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THE SPIN DOCTORS OF NEWS SOURCES

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ABSTRACT - This paper examines in a historical context, with reference to concrete cases, the phenomenon of spin doctors. What is it? How does it act? What is its purpose? Where does it operate? And what are its consequences? These questions are raised in order to help identify the actions and strategies benefitting news sources, as well as the impact on journalism: the accommodation of journalists, the reduction or elimination of investigative journalism, the transference of the news to digital social networks, and the expansion of media sources. The article draws on a survey conducted with 163 news sources and journalists, on the premise that spin doctors are professional communicators, who are able to forge public opinion using processes, procedures, journalist's co-optation, and knowledge of journalism and public relations, in order to be successful in the media, or directly with the target audience.

Keywords: Journalism. News sources. Relationship between sources and journalists. *Spin doctor*.

OS SPIN DOCTORS DAS FONTES DE NOTÍCIAS

RESUMO - O artigo examina, a partir de uma contextualização histórica e de alguns casos, o crescente fenômeno do spin doctor. O que é? Como age? Qual o seu propósito? Onde atua? E quais as consequências? Apresenta essas questões para identificar as suas ações e estratégias a serviço das fontes de notícias e seus impactos no jornalismo: o comodismo dos jornalistas, a redução ou neutralização do jornalismo investigativo, o deslocamento das notícias para as redes sociais digitais, a expansão das mídias das fontes etc. Fundamenta-se ainda em uma enquete (survey) com 163 fontes de notícias e jornalistas. Parte-se do pressuposto de que os *spin doctors* são profissionais de comunicação, capazes de forjar a opinião pública utilizando-se dos processos, dos procedimentos, da cooptação de jornalistas e do saber do jornalismo e das relações públicas, para ter sucesso na mídia ou diretamente com seu público-alvo.

Palavras-chave: Jornalismo. Fontes de notícias. Relacionamento entre fontes e jornalistas. *Spin doctor*.

LOS "ASESORES DE PRENSA" (SPIN DOCTORS) DE LAS FUENTES DE NOTICIAS

RESUMEN - El artículo examina, a partir de una contextualización histórica y de algunos casos, el fenómeno creciente de los "asesores de prensa" de los políticos o spin doctors. ¿Qué son?, ¿cómo actúan?, ¿cuál es su propósito?, ¿dónde actúan? y ¿cuáles son las consecuencias de su trabajo? Se presentan estas cuestiones para identificar sus estrategias y acciones al servicio de las fuentes de noticias y su impacto en el periodismo: la actitud acomodaticia de los periodistas, la reducción o neutralización del periodismo de investigación, el desplazamiento de las noticias a las redes sociales, la expansión de los medios de las fuentes, etc. El trabajo utiliza asimismo una encuesta a 163 periodistas y fuentes de noticias. Se parte del presupuesto de que los asesores de prensa son profesionales de la comunicación capaces de manipular la opinión pública utilizando los procedimientos de la cooptación de periodistas y el conocimiento de las relaciones públicas y del periodismo, para tener éxito en los medios de comunicación o directamente con su público objeto.

Palabras clave: Periodismo. Fuentes de noticias. Relaciones entre fuentes y periodistas. Asesores de prensa (*spin doctor*).

INTRODUCTION

The expression “spin doctor” denotes someone who tries to influence the public by adopting a certain bias with regard to information presented to the public or media. It is commonplace in politics, especially during campaigns, as well as in companies facing crises, and deployed in relation to politicians, artists, sportsman and individuals involved in lawsuits and scandals. The phenomenon can induce journalists into making mistakes and usurp a press office, by manipulating statistics, engendering information, fabricating subliminal messages, distributing false releases and co-opting journalists, with the purpose of conjuring a truth that best suits their interests.

Spin means to manipulate, turn (the best angle of a ball to hit in snooker or baseball), while *doctor* is not used in the *medical* sense, but rather, to mean *forging, altering, artificial bait*. Also it is not a rock band or a massager. The expression “spin doctor” first appeared in the October 21st, 1984 issue of *The New York Times*, in an article about a TV debate between Walter Mondale and Ronald Reagan that happened during Reagan’s presidential re-election campaign. In this context, the term was used as a synonym for “expert in misrepresentation”, a person who alters the facts, characterizing skilful advisors, capable of maximizing the positives and minimizing the negatives. Initially, “to misrepresent was restricted to unethical activities that induce journalists to error”, as Sousa explains (2004, p. 328), being incorporated in the lingo of communication as the practice of manipulating public opinion. The term spin doctor was then universally adopted.

In order to carry out this study, in addition to the bibliographic review and contextualization of cases in Brazil, USA, and Britain, the authors drew on a survey, conducted online, of 163 participants from most of the Brazilian states, using a proportional number (in relation to the population) of 92 journalists, operating in different sectors, including newspapers (45%), magazines (32%), internet (16%), TV (5%), and radio (2%); working as reporters (63%), editors (39%), columnists (12%), TV producers and assignment editors (4%); from 71 news sources in the public sector (48%), service organizations (24%), industry (11%), tertiary sector (10%), and trading (7%); occupying the posts of presidents or CEOs (63%), directors (21%), and other occupations (15%).

I THE PIONEERS: LEE AND BERNAYS

The spin doctor's technique, frequently used in advertising, public relation and press offices, started with Ivy Lee and Eduard Bernays, in the beginning of the 20th century, although the expression was not then in use. Both are considered the fathers of public relations, depending on the school in question. At the time, the concentration of wealth and the monopoly of great American corporations were provoking riots and criticism against tycoons like John Rockefeller Jr. (mining), John Morgan (banking), and William Vanderbilt (railways). The American government, under pressure, devised measures to curb cartels and trusts, which forced the companies and businessmen to provide explanations for the public (WEY, 1986, p. 29-31).

According to the authors, during the rise of unbridled capitalism, dominated by "thieving barons" and "unscrupulous industries", the journalist Ivy Lee, working at newspapers like *The New York Times* and *The World*, came to the fore. In 1904, Lee and the marketing professional George Parker, created the Parker & Lee agency, adopting the slogan: "accuracy, authenticity, and interest." He defended the transparency of the organizations, proclaiming constantly that "the public must be informed." In 1906, he sent to newspapers the "Declaration of Principles" of press officers, while advising clients to recycle their organizational policies and correct wrong attitudes, to create a favourable public opinion and good will in the press. However, he was accused of underhand tactics when he offered advantages to journalists. According to Hiebert (1966), his efforts were known as "poison Ivy", because of his ability to "poison" the information, to persuade the journalists and the people, especial during times of crisis.

Also, according to these authors, the "poison" of Lee became even more effective when he started working for Rockefeller Jr., in 1914, as a consultant at Colorado Fuel & Iron Co. and "enhanced the family's image" after a riot in Colorado's coal mine, known as the Ludlow Massacre. Lee guided Rockefeller to cooperate in the investigations and "humanize the business", while using the "two-way" strategy, convincing journalists not to launch attacks and instead publish favourable information about the great capitalists.

Another pioneer involved in shaping and manipulating public opinion was Eduard Bernays (double nephew of Sigmund Freud) who, influenced by his uncle's psychology, urged organizations to influence people's subconscious, creating "unnecessary" needs, using the technique

of “engineering consent”, arguing that “conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society” hold some kind of invisible power (BERNAYS, 2004, p. 10).

During the First World War, Bernays was part of the USA’s Committee on Public Information (CPI), also known as the Creel Committee because of its chairman, the journalist George Creel. This propaganda agency urged the American people to believe that the war would “make the world safer for democracy”. Within six months, as Chomsky explains (2002, p. 11), “a pacifist population was transformed into a hysterical, warmongering population, which wanted to destroy everything German, tear the Germans limb from limb, go to war and save the world”.

Based on the techniques developed by the Creel Committee and the incorporation of columnist Walter Lipmann’s ideas, Bernays became a spokesman of communication as a tool for social manipulation. In his book *Propaganda*, first published in 1928, he reveals his opinion on how to manipulate the masses in an organized way, thus becoming “the father of spin doctoring” (TYE, 1998).

He distinguished himself by organizing an event for American Tobacco, owner of Lucky Strike cigarettes. According to Tye (1998), Bernays summoned the press, stating that a group of women’s rights protesters, the *suffragettes*, who advocated women’s suffrage, would feature in New York’s Easter Parade, in 1920, wielding the “torches of freedom”. Actually, models were hired to parade, smoking and displaying signs where the campaign slogan could be read, a reference to the Statue of Liberty, associated with the taboo of women smoking in public, “in defense of women’s emancipation and gender equality”. But his real motive was to sell cigarettes.

2 SERVING POWER

In the United Kingdom, the expression spin doctor is normally associated with the special advisers hired by the government to manage and guide relationships with journalists. Lance Price (2006), who worked at the press office at “10 Downing Street”, tells a story of a famous case about the Prime Minister Tony Blair (1997-2007) between 1998 and 2000, and the director of communication of Britain’s Labour Party, during the elections of 2001, when he wrote a controversial diary revealing the promiscuous relationship the government and the party had with the media.

Price (2006) depicts Alastair Campbell, director of Communication and Strategies for Tony Blair between 1997 and 2003, as a skilled and preposterous spin doctor, who induced Blair and his ministers into obsessively covering up the New Labour government before the public, using the media and especially the media controlled by Rupert Murdoch, who was considered an advisor and friend of Blair. Manipulations of public opinion include false information about the Kosovo War, the spread of BSE (“mad cow” disease), the resignation of the minister Peter Mandelson (Mandy) due to his homosexuality, unfounded dossiers that led to the Iraq war, among other manoeuvres.

In the United States, presidents are also advised by spin doctors. Maltese (1994) describes the plots of Herb Klein and Ron Ziegler at the press office of President Richard Nixon (1969-1974), who got caught in their own trap, the Watergate scandal. Also, The hoaxes of Gerry Rafshoon during the Gerald Ford (1974-1977) and Jimmy Carter (1977-1981) governments, are mentioned. Further, David Gergen and Larry Speakes are described as authentic spin doctors of Reagan (1981-1989), who were discharged by George Bush (1989-1993).

Just like his predecessor, Barack Obama “shamelessly uses every prerogative at his disposal to win favor with journalists”, assures Starobin (2011). Rahm Emanuel was an irrepressible spin during Obama’s first term, after which he was elected mayor of Chicago, “because he used the whole team to defend the game, from morning until midnight, via phone, email and face to face conversations”. His successor, William Daley (2011-2012), delegated to staff these manoeuvres, as did the next counsellor, Pete Rouse.

Accordingly, columnists of the website *Politico*, Jim Vandehei and Mike Allen, confirm that “Obama is a master of spin, at shaping and manipulating media coverage of himself and his White House”, using old tricks to control journalists’ access, and innovative and merciless social networks, where he has millions of followers who only praise his government, while “in the main media, he has no fans”, as Vandehei and Allen explain (2013), because he focuses on the regional media, in which he was interviewed 674 times during his first term, compared to George W. Bush’s 217 times, during the same period. Newspapers like *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, for example, didn’t interview Obama in three years (2010 to 2012).

Without putting on spin doctors’ shoes, the staff at the White House play with prestige to shape, seduce, and spin: they invite journalists on presidential trips in Air Force One – an icon of power and luxury, to

spend informal moments with the president – who gives his approval to their books and other publications. In this way, many journalists have become personal advisers of the president on polemic issues. They're called *pundits* (from Sanskrit *pandita*, “learned” person). The most famous of them is Walter Lippmann, renowned for his involvement with a whole host of presidents, from Woodrow Wilson to Lyndon Johnson. The act of soliciting advice from such individuals becomes a kind of co-optation, or a way to ease criticism, as flattering the president brings about personal prestige (STAROBIN, 2011).

In Brazil, there are also cases of spin doctors at the President's Office. Among the press officers at the Palácio do Planalto, the most immoral one, Cláudio Humberto, was Fernando Collor's secretary, from the time when he was governor of the State of Alagoas (1987), during his campaign, and up until his presidency (1990-1992). There are amusing cases involving the “filthy rich people hunter” and the impeached president, an authentic creator of factoids. “The ideas were his, but when he heard suggestions, he always improved them a lot”, affirms Humberto (SINGER *et al* 2010, p.160).

In this book, he describes Collor's visit to the Sambadrome in Rio de Janeiro in 1988, when he was governor of Alagoas and very popular because of the so called “hunt against the filthy rich”, which was the theme of four samba schools that same year. Humberto suggested that he greet the first dancers who were dressed as maharajas, explaining: “I could only imagine the pictures. He went there without any hesitation”. They left the VIP area (located at Apotheosis Square, where the parade ended) and walked in the opposite direction, to the parade's departure point; in the middle of the Sambadrome, Collor received a standing ovation from everyone present, on the way there and back”. This story featured on the front pages of the major newspapers and was a hot topic throughout the media in general. During his term, he continued the saga, flying on Brazilian Air Force jets, piloting sports cars and water bikes, running races on Sundays, among other raptures.

Another potential spin doctor is Saïd Farhat, a political counsellor, spokesman and minister of communication for General João Baptista Figueiredo. Farhat tried to transform the harsh military man who was averse to politics, into President “João”, a “people's person”, a popular figure, by using a “media operation”, including positive agendas, exclusive information and adverts, explain Singer *et al* (2010). However, the spin actions, which portrayed a president ushering in “democratic opening”, wearing bathing suits whilst lifting dumbbells, on a motorcycle,

or being carried by miners in Serra Pelada, became overwhelming for the feisty president of the time, who made comments such as: “I would rather smell horses than people”, anyone who is against the democratic opening “will be arrested and beaten by me”, If I had to live only with the minimum wage “I’d put a bullet in my head”, and in the end, “forget me”.

Importantly, the spin doctor technique goes beyond presidential houses, being present behind the scenes in different kinds of sources, from politicians involved in scandals, companies in crisis, and celebrities. One example is Ryan Holiday (2012), a media manipulator, who worked for book authors and musicians. In this sense, Bueno (2005; 2009) lists the companies that “mess up” and manipulate the concept of social responsibility and relations with the public, such as alcohol and tobacco companies that cause the deaths of millions of people and claim to be socially responsible.

3 THE INVISIBLE POWER OF THE SPIN DOCTOR

It is assumed that the spin doctor is capable of forging public opinion by using the wisdom of journalism and public relations to be successful in the media. For Luhmann (2000), public opinion is not related to personal opinion, but to an “invisible power of the visible”. It is a communication network of public memory where the media doesn’t force public involvement, but can influence the shaping of opinions, transferring as well as processing information, ultimately manipulating it, once the public are aware of and believe in the message. This is what leads to the formation of public opinion, ephemeral and mutant.

From this standpoint, therefore, the routine involves someone who opines, the opinion of a concrete and determined public, which Habermas (2003, p.109) calls the enlightened public: “the process of moulding opinion and political will in the public opinion sphere, is determined by the competence (and negotiation) of collective actors who act strategically, in order to maintain their positions of power, or reinforce themselves with such positions.” Hence, it is believed that a minority group of specialists, supposedly alert and well-informed, is capable of having significant influence on collective decisions.

Thus, “defining public opinion from the media’s point of view is not an easy task,” recognizes Charaudeau (2005, p 123), since communication vehicles are heterogeneous, though they repeat similar speeches and have the power to influence indirectly by “letting people know, think, and feel”, explains the author. However, in general, this is

not the journalist's role. Rather, they aim for productivity, to maintain successful ratings with audiences, as imposed by media organizations.

The media seeks the public's attention to sell news and their advertising spaces. Lippmann (1960) says that to support this magic formula, the media acts on behalf of the public interest, with information that meets the wishes, expectations and cultivated stereotypes. Thus, coverage is episodic, without context, and simplistic. This makes room for the actions and strategies of news sources, advised by communication professionals or spin doctors to influence the media, and highlight everything that is in the interests of the organization.

Charaudeau (2005, p. 39) believes that "communicating, informing, everything is a choice. Not only the choice of content to transmit" but also, how to influence the other. As Nilson Lage (2001) stated, the sources wish to report the positive information regarding their actions, or prevent the dissemination of an inconvenient version. The journalist, as someone who selects, decides whether the fact is news or not, in other words, whether it interests or not the target audience, viewing sources as collaborators in journalistic production. Meanwhile, aware of the procedure, the professional press office uses strategic means to gain visibility in the public sphere, legitimize organizational or personal identity, and forge a positive image, associated with the credibility and good reputation of the party the press officer represents.

From a journalistic point of view point, this is of little importance. Not even the promotional nature of information – if it is about something *spontaneous, natural*, or it is just a scheduled event, a *pseudo-event* – it should interfere in the decision of the *gatekeeper*, that is to say, the person who decides if the material will be published or not. What they need to consider is whether the fact or event is news, if it provokes or encompasses the right amount of interest in the public. This really opens the door to public relations manoeuvres, for which the media do not feel, in the least bit, responsible (LAGE, 2001, p. 69).

The spin doctor technique addresses pseudo-events, counterfeiting real events, where "facts" are deliberately planned and plotted to be on the news. These are the indirect strategies to induce the public into believing that an artificial event is a fact. For Boorstin (1992, p. 13), pseudo-events are "vivid images that cover pale reality", happening at times, locations and on days, which can be easily covered by the media. There is a promiscuous relationship between the journalist and the source, when the spin doctor forces their client to be in newspaper headlines, and the media take the bait and transform them into sensationalist news.

So, filling this gap, the spin doctor can build a “reality”, a version of the “relative truth”, and reveal it to the public. Accordingly, Bernays defends the possibility of moulding public opinion by stimulating subconscious desires to consume and build a positive image, and convince the public during crises:

We are governed, our minds moulded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of [...] In almost every act of our daily lives, whether in the sphere of politics or business, in our social conduct or our ethical thinking, we are dominated by the relatively small number of persons – a trifling fraction of our hundred and twenty million – who understand the mental processes and social patterns of the masses. It is they who pull the wires which control the public mind (BERNAYS, 2004, p. 37)

According to Jones (1996), as a controller of the public’s mind, spin doctor determines the perspective on the fact, the emphasis of the report, the way in which information or counter-information undermines the truth. The strategy they apply assumes the dissemination of journalistic information, taking into account esthetical and technical criteria, in order for purely journalistic content to be considered legitimate and believable. This can also be done by a competent press officer, without the latter being called a spin doctor. Therefore, there is a thin line between the two strategies.

4 PRESS OFFICE VS SPIN DOCTOR

The proposal that follows serves to establish an acceptable and legitimate demarcation between a professional and ethical press office that plans and executes its strategies and proactive actions, and a spin doctor, though there is a fragile boundary between the two. This analysis is strictly related to the organizations’ communication and does not address the press office during electoral campaigns, for it can be confused with political marketing. As Schmitz (2011, p. 29) explains, the “proactive source” is permanently available to journalists, supplying information about events in advance and, according to the newsworthiness criteria, aims to be one step ahead of the journalistic media to ensure notoriety and recognition, considering the continuous disclosure of their facts and interests.

Regarding relations with journalists, the proactive source establishes a lasting bond with continuous, structured and planned actions, not only for simply providing information or meeting the media’s

demands, but for building a mosaic that leads to a process of making conversations a taboo and shaping a favourable opinion from different audiences, aimed at consolidating a leading position in the market and society. This requires a press officer, a “professional in the true meaning of the word because... it is difficult and one can only succeed in the media battle if he/she is 'good at this'” (BUENO, 2005, p. 62).

The source’s primary purpose is to access the publishing world, where a positive image and reputation basis are built. “Thus, even if the agenda is not favourable, the person who maintains a transparent and consistent relationship with the media, conquers their defence space” (SCHMITZ, 2011, p. 39). An ethical and competent press office, unlike the spin doctor, constantly strives for the truth and loyalty to facts, responds quickly, and provides credible and relevant information to the journalists.

To this end, one of the main tools to inform journalists is the press release, written with all the refinements of a news item, and ready to be used. Journalists only have “to check the source, investigate the matter, find out what is behind the news, and then use it as the agenda or even publish it”, explains Lima (1985, p. 47). The author notes that this model is valuable to the media of small and medium-sized businesses that are not equipped to produce news, as well as to the “mainstream media” as an agenda or for possible application.

Therefore, the press release, “despite being a unidirectional, official, formal, vulgar communication instrument, depending on its content and sending circumstances, it can be most welcome in a newsroom” (DUARTE, 2010, p. 309), which decides if it will be used or not, in part or in full. The vehicle does not reveal to the public the origin (press release) or the author (officer), although some “journalists” claim authorship for material they did not produce. This happens because when they publish a press release, the journalists and the vehicle assume and endorse the information without infringing any copyright laws (BRASIL, 1998).

From this perspective, the purposes of news sources and the journalists are not exactly the same, though they depend on one other. Therefore, there is a confrontation between the ethics of the sources, and the deontology of the journalists, defended by the professional press officers. But some actions verge on promiscuity, like those used by Ivy Lee, who created the “dirty game. He corrupted journalism with: double-employments, bribery, favours, lunches, gifts, trips” (CHAPARRO, 2007, p. 48).

Chart 1 Professional press office vs spin doctor

	Professional and proactive press office	Spin doctor in press office
Action	Proactive. Well-targeted facts, stories and characters, to guide the audience and shun possible crises.	Reactive. Reversal of adverse events, control of the situation "with strong hands", neutralizing opposing opinions, competitors or adversaries.
Relationship with the media	Equitable relationships with editors and reporters from newspapers, magazines, radio, television and the digital media.	Distinct relations, focusing on media with the largest audience, opinion-shaping columnists and journalists. Direct contact with media editors and directors.
Type of advisee	Companies, government agencies and NGOs.	Government organizations and companies in crisis, politicians, artists, athletes and people involved in lawsuits and scandals.
Relationship with advisee	Guidelines to the advisee about their speeches and postures; proactive training (media training) for everyday routines and crises.	Influence over the client and control over their attitudes, words and postures; reactive training (media training) to manage crisis and media scandals.
Tools and routine channels	Press releases, notes, suggestions for the agenda, press room, individual interviews and conference support material (photo, video, audio).	In addition to shaping the traditional tools (as described to the left), lobbying, advocacy, public affairs.
Content	General information on the procedures and technical standards of journalism.	Specific information, based on a version of the "relative" and controversial truth. Use of the language of journalism for advertising. <i>Advertorial</i> .
Information distribution	Information sent to the media in general, for editorials, columns or (radio and TV) programs, using a targeted mailing list, at appropriate times and on appropriate days.	Material delivered to the media with the largest audience, directly to the chief editor, meeting final deadlines (days and times), to avoid contextualization.

Contact with the media	Moderate use of email, press room, digital social networks and follow-up.	Conspicuous use of mobile devices (voice and text message), email (including the journalists' private e-mail), apocryphal comments (fake) on blogs and social networks (Facebook, Twitter).
Ethics	Respect for the ethics of the media and the ethics of journalists. Follows the ethical conduct of corporate communication.	Transgression of the ethics code of the media and journalists. Unethical conduct in retaliation, expensive gifts, kickbacks, privileges, etc.
Outcome measurement	Auditing, analysing and measuring of the results of media presence periodically using several indexes.	Valuing the outcome using table taxes for advertising of the media. Uses research to control public opinion.
Professional activity	Recognized as a press officer, although prefers to introduce himself as "journalist" or PR.	Denies the activity and being a spin doctor.

Source: adaptation from Sumpter and Tankard Jr. (1994) model

5 IMPACT ON JOURNALISM

There has been a growing mobilization from news sources to intervene in journalism, in proactive fashion, as this preserves communication structures, whose professionals include experienced journalists who have worked in newsrooms and who, through their understanding of journalism routines and procedures, produce and offer ready news that is ready and ostensible, and in prompt fashion. They use "journalistic language and the public space where journalism has transformed itself, to make discursive contributions to society, via the journalistic path", notes Chaparro (2009), adding that it allows sources to "have the ability and vocation to be producers of facts and relevant comments that feed the news".

Another impact concerns the convenience of journalists, since the origins of agendas as Bueno (2009, p. 236) argues: "have been (largely) managed, thought, planned in press offices to serve companies, institutions and even the Government", that remain strongly committed to the main goal of having an agenda and spreading positively the facts to the target audience and public, making journalists passive, rather than active and gathering information.

For this reason, the decline of investigative journalism and accommodation within newsrooms has also been noted by Kucinski (2002,

p. 59), since “the journalist does not go to the sources. The sources make their interests known to the journalists so they can disclose them. An easy process”. According to our survey of 163 news sources and journalists, 89% of those interviewed believe this practice causes side effects in the media, as it pre-empts the routines and journalistic practices. Hence, it promotes the convenience of journalists (61%), who publish partially or fully press releases (88%). Coverage therefore becomes bureaucratic, less investigative, containing very similar content.

This phenomenon results in the media being guided rather than guiding, as they prefer the treat of having ready information and listening to the same sources that feature in releases. As Gilmore explains: “Moreover, in a world where there are too many journalists, and most of them are little more than stenographers, the sources establish and create the agendas” (2006, p. 79). Thus, the public cannot distinguish whether certain news comes from a story or advertising, as the techniques used by spin doctors and even the professional advisors are so engineered.

To avoid investigative journalism, sources keep their distance from journalists and media who can question them, fearing impertinent questions (85%), misrepresentation of information (69%), the selective picking out of comments and publication out of context (79%), and judgment from journalists (65%), as our survey showed after interviewing sources about the impacts of information searches by journalists. Although it is a sacred principle in journalism, objectivity is challenged by the sources, who feel threatened by the reporters.

In this respect, Francisco Sant’Anna discusses another impactful strategy, the proper media, which he calls “the journalism of sources” and that adopts the traditional journalism techniques from their own radio and TV stations, magazines and newspapers, internet sites and blogs. This “guarantees the transmission of information to the public, without the filtering of traditional press gatekeepers and, at the same time, it puts pressure on the agenda of this press” (SANT’ANNA, 2009, p. 47).

It is little wonder, therefore, that editorial spaces in the traditional media are increasingly scarce and disputed by the sources. Hence, the “journalism of sources” is also gaining ground in the digital sphere, where it is easy to produce and spread news. New media enable diffusion on social networks and the emergence of a new way to communicate with the public of a given organization. Some “communities” are not spontaneous, but are encouraged by the traditional media that promote an increase in access and provide legitimacy. In these media, “contexts

are set aside and there are no contradictions”, notes Lima (2012), noting that:

there is no preoccupation with the principle of contradictory, full right to defense, presumption of innocence, or any other rights featuring in human relationships in modern democratic societies. The principle of spectacle and publicity is allowed, harking back to the origins of journalism at the beginning of the 17th century. This is a place for celebration only. Those who don't agree [...] are disqualified, immediately.

Pilger (2013) argues that the simulacrum of journalism and communication in social networks impose “digital slavery”, the “primary means of social control, because it is voluntary, addictive and surrounded by delusions of personal freedom”. Followers, playing the role of fans, assume an unconditional defence. This reverse logic to journalism leads to liberal fascism and gives organizations and personalities a false sense of full approval of their actions.

There are also ethical questions, like when the source plants news (factoid) and distributes false press releases; or when the source only wants good press, denying access to journalists, retaliating with budget cuts and concealing facts. To dissolve these inconveniences, sources harass and co-opt journalists with touristic trips, expensive gifts, bribes, tickets, banquets, and other treats (SCHMITZ, 2011).

Another way to deceive the public is through paid reports (advertorial), a tactic adopted by spin doctors and unsuspecting press officers, while a clear separation between editorials and advertisement, is recommended. After all, “transparency and ethics are priceless, the advertorial is the worst element” of the collusion between the media and sources, and should be eradicated”, argues Bueno (2005, p. 76).

CONCLUSIONS

Spin doctors represent more than just a powerful catchphrase. Although studies and discussions are needed, there is evidence that, as an invisible power, they act as advisors to news sources, developing press offices’ actions, which go beyond the permissible, and undermine ethics by using engendered techniques of communication or counter-information, subverting the order of journalism to shape, manipulate and fool the audience.

They are professional communicators, able to transmit news in the most favourable light for sources, even if it is not the truth, inducing journalists into making mistakes. Their role is to work behind the scenes for the purposes of damage control, conceal reality, disqualify opposing

arguments, create spectacular factoids to take away attention from crises or scandals, encourage sources to avoid controversial questions and answer evasively, obstruct inquisitive journalists by using excuses and pretexts, produce perceptions, and manipulate cognitions for the media to guide the public's attitudes, in order to ease a crisis, scandal or negative fact.

Although they are difficult to identify, these practices seek the admiration and engagement of the public – advertising is not enough because is unilateral. Therefore, in journalism, spin doctors seek a place to legitimize the discourse of their clients, the news sources, because it is polyphonic and controversial,. In this way, a press office, even if competent and professional, but disconnected and desperate to be a strategist, can follow this path.

Finally, the manipulation of information by a spin doctor can be victorious if the media and public so allow. Rousseau (2012, p 115) warned in 1762 that “good and simple men are hard to fool because of their simplicity; neither baits nor refined excuses fool them in anyway”. For this to happen, a less bureaucratic and more investigative journalism is needed, influenced by different sources; an ethical and professional press office; as well as with an audience who are aware of the manoeuvres of manipulative discourses.

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