

The Past Evolution, Present Challenge and Future Prospect of the Post-Truth Research

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Abstract: In the past few years, the phenomenon of post truth has become popular in Western countries. It refers to the fact that public emotions and personal beliefs have a greater impact on facts than the actual situation itself. The history of the post truth phenomenon can be traced back to the 1970s, but in recent years, due to the widespread use of digital and social media, the spread of fake news has become even more rampant. The phenomenon of post truth has become a new political culture, regarded as a manifestation of populist movements that resist elites. Currently, the post truth phenomenon faces some challenges. With the frequent occurrence of major public emergencies, new impetus has been provided for the popularization and complexity of post truth. After the COVID-19, people began to connect their personal situation with the health of the whole society, which further aroused the public's attention to the truth. However, studying post truth faces many challenges, such as how to explain the phenomenon of post truth, the motivation of fake news, and the persuasive strategies of news. In future prospects, the focus of truth after research may shift towards the role of emotions. Emotions are increasingly valued in social sciences. Understanding the relationship between emotions and facts will help to better understand post truth phenomena. Emotion is not only the opposite of truth or rationality, but also an important component of cognitive psychology and even a resource for social mobilization and integration. Further research on the role of emotional discourse will help reveal the social and cultural aspects of post truth phenomena. In summary, the evolution of post truth phenomena, current challenges, and future prospects are all important aspects of studying post truth. A thorough study of the history, motivation, and impact of post truth phenomena will help us better understand and respond to the challenges of post truth phenomena, and provide new directions for future research.

1 The Past Evolution

Post-truth, as one of the 2016 annual hot words of the Oxford Dictionary, which refers to that when the public forms opinions on an event, the influence of emotions and personal beliefs on them exceeds the fact itself.^[1] The high-frequency use of the term post-truth occurred during the 2015 U.K. government's "Brexit referendum" proposal and the 2016 U.S. general election. Although the post-truth phenomenon has become popular in recent years, Arendt proposed the concepts of "deliberate misinterpretation of the truth" and "deliberately changing the truth" as early as 1972^[2]. Later, the term post-truth was cited by *The Nation* to describe the news environment during the Watergate incident, the Iran Gate and the Gulf War^{[3][4]}. While Eric's (1992) definition focused on the denial of historical reality, Tesich (1992), Keyes (2004), and Fuller (2018) defined it as the actions of individuals in positions of authority in government, business, and culture who purposefully hid and manipulated information for self-preservation and personal gain, which would have been beneficial for the public to know and have reported accurately^{[5][6][7]}. Post truth politics is

interpreted as a populist movement, a resistance to elite rule, and has become a new political culture in the West.^[8]

Post-truth history is the communication of false information on a historical phenomenon that appeals to emotion and personal belief, where both the purveyor and recipient are indifferent to historicity and contemptuous of expert opinion that contradicts it, and where the underlying objective is ideological, especially in support of a collective identity or a political programme^[9]. The main current characteristics of the post-truth era are the widespread dissemination of fake news, and the digital and social media, niche media, and social networks have contributed to the rampant of fake news. The production of fake news is mainly driven by ideological and economic interests^[10]. Lippmann (1997) also stated that news events are not equal to the objective facts and that the news environment is nothing but a "pseudo-environment" constructed by journalists due to the subjective nature of reporting. Actually, the "pseudo-environment" has been accepted by the public as a stable media environment before, however, the emergence of post-truth broke this balance and pushed the non-objectivity and non-authenticity of news reports to the extreme.

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2 The Present Challenge

There is no denying that the frequent occurrence of public major emergencies has given new impetus to the popularity and complication of post-truth. Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, most academic discussions surrounding post-truth revolved around its association with the rejection or intentional disregard of verifiable facts, particularly in relation to issues that perpetuate social and political exclusion. These issues encompassed various forms of denial, such as downplaying or denying instances of sexual abuse and misogyny, overlooking genocidal acts against indigenous populations, and even questioning the historical reality of the Holocaust. These cases represented instances where the manipulation or distortion of truth served to perpetuate harmful narratives and maintain systems of power and oppression.^{[11][12][13]}

Due to the impact of COVID-19, there has been a notable change in how individuals perceive the relationship between personal circumstances and the overall health of society [14]. This shift has resulted in increased public awareness of the challenges posed by post-truth, as personal welfare has been explicitly linked to both physical and psychological well-being. Currently, discussions on "post truth" are increasingly attracting the attention of scholars, who see it as a manifestation of a broader crisis of authority. In today's political theory literature, the concepts of truth and fact are highly regarded, but some viewpoints emphasize that the "post truth" state itself involves deeper social, political, or cultural essence, rather than simply belonging to the epistemological category^[15]. The interpretation of "post truth" as a "political crisis" continues to expand (Newman, 2019), covering a wide and diverse range, involving many factors such as the "media environment" (Hayward, 2018) and the "neoliberal consensus" (Newman, 2019), and even emphasizing not only the loss of truth itself, but also the absence of a common world based on Arendt's spiritual and linguistic perspectives^[16]. These discussions enrich the understanding of the "post truth" phenomenon and call for a more comprehensive and in-depth reflection on its profound social, political, and cultural significance.

This pre-set value position of post-truth brings about a great many challenges to the academic research on the post-truth^[17]. Therefore, Many scholars believe that the large-scale public opinion gathering and offline social movements triggered by the post truth phenomenon are mainly caused by emotional, irrational, and ignorant public citizens. However, viewing post truth phenomena from this perspective is an important obstacle in post truth research, as this perspective overlooks other key factors. In fact, the motivation for creating fake news, the framework and agenda of post truth era news, and the persuasive strategies of news should also receive more attention. Firstly, regarding the motivation for creating fake news, in addition to public emotions and irrationality, there are other complex profit drivers. For example, political, commercial, and other organizations may achieve their goals by disseminating false information, including defaming opponents, shaping public opinion, and seeking profits. Therefore, attributing the post truth

phenomenon solely to the public's emotional response is not comprehensive. Secondly, the news framework and agenda of the post truth era also require more attention. In the digital age, information dissemination has become faster and more widespread, making it easier for media organizations and individuals to choose and emphasize specific news events and viewpoints. This choice and emphasis have had a significant impact on the public's opinions and attitudes, further exacerbating the post truth phenomenon. Finally, the persuasive strategy of news is also a noteworthy aspect in post truth research. Media and other information dissemination agencies use various means to influence the public's views and behavior, including emotional demands, personalized customization, and social media algorithms. These strategies may increase the public's acceptance of false information, thereby exacerbating the spread of post truth phenomena.

In summary, attributing the post truth phenomenon solely to an emotional, irrational, and ignorant public is not comprehensive enough. Researchers should pay more attention to the motivation for creating fake news, the framework and agenda of post truth era news, and the persuasive strategies of news, in order to better understand and respond to post truth phenomena.

3 The Future Prospect

Although abundant previous relevant researches are unable to propose effective countermeasures against the widespread dissemination of fake news, it's of great value to draw forth discussions about the emotion in their analysis. In the field of social sciences, the importance of emotions is increasingly receiving widespread attention^[18]. In the exploration of "post truth", some discourse tends to oppose "fact" and "emotion" without specifying which specific emotions are involved, resulting in a binary opposition between fact and emotion^[19].

The key to understanding the "post truth" lies not only in evaluating the impact of emotions and balancing facts, but also in deeply understanding the correlation between different emotions, the expression of rationality and facts in various political ecosystems, and forming a reasonable emotional orientation. In Western democratic elections, although public emotions, prejudices, and ignorance are common and seemingly absurd on the surface, in reality, they demonstrate a consciousness of "emotional compensation" during the election process, forming a potential invisible power distribution mechanism and producing a miraculous effect of collective behavior. In most cases, emotions are a social resource that can be mobilized. Therefore, emotions are neither the opposite of truth nor rational anomalies, but a key component of cognitive psychology, the foundation of rational systems, and even an important resource for social mobilization and integration. From this perspective, the future research prospects of "post truth" should delve into the "potential" function of emotions in a dialectical way, in order to deeply understand human psychology and gain insight into the evolutionary laws in social and political ecology.

To put it concretely, by emphasizing the role of emotional discourse, we can gain a deeper understanding

and elucidation of the importance of socio-cultural analysis in understanding the phenomenon of truth. In discourse, the depiction and expression of emotions often divide participants into two roles: "understanding the facts" and "emotions". The shaping of emotions and facts is interrelated and complementary, and this viewpoint has been widely explained^[20]. Emotions are endowed with meaning, and we can reveal their meaning by analyzing the ways in which emotions are quoted in public discourse, and how these citation methods define emotions as "rational," "irrational," "factual," or "emotional.". The emphasis on emotional discourse is an important supplement to the analysis of scientific negation and post truth socio-cultural aspects in post truth analysis. Emotions are connected to particular social and cultural representations, and the exploration of how the public emotions align with the frame and agenda of these news event to create such unexpected persuasion effects is of great research significance.

4 Conclusion

In today's Internet era, the prosperity of we-media and short video platforms has gradually delegated the right of discourse to each Internet user audience. At the same time, the dissemination of information in the network breaks through the limitations of time and space, and has the characteristics of network and generalization. Moreover, online speech is anonymous, and it is difficult to determine who is responsible for its speech, which is more likely to stimulate extreme emotions. The communication mechanism of "Everyone is media" has brought public opinion communication into the "post-truth" era, "various situations in which appeals to emotions and personal beliefs can affect public opinion more than stating objective facts". In the face of hot information in society, after receiving information, people are more likely to be influenced by various emotions and emotions than facts and truth. Express a range of emotional, personal opinions and opinions.

However, it should be noted that the "post-truth" era is not without truth, but puts the truth after people's emotions or stereotypes, that is, emotions first, facts later. Such news production standards not only destroy the authenticity of news and make the network environment mixed, but also affect the emotions and psychology of participants, resulting in group polarization.

In the past evolution, the phenomenon of post truth has gradually become popular, especially driven by the popularity of digital and social media. This phenomenon refers to the influence of public emotions and personal beliefs on facts beyond the facts themselves. The history of post truth can be traced back to the 1970s, but its use has increased in recent years in major events such as the Brexit referendum in the UK and the US election.

However, the challenge now is that the post truth phenomenon is facing a complex situation. The frequent occurrence of major public emergencies has provided new impetus for the post truth, and the public has begun to link their personal situation with the health of the entire society. This has attracted public attention to the post truth, but it

has also brought challenges to the study of post truth. There is still controversy over issues such as the phenomenon of truth after explanation, the motivation for fake news, and the persuasive strategy of news.

In future prospects, the focus of truth after research may shift towards the role of emotions. Emotions are receiving increasing attention in social sciences, and understanding the relationship between emotions and facts will help to better understand post truth phenomena. Emotion is not only the opposite of truth or rationality, but also an important component of cognitive psychology and even a resource for social mobilization and integration.

A thorough study of the role of emotional discourse will help reveal the social and cultural aspects of post truth phenomena. The expression and dissemination of emotions are very common on social media, where people express support or opposition to specific views or events through emotions, thereby influencing others' attitudes and beliefs. Therefore, studying the role of emotions in post truth can help us understand why certain fake news and rumors can quickly spread and have an impact.

In addition, research also needs to focus on the social impact and coping strategies of post truth. The prevalence of post truth phenomena has had a widespread impact on society, not only on individual beliefs and attitudes, but also on politics and social order. Therefore, we need to conduct in-depth research on how to deal with post truth phenomena, including improving the public's ability to discern the authenticity of information, enhancing the quality and credibility of news media, and strengthening media literacy education in the education system.

The phenomenon of post truth has gradually become popular in the past evolution, but it faces complex challenges. In the future, research on post truth requires attention to the role of emotions and a deep understanding of the relationship between emotions and facts. This will help to better understand the phenomenon of post truth and provide new ideas for addressing its challenges. Only through in-depth research and resolution of the issue of post truth can we establish a more objective and authentic social environment.

The "post-truth" era is an era full of challenges and opportunities, the news media and other parties must face the realistic dilemma and future prospects, earnestly implement the Marxist news concept, and make their own contributions to create a good public opinion environment. The only way to solve the dilemma of public opinion in the post-truth era is to promote the Marxist news concept to guide multiple subjects, vigorously promote the principle of news authenticity, technical research and judgment of public opinion, and deepen the practice of Marxist news concept.

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