

THE IMPACT OF POST-TRUTH ON MODERN SPHERES OF SOCIETY

Andrii Verstyn

Postgraduate Student at the Department of Philosophy, Sociology and Religious Studies,
Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University, Ukraine
e-mail: andriiverstyn8@ukr.net, orcid.org/0009-0002-6958-852X

Summary

The article is devoted to the era of post-truth as a phenomenon of socio-political discourse and practice, when the truth or falsity of facts and judgments is ignored. The beginning of the post-truth era is usually associated with 2016, namely the referendum and the Brexit procedure, the election of the US president (directly because of the figure of D. Trump). The post-truth era refers to a situation where everything is completely built on lies that do not cause public condemnation. A peculiarity is the manifestation of these signs among democratic countries. The philosophical origins of the post-truth era lie in the theory of subjective relativism, which denies the existence of absolute, objective truth and emphasizes that the status of truth depends on individual judgments, experiences, and cultural conditions. In the context of relativism, science is only one perspective on the world that has the same force and influence of arguments with religion, myths, judgments and personal experiences of the average person. The concept of equality of opinions and points of view is intertwined with the problem of the limits of freedom of speech: whether different opinions should really be broadcast in society, regardless of evidence. Characteristic features of post-truth are: a) ignoring objective facts in reporting; b) appeal to the values and beliefs of the individual; c) using emotional pressure to argue one's position. It is substantiated that the emergence and development of the post-truth era is determined by technological, political, philosophical and informational factors. It is considered how the post-truth era affects the political, educational, scientific and other spheres, which significantly reduces their effectiveness. Disinformation as part of the post-truth is a significant challenge for ordinary citizens.

Key words: post-truth, disinformation, proof, truth, truth, lie.

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1. Introduction

The era of post-truth (English post-truth) is defined by the Oxford dictionary as historical “conditions under which objective facts have less influence on the formation of public opinion than appeals to emotions and personal beliefs.” Due to the large number of mentions, the term “post-truth” became the Oxford English Dictionary's word of the year for 2016. The term gained widespread popularity against the background of the referendum and the Brexit procedure, the US presidential election (directly because of D. Trump) and the spread of political populism in various countries.

2. Post-truth era

In general, the concept of “post-truth era” has a narrow and broad meaning. In a narrow sense, the term is used only in the political context as “post-truth politics” or “post-truth politics”, when the adoption and argumentation of political actions is based on fabricated facts,

previously distorted information, propaganda, etc. Mass media (mass media) become a channel for the spread of false information, manipulation and mislead society. As the philosopher K. Higgins notes, the post-truth era marks a situation when politics is completely built on lies that do not cause public condemnation. Society's tolerance is high even in cases of outright political lies and non-recognition of scientific facts. The biggest danger is that science ceases to be the basis for effective state policy (Higgins, 2016). In a broad sense, post-truth is a philosophical concept that makes the existence of objective standards of truth impossible. Thus, according to Ukrainian philosopher V. Volkovskiy, post-truth is “such a state of socio-political discourse and practice, when the truth or falsity of facts and judgments is ignored” (Volkovskiy, 2019: 90).

Yuval Noah Harari, in his bestseller “21 Lessons for the 21st Century” suggests that “humanity has always existed in the post-truth era” because it “depends on myths and belief in them”.

Based on these theses, the essence of the post-truth phenomenon should be sought in the peculiarities of human cognition of reality, misunderstanding of the meaning of what is happening, subjectivity of the process of transforming ideas into beliefs.

In his book *Post-Truth*, Lee McIntyre states: “People are not inclined to doubt an obvious fact or a fact that is easily proven; they do so only for their own benefit. If someone's belief is threatened by an “inconvenient fact,” sometimes it's easier to question the fact than the belief. This happens on both conscious and unconscious levels (sometimes the person we are trying to convince is ourselves), but the point is that such a “post-truth” attitude to the facts only happens when we are trying to defend what is more important to us than the truth itself”.

Lee McIntyre also points out different ways to “shake the truth”: “First of all, it is important to realize that sometimes we are wrong and say things that are not true without meaning to. In such a case, a person expresses a “lie”, but this is not the same as a lie, because the mistake is not intentional.

The next step is “willful ignorance”, when we actually don't know whether something is true or not, but we say it anyway, without bothering to check whether our information is correct or not. In this case, we have every reason to accuse the person of laziness, because if the facts are readily available, then by making false statements, he is at least partly responsible for ignoring the truth. Next comes lying, when we tell a lie with the purpose of misleading someone. This is an important milestone, because here we have crossed the line and are going to deceive others, even though we know that we are telling lies. By definition, every lie has its audience”.

In a consumer society, an individual turns into a consumer of information who seeks comfort in consumption. This necessarily leads the entities disseminating information to the need to present information in the most acceptable form for recipients through simplification, emotionally attractive coloring, technical accessibility thanks to the use of the ICT (information and communication technologies) arsenal. Thus, with the participation of artificial intelligence of the search network, the consumer quickly finds himself in an “information bubble” and begins to receive information that is filtered by an algorithm in accordance with the established preferences of the network user. Such a system limits us from contact with uncomfortable ideas and critical information, which leads to a distorted perception of information. In communicative practices (both interpersonal and social networks), individuals seek to build connections with subjects close in interests and values.

Eli Perister used the metaphor “filter-bubble” to describe the structure of modern human perception. “Filter-bubble” is a set of individual preferences that, surrounding a person, do not allow new, unexpected, non-standard information to penetrate into his consciousness. Personalized information search and recommendation services play an important role in its formation. They are exactly the information that the user wants to receive, they are adjusted to the tastes

and preferences, leaving fewer chances to get acquainted with various sources, different points of view on the same event, that is, they actually lead to intellectual isolation.

So, consumers of information in the post-truth era can be distinguished as follows:

The first group is those who mainly consume information that does not create contradictions to already formed stereotypes of assessments, do not perceive facts and their interpretations, if they do not confirm their own existing judgments, limit their own communications to communication with carriers of alternative approaches (*Korkos, 2023: 23*).

The second group is those who approach the difficulties in analyzing the contradictory and ambiguous interpretation of events from the position of asserting that “we will never know the truth”. Such carriers of information are characterized by either an extremely simplified system of views and beliefs, or a fragmented consciousness with strong internal contradictions.

The third group is those who strive and practice getting acquainted with versatile information on certain issues, are inclined to a critical approach, comparing different opinions, even if they are uncomfortable for their own beliefs. As a rule, they adhere to a moderate position in assessing the facts.

Therefore, each representative of the above-mentioned groups has their own truth, as they understand information according to their beliefs, emotions, background knowledge, their position, why and what they are ready to believe. Understanding facts, their axiology (orientation in understanding to what corresponds to a person's personal requests – fact as a value) allows researchers of the post-truth phenomenon to talk about the purposeful selection of facts, which is based on a subjective factor. Therefore, it is extremely important today to distinguish between a real description of events and their interpretation, that is, valid facts and opinions about them. Most people only hear what they want to hear because they will only receive knowledge from sources whose biases they agree with in advance.

3. Post-truth

“If post-truth was a lie, why would there be a need to invent a new term? After all, reducing the concept of “post-truth” to a primitive “lie” is a typical attempt to primitivize the concept. Because the essence of post-truth is that it is not a lie, but an interpretation of the truth. The spectrum of such interpretations is so large that they can both slightly correct the facts and completely distort them (it is this aspect that is mistakenly associated with lies). To put it bluntly, post-truth is a vulgarization of facts inherent in ordinary people, because these people (in other words, the masses) do not have the skills to work professionally with information, check it, analyze it, and separate facts from judgments. If a person spices up a fact with a personal emotion that resonates with the emotions of other ordinary people, the message becomes viral and instantly spreads through social networks, which is similar to the snowball effect – it will not stop until it is interrupted by the next “snowballs” (*Korkos, 2023: 23*).

Undoubtedly, conveying true information about the war in Ukraine is a complex and lengthy process that has its own specifics, limitations, and time perspectives. At the same time, he already needs to convey objective information about the Kremlin's aggression in Ukraine to the citizens of Ukraine, who have been under the influence of the occupation authorities of the Russian Federation for a long time; clear delineation of addressees, form and content of information content. At first, it is not about “conviction”, but rather about forming the ground for doubts, creating conditions for changes in the consciousness of certain categories of the population – from a change in attitude towards “special operations” to awareness of the crimes of the current occupation Putin's regime.

How is post-truth interpreted today? First of all, this is the presentation of certain information that affects emotions, rather than conveying facts. It is about the fact that the subjects of the presentation of information (political leaders, journalists, public figures, etc.) disseminate information that the recipient (the public) wants to hear. However, post-truth is not always false. In most cases, post-truth is a set of distorted (half-truths) or fabricated facts that lead to false conclusions. In the post-truth era, fake news presented as authentic and conspiracy theories create an alternate reality and serve propaganda purposes. Post-truth is used and presented by those people who seek to convince others of their “made-up truth”. So, today the main subjects of the spread of post-truth are: 1) politicians who seek significant support in the elections; 2) journalists of those mass media that try to attract the attention of viewers and listeners in order to achieve popularity and career growth; 3) sellers of goods and services who are always looking for customers; 4) bloggers who seek more subscribers or advertisers (*Movchan, 2019*). To these listed subjects we can add all the people whose opinion can in a certain way influence the choice of others. The main reason for the rapid spread of post-truth is: people's reluctance to check facts, stereotyped thinking, lack of critical thinking and application of logical knowledge.

4. Post-truth is explained by the interaction of numerous factors

The strengthening of the post-truth is explained by the interaction of numerous factors. Among them, researchers single out the following:

– socio-technological factors. Here it is said that modern information and communication technologies, especially social media, have dramatically increased the volume of disseminated information in the information environment, the ease of access to it, and the speed of its dissemination. On the other hand, despite the fact that the increase in the level of availability of information has many positive consequences, it also increases the volume and speed of dissemination of unreliable information that is not professionally verified. In addition, filtering and personalization algorithms in modern search engines and social media can limit the level of access and exposure to various information and sources;

– political factors. It is widely recognized that disinformation and propaganda are often used to promote the political and ideological agendas of political parties, leaders and movements. The political information space is increasingly dominated by information resources, social networks, websites that serve the specific programs of political parties and leaders, and ensure the distribution of the content they need. Therefore, growing political polarization causes the spread of post-truth manifestations. J. Hopkin and B. Rosamond (*Hopkin and Rosamond, 2017*) claim that the growth of populist and anti-elitist movements and the refusal of political subjects to apply the basic principles of rational proof and truth, which are characteristic of the political discourse of such parties and movements, causes significant interest of the mass media, although so far it does not contribute much to the systematic study of this phenomenon. In addition, researchers point out that in the political sphere, the success of the use of post-truth tools by political actors can be explained by two main reasons. First, the loss of public support for those political parties whose goal is no longer to govern the state for the benefit of the broad social strata, but instead to promote the political career of party officials and/or candidates applying for this or that position. Ultimately, this weakens the connection between voters, activists and party leaders; political parties increasingly distance themselves from the social interests they conventionally represent and are increasingly reluctant to express clearly identifiable political positions. Second, when major policy decisions are justified technocratically or limited to pressure on financial markets, the reward for developing concrete policy

proposals decreases, while the reward for developing offensive or vague plausible discourses remains the same: “bad ideas overcome, good ones win” (Hopkin and Rosamond, 2017);

– economic factors. Disinformation and propaganda are also spread to achieve economic benefits and serve corporate interests. In addition, media companies seek to maximize profits for themselves and their advertisers by promoting information based on its emotional appeal and people's personal preferences. In socio-political terms, growing economic inequality can increase political polarization and thus contribute to the spread of misinformation;

– scientific factors. Some researchers suggest that certain aspects of modern science and scientific communication can reduce trust in science. The increased role of the private sector in supporting research increases the threat of financial bias. Trust in science, uncertainty about its reliability is often undermined today by certain communication practices, in particular, such as “exaggerating” scientific conclusions or creating a “false balance” (Barzilai and Chinn, 2020).

5. Conclusions

So, it is worth noting that the spread of the post-truth phenomenon creates a new situation in which both the masses and decision-makers find it increasingly difficult to understand and explain reality and make the right decisions based on it. In particular, the basic (dominant) approach to reality, which involves fact-checking and rational decision-making, is being questioned. Therefore, in its framework, the value of experience and knowledge is questioned, the priority of facts (specific empirical data) is rejected. Today, the phenomenon of post-truth affects the perception of reality and means that it is necessary to spend more time to carefully select data and/or check it for reliability. Therefore, complex studies of post-truth manifestations in modern political discourse, finding models for minimizing their negative impact, strengthening the role of modern political knowledge and facts that will enable dialogue and better understanding between political elites and the masses should be considered promising. Apart from this, the Ukrainian context of the post-truth phenomenon needs more detailed elaboration and analysis.

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