

The image of public relations in Portugal. A self-monitoring problem or a structural problem?

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Introduction

Public relations occupy a central place in democratic societies these days. Public relations is currently a worldwide level profession practiced by thousands of people for the benefit of the most varied organisations. These days millions of citizens throughout the world are the target of messages coming from “the great Niagara of public relations” (Moloney, 2006: 1): press conferences, interviews, sponsorships, social and environmental responsibility campaigns, *lobbying*, et cetera. However, despite the visibility of this persuasion industry, both in the number of professionals and in the activities developed, many people do not know what it is, or do not like what they know about public relations.

In the specific Portuguese case, this strange fact is related to the multiplication over the last decades of the number of communication agencies and of communications/public relations management positions in large government and private companies and above all in the association of the activity with *media relations* techniques, often by ex-journalists, working for private interests. According to an estimate in the *Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management* report in 2008, there are 2,500 to 3,000 professionals in Portugal, distributed through government administration, internal departments in companies, associations, NGOs and churches, and also communication and public relations consultancy companies. Furthermore, the fact that public relations activities are practiced backstage, in the name of individuals, companies, governments and other organisations, partly explains why the activity does not have a transparent public identity, which also contributes to a lot of the mystery that involves this expanding industry. The APECOM/OJE (2009) study

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recently confirmed the growing importance of the Portuguese communication consultancy sector, assessing the business volume relating to 2007 at about 60 million Euros.

One can say in simple terms that public relations practice is the development of communicational strategies for the presentation and defence of the image of an organisation in public space. Public relations in principle advocates corporate interests in the “court of public opinion” (Ivy Lee *apud* Hiebert, 1966: 185). From which it is consensual to say that public relations is at the service of large and powerful corporate organisations and governmental entities. It can also however be at the service of the public good, like in health or in the environment, supporting non-governmental organisations or pressure groups. One can even observe two conflicting trends in the case of relationship strategies with the *media*: the most powerful information sources (like companies and governments) have facilitated access to the *media* however simultaneously the alternative sources (the pressure groups for example) have also gained leadership in the mass media arena. One can see as an example the recent oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. If on one hand BP tried to defend its image through media intervention, the pressure groups, like Greenpeace have also gained leadership through mass media actions, in which they accuse the oil company of being an example of a *greenwash* (adopt a image of a company concerned with renewable energy with sustainability not corresponding to reality).

Companies have to legitimize their actions before the public in democratic societies. When an issue no longer has a merely private nature, as it is a problem which is also of public interest, it becomes an object of public discussion. These are the precise public issues that shape the public relations action field. We accordingly understand public relations as being an activity which places itself at an exact point in which private interests intersect public interests. This means to say that the ultimate objective of public relations is to legitimize the private interests of companies in society in relation to the demands of public opinion about common good. But would it be that communicational actions developed by public relations to attain this objective can be called legitimate persuasion or would it be mere opinion engineering techniques? Do public relations provide mutual understanding between companies and their publics or do they limit themselves to contributing to imposing the wish of the first over the second? Would it be for example that when an organisation promotes its concern with

the environment or sustainability, it is communicating a fact, based on the company's philosophy, or only to construct a "green image" that enables it to obtain good public publicity results and an increase in sales? What is basically the role that public relations plays in public opinion construction? Persuasion or manipulation? These and other issues point in the direction of the main problem underlying our work, which will be presented here in three main parts. In a first instance of theoretic contextualization, the polarized debate is summarized, which accompanies the reflection on the role of public relations in society: the symmetrical perspective and the critical perspective. Then, the perception is sought as to the form in which these two perspectives meet in empiric reality, through a qualitative study with public relations agents operating in Portugal. The possibility that public relations have an ethical identity is defended from the conclusions obtained.

1. The critical perspective and symmetrical perspective of public relations

One can defend in a simple form that the reflection about the role of public relations in society has become polarized between the symmetrical perspective and the critical perspective of public relations. The symmetrical perspective of public relations is clearly an optimistic vision (or as some will call it, naïve), of the *mediator* role of public relations, or better, a practitioner committed, both to the organisation that employs him/her and to society as a whole, in the construction of mutually beneficial relations. The critical perspective has a more negative vision (but which some consider more pragmatic), of the activities of public relations, attributing it with the role of *propagandist*.

The critical approach to public relations, in the wake of the Marxist theory about capitalist society, seeks to reveal and explain the different structures and power relations that exist in society. Like Trujillo and Toth (1987: 216) who underline the critical perspective of public relations, understanding organisations as "ideological and material arenas of power, influence and control" that use public communication "to bargain and negotiate" with the different public groups. This vision is patent in the *Rethinking Public Relations* (2006) work by Kevin Moloney, where public relations is understood as a persuasive process dedicated to the creation of *weak propaganda* programs. Accordingly, whilst professional information sources provide media content orientated by private interests which, ultimately can even damage contemporary democracy.

The invisible side of public relations and its power to influence public opinion through the *media* is also the main thesis of Stauber and Rampton in the essay *Toxic sludge is good for you!* (2004). They believe that public relations practice is not intrinsically bad, for example, when it is at the service of NGOs or benefit associations. However this fact, “does not in any way mitigate the undemocratic power of the multi-billion dollar PR industry to manipulate and propagandise on behalf of wealthy special interests, dominating debate, discussion and decision-making” (Stauber and Rampton, 2004: 205).

Privileged access to the press is one of the most repeated arguments by public relations critics, as they see this link as a corrosive factor of classic journalism values (the truth, the rigor and exemption). Some authors, like Schudson (2003: 3), consider even the existence of a vast world of “parajournalists” – public relations companies, communication agencies, press agencies and *spin doctors*, et cetera, which aim more for profit than the truth and are more conditioned by interests than by values, and that in the end contribute greatly to disinformation. Davis (2000) discovered for example, that the production of business and financial news is in the hands of a restricted group, which includes specialized journalists, analysts and press agents who generate information in order to reinforce superiority and the interests of the company in the market. Some authors point to economic necessities and consequent lack of human resources in the newsworthy machine as one of the main explanations for the growing dependence of journalists for professional information sources, personified in public relations (Stauber and Rampton, 2004; Moloney, 2006). Others emphasise the inverse phenomenon, or better, the investment growth in the public relations machine, by both companies and the State, which is visible in the offer of highly specialised and professional products to journalists (see for example, Pitcher, 2003). The reference is also not put to one side to the way economic concentration in the *media* tends to produce a newsworthy agenda that hesitates in challenging the information sources themselves due to the fear of facing pressures and reductions in the purchase of publicity space (McChesney, 1999; Croteau and Hoynes, 2001).

Indeed, the consequences of information source professionalization in mass media economic policy have been on the top of the agenda for investigation for a long time and have been underlined by authors like Herman and Chomsky (1988) in *Manufacturing Consent*. These authors sought to prove how, under the ideal of press

freedom one produces messages that favour governmental or corporate interests, with the polemic “propaganda model”. Falling back on various case studies, they show how the publication of determined information contributes towards the social and political elites “manufacturing of consensus” that favours their actions.

Oscar J. Gandy (1982) coined the expression “information subsidy” to describe the role played by public relations in the *agenda setting* construction process. This author (1982: 15) found that information made available by public relations facilitates the news sourcing process, however with economic implications for the organisations which provide the information and the *media* which receives it. Organisations invest human resources and materials in the production of information that expresses their perspectives; the *media* save resources when they receive this free information. The information is thus seen as an asset with exchange value. Gandy furthermore underlines that in the design and implementation of information subsidies, public relations makes every effort so that the source and interest of the source is adeptly hidden (*ibid.* 64).

Ultimately, the central argument for public relations critical theories falls upon the power that public relations exerts on society by distorting communication and undermining the participative democracy process, thus creating the illusion that there is equality and diversity in *media* access, when in fact only large organisations are “heard” in public space. They basically reclaim the thesis by Walter Lippmann (1922) that public opinion continues to be constructed through obscure propaganda mechanisms. They therefore consider that public relations does not operate in the name of public interest and for this very reason, is ineffective in the construction of beneficial relationships between different players in society. This is the public relations symmetrical perspective thesis.

James E. Grunig is the public relations symmetrical perspective protagonist also denominated Symmetrical/Excellent due to the *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management* study made in the nineties. The most interesting part of the Grunigian theory resides in the defence that excellent public relations, apart from having value in the organisation, also has value for society. The reasoning adopted to prove public relations value in society can be very simply set out. When an organisation ignores or opposes public interests, the latter organise themselves into pressure or activist groups which will confront and challenge the organisation. The result is a conflict that contributes to the creation of instability in society. To the contrary when an

organisation seeks to attain its objectives without disrespecting its public's interest and exercises its activity with responsibility (economic, social, environmental and labour) contributes to social harmony.

Asserting that symmetrical/excellent public relations plays an important role in the organisation's strategy definition means that it has an active role in the decision taking process. Strategic management of organisations, as always, seeks out opportunities in the involving environment that are conducive to obtaining competitive advantages. In a classic marketing perspective, these opportunities refer to the involving economic environment (covering especially consumers, suppliers or the competition) that propitiate resources for the organisation and that buy or use its products or services. These opportunities within a public relations perspective are contextualised with information about the social and institutional involving environment, including all the public's that participate in the establishing of the organisation's mission. The public relations perspective therefore adds to the vision of the market, the vision about the consequences of the organisation's decisions for strategic public's (whether for a simple launch of a new product or the shutting down of a factory).

So that the value of public relations in an organisation and, consequently, in society has a visible translation in reality, Grunig defends the practice that he denominates *two-way symmetrical communication*²:

“An organisation that uses the two-way symmetrical model, utilizes research and dialogue to manage conflict, improve understanding, and build relationships with public's. With the symmetrical model, both the organisation and public's can be persuaded; [...] public relations is a symmetrical process of compromise and negotiation and not a war of power” (Grunig and White, 1992: 39).

As the name itself indicates, to the contrary of the practice of one-way public relations, which can be seen as a *promotional monologue* of the organisation, with the *two-way symmetrical communication*, public relations develops research between the public's with the aim of finding the best arguments to promote a *dialogue* with these public's. It is not however an egoistic dialogue, seen only through the company's eye,

² This public relations perspective results from the typology of the 4 models presented earlier by Grunig and Todd in *Managing Public Relations* (1984). These models would be a chronological perspective of public relations practice in the USA: 1. Publicity/press agency model; 2. Public information model; 3. Two-way symmetrical model; and 4. Two-way symmetrical model.

like the one that is provided by the *two-way asymmetrical communication*, where the research is only to identify the messages with more persuasive power, which permit the company to impose its argument upon that of the publics. Public relations that practice *two-way symmetrical communication*, consider that studying the publics is fundamental for providing a dialogue in which the organisation and its publics negotiate, having in mind the consensus and the commitment to the more correct decisions to adopt. Only this model facilitates the participation of the publics in the negotiations and discussions with the organisation that affects them. The principle of symmetry means that the values and problems of organisations and of the publics are both relevant. Consequently the dialog promoted by public relations is intrinsically ethical and contributes so that the organisation is more responsible before society. As a final consequence, public relations as a vehicle for the co-creation of common meanings for the publics and the organisation:

“We believe public relations should be practiced to serve the public interest, to develop mutual understanding between organisations and their publics, and to contribute to informed debate about issues in society” (Grunig, 1992: 9).

In our opinion this is the phrase that demonstrates the originality of the main public relations symmetrical perspective thesis best – *public relations to serve the public interest* – and which, at the same time provoke more incredulity and criticism about its idealism and unrealism. After all, how can public relations serve the public interest when it is serving the interests of private businesses? Also till what point can the debate promoted by public relations contribute to the mutual understanding about conflicting topics, if public relations is serving private interests? Faced with this problem, we opted to follow two paths in the endeavour to find a reply. On one hand we followed the empirical path that necessarily takes us to the public relations professionals themselves with the objective of analysing the way they present themselves to others (*identity*). On the other hand we explore the mass media image of these same professionals, through a documental analysis about what is said in the press about the public relations activity (*the mass media image*).

2. The identity of public relations: how it is presented to others

The starting point for reflection about the identity of public relations is the recently created *Code of Professional Conduct of the Professional Association of Corporate Communicators and Public Relations* (APCE). This code, which was very recently approved, in April 2009, aims to enhance the current debate about the underlying values of the activity of public relations in the heart of this professional community. The APCE and APECOM, which have been operating in Portugal since the end of the eighties, are the two main public relations professional associations, which have the objective of affiliating public relations agents and promoting their professional recognition. The Portuguese Association of Ag Communications (APECOM) was constituted in 1989 and the Portuguese Association of Corporate Communications (APCE) in 1990. Whilst the former represents the communication and public relations consulting companies, the latter includes communication professionals established in companies and organisations and students in the institutional communication area. According to their respective official sites, APECOM currently unites 31 agencies and APCE, 82 individually named members (communication technicians), 118 student members, 2 honorary members and also 56 companies of national ³ panorama importance.

To perceive how the public relations agents themselves defines themselves, is not a simple objective as there are multiple messages projected in different environments about their activity. In order to try and outline this subjectivity a documental study option was determined of the code of ethics and professional conduct. The codes after all, represent the official and more institutional version of same, apart from being a privileged repository of the values, which ideally accompany the public relations profession.

The APCE and APECOM professional associations, adopted international codes: *The European Code* of the European Confederation of Public Relations CERP and the *Stockholm Code* of the International Communications Consultancy Organisation (ICCO)⁴, respectively. They also created national Codes: The APECOM *Code of Ethics*

³ The APCE and APECOM institutional sites can be respectively consulted at www.apce.pt and www.apecom.pt

⁴ The International Communications Consultancy Organisation (ICCO) is a worldwide organisation, which represents about 30 national communication consultancy associations. They follow the code of ethics denominated the “Stockholm Code” (2003), a code update of the Rome Code (1986). Official site: www.iccopr.com.

and the already referred to APCE.⁵ *Conduct Code for the Management of Organisational Communication and Public Relations*.

In the comparative study of international public relations codes of ethics, Gonçalves (2007) found that all of them, in a more or less obvious way, derive from the Athens Code.⁶ The national codes also follow this trend. The authorship of the *Athens Code*, also known as the *Public Relations International Code of Ethics*, is by the Frenchman Lucien Matrat and was created upon the occasion of the European Centre of Public Relations (CERP)⁷ general assembly, in Athens, on the 11th May 1965.⁸ The value of a written code as underlined by Kruckeberg (1989) and Day (1991) lies in the arrangement of guides for professionals and the identification of the set of underlying expectations for the profession, encouraging them to not trust in merely subjective judgements. From this and from the analysis of the codes, one can attempt to determine what are the principles and duties of the most recurring public relations professionals. According to T. Healy, the *Athens Code* is the ideal document to identify the *core-values* of public relations, which is “truth, dialogue and public interest”. (Healy, 1988):

“Each member shall refrain from subordinating:

- the *truth* to other requirements (article 10);
- circulating information which is not based on established and ascertainable facts (article 11).;

Each member shall undertake:

- To establish the moral, psychological and intellectual conditions for *dialogue* in its true sense, and to recognize the rights of these parties involved to state their case and express their views (article 7);

⁵ The APECOM and APCE codes are respectively available at www.apecom.pt and www.apce.pt.

⁶ The 5 Codes adopted by the main international and European associations are compared in the study undertaken by Gonçalves (2007): the *PRSA Member Code of Ethics 2000*, of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the *Global Protocol on Public Relations Ethics*, of the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management (GA), the *Code of Ethics for Professional Communicators of the International Association Business Communication* (IABC), the *Lisbon Code (also known as the European Code)* of the *European Confederation of Public Relations* (CERP), and the *Stockholm Charter of the International Communications Consultancy Organisation* (ICCO).

⁷ The European Center of Public Relations (CERP), founded in France in 1959, is today called the European Confederation of Public Relations and unites the main public relations associations in Western Europe. Official site: www.cerp.org.

⁸ The Athens Code was created in 1965 under the aegis of the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), which would be adopted for the 1st time 1968.

- To act, in all circumstances, in such a manner as to take account of the respective interests of the parties involved; both the *interests of the organisation* which he/she serves and the *interests of the publics* concerned (article 8)”⁹.

Apart from finding their inspiration in the Athens Code from the comparative study of international public relations codes, Gonçalves (2007: 17) also identified the set of principles and conduct standards that ideally help the public relations agent to confront the ethical dilemmas of his/her quotidian practice: 1) duty to himself/herself; 2) duty towards the organisation, client or employer; 3) duty towards the profession and 4) duty towards society. This set of principles – which also can be identified in the Codes adopted by the Portuguese professional associations – are the following: *transparency*, *confidentiality*, to avoid *the conflict of interests*, to respect *the free circulation of information* (expression and press freedom), the respect for *free competition*, to promote a service that contributes to the ennoblement of the profession and safeguard public interests.

Summarizing, the main conclusion to draw from the analysis of the sector’s conduct codes, is *that the public relations agent must guide his/her professional conduct using the values of truth, honesty and loyalty towards the client or patron entity and respect for the freedom of communication and free competition, in order to foster dialogue and safeguard public interest..*

One can therefore say that the vision of public relations that trespass conduct codes is that public relations must be guided according to ethical standards that meet public interest, emphasising the need to foster the dialogue between the organisation and its publics. Thus the identity, which the public relations agents defend, fits within a symmetrical perspective of public relations in society to the detriment of a critical vision.

3. The mass media image of public relations: how it is seen in the press

Given the importance that the *media* has in modern societies, the mass media discourse is, unavoidably, one of the main stanchions in the construction of the image of

⁹ In the Athens Code, emphasis of our authorship. The integral code can be consulted at <http://www.cerp.org/codes/international.asp> (accessed in June 2008).

any entity. An analysis of the mass media content can be for this reason, the most indicated way to perceive how the public relations image is projected in the involving environment. The following study, which is presented, was guided by the objective of discovering on one hand, what the public relations activity characteristics are, and the values and most mediated personalities and on the other hand, what the topics and polemics are that stand out and stereotype the profession. As an updated non-diachronic analysis was intended, the research and analysis of mass media data was limited to the period of 2004-2008 and followed the below outlined steps:¹⁰

1. The research was made based on national press data using the following keywords: public relations, communication consultant or agent, communication agency and press agent or communication director. The option to only analyse the national press was due to the interest in studying in which way the public relations topic would be published in the general press. An analysis is therefore included of all the daily and weekly nationally characterized newspapers and all magazines. Although is it is not a quantitative analysis, it was possible to determine the mass media coverage of certain topics (repetition).
2. Once the study body had been identified (set of news), the *tone of the message* or mass *media favourability* was analysed, or better, the general attitude transmitted in an article in relation to the topic being studied. This information's selection criterion was based on the editorial handling of the news, and only news was considered where the content approached the activity, personalities and opinions directly, about the professional communication sector and which developed its involvement in the approached issue.
3. The message tone classification is not based on the positivity or negativity inherent to an event, topic or subject matter, but on the way the journalist or columnist decides to communicate the information. Three groups of articles have been constituted from this:

¹⁰ The data collection necessary for the analysis of the mass media content was facilitated by the invaluable support of *Manchete*, which is a company specialized in monitoring the *media* (www.manchete.pt).

- a. *Positive articles* (include favourable information): for example, articles written by professionals themselves about the activity or the description of the most efficient and mass media campaigns.
- b. *Neutral articles* (news that only transmits facts, without the indication of praise, preference or criticism): for example, awards, professional movements or sector events.
- c. *Negative articles* (containing unfavourable affirmations): the articles included in this group refer predominantly to the relationship of organisations within the journalistic sphere, mediated by press agencies or communication agencies and are specially concentrated on opinion articles.

The main and most interesting conclusions to draw from this study are exactly related to the negative group articles about the public relations sector in Portugal. After having analysed the selected articles it was observed that the communication agencies and press agencies have the higher number of references and that the more redundant topics, which appear over the 5 years that were analysed, with a high concentration of articles, are centralised precisely on three topics: 1) press agencies, or better, the interaction with the journalists; 2) the power to influence the *agenda setting*; and 3) political communication.

As it is not possible for us to present the whole *corpus* of the analysed press clippings here, the option was taken to select excerpts that illustrate the connotations associated with the public relations activity best. Especially the way in which *opinion makers*, journalists or not, associate public relations with an illegitimate manipulation activity of journalists, and consequently of public opinion. In some cases, even affirming that the profession presents indications of corruption, resulting from an “incestuous relationship”¹¹ between journalists and press agencies:

“In the anxiety to close contracts with potential clients they asseverate that they control what comes out in the newspapers and even nurture the idea (that already exists among some managers and entrepreneurs) that journalists are ‘buyable’. The owner for example of one of these agencies (an ex-journalist) promised the administrators of a media company that he would constitute a ‘club of journalist

¹¹ *Sábado Magazine*(25.05.06), “Carrilho’s denouncement”, by João Marcelino.

friends' of this company, guaranteeing that he controlled crisis situations, when the company may be the object of negative news" (*Expresso*, 08.11.08).¹²

"They give, choose, program and hide news. They plan information. They calculate the effects and count the references made in the press. They handle image, buy shirts for their masters and check out that ties match, prepare spontaneous moments, formulate outcries, stage incidents and organize cases. (...) There are those who think this is modernity. The rational information of the present time. The sign of efficiency, the transparency instrument, but undeceiving the credulous. The objective of the agents and communication agencies is always to defend the information author's interests, never, of the addressee or of the citizen. The only concern of the agent is to sell the most possible of assets, ideas, merchandize or decisions, at the best conditions" (*Público*, 27.01.08).¹³

"It is a mystery without being a miracle, that the press offers to publish this news upon request, leaving the others to sell their hidden space and prestige, as being so, it itself produces doubts about its seriousness. Is it doing it because this news is second class publicity? Because it is an implicit condition in first call publicity? Because an infinitesimal minority of journalists have a hidden agenda?

Notwithstanding that this scheme is an unknown public service, there is a problem: the scheme is hidden from the reader. The reader reads a piece of news upon request, concludes he/she is reading a journalist newspaper and, without knowing it, reads hidden publicity of a government institute or private company. To avoid a conflict of interests, journalists should only publish these articles preceded by the information: Prose upon request" (*Público*, 27.03.06).¹⁴

Summing up, one can say following the analysis of mass media content that determined concepts or key connotations exist, which fit into the *mass media image* of public relations activity, even if in very limited moments in present national times. Especially the perception that the *public relation agent develops strategies of influence and manipulation in the journalistic sphere to attain private objectives of mass media exposure*. This connotation that questions the legitimacy of the press agents in democratic society seems to fit into the critical vision of public relations in detriment to the symmetric vision strategies.

¹² Weekly - *Expresso* (08.11.08), "The owners of information", report by Catarina Nunes.

¹³ Newspaper - *Público* (27.01.08) "The art of lying", an opinion article by António Barreto.

¹⁴ Daily newspaper - *Público* (27.03.06), "Hidden publicity", opinion article by Luís Salgado de Matos.

4. Conclusive reflection

The main conclusion to draw from our qualitative study is that the two theoretical frameworks of public relations – *symmetrical and critical* – can be identified and coexist in Portuguese reality. In fact, we can observe through the collected data that the official positioning of the public relations profession (*identity*) is strongly associated with professional values, especially emphasized by the set of ethnic codes and conduct in force. From this one can consider that public relations agents defend an ethical and symmetrical professional identification, which result from the development of persuasive mechanisms – which we will call *legitimate* – in the interaction with the journalistic sphere, as well as all the other groups of publics that are important for the organisation.

Well, it is precisely the lack of an ethical posture that emerges in an analysis about what is said in the press about the public relations activity (*mass media image*). Especially in the association with press agents *illegitimate persuasive* mechanisms, in view of the pursuance of purely private objectives. If the *mass media* image of the press agency activity is very implicated with the traffic of influences and manipulation of the journalistic sphere, there is no correspondence therefore with the *ethical identity* that is officially defended. Would it be possible therefore to speak of ethical public relations, or would it be that this expression is an oxymoron?

In our opinion, this apparent paradox can be analysed through two interconnected lines of reasoning:

- (1) The mass media image of public relations activities is influenced by preconceptions related to its “power” to influence the journalistic sphere which points to a *structural problem*. This problem is rooted in the history of public relations itself in Portugal. Among other reasons, the fact that it is a professional sector that is strongly constituted by ex-journalists brings about questions as to the appropriateness of its activities. This does not mean however that these agents (ex-journalists or not) do not exercise their press agency activities in an ethical way.
- (2) Certain authors, who are critical about public relations, interpret the symmetrical and ethical theories about public relations as “an immense distraction weapon” (McKie and Munshi, 2007: 37) about the veritable asymmetric reality of public relations: propaganda or manipulation of public opinion. In our opinion, the

defence of an ethical positioning for public relations agents must be interpreted as a “regulating ideal”. That is to say, the ideal that public relations activities can be developed respecting corporate interests and objectives but, at the same time bearing in mind public interest. This ideal is latent in the discussion about conduct codes to adopt and in the concern about the self-monitoring of public relations activities in the benefit of an ethical identity.

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