"Fractured Realities: Technology and the Enigma of Truth"

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Truthfulness has never been counted among political virtues because it has little to contribute to that change in the world and circumstances among the most legitimate political activities. Only where a community has embarked upon organized lying on principle, and not only concerning particulars, can truthfulness as such, unsupported by the distorting forces of power and interest, become a political factor of the first order. Where everybody lies about everything of importance, the truthteller, whether he knows it or not, has begun to act; he, too, has engaged himself in political business, for, in the unlikely event that he survives, he has made a start toward changing the world.–
Hannah Arendt, "Truth and Politics," 1967

Abstract
In today's post-truth age, technological platforms, political power, and human psychology all work together to blur the line between fact and fiction. Drawing on thinkers like Neil Postman, Marshall McLuhan, Michel Foucault, and Hannah Arendt, this essay shows how entertainment-focused media, personalized news feeds, and calculated propaganda weaken our ability to think critically and trust each other. It also explores deeper questions about knowledge and truth, revealing how emotional stories and personal viewpoints often overshadow evidence-based discussions. By examining both past examples and current trends, the essay highlights how technology companies and political leaders contribute to this climate undermining democracy, increasing political divides, and threatening honest public debate.

I.   Introduction to the Post-Truth Era

In the post-truth era, Rehagen (2020) describes how traditional institutions are losing credibility; facts are sidelined by partial truths influenced by political, emotional, and commercial factors. Many causal factors have contributed to this phenomenon. A primary factor is the internet and the lack of accountability of social media platforms. Today stories are told through different types of media, each adding something unique to the story, television is becoming more fragmented and the lines between different forms are mixing (Lister et al., 2009, p. 9). Also, new technologies and media have brought about a number of significant changes, and one of these is the rise of the 'citizen journalist' (Lister et al., 2009, p. 10). Citizen journalism involves ordinary people without formal training actively gathering, reporting, and sharing news through blogs, social media, or dedicated websites, in real-time (AlliGee,2023, para.6). Citizen journalism often combines professional journalism with promoting agendas, unlike news agencies that follow ethical codes and aim for objectivity, citizen journalists reporting also reflect their personal biases or opinions (AlliGee,2023, para.8).

This shift has transformed traditional 'audiences' into 'users' and 'consumers' into 'producers' (Lister et al., 2009, p. 10). New interactions between people (as users and consumers) and media technologies have changed how we use and understand image and communication media daily and the importance we assign to these technologies (Lister et al., 2009, p. 12). Social media is becoming increasingly popular for connecting people. However, instead of ameliorating the growing problem of isolation and loneliness so prominent in Western societies, according to Elizabeth Purdy (2024), studies from various countries suggest that social media may actually increase loneliness, because some people use it to avoid real-life interactions.Essentially, as people use different types of media more, how they see and handle these technologies changes, affecting how useful and important they are in our daily lives (Lister et al., 2009, p. 12).

The Medium, Message, and Public Discourse

This idea supports Neil Postman's argument in his 1985 book, "Amusing Ourselves to Death," that television focuses more on entertainment than on significant content, changing public discussions and contributing significantly to the rise of a post-truth society. Postman notes that visual media, particularly television, are different because they are designed for quick, emotionally impactful visuals and short, fascinating content (Postman, 1985, p. 16). The

visual concept of television has severely undermined the in-depth, debate-driven conversations once fostered by print culture, replacing it with an entertainment-focused approach to politics, education, and news (Postman, 1985, pp.16–17). However, we often do not notice these changes to our consciousness as they tend to be subtle, gradual, and imperceptible to us.

Marshall McLuhan's concept of "narcissus narcosis," described by Strate (2012), refers to the mental dulling that occurs as we adopt new technologies. McLuhan argued that when we begin using new media or communication tools, like television or the internet, which extend our senses, we often fail to realize how deeply these tools become embedded in our lives and how they alter our perceptions and interactions (Strate, 2012, p.3).McLuhan's notion is that the medium's characteristics shape human relations and action on social media platforms, which condense conversations and drive emotive and sensational content that is more likely to be spread through features like likes and shares (McLuhan, 1964).

Similarly, the Extended Mind Hypothesis, first introduced by Andy Clark and David Chalmers (1998) suggests that our minds are not limited to our brains and bodies; instead, they extend to include the external environment through the tools and technologies we use (Ainebyoona& Adewusi,2024). (Ainebyoona and Adewusi, 2024, p.470). According to them, cognitive processes can be mediated by external items like notebooks, computers, smartphones, and even the internet (Ainebyoona& Adewusi, 2024, p.470).Clark and Chalmers explain that the internet is an external storage space for knowledge, helping people keep track of and access to information without using their memory. That significantly affects our understanding of human thinking and awareness (Ainebyoona& Adewusi,2024, p.469). Moreover, they also say that the extended mind framework shows we should think of technological tools as instruments to help us get work done; instead, they are essential parts of how we think (Ainebyoona& Adewusi,2024, p.469).

However, our lack of awareness leaves us somewhat oblivious or numb to how these technologies operate and their wider implications for both individuals and society (Strate, 2012, p.3) Essentially, we become sleepwalkers, moving through a transformed landscape without fully realizing how we are changed by the technologies we use (Strate,2012, p.3). Politicians, advertisers, and public relations firms, however, quickly grasped the potential that television with its quick, catchy soundbites and dramatic flair for imageryability to

capture the audience's attentionwould be great for their business (Postman, 1985, p. 129).

As audiences grow accustomed to this approach, they prefer quick emotional responses over thoughtful, well-reasoned debates (Postman, 1985, p.77). That obscures the distinction between important issues and entertainment, which Postman refers to as the *loss of meaningful context in public conversations* (Postman, 1985, p. 77).In addition, Ainebyoona and Adewusi (2024) adds that according to Heidegger, technology reshapes our worldview, causing us to regard everything, even people, as resources that can be exploited and improved (p.470). The term post-truth should draw attention to a broader societal change in which technology plays an outside role in shaping our personal beliefs and subjective perceptionof reality.

Nathan Ward (2014) is concerned thatthe reliance on technology with its focus on images over substance has filled our times with meaninglessness. Supporting this concern, Baudrillard (2005) pointed out that phone calls do two things: they help us communicate but also let us avoid real interactions. Making a phone call can maintain a friendship without physical presence (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 23). Nowadays, we can even skip making a phone call by sending emails or short, unimportant texts (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 23).

Confronting the Post-Truth Challenge

Discontent with mainstream media has caused more people to turn to alternative or independent news sources. Linda Jean Kenix (2011) writes in "Alternative and Mainstream Media" that having different media sources is essential for a strong democracy. They reflect our political views, social systems, governments, and identities. Seeing multiple viewpoints helps people understand the similarities and differences among individuals (Kenix, 2011, p.1). However, not everyone believes that the growth of alternative news websites is beneficial.

Tracy (2007) notes that alternative media fundamentally differs from mainstream sources because these platforms can turn passive viewers into active participants in everyday matters and events that influence their lives (Kenix,2011, p.1). Modern mainstream media are now using tactics that make viewers more involved, a method usually linked with alternative media (Kenix, 2011, p.2). This approach adds more division in a society that's already split, with different groups disagreeing on basic truths (Sami, 2024, para.3). Jennifer Kavanagh and Michael D. Rich (2018) identify four main signs of what they call the post-truth era. First, there is a noticeable

increase in disagreements about facts and how to interpret them, with clear examples being climate change and public health statistics (Kavanagh & Rich, 2018, p. x).

Second, separating fact from opinion has become increasingly difficult, partly due to the spread of personal viewpoints, the proliferation of opinions, and editorializing on social media. (Kavanagh & Rich,2018, p. xi) Third, opinion and individual experience frequently overshadow objective data, with circumstantial evidence sometimes carrying more weight in public discourse than peer-reviewed research (Kavanagh & Rich,2018, p. xi). The crisis that we face is as Kavanagh & Rich (2018) notes is people are losing faith in once highly regarded institutions such as major news outlets, universities, and government agencies, making it increasingly difficultto reach any universal agreement on reliable evidence (p. xi). However, the most significant threat is that people have lost trust in each other, seduced by seditious and misleading information on social media, the social compact that has held us together is unraveling.

Arendt noted that lying and deception hasplayed a part in the rising distrust in our information, knowledge and political institutions (Stonebridge, 2024, para.4). She offered a timely insight, noting that lying in politics did not just accidentally occur due to human flaws; therefore, simply being morally indignant will not abolish it (Stonebridge,2024, para.4).Arendt adds that merely accusing someone of lying will not make them stop (Stonebridge,2024, para.4). Indeed, current events indicate that outrage not only fuels the system leading to the stripping of facts from politics but also fosters a climate where emotions prevail over facts (Stonebridge,2024, para. 4). At the heart of this crisis there are difficult factual and ethical questions about our relationship with truth, trust, and the nature of society.

There is a kind of madness here. Arendt described the "active, aggressive capability

"to believe in lies (as compared to passive gullibility) that distinguishes modern
political lying. Lies like this are grandly shameless, blatantly, and obviously fake.
Political lying isn't even lying anymore. We know that you know we are lying, say
the politicians, but isn't that part of the thrill? Tell us the world is made up of more
than the mundane fact we are forced to live by, reply many, and yes, of course we
will believe you. Anything is better than this. (As Quoted in Stonebridge,2024,

para. 6).

Individuals who expect that a lie might one day become true tend to overlook the current falsehood, which diminishes their moral judgment (Brenner, 2022, para. 10). [People] conditioned to think that a lie might likely become true showed less inclination to hold others accountable for spreading on social lies and were more prone to spread disinformation themselves (Brenner, 2022, para. 10). The more believable the lie seemed, the greater the effect. The effect was more substantial if people thought the lie would become true later (Brenner, 2022, para. 11). These lies succeed because their creators recognize that in today's political environment, it is not just that people are unsure of what to believe; it is that genuinely believing in anything with sincerity or authenticity has become nearly unfeasible (Stonebridge,2024, para.7). Believing in the absurd has turned into a sort of pseudo-action, a desperate, irrational attempt to achieve a sense of political belonging (Stonebridge,2024, para.7). The significance of this is immense. People embrace the narrative not because it is factual, but because it cultivates a sense of group solidarity (Desmet, 2022, p. 97). Festinger investigates this behavior in his work, "The Doomsday Cult" (McIntyre, 2018, pp. 37-38). In it, he provides a detailed description of a group known as "The Seekers" (McIntyre, 2018, p. 38). This group's leader, Dorothy Martin, claimed to communicate messages from extraterrestrials (McIntyre,2018,p. 38). These aliens, she asserted, would save them before the world was supposed to end on December 21, 1954 (McIntyre, 2018, p. 38).

After sellingall of their possessions, they waited on top of a mountain,only to find that the aliens never showed up(and ofcourse the world never ended).
The cognitive dissonancemust have been tremendous. How did they resolve it? DorothyMartin soon greeted them with a new message: theirfaith and prayers had been so powerful that the alienshad decided to call off their plans.
The Seekers had savedthe world(McIntyre,2018, p. 38).
Viewed from the outside, these may seem like the beliefs of easily deceived individuals, yet additional studies by Festinger and his colleagues have shown that everyone experiences cognitive dissonance to some extent (McIntyre,2018, p. 38). For instance, if we join a gym that is far away, we may excuse the cost by claiming that the intense nature of the workouts means we only need to go once weekly;

likewise, if we score lower than expected in organic chemistry, we may tell ourselves that pursuing medical school was not our true intention after all (McIntyre, 2018, p. 38). Moreover, this tendency towards seemingly unreasonable beliefs is strengthened when we are in the company of others who share the same convictions (McIntyre, 2018, p. 38).

Some politicians, thought leaders, and influencers take advantage of the current anxieties amongst voters. These actors stress both present fears and future threats fueling a sense of decline and turning nostalgia into a powerful political tool for campaigns and policymaking. As a result, political polarization intensifies, with people inhabiting distinct realities shaped by their [political or religious leaders] and chosen news sources (Sami,2024, para.3).

It is in this environmentunder the post-truth regime, fidelity to truth is becominguncommon and so has consequences for falsehood. Nationalistic politicians are unaffected by being labeled dishonest (Franklin, p. 5). Hahl et al. (2018) suggest that openly recognized falsehoods may bolster a politician's perceived genuineness, mainly when their supporters see themselves as outsiders to mainstream politics (Franklin, 2025, p.5). That setting allows political leaders to shape their own stories and build alternate realities. They do this by calling harsh truths "fake" and criticizing the media and academics, rejecting science or anything that conflicts with their political goals (Franklin, 2025, p.5). Fragmentation and political polarization are not incidental elements of post-truth ascendancy. They are the main goals of political agents interested in disseminating ideology, controlling alliances, and exercising political domination.

Post-truth is, for McIntyre (2018), a means of achieving political power developed by politicians interested in demonstrating that they have the power to challenge reality. In his book "The Demon in Democracy: Totalitarian Temptations in Free Societies," Ryszard Legutko sees troubling similarities between what happened in Communist totalitarian regimes and what happens in today's liberal democracies: "Communism and liberal democracy were powerful forces that told their followers how to think, what to do, how to judge events, what to dream about, and what language to use" (Gausau, 2021, para.6).

It is a way to make people believe they are acting independently when they are being manipulated and deceived. Therefore, post-truth as a manifestation of propaganda is the first step towards an authoritarian regime. This point is underscored by

Snyder (2017), who argues that 'post-truth is pre-fascism'. For him, "to abandon facts is to abandon freedom (…) [because] if nothing is true, then no one can criticize power, because there is no base to do so" (Snyder, 2017, p. 65). In other words, the erosion of a shared reality makes "people susceptible to demagoguery and political manipulation" (Kakutani, p. 2018, p. 12). (Cunha,2019, para.7). Whether totalitarian or not, dictatorships thrive in an environment where the public is uninformed (Arendt,1978, para.2). Without access to truthful information, forming educated opinions becomes impossible (Arendt,1978, para.2).

Arendt also notes that the impact of constant lying by the government is not necessarily a belief in those falsehoods; instead, it leads to a general mistrust where people no longer believe anything at all (Arendt,1978, para.2). Post-truth rhetoric is not simply about falsehoods; it represents an attack on the collective reality essential for the functioning of freedom and democracy (Arendt,1978, para.2). Liars often remain unaffected by their lies. They may even be rewarded with television or radio programs, book contracts, and magazine columns (Keyes, 2004, p.19). In a media-driven society, honesty is not particularly valued; deceit, on the other hand, can raise someone to celebrity status because notoriety often leads to fame (Keyes, 2004, p. 19). 18).

In a time dominated by social media and screen content, where teenage girls become depressed and more likely to attempt suicide due to not getting enough "likes" on Instagram, shows how real, face-to-face relationships that should lead to meaningful interactions are missing (Gausau, 2021, para. 18). Smartphones and social media have significantly reduced real human contact, a change that many teachers and parents have noticed. This decrease in real interactions is part of a bigger problem where our social lives are getting worse, made even more challenging by other big changes in society (Gausau, 2021, para. 18). Adding to this, Baudrillard points out a contradiction: while digital technologies are often praised for significantly improving communication, they are at the same time making human relationships more superficial and less meaningful (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 23). Our inability to see this contradiction shows how much these technologies have become a normal part of our lives, making their impacts unquestioned (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 23). These technologies are now so ingrained in our lives that their impacts go unquestioned (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 23).

The Enigma of Truth

Meanwhile, Jean-François Lyotard's (1979) notes in The Postmodern Condition suggested more

than four-decades ago that modernity is in crisis because the unifying narrative that once held us together has broken down into many localized "language games." Lyotard uses the concept of language games, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and valuing diverse ways of understanding and communicating in society (Lyotard,1979, pp. 31-32). Diversity creates a variety of discussions, and diverse interpretations contest the notion of a unified, objective truth. Lyotard (1979) argues that the multiplicity of viewpoints has undermined any singular notions of truth (pp. 31-32). For example, mobilizing the public around the issue of poverty change may involve the participants following different rules and evaluating success or truth differently. A social scientist seeks evidence based on established scientific facts and accuracy, a politician seeks to build consensus or political support, and an activist aims to galvanize moral action and public engagement.

Lyotard would say that no single dominant narrative unifies these perspectives; instead, they coexist as distinct language games, each with its own way of arguing and legitimizing claims. Understanding their differences is key to understanding the contemporary debate around truth and how different discourses can overlap yet remain distinct in their methods, goals, and authority (Lyotard,1979, pp.31-32). The term "post-truth" implies a shift from an era guided by truth to one where truth seems to have vanished. However, the truth has neither vanished nor disappeared. Salman Rushdie (2018) notes that the old agreement on reality has broken down. It is now better described as a battle between opposing and often unresolvable stories.

Salman Rushdie (2018) observes that the traditional consensus on reality has broken down into a battle between conflicting and often unresolvable narratives. This kind of fragmentation suggests that different groups now hold onto distinct and competing versions of truth, leading to deep societal divisions over what constitutes factual or fictional representations of the world (Rushdie, 2018, para.2). In today's environment, where people frequently dispute the truth, as mentioned, many influential leaders actively promote falsehoods that serve their interests and present them as facts (Rushdie,2018, para.2). At the same time, credible information is frequently rejected and labeled as "fake news" (Rushdie,2018, para.2).

This state of affairs is frightening to those who came of age where truth was not fluid and they would prefer to undo all that has been by returning to some idealized past where truth was undisputed and

universally agreed upon (Rushdie,2018, para.2). The desire to return to a past where truth was clear and agreed upon by everyone stems from nostalgia and a wish for simplicity and stability (Walse, 2025). This longing is also desire for unity, which can mitigate conflict and foster a sense of community and shared purpose (Walse, 2025, para.5).People are attracted to the concept of a single, undisputed truth because it simplifies communication and decision-making, leading to a more stable and organized world (Walse, 2025, para. 6). Oversimplifying the world like this can result in faulty conclusions. When a single narrative is overwhelmingly accepted and enforced by society,often comes at the cost dissenting voices marginalization or silenced.

We learn that certain events are "basic facts" and cannot be disputed, like the Battle of Hastings in 1066 or the American Declaration of Independence, signed on July 4, 1776 (Rushdie,2018, para.3). However, as Rushdie (2018) explains, the establishment of what we consider a historical fact involves assigning specific significance to an event (para.3). The way history gets documented reflects the perspectives and interpretations of those recording it. That shows that people do not just record facts; they shape them based on their cultural and historical background (Rushdie, 2018, par 3).

Julius Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon is a historical fact. But many other people have crossed that river, and their actions are not of in- terest to history. Those crossings are not, in this sense, facts. Also, the passage of time often changes the meaning of a fact. During the British Empire, the military revolt of 1857 was known as the Indian Mutiny, and because a mutiny is a rebellion against the proper authorities, that name, and therefore the meaning of that fact, placed the "mutinying" Indians in the wrong. Indian historians today refer to this event as the Indian Uprising, which makes it an entirely different sort of fact, which means a different thing. The past is constantly re- vised according to the attitudes of the present. (Rushdie,2018, para.3).

Arendt, for instance, distinguished between rational truths from thinking and factual truths from history (Leigha,2019). The difference is that factual truths are rooted in historical occurrences, and rational truths are a product of abstract thought, like what you find in mathematics or philosophy (Leigha, 2019, para.3). She notes that the political world is important here because it can make things seem true to people (Leigha, 2019, para. 3). She also mentions that the power in politics is based on what people there believe (Leigha, 2019, para. 3). If the political world shapes reality, then when certain facts (factual truths) get in the way with their purposes, those in

power may alter these facts to better suit their agendas (Leigha, 2019, para. 3).

Historical records show that powerful people or groups frequently distort or hide true events from the public by lying (Gessen, 2021). Therefore, truth is often treated as just another opinion, not as an absolute fact, especially in societies where all opinions are seen as equally valid (Leigha, 2019, para. 4). This transition, however, does not make truth obsolete; instead, truth is continually being reinterpreted and updated within a continuously changing cultural, social, and technological landscape (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiii). Far from indicating the disappearance of truth, in this changed setting, the significance of truth persists, even as historically traditional institutions that used to justify all forms of knowledge have lost credibility in a climate of skepticism (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiii).

This weakness and susceptibility to attack apply only to factual truths (Leigha,2019, para.5). Rational truths found in abstract disciplines such as philosophy and mathematics typically have little bearing on political opinions. Rational truths do not need to be evaluated before suggesting changes in human affairs (Leigha,2019, para.5). However, the diversity in understanding and interpreting these factual truths can lead to deep societal divisions. This is evident in the contentious debates over historical events like 9/11 or the U.S. Capitol riots, where currently, the two main political parties clearly hold different views on the events of those days (Gessen, 2021).One party view factual truth as just another opinion that needs to be defended, while the other sees it as an opinion that should be contested (Gessen, 2021, para. 8).

Institutions create "facts" mainly from censuses, surveys, and tax records, and societies use these to define and change themselves (Piketty, 2020). Facts are created ideas, and finding absolute truth is becoming increasingly difficult because societies struggle with changing views (Piketty, 2020). That leads to conflicts as different groups have their own goals and views of history (Piketty, 2020). Michel Foucault takes the conversation in a different way by arguing that truth is not an absolute or independent reality what we consider to be "truth" is actually constructed by different "regimes of truth" (Foucault, 1980).

According to Foucault, truth emerges through the interaction of power relations, discourse, and institutions, which simultaneously shape and are shaped by broader power structures (Discourse Analyzer (2024, para,1).Power determines the limits of recognized knowledge, deciding which ideas gain acceptance and which are dismissed (Discourse

Analyzer, 2024, para.2).In the post-truth era, influential people or powerful groups often pushed their goals by questioning established rules. (Discourse Analyzer, 2024). They do this by attacking trusted institutions and targeting their experts, like academics and journalists, who usually help solve factual disputes (Oreskes & Conway, 2010). These post-truth leaders try to change the standards that differentiate truth from lies by assuming the power to define truth themselves (Harsin, 2018). For instance, when leaders of either authoritarian or democratic nations advise their citizens not to trust long-standing media outlets and proclaim themselves as the source of truth, they do more than challenge facts. They assert authority to define what truth is (Harsin, 2018).

That is not just about checking facts; it creates a new "regime of truth" as described by Foucault (Foucault, 1991). In this new regime, truth is whatever the leader says, not what facts say (Harsin, 2018). Foucault argued that we should stop seeing power's effects as only negative; it does not exclude or hide; it actually creates reality (Foucault, 1991).He points out that power influences the knowledge we acquire (Foucault, 1991).(Kavanagh, 2018, p. 102). These actions go further than just checking facts; they create a new "regime of truth," as Foucault called it (1991, p.194). This new regime alters the very nature of truth, determining what is accepted as true based not on facts, but on what those in charge say (Foucault, 1991). We must cease once and for all, Foucault argues, describing the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes,' it 'represses,' it 'censors,' it 'abstracts,' it 'masks,' it 'conceals' (Foucault, 1991, p.194). According to him, the knowledge individuals acquire is a product of these power-driven processes (Foucault,1991, p.194).

This view suggests that what is considered truth is contingent on the prevailing power relations at any given time (Foucault, 1980, p.131; Foucault, 1977, p.13). In this framework, the systems responsible for creating, circulating, and legitimizing knowledge produce and reinforce societal truths (Foucault, 1980, p. 114). He proposes that each society establishes its own "regime of truth," or a set of norms that dictate which discourses are accepted as truth (Goswami, 2014, p.9). (Discourse is the framework of language and thought that defines and limits how ideas are expressed and understood in a particular cultural or social context). That includes mechanisms for distinguishing between true and false statements, sanctions for each, and the recognized methods for obtaining truth (Goswami, 2014, p.9). Moreover, he emphasizes the importance of the roles of those designated to determine truth (Goswami,

2014, p.9). Foucault also claims that discourse alone gives things meaning, suggesting that we construct meaning through and within discourse rather than it existing independently (Goswami, 2014, p.10). In other words, meaning does not inherently exist in objects or concepts outside of how they are discussed, interpreted, debated, and through practices (Goswami, 2014, p. 10). (Goswami, 2014, p. 10).

Foucault's idea of "regimes of truth" can be seen in medicine, where the usual rules and methods set by institutions define what we know about medicine (Goswami, 2014, p.10). These rules decide which research processes are acceptable, which treatments work, and what judgements are accepted, and are shaped by schools, medical journals, and regulatory associations (Goswami, 2014, p.10). The medical "regime of truth" emphasizes Foucault's idea that truth is not just discovered but produced through the mechanisms that define and uphold the dominant discourses of the era (Discourse Analyzer, 2024, para. 17).

The same holds true for institutions, for instance, such as the legal system, psychiatry, and education dictate which forms of knowledge are legitimate and who is authorized to speak (Discourse Analyzer,2024, para.17). Additionally, Foucault cautions that all claims of knowledge, including those of self-described experts, must be critically examined (Tuathail,1998, p.17). The belief that human intellect alone can guide life and society has proven illusory (Tuathail, 1998, p.17). Like everyone else, experts are shaped by the social, economic, and cultural contexts in which they operate (Tuathail, 1998, p.17). Consequently, they do not perceive reality objectively but through their own experiences and biases. Often, the "laws" or "strategies" they endorse merely reflect prevailing societal ideologies (Tuathail,1998, p.4).

For example, Foucault argued that key social institutions like the military, police, and courts devise various ways to justify their authority and maintain control (Tuathail, 1998, p.4). Tuathail (1998) explains that the military focuses on national security, the police maintaining order, and the courts ensuring consistency and agreement (p.4). Each institution creates stories that suit its needs, often leading to more money and power (Tuathail,1998, p.4). Knowledge production becomes political power to further their political objectives (Tuathail, 1998, p. 17).The power to act, claim resources, and exert control depends on prevailing knowledge (Burr, 2025, p.79). Specific ways of talking or thinking (discourses) legitimize actions (Burr, 2025, p.79). Discourse is a collection of statements that supply the language for discussing and representing knowledge at a given time in history. For example, everything surrounding the identity of a lawyer, including language, documents, attire, and behaviors, illustrates the idea of discourse. In this environment, individuals embody the role of 'lawyers.' When a distinct discourse emerges from ordinary discourse, Foucault calls it a discursive formation (Van de Ven, 2012, pp. 3-4). Stuart Hall points out that "Discourse involves certain ways of using language that reveal things about the speaker, their culture, the social settings they are part of, and their basic beliefs" (Van de Ven, 2012, p.4)

For Foucault, discourse not only forms and organizes knowledge but also embeds social practices and power structures that shape its subjects (Burr, 2025, p.79). Discourses, shaped by human relations, develop seamlessly (Van de Ven, 2012, p.4). More importantly, discourse transmits and constructs knowledge and 'truth' (Van de Ven, 2012, p.5). Foucault argues that language frameworks organize knowledge, enabling discourses to persuade people to accept ideas as true, regardless of their objective accuracy (Van de Ven, 2012, p.5).). When we describe the world in ways that justify our actions, we exercise power (Burr, 2025, p.79).

These stories shape what people accept as true, and they, by implication, influence power. Consider the debates over the definition of "woman," mainly whether it includes transwomen (Anderson, 2021, p.3). The statement "Transwomen are women" faces disagreement due to historical exclusion and skepticism toward non-traditional gender categories (Anderson, 2021, p.5). Foucault's concept of power is evident in how transgender identities are debated and regulated, with rigid biological notions reinforcing restrictive norms (Anderson, 2021, p.5). When gender gets treated as flexible, it empowers transgender people and promotes broader inclusion (Anderson, 2021, p.5). These epistemic foundations, such as shared beliefs and methods of understanding, shape our collective reality (Anderson, 2021, p.5). Power affects sexual orientation, social acceptance, and reducing stigma (Anderson, 2021, p.5). How we talk about these topics shapes society and its main ideas, either supporting or challenging power structures (Anderson, 2021, p.5). Again, power and knowledge are directly linked; power produces knowledge (Van de Ven, 2012, p.6).

Nietzsche believes that truths are not fixed, set in stone, or absolute; instead, they are created by how people see and understand the world, which helps us get through life (Garcia, 2021, p.930). This idea focuses on how useful and practical our beliefs are (Garcia, 2021, p.930). In addition to rejecting objective truth, Nietzsche notes that humans value truth not for its intrinsic worth but for its comforting

or pragmatic benefits, as expressed in his essay, On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense (Nietzsche cited in Gilb, n.d.).In this essay, he suggested that the contemporary "post-truth" condition, characterized by comforting fiction, is valued more than inconvenient truths, which echoes his view that truth is shaped by the need for social harmony and personal benefit (Nietzsche as cited in Gilb, n.d., para.1). Nietzsche points out that humans use socially accepted words to create and live within illusions that help us communicate and cooperate, emphasizing that what we perceive as truth is just a metaphor, which shows how fragile and arbitrary our claims to absolute truth are (Nietzsche as cited in Gilb, n.d., para.1). Assmann (2014) discusses in "Selective Forgetting and the Power of Framing" how we do not just store memories as facts; instead, he argues that we shape them based on what is currently important to us (Assmann, 2024, para. 20). This idea supports Nietzsche's view that truth changes depending on what is valuable to us at the time. The way we highlight some events and ignore others shows that truth is flexible and tailored to fit our needs (Assmann, 2024, para. 20).

The urge to belong shapes the balance between remembering and forgetting, as social groups often exclude memories that do not align with their identity or are deemed unacceptable (Assmann,2014, para.20). These memories come back only when the primary way we remember things changes, similar to major shifts occur in scientific thinking (Assmann, 2024, para. 20). To fully grasp the dynamics of memory politics, it's essential to merge Halbwachs' concept of social frames with Nietzsche's psychological insights into group memories (Assmann,2014, para.20).

From a Foucauldian viewpoint, each social group's "memory framework" operates as part of a broader "regime of truth," a system of power and knowledge that establishes what counts as legitimate or acceptable truth (Foucault,1980, p.114). Specific memories get elevated in such regimes while others are suppressed or dismissed (Foucault, 1980, p. 114). From a Foucauldian viewpoint, each social group's way of remembering is part of a more extensive system that decides what is seen as true or acceptable, or "regime of truth (Foucault, 1980, p. 114). The system combines power and knowledge to determine what truths are recognized, such as what memories are retained and which are ignored or pushed aside (Foucault, 1980, p. 114). When the dominant regime of truth shifts, like a paradigm shift, previously excluded memories can reemerge and be "reintegrated" into the group's narrative (Assmann, 2014, para. into the group's narrative (Assmann,2014,

para.20). Nietzsche explains how psychological factors affect memory, especially in what societies decide to remember and the truths they pick, which are often tied to feelings of pain or guilt (Assmann, 2014, para. 20). He points out that national pride can influence collective memory, focusing on stories of being victims or heroes (Assmann, 2014, para. 20).

By doing so, it minimizes or excludes responsibility for wrongdoing (Assmann, 2014, para.20). In Nietzsche's argument, moral questions like guilt and responsibility are often overshadowed by socio-psychological needs such as pride, and the need to maintain social respectability is deeply involved in shaping memory, identity, and the acceptance of societal truths (Assmann, 2014, para.20). Finally, memory gives in" (Assmann,2014, para.17). For instance, West Germany's post-war focus on German suffering is a prime example of how a regime of truth can exclude or minimize memories of responsibility (Assmann,2014, p.25). The 1990s represented a shift in that truth regime: an expanded historical consciousness permitted acknowledgment of Germans' complicity in wartime crimes (Assmann,2014, p.25). In simpler terms, Foucault suggests that when old power structures changed, they allowed previously overlooked memories and truth to become recognized as part of the collective narrative (Assmann, 2014, p. 26). This shows how a country's shared memories can change from focusing only on themselves to accepting the inconvenient truths as well (Assmann, 2014, para. 20).

The Post-Truth Dilemma: Power, Media, and the Erosion of Shared Reality

In the post-truth era, our personal and cultural biases often shape our understanding of truth without us realizing how these truths are formed (May-Hobbs, 2023). Jacques Lacan, a French psychoanalyst, argued that our minds have three parts: the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary (Lacan, 2006). These parts influence our desires and how we perceive the world, making us susceptible to believing appealing yet untrue ideas (May-Hobbs, 2023). For example, politicians often make unrealistic campaign promises to attract votes (May-Hobbs, 2023).According to the 2025 Edelman Trust Barometer, economic concerns have led to widespread anger and blame (Edelman, 2025). That is a strong drive to protect personal interests, not just about political divisions anymore. In the last year, people worldwide have criticized big businesses, governments, and the wealthy (Edelman, 2025). In many Western countries like the U.S., U.K., France, Germany, and Canada, ruling parties have lost power.

People are also challenging companies that engage in social issues like diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and environmental efforts (Edelman, 2025).

In countries with low trust in institutions, people tend to feel more anger and frustration. Rebuilding trust could make people more optimistic about the future (Edelman, 2025). For instance, in Germany, only 41% of people trust institutions, and many feel frustrated, whereas in Singapore, where 65% trust their institutions, fewer people feel this way (Edelman, 2025). This shows that higher trust in institutions generally leads to less anger and frustration (Edelman, 2025). From a Lacanian viewpoint, these stories are compelling because they connect with deep psychological desires and the fundamental need for recognition (Murphy, 2024). According to Murphy (2024), Lacan's theory of human psychology suggests that desire, lack, and the need for recognition fundamentally structure human psychology, making us vulnerable to illusions and even discomforting falsehoods (para.10). According to Lacan, our sense of self-worth is based on how we believe others perceive us (Murphy,2024, para.5).

The desire to be noticed can make people hold onto convincing lies that trigger jouissance, a troubling yet alluring pleasure linked to our deepest wishes and dreams (Murphy, 2024, para. 27). In politics, this situation is clear when people support policies despite doubting that the promises are achievable (Murphy, 2024, para. 14). The emotional appeal of a possible future can sometimes temporarily overpower skepticism (May-Hobbs, 2023, para.8). Bold claims capitalize on shared hopes and fears, pushing beyond conventional reasoning to show how collective desires can eclipse rational limits (May-Hobbs,2023, para.8).

The post-truth world did not emerge in a vacuum. In 1953, a study by Cancer Research demonstrating a link between cigarette tar and tumor growth sparked increased public concern (Boles, 2022, p. 1). In response, the tobacco industry launched a misleading narrative, showcasing how powerful groups can distort information to shape public beliefs and alter reality (Boles, 2022, p. 1). This manipulation echoes concerns raised nearly three decades ago by Steve Tesich in his 1992 essay "A Government of Lies" published in The Nation, where he argued that society has willingly entered a post-truth era, choosing to ignore reality in favor of comforting falsehoods (Boles, 2022, p. 7). Tesich links the origin of our post-truth era to the politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s, stressing President Richard Nixon [Watergate investigation]and the Vietnam War, as significant influences on our fragile relationship with truth (Boles,2022, p.7). Tesich

suggests that the trauma of the Watergate scandal and the Vietnam War, followed by Nixon's swift pardon, led us to recoil from the truth, associating it with bad news we no longer wanted, regardless of its importance for our national well-being (Boles,2022, p.7).

Afterward, the American people began expecting our government to shield them from inconvenient truths (Boles,2022, p.7).Tesich argued that President Reagan, taking advantage of Americans' dislike for harsh truths, used his Hollywood charm and friendly style to lower their expectations for more government transparency. He knew that people preferred comforting lies to discomforting truth, which made it easy for him to deceive them (Boles, 2022, p.7). Similarly to how some [U.S. politicians] were careless with the truth, participants in the Brexit Leave campaign also showed little regard for honesty in their statements (Boles, 2022, p. 14). Wilbur (2017) points out that Brexit promoters candidly confessed to promoting concepts they knew were false, justifying their actions by stating, "there really are no facts," and emphasizing that "what matters is that we truly believe this "... in a post-truth culture, what one desires to be true becomes the truth (Boles, 2022, p. 14).

Marshall and Drieschova (2018) say that events such as the Iraq War, the 2008 financial crisis, and the 2009 scandal over MPs' expenses caused people to lose trust in experts, politicians, and the overall system (Boles, 2022, p. 14).Academia has contributed to the post-truth era by encouraging students in classrooms to express their own ideas and debate different interpretations of texts (Boles, 2022, p. 17). Colin Wight (2018) emphasized that this teaching approach has helped foster a climate where people depend on alternative realities based on the facts they choose to accept (Boles, 2022, p. 18). Wight (2018, p.23) claims that academia's emphasis on interpretation, teaching students that facts do not speak for themselves, and questioning which facts matter has legitimized the post-truth era (Boles,2022, p.18). Wright argues that this critical approach to knowledge construction fosters a necessary skepticism toward all truth claims in academic settings (Boles, 2018, p.18).

Additionally, Arendt points out that depending on "ideological fictions" aligns with Lacan's concept of the Imaginary, where a person becomes entangled in false beliefs that help sustain a consistent sense of identity (Arendt, 1951). Lacan (1977). Under a totalitarian or heavily propagandized mass culture, these illusions not only offer a semblance of unity or belonging but also mask

underlying contradictions and grievances, and like Lacan's conception of the Real, these illusions, though reassuring, can never fully eradicate the anxieties associated with unresolved social tensions (May-Hobbs,2023, para,8). Pervasive skepticism is essential for understanding post-truth politics, in which politicians frequently manipulate facts and operate as if honesty and guiding principles are irrelevant (Olah,2019, p.8). Self-promotion and virtue signaling precede values such as honesty and fidelity in today's post-truth world. Beliefs often get leveraged for self-assertion and personal advantage.

II.   Conclusion

As Moussaid et al. (2013), truth is shaped by social influences; opinion-shaping is a social process contrary to the belief that opinions are formulated privately and independently (Moussaid et al.,2013, p.1). People form their views and opinions through social interactions (Moussaid et al.,2013, p.1). These exchanges let them share ideas, challenge perspectives, and refine beliefs, ultimately shaping the opinions they hold and express (Moussaid et al.,2013, p.1). In addition, as Neil Postman (1992) warns that technology, by reshaping our cognitive tools and social interactions, impairs our thinking abilities and makes its limitations comfortable. Postman further contends that our understanding of truth is influenced by our communication methods, which shape how we share and discuss information. Stylman (2024) adds that modern technology, rather than liberating us, has made manipulation more sophisticated. As a result, Western societies have become more divided and polarized, and in America, it's impossible to talk about American politics in 2023 without talking about trust or, more accurately, about its conspicuous absence from public life (Ward,2023). Everyone has seen the statistics concerning Americans' distrust in government, which has declined precipitously since the 1960s (Ward,2023, para.1). But something about the contemporary crisis of trust seems even deeper than that (Ward,2023, para.1).

Instead of holding the powerful accountable, people resort to mysticism, conspiracy theories, and authoritarian leaders who offer easy solutions without actual costs (Peterson,2025). Their followers are not looking for accountability from their leaders as a result, Western societies have become more divided, polarize and in America it's impossible to talk about American politics in 2023 without talking about trust or, more accurately, about its conspicuous absence from public life (Ward,2023). Everyone has seen the charts showing that Americans' trust in government has declined precipitously since the 1960s

(Ward,2023, para.1). But something about the contemporary crisis of trust seems even deeper than that (Ward,2023, para.1).

The public, instead of holding those in power accountable, turn to magical thinking, conspiracy theories, and authoritarian leaders who offer easy solutions do so without any actual costs (Peterson,2025). Their followers aren't looking for accountability; they seek an escape from the chaos of reality (Peterson,2025, para.9). This phenomenon is neither new nor exclusive to our times (Peterson,2025, para.10). As conditions deteriorate, more individuals gravitate towards stories that insulate them from brutal realities (Peterson,2025, para.10). Historically, when truth becomes problematic, those peddling falsehoods, however bizarre, tend to prosper (Peteson,2025).

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