

Post-Truth(Lee McIntyre)

1. What Is Post-Truth?

post-truth is not so much a claim that truth *does not exist* as that *facts are subordinate to our political point view*.

“Post-truth amounts to a form of ideological supremacy, whereby its practitioners are trying to compel someone to believe in something whether there is good evidence for it or not.”

Our built-in cognitive biases, academic hair-splitting on questions about truth, and exploitation of the media have already had a prior life in the right wings’s attacks science.

2. Science Denial as a Road Map for Understanding Post-Truth

burden of proof: truth → alt

“Doubt Is Our Product”

Merchant of Doubt: Tobacco and oil industries

Why search for scientific disagreement when it can be manufactured? why bother with peer review when one’s opinions can spread by intimidating the media or through public relations? And why wait for government officials to come to the ‘right’ confusion when you can influence them with industry money.”

Climate Change and Beyond

“The selective use of facts that prop up one’s position, and the complete rejection of facts that do not, seems part and parcel of creating the new post-creating the new post-truth reality.”

Implications for Post-Truth

“Our inherent cognitive biases makes us ripe for manipulation and exploitation by those who have an agenda to push, especially if they can discredit all other sources of information.”

3. The Roots of Cognitive Bias

Three Classic Findings from Social Psychology

(1) Cognitive dissonance (2) social conformity, and (3) confirmation bias

Contemporary Work on Cognitive Bias

(1) Backfire effect (2) The Dunning-Kruger effect (too stupid to know they’re stupid)

“Succumbing to cognitive bias can feel a lot like thinking. But especially when we are emotionally invested in a subject, all of the experimental evidence shows that our ability to reason well will probably be affected.”

“Whether we are liberal or conservative, cognitive bias is part of our human inheritance.”

4. The Decline of Traditional Media

non-profits news (Prestige Press: *New York Times*, *Washington Post*...) → *60 Minutes* → CNN (Left)

Rush Limbaugh “set himself up as a source of truth” to the right → FOX

The Problem of Media Bias

“Is the messenger responsible for any false impressions that may be created in his or her community of followers? Or should that responsibility rest only with those who intend to mislead people into believing something that is untrue?”

“By allowing ‘equal time,’ the media only succeeded in creating ‘false equivalence’ between two sides of an issue even when there were not really two credible sides.”

5. The Rise of Social Media and the Problem of Fake News

“The rise of social media as a source of news blurred the lines even further between news and opinion.”

News Silo (echo chamber)

“How ironic that the internet, which allows for immediate access to reliable information by anyone who bothers to look for it, has for some become nothing but an echo chamber.”

“If we look back throughout history, we realize that the rich and powerful have always had an interest (and usually a means) for getting the ‘little people’ to think what they wanted.”

“In this environment, fake news evolved from clickbait to disinformation. It morphed from a vehicle for financial gain to one for political manipulation. “

The History of Fake News

Fake News Today

Down the Rabbit Hole

Fighting Back

6. Did Postmodernism Lead to Post-Truth?

Deconstruction: Everything as a text/narrative (Derrida)

Knowledge/power: Ideology (Foucault)

No objective truth

The Science Wars

weak program: mere ideological bias

strong program: all scientific theories as the product of ideology

Higher superstition: The Academic Left and its Quarrels with Science <—> humanities

The Sokal Hoax

Fashionable Nonsense

Right-Wing Postmodernists

“Even if right-wing politicians and other sciences deniers were not reading Derrida and Foucault, the germ of the idea made its way to them.”

“How does the left fight back against right-wing ideology without using facts? This is the cost of playing with ideas as if they had no consequences.”

Trolling for Trump

7. Fighting Post-Truth