Chapter 17

Convergence, Divergence, and Narrative Integration in Public Relations and Advertising

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ABSTRACT

In traditional approaches, public relations and advertising are shown as different practices in terms of their goals and outputs. While management literature draws lines between two practices; cultural approaches assert that public relations and advertising mingle with one another. In this context, this study aims to show how management literature manifests divergence between public relations and advertising while cultural approach suggests that public relations and advertising converge in their objectives and outcomes. In this study, “co-creational perspective” of Carl H. Botan and Maureen Taylor is introduced. In this regard, the study conceptualizes the practices of public relations and advertising as “cultural intermediaries”, a term introduced in Pierre Bourdieu’s book titled “Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste.” The study argues that it is more suitable to conceptualize public relations and advertising as creative projects because such conceptualization has a potential to show narrative integration between public relations and advertising.

INTRODUCTION

The mainstream theories of strategic communication differ from the ones that challenge those traditional approaches. That is, the practice of public relations and advertising is described and categorized differently by cultural approaches that benefit from the social theories. It seems crucial to identify how the managerial and cultural literature in public relations and advertising define, categorize and locate those two practices. Under the management literature public relations is described as the management of communication and advertising is defined with its focus on the sales of the product/service and profit maximization. In contrast to the managerial literature, the cultural approaches redefine and reconceptualize public relations and advertising. According to Dağtaş (2009, p. 38) in the West and also in Turkey most
of the departments of advertising, studies focus on advertising in terms of marketing literature with its persuasive nature. Although advertising has such a dimensions to it, it is also a cultural and political text, that is, “while advertisements commercialize products/services, they refer to cultural and ideological representations and myths.” (Dağtaş, 2009, p 38). When it comes to cultural approaches, the “co-creational perspective” of Botan and Taylor seems a substantial concept. The concept assumes that the meaning of a communication text is not determined only by the organization. Rather, publics get involved in the meaning making process, too. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s concept “cultural intermediaries”, public relations and advertising become similar occupations whose expertise is about culture, economy and societal expectations. This study draws on the literature known as “socio-cultural turn” which states that “public relations is recognised as a locus of transactions that produce emergent social and cultural meanings” (Edwards & Hodges, 2011, p. 4). Those meanings are produced and reproduced by the public relations professionals/advertisers and by the publics together, which also implies “co-creational perspective” in public relations literature.

Regarded as cultural intermediaries, public relations professionals and advertisers become similar occupational group whose profession is related to creating narratives around the product/service. In this vein, public relations and advertising should not be seen as distinct professions whose boundaries are strictly drawn. To show the differences between the two approaches, the study firstly discusses the managerial approach, then the co-creational perspective. The study also regards public relations professionals and advertisers as cultural intermediaries, which implies that advertising and public relations texts are cultural texts. Those texts narrate stories in society. The fact that social, political and cultural changes are represented in advertisements strengthens the assumption that advertising texts are also “cultural and ideological texts” (Dağtaş, 2009, p. 45). Like advertising, public relations campaigns are cultural texts as well because they draw on cultural codes, changes and trends to attract people’s attention. Their being cultural texts also means that the two practices can be described as a form of narrative, through which communicators or practitioners working in creative projects narrate cultural stories to the publics in the form of advertisements or public relations campaigns.

Although public relations and advertising are described as narrations, the idea that public relations and advertising are form of narrative does not mean that those two practices are piece of literature. According to Dağtaş (2009, p. 56) advertisements include symbols or imagery; however, “they are not literary texts” because what they use as a symbol or imagery are not literary ones. Rather, advertisements are texts which are created by the sector to promote consumption and whose raison d’être is to sustain capitalism. Therefore, researchers should take into consideration the social, cultural, political and economic context in which communication texts are produced.

### TRADITIONAL DIVERGENCE OF ADVERTISING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

The management literature draws clear cut lines between the practices of advertising and public relations, both of which are categorized under the organizational communication. In other words, within the framework of management studies, there are some important crossroads at which advertising and public relations diverge. Those differences or what the academia prefers to call it, the divergence, becomes clear when the researchers list the motivations, results and nature of the mentioned practices. Therefore, the main reason why advertising and public relations are diverging from one another is about the profession’s nature. That is, the managerial perspective establishes a salient difference between advertising and public
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