

When authenticity does not matter: The indirect influence of news tagged as fake on the brand image

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## **Abstract**

From US Presidential Election to COVID-19, fake news has caused a tremendous impact on public opinion. While most fake news studies concern the direct and political implications, this research unfolds the indirect influence of fake news on consumers, particularly when the news is aligned with preexisting opinions. We argue that consumers tend to suppress fake news warnings' influence on themselves when evaluating a focal brand mentioned in the news, but they are less able to suppress this influence when evaluating competitor brands (Study 1 & 2). The mechanism behind this indirect influence should be self-defense, a tendency to protect one's self-defining values such as invulnerability to fake news. We also identify the type of consumers who are more susceptible to fake news. Those people who are less likely to differentiate themselves from others in being vulnerable to digital messages are more influenced by fake news (Study2).

**Keywords:** *fake news; indirect persuasion; third-person effect*

**Track:** Digital Marketing & Social Media