# FIGHTING DISINFORMATION

## A STUDY OF RESPONSE STRATEGIES AND PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF TRUTH

Chloe Morgan, APR+M, Corinne Zilnicki, and Diann Rosenfeld, APR+M

Building upon SCCT, the researchers used a pretest-and-posttest online experiment to determine the most effective disinformation response strategies. Using a scenario wherein Iran releases disinformation and the U.S. is left to counter, the 3x2 factorial design ($N$ = 247) manipulated the variables of response strategies and imagery usage.

## 5 KEY TAKE-AWAYS FOR PR PRACTITIONERS AND SCHOLARS

### 1 ANY RESPONSE WILL LOWER THE AGGRESSOR'S BELIEVABILITY AND CREDIBILITY

Independent t-tests showed that when the U.S. responded using any deny strategy, participants rated Iran's believability and statement credibility lower at statistically significant rates, $t(247) = -2.33$, $p = .020$, $t(246) = -2.17$, $p = .031$, respectively.

### 2 REFUTATION IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE RESPONSE STRATEGY

One-way ANOVAs showed a statistically significant effect of the refutation response on U.S. statement credibility, $F(3, 243) = 6.54$, $p < .001$, U.S. believability $F(3, 243) = 6.08$, $p = .001$, and on Iran's believability $F(3, 245) = 4.02$, $p = .008$.

### 3 RESPONSES WITH IMAGERY AFFECT CREDIBILITY AND BELIEVABILITY

Independent t-tests showed statistically significant effects of imagery on U.S. believability, $t(245) = 2.97$, $p = .003$, Iran's believability $t(247) = -2.20$, $p = .029$, and Iran's statement credibility $t(246) = -3.77$, $p < .001$.

### 4 DISINFORMATION CAN IMPROVE AN AGGRESSOR'S REPUTATION

A paired samples t-test showed that people were more likely to have a positive attitude toward Iran following the disinformation event ($M = 2.78$ , $SD = 0.59$) than before the event ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 0.57$) at a statistically significant rate, $t(241) = -2.22$, $p = .027$.

### 5 PREEXISTING PERCEPTIONS OF REPUTATION MATTER

A linear regression ($R^2$ adj = .65) showed that U.S. reputation before the disinformation event was the most predictive variable of their post-event reputation ($\beta = .48$, $p < .001$). Similarly, Iran's reputation ($R^2$ adj = .64) before the disinformation event was the most predictive variable of their post-event reputation ($\beta = .40$, $p < .001$).