

Post-Truth

Post-Truth:

A Multidisciplinary Approach

Edited by

Raúl Linares-Peralta

and Juan Antonio Nicolás

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PREFACE

In an era where information is readily disseminated through a multitude of channels, the phenomenon of post-truth has emerged as a significant challenge to the traditional paradigms of truth-seeking. The proliferation of misinformation, often masquerading as legitimate discourse, has engendered a climate of uncertainty and skepticism regarding the veracity of information. This erosion of trust in established sources of knowledge, coupled with the amplifying effects of social media and digital platforms, has contributed to the blurring of lines between fact and fiction, between trues and lies. One of the more evident consequences has been the normalization of public lies. This collection of essays, entitled *Post-truth: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, emerges as a response to the intricate challenges posed by the contemporary landscape of information dissemination. It encapsulates the insights and deliberations stemming from the International Congress of Post-truth held in Granada (June 14-16, 2023), where scholars and practitioners from diverse disciplines converged to unravel the complexities of this phenomenon. The congress was one of the results of the research project "Postruth under debate", which involved two years of discussions and meetings between groups from different disciplines.

The essays assembled in this volume attest to the multifaceted nature of the post-truth landscape, transcending disciplinary boundaries to offer a nuanced understanding of its implications. From the realms of communication, politics, technology, philosophy, history, law and education, scholars and practitioners have endeavored to dissect the underlying mechanisms driving the dissemination and reception of post-truth narratives. By interrogating the sociocultural, technological, and epistemological dimensions of this phenomenon, these contributions shed light on the intricate web of factors shaping contemporary discourse. The breadth and depth of this interdisciplinary dialogue underscore the urgency of cultivating collaborative efforts to address the proliferation of falsehoods in our societies.

The present volume is organized into three distinct sections, each dedicated to interconnected realms of inquiry. These divisions are as follows: Part I addresses Communication and Technology; Part II explores Politics, Economics, and Law; and Part III delves into Philosophy and Education. It is noteworthy to emphasize that, owing to the interdisciplinary

nature of the congress, numerous contributions may intersect with multiple realms beyond those specifically delineated here.

Part I: Communication and Technology initiates with a contribution by María Lamuedra Graván, which establishes a conceptual framework aimed at fostering consensus across disciplinary boundaries in the examination of disinformation and post-truth phenomena. Graván introduces a unified model delineating the variables and conditions characterizing both truth and post-truth regimes.

In the second chapter, Pamela Giorgi and Lucía Ballesteros-Aguayo advocate for the imperative of media's social responsibility. Their chapter underscores the challenges inherent in contemporary media landscapes and advocates for media literacy as a means to cultivate critical thinking skills in information consumption, thereby advocating for educational initiatives in communication as a potent antidote.

The subsequent chapter offers a comprehensive overview of Foundation Models in Artificial Intelligence pertinent to post-truth contexts. It probes into the dual issues of AI systems being harnessed to advance political or economic agendas, as well as their role in shaping emotional responses, potentially exacerbating biases.

Carlos Fernández-Barbudo, in the fourth chapter, addresses the burgeoning digitalization of public spheres and the emergent role of technopolitical platforms therein. He posits that the visibility regime of such platforms reconfigures the parameters of public visibility, thereby altering the conditions for pluralistic discourse, proposing post-truth as a distinct truth regime emerging within this digital milieu.

María de los Ángeles Pérez del Amo, in the chapter five, focuses on the challenge posed by COVID-19 denialism and extends this analysis to other contexts marred by denialism. Del Amo advocates for a nuanced understanding of denialism, distinguishing between denialism rooted in issues of inequality and vulnerability versus those concerning rural identities, in order to foster improved scientific communication accessible and responsive to diverse audiences.

Elios Mendieta, in the subsequent chapter, investigates the influence of post-truth on the interpretation of visual representations, particularly within cinematic narratives. Mendieta contends that post-truth exerts a profound impact on cinematic discourse, highlighting its disruptive potential within contemporary visual culture.

In the seventh chapter, Manuel Luna Alcoba' delves into the phenomenon of hybrid warfare, specifically exploring the implications of interpretative relativism within this context. Through a military lens, Luna

Alcoba elucidates how language operates to construct adversaries within hybrid warfare scenarios.

In the light of such landscape, Albert Julià-Espases, in the last chapter of part I, elucidates the mobilization of adversaries through the utilization of echo chambers within hybrid warfare contexts. Julià-Espases' analysis situates itself within the framework of contemporary methodologies of hybrid warfare, elucidating the actual effects engendered by the digitalization of public spaces and its epistemological consequences.

Part II: Politics, Economics, and Law commences with the ninth chapter authored by Enrique Herreras, who articulates concerns regarding the phenomenon of post-truth as a contemporary threat to democracy. Herreras underscores the necessity for a thorough comprehension of this concept, delineating its dual connotations and its anchorage within postmodernist thought. He proceeds to elucidate the perils posed by post-truth to democratic principles, highlighting the potential establishment of an emotivist democracy as its foremost danger.

In the subsequent chapter, Santiago Navajas offers a nuanced distinction between post-truth in its strong and weak manifestations. Navajas elucidates that the former aligns with the relativistic stance on truth espoused by Gorgias and Rorty, whereas the latter corresponds to the pluralistic perspective advocated by Protagoras and Popper. Drawing parallels with Mill's marketplace of ideas and advancing the liberal model, Navajas advocates for the weak post-truth paradigm as a means to counteract monopolistic conceptions of truth.

Benigno Jesús Salvador Palanques, in the eleventh chapter, engages in a reflective analysis of the construction of narratives surrounding the idea of Spain in recent history, with particular attention to the proliferation of post-truth narratives inherent within it. Similarly, Carlos Cardenas Blesa, in the subsequent chapter, examines the construction of Valencian autonomous identity through a comparable lens.

In chapter twelve, Carlos Cárdenas Blesa analyses the Valencian situation in the democratic transition from the point of view of the concept of "post-truth", establishing analogies with this political and historical context.

Jorge Tuñón-Navarro, Raquel Ruíz-Incertis, and Rocío Sánchez-del-Vas undertake an exhaustive examination of European media law in the thirteenth chapter. They offer a detailed exposition of the principal documents of the European Union, elucidating the historical context, legal foundations, and conducting a descriptive analysis of the contents of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA). Furthermore, they identify the

opportunities and shortcomings inherent within this regulatory framework, while also proposing enhancements for its refinement.

Irene Elisa Santacreu Cortés, in chapter fourteen, conducts an analysis of post-truth discourse in relation to Futurism, specifically critiquing Michel Onfray's biased portrayal of Futurism. Santacreu Cortés offers strategies for constructing counter-narratives that challenge post-truth ideologies.

Concluding the part II, Pelayo Guijarro Galindo, in chapter fifteen offers a cartography of Latin American critical emancipatory thought from the mid-twentieth century to the present day to better understand post-truth in the context of manipulation and promotion of extractive policies of the last century.

Part III: Philosophy and Education comprises eight chapters predominantly situated within the philosophical domain and some pedagogical contributions. Jesus Conill, in chapter sixteen, offers a robust critique of postmodernist "logophobia," which he identifies as a foundational element of post-truth philosophies. Conill begins his chapter by advocating for the rigorous pursuit of logos and the intrinsic value of the quest for truth. However, he contends that the hegemony of instrumental rationality within the social and political digital sphere is diminishing the significance of logos. Conill suggests that the restoration of logos necessitates engagement with alternative philosophies that elucidate humanity's authentic relationship with truth, such as the Nietzschean genealogy combined with Zubirian noology.

In chapter seventeen, Raúl Linares-Peralta undertakes a systematic categorization of the fundamental aspects involved in interpretations of post-truth. Linares-Peralta analyzes the key elements shaping definitions and diagnoses of post-truth, culminating in the formulation of four main interpretative frameworks: post-truth denialism, post-truth reductionism, post-truth pluralism, and post-truth essentialism.

Manuel Jacinto Roblizo, in chapter eighteen, reflects on the limitations of the hermeneutic approach in epistemological inquiries within the social sciences. Roblizo examines the conceptions of truth proposed by Gadamer and postmodernists before highlighting the inadequacies of such notions for social scientific research. He suggests that the notion of truth as the unveiling of being presents a viable alternative.

Chapter nineteen, authored by Miguel Oliva Rioboó, offers an original interpretation of Scheler's concept of functionalization applied to the analysis of post-truth. Oliva Rioboó proposes a dynamic understanding of truth intertwined with values and emotions, suggesting the possibility of

adopting a positive interpretation of post-truth as a progression toward truth.

In the twentieth chapter, José Antonio García-Lorente analyzes the value of opinions in the contemporary context of post-truth, examining Aristotle's concept of *éndoxa* and its relevance for facilitating dialogue and discussion amidst pervasive post-truth narratives.

Chapter twenty-one, authored by Juan-Antonio Nicolás, proposes a philosophical response to the challenge of post-truth based on the recovery and valorization of the experience of truth. This experience can be formulated around the principle of affection. Based on this principle, three areas of experience of truth can be considered: affection by demonstration, affection by recognition and affection by imposition.

In chapter twenty-two, José Miguel Santacreu Soler and Rafael Sebastián Alcaraz aim to enhance societal literacy through the historical method, particularly in combating post-truth narratives. They delineate a conceptual framework utilized in the analysis of quantitative interviews conducted with university students.

Lastly, Félix García Moriyón, in chapter twenty-three, provides an exhaustive analysis of global competence as conceptualized by PISA, addressing pedagogical challenges stemming from increasing digitalization and the erosion of truth value within educational contexts.

As editors, we are indebted to the scholarly rigor and intellectual interest exhibited by our contributors, whose insights enrich this discourse. Their collective endeavor underscores the imperative of transcending disciplinary boundaries in confronting the challenges of our post-truth age. Furthermore, we express our sincere gratitude to Ana María Ramírez for her invaluable assistance in coordinating and managing all organizational and administrative aspects of this endeavor. We also express our gratitude to Cambridge Scholars Publishing for their diligent editorial efforts and their willingness to accept the publication of this book.

Moreover, this anthology seeks to serve as a catalyst for ongoing dialogue and concerted action among scholars, policymakers, educators, and media practitioners. By fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and promoting critical inquiry, we aspire to foster a more resilient and truth-oriented public sphere.

In an epoch marked by unprecedented access to information and the concomitant proliferation of misinformation, the imperative of making truth valuable assumes paramount importance. We trust that this volume will inspire readers to engage with the complexities of post-truth with nuance, rigor, and a steadfast commitment to truth-seeking.

PART I

COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY

CHAPTER ONE

ACADEMIC CONSENSUS ACROSS FIELDS AS A VITAL STEP TOWARDS COMBATING POST-TRUTH: THE CASE OF JOURNALISM STUDIES AND FACT-CHECKING

MARÍA LAMUEDRA-GRAVÁN

1. Introduction: Disinformation, post-truth and reprogramming mindsets and experiences

Those messages whose deliberate intention is to distort truth, to alter the notion of reality and even to reprogramme the mindsets and experiences of the citizenry can be defined as disinformation or “infocination”. Its proliferation over the past decade has raised deep concerns in academia and public institutions. On 3 May 2019, the then High Representative of the European Union for Foreign and Security Policy, Federica Moguerini, justified the launching of the “EU Action Plan against Disinformation” in the following terms: ‘Healthy democracy relies on open, free and fair public debate and it is our duty to protect this space and not allow anybody to spread disinformation that fuels hatred, division, and mistrust in democracy’ (European Council 2019).

In a similar vein, the law experts participating in the interdisciplinary project, “Posverdad a debate: reconstrucción social tras la pandemia” [“Post-truth on debate: social reconstruction after the pandemic”], led by Juan Antonio Nicolás, pondered on whether post-truth, as a qualitative phenomenon, could transform the inner workings of liberal democracy and even create the conditions for its eventual collapse (Arias Maldonado *et al.*, forthcoming).

A summary of the agreements and disagreements between the eight groups of experts in communication, technology, psychology, socioeconomics,

history, law, politics, education, and philosophy participating in the project, can be useful for addressing the difficulties of truth, the danger posed by post-truth and, above all, the responsibility of the academic community as a whole – especially in the case of journalism – in this respect. I will now address each one of these issues below from my point of view as a participant in the communication group.

2. Interdisciplinary consensuses

There is a universal consensus on the fact that truth is limited and has five requirements¹ which can be briefly defined as follows.

Human beings have a limited capacity for processing and storing information (Sánchez-Rodríguez *et al.*, forthcoming), from the famous cognitive biases to mindsets – which are socially defined – with which we interpret the information that we receive. Additionally, there is the relationship between truth and the powers that be.

Truth has an axiological dimension. In the Ancient Regime, ‘the noble lie’ was perfectly justified in official discourses which were protected by prior censorship (Faramiñán *et al.*, forthcoming). Democratic values, however, require information sources of a certain quality for free and responsible decision-making on the part of the citizenry, for which reason they are legally protected.

Access to truth is not immediate, for it also involves ethical intentions, an inquisitive mind, method, and dedication.

Truth also entails the requirement that information be reliable even above and beyond its adaptation to an external reality (Conill 2022). This characteristic prompts people to identify the conditions of possibility of that reliability. It requires social structures, subject in turn to economic, social and communication policies. In other words, it is necessary to construct an institutionalism that reinforces trust, while underpinning the other requirements of truth.

Truth requires debate and pluralism in political decision-making (Arias Maldonado *et al.*, forthcoming). Indeed, law experts believe that debate – and not truth – is the core of scientific knowledge and political decision-making, alike.

These requirements lay the foundations of truth and therefore can serve as limits: they construct an ‘inside’ and an ‘outside’. Namely, beyond the

¹ This subsection, together with the following one, is an overview of the conclusions presented in Lamuedra (2023) which is necessary for the purpose of this paper.

notion of limited truth itself, ethical values, the pursuit of research, reliability, pluralism, and the recognition of interlocutors in the debate, the space of lies has the following four characteristics.

Lies differ from errors in that they are deliberate (Conill 2022), which implies that lying can be understood as a free act in that in their utterances liars decide to substitute something that they believe to be true with something that they know is a falsehood. But this free act restricts the decision-making capacity of the receptors of lies. This is why lies ultimately tend to favour the personal interests of whoever tells them over those of whoever is lied to and, consequently, are totally unethical. There are of course exceptions to the rule usually of a cultural nature, like, for instance, the aforementioned noble lie.

In view of the foregoing, lies have nothing to do with quests for truth but, on the contrary, are premeditated artifices. The persistent strategic use of falsehoods and, consequently, placing specific interests above the welfare of others, creates a climate of distrust.

Lastly, liars shun debate and tend to discredit their interlocutors. As lying serves as a way of prioritising one's own interests, it is unethical and disrespectful to others whose welfare it undermines. Indeed, liars often not only restrict the decision-making capacity of others but also explicitly attempt to discredit them.

3. An institutionalism for truth and post-truth

A society that values truth should be grounded in the sort of trust that governs the exchange of information between neighbours, with institutions and in the media system. At the very least, this implies meeting the following requirements:

- A state with institutions in which the citizenry can trust.
- An adequate level of social cohesion, including equality and recognition thresholds for the different sections of society that facilitate a healthy pluralism.
- Institutions of social reproduction based on the value of truth.

Teaching is essential for enabling the citizenry to value truth in relation to scientific knowledge, plus its characteristics and limitations. The same can be said of the media system, which should be particularly trustworthy, as discussed below concerning journalism.

Against this backdrop, certain social dynamics working in the opposite direction towards a regime of post-truth are unsettling. Specifically, in Spain there is a growing distrust of representative institutions. According to the most recent survey data released by the *Centro de Investigaciones*

Sociológicas (Sociological Research Centre, hereinafter CIS) and the Eurobarometer, more than 70 per cent of Spaniards distrust politicians, the Congress, the trade unions and the Government. By the same token, according to the ‘Social Trends Report’, published by the CIS in December 2021, 68.3 per cent of Spaniards had misgivings about the media.

There is a correlation between dissatisfaction and the efficient functioning of the welfare state. As in other European countries, the 2007-2008 financial crisis and the austerity measures that followed explain the rise in structural dissatisfaction (Sánchez Ancochea 2022). In actual fact, Spain is one of the high-income countries with inequality in which poverty is becoming a chronic problem.

Inequality is the condition of possibility of affective polarisation, characterised by preference for or aversion towards political representatives and their supporters, including family members and friends, which does little to foster peaceful coexistence. According to Mariano Torcal (2023), this affective polarisation is promoted by the elites through the implementation of strategies of confrontation. These strategies, often including verbal abuse, disrupt the processes of debate required in an already very fragmented system, which only exacerbates distrust in the social environment.

All these tendencies shape a system in which the experience of reliability in social, institutional, and communicative interactions is becoming increasingly more insufficient. In sum, in the current system most of the requirements of a regime of truth – trust, the recognition of different social sectors, a fair distribution of resources and sufficient pluralism and debate – are not being met.

4. Frameworks of distrust

Experts in psychology have described the difficulties that human beings have in processing information using concepts such as confirmation biases and ‘the effect of illusory truth’ (Sánchez Rodríguez *et al.* 2023). In the same vein, cognitive linguists have proposed a frame theory (Lakoff and Mark 1986; Lakoff 2014). The human brain processes information input according to established interpretative frameworks which have been repeatedly shaped by the simultaneous exposure to words, emotions and images that have activated different parts of it. As words or stimuli processed in different areas of the brain are related, this opens established pathways which form the basis of our interpretative frameworks.

In other words, new stimuli and information are processed with previously established interpretative frameworks. But as we are exposed to new experiences, to new word and idea associations, they can change. For

instance, the consensus in Spain on the prohibition of the general possession of firearms – which is regarded as one of the main factors of civilian massacres in the United States – could change if citizens were frequently bombarded, over a long period, with real or fictional stories about unarmed people being violently attacked, without the possibility of defending themselves.

Different social agents, including political parties, vie with one another to influence the construction of the citizenry's reference or interpretative frameworks, which in the current professionalised system is known as 'neupolitics'. In other words, there is a specialist activity aimed at shaping our minds.

In the United States, according to Lakoff (2014), the Republicans have managed to shape their political worldview using the metaphor of the traditional family, governed by a strict father. The father in this role is described as an actor who is expected to make difficult decisions in a hazardous environment and, as such, should also have the ability to assert his authority. According to this perspective, whoever has this ability and self-discipline will prosper and, accordingly, those who have prospered are assumed to possess both.

From this perspective, the powerful should therefore fulfil their moral obligation to assert their authority, as well. In this 'logical universe', debate and negotiation are seen as irresponsible, given that the more able would be pandering to the less able. Or in plain English, the redistribution of wealth would be immoral because social assistance programmes are regarded as an obstacle preventing 'the best', 'the ablest', from climbing the social ladder and asserting their authority. Taxes would also be a hindrance to the prosperity of these 'strict fathers' who should govern the system.

For its part, in the progressive worldview – according to Lakoff – parents are fundamentally protectors. As there are usually two, this already implies a need for dialogue. Both should strive to ensure that their children grow up and develop in freedom, offering them their support, empathy, and protection. When this metaphor is applied in the field of political organization, it entails a spirit of dialogue as well as public protection and educational programmes that cater to the needs of those with greater difficulties.

According to Lakoff, American conservatives have managed to construct a political language in this respect by conveying a set of moral ideas grounded in the family to much greater effect than their progressive adversaries.

The time has now come to analyse the worldview of the extreme right, which can be identified as an enhanced version of that of the strict father. This is perfectly illustrated by the great replacement theory, popularised by Renaud Camus who contends that the indigenous European – white and Christian – population in general is being systematically replaced by non-European peoples owing to mass migration, demographic growth, and the declining birth rate in Europe, all of which poses a potential threat to Western culture and civilisation (Forti 2022).

This theory portrays the world as a truly dangerous place in which those who should obey (according to this worldview, if they are poorer, it is because they have not developed superior capabilities) are threatening the order imposed by those more moral people, to the point that they could end up invading and occupying the real, symbolic and identity-related space that ‘belongs to them’. For in the worldview of the strict father, above all in the concept’s extreme version, the world has to be perceived as a dangerous place. Because of this, a strict leader with a certain degree of authoritarianism is presented as the solution. As is well known, democracy has been carefully designed to avoid the authoritarianism of previous regimes and only accepts it in small doses.

Different studies have identified biases and hoaxes aimed at breeding distrust of democratic institutions, like, for example, the shortcomings of vote counting systems in elections, something that has occurred in Colombia (Giraldo Zuluaga 2021), Argentina (Cañabate, Magallón and Paniagua 2020) and France (Ballesteros-Aguayo, Magallón and Lamuedra, forthcoming). Mention should also go to messages that cast doubt on welfare institutions, such as the pension system. Research has also been conducted on the US Republican Party’s attempts to exaggerate the impact of crime and to create a climate of uncertainty in society (McIntyre 2018). The focus has also been placed on hoaxes aimed at supporting and popularising great replacement theory, alluding to the alleged disappearance of Catholic traditions or to the hypothetically disproportional increase in the Muslim population in Europe (Ballesteros-Aguayo, Magallón and Lamuedra, forthcoming).

In this context, society needs to distinguish between legitimate and fraudulent tools with an influence on shaping the interpretative frameworks of the citizenry. Although dialogue for contrasting perspectives and frames is crucial for pluralism and the quest for truth, the use of exaggerations, misrepresentations, and deliberate falsehoods to impose conceptual frameworks are techniques aimed at promoting a regime of distrust and post-truth and, as such, incompatible with democracy. In this task, as multidisciplinary scholars we should accept our responsibility.

5. Responsibility in a multidisciplinary academic community

Arriving at basic consensuses on how the variables and conditions of the possibility of truth and post-truth function, in addition to their effects on society, is one of the basic tasks of the academic community studying the post-truth phenomenon in different fields. In combination with a previous work (Lamuedra 2023), the first part of this paper sets out an initial proposal in this respect. To continue with this task, it is important to address two differences of opinion that have been visible throughout the research project.

Albeit seemingly abstract, the first is indeed an important stumbling block. It has to do with the extent to which postmodernism is to blame for post-truth. By way of example, for one of the project's philosophy team members, postmodernism, and even the Frankfurt School, is one of the variables influencing the advent of post-truth (Bermúdez Vázquez 2023) for having concluded that absolute truth does not exist but is subject to the tensions of power and current moral values. A similar argument is developed by McIntyre (2018) in his globally influential essay on post-truth.

This implies that the idea that absolute truth does not exist but is subject to the tensions of power and current moral values is to blame, when in reality – as has been seen – there is an almost full scientific consensus that these limitations do exist. Rather than killing the messenger, there is an urgent need to resolve a very important underlying issue: How can we fill the vacuum left by the impossibility of absolute truth in our social – and vital – system of thought? Without wanting to seem repetitive, the academic community should establish a consensual model in which everything in science should be subject to constant debate and revision but at the same time should function.

The second conceptual problem focuses on the cause of the current concern about post-truth. In this connection, Manuel Arias Maldonado (2023) contends that it is down to an overreaction to the success of political leaders who we believe are undesirable and even dangerous, before adding that the concept of post-truth has no conceptual grounds, while also recognising the difficulties in establishing “factual truth” in the public sphere. The very concept of “factual truth”, to wit, which based on empirically proven facts is less relevant if we accept – as frame theory suggests – those human beings only process information that matches preexisting cognitive frameworks.

I believe that the concern about post-truth is not, or at least should not be, related to leaders or interpretative frameworks that “we do not like” but to those techniques whose deliberate aim is to impose alternative frameworks on the citizenry through hoaxes, biases, and falsehoods. In the current polarised and polarising public sphere, it is exceedingly hard to distinguish between a legitimate argument, however ideologically unacceptable it may seem to some, and an illegitimate one, however ideologically acceptable it may seem to some. A model describing the variables and dynamics of truth and post-truth that facilitates interdisciplinary research can be useful for training different kinds of specialists to make such a distinction.

In this regard, I must insist that a many-sided debate (including opinions that we do not share), the recognition of different social and political identities, an institutionalism that builds overall trust, and an active and ethical promotion – with a certain amount of method – of the quest for truth are all safeguards of democracy. On the contrary, the imposition of frames through falsehoods, deadlock in debate, verbal abuse, stigmatisation, and the dismantling of the institutional structures that foster trust infringe upon democracy. These two tendencies can be represented as alternative cycles, in the sense that the variables that make a type of logic possibly hinder counter- or alternative logic.

Public universities form a fundamental part of democratic institutionalism that should be safeguarded. To this end, multidisciplinary experts in the academic community should meet the following challenges:

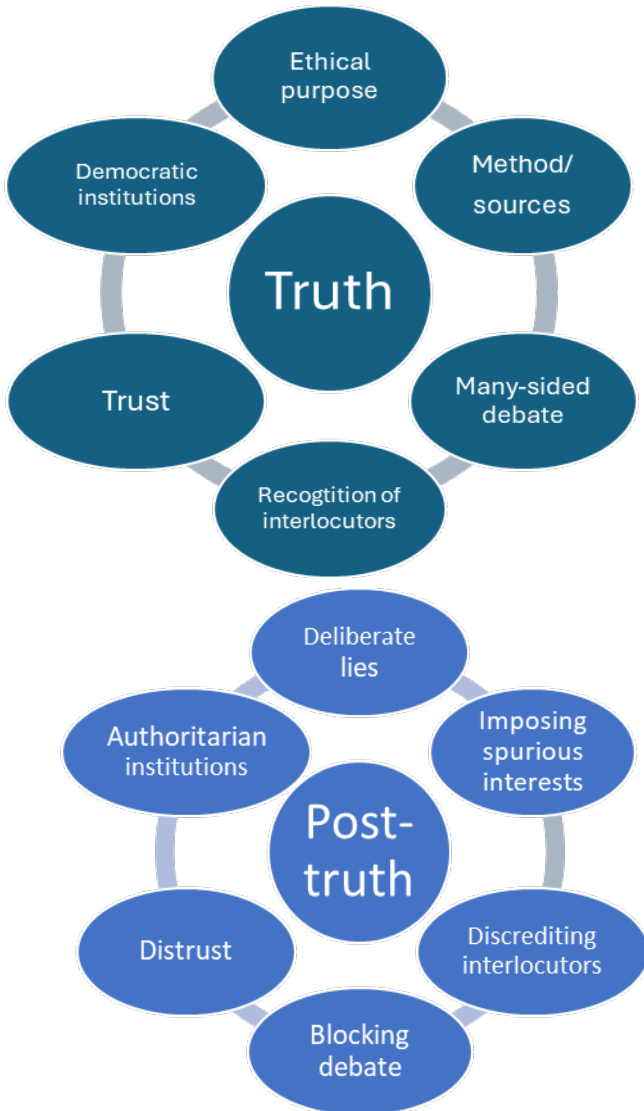
Reaching a broad consensus on the value of truth in society and its requirements and the variables and dynamics with which it interacts.

Making an inventory of all the structural elements underpinning the logic of truth to reinforce them.

Identifying the research areas in which the logic of truth can be defended against post-truth, for example, creating assessment systems for these structural elements or describing the consequences of the logic of post-truth in relation to different disciplinary fields at an international level.

Drafting reports aimed at influencing institutional design in all the structural areas that support the cycle of truth.

Adapting knowledge and consensuses to teaching practice in each discipline. There is a need for professionals trained in all the branches of knowledge with the ability to approach truth methodically and ethically, to create a climate of rational debate, and to leverage pluralism as a way of approaching truth and creating spaces of trust.



*Fig. 1-1. Alternative cycles of variables necessary for truth and post-truth.
Source: own elaboration²*

² These cycles, first appearing in Lamuedra and Ballesteros-Aguayo, 2023, have been rethought and updated here.

Paying special attention to the professions most involved in social reproduction, such as teacher training and journalism.

These last two issues are addressed below to explore the need to design training courses that ensure that future journalists know how to frame news items and to reframe the way in which hoaxes are exposed, according to the logic of journalistic truth.

6. Teaching applications of the cycles of truth from the perspective of frame theory

Journalists tend to reproduce the interpretative framework of the main news sources. This tendency could be related to many of the profession's deficiencies: fewer human resources than professional communication agencies, a lack of time and independence, precarious working conditions and so forth (see, for example, the *Anuales sobre la Profesión Periodística de la Asociación de la Prensa de Madrid*).

This same tendency can also be observed in journalists performing fact-checking tasks at election time, which could be considered as a particularly sensitive case, according to the findings of a study in which I have recently participated (Lamuedra and Ballesteros-Aguayo 2023). It is not only a process with a huge social impact but also a potential tool for training journalists to be aware of their responsibility in maintaining the conditions of possibility of truth and for providing them with the appropriate technical knowhow to achieve this, as the UNESCO has requested (Ireton and Ponsetti 2018, 12-13).

Based on the news analysis performed by a coalition of fact-checkers aimed at exposing the hoaxes put into circulation during the pre-election and election campaign in France, we concluded that journalists had not applied frame theory to news headlines or copy (Lamuedra and Ballesteros-Aguayo 2023). The results show that most of the news items maintained the frame of the hoax and that those that did indeed reframe it did not make the most of the research carried out, which was by and large robust. Consequently, a very high proportion of the news items had the following shortcomings:

1. News items exposing hoaxes maintained the same frame. For a better understanding of this matter, it is helpful to refer to the title of G. Lakoff's influential book, *Don't Think of an Elephant!* According to the US neurolinguist, when human beings hear or see this expression, they automatically think of an elephant. In other words, regardless of whether they are positive or negative, such expressions activate areas and interpretative frameworks in the human brain. For this reason, headlines

like “No, Anne Hidalgo has not lost her driving license for speeding” help to shape the minds of the receivers in the interests of those spreading hoaxes, in this case triggering a connection between “Anne Hidalgo”, “loss of license” and “speeding”. To counter this, Lakoff proposes reframing how hoaxes are exposed, in the ‘form of a sandwich’, namely, enveloping them with large doses of truth.

2. News items exposing hoaxes did not mention in their headlines who had spread them in the first place or for what reason. This conceals fundamental contextual elements from the public, thus preventing the “social punishment” of those spreading hoaxes. In the aforementioned example, the hoax originated from an extreme right-wing Facebook group that was opposed to the establishment of a 30km/h speed limit in Paris. Indeed, the aim of hoaxes is usually to censure specific measures, while circumventing or blocking the debate by stigmatising political rivals or specific collectives like immigrants, environmentalists, and feminists. Nevertheless, in this case, a significant number of the hoaxes were aimed at fuelling distrust of institutions, as often happens at election time.

3. It is impossible to establish any relationship between the seriousness of disinformation campaigns and the type of headline used to expose them, thus confusing the public and making it harder for them to assess the severity of each case. For example, a rather exaggerated statement about a public achievement could seem just as grievous to them as a blatantly false remark aimed at discrediting an opponent.

Owing to these deficiencies, fact-checking services miss the opportunity to create an interpretative framework of how deliberate disinformation flows circulate in the public space. A knowledge of this would contribute to preventing the imposition of conceptual frameworks for which there is no empirical evidence whatsoever, which leads to the following elements of the cycle: stigmatisation of social identities, polarisation, deadlock in the public debate, and a climate of distrust that foreshadows authoritarian institutionalism. In sum, adequately reframed and with the support of the scientific community fully aware of the enormity of this problem, by fact-checking news items it would be possible to create an interpretative framework that vaccinates the public against the current epidemic of infoxication.

In the news items analysed in the project, the inverted pyramid structure was prevalent and, therefore, main images and headlines, plus subtitles, headers and, to a lesser extent, lead paragraphs were the elements framing the information. There is a series of exercises for reframing disinformation –focusing on headline copy – that can help students to become aware of their responsibility in creating and maintaining frames

governed by the logic of truth. But it would first be necessary to address the following matters in the lecture hall:

- The key concepts of the cycles of truth and post-truth.
- The key concepts of frame theory and the importance of headline copy.
- The tendency of journalists not to reframe information. This is not only the case with hoaxes, for there is also a general dependence on the news frames of the dominant sources.
- The importance of robust and multifaceted investigative journalism so as to learn how to frame information. This is a vitally important question because students, as with scholars, often have to distinguish between evidenced-based information (regardless of whether the interpretative framework that it activates goes against the grain or not) and information aimed at imposing a baseless frame, which is a hoax. Research is also relevant for distinguishing between different degrees of falsehood.
- Practical guidelines and headline copywriting exercises along the following lines: headlines should be as specific as investigative journalism allows while attempting to underscore that the problem lies in the purpose of the hoax. For instance, to expose the hoax according to France's first lady is a transexual, instead of *Transphobia and anti-Macronism: The story of the viral infoxication about Brigitte Macron* (Tordjman *et al.* 21 december 2021), in view of the results of the investigation carried out by fact-checkers, it would be more accurate to state, "Websites linked to QAnon behind the misogynous infoxication against Brigitte Macron".
- In the journalistic and fact-checking community there is a need for debate on the serious danger that different types of disinformation pose. As to measures, these could include adopting different types of headlines for each type of disinformation, thus enabling readers to identify the gravity of each case in an intuitive fashion. Several examples are as follows:
- A hoax whose aim is to discredit a person/party/collective should be reframed to highlight the falsehood, the person behind the hoax and its purpose.
- A falsehood whose aim is to conceal misconduct or to exaggerate achievements could be reframed as follows: 'X plays down Y alluding to Z' or 'X exaggerates/misinterprets ... X alluding to Y.'
- Qualifying some or other misleading, exaggerated, or imprecise statement that has given rise to controversy. The structure of the

headline could be like that of the previous case but using less accusatory verbs like ‘qualify’, for example.

The following tables propose alternative headlines for some examples of hoaxes that were spread in the 2020 French election pre-campaign and campaign (the news items were published in French, the translations being mine).

HOAXES	
No, these damaged ballots of ‘Marine Le Pen’ are not an indication of ‘electoral fraud’.	The social media accounts promoting the candidature of ‘Marine Le Pen’ prompt accusations of electoral fraud.
No, ‘Happy Christmas’ has not been prohibited by the ecologists of Besançon.	Eric Ciotti has falsely accused the ecologists of Besançon by spreading the canard of ‘the loss of traditions.
No, Anne Hidalgo has not lost her driving license for speeding.	Extreme right-wing websites spread the hoax against Anne Hidalgo to censure the speed limit in Paris.

Table 1-1. Original and alternative headlines of hoaxes

EXAGGERATIONS	
Consulting firm costs ‘have already dropped by 15%’, according to Macron. A promise that has yet to be kept (Pace and AFP France, 18 march 2021).	Macron exaggerates the lower budget earmarked for consulting executed in 2022, after a historic increase in 2021.
9,000km of branch lines refurbished, according to the Government. Rather, a long-term objective (Acef, Szirnicks, and AFP France, 20 april 2022).	Castex exaggerates the number of branch lines refurbished by the Government: 1,500km, not 9,000km.
As regards renewable energy, is France ‘bringing up the rear’ in Europe, as Anne Hidalgo contends? (Deszpot, 16 march 2022).	Hidalgo exaggerates when claiming that France is bringing up the rear in renewable energy. There are 10 European countries behind it.

Table 1-2. Original and alternative headlines of exaggerations

As it is possible that the headlines on their own cannot achieve a sufficiently clear reframing, there are other central elements of news items where an effort should be made to identify the people behind hoaxes and their ultimate purpose. For instance, with a view to identifying the person behind a hoax, the strategic use of photographs, as well as headers indicating the purpose, is advisable. The lead paragraph, which elaborates briefly on the headline and header, should also refer to the people behind hoaxes and their purpose.

By way of example, an alternative to the headline, “No, these damaged ballots of “Marine Le Pen” are not an indication of ‘electoral fraud’” (Bamas 25 april 2022), could be, “Follower accounts of Marine Le Pen are spreading the hoax about electoral fraud”, accompanied by the subtitle, “Hoaxes about electoral fraud have been spread before in relation to extreme right-wing leaders like Donald Trump in the United States and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. All these cases contribute to erode trust in democracy”. And it could be accompanied by the same cover image.



Fig. 1-2. Cover image of the Marine Le Pen new (Bamas 25 April 2022)

The same logic should be followed in the case of exaggerations employed for concealing governmental problems and other issues. For example, in the case of the increase in spending on consulting firms on the part of the Macron government, the following header could be added: “Controversy surrounding the increase in power of consultants in public policy-making”.

7. Conclusion

My aim here has been to explore the agency of the multidisciplinary academic community studying the phenomenon of disinformation and post-truth. I defend the need to establish a common model that describes the variables and conditions of possibility underpinning a life experience for which truth is an inalienable reference value, versus a logic of post-truth in which the social preponderance of the ‘partisan mega-identity’ takes priority over the ethics of truth. This consensual model should also describe the social, political, and economic consequences of both cycles. I have put forward a brief proposal for a model developed elsewhere (Lamuedra 2023) intending to demonstrate its utility in a specific field of application, in this case journalism.

Indeed, I have described its use for training future journalists or even for raising the awareness of working journalists through different types of training courses. Specifically, I have identified fact-checking at election time, key to democracy, as one of the fields with a huge teaching and informative potential for examining the influence of hoaxes on the quality of our political system. An analysis of the failings of fact-checking in the 2022 presidential elections in France in relation to the application of frame theory highlights the utility of the proposed model for describing the variables of disinformation: stigmatisation of the adversary, deadlock in debate, creation of a climate of distrust and attacking the institutions underpinning the conditions of possibility of truth. It therefore points to the need for learning how to reframe the wording of those news items that spread hoaxes, paying special attention to news headlines (including headers, subtitles, and main images). A correct reframing of news would contribute to give shape to an informative discourse on those who put hoaxes into circulation, plus their aims and consequences, for vaccinating society against infoxication campaigns.

My overall objective has been to underscore the teaching and informative potential of an explicit model that describes the variables involved in the logics of truth and post-truth in a specific disciplinary field. I suggest that the coordinated application of a consensual explanatory model of the variables of truth and post-truth in several multidisciplinary areas would play a significant role in the necessary restructuring and defence of a democratic horizon of truth and the structures and institutions which support it.

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