Chapter 23

The Representation of Public Relations Profession and Public Relations Practitioners in the Context of Entertainment Culture in Turkish TV Series

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to explore how the public relations profession and public relations practicioners are depicted in Turkish television series between the years 2000-2010, which are the most preffered entertainment sources of the public on TV. A study is conducted using qualitative content analysis of the two Turkish TV series that had the highest ratings. It analyses the public relations practitioners' characters and occupational roles to look for positive or negative portrayals in order to understand whether these portrayals are shedding a positive or negative light upon the profession of public relations. The results of the study shows that in both of the TV series public the relations profession and public relations characters are portrayed positively in general and from a professional perspective in both of the TV series.

INTRODUCTION

According to Fred W. Friendly, television is the greatest teaching tool since the printed press. We learn about our world as we watch TV programmes because we see different places. Moreover, we also get the opportunity to observe numerous professions with which we are not familiar and don't encounter in our daily lives. Those unfamiliar areas often include jobs outside our own

experience. Trujillo and Ekdom (1987) said: "Television portrayals do not teach us about actual distributions of occupations but rather teach us about occupations that are socially valued." The choice to include particular jobs in a script or not and specific portrayals influence the views of the audience. The portrayal of public relations (PR) practitioners must certainly have an impact on whether students choose to major in public relations as it gives an idea about how the journalists

work with PR practitioners, and it may also affect how the society thinks of the profession in general (Kinsky, p. 107).

As a highly misunderstood profession due to the ever changing definitions and the evolution of the field (Public Relations Society of America, 2009), the portrayals of the public relations practitioners should be accurate and concordant with the reality of what comprises actually the activities of public relations practitioners. Historically, when it comes to popular culture, the portrayal of public relations practitioners is diverse and frequently far from accurate (Everidge, 2010, p.1)

To help understanding the degree of accuracy in portrayals of public relations practitioners, a clear picture of public relations in general should be set. Within the academic field of public relations, the most cited definition belongs to Grunig and Hunt (1984, p. 6) who state that public relations is a management function that consists of communication between an organization and that organization's publics. While definitions may help to focus on both the practice and research in a particular area, they actually don't reflect the perception of the public about a field. Popular cultural portrayals and characters represented in the movies, TV series or other mass media strongly influence how the public perceives the occupations (Everidge, 2010, p.2).

A limited number of studies were conducted to investigate the depictions of public relations and the task of practitioners in the printed and broadcast news, stories, movies and novels (Jo, 2003; Keenan, 1996; Lee, 2001; Miller, 1999; Spicer, 1993; Tavcar, 1993; Tilson, 2003). However, only a few studies have examined the portrayals of the public relations in television dramas and situation comedies. Given the fact that television provides a learning environment for most people (Yoon & Black, 2011, p. 87) and that television dramas and situation comedies are a popular and accessible form of media entertainment for the majority of people in Turkey (Celenk, 2010, p.

21), it is significant to understand the way and the context in which these programs depict the public relations and its practitioners. This is likely to provide more insight into the root of the public perceptions about the field and its professionals.

Also, since there is obviously a rise in the numbers of the public relations practitioners and an expansion in the public relations as a field; it is becoming more vital to understand how especially the media represents the profession since there are so many individuals who do not have an idea what a public relations practitioner actually practices in the field (Bowen, 2009, p. 1).

The purpose of this chapter is to determine how public relations practitioners were portrayed in two Turkish TV series which had the highest ratings at the time they were shown. To achieve this purpose, this chapter (1) reviews the literature that is relevant to the study and presents the research questions that guide the study; (2) explains the methodology utilised to conduct the research; (3) presents the results of the content analysis of the representations of the public relations practitioners portrayed in the two television series; (4) evaluates the results of the study and (5) supplies certain conclusions and offers suggestions for further research.

BACKGROUND

Television and TV Series as an Entertainment Tool

Schmidt claims that modern entertainment is a phenomenon that has occurred with the modern free time (leisure) in the 18th century and advocates that its roots are based on the distinction between the entertainment culture and the business. The main function of the entertainment is to kill time which remains after work, and amusement as well as enjoyment are two main terms that are related to entertainment. Entertainment is not only pro-

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