

The Liminal: Interdisciplinary Journal of Technology in Education

Volume 1 | Issue 1

Article 2

August 2019

The Historical Impossibility of a Post-Truth Society

Diego Han

Center for Historical Research in Rovinj, diegohan@windowslive.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/theliminal>



Part of the [Comparative Philosophy Commons](#), [Public History Commons](#), and the [Social History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Han, Diego (2019) "The Historical Impossibility of a Post-Truth Society," *The Liminal: Interdisciplinary Journal of Technology in Education*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 2.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/theliminal/vol1/iss1/2>

This Article Discussing a Construct is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Liminal: Interdisciplinary Journal of Technology in Education by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact jennifer.cox@du.edu, dig-commons@du.edu.

The Historical Impossibility of a Post-Truth Society

Abstract

Since 2016 the notions of post-truth and fake news have been playing an important role in the world's social and political life. They developed with the political victories of Donald Trump and Nigel Farage. However, what would have happened if they had lost their political gamble? Would be still talking about post-truth and fake news? In this Op-ed, I claim that these two concepts have only political value. Furthermore, through a short reasoning, I use a historical perspective to prove how biased and vague these two notions are and how wrong the approach of calling them so is.

Keywords

Post-Truth, Fake-News, History, Technology

Is it, or is it not? This question has always been crucial since the origin of philosophy and the reasoning about the human condition: is there an absolute truth? Recently, this concept went through serious reassessments, both in the academic milieu as well as in the social one. In the first case it was postmodernity that pushed scholars and scientists to reconsider the notion of truth, while in the second case it was the result of very specific conditions and changes that have been affecting our society in the last years. For the purposes of this text, the focus will be put on the significance of a historical acknowledgment of the evolution of the post-truth/fake news phenomenon and how this recognition can help us finding the right solutions.

So indeed, how can the scientific community respond to the challenges affecting an apparently very simple concept as the truth is? For example, there is no chance that Hitler could have won and lost the Second World War contemporarily. He lost it, period. That is the truth. Nevertheless, according to some, Hitler did lose the war, but yet managed to successfully escape to South America and spend the rest of his life there. Clearly, this second statement has no serious scientific research and facts corroborating it, but it has still gained a lot of followers and approval. In the time of fake news and post-truth, what should educators and members of the academia do to avoid this kind of cases? Not much more than what they already do. The historical evidences of such event have long been proven at least as inconsistent (Watson, Kershaw, Walters, Evans etc.), underpinned also by pathological researches (Charlier). And still, despite all the education one can get from elementary school up to the University, some people do believe in Hitler's escape. Was this a failure of the Academia? Of course not. Conspiracy theories, lies, deceits, fake news, they have all been existing as long as the modern humans. Historically, terms like post-truth and fake news are nothing new, but simply tendencies towards particular beliefs that spread fast through the society due to the mystery and the unknown surrounding them, characteristics that have a strong emotional appeal over people. Another example could be Tonkin incident of 1964 that was used as the *casus belli* for a broader American intervention in Vietnam. It now seems that the news about the incident was not shared exactly according to "truth" standards (Hanyok), but it happened long before the birth of post-truth and fake news. We could go as back in time as to discuss the news about Nero's fire in Rome, the Dreyfus betrayal, or simply ask ourselves about the arms of mass destruction owned by Saddam Hussein in Iraq, all to see that fake news and lies are a constant and natural part of the human society. As so, we are wrong to call our society a post-truth one, insisting on blaming fake-news for what is going on. Fake-news are as old as gossiping amongst neighbours, but what changed is the mechanism through which we share our information. Nowadays this process does not belong exclusively to professionals and big companies anymore, but to everyone with an internet connection. In this context, paraphrasing the late Umberto Eco, what once could not reach out of a local pub now can be heard by millions of people. As a consequence, although the academic initiatives created to address the fake news/post-truth issues are well worthy and necessary (lessons, fact-check lectures, teachings etc.), currently they can affect just a small portion of the problem. What is needed, is to develop a strong consciousness that clearly understands that post-truth and fake news are nothing more than mere political concepts exploited after Donald Trump's and Nigel Farage's victories over what was deemed by their supporters to be the "establishment". In the end, by acknowledging it, we would be able not only to learn how to recognize and contain fake news, but also to act on the sources that create them, whose motives go way beyond the notions of fake and truth and are rather tied to deeper social instabilities that should be approached from a more holistic perspective.