding image restoration. Thus, the effect on the public has been bare minimum

Respondent 4: I think the Wuhan's government did a great job in spreading awareness among the pandemic and its after-effects and other related information. The PR body is still doing that. Due to the information disseminated, the population of Wuhan was able to understand the state of the country and understand the policies being undertaken by the government. Further this lead to image restoration of the city Wuhan as well.

Respondent 5: According to my opinion, the PR strategies from Wuhan's government were not effective in image restoration of the city. This is because there was much negative information circulated which made grave marks on the city's reputation.

Question 3: Do you think the public of Wuhan have a positive approach or acceptance towards the PR agencies of the government of Wuhan working towards image restoration?

Respondent 1: I do not think the way information disseminated by the government PR bodies much support from the public was gathered. From the reaction of the public

it is evident that, image restoration is not successfully done.

Respondent 2: In the PR strategies included, much information was distributed by the government of Wuhan on the policies and healthcare facilities and economic development brought in by the government. I could not see much of public opinion being included in the PR strategies and thus, the positive approach did not work well.

Respondent 3: According to me, the public of Wuhan had a neutral reaction to the image restoration PR strategies undertaken by the government of Wuhan. This may be due to the fact that public opinion or communication was not established.

Respondent 4: There was a small section of public who reciprocated positively towards the PR communication done by the government of Wuhan. These people had a positive approach and thinks that Wuhan has come from a long from the grave gloomy days to a brighter future that would bring a corona-free world.

Respondent 5: The approach of the PR policies was basically one way by the Wuhan government with very little input from the public. Thus in my opinion I do not think that the impact has been much positive towards restoration of the city image.

Question 4: According to you which has been the most effective strategy for city image restoration by Wuhan PR department in the government. What are the improvements do you want to make in it?

Respondent 1: One news that was increasingly flaunted by the PR departments of Wuhan and Chinese government was “Beijing decided on joining the World Health Organization initiative to ensure just distribution of COVID-19 vaccines once they are available”. This strategy was circulated through press releases and new articles. This was a very important news that required circulation. I think this has helped in image restoration to some extent. According to me, I would have made no improvement.

Respondent 2: For me the most effective PR strategy included by Wuhan’s government was circulation of news releases regarding the opening of retail markets. This made the public restore the believe that infections and the wrath of the diseases is decreasing and thus image restoration was successful.

Respondent 3: The PR of Wuhan government was not very promising to me. So I cannot provide insights on the good sides of it. There are ample number of areas that require improvement.

Respondent 4: For me the most effective PR strategy was when the government announced that infections are decreasing and vaccination rates have increased. Further, minute levels of infections found in Wuhan city was very promising among the public. This gave public the hope and also restore the image of the city.

Respondent 5: Most effective PR strategy was the different press releases and news items being circulated in the media by Wuhan government on the improving situation of the city from the wrath of the virus. This made the public happy and have improved images on the city reputation.

Question 5: What recommendations would you like to give to the government PR agency of Wuhan for improving Wuhan’s city Image?

Respondent 1: According to me, I think the government PR agency for Wuhan should take the example from Italy. The government of Italy along with the Prime Minister of the

country kept constant communication with the public for crisis management. This helped in keeping the public updated

Respondent 2: I think the government of Wuhan and the PR agencies associated with them did a pretty good job in improving the image of the city during and present situation of the pandemic. Most of the PR agencies talked about the reduction in infection and the good things coming way. This instilled hope among the residents and we can say that Wuhan’s city image is somewhat restored.

Respondent 3: As the pandemic graph is slowing down along with the infections, it is highly required for the PR professionals at Wuhan’s government to try and instill people to get back to life. News stories on opening of offices and other recreational facilities will help in improving the city image.

Respondent 4: According to my opinion, Wuhan now needs to organize regular press conferences and news stories on how life being normalized. This will help in the propaganda towards Wuhan’s improving city life and further image restoration can be achieved.

Respondent 5: I think the PR people at Wuhan’s government is going an excellent job and needs to improve on it.

4.2.2. Summary

5 media professionals were considered to get better insights on the effectiveness of the public relation activities undertaken by the Wuhan government for restoring the image of the city after the pandemic. From the responses collected it can be ascertained that, mixed responses were fetched on the effectiveness of using PR activities for the image restoration process by the government of Wuhan. In the next part of the research study, social media posts from Sina Weibo by the government of Wuhan will be analysed in order to understand the effectiveness of PR strategies undertaken for the image restoration process.

4.3. Data for Textual Analysis

4.3.1. Introduction

Different posts were present in various networking sites that helped to propagate the government initiatives taken by the Wuhan government in order to restore the city image after the lockdown. All the posts published as a part of public relations by the government of Wuhan helped in restoring the image of the city to the people residing at Wuhan and outside. From the thousands of posts published in social media, only 3 were selected for analyzing the image on the perception of the audience. The reason for selecting these three posts it to portray the positive changes brought into the city of Wuhan after the pandemic was partially lifted up. The opening of the transportation system, the gathering of people in public places and coming of a healthcare center all directed to the positive activities from the government in order to normalize life for the residents of Wuhan. Many other posts could have been included in the analysis. However these three posts summarizes the overall public relations activities undertaken by the Wuhan government to improve the image of the city to the residents of Wuhan and other population of China.

Posts from Sina Weibo for Textual Analysis

Post 1: This post by the government of Wuhan clearly states of the improvement in condition of the city. Thus this post has a positive impact on the audience and their faith must be restored.

环球时报-英文版 ✓

【武汉市防控指挥部发布：无疫情小区达99.9%】 As of Fri, 99.9 percent **Wuhan** residential compounds stand free of coronavirus infection: **Wuhan local government**.



2020年05月09日 11:00 来自 微博 weibo.com


收藏 | 转发 3 | 评论 2 | 12

Post 2: This post shows hope to the people of Wuhan and China. The picture of public transportation being open for all

and Wuhan functioning in all the economic sectors talks of the improved condition of the city.

CGTN ✓

【直播：湖北省召开新闻发布会介绍疫情防控情况】 Officials from central China's Hubei Province hold the 69th press conference on **#COVID19#** measures. After **Wuhan** restarted on April 8, the **government** is stepping up efforts on the resumption of work. **#coronavirus#** [CGTN](#) 的微博视频 [展开全文](#) ∨



2020年04月10日 16:06 来自 微博原生直播

收藏 | 转发 6 | 评论 9 | 55

Post 3: Wuhan's government went on full force and efforts to provide the best medical facilities to the residents. It continues to do so even when the pandemic is much lesser in

its impact. Thus this can be treated as strategies for image restoration of Wuhan in public perception or opinion.

人民日报英文客户端 ✓

【180秒看 **#雷神山12天建设全纪录#**】 On Jan. 25, the **Wuhan government** decided to build Leishenshan Hospital, a makeshift hospital for coronavirus patients. In the next 12 days, the workers labored day and night. They worked around the clock, sparing no efforts. They raced against ti [展开全文](#) ∨

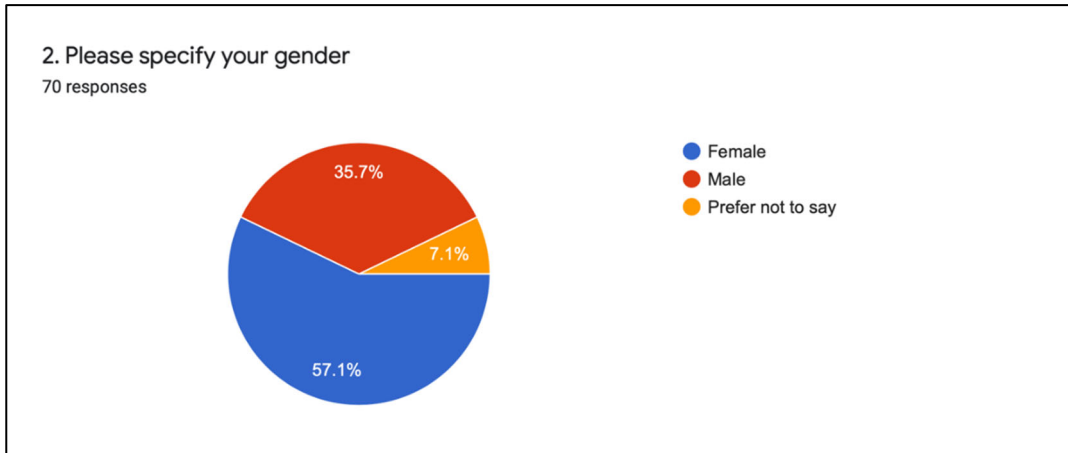


2020年02月10日 14:35 来自 微博视频号

收藏 | 转发 4 | 评论 | 9

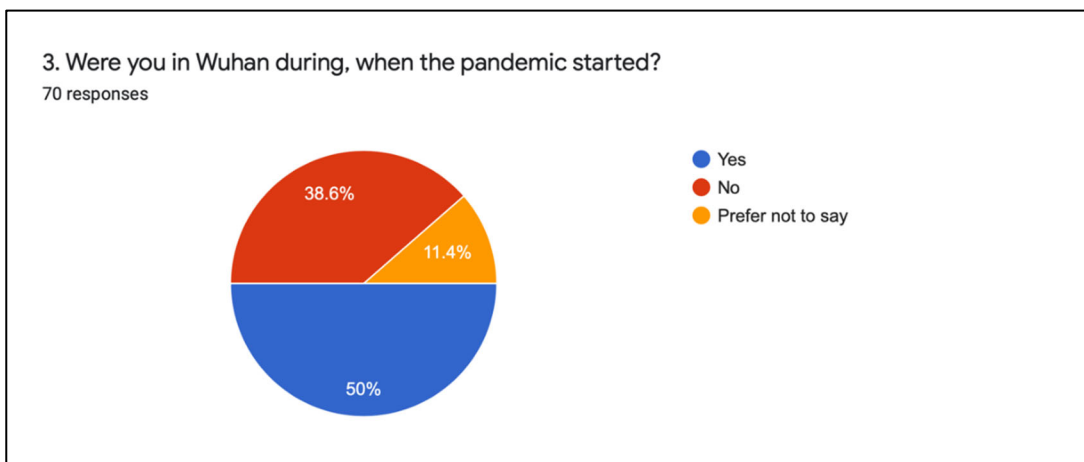
5. Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1. Discussion from Survey



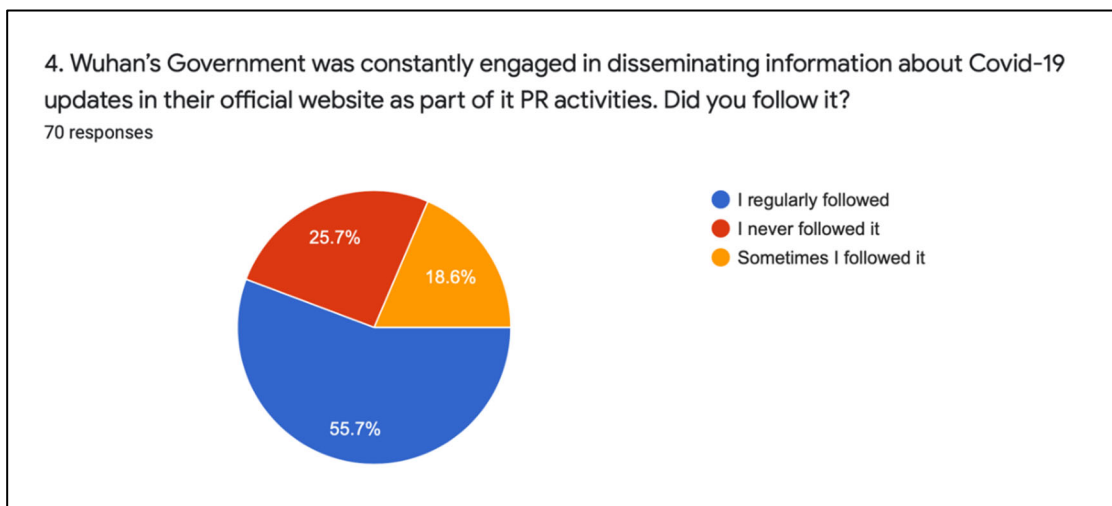
Among from 70 participants, 57.1% were females and males constituted of 35.7%. However, as many as 7.1% of the respondents did not want to reveal their genders. Thus, from

thus it is evident that no gender biasness was followed while choosing the sample population.



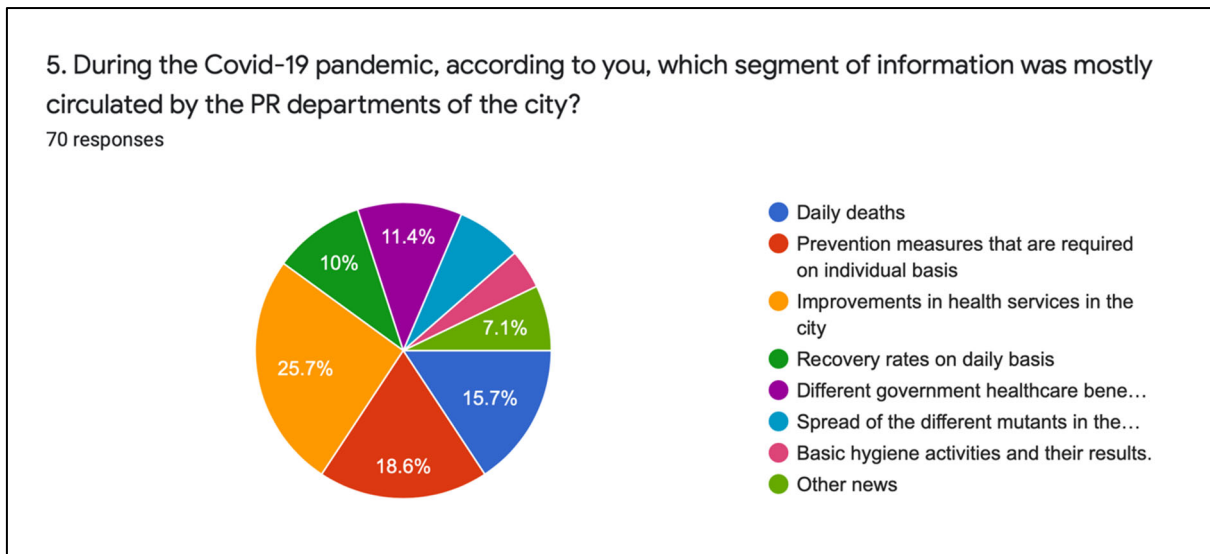
During the pandemic while some participants were in Wuhan, and some were outside. 50% of the participants said they were in Wuhan, while 38.6% were outside the city or country which they did not mention. The higher percentage of people staying in Wuhan has helped this research for gaining

important insights on the PR strategies by Wuhan government on image restoration of the city. The people staying in Wuhan actively followed the PR strategies and thus they were able to provide effective feedback.



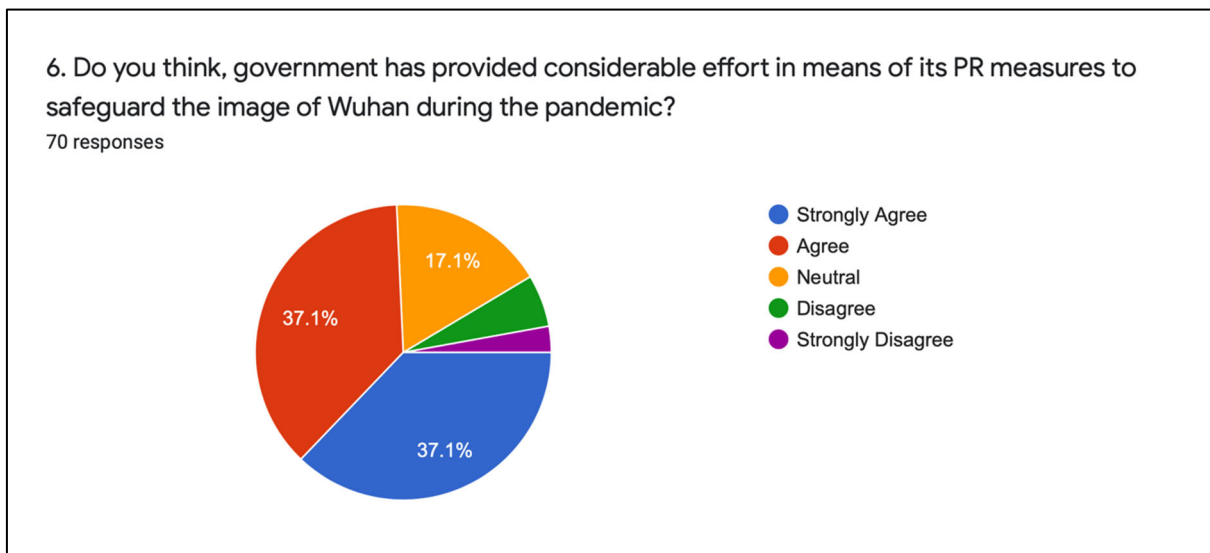
A higher percentage of people that is 55.7% of respondents said they regularly followed the PR strategies of the government after and in between the pandemic. While only 25.7% said they did not follow PR communication by Wuhan

government for Covid-19 updates and development. From this positive percentage of people, it can be ascertained that, news about image restoration reached to the public in a positive tone.



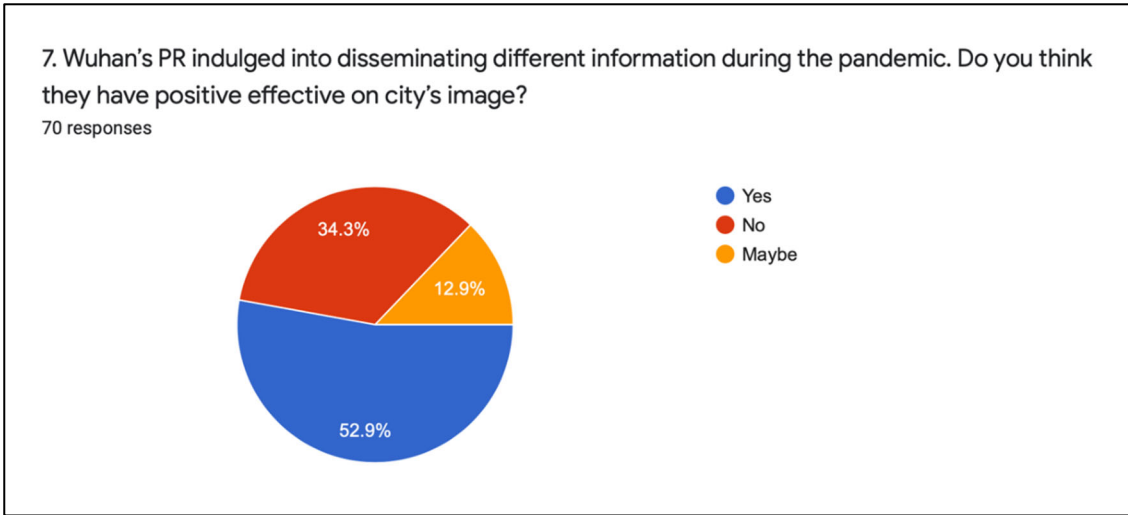
Different information about Wuhan city and the prevailing conditions were circulated by the PR professionals of Wuhan government. Among all these news 25.7% were related to improvement in health services in the city. While individual prevention techniques and how to combat the disease news constituted of 18.6%. Further, 15.7% of information was

disseminated about daily deaths. From the data gained, it can be said that positive news like improvement in health services, different government healthcare benefits for patients helped in restoring public's faith on the government and further built a positive outlook on Wuhan's city image among the people living there.



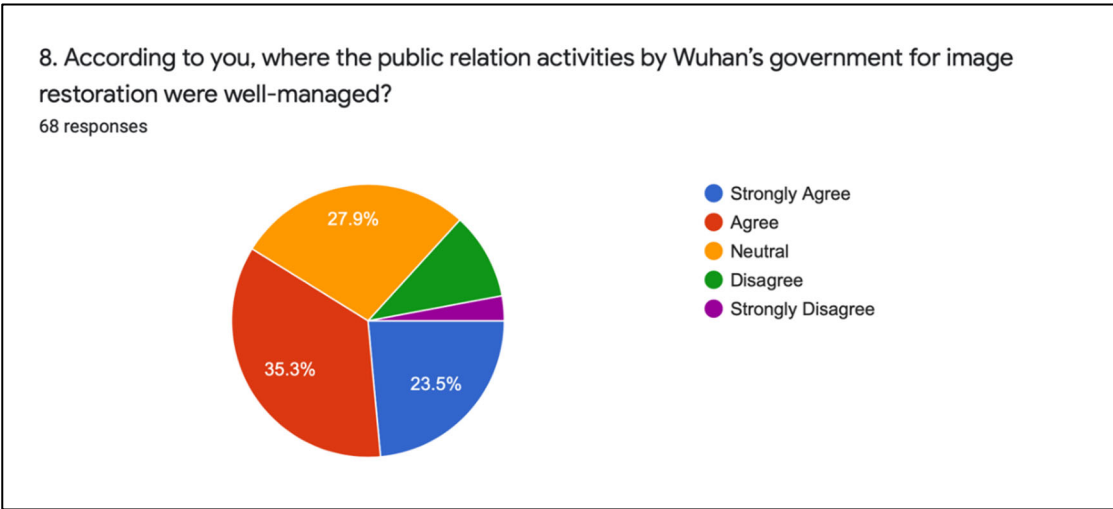
Both 37.1% and 37.1% respondents have strongly agreed and agreed to the fact that the government of Wuhan has provided considerable effort in designing effective PR measures for the restoration of city image during and after it. While a small percentage of respondents like 5.7% and 2.9% did not agree to the fact. They said that government effort was

not satisfactory regarding PR communication for image restoration. The government of Wuhan came up with different news releases, conferences on regular basis to speak about the city's improvement on the lessening of spread of virus and the improvement in health services being provided.



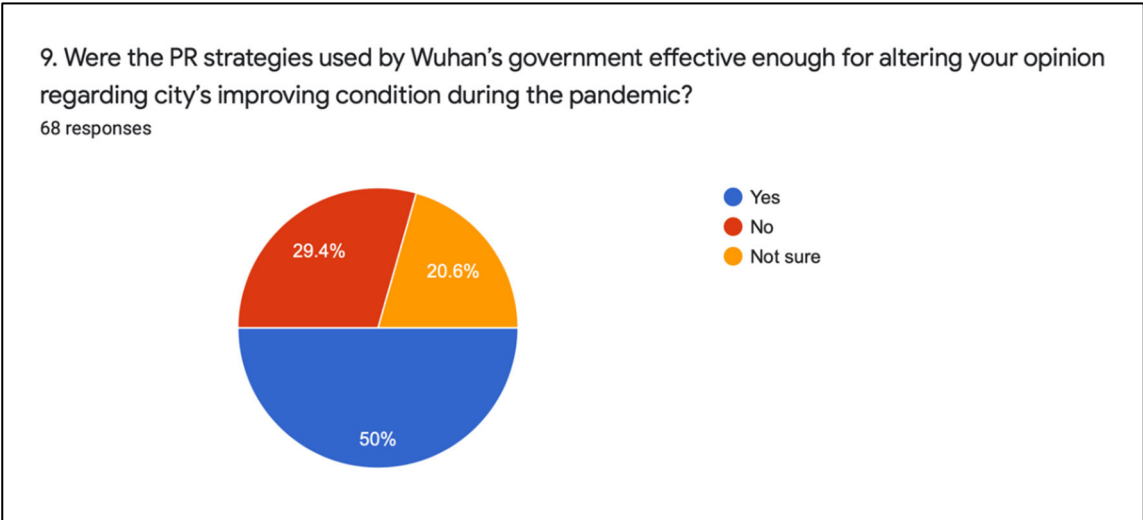
52.9% of people said that PR strategies from Wuhan's government helped them in having a positive image about the city. While 34.3% and 12.9% of respondents said that the impact was not positive and maybe they are not sure about the

impact. From this statistical data it can be concluded that, the positive impact of PR strategies from Wuhan's government was not well accepted among all the citizens of Wuhan.



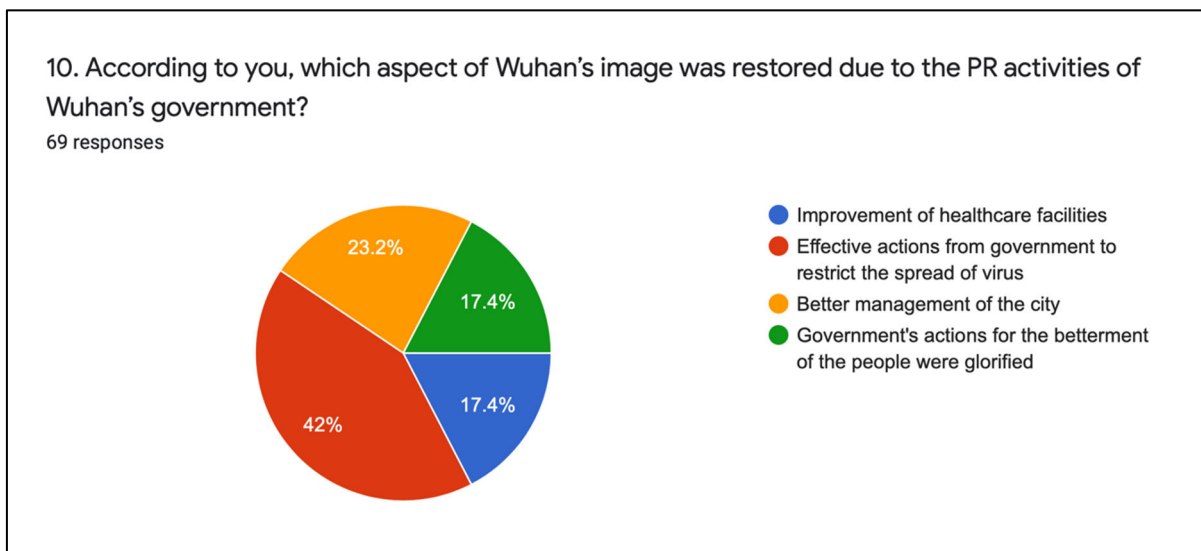
Management of Public relation activities is one important aspect to get desired results from it. After the pandemic, 23.5% and 35.3% of respondents said that PR efforts from Wuhan's government for image restoration were well managed. Different PR activities were carried out by the government.

While PR events like dissemination of information about healthcare activities, decreasing number of infections were carried out in regular intervals. All this helped in restoring the image of the city among the residents.



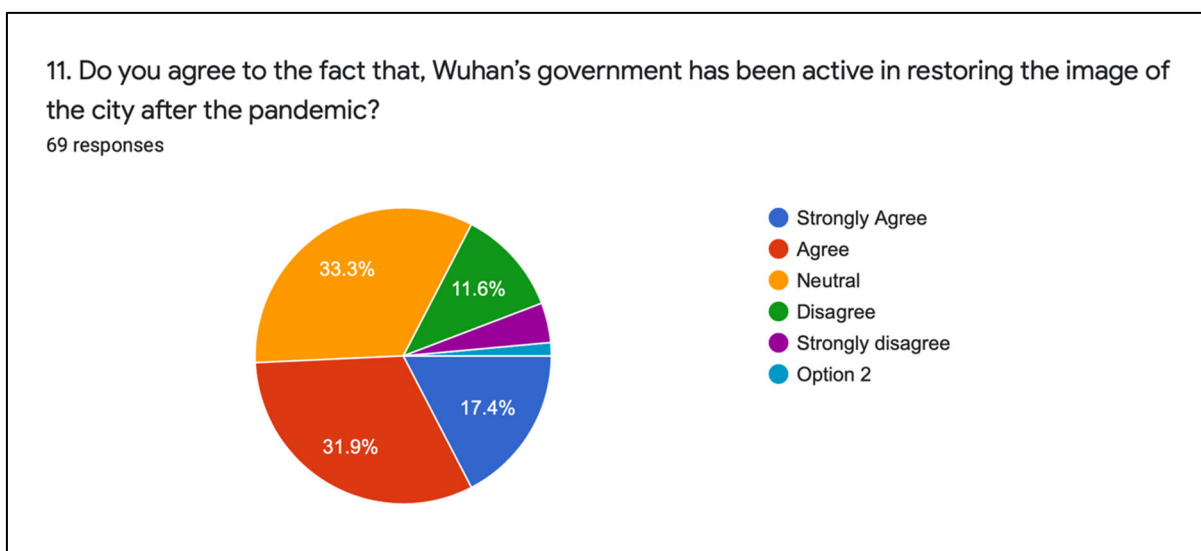
The success of PR campaigns relies on their impact of create a change in the opinion of the public. From the survey it can be understood that, 50% of the respondents have said that the PR campaigns by Wuhan government have helped in altering their opinion. People now tend to believe that the government has done a great job in tackling with the virus and

thus, Wuhan is a safe city to live in. On the other hand, a considerable amount of people leading to 29.4% thinks that Wuhan’s city image is still not restored, and the government lacked different measures to take care of the city and the people. This had made a considerable percentage of people not feel safe about the city conditions even now.



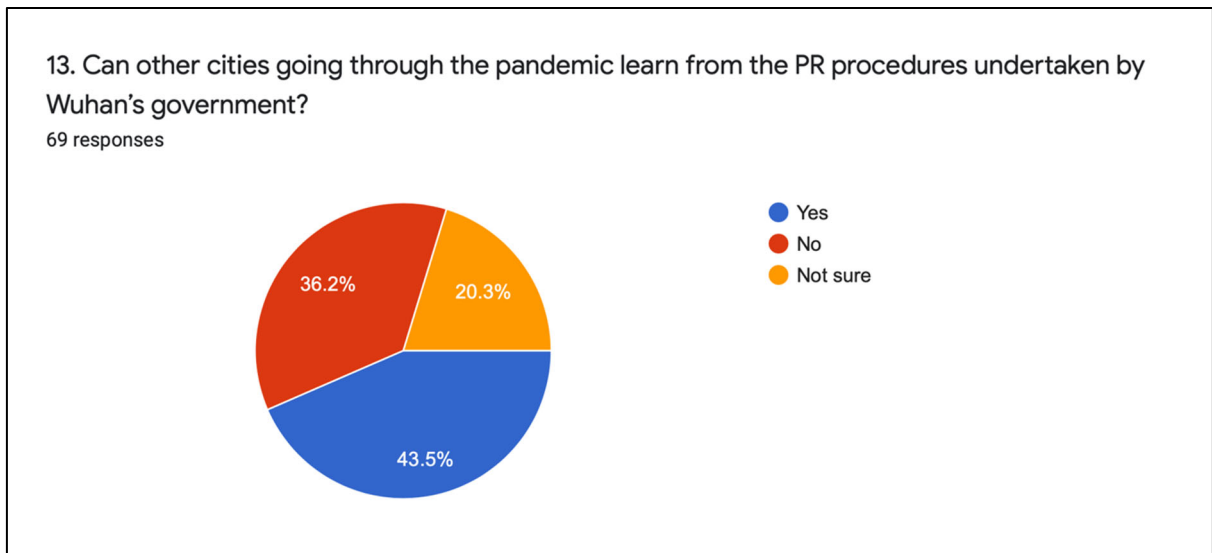
Wuhan’s government and the PR department took care of many segments to take care of the city image. However, from the statistical value gathered it can be ascertained that, 43% of the respondents said Effective actions from government to restrict the spread of virus was well perceived among the masses. In addition to thus, 23.2% of the respondents have

said Better management of the city was finally revealed to the audience. From this it can be understood that, Wuhan’s image restoration was mainly achieved as people started to believe that government is doing its bit to safeguard the citizens. However from the survey, it was also evident that there are some aspects that is missing from the PR campaigns.



34.3% and 35.7% of the respondents have said that, public opinions were not taken into consideration during the campaign and further No regular crisis communication and management were done. Both the elements decreased the effectiveness of the PR campaigns which were directed towards image restoration of Wuhan. Even the PR news items related to false information was circulated on death and

recovery rates were disseminated to instill false hope among the public. While some of the respondents did not have positive notions on the PR campaigns of Wuhan government on city image restoration, a considerable percentage of respondents in the survey had a negative connotation regarding it.



43.5% of the respondents have said that PR strategies of Wuhan can be reference point for other cities to work on the image restoration process. While 36.2% of the people have

said there is nothing to learn from, Wuhan government PR strategies.

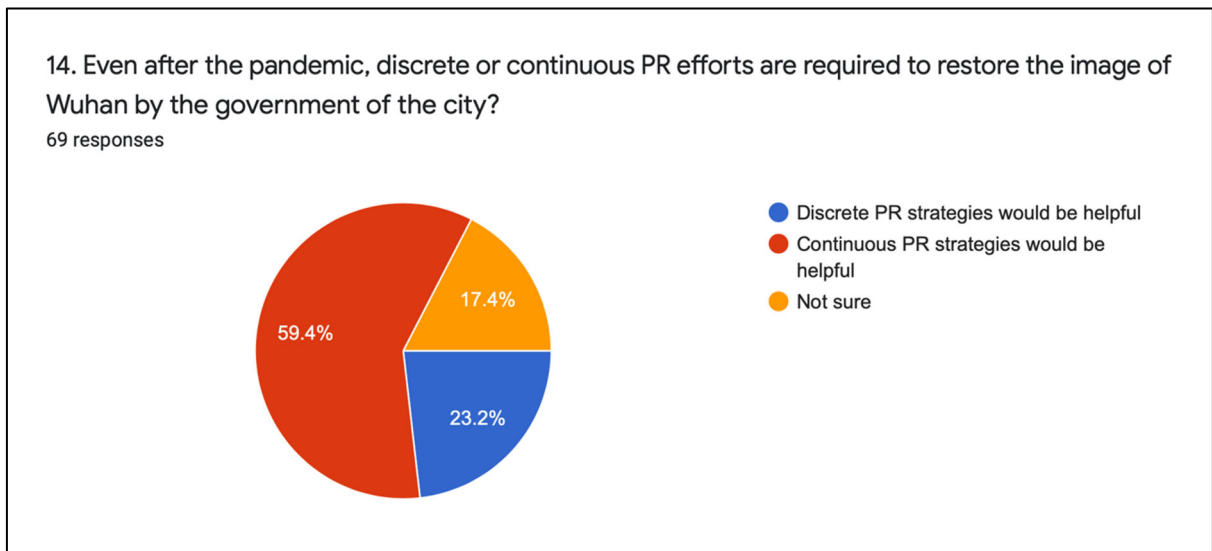


Image restoration is not a one-day process. Thus most of the respondents have said that Continuous PR strategies would be helpful in image restoration for Wuhan even after the pandemic is completely over. On the other hand, 23.2% of the respondents have said that Discrete PR strategies would be helpful in handling the situation.

5.2. Discussion from interviews

Discussion from Question 1:

Mixed responses were gained from the interview sessions on the impact of PR strategies of Wuhan government to safeguard the image of the city. Respondent 3 said that the PR strategies were discrete in nature, and this has not helped in image restoration. While Respondent 1 said that the PR strategies related to healthcare and better management of the city in the times of the pandemic has instilled hope in the minds of people and the residents of Wuhan think that the city is safe to live in. Further a common sentiment that was evident among all the interviewees that, considerable efforts have been made towards image restoration. However, it needs to be a continuous process and not a discrete one.

Discussion from Question 2:

A collective notion on the impact of PR strategies made it evident that, it helped the audience in creating a positive image on Wuhan's reputation after the pandemic had hit the city. The reputation of Wuhan was largely hit as it was being called as the city where the first infections came out. Some respondents have said that following the situational theory by Coombs have helped in image restoration through effective PR handles by Wuhan government. On the other hand, some of the PR professionals said the PR activities even disseminated falsified information and this decreased the trust of the public on the government.

Discussion from Question 3:

One of the backdrops regarding public not having a positive attitude towards the PR strategies of Wuhan government towards image restoration was, public opinion not being included. There was no two-way communication taking place among the government and city residents of Wuhan and this created a gap. This was one of the reasons why a positive response was not seen among the audience. On the other hand, Respondent 4 said that a small section of the people in Wuhan believed the government and had a notion of city image getting restored. One of the major PR strategies

that worked well with the audience was much information was distributed by the government of Wuhan on the policies and healthcare facilities and economic development brought in by the government.

Discussion from Question 4:

There were different PR Strategies that were included by the Wuhan government to safeguard the image of the city. While the significant ones were “Beijing decided on joining the World Health Organization initiative to ensure just distribution of COVID-19 vaccines once they are available”. This created a hope among the people that conditions are beginning to change in Wuhan city and they would be free from the virus. Further, Respondent 4’s view made it evident that when the government announced that infections are decreasing and vaccination rates have increased, it actually instilled hope among the public and restore the faith on the government and the society at large. Further, minute levels of infections found in Wuhan city was very promising among the public in the present days which is continuously helping the city image to get reformed.

Discussion from Question 5:

The PR professionals at the later part of their interview even spoke about some recommendations of the PR department of Wuhan government. Respondent 1 said that Wuhan should learn from the PR tactics of Italy and further indulge the opinion of the public in the communication strategy for image restoration. Further other interviewees have said that dissemination of positive news like News stories on opening of offices and other recreational facilities will help in improving the city image. Additionally news stories on Wuhan at the present moment needs to organize regular press conferences and news stories on how life being normalized would help in image restoration effective.

5.3. Discussion from Social Media Posts

Post 1: The first image presented by the Wuhan government in their Sina Weibo website firstly talks about the lowering rate of infections in the city. As stated in the caption, 99.9% of the Wuhan residential compounds stands free of Corona Virus. From the messages disseminated, it makes clear assumptions to the locals residents of Wuhan that the government has been able to restrict the spread of virus and the state of the city is in a much better shape in the present days when compared to the conditions that was prevailing last year. The images shared by the state government visually communicates the notions communicated through the image description line provided. Visual communication is often effective and is an integral part of textual analysis. The kids cycling in the public areas and people enjoying outdoors communicates to people that Wuhan is a safe city now for people to get back to their normal life, but wearing of masks is important. With the help of semiotics, it can be understood that a clear message is being interpreted to the audience where the Wuhan government is trying to restore the image of the city at the present stage of pandemic communicating the increase in safety measures being taken by the government.

Post 2: Restriction in the movement of people and buses, trains and other public transport was a significant move by the government of China and Wuhan to restrict the spread of virus among the residents of the country. The post here where a woman is waving her hand, states that public transport has been opened in Wuhan and people can get back to their normal lives. It has been successfully visually communicated through the images in the post that Wuhan is safe for public

movement and the chance of getting infected is quite less as vaccination rates is increasing. The visual communication message is enough for instilling hopes in the minds of the people living in Wuhan and work towards the goal of image restoration by the PR department of Wuhan government. Not only the images work for the goal stated above. The caption of the picture where it states, “Wuhan restarted on April 8, the government is stepping up efforts on the resumption of work” works well with stirring positive emotions for image restoration of the city,

Post 3: The third post showcases the development of medical facilities in Wuhan and China for combating with the increase in infections in the city. According to perception of citizens, cities with the best medical facilities are high taking care of the citizens. The Chinese government during and present situation of pandemic, made it clear to the citizens through PR communications that healthcare facilities would not be compromised. The visual representation of the picture in the posts provides information to the public of Wuhan and China about the growth in medical facilities being made available to the people. The images in the post are quite strong and high level of semiotics involved in it. The post is itself self-explanatory as it helps the people of Wuhan in understanding that the government is doing its best to take care of the citizens of the country. The constant dedication of the government of China to construct a makeshift hospital in just 7 days interprets the level of concern Chinese government has for the people living in the country. This post would surely improve the connotations of the public regarding the reputation of the government in China. Further this will have a huge impact on the image restoration of Wuhan city as the hospital was built in Wuhan itself.

6. Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1. Conclusion

Wuhan’s city image was immensely damaged due to several information revolving the international media that the Corona Virus originated in the laboratories in the city. This reputational damage to the city image is being handled by the PR professionals of the city. The research aimed at understanding the impact of the PR strategies and crisis communication on the opinion of the people in Wuhan about the improvement in reputational damage of Wuhan. From the findings of the study, it can be understood that Wuhan government had a number of PR strategies being constantly circulated among people in order to deal with the reputational damage made to the image of Wuhan. Most of the respondents both in interviews and surveys had a say that the government Wuhan with its PR department made it a regular affair to disseminate positive information after the impact of the pandemic was decreasing. Image repair theory has mortification and corrective action as one of the core strategies for image repairs through PR strategies. This was followed by the PR professionals of Wuhan. The responses gained from the surveys, interviews and social media posts on Sina Weibo makes it evident PR department of Wuhan kept the masses updated on the opening of the city activities, international health policies being included improvements in the healthcare facilities being available in the city. The dissemination of regular information to the public on different public media handles helped in improvement of city image among the public.

Further, from the responses it could be ascertained that a huge percentage of the respondents were not in positive response on the effectiveness of the PR crisis communication being done while image restoration of Wuhan. This was because norms of situational crisis communication were not followed. Many of the respondents complained on public opinion not being considered and incorporated information packets being disseminated into the national or international media. Therefore, it can be said that the essence of feedback was not present in the communication process. This was one of the potential pitfalls of the PR crisis communication strategies. Additionally, inclusion of more PR handles is required by the public relations officers and government of Wuhan. Another effective strategy can be collaborating with the private PR concerns in the city. From the notions of the respondents, it has been ascertained that, government PR professionals needs to integrate with the private PR agencies of the city to increase their reach. With more PR strategies being executed, it would be effective in reaching out to a greater number of people and impacting their opinions on city image. Effective PR strategies is all about communicating the right piece of information to the right set of people. This was been done effectively by the government of Wuhan throughout the image repairment process that led to the increase in positive notions of the city among the people. Positive and continuous flow of information to the people was the main agenda of the PR professional of Wuhan government to improve the opinion of the people. The Wuhan government has been moderately effective for doing so. However there were some pitfalls. These pitfalls have been provided with recommendation in the subsequent stages of this chapter.

Thus, from the findings it is evident that the PR strategies of Wuhan government helped in improving the image of the city among the audience after the pandemic. However, this needs to be a continuous process until the world is free from the clutches of the Covid-19 virus. The other metropolitan cities all around the world can get references from the Wuhan's use of PR strategies used for image restoration. While Wuhan can also take lessons from Italy's emotional attachment of the government with the audience in the times of the crisis. This will help in the construction of strong PR strategies and help in better restoration of city image of Wuhan in the near future.

6.2. Recommendations

Crisis communication has helped public relations professionals marketing strategies to save brand, city and celebrity images from grave scandals and mishaps. This has been well understood from the different news stories that flashes the media channels often. Similarly, the Wuhan and its city image and reputation faced severe reputational damage as it was hailed around the world that, Corona Virus originated in this city. Due to this, the PR professionals with different tactics revolving around Image repairment theory and Situational Crisis Communication theory were formed to save the city image was further damage. The PR professionals of Wuhan government, flashed every positive news, actions and agendas from the government for the welfare of the people in every media vehicle. Further, joining the WHO to get vaccines for all, building a massive hospital in just 7 days, providing free tourists visas were all part of the PR strategies of Wuhan government for improving the image of the city among the citizens. However, from the insights of the respondents through interviews and surveys, some pitfalls in

the PR strategies were recognized which needs improvement. The recommendations for PR professionals for restoration of city image is as follows:

Including the opinion of the common people in the PR strategies and communicating with them through social media is immensely important. This helps in understanding the perspectives of people and what kind of information would be the most impactful for improving the image of the city. Further according to the theory of situational crisis communication, feedback is one important component. This was missing from the crisis communication strategies led by the PR professionals of Wuhan government.

The second recommendation is, live streaming and other recent PR strategies like Press conferences and distribution of press kits were not organized regularly to circulate information. The main essence of PR is to circulate as much information as possible for reconstruction of damage city image. The government of Wuhan could have included influential celebrities in the country and live streamed information about the developments taking place in the city. This would have helped in better communication with the masses and improvements would have made regarding city image of Wuhan as well.

6.3. Limitations and Further Scope of Research

Every research when being conducted on moderate or large scale faces different limitations. The limitations can be related to time management, dearth in finding suitable literature due to the recency of the event and effective respondents whose opinions would help in giving body to the research. There were two limitations faced while conducting the research, one was time management issues and another reaching out to the respondents in the times of the pandemic. Drafting the literature and deciding upon the objectives and research questions for the study took the maximum time, which left me with very little time for the subsequent parts of the research study. This happened due to my ill time-management skills which I need to improve. Further in the subsequent period which was left for the completion of the research study, I made a proper timetable which was followed diligently to complete the study. However due to lack of time and resources I was able to consider a moderate number of respondents which limited the findings of my study.

Another limitation was faced regarding the social distancing norms due to Covid-19. Restrictions in physical movements made collection of primary data impossible by engaging into face-to-face interactions. Thus, all the data and responses were collected through digital modes via Google forms and Zoom calls. Face-to-face interactions helps in understanding the hidden connotations of the interviewees on the topic of discussion and this helps in including their viewpoints better in the analysis. Further getting the consent of the respondents was not easy as most of the respondents from the survey had inhibitions regarding participating due to immense number of fraudulent cases were increasing asking for their personal information. However, this limitation was also curbed through providing the respondents with consent forms. The respondents who were not comfortable in participating could not do so.

PR strategies and elements of crisis communication is evolving with improvement in technology. Thus, this research study has ample number of further scopes of expanding in the near future. The pandemic is long drawn as it can be seen thus, image restoration needs to be there for some time now.

Therefore, further research can include case studies of different PR techniques used by PR professionals in Wuhan government and other governments around the world for image restoration of the city. The in-depth analysis of the case studies drawn with the knowledge of different PR theories and theories of crisis communication will help in understanding the importance of PR strategies and crisis communication effective towards image restoration after the pandemic.

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