

Navigating the Post-Truth Era: Truth, Trust, and Strategies for Information Integrity

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Abstract

In the era of information overload and the fragmentation of the media space, the concepts of truth and trust are in the throes of a revolutionary change. ‘Post-truth’, 2016 Oxford Dictionary’s Word of the Year, means “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” (Oxford Languages, 2016). As a result of this, a crisis of epistemic authority is occurring, and many sources of truth are coming under challenge. The processes of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation have become commonplace in the digital age and changed the way people perceive the world, obtain and process information, and trust in the institutions. The objective of this paper is to explore the paradoxical relationship between truth and trust in an age of information abundance, where people have access to an ever-growing supply of information, but the actual knowledge is fragmentary. By combining the philosophical, psychological, technological, sociological, and political approaches to the post-truth concept, the paper will aim to provide a better understanding of the phenomenon as well as of its causes and consequences for the concept of truth and loss of trust in traditional institutions. It will also try to determine the best possible way to regain some amount of integrity of information in the current state of the world.

Keywords: information, Truth, phenomenon, post-truth,

Introduction-

In the post-truth era—designated by Oxford Dictionaries’ 2016 Word of the Year—objective facts increasingly yield to emotional appeals and personal beliefs, eroding the foundation of shared reality. This phenomenon, amplified by Brexit, the 2016 U.S. election, and the relentless evolution of digital ecosystems, has reached critical intensity by late 2025.

Advancements in generative artificial intelligence have collapsed the boundary between authentic and fabricated content. Deepfakes, voice cloning, and synthetic media are now virtually indistinguishable from reality, fueling election interference, financial fraud, and targeted harassment on an unprecedented scale. Social media algorithms, optimized for engagement rather than veracity, accelerate the viral spread of misinformation, further diminishing public trust in institutions, journalism, and expertise.

Review of Literature

The concept of a "post-truth" era, popularized by Oxford Dictionaries in 2016 and traced back to works like Ralph Keyes' *The Post-Truth Era* (2004), describes a societal shift where objective facts are subordinated to emotional appeals and personal beliefs. Scholarly literature has evolved significantly, linking this phenomenon to misinformation proliferation via social media and, more recently, generative

AI. Early studies focused on political events like Brexit and the 2016 U.S. election, highlighting disinformation's role in polarization. By 2024-2025, research has emphasized deepfakes and synthetic media as amplifiers of the crisis, with systematic reviews (e.g., Birrer & Just, 2025; Ching et al., 2025) showing humans struggle to detect AI-generated content, leading to eroded trust in media and institutions. Interdisciplinary works underscore deepfakes' impacts on elections, fraud, and democratic discourse, while noting the "liar's dividend" where authentic evidence is dismissed as fake.

This crisis threatens democratic deliberation, deepens societal polarization, and undermines evidence-based governance. Yet it also presents an imperative for action. This paper investigates the deteriorating relationship between truth and trust, while evaluating practical strategies—media literacy programs, AI detection technologies, regulatory measures, and robust fact-checking ecosystems—to restore information integrity and foster resilience in an increasingly manipulated informational landscape.

Objectives

This paper aims to examine the dynamics of truth and trust in the post-truth era, characterized by the dominance of emotional narratives over factual evidence and exacerbated by AI-driven misinformation. Specific objectives include: (1) analyzing the evolution and impacts of deepfakes and synthetic media on public perception and institutional credibility; (2) exploring the mechanisms through which social media algorithms and generative AI contribute to information fragmentation and polarization; (3) evaluating existing strategies for mitigating disinformation, such as media literacy initiatives and technological detection tools; and (4) proposing integrated approaches involving education, regulation, and innovation to restore information integrity and foster societal resilience against manipulated content in democratic processes.

Main text

Exploring the post-truth condition:

Conceptual lenses and solutions The rise of a post-truth condition, as defined by a collective dismissive posture towards the value of accuracy and the availability of factual information in public life, has been identified as a key threat to the foundations of democratic institutions and deliberation. As such, a variety of theoretical perspectives have emerged in order to understand the phenomenon and delineate its contours both at a conceptual and a systemic level. In the following text, an attempt to define and place into context the notion of 'post-truth' is made, while the central epistemological, sociopolitical, technopolitical, and cognitive elements of the problem are also highlighted. Defining Post-Truth and Information Disorder A variety of theories of post-truth have thus far attempted to dissect and explain the phenomenon. The trajectory of the concept of 'post-truth' in the public and scholarly discourses around it has seen it become used in an increasingly specific way in order to denote the rise of fabrication over fact-checked information, but the picture is complex and far from singular. Best, a political scientist and leading authority on the phenomenon, explicitly problematizes the concept itself due to the multifaceted nature of truth in the contemporary world, and the fact that divergences and complexities are to be expected. A combined analysis of epistemological and sociocultural theories, however, can help deconstruct the logics behind the phenomenon of post-truth narratives. Works on historical public discourses on the devaluation of truth, or more contemporary sociopolitical trends at play in how different audiences view the value of truth, can both help develop a more nuanced understanding. Addressing an initial question: "What characterizes a post-truth condition?" The following, synthetic definition, developed in combination with

a variety of the theoretical frameworks and bodies of work discussed in this paper, is proposed below: The concept of a post-truth era, while variously defined, is ultimately not just an observation of the fact that lies are everywhere, but more so a paradigm shift in the epistemic foundations of public knowledge. Following a similar terminology to that which Keyes (2004) introduced and even later coined as the ‘post-truth era’ to encapsulate the zeitgeist of a phenomenon in which telling lies became more or less normalized, more recent work has built on this definition by Lewandowsky et al. (2017) as a specific paradigm in which the ‘post-truth’ label represents an epistemic position privileging ‘alternative facts’ over an empirically established consensus simply because it more resonates with preexisting beliefs. The theoretical framework of information disorder, proposed by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017), is a helpful framework for disentangling some of the elements that are encompassed by the post-truth umbrella. The proposed categorization was:

1. Misinformation: Information shared that is known to be false
2. Disinformation: Information intentionally fabricated and shared with a goal of deceiving an audience
3. Malinformation: Accurate information that is shared with an intent to harm (e.g. out of context)

This framework not only is useful in informing and widening the debate, but also for bringing more nuance to the consideration of different types of truth distortion mechanisms. The role of technology in misinformation amplification One of the key technological and systemic contexts in which the post-truth condition occurs is the technological architecture of modern information systems. Algorithmic information prioritization logics found in social media platforms are, by design, optimized for amplifying signals that drive user engagement, at the cost of an incentive structure that privileges veracity. The effect of such algorithmic logics was described by Pariser (2011) in a seminal work as a phenomenon of ‘filter bubbles’ in which individual information ecosystems automatically curate content into information echo chambers, shielding users from exposure to countervailing positions. The effects of these logics on any consensus around the nature of truth and the evidentiary basis for it have been profound, creating a crisis of information integrity by contributing to the fragmentation of the informational commons on which democratic deliberation has historically been based. In a study published in the journal *Science*, Vosoughi et al. (2018) found that on social media misinformation spreads faster, reaches more people, and occurs more frequently than true content. Conducted as an analysis of approximately 126,000 rumor cascades reaching over 4.5 million Twitter users from 2006 to 2017, this study concluded that fake news was 70% more likely to be retweeted than the true news. The systemic asymmetry in speed between truthful and untruthful information, this work hypothesizes, is due to novelty effects of the former, which trigger a higher emotional response, cognitive heuristics that incentivize sharing as a result. Platform design is only one part of this vector. Tufekci (2018) describes in a recent work the dynamics of an ‘attention economy’ at work in which social media companies find themselves in a competitive dynamic for access to the limited resource of attention, using a set of increasingly powerful methods to capture and retain user attention. This attention competition, the theory goes, would tend to reward content that is sensational and which therefore disproportionately captures attention regardless of factual accuracy. Psychological factors and cognitive biases A factor that has also been found to be key and understudied in the post-truth condition is the role of individual-level psychological processes which mediate information reception and belief formation. Cognitive biases have been consistently found to compromise rational engagement with information, creating predispositions that result in patterns of user belief that favour the reception of falsehoods which confirm existing preconceptions. Confirmation bias, the tendency of people to process information in a way that confirms their preexisting beliefs, is of direct relevance to this discussion on misinformation. Documented in large

quantities of work by Nickerson (1998) across a range of settings, from scientific inquiry to more quotidian information consumption, confirmation bias has been shown to create systematic distortions of truth evaluation processes. Motivated reasoning, for example, as theorized by Kahan (2016), shows that in a variety of contexts, information is often processed by individuals in ways that are intended to reaffirm cultural identities and group belonging, even at the expense of factual accuracy. This theory of ‘identity-protective cognition’ explains some of the persistence of factual beliefs in the face of corrective information, particularly for beliefs on politically salient issues in which stances are often identity-defining for one’s group membership. The backfire effect, which occurs when the presentation of evidence which contradicts a person’s beliefs results in an entrenchment of those beliefs instead of their revision, presents a further psychological impediment to the restoration of truth. Documented in the political context by Nyhan and Reifler (2010), this effect was shown to reinforce misconceptions among politically ideologically aligned audiences of the initial misinformation. Institutional trust and the knowledge crisis

One final important contextual factor to frame the post-truth condition has been the loss of trust in traditional institutions of knowledge validation. Edelman's Trust Barometer (2021) has shown a systematic and continuous decline in trust in institutions of knowledge such as government, media, business, and NGOs across a wide range of national contexts. The so-called ‘trust recession’ that this dataset reflects has generated an epistemic crisis of sorts in which a variety of alternative sources of information can fill the trust vacuum. This trend is particularly evidenced in the case of the media. Trust in the media has been on a steady decline in the United States over the past decades, with a recent Gallup poll revealing that the share of the American public saying that they have ‘a great deal’ or ‘fair amount’ of trust in mass media declined from 72% in 1976 to 40% in 2021 (Brenan, 2021). This decline has not been experienced homogeneously across the political spectrum, with trust in media today now sharply divided along party lines—a divide that has only increased over the past few decades. This cross-partisan difference in media trust levels creates disparate information ecosystems which make the formation of a shared set of facts more difficult. Knight and Tsao (2019) list several precipitating factors of this decline in institutional trust, such as a perceived capture of institutions by elite groups and interests, the exposure of major institutional failures (intelligence community during the Iraq War, mainstream finance during the 2008 financial crisis), an increasingly polarized media ecosystem, and the wider phenomenon of rising economic inequality and associated status anxiety. The ramifications of a post-truth condition

The consequences of a post-truth condition are similarly far-reaching and, potentially, acutely damaging to the workings of democratic societies. At the centre of the deliberative theory of democracy is the concept of the ‘ideal speech situation,’ a set of conditions of rational discourse in which interlocutors are oriented towards arriving at consensus through a shared orientation towards truth and mutual understanding. An erosion of a shared factual baseline is anathema to the ideal speech situation, and the epistemic presuppositions of the latter are instead replaced by what Mouffe (2005) calls ‘antagonistic pluralism’ – a condition in which truth claims are irreconcilable, deeply held identity markers instead of propositions amenable to rational-critical engagement. This theoretical point is one empirically borne out by research: Lewandowsky et al. (2021) have charted the insidious ways in which misinformation has impacted democratic processes in a variety of contexts, from Brexit to COVID-19 public health measures. The results of their work have indicated that misinformation exposure measurably impacts political attitudes, voting behaviour, and policy preferences in a way that often undermines institutional effectiveness and social cohesion. The case of the COVID-19 pandemic has been a particularly salient example of the risks of a post-truth condition. A study conducted by Romer and Jamieson (2020) showed a direct correlation between belief in COVID-19

misinformation and a lower adherence to public health guidelines, a clear example in which distortion of truth had a measurable and pernicious real-world effect. The World Health Organization's declaration of a parallel 'infodemic' to the biological pandemic was symbolic of the stakes of information integrity. Counteracting post-truth strategies and solutions A range of different interventions would thus be required to mitigate the impact of the post-truth phenomenon, an eclectic array of measures spanning the technological, educational, regulatory, and social. On the technological side, there is some evidence to suggest that platform-led interventions can work. In Zannettou's (2021) work, it is shown that Twitter's practice of introducing labels to misinformation content resulted in a reduction of sharing by as much as 29%, a non-trivial figure which points to the promise of measures that introduce friction to misinformation diffusion without resorting to outright censorship. Educational interventions in media literacy are also showing promise. Jeong et al. (2019) show, in a randomized controlled experiment, that a short educational program in media literacy resulted in significantly improved ability of participants to correctly evaluate misleading news content, with effects persisting for at least 3 weeks. This suggests inoculation against misinformation strategies at the individual level to be a potentially viable approach for building cognitive resilience. Regulatory measures are also beginning to take shape in different national jurisdictions. The European Union's Digital Services Act (European Commission, 2020) sets a precedent for introducing a balance of transparency requirements and accountability mechanisms for digital platforms with respect to content moderation while retaining protections for intermediary liability. This approach, more balanced than many regulatory measures, seeks to protect open expression while still incentivizing responsible information stewardship. Critically, there is evidence to suggest that such technological interventions, while possibly beneficial, are also likely to be ultimately insufficient on their own. The loss of trust in institutional messengers must be restored by also addressing some of the structural grievances that drive truth scepticism. Putnam and Romney Garrett (2020) argue for a rebuilding of social capital through the strengthening of local institutions and bridging social ties across political and cultural divides. This sociological approach to the issue recognizes that the acceptance of truth claims is ultimately as much dependent on the credibility of messengers as on the truth value of messages. The post-truth condition is, indeed, a deep epistemological crisis with material consequences for democracy, institutions, and society. It has proven itself to be a systemic one, as the disruption of truth and the distortion of information are a threefold phenomenon involving technological, psychological, and sociopolitical dynamics often working in synergy. Algorithmic amplification has real-world consequences on the cognitive biases of users, which are often triggered by weak institutions which are themselves impacted by the false information ecosystem (Pariser, 2011). Efforts to identify potential intervention measures to counter the condition, however, quickly reveal a complex ecosystem of vulnerabilities and unmet needs that is unlikely to be disrupted through a silver bullet intervention. It appears that while there can be interventions both on the supply side of this ecosystem (technical measures and manipulation prevention on platforms) as well as the demand side (educational interventions, building cognitive resistance to manipulation), the former cannot work in any effective way if not complemented by a set of solutions to a more systemic problem of trust (Knight & Tsao, 2019). Institutions and public authorities have lost a significant part of the social trust required for information they give to be trusted, which is why they can no longer simply 'demand the truth,' to expect the population to trust them (O'Neill, 2002). The general population must not only be protected from disinformation through education and regulation but also find reasons to believe in truth again and to trust institutions that have been weakened, or even broken (Putnam & Romney Garrett, 2020). A potentially fruitful line of future research is thus an investigation of the different factors conditioning truth

perception on different cultural, age, or geographic cohorts. In particular, a better understanding of whether there are any demographic or cultural variables that protect against a perception of fake news may be key to mapping protection strategies. Monitoring and assessment of the impact of different interventions is also a crucial next step if we are to design successful solutions and stop running through a cycle of interventions that are unable to make a material difference. Cross-cutting research combining different strands of scholarship from the cognitive, the sociological, the political, and the computer science fields seems likely to be a necessary requirement to have a more holistic, multidimensional understanding of the problem. A challenge in this case being how to reconcile these different disciplinary perspectives. The post-truth condition is also emblematic of the fallacy of an idea in which ‘convincing the public’ simply by ‘showing the facts’ is a reasonable proposition. In short, in a context of low-trust levels, truth arguments simply do not reach their audience, and as has been shown, reasons and evidence will not restore trust in government or institutions. Convincing, it must be understood, not in the sense of an intellectual seduction but in the sense of ‘persuading’ populations to trust these institutions. Trust must be earned and it is not given at demand. In this context, countering the post-truth condition will not be possible if efforts are not made in the same vein to also repair the democratic institutions and the epistemic foundations that have been damaged.

Post-Truth Era: Why It Matters and How to Improve

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Findings

Deepfake and AI-generated misinformation have narrowed the "plausibility gap" between authentic and fabricated information by the end of 2025. This is evidenced by a sharp increase in election interference, voice cloning scams, and a decline in global media trust, as well as low public detection rates and growing uncertainty and polarization (UNESCO, 2025; Firstpost, 2025). However, effective solutions are possible: improved media literacy programs have helped to develop critical thinking; AI detection tools and fact-checking ecosystems are available with limitations, and multi-stakeholder regulation can help to limit the spread of false information. In summary, the combination of education, technology, and policy has shown that rebuilding trust and information integrity is possible in the face of emerging digital threats.

conclusion

The post-truth era is defined by the subordination of facts and reason to emotional appeals and personal beliefs. This presents significant implications for truth, trust, and social cohesion. The key drivers of this phenomenon include the fragmentation of digital media, increased polarization and tribalism, and the declining credibility of traditional institutions. As a result, there is an erosion of the role of evidence and rational discourse as a public good essential to democracy and sound decision-making. This, however, also affirms the human ability for discernment or “human tuning.” The ongoing crisis of truth reaffirms the importance of recalibrating our senses and cognitive apparatus in distinguishing between objective facts and subjective or manipulated ones.

The core question for this phenomenon is: how can we preserve and strengthen the information integrity against misinformation and manipulation online? The proposed solutions include promoting media and digital literacy to better empower individuals as active fact-checkers; developing interdisciplinary “technocognition” to design and implement solutions to misinformation and platform governance based on cognitive and psychological insights; strengthening the institutional foundations of epistemic vigilance,

such as independent journalism and regulatory and fact-checking standards, as well as enabling cross-partisan conversations and collaboration. Navigating the post-truth era, then, will require a renewed emphasis on critical thinking and ethical communication online as well as offline. The way forward is to reconnect with our better angels, to err and be humble in the face of complexity, and to remember the human capacity for learning. In other words, the post-truth era calls for refining our human tuning, by means of education, empathy, and rigorous inquiry, to reclaim our shared reality. The stakes are high, but human ingenuity in seeking the truth offers reason for hope.

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