

Kimmel, A. J. (2004). *Rumor and rumor control: A managers guide to understanding and combatting rumors*. Mahwah, N. J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Reviewed by: Gwyneth Howell

Allan J. Kimmel's *Rumor and Rumor Control* comprehensively explores the confounding and damaging phenomenon of rumour, and offers practical strategies for preventing, managing and neutralizing rumours in various business contexts.

Real-life rumours are analysed to show just how damaging an unchecked rumour can be. For example, a false press release, issued in 2000 by a disgruntled former newswire intern, stated that a company was restating its earnings, faced an FTC investigation, and had fired its CEO. The company lost \$2.5 billion dollars in the first morning's trade, with most of the damage done in the first half an hour after release. The intern's motivation was to recoup \$97,000 in losses after 'selling short.' The intern later pleaded guilty to federal securities and wire fraud and is serving 15 years in prison (Kimmel, 2004).

Another example analysed is the rumour that Mrs Fields Cookies provided free cookies to the O.J. Simpson party held to celebrate his not-guilty verdict. The sources included mainstream media and anti-Simpson web sites and chat rooms on the Internet.

Kimmel examines the psychological and social processes underlying rumour transmission, and explores the how and why of rumour development and dissemination. Drawing from the limited theoretical exploration of rumour, the author distinguishes rumour as a unique and distinct communication form. Other recent real-world examples, including rumours about Procter & Gamble, McDonalds, Nike, and Coca Cola, are used to illustrate the impact of commercial rumours and assess strategies employed to combat them. The text also explores and recommends the need for public relations in managing this type of crisis, and presents a compelling argument for businesses to employ an active and comprehensive monitoring program of both traditional and new media to gauge and respond to possible rumour activity. The author uses a variety of public relations case studies to strengthen his case for the strategies recommended.

This is a practical discussion of rumour control, but is based on a strong theoretical foundation. The text provides a clear and comprehensive assessment of the forces that give rise to rumours in a commercial environment. It presents a range of strategies for controlling commercial rumour, and presents detailed tactics for the effective and efficient management of rumours. Kimmel has presented a highly critical and detailed analysis of how information is transmitted in our contemporary corporate environment, exploring not only word-of-mouth communication and informal communication channels, but also the role of mass media and the effect of opinion leaders on rumour transmission, management and response.

Earlier rumour research identified three categories of rumour: pipe dreams (or wish fulfilment); bogey (or anxiety); and wedge driving (Knapp, 1944). Allport and Postman (1947) expanded the categories to include home stretches. Kapferer (1990) sought to develop a framework to standardise rumour identification to reflect the differences in message content, purpose and cause. Kimmel's text further expands this discussion by identifying types of rumour within Knapp's (1944) categories and using Kapferer's (1990) typology. Interestingly, Kimmel emphasises that the categories are not mutually exclusive.

With its integration of theoretical and applied components, this timely text will serve both as a resource for advanced students and academics in public relations, organisational communication, management and related areas, and as a useful guidebook for professionals concerned with preventing and controlling the devastating effects of rumours, negative marketplace buzz, and destructive organisational grapevines.

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About the reviewer:

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