

Why do people tend to break the law in a system of democratic governance? In search of a public relations law and ethics in Sri Lanka

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When it comes to the golden age of public relations in the early mid-twentieth century in Europe, public relations consultants and institutions needed to incorporate a system of ethics to protect the human standards from the extreme use of sensational and personal matters in the media and communication. A system of media law referring to the discipline of public relations was later developed when ethics were insufficient to regulate the public relations campaign not damaging the existing social and cultural policy of the society. However, when it comes to the modern society of democratic governance, it is challenging to protect and conduct law and ethics leading to the professional standards of the practices of public relations in most capitalistic societies. Hence, the objective of this study is to explore the problems encountered in the violation of public relations law and ethics in the Sri Lankan context of democratic capitalism. This research was conducted using qualitative methods of case studies, participatory observations and textual and discourse analyses. Ten commercial advertisements produced in the Sri Lankan local media were critically analyzed using textual analysis and participatory observations leading to selected ten case studies on the advertisements. In-depth interviews were also utilized to explore these cases. Two years, from January 2013 to January 2015 was the time-frame. Data were critically and descriptively analyzed. Based on the research, this study makes the following conclusions. Protecting and conducting law and ethics in mostly a consumerist society in the capital economy could be relatively difficult, when the difference between marketing and public relations could not be properly identified. This has been mostly due to the lack of two aspects. One is the absence of a proper teaching and learning system that makes the difference between the use of marketing and the use of public relations, while public relations has also been taught at the marketing courses. And also the second aspect is insufficiency of the media literacy in the media society where there is a rapid expansion in the channels of media in Sri Lanka. Moreover, objectives of media owners are also shaped by the limited purposes of marketing and financial benefits, so that the violation of law is challengeable, when it is difficult to conduct the basic ethics in broadcasting advertisements in the local channels. Moreover, violation of law has been justified by the morals and dignity of the local politicians, in the use of media at the period of elections and their political dialogues. In a more micro level analysis, violation of ethics is the fact that affects the emergence of the insecurity of the law in the modern consumer society of the democratic capitalism. However, this study assumes the necessity of a productive teaching and learning system of morals and ethics that deeply emphasizes the relevance and significance of the conscience so that anyone can respond to others, when he/she able to account him/her.

Keywords: Public relations law and ethics, Democratic governance, Conscience, Difference between marketing and public relations, Objectives of the media owners