

THE POST -TRUTH PARADOX: A PHILOSOPHICAL EXAMINATION OF FACT, POWER AND PERCEPTION

Mirian Ngozi Alike* and Raphael Chijioke Nwosu**

Abstract

In the era of post-truth politics, the dismissal of objective truth and the spread of misinformation have profound implications for philosophical inquiry, critical thinking, and democratic discourse. This paper critically examines the intersection of post-truth politics and conspiracy theories, highlighting their erosion of epistemic institutions and the challenges they pose to rational discourse. Through a philosophical analysis, this paper argues for a renewed emphasis on critical thinking, intellectual humility, and fact-based reasoning to mitigate the detrimental effects of post-truth politics and conspiracy theories.

Keywords, Post-Truth Politics, ,Conspiracy Theories, Critical Thinking, Democracy, Intellectual Humility.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of post-truth has its roots in philosophical traditions that challenge objective truth and absolute knowledge. Friedrich Nietzsche's ideas, for instance, have been linked to post-truth sentiments, particularly through the controversial editing of his work by his sister Elizabeth after his death. This alteration of Nietzsche's original ideas has been seen as an early manifestation of post-truth tendencies. Similarly, philosophers have argued that post-truth has its foundations in relativism and postmodernism. *Relativism* is a philosophical stance that asserts truth is relative to individual perspectives, cultures, or historical contexts. This view rejects the notion of objective truth, instead embracing the idea that truth is subjective and context-dependent. Postmodernism, on the other hand, is a broader intellectual movement that questions grand narratives, universal truths, and objective reality. Postmodernist thinkers often emphasize the fragmented nature of knowledge, the importance of language and power dynamics, and the instability of meaning. By exploring the connections between post-truth, relativism, and postmodernism, this paper aims to provide a deeper understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of post-truth politics and their implications for our understanding of truth, power, and perception.

However, it was not until the 21st century that the term "post-truth" gained widespread recognition, particularly in the realm of politics. This phenomenon is marked by situations where personal beliefs, emotions, and opinions carry more weight in shaping public opinion than objective facts and evidence-based reasoning. A hallmark of post-truth politics is the reckless disregard for facts, irrespective of their source, without undergoing rigorous scrutiny or evaluation. This approach eschews the pursuit of logical conclusions and contradicts the principles of rational inquiry, as epitomized by René Descartes' notion of "clear and distinct " knowledge, which emphasizes the importance of concise, clear, and indubitable understanding.

Post-truth politics is notoriously associated with the dissemination of misinformation, commonly referred to as "fake news." This phenomenon has been further complicated by the emergence of "deepfakes" – sophisticated, manipulated videos that blur the lines between reality and fabrication. The perpetrators of these falsehoods often rely on social media platforms to spread their misinformation rapidly, seizing upon the populace's propensity to accept information that aligns with their preconceived notions.

This "preferred news" – whether genuine or fabricated – can spread with alarming speed, disseminating like wildfire across digital platforms. Conversely, debunking or retracting false information often proves a more laborious process, frequently taking hours or even longer to rectify. This asymmetry underscores the profound challenges posed by post-truth politics in the digital age.

The phenomenon of post-truth politics emerged from unsubstantiated political claims disseminated through social media and YouTube channels. These claims, often unverifiable, aimed to sway public opinion in favor of a particular party or candidate. Post-truth politics encompasses a range of manipulative tactics, including rumors, lies, panic-inducing misinformation, and fake news. The primary objective of these strategies is to garner favor with the populace, without regard for factual accuracy or the consequences of spreading misinformation. Notably, the perpetrators of post-truth politics demonstrate a blatant disregard for the potential outcomes of their actions, prioritizing short-term gains over long-term consequences. This reckless approach has contributed significantly to the erosion of trust in institutions, the polarization of public discourse, and the undermining of critical thinking.

The election of Donald J. Trump as President of the United States in 2016 marked a watershed moment in the emergence of the post-truth era. This period was characterized by a proliferation of unverified stories and AI-generated videos that further eroded the distinction between fact and fiction. The US presidential election was marred by fake news stories, including false claims that Pope Francis had endorsed Trump, and fabricated allegations that Hillary Clinton had sold weapons to ISIS (Stin & Richards, 2020). Moreover, leaked videos were manipulated and disseminated with the intention of deceiving voters, influencing campaign strategies, and shaping the political opinions of young citizens (Habler, et al, 2023)..This phenomenon represents a troubling trend in which emotion is prioritized over reason, and language is increasingly used to obscure rather than convey truth. The consequences of this post-truth landscape are far-reaching, contributing to the erosion of trust in institutions, the polarization of public discourse, and the devaluation of objective truth.

The UK referendum process was also tainted by exaggerations and dubious facts and figures on both sides, with the Leave campaign being particularly culpable (Wilsdon, 2018). Moreover, these misleading formulations were projected to external target audiences through strategic communication efforts (Charnobrov & Briant, 2022). The social media algorithms used to disseminate this information pose a significant threat, as they can manipulate reality through doctored videos (deepfakes) and audios, spreading deliberate falsehoods. These algorithms prioritize user engagement, fostering a culture of likes, comments, and shares that can perpetuate misinformation. Notably, social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and others have played a pivotal role in shaping the concept of post-truth politics. These platforms have enabled the rapid dissemination of information, often without regard for factual accuracy, and have created echo chambers that reinforce existing beliefs and biases.

The advent of new digital technologies has exacerbated the proliferation of conspiracy theories and intensified the polarization of public discourse, creating an environment where emotions, personal beliefs, and ideological convictions are prioritized over factual reality. This has led to the dissemination of distorted, irrational, and illogical information, which undermines critical thinking and poses a threat to democratic discourse. The digital ecosystem, fueled by the rise of social media and the crisis in news media, has become a breeding ground for disinformation. This phenomenon has far-reaching implications, eroding trust in scientific communities, institutions, and democratic processes. By examining the mechanisms of disinformation and its consequences, this article provides a philosophical critique of post-truth politics and conspiracy theories.

THE NATURE OF TRUTH AND KNOWLEDGE

Epistemology, the theory of knowledge, seeks to uncover certainty and realize facts. A fundamental component of epistemology is the concept of truth. To comprehend truth, we must first ask: what is truth? Surprisingly, truth lacks a universally accepted definition, as what is considered true in one context (A) may not hold in another (B). Truth can be broadly defined as conformity to fact or reality. The notion of truth serves as a guarantee, ensuring that our statements refer to existing entities and are determinable. This paper does not aim to verify the truth or falsity of beliefs but rather explores the conditions under which a belief can be deemed true or false. By clarifying this question, we may ultimately determine which beliefs hold truth.

To be precise, this inquiry asks: "What is truth?" or "What is falsehood?" rather than "Which beliefs are true?" or "Which beliefs are false?" Misconstruing these questions leads to inapplicable answers. Furthermore, falsification occurs when there is a loss, absence, or failure, leading to the destruction of truth. Misunderstanding these questions can lead to inapplicable answers. In modern philosophy, truth is defined through three primary theories:

1. Correspondence theory: Truth corresponds to an objective reality.
2. Coherence theory: Truth is determined by the coherence of a set of beliefs or propositions.
3. Pragmatic theory: Truth is determined by its practical utility and effectiveness.

Furthermore, falsification occurs when there is a loss, absence, or failure, leading to the destruction of truth. This concept is crucial in understanding the nature of post-truth, where falsification and misinformation can spread rapidly. In the context of post-truth, the distinction between truth and falsehood becomes increasingly blurred. The proliferation of misinformation and disinformation can lead to the erosion of trust in institutions and the manipulation of public opinion. Therefore, it is essential to critically evaluate the concept of truth and its implications for knowledge and understanding.

THE CORRESPONDENCE THEORY OF TRUTH

The correspondence theory of truth posits that truth is dependent on reality, adhering to a realist notion of truth and error. This theory asserts that truth is a fidelity to objective reality, where a statement's truthfulness is determined by its agreement with the actual facts or situation it describes (Eboh, 1996). In essence, a statement is considered true if it corresponds to the facts in the real world. A key implication of this theory is that the truth of a statement is independent of individual perspectives or interpretations. Instead, truth exists objectively, outside of one's mind. This means that the truth value of a statement can be verified empirically, through observation and evidence. For instance, if someone claims that there is a car in front of the gate, the statement can be empirically verified by examining the object in question. If the object possesses the attributes of a car, the statement is true. Conversely, if it does not, the statement is false.

According to Wittgenstein's picture theory, statements are meant to serve as accurate representations of reality. The correspondence theory of truth posits that a statement's truthfulness is determined by its correspondence to the state of affairs it describes. In other words, if a statement is true, it accurately reflects reality, whereas if it is false, it fails to do so. The correspondence theory asserts that something is true if it corresponds to reality. However, this theory has faced criticism on several grounds. One of the primary concerns is that the nature of the alleged correspondence relation is unclear and ambiguous. Moreover, critics argue that it is nonsensical to suppose that we can somehow transcend our conceptual scheme or language and directly compare our beliefs or sentences with an objective, unconceptualized reality.

THE COHERENCE THEORY OF TRUTH

The coherence theory of truth presents a rival perspective to the correspondence theory. This approach seeks to capitalize on the limitations of the correspondence theory, particularly its struggle to establish a satisfactory relationship between propositions and reality. According to the coherence theory, truth cannot be determined by correlating propositions with an external reality. Instead, truth exists solely in the coherence of a body of propositions with each other. In essence, the coherence theory posits that a statement's truthfulness is based on its conformity with other statements that have been previously established, accepted, and recognized as true. This theory emphasizes the internal consistency and harmony among propositions, rather than their correspondence to an objective reality.

According to Hanin et al. (2021), the coherence theory of truth posits that truth is a process or the result of a process that exhibits a coherent state, making sense and interconnected between the ideas a subject has about a particular object. This perspective emphasizes the importance of internal consistency and harmony among ideas. Furthermore, Kaushik and Walsh (2019) argue that human actions are inextricably linked to past experiences and the beliefs that originate from those experiences. Human thoughts are inherently connected to action, as individuals base their decisions on the potential consequences of similar actions in the future.

For instance, consider the following example: “Every living human must die. Otakpo is human; therefore, Otakpo will definitely die.” This example illustrates how the coherence theory of truth operates, where the truth of the conclusion is based on the internal consistency and logical connection between the premises.

The coherence theory of truth employs deductive logic, which involves reasoning from general to specific conclusions. According to this theory, truth is achieved when there is a consistent agreement among the ideas featured in a judgment, and this judgment is compatible with other accepted true judgments. In other words, truth by coherence occurs when a new idea or judgment is integrated into an existing system of beliefs, and this integration does not lead to any contradictions or inconsistencies. Philosophers who advocate for the coherence theory of truth argue that it provides a plausible explanation for the truth of complex systems of beliefs, such as scientific theories, mathematical frameworks, and philosophical systems.

CRITICISMS OF THE COHERENCE THEORY OF TRUTH

While the coherence theory of truth has its advantages, other philosophers have raised several concerns. Two significant problems are particularly noteworthy. Firstly, coherence does not necessarily guarantee truth, as there are numerous counterexamples of coherent yet entirely false systems of connected beliefs.

A historical illustration of this issue is the Geocentric theory in astronomy, which positioned the Earth at the center of the solar system. According to this model, all observable celestial bodies, including planets, stars, and moons, revolved around the Earth. Although this model was once widely accepted by astronomers and constituted a coherent set of beliefs that were beyond questioning. The Geocentric theory serves as a prime example of a coherent yet false system of beliefs. At the time, it formed a comprehensive and consistent framework that seemed to explain astronomical observations. All available data appeared to confirm its validity, and it was widely accepted as an unquestionable truth. However, despite its coherence and initial confirmation, the Geocentric theory is now recognized as entirely false.

THE PRAGMATIC THEORY OF TRUTH

In pragmatics, truth is viewed as a means to achieve successful outcomes, with utility, workability, and effectiveness being its defining characteristics. According to Rai and Lama (2020), pragmatist philosophy emphasizes ideas and values that yield practical benefits to humanity, taking into account specific contexts, circumstances, and timeframes. Odunayo (2023) further develops this idea by considering words and thoughts as tools for prediction, problem-solving, and action. Rejecting the notion that thought merely describes or mirrors reality, Odunayo argues that statements are deemed true if they facilitate effective action or solve problems. This context-dependent approach implies that a statement's truth value can vary across different situations and contexts.

Pragmatists argue that various philosophical subjects, including the nature of knowledge, language, concepts, meaning, belief, and science, are best understood in terms of their practical applications and successes. This approach emphasizes the importance of utility and effectiveness in evaluating philosophical theories.

However, critics argue that this pragmatist stance harbors an intolerable epistemological relativism. Since utility is relative to individual perspectives, cultural contexts, and circumstances, this relativism can lead to impaired judgment, making it challenging to evaluate evidence impartially and objectively. In contrast, a more objective understanding of truth emphasizes the faithful adherence of our judgments and ideas to the facts of experience or the world as it is. While we cannot always directly compare our judgments with actual situations, we can test them against other judgments we believe to be valid and true. Alternatively, we can evaluate them based on their usefulness and practical consequences.

OBJECTIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF PRAGMATIC THEORY

The idea that a statement's truth is determined solely by its ability to promote success is vulnerable to numerous objections. Even acknowledging that "successful outcome" lacks a precise technical definition and requires context-dependent interpretation, concerns remain about the usefulness of this framework. It is questionable whether this approach offers anything more than a superficial label for a distinction that can be made more rigorously through other means. In other words, the pragmatist notion of truth may not provide any substantial insight or explanatory power beyond what is already available through alternative philosophical frameworks.

POST-TRUTH POLITICS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

In the post-truth era, political discourse has become a powerful tool for promoting emotional appeals and deliberate ignorance. By exploiting fear through hoaxes and fake news, politicians can foster hatred towards marginalized groups. According to Krasni (2020), fake news is a manifestation of the post-truth concept, which transcends domains, including politics, media, science, and technology. The dissemination of fake news resembles a viral infection, spreading rapidly through personal networks and trust channels. The 2016 US presidential election exemplifies this phenomenon, where politicians who effectively appealed to emotions triumphed over those who relied on factual reality. This era is characterized by technological rationality, which blurs the lines between fact and fiction, making it increasingly challenging for consumers to discern truth from falsehood. Although fake news has long existed, its proliferation has surged in recent years, primarily focusing on politics and scientific knowledge.

THE EROSION OF EPISTEMIC INSTITUTIONS AND THE RISE OF POST-TRUTH POLITICS

Fake news content has a corrosive effect on epistemic institutions, undermining the public's ability to engage in rational and deliberative discourse. The sheer volume of digital content, driven by profit-oriented algorithms, makes it increasingly difficult to critically evaluate the accuracy of information.

Post-truth politics has become a pervasive phenomenon, exemplified by influential politicians who assert outright lies with conviction, often to serve their politically motivated agendas. This rhetoric is directed at both opponents and ideological supporters, further polarizing public discourse.

The term "post-truth rhetoric" refers to the discursive strategies employed to mobilize ideas that disregard epistemic norms, thereby motivating popular support for a particular agenda. This can manifest in various ways, such as:

1. Making false assertions and refusing to provide reasons or evidence when challenged by the public or media.
2. Issuing contradictory statements within a short period and declining to clarify which claim is true.

The proliferation of digital technologies has accelerated the dissemination of information and misinformation worldwide, fueling panic and fear among the public. Social media platforms have become breeding grounds for emotional expression, allowing users to share their feelings and thoughts without necessarily being grounded in fact (Lazzini et al., 2021).

THE INTERSECTION OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND POST-TRUTH POLITICS

Recent studies have shed light on the critical connection between digital technology and post-truth politics. Digital technology has enabled the spread of misinformation, allowing individuals to convince others of false information. This phenomenon is often driven by a desire to challenge factual truths and alter them based on public reaction.

In the post-truth era, political discourse plays a central role in promoting deliberate ignorance and emotionally charged arguments. This can lead to the erosion of critical thinking and rational argumentation. Research has also shown that individuals with a predisposition to view their ingroup as superior or perceive outgroups as threatening are more likely to believe in conspiracy theories. The unchecked dissemination of unverified facts poses a significant threat to global stability, as it can influence election outcomes and undermine democratic systems. This phenomenon is profoundly anti-democratic, imperiling the foundations of informed decision-making, critical thinking, and rational discourse.

Conspiracy theories, often crafted by politically motivated actors, distort public perception of scientific evidence. A notable example is the Trump administration's assault on scientific expertise, particularly in environmental and coronavirus policies (Fischer, 2023).

From the outset, expertise was marginalized, with proposed budget cuts to science agencies and pressure to manipulate findings and policy recommendations to suit political interests. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, a conspiracy theory persisted, suggesting that the virus was a biological weapon created in a Chinese laboratory to destabilize competing powers .

Despite some unsubstantiated claims, this theory was thoroughly debunked by reputable sources, including the BBC and The Washington Post, which cited expert opinions from the US. These efforts underscore the importance of relying on credible sources and scientific evidence to inform public discourse.

THE AMPLIFICATION OF FEAR AND MISINFORMATION DURING THE PANDEMIC

Fear has been a pervasive emotion throughout the pandemic, exacerbated by inconsistent opinions from trusted authorities. Misinformation has further compounded this emotional complexity, underscoring the need for reliable information. The controversy surrounding hydroxychloroquine in the spring of 2020 highlighted the issue of misinformation in medical literature. Initially proposed as a potential therapy for SARS-CoV-2 infection, the debate surrounding its efficacy exemplified the challenges of navigating complex medical information.

Medical misinformation often appeals to emotions, capitalizing on feelings of uncertainty and ambiguity. This can lead to the proliferation of health-related conspiracy theories, which may be driven by non-ideological or political motivations (Ender et al., 2023). For instance, some conspiracy theories suggest that the pharmaceutical industry prioritizes profits from vaccination over population health. However, misinformation surrounding 5G technology has been rampant, with claims that it lowers the human immune system, making individuals more susceptible to COVID-19. This has led to exaggerated perceptions of health risks associated with 5G exposure . The controversy surrounding Huawei's ban from doing business with US-based entities further fueled the spread of fake news about 5G.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which devastated the world in 2020, was a significant factor in the proliferation of hoaxes and fake news. A distinctive feature of this pandemic has been the role of social media in spreading misinformation. Research suggests that certain groups, including the elderly, youth, social media users, and those with limited formal education, are more susceptible to misinformation.

It is well known that mainstream social media platforms employ algorithms that curate content based on user behavior, such as watched videos, shared posts, and liked content. These algorithms learn users' interests and aligns them with consistent information based on that . The scientific consensus is clear: a significant proportion of individuals infected with COVID-19 may remain asymptomatic, while others may exhibit symptoms such as fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Additional symptoms, including headache, myalgia, and diarrhea, suggest the involvement of the gastrointestinal tract.

The scientific community's findings are grounded in rigorous training, peer review, and context-sensitive research (Fuller, 2020; Cappucco, 2023). These expertise-based assertions are essential for establishing trust in scientific knowledge, which has been developed without political interference.

However, conspiracy theories, such as the notion that COVID-19 is a biological weapon or linked to 5G networks, undermine public confidence in scientific knowledge. These unfounded claims can exercise undue influence in the public sphere, potentially eclipsing the credibility of government agencies, academic institutions, and recognized scientific experts.

Conspiracy theories have flourished in the Post-Truth era, offering simplistic explanations for complex phenomena. Belief in conspiracy theories involves the notion that secret agents or groups are

working together to achieve a hidden goal, which is perceived to have a significant causal role (Napolitano and Reuter, 2023). This often involves questioning official explanations for impactful events or presenting alternative, probable accounts of events.

A notable example is Vladimir Putin's use of anti-Western conspiracy theories in Russia, where he has accused NATO and the European Union of funding Ukraine to undermine Russian sovereignty. Such claims erode trust in democratic institutions.

Conspiratorial narratives are often perceived as both the most probable scenario by those who subscribe to them and the least probable account of events by others (Gjoneska, 2021). Interestingly, most conspiracy theorists are not delusional or irrational; rather, they often lack access to accurate sources of information. Conspiracy theories can be understood as a form of psychological coping mechanism, where individuals attribute blame for present and past crises to a secret, powerful group. Research suggests that one of the primary motivations for endorsing conspiracy theories is the desire to make sense of the world and explain complex events.

This drive for understanding can lead to a biased evaluation of false counter-narratives, which are often influenced by intergroup relations and social attitudes. For instance, individuals' attitudes towards conspiracy theories can be shaped by their social connections, perceptions, societal influence, pressure and group affiliations. Given the potential for conspiracy theories to influence behavior, it is essential to investigate the causal role of repetition on truth judgments of these theories. By addressing this issue directly, researchers can better understand how conspiracy theories spread and how to mitigate their impact. Conspiracy theorists' skepticism towards established knowledge stems from a deep-seated habitus of distrust, marked by excessive suspicion, illogical reasoning, and heightened sensitivity to psychological context. This mindset is often accompanied by psychological pathologies, including delusional and irrational thinking (Douglas and Sulton, 2018), as well as paranoid tendencies (Greenburgh et al., 2022).

These psychological factors can contribute to the development of strong, false beliefs (delusions) that persist despite contradictory evidence. In severe cases, this can manifest as a mental disorder characterized by delusions, hallucinations, disorganized thinking, and impaired reality testing. Pervasive distrust and suspicion of others are hallmarks of this psychological profile, often leading to irrational beliefs about others' intentions. This mindset can create a self-reinforcing cycle of paranoia and mistrust, further entrenching conspiracy theorists' convictions.

THE INFLUENCE OF COGNITIVE BIASES ON SOCIAL MEDIA INFORMATION EVALUATION

Cognitive biases can significantly impact how individuals assess information obtained from social media platforms. One notable example is confirmation bias, which leads people to seek out and believe information that aligns with their pre-existing knowledge while disregarding or discrediting contradictory information.

This phenomenon is reminiscent of the 16th-century Protestant Reformation, where distrust of officials rather than institutions themselves was prevalent. Protestants, such as Luther and Calvin, sought to preserve the "theatrical magic" of the Eucharist, resisting rationalization and instead emphasizing their own theological interpretations (Abbot and Fuller, 2022). This mindset enabled them to position themselves as more authentic Christians than the clerical officials in Rome.

Confirmation bias can play a significant role in shaping political perceptions, particularly in the context of elections. Research suggests that this bias may contribute to the widespread belief that elections are rigged, especially among voters who support the losing party. This phenomenon is characterized by a tendency to focus on evidence that supports one's views while ignoring or rationalizing contradictory information.

Furthermore, beliefs in conspiracy theories often correlate with one another, as they are frequently based on indirect agreements. However, when conspiracy theories are mutually exclusive, reliable

correlations between beliefs in these theories are unlikely to occur. The manipulation of tangible evidence and the discrediting of epistemic democratic institutions are common features of conspiracy theories. By comfortably discrediting these institutions, individuals can maintain their beliefs in conspiracy theories, even in the face of contradictory evidence.

THE LINK BETWEEN POPULISM AND CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Research has shown that populists across the globe are more likely to believe in conspiracy theories, which are viewed as explanations for events or situations involving secret groups or actors pursuing malevolent goals (Christner, 2022). The adoption of specific conspiracy theories depends on individual differences and predispositions, with some people exhibiting a general conspiracy mentality (Bena et al., 2023; Pishchik, 2022).

Populism often involves a Manichean worldview, where the political sphere is divided into clear moral sides, with the established elite and politicians perceived as having betrayed the people. This narrative of betrayal and elite complicity has been fueled by significant events, such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which marked the beginning of a new phase of conspiratorial populism (Bergmann, 2025). The 9/11 Truth Movement, led by figures like David Ray Griffin and Alex Jones, gained significant traction with theories ranging from controlled demolition to accusations of government foreknowledge. Populist political movements often spread conspiracy theories not verified and which are associated with political stance and information consumed by the populace. The portrayal of Islam as an existential threat, erosion of civil liberties, and rise of anti-globalist narratives have contributed to a political environment conducive to the flourishing of conspiracy theories. In an era marked by uncertainty, economic volatility, climate change, and migration pressures, populist leaders are poised to exploit new fears and anxieties.

THE ROLE OF PHILOSOPHY IN ADDRESSING POST-TRUTH CHALLENGES

Philosophers have long grappled with defining critical thinking, debating whether it is domain-specific or domain-general. Nonetheless, most definitions converge on the idea that critical thinking involves logical and unbiased thinking. Cultivating critical thinking is essential for maturing decision-making processes. As Pukhita (2019) notes, critical thinking focuses not on the information itself, but on how individuals study and utilize it. By fostering critical thinking, people can enhance their consciousness and make more informed choices.

Critical thinking involves a dynamic and iterative cognitive process that actively questions hypotheses, seeks evidence, and evaluates arguments (Kumar, 2024). This process requires not only the possession of critical thinking skills but also the disposition to use them. Having the knowledge of critical thinking skills is not enough; one must also be willing to deploy those skills in situations that demand critical evaluation. A person who understands critical thinking skills but fails to apply them when necessary cannot be considered a critical thinker. Critical thinking emphasizes the importance of rational evaluation, acknowledging that emotional and irrational components can sometimes influence thought processes. By recognizing these influences, critical thinkers can strive to separate rational analysis from emotional or irrational biases.

Hermeneutics, a theory of interpretation and understanding, reminds us of the principle of the hermeneutic circle. This principle highlights the dynamic interaction between the whole and its parts, and vice versa. When we encounter new information or facts, they enter the field of our attention, and we instinctively interpret them through the lens of our pre-existing understanding. This initial understanding is shaped by our established views and biases. However, through critical reflection, we can challenge and refine our understanding. To achieve this, it is essential to cultivate an impartial and critical consciousness. Simultaneously, we should enrich our general philosophical context by examining and refining our previously formed individual convictions.

Logical reasoning is essential in navigating the complexities of post-truth rhetoric, where fallacies such as false dilemmas, ad hominem attacks, and appeals to emotion are prevalent. By engaging with

skepticism and justified belief, philosophy encourages individuals to think critically about what constitutes knowledge and how to verify truth in an era of widespread misinformation.

The philosophy of ethics plays a crucial role in examining the moral responsibilities of individuals, media, and political actors in spreading information. Deontological ethics, in the tradition of Immanuel Kant, emphasizes rational agency as the core of ethical theory. Kant's moral framework assumes that rational agents with free will are capable of making moral evaluations based on a rational moral law. As Spahn (2020) notes, deontological ethics comprises three essential elements:

1. Epistemic rationalism: Moral choices should be based on autonomous rational considerations.
2. Motivational rationalism: Insight into the morality of an action should motivate the action itself.
3. Deliberation (enlightenment) rationalism: Deliberation is a crucial aspect of societal debates for resolving ethical issues in the public sphere.

Political philosophy provides a framework for examining how power structures and ideological manipulation contribute to the proliferation of post-truth narratives. A seminal work in this area, "Consent" offers a critical analysis of how state propaganda and disinformation are reproduced in democratic societies, highlighting the various actors involved in their creation.

The insights of Michel Foucault are particularly relevant in this context. His concepts of discourse as a programmed meaning production and the regime of truth that governs this process help us understand how language shapes our values and reinforces social hierarchies. However, the fake news discourse has recoded these ideas, presenting them as forms of intellectual misinformation. By applying philosophical reasoning, individuals can:

1. Question dominant narratives and challenge prevailing power structures.
2. Recognize biases and ideological manipulation.
3. Seek more truthful and ethical ways of understanding the world.

PHILOSOPHY AS A COUNTERMEASURE TO POST-TRUTH CHALLENGES

Philosophy promotes dialogue and debate, encouraging individuals to engage with diverse perspectives and challenge their assumptions. While epistemic authorities, such as scientists and medical experts, are not infallible, it is essential to maintain a presumption of trustworthiness when a consensus is clear (Raikka, 2023). These established institutions and experts serve as epistemic authorities, guiding our acquisition of epistemological beliefs (Raikka and Rukola, 2020). The empirical element reinforced by these authorities justifies the preference for scientific epistemology over conspiracist epistemology. In contrast, conspiracist epistemology spreads intentionally false information, leading to distrust, discredit, and recontextualization of medical knowledge. Philosophy offers a powerful antidote to post-truth challenges by:

1. Fostering critical thinking and epistemological reflection.
2. Promoting ethical responsibility and political awareness.
3. Encouraging open dialogue and debate.

By cultivating these values, philosophy helps individuals and societies navigate the complexities of misinformation and defend objective truth.

CONCLUSION

The spread of conspiracy theories has become a pervasive issue, eroding public trust in scientific knowledge and established institutions of experts. This phenomenon is evident in various domains, including climate change, vaccination skepticism, and the electoral process. Social media platforms have played a significant role in perpetuating false content, rumors, lies, and conspiracy theories.

To combat the habitual spread of misinformation, social media network platforms must undergo major structural changes. The integrity of contemporary democracy is at stake, as it faces an epistemological crisis. While post-truth politics may be a viable option for some, its epistemological validity is highly questionable.

Rather than shutting down political disagreement or policing what is deemed false, we need to foster a deliberative decision-making process that is inclusive and refining. This approach should prioritize the refinement of knowledge, allowing for the open exchange of ideas and the cultivation of critical thinking.

***Mirian Ngozi Alike**

Department of Philosophy,
Nnamdi.Azikiwe University, Awka
Email: mn.alike@unizik.edu.ng

****Raphael Chijioke Nwosu**

Department of Educational Foundation / Management
Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education.
Owerri.
Email: chijiraph@gmail.com

References

- Abbot G And Fuller .s. 2022 Can Post-Truth Provide an Adequate Ethics For Social Epistemology ? Dialogue Between Graty Abbot And Steve Fuller. Social Epistemology Review And Reply Collective Vol 11 (9).
- Bergmann,E (2025) The Strategic Exploitation Of Conspiracy Theories By Populist Leaders. Genealogy. 9(2) 41.
- Bena,J , Right, M ,and Carreras, O(2023) Repetition Could Increase The Perceived Truth Of Conspiracy Theories. Psychonmme Bulletin And Review.
- Gjoneska,B (2020) Conspiratorial Beliefs And Cognitive Styles: An Mitigated Look On Analytic Thinking, Critical Thinking And Scientific Reasoning In Relation To Distrust In Conspiracy theories. Front Psychology. 12: 736838.
- Christner ,C (2022) Populist Attitudes And Conspiracy Beliefs: Exploring The Relation Between The Latent Structures Of Populist Attitudes And Conspiracy Beliefs. Journal Of Social And Political Psychology. 10(1) 72-85.
- Chernobrov, D. And Briant, E.L. (2022) Competing propagandas: How the US and Russia represent mutual propaganda activities. Politics, 42 (3). Pp. 393-409.
- Douglas,K. M ,Sutton,R.M And Cichocka,A (2017) The Psychology Of Conspiracy Theories. Current Directions In Psychological Science. Vol 26(6) 538-542.
- Douglas, K.M. and Sutton, R.M. (2018). Why conspiracy theories matter: A social psychological analysis. European Review of Social Psychology. Vol. 29 (1). 256-298.
- Enders ,A.M , Diekman,A ,Klofetad, C (2023) On Modelling The Correlates Of Conspiracy Thinking . Scientific Reports. Vol 13.
- Fischer,F (2023) Post Truth Populism And Scientific Expertise: Climate And Covid Policies From Trump To Biden. International Review Of Public Policy. 4(1) 115-122.
- Greenburgh, A.G., Lietgreen, A., Bell, V. & Raihani, N. (2022). Factors affecting conspiracy theory endorsement in paranoia. Royal society open science. Vol. 9(1).
- Kaushik, V and Walsh,C.A(2019) Pragmatism As A Research Paradigm And It's Implications For Social Work Research. Social Sciences. 8 (9) 255.
- Kumar,J. M (2024) The Imperative Of Critical Thinking In Higher Education. IETE Technical Review. 41(5) 509-510.
- Lazzini, A ,Lazzini,S , Balluchi,F And Mazza, M (2021) Emotions,Moods And Hyperrality: Social Media And The Stock Market During The First Phase Of Covid-19 Pandemic. Accounting ,Auditing And Accountability Journal. 35(1).
- Odunayo, O.F (2023) The Pragmatic Theory Of Truth :A Defense And Reconciliation. Aquino Journal of Philosophy, Vol 3 Issue 1.

- Rai,C.P And Lama, R (2020) Pragmatism And It's Contribution To Education. International Journal Of Creative Research Thought. 8(3).
- Raikka,J (2023) Why A Pejorative Definition Of Conspiracy Theory Need Not Be Fair. Social Epistemology Review And Reply Collective. 12(5)63- 71.
- Raikka,J and Ritola ,J (2020) Philosophy And conspiracy Theories in Handbook of Conspiracy theories (eds) Bufferlin,Knight. P.Routledge.
- Stin ,P And Richards,R (2020) Political News On Facebook During The 2019. In book , The Politics Of Social Media Manipulation. 71-96
- Wilsdon,J (2018) The Brexit Experience Evidence, Expertise And Post-Truth Politics. Journal And Proceedings Of The Royal Society Of New South Wales . Vol 155 part 1.