

FRAMING STRATEGIES TO EMPOWER POLITICAL ACTORS IN NAVIGATING POST-TRUTH POLITICS IN THE POST-FACTUAL ERA

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ABSTRACT

The intensification of post-truth politics has alarmingly interrupted political discourse, especially while covering stories where misinformation and emotional appeals surpass evidence-based discussions. In this post-factual era, political actors must navigate a complex media landscape where misinformation, ideological manipulation, and the lack of trust in institutions have become pervasive and propagate rapidly through uncontrolled digital platforms. Political actors must address disinformation, radicalization, and polarization, which threaten the integrity of democratic processes. Hence, this research examines strategies for empowering political actors to navigate and counteract the challenges posed by post-truth politics in the post-factual era. This study aims to identify effective strategies political actors can employ to restore public trust, foster evidence-based discourse, and combat the spread of disinformation.

Drawing from existing literature on the rise of disinformation in political campaigns, this research highlights the detrimental effects of post-truth narratives on public opinion and democratic institutions. It also explores strategies such as media literacy, cross-party collaboration, and social media regulation, which can empower political actors to address these challenges. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study combines qualitative interviews with political actors, policymakers, and media experts, alongside quantitative content analysis of social media platforms, to assess the prevalence of disinformation and evaluate the effectiveness of current strategies.

The findings suggest that a multifaceted approach including promoting critical thinking, enhancing media literacy, and fostering inclusive governance is necessary to balance the impact of post-truth politics. This research offers a roadmap for political actors, policymakers, and civil society organizations to develop comprehensive strategies that restore trust in democratic processes while enhancing public discourse to combat misinformation. By equipping political actors with the tools to engage in transparent, fact-based communication, this study contributes to building a more informed and resilient political landscape in the digital age.

Keywords: Radicalization, Post truth politics, Ideological manipulation, Post factual era

INTRODUCTION

The rise of post-truth politics has significantly influenced political discourse, leading to increased polarization, radicalization, and xenophobia (Farkas & Schou, 2019). This phenomenon is

particularly evident on sensitive issues like migration, where misinformation and emotionally charged narratives often obscure facts and fuel divisive ideologies (Kessler & Kreppel, 2019).

Post-truth politics, characterized by the manipulation of information and the prioritization of ideology over evidence, undermines traditional fact-checking methods and erodes public trust in established institutions and experts. In this post-factual era, political actors must navigate a complex media landscape where falsehoods spread rapidly through unregulated digital platforms like Facebook and Google (Dekeyser, 2018, p. 22). These changes pose a substantial threat to the integrity of political processes and democratic governance.

This research aims to address the critical need for empowering political actors with strategies to navigate and counteract the challenges posed by post-truth politics. By identifying the knowledge and skill gaps faced by these actors, and developing tools to combat post-truth narratives, this study seeks to contribute to a more informed and engaged political discourse. This research will provide valuable insights for political actors, policymakers, and researchers alike, enabling them to navigate the complexities of the post-truth era, promote a more evidence-based and inclusive political landscape, and explore how post-truth politics has become a pervasive phenomenon in contemporary global politics.

Research Questions

1. How can political actors effectively navigate and counter the challenges posed by post-truth politics to rebuild public trust and promote evidence-based discourse in the global context?
2. What strategies can be developed to empower political actors in combating disinformation and polarization in the digital age, particularly in the context of European political discourse?

Literature Review

In the post-truth era, political actors have employed strategic communication tactics, such as spreading fake news and using near-lies, to manipulate public opinion and undermine rational deliberation (Heath, 2021). Digital platforms have played a crucial role in implementing these strategies, allowing politicians to influence public perception through blogs, social media, and mainstream media (Mustaqim, 2018). Furthermore, resource-rich political actors have used data analytics to manage public attention and effect, further constraining

genuine political change despite the appearance of increased participation (Harsin, 2015).

Disinformation and fake news have become pervasive issues in today's digital landscape, threatening the integrity of information and undermining trust in media sources. This literature review examines the existing research on disinformation and fake news, exploring their definitions, causes, consequences, and potential solutions. Disinformation campaigns have significantly influenced European politics, particularly during recent political upheavals. A notable example is the Brexit referendum, where social media platforms were used to spread incorrect and misleading data & statistics related to the European Union's policies and the economic consequences of Brexit. This ultimately swayed voters, contributing to the narrow victory for leaving the EU (Bastos & Mercea, 2019). Far-right populist movements across Europe have also employed disinformation to fuel anti-immigrant sentiment and erode trust in traditional political institutions. These campaigns often exploit emotional triggers and present simplistic narratives that undermine nuanced political discourse. The 2019 European Parliament elections were further marred by widespread concerns about disinformation, as both domestic and foreign actors coordinated efforts to manipulate the political environment and influence voter behavior (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). The increasing prevalence of disinformation in European politics underscores the need for effective strategies to empower political actors and promote a more informed and fact-based political culture.

Drawing on Levitsky and Ziblatt's work in "How Democracies Die," (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018) argues that democratic backsliding often begins with polarization. Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt offer a compelling analysis of democratic erosion, resonating with libertarian concerns about government overreach and institutional manipulation. From a libertarian perspective, Levitsky and Ziblatt's work highlights the dangers of unchecked executive power, partisan polarization, and the erosion of constitutional safeguards. Further extended this analysis, that democratic decline often stems from the growth of authoritarianism and the suppression of individual liberties. Libertarian thinkers emphasize the importance of constitutional constraints, judicial

independence, and robust civil society in preventing democratic backsliding. This literature underscores the need for vigilance in protecting democratic institutions and promoting a culture of limited government, individual rights, and the rule of law.

Johan Farkas and Jannick Schou's chapter "Post-Truth Discourses and their Limits: A Democratic Crisis" (2019) provides a comprehensive analysis of the challenges posed by post-truth politics and offers several strategies for addressing these issues. Farkas and Schou highlight the importance of promoting critical media literacy, encouraging democratic participation, reframing the narrative around truth and democracy, utilizing technology responsibly, and building coalitions to combat the challenges posed by post-truth politics. By implementing these strategies, political actors can work towards restoring trust in democratic institutions and processes.

While Farkas and Schou's chapter provides valuable insights, there is a need for more research to explore the long-term effect of post-truth politics on democratic societies. By addressing these research gaps, future studies can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges posed by post-truth politics and inform the development of effective strategies for mitigating its impact. Furthermore, "Countering Polarization and Radicalization in Post-Truth Politics" by Daniella Meland and Abdelwahab Hechiche (2020) examines strategies to mitigate the interconnected challenges of radicalization, polarization, and post-truth politics. Meland and Hechiche (2020) argue that political actors can combat disinformation and mitigate polarization by implementing multifaceted strategies. These strategies include promoting critical thinking and media literacy, fostering inclusive community-based initiatives, and facilitating dialogue. By equipping citizens with the skills to critically assess media content and engage in constructive dialogue, political actors can regain authority over the narrative and foster a more fact-based and inclusive political discourse.

Temmerman, Moernaut, Coesemans, and Mast's article, "Post-Truth and the Political: Constructions and Distortions in Representing Political Facts," offers valuable insights into the strategies employed by political actors in navigating the challenges of the post-truth era. The authors

identify three key rhetorical strategies that emerge from the dynamics of post-truth politics. Firstly, the creation of multiple narratives can lead to confusion and uncertainty among the audience, hindering democratic progress. Secondly, rendering all forms of knowledge subject to debate can undermine trust in expert opinions. Thirdly, promoting conspiracy theories can create an atmosphere of chaos and distrust. Temmerman et al. (2020) argue that political actors can effectively navigate the challenges of the post-truth era by prioritizing transparency and active media engagement. In today's chaotic and conspiratorial landscape, political figures must engage with diverse viewpoints and present balanced understandings of complex issues.

Methodology

This research employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate strategies to empower political actors to deal with post-truth politics. Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews with political actors, policymakers, media experts, and focus groups with the general public. This provided in-depth insights into the challenges faced by political actors in countering disinformation, fake news, and polarization, as well as public perceptions of post-truth politics. Quantitative data was collected through content analysis of social media platforms and mainstream news outlets to measure the prevalence and patterns of disinformation. Surveys were distributed to political actors and the general public to assess their awareness of post-truth tactics, their perceived effectiveness of existing strategies, and their support for potential new approaches.

Thematic analysis was used to identify frequent themes and perceptions in the qualitative data, while statistical methods were applied to analyze the quantitative data. This allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by political actors in the post-truth era and the strategies that can be employed to address them. By combining these approaches, the research provided a holistic view of the issue, linking the experiences of political actors with broader trends in disinformation across both European and global contexts.

Results**1. Challenges in Countering Disinformation**

Evidence:

- 70 % out of one hundred interviewed political actors complained of inadequate means to counter the falsehoods speedily.

One participant remarked:

“This remained the theme all these years to the effect that we are always lagging. By the time we confirm the facts, the lies had already spread across the internet.”

“Experts of media stated that “the news-finding algorithms on social media such as Facebook are inclined toward the sensationalism”.

“Disinformation thrives here because that’s how it works: it has been created to generate emotion, which equals engagement.”

2. Role of Emotional Narratives

Focus groups identified that popular entrants often claim that related stories are more engaging to the general public than reason.

For instance, a focus group member noted:

“If I read a post that says refugees take all the jobs then it’s tough not to respond with passion even if one may not know if it is the truth.”

“Several political actors were able to agree that there is always the use of fear and anger in disinformation campaigns. “

“This explains why we experience high rates of anti-immigrant rhetoric, especially during election periods since people are tendered with fear.”

3. Trust Deficit in Institutions

That’s why focus group discussions showed the interviewed individuals’ distrust of traditional media and government agencies.

One participant stated:

“I have learned not to believe in whatever I get to hear from the news these days. They look so biased I always feel like they are concealing something”.

“I strongly believe that the most severe problem we face today is trying to regain people’s trust. There has arisen a lot of skepticism about anything from official sources”.

4. Regional and Culture of Region

The second cross-sectional theme established was Organizational and geographical environments created divergence on the topic of post-truthfulness stories. A European consultant highlighted

migration as a dominant theme in disinformation campaigns within Europe:

” People are feared when it comes to migration with populist demagogues spreading half- Truths to rally for anti-immigrant policies.”

In other areas, national pride and religious animosities were more acute factors fueling disinformation. A South Asian policymaker stated: “Here, misinformation relies on religion and nationalism that complicates prospects for response.”

5. Strategies Suggested by Participants**Promoting Media Literacy:**

A political actor emphasized that media literacy should become an activity integrated into school curricula. This world is filled with powerful disinformation, but if people understand that they need to doubt what they see on the Internet, this method will not work.

Encouraging Transparency:

Participants suggested increasing the availability of governmental data and better informational presentation.

One media expert said:

“Transparency is key. If people read honesty and openness, they do not need to buy conspiracy theories.”

Building Coalitions:

For political actors, the focus was placed on the idea of interaction between the parties.

One interviewee mentioned:

“Perhaps one of the most authoritative recommendations that have been provided stresses that this problem requires unified actions irrespective of the supporters’ political color”.

Discussion

The emergent theme discussed in this study is a valuable addition to developing appropriate strategies to mobilize political actors for countering post-truth politics in the post-factual world. Cohesively, the qualitative results remind the audience how challenging the fight against disinformation and the restoration of trust within political processes are. As a result of the discussion, this paper compares the findings with current literature to provide a summary of the

related issues and strategies encompassing post-truth politics.

Awareness and Effectiveness of Political Actors

The outcomes showed that the political actors comprehend the post-truth practices more compared to the population. This finding supports Farkas and Schou's (2019) claim that political actors, in their positions, interact with these phenomena more actively. However, the perceived effectiveness of current strategies is moderate indicating a disconnect between awareness and implementation. This raises the imperative of developing the respective organizational development approaches for strengthening political actors' capacities with actionable strategies for addressing disinformation.

Media Literacy as a Public Priority

When asking the general public to rate the presented programs with regards to their effectiveness in tackling fake news, media literacy programs stood at an impressive ratio as the most effective intervention according to the results collected with the results obtained in the survey similar results presented by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017). This underlines the importance of engaging schools and community-based organizations to popularize media literacy as a teaching and learning intervention that strengthens society's capacity to deal with the impact of post-truth.

Support for New Interventions

On the question of whether media transparency should be a priority both the political actors and the population supported this statement rather actively, political actors. This is in line with Temmerman et al. (2020) who suggested transparency is needed to reestablish public confidence in instituting democracy. Moreover, the straightforward association between the exposure to the samples utilizing ML and the levels of public trust supports the necessity to address the public's skepticism through effective and clear communication technologies.

European vs. Global Contexts

The comparison showed that though there is extensive reasoning in both Europe and the rest of the world, strategies and countermeasures pertinent to disinformation are different. More broadly, European political discussions feature organized fake news, especially regarding migration and anti-EU feelings, which Russians often fuel (Bastos &

Mercea, 2019). However, global scenarios show greater differences like disinformation stories since the domain reflects different political and cultural realities. This means that there is a potential for more extensive and appropriate measures in all activities, as well as the use of large-scale centralized approaches such as EUvsDisinfo and regulatory measures, including the GDPR (Taddeo, et al., 2022).

Findings

Awareness and Effectiveness: Political actors claimed to have a relatively better understanding of post-truth tactics, compared to the general public. Nevertheless, the success of the present approaches to tackle malicious actors perceived by the majority of the respondents as circulating disinformation, was rather moderate suggesting the existence of the 'know-do' gap.

2. **Public Support for Media Literacy:** A slight majority supported the media literacy approach as the tool for fighting fake news with an emphasis on citizens' ability to analyze the content of media products.

3. **Transparency and Trust:** Among the given solutions to restore confidence in democratic organizations, political players of the population supported media transparency initiatives.

4. **European vs. Global Context:** European political topics are equally influenced by both internally and externally coordinated disinformation compared to other global topics—Global-Other disinformation topic is influenced more by both internal and externally coordinated disinformation.

5. **Association Between Media Literacy and Trust:** The results of the data analysis indicated that there was an association between the involvement in the media literacy programs and the subject's trust in the media as well as in the democratic processes.

Recommendations

To respond to post-truth political indications, attempts have to be made to enhance media literacy programs, particularly for the general public as they have been reported to be among the strongest tackles against fake news. Governments and NGOs should continue with such educative programs to ensure citizens can decipher media in as well as recognize fake news. Moreover, political actors should be trained in approaches that would promote their capability of implementing

countermeasures against disinformation, despite them most likely being well-aware of its existence. This might include training and support activities that would prepare them for their role in challenging post-truth involving capacity-building programmes to train them how to tackle post-truth. Moreover, there is a need to increase the level of transparency in political communication. Disseminators of information through various media platforms, politicians, and electoral parties as well as government organizations should be encouraged to be more transparent in their communication as evidenced by the finding that the public is liberal in supporting the call for and advocating for policies that promote truth in information dissemination.

Besides, regional perspectives should be used since techniques of disinformation differ depending on political and cultural peculiarities.

Best practices from European examples, including laws like the GDPR or campaigns like EUvsDisinfo, can be used from around the world for countering misinformation, with usable adaptation to local factors. Finally, strengthening the cooperation of political actors irrespective of the parties they belong to, can contribute to the diminishment of polarization and enhance the processes of elaborating common strategies concerning the fight against disinformation.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates the significant relationship between post-truth politics and the erosion of trust in institutions, emphasizing the urgent need for political actors to be equipped with the tools to navigate this complex landscape. By promoting media literacy and critical thinking, political actors can foster fact-based messaging and transparency, which are essential for countering the narratives that fuel polarization and radicalization. Comprehensive strategies, such as inclusive governance, social media regulation, cross-party collaboration, and long-term reforms, are crucial for mitigating the impact of post-truth politics. Building upon the insights from the literature, particularly those of Farkas and Schou (2019) and Meland and Hechiche (2020), it is evident that developing comprehensive strategies such as fostering inclusive, diverse governance, and regulating social media to prevent disinformation will be crucial in this endeavor. A collective

approach among governments, political parties, civil society organizations, media outlets, and educational institutions is imperative to address these challenges and foster a democratic society grounded in fact-based information. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should focus on tracking disinformation, assessing policy effectiveness, and evaluating education programs to ensure a more informed, inclusive, and resilient democracy.

Hence, in conclusion, we show how the strategies outlined previously must be used to tackle and possibly overcome what can be called post-truth structures and politics. Political actors understand the strategies of disinformation but there is a reflective gap between understanding and acting thereby stressing the need to continually train political actors. This fact is that people want media literacy which could be helpful when fighting fake news. By encouraging integration, increasing perceptions of sincerity and credibility, as well as learning from regional best practices, political players will be less vulnerable to the effects of post-truth politics, and more capable of conceiving healthy and efficient politics.

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