



Arlington
Research



Arlington Research Study:
the fake news phenomenon

The rise of fake news

There is no question that the news landscape has altered beyond all recognition in the past few years. Dwindling print sales and a heightened appetite for news on the go has changed the way we disseminate and digest news.

This shift has primarily been driven by the rise of social media and the ability to access information from anywhere, at any time, via smart-phones and tablets. According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017, more than four in ten (41%) people in the UK get their news through social media and 54% prefer to discover news through algorithms rather than editors or journalists. This effect is even more apparent for those who mainly use smart-phones (58%) and those aged under 35 (64%).

But it's the advent and momentum behind "fake news" over the past 12 months that has made all the headlines, adding a new dimension into the media mix. Whilst you might think that these types of stories only affect celebrities, high profile politicians or household brands, the widespread nature of fake news has had a detrimental effect on the way people react to all news stories – and every company can be caught out.

Every story has the potential to be tarnished with the fake news brush, with trust levels among consumers taking a hit and harming brand reputation.

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How do you take your news? With a large dose of scepticism and a pinch of salt

Surely most of us would be able to spot a fake story, right? Wrong. As computer algorithms have become more advanced and the people behind them have become more adept at manipulating social media, fake news has become increasingly difficult to differentiate from the truth.

The BBC suggests that there are two types of fake news: "Firstly, false stories that are deliberately published or sent around, in order to make people believe something untrue or to get lots of people to visit a website. Secondly, stories that may have some truth to them, but are not completely accurate. This is because the people writing them don't check all of the facts before publishing the story, or they might exaggerate some of it."

There have been some very high-profile examples of fake news that have made waves in recent years. For example, in 2016 a site called wtoe 5 News published a story with the headline "Pope Francis shocks world, endorses Donald Trump for president," which went on to generate over 960,000 Facebook engagements.

And the trend continued in the UK last year, with reams of fake and inaccurate reports generating widespread attention on social media, related to incidents such as the Westminster and London Bridge terror attacks and the fire at Grenfell Tower.

So, how do we determine fact from fiction? Well, a third (36%) of UK adults we spoke to consider any story without a proof point to be fake news. This worrying statistic can be attributed to the fact that only a quarter (26%) of consumers trust the media, a figure which falls to just 22% for the over 55s.

It is therefore no surprise that fake news is becoming a real worry for people – with 46% of adults agreeing. How can they be sure that what they are reading is accurate? For a third (33%), it's the use of statistics that gives a story credibility – but it isn't feasible or realistic to back every story up with statistics, making the use of robust research only part of the answer.



Fake news: Finding the facts

Amid the vast amounts of news stories and snippets we consume, fake news is a real concern for many of us, clouding our judgement about the validity of everything we read.

To find out to what extent, by interviewing over 2000 UK consumers about their attitudes towards fake news. Their responses are outlined in the following report¹.

Taking a stand with stories that stick

Strong stats and stories with staying power, can however be the saving grace, elevating the truth from the lies and helping your stories stand out from the daily deluge of content facing consumers today.

For example, 37% of adults say they remember stories more easily than information (rising to 45% of 18–24 year olds) and 31% are more likely to buy from a brand which uses a good story in its advertising or news.

Furthermore, only 19% of UK adults agree that bad news is more interesting than good news and 29% of adults agree that a story without drama is dull, highlighting the importance of creating engaging narratives.

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The viral effect – from cats to CEOs

The challenge for businesses is that, in the ever-changing world of social media, viral posts that people can quickly digest and share while on the move now demand a huge amount of consumer attention.

Our research found that:

- 32% get most of their news from social media
- 53% rarely buy a daily newspaper
- 57% read the news every day (63% of women vs. 51% of men)
- 40% of UK share a news story online if they find it interesting

In light of this shifting media landscape and with sceptics abundant, the key for businesses and brands is to create relevant, compelling stories that cut through the fake dross and engage your target audience.

This is easier said than done but, through tried and tested methods, we've put together a few top tips to help lift your news above the noise:

- **Build proof into your story.** With trust in the media low, anything you disseminate to the press needs to be robust and reliable. Reputable stats build trust in the story (and brand).
- **Don't only focus on the dailies.** Print newspapers still have large circulations, but targeting the broadsheets and free daily papers might not always be the best audience when trying raise your brand above the noise.
- **Make it shareable.** It's not just videos of cats or the latest celebrity gossip that go viral. If the story sticks, it will get shared. Even CEOs can become social media sensations.
- **Using drama doesn't need to be over the top.** Despite how it sounds, adding an element of drama doesn't diminish a story. It can in fact enhance it and take the content from interesting to engaging.



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*A minimum of 2000 interviews were conducted with consumers in the UK and Northern Ireland (increasing to 2852 interviews for some questions), using an online methodology amongst a nationally representative sample. All respondents were aged 18 and over. Quotas were applied for gender, age of respondent and the region in which they reside to ensure that the sample was nationally representative.