
YULIA KOROBKOVA. ON PRACTICE OF SPINDOCTORING IN THE FOREIGN POLICY OF RUSSIA // *The article was written for the bulletin "Russia and the Moslem World."*

Keywords: spindoctoring; reputation management; foreign policy; political technologies; public opinion; interests.

Yulia Korobkova,
2nd year Master's Degree,
Moscow State Linguistic University

Citation: Korobkova Y. On Practice of Spindoctoring in the Foreign Policy of Russia // Russia and the Moslem World, 2020, № 4 (310), P. 11–15. DOI: 10.31249/rmw/2020.04.01

Abstract. The article considers the necessity to apply spindoctoring as a modern political technology and possibility of its use as an instrument for protecting the interests of the state not only in the domestic political sphere, but also at the level of international politics as a whole. The Russian Federation may also resort to such technologies to work on topical courses of its foreign policy in order to improve its image abroad and to protect its interests.

Spindoctoring is a manipulative PR technology to change public opinion in this or other way necessary for the customer, using certain technologies and methods.

Among modern researchers, there is a belief that spindoctoring is used exclusively to protect only self-serving interests of politicians of various ranks and is a type of reputational management. Therefore, it often belongs to "dirty" technologies. Contemporary political realities, especially in the realm of world politics and international relations, allow us to consider spindoctoring as an effective technology for protecting interests and reputation of the state itself.

There are a number of issues in Russian foreign policy that need to be worked out by political consultants in order to protect

Russia from attacks by foreign politicians and the media and improve the image of Russia in the eyes of the world community. Today they are:

- Gas “wars” with Ukraine and the Republic of Belarus
- Formation of union state with Belarus
- Annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation
- Doping scandal in international sports
- Salisbury incident
- Russia’s participation in the Syrian war
- Construction of Nord Stream 2.

American PR specialist Harold Burson said, that first, customers told us: “Here is our message. Go, deliver it.” Then they began to ask: “What should our message be?” Now: “What should we do?”¹ The work of political consultants was transformed into something more than news management. Today, political public relations consultants work both ways: they tell the customer what he must do to appeal to the public, and the public what it should think about the customer. Therefore, it is permissible for political consultants to advise entire states not only how to get their message across to the people of another country, but also what should be done to achieve the desired result, because no political technology can radically change someone’s opinion to the opposite side.

Today, political public relations consultants work both ways: they tell the customer what he must do to appeal to the public, and the public what to think about the customer. Therefore, it is permissible for political advisers to advise entire states not only how to convey their message to the people of another country, but also what needs to be done to achieve the desired result, because no political technology can change someone’s opinion in a radically opposite direction.

One of the most important areas of foreign policy are Russia’s closest neighbors – Ukraine and Belarus. The unquestionable advantage of the situation is the commonality of the language, the common socio-cultural space, which simplifies

the work of political technologists. As for the audiences of more distant states, information is already transmitted to them indirectly, that is, not through information from acquaintances or collapses, but through the media with translation and commentary. A tangible downside to working with Ukraine and Belarus is the internal disunity of the audiences of these countries: the so-called “pro-Western” and “pro-Eastern” groups have polar views on the past and future of their country, on their place in the political arena and on Russia as their neighbor. Even the internal elites cannot unify these groups, so Russia has a difficult task – to find a common denominator in order to turn the opinion of the entire people of another country in its direction. In this case, it is necessary to strengthen influence on the media of both countries, work with political parties, leaders of public opinion. The holding of various cultural, entertainment and cultural and educational events is also a good initiative. The holding of the World Cup in 2018 changed the attitude of foreigners towards Russia, since they saw with their own eyes what was happening inside our country and how people live in it, and now for foreigners who visited Russia, hostile media will not be able to change this image in the opposite direction. Such large-scale, expensive events are important for increasing the positive public in different parts of the world.

Public relations specialists agree that not only the media influence public opinion, but also the public opinion has an impact on the information presented by the media. Obviously, the opinion of the Russian and foreign audiences varies on all the above listed conflict affairs. Therefore, it is necessary to take into account the local specifics of the audience, as the public perceives everything that happens through the prism of their own culture. It is also obvious that stating of direct errors of the opposite side causes the perverse effect among the audience and desire to support and protect their side. Therefore, it is necessary to refrain from direct accusations towards the opponent. On the other hand, in case of accusations towards oneself, it is appropriate to

use spindoctoring technology. For example, Russia's argument about the Salisbury incident is based on the UK's accusation of the lack of evidence and information on the supposed perpetrators of the poisoning.² In this case, it is more appropriate to use the "spin-control" technology, when the press office often, but briefly and distantly, presents the newly discovered facts of the investigation, without adding comments, excuses and accusations. The foreign press will have to put this information on the front pages of newspapers, and the rest of the work will be done by another group of specialists who should draw attention to something "taking away attention," for example, another large-scale event.

The use of spindoctoring is also beneficial for the customer in that suppressing the situation generates rumors and various interpretations from the audience, and spindoctoring offers a made-up scenario and explanations, which helps to direct public opinion to the right way. Therefore, it is important to provide the public with a large amount of convenient information on a particular issue. These can be documentaries, investigative films, television programs, analytical articles, statements of politicians and comments of opinion leaders. For example, in conflict situations, president of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko tries to interpret events in simple phrase, that is commented by the Russian side as a "manifestation of emotionality."³ In layman's terms, especially from the Belarusian side, the direct message of President Lukashenko is much more understandable than the covert message of the press secretary of Peskov. Simple statements of the top officials instantly spread through the media and clearly reach an average listener, so it is advisable for the Russian side to use the same "medicine." In the case of an English-speaking audience accustomed to "prime standards" of the media, it is appropriate to publish large analytical articles, detailed investigative films, high-quality and interesting news stories, as they will be popular with the audience.

Conclusions. Among the foreign policy interests of Russia, peaceful coexistence with other countries and the maintenance of friendly relations are the most important. However, to achieve this goal, it is necessary to assert yourself and your friendly intentions in understandable ways for various audiences. Current conditions create the necessity to use various methods and technologies to build a positive image in the eyes of a foreign public, otherwise this threatens misunderstanding of Russia as a nation, further hate campaign in the media and deterioration of relations with other countries, which contradicts the interests of the Russian Federation.

References

1. Mazzoleni G., Schulz W. "Mediatization" of Politics: A Challenge for Democracy? Political Communication, 1999, Vol. 16, № 3, P. 247–262.
2. "Zakharova about declaration of Bristow: than what happened in Salisbury" / RT in Russian // 19.10.2018 [Electronic recourse]. – Access mode: <https://russian.rt.com/world/news/565658-zaharova-britaniya-otkaz-solsberi>
3. "Peskov: the dialog with Belarus will be kept going, in spite of emotional replies of Lukashenko" / TACC // 17.02.2020 [Electronic recourse]. – Access mode: <https://tass.ru/politika/7777283>

2020.04.002. ELENA DMITRIEVA. ISLAMIC FINANCIAL SYSTEM IN THE POST-SOVIET SPACE. CONDENSED ABSTRACT.

Keywords: Islamic financial system, Islamic banking, post-Soviet space, alternative banking system.

Elena Dmitrieva,
Senior Research Associate,
INION RAN

1. Sharipov Sh.S. Issues of Islamic Banking System Formation on the Example of the States of Post-Soviet States* // *Vestnik Universiteta*. 2018. № 9. P. 147–151.