

The Top Term Media Pros Should Avoid



Karen Maserjian Shan, Account Manager, [Impact PR & Communications](#)

So, who in the media likes the expression ‘fake news’? Anyone?

The phrase came about to discredit news stories that reveal negative facts about a specific person/organization/business. But of course, just because news is negative, doesn’t mean it isn’t true. And calling a story fake news doesn’t mean the piece isn’t genuine. Facts presented in news stories are facts, whether they’re negative, positive or neutral. Telling those facts, is what ethical journalism is about.

It could be argued, then, that the media and other communicators that use the phrase [‘fake news’](#) in any manner—except to report that someone else used it to discredit a published news story—perpetuate the idea that outlets are reporting news that isn’t true. Certainly, using a term increases its presence, whether in conversation or publication. Even when used as a trendy catch-all for ideas, thoughts or concepts that aren’t true, spouting the phrase is short-sighted. It’s not simply a trendy or fun way to join the conversation or engage people. It’s a derogatory one. Regardless of how it’s expressed, the more often the phrase is said, printed or posted, the more often it’s heard and the undercurrent of its original meaning, strengthened.

Better, would be to avoid using the term, altogether. Better, would be to continue to focus on facts.

While ethical journalism and communications are undermined by the phrase, they're not the only ones. Perhaps worse, is that society also suffers when a disparaging phrase is used to belittle its trusted news sources (whether directly or indirectly), because it breeds an environment of distrust that all too often leeches into other areas of people's lives and their communities.

As for me, I don't use the phrase 'fake news'. I don't even use the word 'fake' anymore. It's become too closely aligned with the word 'news'. Think about it. When a headline, caption, sentence or post declares: Fake [*something*], what subliminal message creeps through?

Yet being informed is important. Without trusted news sources, how can a society's members learn about local happenings, national events or global occurrences? How can people, businesses and organizations be held accountable for their deeds—good or bad—when no one reads or hears about them? When a trendy phrase, like 'fake news', instills even a bit doubt as to whether reported news is true or manages to soften the story's edge, however fact-packed the piece is, the incident suddenly becomes less serious or relevant or remarkable than it is, thereby stalling appropriate actions to the reported news.

Legitimate news coverage and communications matter. That's why supporting them is important and why rejecting harmful phrases like 'fake news' is imperative.

The media, communicators and public, in general, need to be mindful of which of-the-minute lingo they adopt. After all, how do you want to be heard? What do you want your voice to support?

About the Author: Karen Maserjian Shan is an account manager at Impact PR & Communications, Ltd. (www.prwithimpact.com), a certified Women Business Enterprise (WBE) and award-winning public relations firm based in New York's Hudson Valley. Shan can be reached at (845) 462-4979 or karen@prwithimpact.com.