

Identifying (Mis/Dis)Information Skills: The Need for Educating and Training a Holistic PR Professional

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ABSTRACT

In the digital age, public relations professionals play a vital role in managing information, particularly (mis/dis)information. Understanding the ethical implications and resources needed to navigate (mis/dis)information is crucial. This study explores PR professionals' perceptions of ethical education and the skills and resources required to address (mis/dis)information. In-depth interviews with professionals reveal insights for better preparing the next generation of PR professionals to navigate the post-truth era effectively. These findings shed light on the multifaceted skill set needed by PR professionals and the essential role of both informal and formal resources in preparing them to navigate (mis/dis)information effectively. Recommendations for education emphasize experiential learning, ethics-focused content, and readily available online resources.

Keywords: public relations ethics, disinformation, misinformation, public relations education

In an era characterized by the rapid dissemination of information through digital channels, the role of public relations (PR) professionals has evolved into a critical force in shaping public discussion and discourse (Heath, 2000). The digital landscape offers unparalleled engagement and information exchange opportunities, yet it also presents a daunting challenge – the pervasive presence of (mis/dis)information. As PR professionals find themselves at the forefront of managing and mediating information flows, it has become paramount to understand and effectively address ethical dilemmas, particularly those surrounding (mis/dis) information.

Misinformation, defined as inaccurate information that may not necessarily be intentionally falsified but diverges from expert judgments or empirical evidence (Vraga & Bode, 2020), coexists with disinformation, which comprises deliberately inaccurate information designed for persuasion and intentional dissemination (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). The line between misinformation and disinformation blurs at the point where intent intersects with information manipulation. Understanding this distinction is pivotal to the PR professional's effective management of the information landscape. In addition, understanding (mis/dis)information from an ethical standpoint is vital in public relations because it enables practitioners to discern between unintentional errors and deliberate attempts to deceive the public (Edwards, 2020). This distinction informs responsible decision-making and helps PR professionals uphold ethical standards, maintaining the credibility and trust essential for effective communication and stakeholder relationship-building.

Ethical considerations are key to the practice of public relations, where practitioners often act as intermediaries between organizations and the public, making decisions that can profoundly impact society (Heath, 2000). Public relations professionals wield considerable influence in shaping narratives and disseminating information, making ethical

considerations essential to maintain the integrity and credibility of the profession. Educators have employed various pedagogical approaches to instill ethical values and principles in future PR professionals. These include incorporating ethical theories and case studies into curricula, encouraging critical thinking about ethical dilemmas, emphasizing industry-specific codes of ethics, and providing opportunities for practical application and discussion (Del Rosso et al., 2020). Additionally, it is important to adapt teaching methods to address evolving challenges, such as the management of (mis/dis)information in the digital age (Krishna et al., 2020). Continuously exploring and refining ethical instruction can equip students and professionals with the knowledge and skills needed to act effectively in challenging situations..

This manuscript delves into the perspectives and experiences of PR professionals to explore how they perceive the coverage of ethical issues, particularly in dealing with (mis/dis)information. Furthermore, it seeks to identify the essential skills necessary for navigating this complex terrain and the resources that facilitate ongoing professional development in an age where (mis/dis)information proliferates. Krishna et al. (2020) highlighted the need for future public relations professionals “to communicate effectively in today’s environment of disinformation” (p. 51). Although this need has been emphasized, research has not examined what core skills are necessary. As such, the current research endeavor aims to better understand how public relations educators, both in the classroom and in continuing education, can help professionals succeed in this climate of false truths. To do so, in-depth interviews were conducted with public relations professionals to uncover the nuances of PR education and training in the context of (mis/dis)information. This paper offers insights that work to empower professionals and educators to confront the difficulties of the post-truth era more adeptly.

Literature Review

Defining Deception-based Tactics Within Public Relations

Delving into the ethical landscape of public relations unveils a historical backdrop characterized by a spectrum of (mis/dis)information tactics, including propaganda, fake news, and astroturfing (e.g., Curtin & Gaither, 2005; L'Etang, 1998; Tandoc et al., 2018). Before the formalization of public relations as a profession, terms like “public relations” and “propaganda” were often used interchangeably. Before the formalization of public relations as a profession, terms like “public relations” and “propaganda” were often used interchangeably. The founding of the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) in the United Kingdom in 1948 was a pivotal moment in the evolution of public relations, signaling a shift towards ethical practices and professional standards (L'Etang, 1998). While the profession has evolved, ethical lapses persist, necessitating an exploration of the deceptive strategies employed and their implications (Fawkes, 2012).

The term “fake news” gained prominence during the 2016 U.S. presidential election but had been part of media discussions for some time (Tandoc et al., 2018). Scholars define fake news as “intentionally and verifiably false news articles that have the potential to mislead readers” (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 213). What sets fake news apart in public relations is often its association with financial gain, as PR professionals may resort to deceptive practices to insert persuasive messaging into news media. Another disinformation tactic is astroturfing, which often emerges from unethical PR campaigns where the origin and intent of the message are deliberately concealed to hide the identities of the backers (e.g., Boman & Schneider, 2021; Zerback et al., 2021). What distinguishes astroturfing from ethical PR tactics like grassroots campaigns is its underlying motive: it creates a false impression of public support or opposition, serving a specific agenda (Farkas, 2018).

Astroturfing encompasses actions such as company-employed bloggers posting seemingly unbiased product reviews, pay-for-play arrangements, and advertisements redirecting to corporate-generated content.

Strategies Used to Combat False Truths

Communication experts employ a multifaceted approach to combat (mis/dis)information, utilizing proactive strategies like inoculation and supportive messaging, reactive responses, and media literacy (Compton et al., 2021; Jang & Kim, 2018; van der Linden, 2022; Zerback et al., 2021). For example, inoculation preempts false information by providing accurate facts, enhancing critical thinking across diverse fields including public health (see Basol et al., 2021; Richards & Banas, 2018; van der Linden et al., 2020), politics (see An & Pfau, 2004; Ivanov et al., 2018), and science (see Compton et al., 2021; Roozenbeek et al., 2022). Additionally, using supportive messaging by building trust through transparent and credible information, is crucial across various industries where trust in institutions and media is eroding (McGuire, 1961; Wan & Pfau, 2004). Through consistent delivery of these messages, communication professionals can contribute to a more informed and discerning public, making it challenging for (mis/dis)information to gain traction (Boman & Schneider, 2021).

Reactive, swift responses, often in the form of debunking, are essential when (mis/dis)information surfaces, correcting inaccuracies and reinforcing trust in reliable sources (Y. Kim & Lim, 2023). Moreover, media literacy programs, integral to PR efforts, educate the public on evaluating information sources and recognizing propaganda techniques, empowering individuals across industries to navigate the information landscape effectively (Fullerton et al., 2020). The integration of proactive and reactive messaging with media literacy initiatives empowers professionals in various industries to combat (mis/dis)information, fostering an informed and discerning society.

Guiding these strategies within the industry are personal and professional ethics, acting as a compass for public relations professionals in their mission to address (mis/dis)information.

Using Ethics to Navigate False Truths

Ethics plays a fundamental role in shaping the conduct of public relations professionals, and should serve as a guiding compass in their interactions and decision-making processes (Place, 2015). This significance is particularly heightened in the context of (mis/dis)information, where the potential consequences for public perception and trust are substantial. In a landscape where false information can quickly spread through various channels, adhering to ethical principles becomes a crucial safeguard against the erosion of trust (Fawkes, 2012). Professionals who prioritize ethical decision-making not only contribute to the overall credibility of the field but also actively work towards fostering a transparent and trustworthy communication environment amid the challenges posed by false information (Fawkes, 2012).

Ethical decision-making is defined as rational choices between good and bad, justifiable or unjustifiable actions (Patterson & Wilkins, 2005). To help guide this process, public relations scholars have integrated moral philosophy frameworks, such as business ethics (Rossi et al., 2021), ethics of leadership (Lee & Cheng, 2012), virtue ethics (Seeger & Ulmer, 2001), ethics of justice (Simola, 2003), and ethics of care (Lemon & Boman, 2022). Each framework provides a lens to determine appropriate behaviors and actions. For example, business ethics focuses on the impact of intentional organizational behaviors on publics (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). While ethical dimensions provide valuable guidance, practical applications often rely on established codes within the field of public relations. These codes not only encapsulate the broader ethical principles but also serve as practical tools for professionals to navigate the intricate landscape of ethical decision-making.

Code of Ethics

Codes of ethics are a routine way for professional organizations to communicate key principles for practitioners to use in decision-making. Within the field of public relations, not only do codes of ethics aid in establishing standards to aid in decision making, they can also serve as reference to balance the sometimes conflicting needs and duties of serving the public and clients (Schauster & Neill, 2017). These ethical guidelines underscore the importance of truth, accuracy, and transparency in all public relations endeavors (PRSA, n.d.).

In a review of 45 codes of ethics representing professional public relations associations in 107 countries, Kim and Ki (2014) observed that within public relations, codes of ethics signify professionalism and efforts to comply with ethical standards. As Bowen (2007) argued, these codes “reflect the current state of ethics in the field” (p. 239). For this reason, we turn our attention to codes of ethics presented by major public relations education associations and industry groups to understand their relevance and applicability to the emergence of (mis/dis)information.

Higher Education Resources

In the higher education context, resources from the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) and the Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) offer general ethical guidance to educators. These organizations provide insight into expectations for educators who are teaching students how to approach and respond to misinformation and disinformation. The AEJMC Code of Ethics (2005), which the organization adapted from a code produced by the National Education Association (NEA), is primarily concerned with educators’ professional comportment in the classroom and as members of academic communities; its explicit references to ethical behavior appear under the principles of minimizing harm and providing benefits to students and colleagues. CPRE addresses ethical issues in a

2023 report coinciding with the commission's 50th anniversary (Toth & Bourland, 2023). This report includes ethics among seven key areas for which the commission offers recommendations under the theme of navigating change. The CPRE report follows updated recommendations issued by the commission's ethics committee the previous year (Bortree, 2022). The 2022 recommendations highlight themes including navigating misinformation in crisis and disaster communication, critical thinking and ethical decision-making, and courage and confidence in addressing ethical issues. The committee called for greater urgency for these concerns within course content in response to issues that emerged since its previous report in 2018-2019.

Professional Resources

Ethical codes presented by leading industry organizations seemingly address issues of (mis/dis)information implicitly. For example, industry professionals may extrapolate a sense of their obligations regarding (mis/dis)information from the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) Code of Ethics. The code addresses (mis/dis)information indirectly through its emphasis on the professional values of advocacy, which identifies a responsibility to facilitate "informed public debate;" honesty, which holds members of the profession to "accuracy and truth;" and loyalty, which includes "obligation to the public interest" (PRSA, n.d.). Interestingly, guidelines under the code's six provisions of conduct are prefaced with statements of intent, instilling a telos toward ethical decision-making (and presumably, away from (mis/dis)information) applicable to specific circumstances or dilemmas. In a similar vein, the professional charter of the Public Relations and Communication Association (PRCA) takes a similarly expansive approach toward (mis/dis) information. For example, the 2019 update of the charter charges members with a "positive duty" toward ethical standards, requiring members not to "disseminate false or misleading information knowingly or recklessly" and

“use proper care to avoid doing so inadvertently” (Public Relations and Communication Association, 2016).

In essence, public relations professionals, akin to the codes of ethics of their counterparts in advertising (American Advertising Federation), journalism (Society of Professional Journalists), and marketing (American Marketing Association), are called to uphold ethical principles outlined in industry-specific codes focused on being transparent and honest while not always directly mentioning the topic of (mis/dis)information.

Research Question

This research endeavored to explore the perspectives and experiences of public relations professionals, aiming to shed light on the coverage of ethical issues within educational programs, with a particular focus on addressing (mis/dis)information. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, PR professionals play a pivotal role in navigating the complexities of information dissemination. The research seeks to identify the skills essential for PR professionals to effectively manage (mis/dis)information and the resources that facilitate ongoing professional development and education in this dynamic environment. Thus, this study asked the following research question:

RQ: How are PR professionals learning about and preparing for situations that involve (mis/dis)information?

Method

Due to the type of research question that was asked, qualitative methods were chosen to address the lines of inquiry. Qualitative methods reveal how people make meaning of their lived experiences and are useful when phenomena have undiscovered insights or theory development remains at a nascent stage (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, this paper relied on in-depth interviews to capture public relations professionals' perceptions of how they learn about and prepare for (mis/dis)information..

Researcher Positionality Statement

Before outlining the method steps, it is important to provide the positionality of the research team. This helps contextualize our study, so that the reader understands how our lived experiences contributed to data collection and analysis. We are a research team based at a large southeastern university. Collectively, we have 26 years of industry experience in agencies and consultancies, non-profits, and higher education. In addition, we have a total of 34 years as educators at small, regional universities and large, flagship campuses. As insiders to both the practice of public relations and educating future professionals, these experiences shape how we see the world and how we approached this project, including the conversations with our participants.

Sampling Approach

The sampling procedures for this study took a purposive approach. Purposive sampling is useful in recruiting participants who have robust experiences with the phenomenon under investigation and can share narratives related to those experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These “information-rich cases” provide the researcher with a sample that shares detailed and valuable insights to help answer the research question (p. 96). The purposive sample for this study included public relations professionals who had experience with (mis/dis)information.

In addition to purposive sampling, criterion-based sampling was used. To be included in the study, participants needed to be public relations professionals located in the U.S. and members of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). The established criteria ensured that the sample had knowledge of PRSA’s code of ethics, experiences with (mis/dis)information, and awareness of higher education practices in the U.S. Recruitment concluded once saturation was reached, which was when no new insights were shared during the interviews. Specifically, once the participants repeatedly shared similar information and information

redundancy was present during the final few interviews, the research team felt comfortable concluding data collection.

The final sample included 16 professionals, three men and 13 women, who practiced public relations in the U.S. The goal of the sample was to achieve maximum variation in perspectives and experiences, which enables the transferability of the study's findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participant tenure ranged from nine months to eight years with their current employers. Many of the participants worked for public relations agencies (n=10), while others worked freelance (n=1), in-house (n=1), for non-profit organizations (n=1), and for media companies (n=3). Many of the agencies in which the participants worked for are well-known, global organizations. To balance these perspectives, we sought to include those who work in-house or for specialized, boutique firms. Participants were also located across the U.S., residing in New York, Texas, Iowa, Georgia, Hawaii, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Kentucky, Tennessee, and California. Positions of the participants included account supervisor, director, account executive, manager, consultant, vice president, marketing director, and senior consultant. The sample demographics illustrate that maximum variation was achieved.

Data Collection Approach

To answer the research question, this study relied on in-depth interviews. The interview is an ideal data collection tool to allow participants to share their opinions, perceptions and lived experiences (McCracken, 1988). The semi-structured interview allowed the researchers to capture the meaning associated with the lived experiences of public relations professionals to arrive at insights related to the skills and resources needed to navigate (mis/dis)information.

To begin, participants were asked to fill out and sign an IRB-approved informed consent, which ensured they were willing to be audio recorded. All participants confirmed they were comfortable being audio

recorded. Once confirmed, interviews were scheduled at a date and time that was most convenient for the participants. Next, interviews were conducted using the Zoom platform, where the audio record function was used to capture the conversation. When the interviews were finished, the audio component of the interview was uploaded to a password-protected, cloud-based server. The interviews ranged from 27 to 67 minutes; the average interview was 46 minutes. The 736 minutes or over 12 hours of data resulted in 177 single-spaced transcript pages. Four research assistants transcribed the audio recordings after signing an IRB-approved confidentiality form.

In terms of the interviews, the conversation started broadly and then transitioned to more specific questions. Throughout, prompts and probes were used to encourage greater details in participant responses. All interviews began with building rapport, which helped make the participants feel more comfortable in sharing their thoughts and experiences. Next, participants were asked to share their professional background, where they currently work, and for how long. Specific questions related to skills and training to handle (mis/dis)information were asked next. For example, participants were asked: Do you see a clear link between your role within PR and the issue of limiting (mis/dis)information? Please explain. How were you informed about this link (i.e., boss, previous education)? How prepared do you think recent public relations graduates are for the challenges (mis/dis)information brings? What assistance or tools would help you navigate or deal with (mis/dis) information? What do you think is the most important action a practitioner can take to deal with (mis/dis)information?

Data Analysis Approach

Using a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), NVivo for Mac, data were analyzed inductively. Inductive data analysis uses observations to develop conceptualizations of patterns

to arrive at themes that are supported by tentative claims. These emergent themes are how the research question was answered by the data. In addition, Microsoft Excel was used for further developing the categories, which led to the development of the themes. It is important to note that the software does not actually complete the data analysis, but instead provides a way to organize data and maintain rigor.

Data analysis included five steps. One research team member oversaw steps one through three, and all team members participated in steps four and five. This approach ensured credibility and consistency of the findings. Step one was to view the transcripts while listening to the audio recordings to ensure accuracy. Reviewing the transcripts was essential since each research team member conducted a set of interviews. In addition, the interviews were transcribed by four people. Step two included open coding of the data. Open coding is when the researcher labels every word and phrase that is relevant to the research question with a code. In total, there were 84 open codes. Step three combined the repetitive codes by collapsing them into one code or category, which resulted in 14 codes. Step four focused on theme development by continuing to reduce the data; four themes emerged from the data to answer the research question. Steps one and two were conducted in NVivo, and steps three and four were completed in Microsoft Excel. The last step was to ensure themes were clear, consistent, and exhaustive across all participant experiences. Peer debriefing sessions, reviewing existing scholarship, and revisiting the original transcripts were used to confirm the emergent themes and findings. Specifically, the peer debriefing sessions allowed the research team to work through discrepancies and disagreements about the emergent themes. When needed, existing scholarship was brought into the discussion to help explain arguments or examples from the data were used to illustrate certain points; this process helped us critically assess each theme. The following section discusses the findings in relation to the proposed research question.

Findings

The proposed research question asked how public relations professionals are learning about and educating themselves to deal with situations that involve (mis/dis)information. Four themes emerged from the data. The first theme explained that most of the training professionals receive, as it relates to (mis/dis)information, occurs in real time, which means they are learning on the job. This leads professionals to develop an informal process of their own to navigate these situations, which is theme two. Additionally, professionals lean on soft skills to prepare for (mis/dis)information, which helps with staying nimble in such complex situations. Last, professionals provided ideas for resources, which serves as a starting point since preparing for (mis/dis)information is a complex process; this is theme four. All themes are discussed next and supported with evidence from participants.

Learning on the Job, in Real Time

The evidence for the first theme illustrated that most professionals are learning on the job informally, with no formal education. A senior consultant at a media company explained, “the root of disinformation is people. And so you can’t learn in a book, or in a classroom...a lot of that is experience.” Specifically, participants were asked about the protocols their agencies have in place to deal with (mis/dis)information and many shared that formal processes and protocols do not exist. A marketing director shared, “[the training] is more informal and honestly very opinion-based I would say, like a very individual base.” An account executive for an agency said, “I mean some of [the protocols] are organic, and we all just kind of share it, and let the conversation flow that way.” An agency director said, “I would say [the protocols] are more informal; we don’t have any specific protocols on how we handle something.” A director for a media company said, “we don’t have protocols, per se.” An account executive explained, “I think it’s definitely individualized to, you know, there’s no, like, formalized protocol for that.”

Because training is informal and companies/agencies do not have a formal protocol to address (mis/dis)information, most participants talked about the fact that each situation is treated as new and unique. A senior consultant at a media company said, “we don’t have anything formal in place. It is usually case by case.” A freelance publicist also talked about how it is a “case-by-case scenario.” The fact that the learning process is informal, many of the participants explained the steps they take to prepare for the complexity of navigating (mis/dis)information, which is discussed next in theme two.

Developing a Process

For theme two, the evidence demonstrated that since professionals are learning on the job, they are preparing by developing their own process to deal with (mis/dis)information. Participants discussed how they begin by researching sources and information to identify (mis/dis)information; this also includes differentiating between fact and opinion. The next step is to understand sources and audiences and then finally to deliver strong messages.

As mentioned in theme one, many organizations and agencies do not have a formal process in place to deal with (mis/dis)information and many educational resources are not available, which makes learning difficult. An account executive said, “I will scour the online sources almost daily to find something to forward on because honestly there’s no resources to send over to the teams.” A program manager shared similar insights and said, “there truly isn’t a ton of education provided, and I wish there was. There’s not a ton of education provided at all in our agency... In terms of any additional coursework, it’s whatever we’re able to find online.” Therefore, professionals are left to create their own strategic approach.

For many of the professionals in this study, the process begins with some form of research. A director for a PR agency also talked about

the value of research on the front end and said, “I would say the most important action you can take in dealing with it...is probably the step before dealing with it, which is ‘research’ to really, really understand what the argument is.” Within this context, taking a research approach is focused on doing the legwork to be able to identify (mis/dis)information. A director for a small PR agency explained, “to navigate it, obviously I think the first thing.. [is] to be able to recognize it.” Participants discussed how they take it upon themselves to screen information to research whether or not it is (mis/dis)information. A senior consultant at an agency explained, “I’ve taken it upon myself, and I think a few of my colleagues that I work with right now to do our own research and our own reading about ethics in the industry... not a formal training by any means.” Here, the participant is referring to research as secondary research, reviewing what is already available versus collecting primary research.

In addition, research helps professionals identify logical fallacies to differentiate between fact and opinion. An account manager stated, “I think understanding logical fallacies is important and it’s something that I don’t think a lot of PR professionals navigate regularly... So, if we don’t have those tools in our arsenal to be able to evaluate what our clients are saying, then I think that we are more likely to be the vessel for disinformation spreading.” This means that professionals need to be able to consume lots of different information from different sources as part of the research, as explained by an account supervisor who said, “I would say obviously an ability to multi-task and take in lots of different information” is crucial.

Starting with research aids professionals in identifying credible sources as the next step in the process. An account executive discussed how “making sure you have the correct information on hand and readily available, and you have credible sources to look to” is a key. A program manager also shared the value of having credible sources and said, “I think that is the biggest key: to know your sources, and then having basic trust skills, knowing your sources.”

The third step is to see how proactive and reactive response strategies will be received by audiences. A director for a PR agency explained:

Folks need to be able to quickly put themselves in the position of the audiences with the general public that the brand is trying to reach and do an assessment on you know how this is going to be received... you have to be able to switch back and forth really easily and put on your PR pro hat and your general public hat and say okay I'm stepping back and I am receiving this message what are the problems that I could potentially foresee and then switch back over to the PR pro.

A vice president for a PR agency also talked about how audience research is a crucial step that leads to strategy. He said, "it's important to determine not only who the stakeholders are and where they lie, but the level of importance. Can they be moved or not? That has to play into your decision making on how you put together a response."

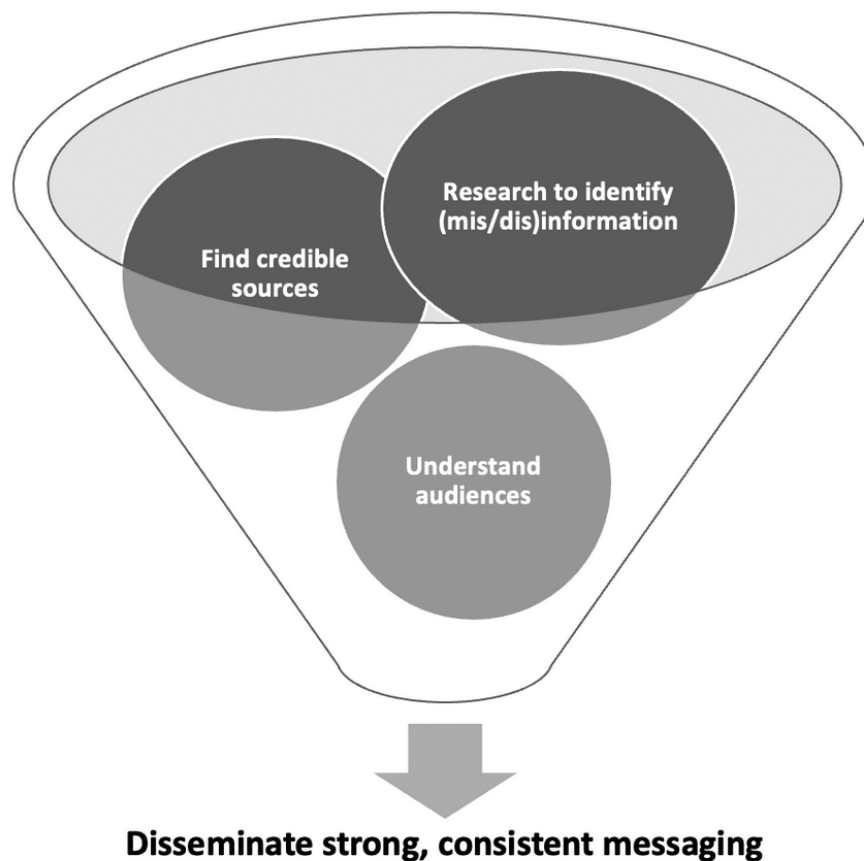
Having executed the research on the front end allows for the construction and dissemination of strong, consistent messaging, which is the final step of the process. A director for a PR agency shared, "being able to deliver strong messages and messages that resonate is an important skill to have...something that's not fluff, something that isn't timid. Being able to deliver those strong messages that stand up to disinformation." An account manager said, "using as many channels as you can, trying to use your own organic voice when possible, but then also tapping into media when you can trust the reporters that you're working with, I think that's really the best way to go about it."

The process that emerges is illustrated in Figure 1. The process is not linear and some stages may come before others depending on the situation. In addition, each professional might have different steps they would include that are not mentioned here. Yet, the professionals

provided suggestions for an initial approach. Ultimately, the purpose of the process is for professionals to develop and disseminate strong, consistent messaging on behalf of their organization or client.

Figure 1

The professional process: Leaning on soft skills



In addition to the skill of developing a process, participants discussed the various soft skills needed to navigate (mis/dis)information. Most of the soft skills mentioned by professionals focused on critical thinking, understanding, problem solving, attitudes, and ethics. These core attributes are often inherent for individuals and are needed given the complexity of preparing for (mis/dis)information. For example, a freelance

publicist shared about the value of curiosity and said, “I feel like the core skill, I think the biggest skill is to have that curiosity to want to research and not take things at face value.” An agency director talked about empathy and shared, “if you don’t have empathy, and you can’t actively put yourself in different positions then PR is not for you. If you don’t have that, and it’s not really something you can teach... then you won’t last long in PR.” A nonprofit consultant reinforced the value of being decisive and said, “the biggest thing is just being decisive and forward thinking.” Two other participants talked about having the ability to examine facts with a calm demeanor. An in-house marketing manager said, “the most important thing that they should keep in mind is not let your emotions run wild.” A senior consultant for a media company said, “You know you really just have to address things calmly and factually.”

Since (mis/dis)information often has an ethical component, the moral compass of the professional is pivotal. An agency director talked about “the difference in right/wrong and having those morals, those ethics that you not only have as a human being but you have as a public relations professional.” An account supervisor shared, “being able to kind of keep that ethics hat on at all times is really key, so that we are looking at it through that lens.” When guided by a strong moral compass, a professional is more willing to up and out against disinformation. A marketing director said, “see something, say something. Not only say something, but do something.”

Soft skills make traditional education somewhat challenging since most of these skills are either inherent (curiosity, empathy, strong moral compass) or from experience (decisiveness, a calm demeanor). Therefore, participants talked about the value of learning from professional mentors to help develop soft skills. An account executive said, “I think joining a small firm like I did, having that close relationship with my boss and the founder of the company who had decades of experience definitely helped influence how I operate and move throughout the public relations

world.” A freelance publicist shared, “I’ve been very blessed to have mentors within the PR space that have had a lot of experience dealing with different crises...So I’ve usually taken gems from them and have learned how to really navigate this space.”

Starting Point for Resources

Participants were asked to share possible resources to help students and professionals learn about and prepare for (mis/dis)information. It is important to note that given the complexity of the (mis/dis)information phenomenon, these resources are a starting point of what professionals think is needed. It is hard to state explicitly everything that is needed given that each encounter with (mis/dis)information is nuanced and unique. Therefore, resources that have yet to be identified do potentially exist and will most likely be uncovered in real time.

Resources for Students

The professionals in this study provided suggestions to equip the next generation of students with the tools and resources to learn about and prepare for (mis/dis)information. One suggestion was to ensure students have access to professionals. However, the professionals need to provide a realistic view of what it means to work in public relations. Often, professionals present the “best” parts of the field to students, without describing the challenging and mundane parts of the job. An account executive spoke from her own experience and explained:

I think the integration of actual professionals within these classroom settings is vital. A lot of the stuff I didn’t know until I got here, and I was doing it, and I was tossed out of the frying pan and into the fire. And I think that’s how I grew, and so I think advocating a realistic view of the PR world from people who are in it can only help...It’s hard because not every day is a splashy client story, right? There are tough stories. So, it’s about getting a balance of, you know, the really cool projects you’ve done versus the really mundane projects you’ve done versus the crappy projects you’ve done. Showing that it’s not all Samantha Jones in *Sex and the City*,

sometimes it's just grinding through another day, but making sure that your client comes out on top; a realistic perspective of the public relations industry.

Another suggestion was to ensure students take ethics courses as part of their degree program. An account supervisor for an agency said, "I would hope given everything that has happened in the last couple of years that they're taking a PR ethics course." An in-house marketing manager encouraged the use of case studies based on real events and said, "I think the best way to learn is case studies." A freelance publicist proposed training that teaches students to unbiasedly read the news. She said, "They do spend a lot of time on social media, which is where they usually get their news. So I think by preparing them is to teach them how to look at news unbiasedly...we tend to be biased and gravitate towards what naturally aligns with our beliefs."

Resources for Professionals

Participants also discussed various resources that professionals use to learn about and prepare for (mis/dis)information. The most frequently mentioned tools included webinars, case studies, templates, and fact-checking websites. For example, participants suggested interactive webinars that focused on real-life examples would be useful. A senior consultant said, "an interactive workshop would also be interesting, just so you can hear some more real-life examples." An account manager said, "I think the most impactful would be a panel setting, either virtual or in person, where you can hear from an individual but also see examples, maybe read some headlines, see some social media posts, to really get an understanding." A vice president said, "it would be a really good [to have a] speaker series or online roundtable discussion... I personally would be intrigued to see discussions at various different levels of participation or levels of experience." Based on the comments, it is evident that having a workshop that includes dialogue and examples is key.

Building on the need for examples, participants talked about the

value of case studies being easily accessible or part of an interactive event. A senior consultant for a media company said, “I always love case studies examples. I get nothing will ever be cookie cutter like we could do the exact same thing, but I love hearing how other people have handled situations and what they’ve learned from it.” An account supervisor suggested, “sourcing from publications that target the industry, so like PRWeek, PR News, where there might be recent stories or case studies on where someone was presented with the challenge that they were able to solve.” An agency director suggested, “looking at case studies on a global basis, something that everyone can relate to whether that be through a workshop or seminar here locally.”

Also shared among the professionals in this study was the need for resources, specifically a fact-checking website and templates to follow when being confronted with (mis/dis)information. Many participants shared how their agency or company did not have a standard operating procedure for dealing with (mis/dis)information, and therefore, a template would be helpful. An account executive shared, “maybe a general kind of SOP...on how to handle the situations.” A nonprofit consultant also talked about the value of having a template. The other resource mentioned by professionals was a fact-checking website or clearing house to confirm whether or not information is truthful. This resource may be a bit harder to come by, but still something that would help professionals remain agile. A program manager explained, “I think it would be easier if you could plug it into a website, and it was red for yes, this is disinformation... and green if it was good to go, and you could use it.” An agency vice president suggested:

Maybe there’s some way in this day and age to have a clearinghouse of data and a clearinghouse of topics that would provide a range of information. With descriptions of the non-biased middle perspective of a PRSA...or someone that’s not representing

an ownership group of anybody or being beholden to any client or any group to be able to say with some level of clarity this information is true.

In conclusion to the research question, participants shared how they are learning on the job to prepare for (mis/dis)information. Many organizations and agencies do not have formal training or protocols in place for professionals, which leads them to develop their own process to ensure messaging to audiences is strategic and effective. Given the informal, yet complex nature of navigating (mis/dis)information, participants discussed how they rely on their soft skills. Additionally, participants shared resources for students and professionals to learn about and prepare for (mis/dis)information. These suggestions are a starting point, knowing that more resources will be identified in real time, based on the particulars of a given situation that involves (mis/dis)information.

Discussion

The findings from this research study uncover crucial insights into the skills and resources necessary for public relations professionals to effectively navigate situations involving (mis/dis)information. Marked by the intricacies of the post-truth era, the study reveals the multifaceted nature of skills required by PR professionals through four key themes.

Firstly, the predominant mode of learning is on the job in real-time, with professionals acquiring knowledge through practical experience rather than formal education. This approach, as emphasized by participants, is rooted in the belief that the complexity of (mis/dis) information cannot be adequately addressed through classroom learning alone. Secondly, due to the lack of formal training and protocols within organizations, professionals are compelled to develop their own processes to navigate (mis/dis)information. This involves steps such as researching sources, differentiating between fact and opinion, understanding audiences, and delivering strong messages (figure 1). The absence of

standardized procedures requires practitioners to approach each situation uniquely, as articulated by participants who emphasized the case-by-case nature of their responses.

In addition, findings highlight the significance of soft skills, accentuating the complex ethical terrain that PR professionals navigate. Skills like curiosity, empathy, the ability to maintain a calm demeanor, decisiveness, and a strong moral compass are paramount for addressing (mis/dis)information ethically and responsibly. This dimension of PR practice often evolves through hands-on experience, emphasizing the challenge of imparting these soft skills through formal education alone. Hence, experiential learning and mentorship play a pivotal role in honing these competencies, emphasizing their practical value in real-world PR scenarios.

Lastly, participants suggested resources for both students and professionals to learn about and prepare for (mis/dis)information. Recommendations for students included integrating professionals who share narratives that focus on all parts of the job into classroom settings, emphasizing ethics courses, and using case studies based on real events. Professionals, on the other hand, could benefit from resources such as interactive webinars, panel discussions, case studies, fact-checking websites, and templates. The findings acknowledge that the evolving nature of (mis/dis)information requires ongoing identification and incorporation of new resources in real-time, all of which contribute to PR professionals' agility and readiness to combat the evolving challenges of (mis/dis)information.

Ultimately, this research reinforces the holistic blend of practical and soft skills, along with ongoing learning and collaboration, as the cornerstone of effective (mis/dis)information management in the ever-changing PR landscape.

Establishing Disinformation Skills: The Holistic Professional

This study highlights the multifaceted and holistic nature of skills and resources required by public relations professionals to navigate (mis/dis)information effectively. From this study, it becomes evident that education surrounding the public relations field must move beyond the dichotomy of hard vs. soft skills to aid professionals in the ability to navigate the public relations industry. It is not simply a matter of hard vs. soft skills but rather a holistic blend of practical and soft skills. Additional findings emphasize the need for experiential learning, ethics-focused education, and easily accessible online resources to ensure PR professionals are well-equipped to address false truths in today's complex media landscape. In addition, where new forms of (mis/dis)information constantly emerge, the ability to learn from the experiences and insights of peers is invaluable. Participants in this study discussed the benefits of sharing strategies, best practices, and ethical approaches for addressing (mis/dis)information effectively. This collaborative approach can enhance the collective preparedness of the PR industry in dealing with this challenge.

Our findings underscore the multifaceted nature of the skills and resources needed by public relations professionals to navigate (mis/dis) information effectively. Professionals must be adept at vetting information sources, distinguishing between fact and opinion, understanding their target audiences, and delivering credible messages. Simultaneously, they require soft skills such as curiosity, empathy, maintaining a calm demeanor, decisiveness, and a strong moral compass to address (mis/dis)information ethically and responsibly. PR education should strive to cultivate holistic professionals who are well-equipped to navigate the multifaceted challenges of (mis/dis)information in today's complex media landscape. Doing so will help ensure that PR professionals are not only prepared, but also empowered to address (mis/dis)information effectively, upholding the integrity and credibility of the industry.

Implications for PR Educators in Higher Education

Drawing from Rittel and Webber's (1973) concept of "wicked problems," or complex problems that defy simple resolution and frequently signify the presence of other complex problems, Jack (2019) argues that misinformation, disinformation, and fake news should be considered "wicked content" as a way of acknowledging the interrelated social issues that contribute to its rise and distinguish it from propaganda. Yet, despite the view of wicked problems as intractable, public relations educators in higher education settings have resources that can prepare students to understand and partially mitigate the problem of (mis/dis)information. Fortunately, many of these are variations or expansions of pedagogical strategies that many instructors have already found valuable.

One such approach is for PR professors to collaborate with faculty who teach moral philosophy or applied ethics to develop modules, lesson plans, and thought exercises that introduce students in both disciplines to ethical principles and expose them to complex ethical dilemmas related to (mis/dis)information. Such interdisciplinary collaboration has the potential to help students form broad, practical understandings of ethics beyond a general sense that deception is unethical. For example, Bowen (2016) observed a need for clarity and standardization regarding the definitions of ethical considerations in public relations and recommended the use of terms from moral philosophy to do so, arguing that such clarity will produce more effective practitioners who can better understand the difference between what is legal and what is moral. This has the potential to enhance students' personal and professional abilities to contribute to societal benefit—particularly, Bowen argues, in a communication environment that requires interactions with content creators who may lack ethical training.

The use of case studies—a staple of public relations pedagogy—may also be enhanced through engagement with philosophy. For example, how might PR educators adapt a version of Foot's Trolley Dilemma

(Foot, 1967) to explore questions such as: how to ethically prioritize the concerns of various publics, how practitioners incorporate understandings of free will into combatting (mis/dis)information and fake news, and what values or principles should guide our advice to leadership when a mutually beneficial outcome, a win-win, is not possible.

Educators can also expose students to professionals who can speak frankly about the tough ethical decisions they have faced—the cases that defied easy resolutions and perhaps still keep them up at night. Alternatively, because professional resources on this topic are comparatively nascent, it may be useful to ask guest professionals to discuss how they are applying existing ethical principles or problem-solving heuristics to this new context. Scholars including Anderson (1999) and Hughes Miller (2014) have observed that guest speakers can expose students to the latest developments in the field and broaden their perspectives. However, an unreflective use of industry guest speakers may not have the intended positive effect (Anderson, 1999). The mere presence of guest speakers does not guarantee relevance to the topic, alignment with course objectives, or student engagement (Lang, 2008). This may be particularly true for emerging topics such as (mis/dis) information. Therefore, strategies such as attention to speaker selection and connecting speakers' presentations to specific follow-up assignments (Roush, 2013), along with advance coordination with speakers on alignment with course objectives, provision of examples, and active presentation style (Merle & Craig, 2017), may ensure that students receive the intended benefit. Additionally, teachers can guide students to ask probing questions of professionals that generate insights beyond the facts of the case, or design brief, in-class writing exercises to encourage students to reflect on speakers' remarks and draw connections with other class materials. While exposure to industry professionals does not substitute for experiential, on-the-job learning, it can be a way of helping students understand the

complexities of public relations and examine their own moral compasses in preparation for future professional roles..

Implications for PR Educators Beyond the Classroom

Professional public relations organizations like the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and the Public Relations and Communications Association (PRCA) play an important role in ongoing education for members, particularly on emergent issues. Through training materials such as webinars, regular publications, and networking opportunities, these and other organizations provide resources beyond formal education; they also assist practitioners in maintaining relevant skills in a changing environment (Nichols, 2023).

Such organizations highlight the role of ethics in responsible, professional practice through emphasis months (for example, PRSA observes September as “Ethics Month”), position papers, and advisories, as well as through the codes of ethics they promote. Given its influence in promoting professionalism within the field nationally and internationally, these organizations may consider addressing (mis/dis)information more explicitly in their ethics codes to manage this emerging yet persistent concern. It is important to note that while PRSA published an ethical standards advisory (ESA) regarding misinformation in December 2021, no participants explicitly mentioned it. This suggests opportunities to more deeply engage professionals with emergent ESAs in the future, or to consider other formats for engaging professionals around emerging ethical issues outside of or in complement to the ESA format.

In addition to refreshing codes of ethics in light of the prevalence of (mis/dis)information, professional organizations can advise members on how to influence the environments where they work to foster a cultural climate where practitioners are not merely equipped, but also empowered, to recognize and combat these practices. Given the importance of organizational culture in shaping norms (Kuye et al., 2013), academics

and practitioners can focus attention on how to develop and maintain organizational cultures where communicators can, to quote one of our participants, “not only say something, but do something” when they are confronted with (mis/dis)information. To support such environments bolsters our quest to serve society as well as the people, organizations, and causes for whom we work.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

Although this study affords a snapshot of professional experiences and perceptions related to (mis/dis)information training and management, it is not without limitations. The current research only focused on those professionals who are current members of the Public Relations Society of America. Although PRSA is the largest professional association for public relations practitioners, practitioners are not required to adhere to a professional code of ethics, let alone PRSA’s code of ethics. PRSA’s code of ethics were focused on due to the organization’s scale, scope, and influence in the public relations industry. Future research should consider professionals who may or may not affiliate with PRSA to examine commonalities and differences in behaviors, experiences, and perceptions. Similarly, a useful comparison point in future research might be examining the perspective of accredited professionals, in particular, to discern how formal professional development activities may influence professionals’ ability to navigate emergent ethical issues.

In addition, the majority of the sample in this study consisted of participants who worked for public relations agencies; perhaps more diversity in the representation of participants’ industries would yield varied findings. To that end, about 80% of our sample consisted of self-identified women; although this may be a limitation of the current approach, the gender breakdown resembles the PR workforce (Bardhan & Gower, 2020). Additionally, the highest level of education was not collected during the interviews. Nonetheless, future research should continue to articulate

how education and training may best equip students and practitioners for managing emergent professional ethical issues, such as those arising from (mis/dis)information. Future research should build from this formative work to assess broader, and perhaps more generalizable, attitudes, behaviors, perceptions, education, and experiences among professionals and to directly observe and measure the impact of different educational and training interventions on student and professional readiness and ability to navigate (mis/dis)information.

Conclusion

Findings from this research shed light on the intricate landscape of skills and resources required for public relations professionals to adeptly navigate the challenges posed by (mis/dis)information. Results emphasizing real-time, on-the-job learning underscore the belief that the intricacies of (mis/dis)information cannot be comprehensively addressed through traditional classroom education alone. Secondly, the absence of formal training and protocols necessitates professionals to craft their own processes, engaging in steps like researching sources and delivering strategic messages on a case-by-case basis. Furthermore, the study underscores the pivotal role of soft skills, such as curiosity, empathy, and ethical awareness, in negotiating the complex ethical landscape of (mis/dis)information. These skills often evolve through experiential learning and mentorship, emphasizing their practical significance in real-world public relations scenarios.

Moreover, the research highlights the practical recommendations for resources that can equip both students and professionals to grapple with (mis/dis)information effectively. The evolving nature of (mis/dis)information calls for continuous identification and integration of new resources in real-time, contributing to the agility and readiness of public relations professionals in facing these challenges. Ultimately, the study advocates for a holistic approach to skills development, recognizing the

interplay of practical and soft skills, experiential learning, ethics-focused education, and readily available online resources as essential components in preparing PR professionals to navigate the complex media landscape successfully.

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Appendix A

Table 1

Participant sample demographics (U.S. professionals)

Gender	Tenure with current employer	Type of organization	Size of organization	U.S. State	Position
13 women 3 men	9 months - 8 years	Public Relations (10) Freelance (1) In-house (1) Nonprofit (1) Media Companies (3)	1,000+ employees (2) >200 employees (2) <200 employees (10) Other (2)	New York Texas Iowa Georgia Hawaii Pennsylvania Maryland Kentucky Tennessee California	Account supervisor Director Account executive Manager Consultant Vice president Marketing director Senior consultant

Table 2

Emergent Theme 2: Developing a Process

Description	Skills	Exemplar Quotes
Practical skills are needed to deal with (mis/dis)information.	1. Research to be able to identify (mis/dis)information	“I’ve taken it upon myself, and I think a few of my colleagues that I work with right now to do our own research and our own reading about ethics in the industry...not a formal training by any means.”
	2. Research to identify logical fallacies and to differentiate between fact and opinion	“I think understanding logical fallacies is important and it’s something that I don’t think a lot of PR professionals navigate regularly...So, if we don’t have those tools in our arsenal to be able to evaluate what our clients are saying, then I think that we are more likely to be the vessel for disinformation spreading.”
	3. Understanding the audience	“Folks need to be able to quickly put themselves in the position of the audiences with the general public that the brand is trying to reach and do an assessment on you know how this is going to be received...you have to be able to switch back and forth really easily and put on your PR pro hat and your general public hat and say okay I’m stepping back and I am receiving this message what are the problems that I could potentially foresee and then switch back over to the PR pro.”

Table 3*Emergent Theme 3: Leaning on Soft Skills*

Description	Skills	Exemplar Quotes
Various soft skills are needed to navigate (mis/dis)information.	1. Curiosity	"I feel like the core skill, I think the biggest skill is to have that curiosity to want to research and not take things at face value."
	2. Empathy	"If you don't have empathy and you can't actively put yourself in different positions then PR is not for you. If you don't have that, and it's not really something you can teach...then you won't last long in PR."
	3. Decisiveness	"The biggest thing is just being decisive and forward-thinking."
	4. Calm demeanor	"You know you really just have to address things calmly and factually."
	5. Moral compass	"[T]he difference in right/wrong and having those morals, those ethics that you not only have as a human being but you have as a public relations professional."
	6. Learning on the job and from professional mentors	"I've been very blessed to have mentors within the PR space that have had a lot of experience dealing with different crises...So I've usually taken gems from them and have learned how to really navigate this space."

Table 4*Emergent Theme 4: Ideas for resources*

Description	Skills	Exemplar Quotes
Several resources can help students develop skills to manage (mis/dis)information.	1. Ensure students have access to professionals.	“I think the integration of actual professionals within these classroom settings is vital. A lot of the stuff I didn’t know until I got here, and I was doing it, and I was tossed out of the frying pan and into the fire. And I think that’s how I grew, and so I think advocating a realistic view of the PR world from people who are in it can only help.”
	2. Ensure students take an ethics course as part of their degree program.	“I would hope given everything that has happened in the last couple of years that they’re taking a PR ethics course.”
	3. Teach case studies based on real events.	“I always love case studies examples. I get nothing will ever be cookie cutter like we could do the exact same thing, but I love hearing how other people have handled situations and what they’ve learned from it.”
	4. Provide students with training to unbiasedly read the news.	“They do spend a lot of time on social media, which is where they usually get their news. So I think by preparing them is to teach them how to look at news unbiasedly...we tend to be biased and gravitate towards what naturally aligns with our beliefs.”
	5. Create webinars, case studies, templates, and fact-checking websites for professionals.	“I think the most impactful would be a panel setting, either virtual or in-person, where you can hear from an individual but also see examples, maybe read some headlines, see some social media posts, to really get an understanding.”

Appendix B

Semi-Structured Long Interview Guide

Introduction and Basic Points

Good [morning/afternoon/evening], my name is [], and I am an [assistant/associate] professor at. I am working on a research project in collaboration with PRSA's Voices4Everyone initiative that focuses on perceptions and understanding of disinformation within the public relations industry. Your experiences will help us understand more about these topic areas and allow us to share insights pertaining to the public relations industry.

(Repeat these points if individuals have questions about the consent forms they have signed)

- Every opinion is valuable and I only want to know your thoughts and opinions.
- Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. You may choose to skip a question or stop the interview at any time and for any reason with no penalty, especially if you feel uncomfortable with the question or subject. Your information will stay secure. I will not share your personal information, including your name, with anyone else. Unless you prefer otherwise, your name will not be linked to the information that you provide during the interview.
- This interview is being audio-recorded in case I need to listen to it later to clarify something from the notes. This recording will not be shared with others and will be destroyed at the end of this research.
- The interview should take no longer than an hour.
- Do you have any questions before we begin?

Opening

1. Could you tell me a little bit about your professional background, including where you are now?
 - a. What is your current position, and how long have you been with the agency?

Defining disinformation

1. What comes to mind when you hear the term misinformation?
2. What comes to mind when you hear the term disinformation?
3. From your perspective, what is the difference between misinformation and disinformation?
4. What role do you think PR professionals play in discrediting or thwarting disinformation?
 - a. How important do you think it is for PR professionals to inform clients that certain ideas might be disinformation?
5. When do you feel disinformation became prevalent for PR professionals?
6. What is the media's role in disinformation?
7. Do you see a clear link between your role within PR and the issue of limiting disinformation? Please explain. How were you informed about this link (i.e., boss, previous education)?

Note: In the event that participants are unsure, we might suggest that disinformation is false information deliberately and often covertly spread (as by the planting of rumors) to influence public opinion or obscure the truth.

I am now going to transition to a few questions about your actual experiences in learning about disinformation and possible client interactions you feel comfortable sharing. Please remember the information you share here is confidential.

Attitudes and Experience with Disinformation

1. Have you ever experienced a situation with a client that included disinformation? Can you walk me through that situation?
2. Could you please provide an example of disinformation from your experience as a practitioner or one you have observed within the field of public relations?

3. Has a client ever knowingly or unknowingly asked your agency to create a disinformation-based campaign or strategy? Can you please walk me through that experience? What were you thinking/feeling? How did you navigate such a difficult situation with the client? What helped guide your response?
4. Has one of your clients experienced a disinformation-based attack from a third party? If so, what was your recommendation to the client?
5. Can you provide an example of how you have navigated conversations regarding disinformation or intentional deception with fellow employees at your agency?

I am now going to ask a few questions about your agency's protocols regarding disinformation.

Agency Protocols

1. What protocols does your agency have in place to deal with disinformation?
 - a. How do you vet potential pieces of disinformation?
 - b. Does the agency have policies regarding the use of disinformation? If so, can you describe these policies?
 - c. What steps are taken to ensure that sources of information are credible?
 - d. What policies are in place to help clients' that are experiencing a disinformation-based attack from a third party?
 - e. What do you think is missing from your agency's disinformation protocols?

Now for a few questions about your education, training, and available industry resources you use to deal with disinformation.

Educational Background

1. What training have you received regarding disinformation, and where has it come from?
 - a. Does your agency provide any training or education to employees regarding disinformation? If so, please explain.

- b. What training or education do you think would be helpful for your agency to provide regarding disinformation?
2. What do you see as the core skills needed to navigate the topic of disinformation within the PR industry?
3. How prepared do you think recent public relations graduates are for the challenges disinformation brings?
 - a. Are there any areas you see for improvement?

PRSA/Industry Standards and Ethics

1. Are there clear guidelines to help the PR industry and practitioners deal with disinformation? If so, can you describe these guidelines?
2. What do you think are the weaknesses within the PR industry when it comes to disinformation?
3. What type of resources would be helpful for PRSA to provide to help you navigate topics surrounding disinformation?
4. How often do you refer to PRSA's code of ethics? What do you think could make these guidelines more helpful?

Perceptions of Response Tools

1. What assistance or tools would help you navigate or deal with disinformation?
2. What do you think is the most important action a practitioner can take to deal with disinformation?
3. Do you think proactive communication is helpful in responding to disinformation? If so, please explain.
 - a. Are you familiar with inoculation? If so, please explain in your own words.
 - b. Are you familiar with prebunking? If so, please explain in your own words.

That's all the questions I have. Is there anything that you feel I left out or did not ask about that would be important for me to know regarding disinformation?

Lastly, is there anyone you could recommend to be included in this study? Our only requirement is that they are a member of PRSA.

Closing

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. Would you be willing to be contacted again in the future should I need to conduct a follow-up interview at a later date? In addition, can I contact you once I have preliminary results from my study to ensure your perspective is represented?