

The Appeal of Misinformation:

What Happens When You Follow The Pied Pfeiffer

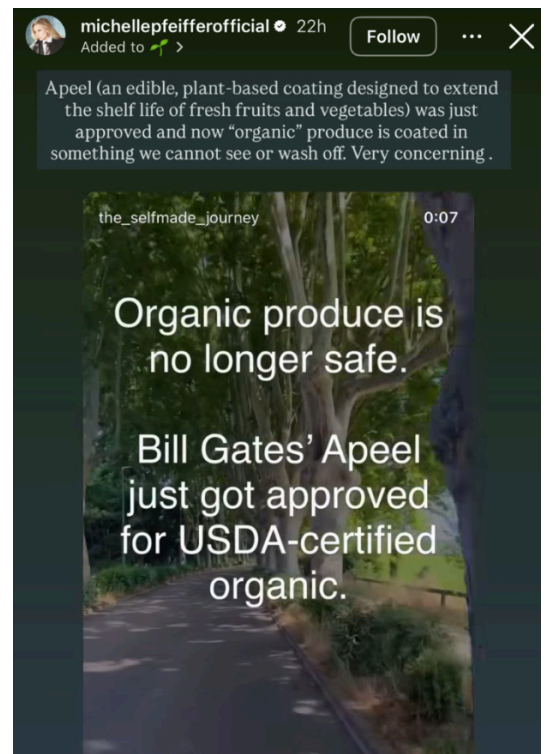


It all began with an Instagram story. In July 2025, outrage broke out on X and Instagram when Michelle Pfeiffer, an Oscar nominated actress, posted a warning about the company Apeel. Many followers expressed concern after learning that the organic products they were feeding themselves and their children might not be safe. Even worse, the company was described as being owned by Bill Gates. Her influence was broad, and the claim was strong.

In reality, the truth was far from the story the media portrayed.

Pfeiffer's information was inaccurate. Gates actually had no role or ownership in Apeel Sciences. Luiz Beling, CEO at the time, had taken over for founder James Rogers in early 2024. Organipeel, the coating product, had been approved since 2017, and the coating could be washed off. But the damage was already done: a story that only lasted 24 hours created a wave of negative sentiment across social and news media that long outlived the post. Meanwhile, news coverage was taking large bites out of Apeel's reputation. The post left everyday consumers asking the question:

What is Apeel, and should we be worried?



Timeline

12/13/2016

Apeel gained approval by the FDA to use their product, Organipeel, to coat organic produce. The company was viewed positively at large.



07/13/2025

Mentions of Apeel spiked to over 16,000 just a few days after the post. The majority of the talk on social media spoke of Apeel's toxicity and potential health risks.



07/31/2025

Michelle Pfeiffer flipped her viewpoint, apologizing for her post and discouraging the spread of misinformation. Apeel acknowledged and promoted Pfeiffer's apology.



07/11/2025

Michelle Pfeiffer drew negative attention to Apeel through an Instagram post after 8 years of the company keeping a low profile.

07/14/2025

News media outlets quickly picked up on the story, using Michelle Pfeiffer as a credible source to spread negative sentiment about Apeel and Bill Gates.



08/05/2025

Apeel Sciences officially broke their silence on the matter in a statement clarifying the lack of Gates' involvement with the company, as well as the safety and legality of their product.



Overall, Apeel saw more than 10 times as much negative sentiment across social media platforms as they saw positive. A report created using Meltwater analyzed more than 175,000 social media posts and found that a whopping 48.5% of the sentiment around Apeel was negative, while only 0.8% was positive (see fig. 1).

The negativity largely stemmed from the alleged connection to Bill Gates. According to a key message pull-through report produced through Muck Rack, news articles discussed Bill Gates at a much higher rate during the crisis than they discussed the other concerns brought up by Pfeiffer (see fig. 2).

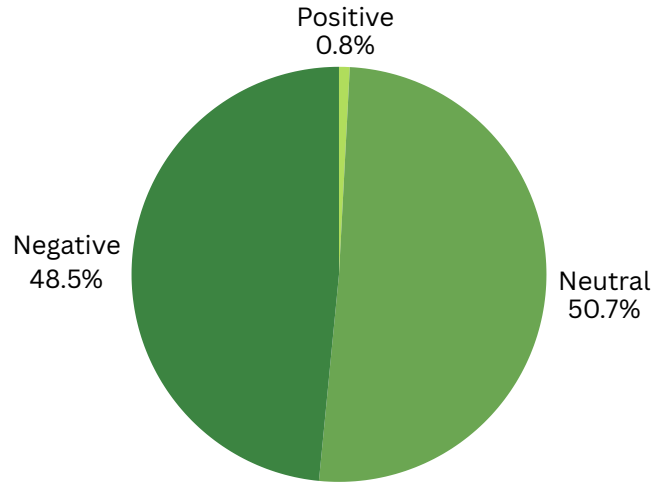


Figure 1

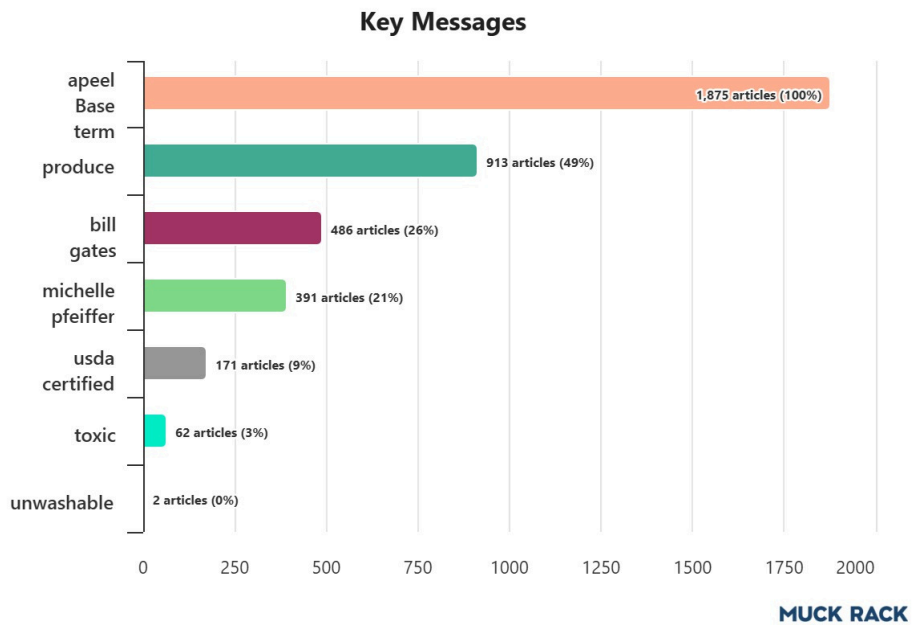
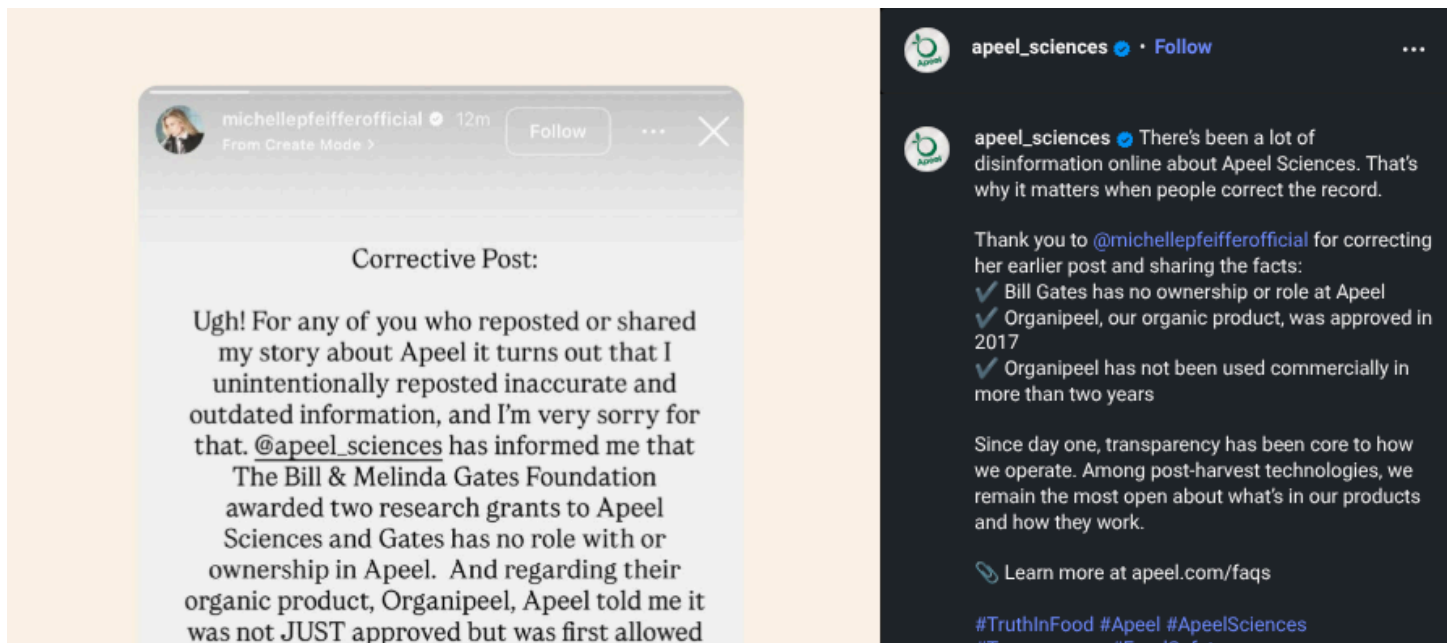


Figure 2

Apeel's [company values](#) center on transparency, innovation, and environmental sustainability. As Apeel responded to the crisis caused by the disinformation spread by Michelle Pfeiffer, they consistently advocated their values in connection to the company's actions.

Apeel utilized their social media platforms to highlight Michelle Pfeiffer's detraction of her original Instagram story. After those initial posts, Apeel later used posts across their platforms to clarify key issues, such as the nature of Bill Gates's relationship with the company, the safety of their plant-based coating, and the coating's prior approval with the FDA.



Apeel has had an ongoing battle against social media influencers spreading misinformation, with Michelle Pfeiffer being just one example. By the time Pfeiffer retracted her post, the conversation around Apeel was already cooling down. Figure 3 shows an analysis created in Meltwater of the social media mentions by volume of Apeel. Per this data, Pfeiffer's apology did not create nearly the same social media traction that her initial post did, but it most likely prevented renewed escalation of the crisis. Although Apeel was active on social media after she retracted her post, the company did not issue a response until after Pfeiffer posted her apology.

Mentions Trend

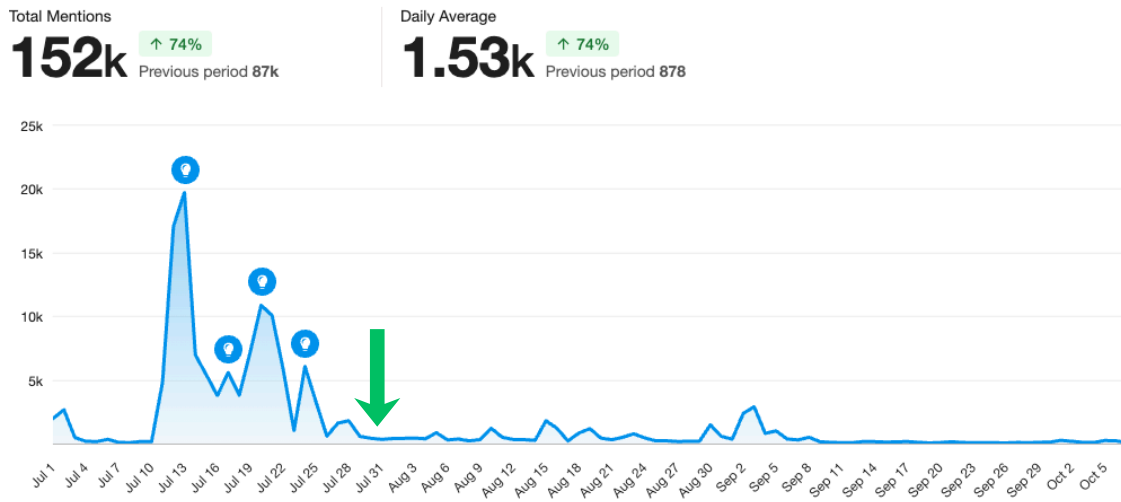


Figure 3

Based on Pfeiffer's post, it is possible that Apeel focused its efforts on a private response to her. This allowed both parties to limit public criticism or shame. Shortly after this incident, Apeel sued another influencer known as "[Green Smoothie Girl](#)" for disseminating disinformation after she published at least 60 different posts across platforms. Perhaps Apeel approached this influencer with the same opportunity to resolve the issue privately, but after no resolution, the company was forced to take legal action to protect its reputation.

One prominent individual who advocated for Apeel was American fitness trainer, [Jillian Michaels](#). She took it upon herself to conduct individual research into the company to find out if Pfeiffer's claims were true. After failing to find information backing up Pfeiffer's claims, she used her platform to reveal the truth about the safety of the company. This supporter became a more credible source to the public since Apeel trusted the information it had on its own website and allowed the situation to work itself out before making any public comments. Plus, claims from third-party advocates are often trusted more than statements directly from the brand itself. Michaels' advocacy also gave Apeel the opportunity to combat the large amount of misinformation that was being pushed out about their company.

Apeel's response allowed them to use the words of others to advocate for their company. As it regards any damage done by Michelle Pfeiffer to Apeel and the company's public image, this incident with Michelle Pfeiffer pushed Apeel to become more proactive in combating misinformation shared about them across all media mediums.

Additionally, this case shows the critical need for brands to include informational content on their website to be able to control the narrative in times of crisis. An analysis of search intent using Semrush of the top 100 searches related to Apeel (see fig. 4) found that the vast majority had informational intent. In times of crisis, consumers want to learn what’s really happening. Search behavior often spikes when confusion arises. If organizations monitor key search terms and include that content in their owned media, they have the chance to be leaders in the conversation around their brand.

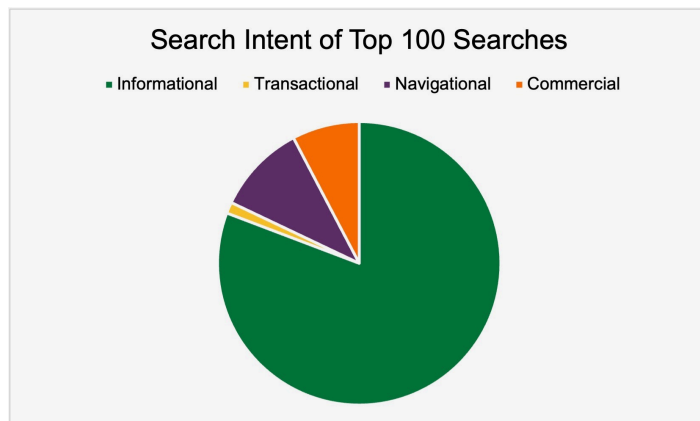


Figure 4

Being leaders in this conversation includes using the most searched keywords with the least keyword difficulty percentage, and Apeel has many opportunities to do so.

After another analysis conducted using Semrush, it is evident that those interested in learning more about Apeel are searching for keywords such as “apeel,” “apeel coating,” and “what is apeel” (see fig. 5). Apeel could easily incorporate these keywords into their website titles and headings due to the low keyword difficulty percentage. This way, the public would be directed to Apeel’s website more frequently, decreasing the spread of misinformation.

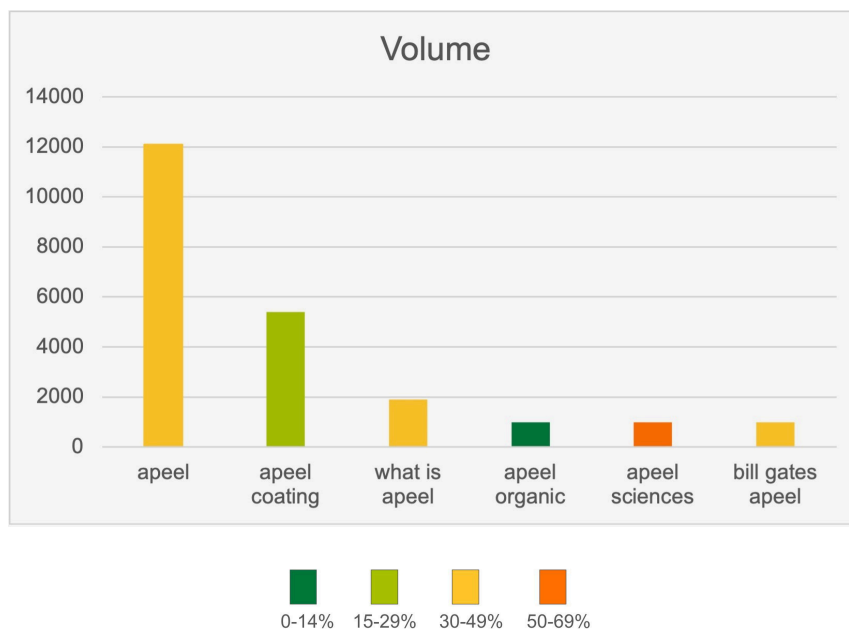


Figure 5

In today's hyper-accelerated media environment, the Apeel incident serves as a definitive reminder that constant social listening is no longer optional; it's foundational. A single Instagram story from a high-profile figure ignited a full-blown reputational crisis, illustrating how quickly misinformation can dominate conversation before communicators even enter the arena. Whether through a PR, marketing, or social media team, organizations must maintain an unbroken awareness of the narratives forming around themselves and prepare a strategy to intervene early, decisively, and transparently. The case underscores that once misinformation goes viral, even public retractions struggle to regain the ground already lost.

Equally important is the strategic use of an organization's owned media and forward-facing domains. As the report shows, Apeel's most persuasive advocacy came not from corporate statements but from Michelle Pfeiffer's own correction and support from respected personalities like Jillian Michaels. If Apeel had had better forward-facing information on their own sites, correcting this issue would have gone more smoothly. For PR professionals, the lesson is clear: in a credibility-driven landscape, organizations should amplify accurate information not only through trusted messengers who can reach skeptical audiences more effectively than traditional brand channels, but also through their own sites and channels. By pairing vigilant monitoring with smart, strategic, owned domain content, communicators can better safeguard reputation in the face of viral misinformation.