

A genealogy of public relations in the context of war

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Abstract

‘Truth’ has long been a central issue in public relations (PR) discourse. How does PR constitute truth? Governmentality theorists such as Nikolas Rose who adopted Foucault’s genealogical method have proposed that ‘technologies’ of government such as PR can be understood by mapping out historical transformations in liberalism. This paper draws on the work of Rose to discuss prominent historical accounts of the role of PR in war. It suggests that contemporary PR of advanced liberalism constitutes a truth that is shaped by expertise drawing on knowledge of fragmented public opinion markets. This marks a break from the previous truth of social liberal PR which derived more from expertise based on ‘objectivity’. No doubt there are other elements in the constitution of this truth but such an insight may provide a satisfying basis for future research on the contemporary role that PR plays in war.

Biography

Jack Roberts is currently undertaking PhD research and teaching in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Melbourne. He completed his Master of Social Science by research at RMIT University on the Australian press reporting of the Bougainville War in 2002. j.roberts2@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au