

## **‘TRUTHS’ IN POST- TRUTH MEDIA STUDIES**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*The word Post-Truth refers to the realisation of the readership on the existence of ‘seeming truth’, ‘alternative truths’ or rather ‘multiple truth’ in the period that swept the world after the year 2016. The birth of the post truth era is a resultant of many political upheavals on the global scale, but precisely epicentred in the North American political drama. The post truth world is filled with a wide range of choices leaving the audience and readership grooved only to the task of choice-making but never ending up with the actual decision. The post truth critics evaluate and reflect on a range of information available in the social media; to measure the conditioning of the public minds to a particular, specified news piece curated by the elitist dominant politicians. This paper attempts to study the influence of such post truths in the social as well as the political world that leaves the readership and stakeholders in a perpetual state of conflicting choices.*

**KEYWORDS:** *post truth, information system, mafia, post facts, dominant schools, politics*

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

-Lee McIntyre

Human brain is capable of handling and organising a multiplicity of information all at once, that includes cognitive thoughts, emotional frames of an individual including an inclusive social behaviour. The marvel of the human brain and his potential to race through the evolutionary cycle of living organisms has fetched the place to be the most rational and intellectually potential animal on this planet. It is with this potency that he has conquered the planet with intent to build the same as an industrial megatycoon. It is also necessary to investigate if man has remained true to the success and achievements of his

own race or has been partial in the promotion of only a part of his affluent companions leaving other members of the same race in oblivion surrounded by a cloud of distrust and suspicion.

Proper food, shelter and clothing to every single individual are the motto and mantra of this industrially driven society. But these afore-mentioned basic requirements surpass the real intention and stand to decide the social status of the individual. Hence it is not enough that one has a home, but is important to own 'the kind' of home the society expects one to own. Thus the food clothing and life-style choices have moved beyond the definition of requisite role and at present stands to designate only social power of the individual.

The role of education, instruction and conditioning play a major role in shaping the aspirations and the unique sensibilities of the individuals. In this regard, the information environment one is exposed to conditions the cognitive outcomes and the emotional outcomes of the individual. The news piece (visual, printed and auditory) one is exposed to in the social set-up sculpted by the capitalist and elitist communions, the proletarian (common salary man) often plays a vicious role of a confused spectator. Education has moved from the central purpose of enlightenment (to see the truth) to the peripheral objective of instruction (blindfolded adherence to dictation). Removal of education from its noble purpose is directly proportional to outlandish exacerbation of 'will' and 'free thought' paving way for monotony and standardisation of the society.

Media role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century serves a conglomerated political agenda interspersed with an obligation to colour and fabricate the minds of the readership and the audience. Media far from its enrolment to offer responsible news and instruction has come to compromise its standards and roles as a mediator or even function as an unofficial spokesperson of a political capitalist. Media discourses offer a wide range of codes and subcodes to imply the impending plan of the political mainframe, subjugating the needs of the proletariat audience. The agenda is to enlarge the ambitions and lifestyle choices of the minority elites thereby making the same as a standard culture. The duty of the media houses does not stop there abruptly; rather they emboss the culture of the elites and business classes as the accepted central culture of the society very carefully in the thoughts and beliefs of the sub-strata of the society. The objective of this conditioning of the minds of the readership is an unquestioned acceptance of the far-fetched, inaccessible culture of the elites by the common salaried man, who is ever-stranded in the pavilion surrounded with poverty, in want of attention, basic needs and middleclass aspirations.

Post Truth is the idea attached with such falsely created sentiments and thought courses, which leave an indelible impression on the commoner or the readership of laymen. The word Post Truth was coined by Ralph Kryes in 1992. The word in its infancy and early days after coinage meant simple or plain truth. Later after the empowerment of the media houses in the last decade, the word has increasingly stood to refer to fake news as well as ‘alternative truths’. It is necessary to understand the ambiguity of the word as the false news is neither negated nor challenged, instead the public minds are rewritten with the ‘constructed facts’ propounded by the affluent strata of the society. The dangers of this fake news and fake media entertainment are alarming as it numbs the senses as well as the liberty of thoughts among the audience. In the context of Popular culture, the word ‘Post Truth’ has borrowed the shade of meaning that implies conspiracies and hypothesis regarding the end of the world, autocracy of the Illuminati, alien invasion, existence of multiverse and parallel universe etc. A deeper analysis of such conspiracy theories only leads public minds to distrust and chaos, which remains the aimed ultimatum of the autocrats.

In the year 2016, a marked change dawned in German politics, when the former Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel frankly referred to this Post Truth scenario as an era of ‘Post Factual’ events. She out rightly called out the dangers of the fake news as, “Lately we live in post-factual times. This means that people are no longer interested in facts, but in feelings”. Her statement precisely denotes the emotional sway of people and their reception of news and information. Rational application of thought is preceded by the benumbing over-emphasis of emotion through a continual display of sensitive news or facts by media houses. For example, pictures showcasing violence and gory visuals of death, destruction and decay by the news media; either photographic visual or a videography only eliminates the intrinsic purpose of the sensitivity towards the issue and rather conditions the viewership to await such visuals.

The underplay of sympathy and emotional intelligence which requires a cautious treatment here topsy-turves the entire aspect of reality and the facts embossed in our daily occurrences. Therefore there is a war waged on the emotions of people, turning them only to stop reacting to a problem emotionally rather than rational perception of the problem. For example, in America, during the 2000s era, at the time of president ship of George W. Bush the junior, the attack on Iraq was referred to as the ‘The Last Crusade’. The former president of USA with a great political care, religious craft and slyness called the war on Iraq as a form of crusade or holy war that would salvage Iraqis from its dictator. The word was criticised as well as received with greater acknowledgement given the political supremacist status of USA. The Last Crusade still rings in the mind of people as an allusion to biblical scriptural prophecy and

serves as a model of redemption of land and its people from an oppressor. Naïve minds of the audience is a fertile ground for the power play of emotions intermingled with a political agenda that further propels fear and mistrust among the viewers.

Popular entertainment and media offers a wide range of choice on news, lifestyle, music, ideas, ideologies, religious practices, home décor, shopping, festivities and culinary choices thus expanding the role of service providers and turning the market scope into an economic boom. Indulgence in popular entertainment benumbs one's creative thought turning them to dance to the drumbeats of the capitalist media. The machinations of capitalist media and producers of information and news always aim to limit the focus of the public minds to earn the average wages of the middle classes rather than elevating their aspirations to the political sphere or promotion to the next level of financial status. This in turn, the media stagnates the intellectual progression and binds the populace to the dominant capitalist institutions. Bertolt Brecht coins the effect as 'Verfremdungseffekt' or the 'v-effect' translated as the Alienation effect and the distancing effect. Brecht predicts the danger of the situation in which the society will have swayed by the constructed emotions; simultaneously mislead to solve the existing problems of society and mankind. Emotions thus becomes an abstraction of least importance to Brecht and he in-builds the distancing effect in his plays to call for an immediacy of solution in real time.

George Orwell rechristens the word 'post-truth' as 'double-think'- the reversal of truth, the birth of alternate truths etc. Orwell reflects this dystopian fear as, "In times of universal deceit, telling the truth will be revolutionary act" for the neglect of absolute truth will land in the serious problem of denial of objective truth and lies passing into history. In other words, the 'lies' generated once makes up into the normative 'memory' of populace and shapes into an 'effectual truth' in future. A perfect example of this statement is echoed in Orwell's novel *1984* as the well-known slogan by the Ministry of Truth: "War is Peace; Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength" (6).

When people tend to receive news with a certain percent of emotional indulgence, there is a failure to read between the news and decode the real news. Too much supply of news bulletins on trivial domestic occurrences or day-to-day happenings removes the public interest from the mega- political events of the day. With the present day reporting of popular news by the satellite televisions, the intent lies behind rising the popularity of the television channels; needless to mention that these channels function with the ownership of political tycoons. Looking at it from the political angle, the agenda and ideology of majority

of the political parties get funded by such business tycoons. Here evolves the concept of ‘Public Sphere’, which bears the generally perceived concept of belonging to the commoners or the proletarians.

Jurgen Habermas differs in this perceived intention and identifies Public sphere as the one that is taken over by the private ownership where these owners articulate the needs of the society in consultation with the nation-state. Some of the examples being 1) the announcement of government schemes and tenders, in which proletarians are the identified beneficiaries; but those in the ladder of power reap the maximum benefit through coercion or consent and 2) the ownership of port by Adani industries, the case in which the people were the stakeholders earlier- in this case the allegations against the Adani group are manifold that ranges from the ‘over-invoicing’ of the coal imports the burden of which fell on the shoulders of Indian public to the protest by the fishing communities in the Adani’s expansion of the Vizhinjam port in Kerala to the protests by the indigenous communities against the Dhirauli Coal Project etc. These incidents record the capitalist ownership of public enterprises that were institutionalised to cater to the needs of the common good of the public. Thus the ‘public sphere’ no longer designates those entities that belong to the proletariats but to the invested interests of supremacist, capitalist godhead who also spearheads the political aspirants of the nation-state.

So, how is the fact of reality and truth twice-removed from the public minds? The pattern of state colonisation deliberates through the five-staged process. It’s performative function is enacted through various helmsmen who steer the progress of lies and fake news. The action is five-phased and is achieved through :

- Lobbyists
- Advocates
- Expert professionals
- Moral entrepreneurs
- Intellectuals

The lobbyists employed by the super powers or capitalist- influencers belong to the special elite groups, who take over the processing of news along with media agencies. In the second stage, we have the advocates / propagandists who become the spokesperson of the common public or the marginalised sections of the society. The third party is the subject matter expert who analyses the political or the economic situation on par with the public, political or economic interest. The moral entrepreneurs bring to light the neglect issues of the social domain and the final ones are the intellectuals who share their portion

of knowledge to further put the public minds in discord so as the public are left with too many choices of little message and zero impact for solution. These five representations from the social-political group are found at present on any television debate channel on a routine, leaving no massive foundational changes among the target groups (audience).

The renowned Post-Truth critic Ramsay Dukes evaluates the present day scenario as an age that lives in denial of truth and invents the term ‘Magical- Thinking’ to refer the shift from truth and rather emphasise on what is right and pertinent to the present day scenario- the corollary being the existent of multiple truths. Post –industrial revolution, amidst the growing economic zones in every other nation-state structure, the working classes and public paced in the intellectual world are both likely to get hoodwinked by the rumours on Multi- National agencies, space travels, existence of multi-verses/ parallel universes, authority of secret societies etc. Akin to the influence of popular news, as part of popular entertainment, pulp fiction writers and writers of science fiction articulate the imaginative mediums that may have a possibility of existence alongside the research on real-time space missions and planetary explorations by scientific institutions like NASA. Every fiction and tale lays a certain amount of plain truth that unleashes the strange possibilities of the Dark Web and secret societies.

The essential and plain question here is if anti-social secret societies as well as Dark Web exist, then have the political leaderships found themselves insufficient and incapacitated to curb them? Or are the public minds deliberately pledged to these institutions and their frames of ideology or are the populace allowed to be misled by these rumours; in which case they must have been rescued by the timely intervention of the political/ democratic leadership. That leaves unsaid and understood that many of such rumours originate as an intriguing artifice of political conspiracy. This is the typical era of Post Truth which is clouded in a series of suspicion, mystery, anxiety and endless doubt.

Speaking of conspiracies and dark world demons, there is yet another extension to the world of lies- the Big Pharma. National health statistics of a particular nation boast of its advancement in medical health and its technologies. Advanced medical care of any nation stands as a testimony to its support system and welfare. At the same time, we tend to miss the important message of growing number of diseases and outnumbering patients in the healthcare system. For example if a nation had the medical professional-patient ratio as 1:50 two decades ago and has come up to 10: 50 in the present day it is erroneously counted as a mark of progress. The truth behind the bombardment of diseases and drug supply chain is surpassed through a broader campaign of ultra-modern medical care.

In a similar case, the entertainment industry supplies trashcan of entertainment making the senses benumbed with ‘candyfloss entertainment’ as quoted by the Leavisites from the School of Cultural Studies. In other words, the populace is supplied with monotony of soap operas, music shows, dance numbers, reality shows, web series, thrillers, talk shows that infringe the private lives of individuals furthering denounced taste and derogatory conversions. Recalling the adage ‘Less is more’ is outdated in the present entertainment context marking the threshold of public taste at the primary zones of debasement and crude choices. This must be inferred as distraction of the citizens of a democracy from the necessity of interest in the left wing ideologies.

Critics of Post-Truth studies refer to this pattern of misinformation as ‘bull-shitting’ and ‘gas lighting’. The words became popular during the presidential tenure Donald Trump (USA) for his inaccurate treatment of facts and truths in the public domain and his inefficiency to handle the COVID situation. The internet is a weird place and it has truly expanded the limits of liberal thought as well as has paved way for a dangerously influential malicious content. Media agencies do not alone carry the mass of such post-truth material but are found anywhere on the internet; hence the dangerousness of the situation! In an era of unimaginable growth and proximity of nations connected through a world of web, media undeniably stirs a typhoon of opinionated discourse.

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