

Do your employees think your slogan is “fake news?” A framework for understanding the impact of company slogans on employees

Linda W. Lee, Nottingham Trent University
David R. Hannah, Simon Fraser University
Ian P. McCarthy, Simon Fraser University

Purpose

This article connects the phenomenon of fake news with company slogans. Focusing on the employee audience, the article explores how this stakeholder can perceive and be impacted by different types of slogan fakeness.

Design/methodology/approach

Conceptual article.

Findings

Employees attend to two important dimensions of slogans: whether they accurately reflect a company's (1) values and (2) value proposition. These dimensions combine to form a typology of four ways in which employees can perceive their company's slogans: authentic, narcissistic, foreign, or corrupt.

Research implications

This paper outlines how the typology provides a theoretical basis for more refined empirical research on how company slogans influence a key stakeholder: their employees. Future research could test the arguments about how certain characteristics of slogans are more or less likely to cause employees to conclude that slogans are fake news. Those conclusions will in turn have implications for the morale and engagement of employees. The ideas herein can also enable a more comprehensive assessment of the impact of slogans.

Practical implications

Employees can view three types of slogans as fake news (narcissistic, foreign, and corrupt slogans). This article identifies the implications of each type, and explains how companies can go about developing authentic slogans.

Originality/value

This article is one of very few that draws upon the phenomenon of fake news to explore the impact of slogan veracity on stakeholders. While this work also has relevance to other stakeholders, such as customers, employees are an important audience that has been neglected by studies to date. Thus, the insights and implications specific to this internal stakeholder are novel.

Key words: fake news, slogans, values, value propositions, organizational culture, employee attachment, typology

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Introduction

Research interest in “fake news” has focused largely on how fake news impacts communications related to elections (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Guo et al., 2018), journalism (Khaldarova and Pantti 2016; Murtha, 2015) and health care (Cantoni, 2017; Speed and Mannion, 2017). As fake news involves the production of false information, there have been calls by marketing scholars to explore the complicated relationship that brand management has with fake news (Berthon and Pitt, 2018). In response, this article explores how company slogans can be a form of fake news, conveying false information about a company’s actual values and value propositions.

The fakeness of a company slogan can impact a range of stakeholders, including customers, potential customers, shareholders, and employees. This article focuses on employees for two reasons. First, employees are an important but somewhat neglected stakeholder when it comes to research on slogans. Slogans are not only created by firms to communicate the essence of a brand or company’s value proposition to customers (Dahlen and Rosengren, 2005; Keller, 1993), but also to influence employees of the organization who are expected to follow the values espoused by the slogan (Baker and Balmer, 1997; Gray and Balmer, 1998; Stuart and Muzellec, 2004). Second, by focusing on how employees perceive and are impacted by slogan fakeness, we offer bounded and specific implications for this type of stakeholder.

To connect the phenomenon of fake news with slogans this article begins by defining fake news and identifies three different ways slogans can be fake news: through association

with fake news, through the slogan itself being fake, and whether the slogan is real but conveys fake news about the brand or the company. The article focuses on the last, and explores when employees perceive that slogans convey fake news. It is argued that employees attend to two important characteristics of slogans: (1) whether they reflect company values, i.e. the practices and culture of the firm; and (2) whether they reflect the company value proposition, i.e. why customers should be attracted to the company and its brands and products. Based on those two characteristics, employees may perceive slogans to be either (1) authentic, (2) foreign, (3) narcissistic, or (4) corrupt, terms that are elucidated later in this article.

Defining Fake News

Fake news has been defined as any type of news that is intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Berthon and Pitt 2018). Internet platforms are the most important enablers and primary channels of fake news (Lazer et al., 2018), with the news content of such platforms often designed to be more alluring and impactful than real news. For example, a study of verified true and fake news stories distributed on Twitter from 2006 to 2017 found that fake news was more novel and more shared than true news (Vosoughi et al., 2018). Other studies have examined how the spread of conspiracy theories about scientific news generates homogeneous and polarized communities (i.e., echo chambers) (Del Vicario et al., 2016), and how social ties help such fake news spread readily and rapidly (Friggeri et al., 2014). Based on such research, we suggest there are at least three important aspects to consider when examining how the phenomenon of fake news relates to company slogans.

The first is the information that is conveyed. Fake news contains information that its creators know to be untrue, and that has the potential to mislead. It therefore excludes

information sharing where the content is believed to be true (such as genuine mistakes) and satire that should not be interpreted as factual (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017). Following Berthon and Pitt (2018), this informational aspect of fake news can be in the form of fake stories, fake pictures, fake reviews, and fake polls; and, as we will argue shortly, many other kinds of corporate information, including fake slogans.

The second aspect of fake news is who creates it. Although fake news often originates from or is passed on by entities portraying themselves as online news organizations, it can originate from many kinds of sources. For example, following the 2016 U.S. presidential election, investigations revealed that more than 100 websites that posted fake news about the election were run by teenagers in the small town of Veles, Macedonia (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Baccarella et al., 2018). Thus, to understand how fake news impacts brands, it is important to understand the different types of entities that create or share the news and their intentions for doing so. For example, many of the creators of fake news do not employ journalistic norms and processes because they do not care about the accuracy and credibility of information. Instead, they know that their information is inaccurate, and their intention is to deceive, often by mimicking genuine news media content in presentation.

The third aspect of fake news is that it has an intended audience. Those who consume fake news do so, not because they come from a trusted source or because they are accurate and unbiased but, because the fake news provides psychological utility by supporting the audience's biases (Mullainathan and Shleifer, 2005). Often, the creators of fake news will be aware of the preferences of their audience and will embed themselves in social media networks of individuals, communities, and organizations that hold those preferences (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Within those networks, fake news purveyors leverage

social media to maximize the supply and consumption of fake news for monetary and/or ideological gain. By concealing their own identities, purveyors limit the reputational risks of knowingly reporting fake stories.

From these three aspects, we now introduce how fake news can take the form of one type of corporate communication: company slogans. We outline what a slogan is and explain how companies use them as mechanisms for conveying information that can often be fake. We also explain how this can impact a key audience for slogans: employees. Our focus on employees enable us to better understand how fake slogans influence employees' attitudes and actions. Although the majority of previous research has focused on how they influence customers, slogans can also shape employees' image of their employers (Ind, 2003). We will elaborate on this issue shortly.

Slogans as Fake News

Slogans are defined as short phrases that capture a brand's essence, personality, value proposition, and differentiates the brand from its competitors (Wheeler, 2018). They represent an organization's values, philosophy (Melawar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006); history, culture, and strategy (van den Bosch et al., 2005) and can reinforce a brand image held by many, if not all, of a company's stakeholders (Hatch and Schulz, 2001). Slogans are typically highly visible, commonly featured on websites and advertising (Dinoftie and Yalch, 2007), and at the forefront of many marketing strategies (Dowling and Kabanoff, 1996).

While slogans are typically developed to communicate with customers, they also play an important role in inspiring and motivating employees (Hatch and Schultz, 2001; Melawar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006) because they offer information about a company's values and value propositions. An example is Campbell Soup Company's "Real food that matters for life's moments", which reflects a company that aspires for people to trust that it

“provides food and drink that is good, honest, authentic, and flavorful—made from ingredients that are grown, prepared, cooked, or baked with care” (Campbell Soup Company, 2019). In short, company slogans should reflect the fundamental values of an organization (Stuart and Muzellec, 2004). While this article focuses on company slogans, in practice, many of our insights could apply to the slogans of product brands, particularly when they are so prominent in an organization that, in the minds of employees, they come to represent or epitomize the larger organization.

Slogans can be fake or tainted by fake news in a number of ways (see Table 1). First, the slogan itself could be presented accurately, but information could be presented alongside the slogan with an intention to mislead. When this happens, the advertising and its slogan could enhance the credibility of the fake story, or the story could diminish the integrity of the brand. For example, imagine that Verizon’s slogan “Can you hear me now” was presented alongside a fake news story that claimed American cellular phone towers were emitting sound waves that were harming customers’ hearing. Second, the slogan itself could be the subject of a fake story. For example, a fake news outlet might report that Gillette was changing its slogan from “The best a man can get” to “You need more blades” in order to mock the company’s tendency to launch new products that seem to simply add more and more blades to its razors. Third, the slogan itself could be misleading. For example, McNeil Nutritionals, the makers of Splenda, created the slogan “Made from sugar so it tastes like sugar,” a claim that sparked lawsuits over its veracity, because while sugar molecules were used at the beginning of the manufacturing process, they were immediately altered chemically and no sugar was present in the actual product (Browning, 2007). Understanding how and when slogans make statements that do not reflect the actual values, culture, and identity of the company, is a focus of this article.

Insert Table 1 about here

There is relatively little research on the impact of slogans, and what little research that exists tends to be focused on consumers. For the purposes of the current paper, the most salient findings of that research are that there is often an element of fakeness in the creation of brand slogans. For example, more than 25 percent of brand slogans are purposefully distorted by brand managers (Strutton and Roswinanto, 2014). While it may seem counterintuitive that brand managers would deliberately distort their slogans, other researchers have found that under certain circumstances, having vague slogans may actually benefit brands (Dahlen and Rosengren, 2005; Dowling and Kabanoff, 1996). The prevalence of this distortion may offer a partial explanation for why consumers have such low recall of slogans (Broniarczyk and Genrshoff, 2003; Kiley, 2004; Law, 2002), usually only successfully matching slogans to brands with high brand equity (Dahlen and Rosengren, 2005).

While research on slogans has mostly focused on their effect on external stakeholders of organizations, there is another important audience that is influenced by slogans: organizational employees (Gray and Balmer, 1998; Stuart and Muzellec, 2004). In general, employees are keen consumers of corporate communication, even when it is designed for external audiences (Celsi and Gilly 2010; Gilly and Wolfinbarger, 1998). Advertising, including slogans, can summarize the meaning of an organization to both customers and employees (Celsi and Gilly 2010; Gilly and Wolfinbarger, 1998). As Dowling and Kabanoff (1996, p. 64) argued, slogans may be designed "...as much for the motivation of employees as customers. For example, Nike's slogan 'Just do it' would also be a powerful reminder to employees to get things done." Company slogans are often used to motivate employees to engage in behaviors that are consistent with the brand image when interacting with customers (Gray and Balmer, 1998). However, this is only likely to happen

when the slogans resonate with employees (Stuart and Muzellec, 2004). This in turn is likely to depend on the efficacy of a company's internal marketing.

Internal marketing is focused on aligning, educating, and motivating employees toward organizational priorities and requires communicating to them about a company's marketing strategies (Suh et al., 2011; Winter, 1985). Internal marketing can be a useful tool, and has been found to be more effective than training for motivating employees to perform their roles (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007). Indeed, Gronroos (1990) suggests that internal marketing success is crucial to the success of external marketing, because, for employees to be effective, they need to understand and contribute to the implementation of the marketing strategy (Heskett, 1987) by engaging in the necessary marketing-oriented attitudes and behavior. A company whose marketing emphasizes great customer service, for example, must ensure that its employees are able and willing to provide such service. In the words of Punjaisri and Wilson (2007, p. 60), the internal marketing of a slogan can be critical "to ensure that employees transform espoused brand messages into brand reality for customers and other stakeholders".

Thus, employees are a critical audience for internal marketing, including slogans. Further, the fakeness that research suggests which is often present in slogans is likely to be salient to employees for at least three reasons. First, employees are particularly well-placed to evaluate the truthfulness or fakeness of slogans, since they can observe the truth of what is happening inside organizations. Second, unlike customers who can easily ignore slogans, employees are often exposed daily to a company's brand promises and are expected to deliver on the value propositions that are promised to customers. Third, previous research suggests that employees are attuned to inconsistencies between the promises made in consumer advertising and their own perceptions of the organization (Gilly and Wolfinbarger,

1998) and these inconsistencies impact the customer focus of employees (Celsi and Gilly, 2010). Specifically, employees evaluate consumer advertising for effectiveness (their perception of how successful the advertising will be in gaining consumer attention and sales) and for value congruence (similarity between personal values and the values highlighted in the advertising) (Celsi and Gilly, 2010). The importance of value congruence is supported by organizational behavior research that has found employees who perceive their values to be similar to their employers report higher satisfaction, commitment, emotional engagement, trust, and performance (Avolio et al., 2000; Chatman, 1991; Jung and Avolio, 2000; Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1996; Meglino et al., 1989; Shamir et al., 1993). Thus, employees are likely to notice and evaluate the fakeness of slogans, and this evaluation can influence their attitudes and behavior toward their employer. Next, we turn our attention to that evaluation process.

How Slogans Can Be Fake News for Employees: A Typology

To understand the influence of slogans on employees, it is useful to conceptualize them as a type of cultural form (Trice and Beyer, 1993), in that they serve to both express and reinforce aspects of organizational cultures (Sadri and Lees, 2001). For example, the “Just do it” slogan expresses the action-oriented nature of the Nike culture and also reinforces the importance of this cultural value to employees. Avis’ “We try harder”, Prudential’s “Own a piece of the rock”, DuPont’s “Better living through chemistry” are examples of company slogans that convey messages to employees about the importance of work ethic, financial stability, and science-driven culture, respectively (Gray and Balmer, 1998).

However, slogans may influence employees in unintended ways. A Nike employee may react to the “Just do it” slogan by acting hastily or unwisely, and a Prudential employee

may interpret “Own a piece of the rock” as valuing stability or solidity to such a degree that she refrains from offering new ideas. Just as the external impact of slogans depends on how they are interpreted by customers (Dass et al., 2014), employees may arrive at their own interpretations of their company’s slogans. While employees may view those slogans in a positive light, it is also possible that employees may come to perceive the slogans as fake news. Next, this article turns to the question of when and why this is likely to happen by introducing two dimensions that we believe are key to understanding the extent to which employees perceive and react to slogan fakeness: their perception of whether a slogan reflects a *company’s value proposition*, and whether a slogan reflects a *company’s values* (i.e. the practices and culture of the firm). As we now explain, we chose these two dimensions as they represent two of the most important information aspects of a slogan.

Slogans Reflecting Value Proposition

The first dimension of our typology is the extent to which employees perceive a slogan to truly reflect a company’s value proposition. For many companies, the value proposition offered to customers will be synonymous with or driven by the company’s brand (American Marketing Association, n.d.). In other cases, a company may not strive to create a clear brand image, and the value proposition will be aligned with other aspects of the company. For the sake of brevity, we use the term “company’s value proposition,” and highlight that companies’ use of slogans can reflect their value proposition not just to external stakeholders, but also to those inside organizations (Dowling and Kabanoff, 1996). In other words, a slogan’s statement of a company’s value proposition conveys information to customers and to employees whose actions will determine whether that value proposition is delivered to customers (Baker and Balmer 1997; Ind, 2003). When a

company's value proposition is clearly captured in a slogan, this helps provide a clear direction for employee efforts (King and Grace, 2008; Tosti and Stotz, 2001).

Despite how important it is for slogans to accurately reflect a company's value proposition to employees, studies suggest that slogans are often ineffective in achieving this goal. For example, up to 70 percent of U.S. employees were found not to believe in their companies' branded values and in turn, became either not engaged or actively disengaged in their work (Gallup, 2000). Furthermore, King and Grace (2008) found that most employees had limited brand commitment, meaning that many did not understand and/or believe in their organization's brand. This in turn suggests that employees will reach their own judgements about whether a company's slogan truly reflects its value proposition. Further, as noted earlier, employees are well-placed to notice inconsistencies between value propositions and slogans. They are also likely to be sensitive to those inconsistencies because their work lives will be affected by them. Specifically, they are likely to be the ones who have to interact with customers who become frustrated when they perceive that a promised value proposition is not fulfilled (Hannah et al., 2016).

Slogans Reflecting Values

The second dimension of the typology is the extent to which employees consider the slogan to truly reflect the values of the company. Corporate values represent the core assumptions, beliefs, and ways of seeing the world that are commonly held within organizations (Grojean et al., 2004; Hunt, Wood, and Chonko, 1989; Schein, 1990; Trice and Beyer, 1993). Values can comprise or express the intended priorities and practices of companies (Michailova and Minbaeva, 2012), and criteria for making decisions and taking actions (Chatman and Jehn, 1994). Values are a crucial building block for organizational

cultures (Quinn and Rohrbaugh, 1983), and can have a powerful influence on the actions of employees (Detert et al., 2000; Khazanchi et al., 2007).

Slogans are branding symbols that not only reflect company values to external stakeholders such as customers, but also to employees. For employees, slogans should reflect and fit with the essence of a company's culture, values, and underpinning beliefs. For example, in an ethnographic study of an unnamed insurance company, Smircich (1983) highlights how the company slogan "wheeling together", was an important symbolic mechanism that helped to create shared organizational meanings among employees. If employees believe that a slogan accurately reflects a company's culture, and employees are attracted to that culture, then the slogans can serve as an important way of motivating and even inspiring employees. On the other hand, if employees believe slogans are fake and do not reflect a company's values, this weakens employees' attachment to the organization (Stuart, 2002; Simões et al., 2005).

In summary, employees are likely to make judgements about two aspects of company slogans: whether they reflect the values of the company, and whether they are consistent with the value proposition of the company. By considering these two aspects in tandem, one can identify four ways in which employees may perceive slogans: as authentic, narcissistic, foreign, or corrupt. Figure 1 identifies and summarizes each of these four types, and they are described in more detail below.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Authentic Slogans

Authentic slogans reflect both the company's culture and practices, and the value proposition it offers to customers. To illustrate, consider the Mustang Survival Company, which manufactures equipment designed to protect and save lives, including personal

flotation devices. It has a 50-year history in developing products for water rescue and military applications. Its slogan is “We save lives for a living.” Assuming the company is passionate about working safely and ensuring the well-being of its employees then this slogan would be consistent with the values of the company. Further, the slogan is also consistent with the value proposition offered to customers, which is that if customers purchase Mustang products, they can feel safer and actually be safer in the case of accidents. This type of slogan is often developed as part of a comprehensive brand identity process that involves a process of discovery to understand what the organization stands for, its aims, and how it differs from others (van den Bosch et al. 2005). Research among internal and external stakeholders is a vital part of this process (Stuart and Muzellec, 2004). Organizations with authentic slogans can leverage them with employees through internal corporate communication that is designed to promote commitment to the organization, a sense of belonging, awareness of the marketing environment, and the marketing strategy (Welch and Jackson, 2007; Welch, 2011). When employees embrace the organizational values and value proposition that are communicated by authentic slogans, organizations stand to benefit.

Narcissistic Slogans

When employees believe that a slogan is narcissistic, they perceive it as consistent with the company’s values, but fake in the sense that it does not reflect the company’s value proposition to customers. One sector in which narcissistic slogans appear to be common is higher education. Kolowich (2015) took 88 slogans from colleges and arranged them into a poem. We include the first six lines of that poem here alongside their respective colleges:

“Change Your Life. Start Here. Charter College, Alaska

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Life's Calling | De Moines Area Community College, Iowa |
| It's Your Life | Columbus State University, Georgia |
| Your Extraordinary Life | Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Ohio |
| The Life of the Mind | University of Chicago, Illinois |
| Change Your Mind. Change Your Life". | Tillamook Bay Community College, Oregon |

While it is accurate to view the foundational culture of many academic institutions as being based on the premise that education can broaden students' minds and enable them to change their lives for the better, an alternative, and likely commonly conveyed value proposition would be to offer a qualification, such as particular types of diplomas or degrees that could enable students to obtain particular types of jobs. In organizations with narcissistic slogans, employees are likely to evaluate the slogan's promise and find it inconsistent with the actual value proposition. This in turn will have a negative impact on employees' relationships with their employers. Narcissistic slogans are likely to exist in organizations when top managers are too internally focused and thus lose sight of what their external value proposition actually is.

Foreign Slogans

Employees will perceive slogans as foreign when they do not reflect the organization's stated value proposition, but are fake because they do not reflect its actual culture and practices. An example is Google's "Don't be evil" slogan. In its 2004 Founders' letter, Google promises to be "a company that does good things for the world even if we forgo some short term gains" (Page and Brin, 2004). In 2015, as part of Google's corporate restructuring under the conglomerate Alphabet Inc. the slogan was changed to "Do the right thing". Both Google slogans were created to communicate to customers and employees that the activities, innovations, and services of the company are principled and for the good of society. However, multiple allegations of sexual misconduct were made by employees against senior executives (Weaver et al., 2018) and a high-profile senior executive was paid

a \$90 million exit package after a credible claim that a female employee accused him of coercing her to perform a sexual act with him (Wakabayashi and Conger, 2019), indicating that the values in the slogan did not reflect internal culture and practices. As a consequence, demonstrations and walkouts of thousands of Google staff were organized in November 2018 in London, Dublin, New York, Singapore, Zurich, Haifa, and Berlin (Weaver et al., 2018). The reason for these demonstrations was, according to a flyer employees left at their desks, to protest against “sexual harassment, misconduct, lack of transparency and a workplace culture that’s not working for everyone”(Weaver et al., 2018). Further, a shareholder lawsuit was lodged against the board of directors of Google’s parent company for approving the exit package for the senior executive (Wakabayashi and Conger, 2019). Clearly, many Google employees believe there is a disconnect between the company’s slogan and either its willingness or capabilities to deliver on that promise. Foreign slogans are likely to exist when the leaders of organizations become so focused on their external competitive position that they lose sight of their true internal company values.

Corrupt Slogans

Finally, if employees perceive slogans to be completely fake, because they reflect neither the firm’s value proposition nor its company values, they will view the slogans as corrupt. Consider the slogan of disgraced energy trading company Enron, which was “Ask why.” Enron went bankrupt in 2001 after having been found to be hiding billions of dollars in debt. According to Houston Chronicle reporters Mike Tolson and Katherine Feser, early in 2001 when Wall Street analyst Richard Grubman asked then-CEO Jeff Skilling why Enron was the only company that didn’t release a balance sheet along with its earnings statements, he replied “Thank you very much, we appreciate it...Asshole.” (Tolson and Feser, 2004) “Ask why, asshole” then became a running joke among Enron employees as a way of mocking the

analyst. However, this incident also demonstrated to employees that if one wanted to remain in the good graces of upper management, one should not “Ask why” about certain topics. As Enron did not want anyone—employees, analysts, or customers—to ask about its financial standing, the slogan “Ask why” was fake news.

Corrupt types of slogans are likely to be developed when organizational leaders are either completely deluded about the actual values and value proposition of a company, or when they recognize the disconnect between their slogan and reality, but persist with the slogan anyway, perhaps because they have already committed organizational resources to it or are publicly identified with the current course of action of the company (Staw, 1981; Brockner, 1992). Out of the four types of slogans, we suggest *corrupt slogans* are the most likely to inspire cynicism among employees and in turn, lead to disengagement and counterproductive behavior (Dean et al., 1998), because it will be evident to employees that the organizations’ leaders either do not know what the organization’s capabilities are, or do know those capabilities and are choosing to mislead their stakeholders. This will undermine employees’ trust in their leaders, which will in turn lead to employee behaviors that are dysfunctional for the organization (Dirks and Ferrin, 2012).

Implications for Research and Practice

This article has explored a heretofore neglected aspect of company slogans: their impact on employees. By viewing these slogans through the lens of fake news, we have generated novel insights into how and why different aspects of slogan fakeness influence employees. More specifically, this typology provides the basis for a diagnostic tool to help researchers and brand professionals understand the impact of slogans on employee audiences. To conclude, the article focuses on future areas of research and advice for practitioners.

Next Steps for Theory and Research

First and foremost, since this is a conceptual paper all of the ideas discussed herein could be subjected to theory development and empirical testing. While we have grounded our ideas in previous research on employees' reactions to external and internal marketing, and in the limited inquiries to date on how employees perceive and react to their companies' slogans, empirical research is necessary to test the validity and generalizability of our arguments. In addition to this broad point, we suggest three additional, more specific avenues for research that we think are particularly worthy of investigation.

The first avenue concerns understanding other influences on employees' perceptions of types of slogans and reactions to them. As noted earlier, how companies communicate with employees is likely to shape their reactions to the slogans. Thus, perhaps an employee could be convinced that a slogan that they believed to be fake is actually authentic. Further, different types of employees may react in different ways to slogans even when they perceive they are fake news. For example, some employees may react particularly negatively to corrupt slogans, but others may view them as part of the normal landscape of their industry. Still other employees might be more or less comfortable with narcissistic slogans. Slogans may even divide opinion within a workforce, as some may view the slogan as authentic while others view it as foreign. Slogans are, of course, only one aspect of corporate communications, which also include mission and vision statements, as their vagueness or specificity, for example, may also impact how employees react to slogan fakeness. Given the subjective aspect in employees' judgements of whether slogans constitute fake news, it is important to examine other factors that may influence those judgements.

The second avenue of research is that the typology should provide a framework to study how slogan fakeness changes over time. Company slogans and the companies about which they make statements have life cycles. This means that the slogan that was authentic at one point of time may become fake as the years pass. As a company evolves, its evolution may necessarily involve changes in its company values and value proposition - changes that a slogan needs to reflect. For example, UPS evolved from a parcel delivery company to a worldwide logistics company that provides transportation, finance, and technology services in which package delivery became a much smaller part of the business. As the company became more diversified, its company slogan that was specifically focused on package delivery (“What can brown do for you?”) became more generalized (“We [heart] logistics” and “United Problem Solvers”). UPS made a tradeoff in giving up the equity in its previous slogan to move to a new slogan that was more authentic.

Rather than changing one’s slogan over time, another option for brands and companies is to do away with slogans altogether. This may be a sensible choice for companies in sectors where shifts in the marketplace are common and frequent, with mergers, acquisitions, divestitures, new competitors, and changing economic or legal conditions (Stuart and Muzellec, 2004). This would reduce the risks of having a slogan that is perceived by employees to be corrupt or foreign. Indeed, there is suggestive evidence that slogans are becoming less widely used. In 1994, approximately half of advertisements in high profile business magazines used brand slogans (Dowling and Kabanoff, 1996), but in 2012/13, only 38 percent of 1,189 company websites contained brand slogans (Anwar, 2015). Some of the most valuable brands no longer use slogans: Apple (#1 on the Interbrand 2018 ranking), Amazon (#3), and Starbucks (#57). This lesser use of slogans could be a recognition that the development of effective slogans takes significant resources (with

companies spending \$1 million to tens of millions to develop good slogans) (Aaker, 2009; Laran et al., 2011) and years of active use (Kohli, Thomas, and Suri, 2013). Despite the role of slogans as valuable corporate symbols (Turner and Spencer, 1997), organizations may recognize the importance of being truthful to the slogans they present and are retreating from using slogans during periods of rapid change.

The third area of future research is what are the costs when slogans convey fake news. In other words, by conceptualizing slogan fakeness in terms of company values and value propositions, researchers and practitioners can discern and measure associated outcomes on employee morale and organizational culture when producing company slogans. For instance, consider that scholars examine the determinants of brand equity based on the logic that a well-known and well-regarded brand name will appeal to consumers and generate more revenue than brands that are less well known and less well regarded. The same logic could be applied to the costs of slogan fakeness on employee and organizational performance. Authentic slogans are the most likely to have positive impacts on employees, because they convey the distinctive competence of the organization (Dowling and Kabanoff, 1996) and can inspire and guide action (Hatch and Schultz 2001) that is aligned with the company's goals. More specifically, since employees are important communicators of brand identity (Baker and Balmer, 1997), if they perceive a slogan to be authentic, they are more likely to be enthusiastic communicators. In contrast, narcissistic, foreign, and corrupt slogans are likely to lead to cynicism, disengagement, and confusion. In the same way researchers have developed measures for brand equity related to consumers (e.g. Aaker 1992), future research on slogan fakeness for employees could develop and test measures related to how slogan fakeness impacts meaningful work, employee retention, and employee productivity.

Advice for Practitioners

Having an authentic slogan is of course an ideal situation for organizations. It is true to the organizational brand and clearly communicates the company's values and value proposition. Often, an authentic slogan results from a corporate marketing strategy that has involved multiple internal and external stakeholders in its development (Hatch and Schultz, 2001). Once the strategy has been finalized, the creative development begins, which is also a costly and time-consuming process that often involves multiple iterations and feedback from customers, with the ultimate goal being a slogan that is memorable, interesting, and relevant to customers (Aaker, 2009; Laran et al., 2011). We suggest employees should also be involved in this process, firstly to ensure that the slogan is truly reflecting the company's values and value proposition, and secondly so that employees know what is expected of them when they interact with stakeholders. Further, in order to optimize the valuable asset of an authentic slogan, organizations are advised to engage employees through internal marketing – communicating the clear sense of purpose embodied in the slogan and putting in place policies, procedures, and processes that allow employees to implement the slogan's promise (Admed and Rafiq, 2003; Winter, 1985).

Narcissistic or foreign slogans require a stronger match between an organization's value proposition and values, although different actions are advised. Organizations with *narcissistic slogans* may have lost sight of what they offer that is relevant to their customers. Such an organization is advised to, at the very least, conduct market research among its customers to better understand and update its value proposition, then update its marketing communications, including its brand slogan. Alternatively, a realization that one's slogan has become narcissistic could be the impetus for an overhaul of a corporate marketing strategy.

Organizations with *foreign slogans* may be making promises that are relevant to their customers but these promises are not being reflected within the organization. If these promises are to be kept, the practices and culture of the organization will need to change. This is no small feat and could include changes to policies and procedures that facilitate the promises communicated by the slogan, rewards and recognition that are tied to the value proposition, goal alignment between senior management and staff, training, and improved communication between marketers and those employees who must abide by the promises marketers make (Hallowell et al., 1996; Hannah et al., 2016).

Corrupt slogans are simply not credible to employees, and probably to customers as well. Organizations could be in this situation because of shifts in the marketplace in which the promises in the slogan no longer apply, or because in the drive to communicate differentiation of the brand from the competition, the organization loses sight of its own values. Corrupt slogans may also signal that an organization's leadership is delusional and untrustworthy. Corrupt slogans should be changed immediately, or the organization needs to change in order to meet the promise made by its slogan – either way, the slogan and the organization need to be congruent. Companies who realize that their slogans are corrupt should also look carefully at their leaders. The risks in not changing corrupt slogans and the leaders that espouse them include (1) employees actively seeking to undermine the slogan and organization and denigrate them to customers and other external stakeholders, and (2) turnover of staff, as employees seek to work for other organizations in which there is congruence between the external communication and the organization's values.

In conclusion, while genuine news is constructed by journalists, and fake news is often produced by special interest organizations, fake slogans are produced by marketers. Marketers by nature tend to be focused on persuading customers; however, there is

another critical audience for marketing efforts, and that is employees. If that audience believes their company slogans are narcissistic, or foreign, or corrupt, then there are negative consequences for organizations. Organizations are therefore well-advised to ensure that their employees do not see their slogans as fake news.

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Table 1. The Links between Company Slogans and Fake News

| Slogans and Fake News | Definition and Descriptions | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Slogans associated with fake news | The news is fake. The slogan is just somehow connected to the fake news. | False information is presented with or next to a slogan. |
| Fake news about slogans | | False information is produced and shared about a company's slogan |
| Slogans convey fake news | The slogan is perceived to present fake news or disinformation about its brand. | The slogan is real, but the information it presents is not perceived to reflect the company's values and stated value proposition. |

Figure 1. Employees' Perceptions of Company Slogans

| | | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Slogan Reflects Company Values (i.e. the practices and culture of the firm)</p> | Yes | <p>Narcissistic Slogans Employees perceive that the slogan reflects the company's culture and practices, but is fake as it does not reflect the company's value proposition to customers.</p> | <p>Authentic Slogans Employees perceive that the slogan truly reflects both the company's value proposition and values.</p> |
| | No | <p>Corrupt Slogans Employees perceive that the slogan is completely fake as it neither reflects the company's value proposition nor values.</p> | <p>Foreign Slogans Employees perceive that the slogan reflects the company's value proposition, but is fake as it does not reflect the company's culture and practices.</p> |
| | | No | Yes |
| <p>Slogan Reflects Company Value Proposition (i.e. the value proposition offered to customers)</p> | | | |