

The Candy Bar – CHEAT TEST
SIX reasons why journalists take the bait of “Fake News”

C – Convenience
H – Heroics
E – Economics
A – Attention or Assumption
T – Technology

First day of Media Ethics pedagogy:

Students sit in assigned seats based on their individual majors.

Public Relations sit on one side of the room with the Film Production students and the MMJ students sit on the opposite side of the room.

Each seat has a name card with a candy bar placed on top of the name card.

When the students come to the first class they find their assigned seats. Begin class by going over the syllabus. The tried and true “first day” syllabus reading lures them into a complacency and familiarity. After finishing with the syllabus details ask, “Who has eaten the candy?” Hopefully, someone has eaten his or her candy bar.

Confront the candy bar eater with a simple question, “Why did you eat the candy bar?” The usual answer, “Because it was there and I thought it was for me to eat.” This brings up a discussion about temptation, ethical decision-making, and assumptions. Reveal to the class, the candy is fake news or information from an organization with another agenda than journalism.

Don't ever take anything unless you understand the reason why it was placed in front of you. NEVER accept anything without realizing when you take something from an organization it may impact your perceived objectivity. It will impact your credibility. (See Dan Rather) It may haunt you down the road.

To help them understand why people take the bait and why “fake news” is becoming a daily challenge present this acronym, CHEAT, to both the MMJ and the Public Relations. These are the temptations confronting journalists today.

Convenience – The “fake news” is right in front of you. It would be easy to take the story, run it and then retract if you had to. It's about efficiency. *You don't have time, you need to make deadline, and it wouldn't hurt anyone. Fill the time.*

Heroics – Beat the other news organizations. *Win your time slot. Get the most likes! Be the hero!* You have the story no one else has (because it is fake) but you want to win and you want your organization to win.

Economics – Management steps in and makes the decision. *We only have one crew tonight and we need to fill the B block. We need a story.* Our sales manager says that Bob's Ford is having a cookout to raise money for Veterans. Let's go. It would help

our sales staff. Did they raise any money? *We won't follow up to see if they did raise any money, we don't investigate our advertisers.*

Attention – We have the sexiest stories and the stories everyone is talking about. People come to us to be entertained. *We like likes! Give us a headline that gives us eyeballs and we win! We want to be #1.* We want to retain the audience that is slowly depleting. We don't want to be the news agency no one is watching because that's a downward spiral.

Assumption – The purpose and intent of the information is assumed to be accurate and not given with other intentions. *Or laid in front of you like a candy bar. You assume time; place and circumstances justify the acquisition or taking of gifts.*

Technology – *If we weren't intended to use it, science would not have created Photoshop or After Effects. Our audience wants sexy. We should "sexy up" our story with state of the art imagery because that give us more attention.* People need the shiny objects and we'll give it to them. Journalism is about storytelling and now we have the technology to tell visually stunning stories (even though we manipulate images, feelings, add music and alter images to benefit our agenda). The ethics of news gathering, producing and presenting stories has as many entangled ethics as fake news.

When you've made your point with MMJ students, flip this around and discuss how Public Relations utilizes the same urges to attract journalists to their stories. The Public Relations representatives provide the candy, hopefully meaningful information and not fake news.

Convenient/Economics: Partner up with a news organization. *Be available to the news organization at all times. Appear on their news set. Go to their news agency. Become the only organization they rely on because you are always there, like a good friend. Sponsor events together and give them stories about your innovations or provide them the "local angle" for bigger wire stories. Hospitals like to give you a one-stop shop: patient, doctor, and b-roll.*

Attention: Partner up and put the news agency logos on everything. The station wants their audience to know they care about their community. Give them an expert that can sit on their set and talk generalities or specifics with your business name on the lower third. *In exchange, stroke news anchors egos by inviting them to speak, cut ribbons, meet customers and form a personal relationship..* Hint: News anchors freak out if you do not include their speech or visit in the newscast.

Technology: Give them video opportunities. Provide a live link to the stations so they can interview your company's experts. *Heck, maybe every station in their corporation will want the same live shot.* The link should be high quality and not Face Time yuck. Give them visually appealing moments that they can use to get the

audience's attention. Drones! Helicopters! Sparkly things! *Give them stories that can make a wicked cool standup for the reporter.*

After you've fully discussed as many ethical ambiguities created by the "candy bar" you can always refer back to the CHEAT acronym when you assign case studies or examine current events.