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EDITORIAL

Post-Truth - When Emotion Becomes Authority

Alina Chiracu

University of Bucharest

In recent years, the concept of post-truth has gained significant traction in political discourse, media studies, and social analysis. It refers to a cultural and political condition in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief (McIntyre, 2018; Oxford University Press, 2016). The rise of post-truth discourse signals a shift in the ways knowledge, authority, and truth are perceived and constructed in the public sphere.

The term post-truth was selected as the Word of the Year 2016 by the Oxford Dictionaries, which defined it as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (Oxford University Press, 2016). Although the word gained popularity in the 21st century, its conceptual roots can be traced back to the 1990s. The American-Serbian playwright and essayist Steve Tesich is credited with one of the earliest uses of the term in a 1992 essay in The Nation, where he criticized the public's willingness to accept political falsehoods in the wake of the Iran-Contra scandal and the Gulf War (Tesich, 1992).

The post-truth phenomenon is characterized by several key elements: distrust in traditional institutions, with a growing skepticism toward the mainstream media, scientific authorities, academia, and governmental bodies; emotional reasoning over evidence-based reasoning, where personal feelings, intuitions, and ideological affiliations often outweigh factual analysis in public decision-making; information overload and fragmentation, where through the proliferation of digital platforms and social media, users are increasingly exposed to tailored content that reinforces pre-existing views (the "echo chamber" effect); manipulation through misinformation, where the deliberate spread of false or misleading information, commonly referred to as "fake news", is used to influence political, economic, or social behavior (Lewandowsky et al., 2017; Tandoc et al., 2018); and relativism of truth, where the notion that truth is subjective and constructed, rather than verifiable and universal, becomes increasingly prevalent (Keyes, 2004; McIntyre, 2018).

Post-truth discourse flourished in contexts marked by populist politics, polarization, and crises of legitimacy. One notable example is the 2016 Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom, where misleading claims (e.g., about EU funding for the NHS) were widely circulated (D'Ancona, 2017). Another example is the 2016 U.S. presidential election, during which both major campaigns were accused of misrepresenting facts, with false stories spreading virally on social media (Lewandowsky et al., 2017). A more recent example is the COVID-19 pandemic, which gave rise to massive waves of conspiracy theories, vaccine skepticism, and pseudoscience, undermining public health efforts (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). In these and similar situations, political leaders have often capitalized on emotions such as fear, anger, and resentment, rejecting expert knowledge in favor of rhetorical simplicity and identity-based appeals (D'Ancona, 2017; McIntyre, 2018).

The post-truth condition poses serious challenges for democratic societies. For democracy, when truth becomes negotiable, deliberative processes, accountability, and informed citizenship are undermined. Disinformation campaigns can

manipulate elections, fuel division, and erode trust in democratic institutions (Keyes, 2004; Lewandowsky et al., 2017). For education, the need to promote critical thinking, media literacy, and epistemic responsibility becomes urgent. Students must learn not only to analyze sources but to recognize bias, assess evidence, and understand the distinction between opinion and fact (McIntyre, 2018). For science, the authority of science is called into question by ideological forces. Climate change denial, anti-vaccination movements, and the rejection of evolution theory exemplify how scientific consensus can be attacked by cultural narratives or political interests (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

The world is in urgent need of transformation. Current developments often diverge from the expectations and aspirations of individuals and communities alike. Yet, in the face of this uncertainty, self-destruction is not an option. We carry the ethical responsibility to protect ourselves - intellectually, emotionally, and socially - against the distortions of the post-truth era. The transition from rationality to emotional reasoning is often subtle, but alarmingly swift. This shift threatens not only our personal integrity, but also the coherence and resilience of the societies we inhabit (D'Ancona, 2017; McIntyre, 2018).

To counteract post-truth dynamics, scholars and educators propose several strategies. For example, teaching epistemic humility and cognitive biases by helping individuals understand how beliefs are formed and how cognitive shortcuts (e.g., confirmation bias) affect reasoning (Lewandowsky et al., 2017). Another approach is to foster civic dialogue and ethical communication, creating spaces for open but responsible dialogue, rooted in mutual respect and shared commitment to truth (McIntyre, 2018). People must be supported in recognizing and understanding the truth by being encouraged to seek information from trustworthy and evidence-based sources. In this regard, cultivating the habit of reading remains a highly recommended and necessary practice - particularly the reading of scientific literature, critical essays, and well-documented journalistic investigations, which foster discernment, analytical thinking, and a deeper grasp of complex realities (D'Ancona, 2017; Keyes, 2004). Supporting independent journalism and fact-checking initiatives is another option.

While post-truth is often treated as a political or media problem, it also raises philosophical questions about the nature of truth, reality, and belief. Critics argue that postmodern relativism, emphasizing that truth is socially constructed, has inadvertently contributed to the erosion of trust in facts. Others contend that post-truth is not about truth itself, but about power: who controls narratives and whose knowledge is legitimized (McIntyre, 2018). As philosopher Lee McIntyre (2018) notes, post-truth is not the same as lying; it is the deliberate construction of narratives where truth simply doesn't matter.

The post-truth era challenges us to rethink the role of facts, evidence, and rational discourse in public life. It compels educators, scientists, and citizens alike to defend truth as a shared public good, not merely as a personal perspective. Combating post-truth requires a long-term cultural shift toward epistemic responsibility, critical inquiry, and resilient democratic values (Lewandowsky et al., 2017; McIntyre, 2018;).

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