

TIME TO RESPIN THE ART OF SPIN



I was in the White House press room when his finger wagged and lips puckered: "I did not have #@!%! with that woman." It was the birth of the greatest spin machine in modern history. Long before tweets, pokes and blogs, Bill Clinton and his surrogates spun that day until much of the free world loathed Republican politicians. Political carcasses fell to form a psychopartisan police line around the White House. Many would say these were smart people serving their country. But spin has long been branded an art of deception, and its practitioners slick heavies. Would you let your kid be on the school "spin team?" Be coached by a spin doctor? Probably not.

Maybe that mindset needs to be reconsidered. Spin is undergoing a sea-change while becoming so ubiquitous that some aisles in the hallowed marketplace of ideas resemble counterfeit handbag stalls in Chinatown. Half the world's bloggers are aspiring spin doctors, and some people source the blogosphere like it's a giant reference book. I used to jokingly explain to foreign clients, who were considering image campaigns in America, not to be shy about advocacy advertising because American presidents were elected from 30-second commercials. I pine for those days of such in-depth contemplation.

Now social media is replacing socializing. Every nano-niche in the universe has its own app and Twitter feed, and those little ads on your computer screen are so tailored it feels like you're being stalked. We might as well start putting hashtags on our children's birth certificates.

The net effect is that spin and distribution, once distinct provinces, have become inseparably conjoined twins. What medium you distribute spin over is now part of the spin. This "spinstribution" is higher risk, higher reward — boom *and* bust all in an afternoon, while our ability to measure efficacy is faster and better too. But watch out because anyone on the planet can spinstribute right back at you before you can count to 150 characters.

The grievous fringe of this reality is that bad people use spinstribution too, sometimes more effectively than good people do. The process has become so nuanced and potent that perhaps our nation's universities should start offering degrees in spinstribution. With so much of the information we consume marinated in pre-judgment, it's time to destigmatize the work of good spin doctors.

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