

Chapter 14

The Other Side of Public Relations: A Critical Perspective on the Roles and Functions of Public Relations

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ABSTRACT

After 1980, as PR was advocating the neo-liberal policies such as deregulation, privatization, and free global trade which were largely implemented, it played an instrumental role. These practices aimed at reducing state control, preventing state intervention in the market and changing existing economic regulations have played an important role in abandoning the Keynesian Welfare economy. These neoliberal policies put into practice were not only for the interest of big business against the common good but also led to a further gap increase between the countries. In the case of global reactions against these policies, public relations were used for consent engineering or manipulation. Perceptions and beliefs are managed with common persuasion methods so that the public cannot understand this. This requires considering public relations in a more complex, national and global framework through economic policy studies which analyze the political economy, politics and social dimensions in a holistic way.

INTRODUCTION

The crises of capitalism in 2008 have increased the number of studies on the economic roots of public relations and its relations with the economy. Any crises that occur plays an important role to highlight a subject. It was seen how PR was the protector of the capitalist system after the Great Depression of 1929. Leading leaders of the business world have largely turned to PR to defend their private vested interests against Roosevelt's New Deal Policy involved in the enlargement of social reforms and government regulations to a great extent. After 1980, as PR was advocating the neo-liberal policies such as

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-3270-6.ch014

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deregulation, privatization and free global trade which were largely implemented, it played an instrumental role. These practices aimed at reducing state control, preventing state intervention in the market and changing existing economic regulations have played an important role in abandoning the Keynesian Welfare economy. Numerous lobbying campaigns and public relations activity has been done in the global decision centres such as Washington and Brussels and transnational bodies such as IMF, WB and WTO, and free trade has been encouraged to make capital travel easily and rapidly beyond the borders to increase itself without any national obstacles. With the globalization of capital, public relations itself has also become globalized and has expanded a lot from branding, lobbying, public diplomacy and even psychological warfare. These neoliberal policies put into practice were not only for the interest of big business against the common good but also led to a further gap increase between the countries. While developed countries have become more advantageous, less developed countries have become less competitive. Even if these countries achieved growth, they observed that most of their earnings ended up going to developed countries. In the case of global reactions against these policies, public relations were used for consent engineering or manipulation.

When companies see a threat to their assets and profits or want to take advantage of a market opportunity, they combine it with broader and common national interests, such as economic growth, productivity, and employment. Public relations do the necessary work for companies to build trust. The function of public relations is to attract investments as well as the sale of products, individuals, companies, governments and other organizations, raise public profiles of companies, cover disasters and crises, reduce the impact of counter-campaigns, and provide public support in conducting wars to change public perception against oppressive regimes (Jones, 2016). All these works prevented the real face of neo-liberalism to be seen. Neoliberalism is not only the continuation of capitalism, but it is also the overriding of financial capitalism to industrial capitalism. This is the shaping of the economy and society according to the priorities of capital, leaving aside all the needs of society. As Harvey (2007) points out, while wealth and power are concentrated in a few hands, most of society is deprived of wealth and assets. Perceptions and beliefs are managed with common persuasion methods so that the public cannot understand this. Increasing domination is described as common sense in the media. Opposition ideas or alternative ideas to neoliberalism are not allowed to reach the public. This attitude of the media is normal since the media is in the hands of big companies as well as public relations. In a sense, the public relations which affect the access of different powers to the resources and stand by the hegemonic power build to the control relations on history, industrial structures, culture and practices, and material resources. This requires considering public relations in a more complex, national and global framework through political economy studies which analyze the economy, politics and social dimensions in a holistic way.

As Bettig (1999, p. 1) said, the political economy of communication has contributed greatly to our understanding of mass communication and society. Major changes in communication technologies have influenced daily life practices and the global economic system while broadening the economic policy of communication. McQuail identified three major trends in media and technology as “ concentration of media systems into the hands of several transnational corporations, the expansion of the information economy, and the convergence technologies and the decline of public control over communication systems” (quoted from Bettig, 1999, p. 1). Mosco stated the general characteristics of the political economy of communication as a social totality, social change, morality and praxis. He has also determined the entry points to the political economy of communication as commodification, spatialization and structuralization. Mc Chesney (2012) also stated that there are 3 components of political economy of communication as a critical analysis of how the media system affects or interacts with the general

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