

## **Strategic Truth-Telling in the Age of Disinformation**

In the constantly changing media environment, the relationship between public relations and fake news has grown as a significant area of concern for communication professionals. Modern social media platforms have now increased the speed and reach of false information, putting brands and organizations to face larger risks to their reputation and credibility. Fake news, fabricated or misleading information that has been disguised as legitimate journalism, creates not only a threat to the public's understanding but also challenges traditional PR strategies that rely on factual persuasion and an established trust. As the public grows more skeptical and polarized, public relations professionals have to go beyond simple fact-checking and must adapt their strategies to manage, counter, and reduce the efforts of false news.

In "Fake-News Network Model: A Conceptual Framework for Strategic Communication to Deal with Fake News," Ali (2022) gives a detailed analysis of how a fake-news item related to Nike spread on Twitter and how audiences responded. Using confirmation bias as a theoretical framework, Ali shows how people's preexisting beliefs that have been influenced by political affiliation and social context, have the ability to shape their reaction towards fake news. The article proposes an illustration of a "Fake-News Network Model," a structure that explains how fake news operates together involving context, perception, opinion leaders, and cognitive biases. This "Fake-News Network Model" is able to serve as both a tool for academic analysis and a practical guide for communication professionals to anticipate, understand, and respond to fake news crises.

Jahng, Lee, and Rochadiat (2020), in their article "Public relations practitioners' management of fake news: Exploring key elements and acts of information authentication," provides a study based on thematic analysis of responses from 206 U.S. PR practitioners, and

identifies how practitioners understand and address fake news. Two main elements define fake news for them, deceptive motivations to mislead or harm reputations and misleading content such as exaggerated or emotional storytelling. To manage fake news, the authors noted that PR professionals rely on cross-verification through multiple news sources and crowdsourcing within their networks. PR professionals also try to differentiate organizational messages from fake news by adhering to ethical standards, controlling message spreading, and avoiding politically charged content. The authors frame fake news as an organizational issue that requires proactive issues management, a call for better monitoring, education, and ethical guidance within the PR profession.

In "Brand Management in the Era of Fake News: Narrative Response as a Strategy to Insulate Brand Value" Mills and Robson (2020), the authors argue that traditional brand crisis strategies such as fact-based rebuttals or discrediting sources, are insufficient in the "post-fact" era of fake news. They argue that the power of fake news does not stem from factual credibility but because of its emotional connections and viral spread where "plausible deniability is sufficient". To combat this, the authors propose that "brand storytelling" is a more effective strategy. This can involve creating emotionally engaging and authentic narratives to counteract fake news. Key components include using familiar narrative elements emphasizing emotional reactions, and establishing authenticity to create trust. The authors emphasize the need for brands to strategically control their narrative in a way that aligns emotionally with their audiences as well as reinforcing their credibility.

The three articles have complementary but yet distinctive perspectives on fake news, all ultimately defining it as intentionally deceptive, emotionally charged content that undermines truth and has the ability to harm reputations. Mills and Robson (2020) frame fake news as a

branding threat that is best countered through emotionally filled storytelling that matches the nature of disinformation. Ali (2022) examines fake news through the lens of confirmation bias, offering the “Fake-News Network Model” to explain how context, identity, and opinion shape belief systems and social discussion. In addition, Jahng et al. (2020) views fake news as a strategic issue in public relations, emphasizing the importance of verification, ethical standards, and being in control of the organizational narrative to avoid crisis. Moreover, a common theme across all three include the emotional and cognitive power of fake news, the lack of traditional fact-based responses, and the dire need for proactive, strategic communication. While Mills and Robson advocate for narrative strategies, Ali emphasises cognitive analysis, and Jahng et al. focuses on professional integrity and issues management. Despite their differences, all authors agree that the urgency of advancing communication practices to address the challenges created by fake news.

Reading these three articles has deepened my understanding of the complexity and importance around fake news in the communications field. I had previously viewed fake news as a problem of misinformation, but after reading these articles it has opened my eyes to how it also has the ability to be a psychological, emotional, and strategic issue. What stood out to me the most is Mohammad Ali’s use of confirmation bias to explain how people are not just misled by fake news, but they often want to believe it. Overall, I now see fake news as not only a simple crisis, but as a complex challenge that requires creativity and strategic thinking to address effectively.

## References

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