

From Doxa to Post-Truth: The Epistemic Frailty of the Human Mind

Doxadan Post-Trutha: İnsan Zihninin Epistemik Zafiyeti

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Abstract: Post-truth is a multifaceted and multi-layered problematic that encompasses not only factors unique to our age, but also elements that have accompanied the biological and cultural history of humanity from the very beginning. Existing literature on post-truth largely focuses on external factors such as political manipulations, media strategies and social dynamics, while the cognitive tendencies that play a central role in the emergent epistemic crisis are usually only partially and limitedly addressed. Yet, the sole reason for the devaluation of truth is not external manipulations, but also the cognitive biases inherent in our mental structuring and the epistemic frailty that emerges under their influence. This finding is important in that it transforms the phenomenon of post-truth from being solely a problem of misinformation into an issue originating from the very structure of the human mind. Thus, the main purpose of this study is to reveal how cognitive biases actively shape the ways in which individuals select, interpret and reject information, and to address the individual and social strategies that can be used to combat the negative consequences of these biases.

Keywords: Post-truth, mind, cognitive bias, epistemic frailty, critical thinking.



Introduction

In his 1992 article “A Government of Lies” in *The Nation*, the American playwright Steve Tesich advances a provocative claim: “In a very fundamental way, we as a free people have freely decided that we want to live in a post-truth world.” According to Tesich, throughout history, governments have utilized strategies of distortion, concealment and suppression of the truth to direct and manipulate society. However, Tesich’s observations of contemporary society reveal a shift in this dynamic, suggesting that society now spontaneously activates the mechanisms to *denude* the truth. Tesich’s argument is that society no longer demands access to the truth, but rather seeks a fictionalized ‘narrative’ that it is willing to accept.

Tesich died 4 years after the publication of this article, but he left a valuable legacy to the world of ideas. Over the next two decades, the concept of *post-truth* would become one of the central elements of contemporary debate, proliferating in literature, most notably in Ralph Keyes’s *The Post-Truth Era* (Keyes, 2004), and even becoming the Oxford Dictionary’s word of the year in 2016.¹ As Keyes puts it,

Now, clever people that we are, we have come up with rationales for tampering with truth so we can dissemble guilt-free. I call it post-truth. We live in a post-truth era. ... When our behaviour conflicts with our values, what we’re most likely to do is reconceive our values. Few of us want to think of ourselves as being unethical, let alone admit that to others, so we devise alternative approaches to morality (Keyes, 2004, pp. 12-13).

The term’s surge in popularity in 2016 was, of course, no coincidence. The year of the presidential election in the United States and the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom provided numerous examples of the *voluntary* disconnection of part of public opinion from the truth. The circulation of fake data by both Trump during his 2016 election campaign and the British government prior to the Brexit vote is perhaps unsurprising in itself. It has long been recognized and discussed that propaganda and lies are tools used by those in power to manipulate public opinion. However, the behaviour of individuals in society when presented with evidence that the data was

¹ Post-truth is an adjective defined as ‘relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief’. Oxford Languages, <https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/2016/>, 22.II.2024.



false clearly demonstrated the accuracy of Tesich's assessment. In essence, the revelation that the data had been fabricated did not result in a shift in the opinions of voters who had previously supported Trump and Brexit. In fact, it led to a strengthening of support for some of them.

The process that ultimately resulted in the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States and the acceptance of Brexit was regarded as indicative of public preferences being influenced by irrational tendencies rather than objective factors. In other words, it was suggested that a significant segment of society may accept as truth 'what they want to believe' or 'what is convenient'. Subsequent studies have demonstrated that this phenomenon has become entrenched within the fabric of everyday social life.

[T]he problem of truth posed by the article points to a questioning not in the context of 'lack of access to the truth' or 'the increase in fake news', but in the context of 'the social construction of the necessary reality' (Demirkol, 2022, pp. 142).

The unconscious consumption of masses of unqualified raw information that circulate, especially with the widespread use of social media, is characterized by a growing polarization and radicalization of social life, as well as an epistemic chaos dominated by opinions that lack a rational basis. "In the face of dramatic recent increases in communications options, there is an omnipresent risk of information overload –too many options, too many topics, too many opinions, a cacophony of voices" (Sunstein, 2007, p. 51).

The increasing tendency towards information that appeals to people's emotions and reinforces their beliefs, but does not claim to be true, has worrying consequences at both the individual and social levels. This chaotic atmosphere is clearly a cause for concern because what is at stake is not merely an interpretation or a trend, but the very truth itself. As Julian Baggini contends "we wouldn't even be talking about post-truth if we didn't think truth mattered. The world is neither ready nor willing to say goodbye to truth (Baggini, 2017, p. 7).

If post-truth rhetoric goes unchecked ... [x]enophobia will replace social justice, isolationism will invalidate cultural freedom, shouting will trump listening, disruption will drown out response, insults will replace



respect, exclusion will diminish diversity, divisiveness will preclude negotiation, invective will erode support, fear will challenge safety, and success at all costs will invalidate responsible inquiry (McComiskey, 2017, p. 43).

The widespread popularization of post-truth has sparked extensive debate on its meaning, scope, and validity. Over the past decade, scholars have offered diverse interpretations, reflecting its multifaceted nature. Post-truth encompasses both enduring cognitive and cultural elements and contemporary factors unique to the present era. A comprehensive understanding requires a nuanced analysis of its implications, examining each component separately.

Indeed, a general consensus exists within post-truth studies that the problem arises as a result of a combination of many separate factors. Although this is not an exhaustive list, the following factors are identified as key in post-truth analyses of the devaluation of truth: (1) the genetic/evolutionary origins of our neurological configuration, (2) our mental/cognitive bias and epistemic foibles, (3) our cultural heritage, (4) the collective unconscious, (5) globalization, (6) propaganda, (7) postmodern critiques and objections to the concept of absolute/objective truth², (8) the discrediting of science as a tool of political-economic manipulation, (9) the proliferation of social media and the dissemination and unconscious consumption of massive amounts of information without any control mechanism. Given the scope and background of these factors, each of which is an independent research topic, the semantic load of the concept of post-truth becomes even clearer.

This study focuses on the first two factors mentioned, examining how cognitive structuring influences knowledge acquisition, decision-making, belief acceptance, judgment, and action. It further explores how these effects shape our relationship with truth and strategies to mitigate their impact. Given that the history of the mind is inextricably intertwined with the history of humanity, it is imperative to first delineate and circumscribe the scope of the study. While the mind gained philosophical prominence with Descartes, its connection to concepts like the soul (*psyche*) and *nous*

² The relationship between postmodernism and post-truth must not be overlooked. Postmodernism, as a theoretical approach, is characterised by its rejection of grand narratives, its criticism of domination-establishing truth designs, and its encouragement of diverse interpretations of truth.



has been central in theological, mythological, and philosophical traditions, shaping our understanding of cognitive functions.

Philosophers have long argued that attaining truth depends on the proper use of cognitive faculties, though interpretations of ‘correct usage’ vary. Biological, historical, cultural, and personal factors significantly shape mental structures. As a result, conceptualizations of truth and epistemic assessments inevitably vary, to a certain extent, depending on historical context, dominant paradigms, and subjective perspectives.

Conversely, if human history is initiated with *homo habilis*, it is evident the brain –and all cognitive faculties– has evolved over nearly two million years. From this perspective, the two thousand five hundred years of philosophy’s history is a very short period of time. Over the course of hundreds of thousands of years, the human brain has evolved to possess a diverse array of cognitive mechanisms, tendencies, traps, shortcuts and strategies that have contributed to enhancing the probability of survival and reproduction. This biological inheritance continues to shape civilization, evident in the striking similarities between historical and contemporary texts. Indeed, post-truth thinkers almost invariably draw attention to this commonality and continuity. As Erik Bengston asserts, it is imperative to avoid the intellectual pitfall of perceiving our era and our society as ontologically distinct and exceptional from others. “The post-truth condition can be fruitfully understood as a stance that is not entirely new but rather with parallels in history” (Bengston, 2017, pp. 209-210).

Advancements in technology, particularly brain imaging, and experimental research over the past five decades have vastly expanded our understanding of the brain, mind, and behaviour. This growing body of knowledge has refined concepts of the conscious/unconscious and rational/irrational influences on reality perception. Experimental Philosophy has emerged to integrate psychological and cognitive science findings within a philosophical framework, offering new insights into rational and irrational thought. Studies highlight how genetic predispositions, personal history, survival instincts, stress management, and social approval shape our epistemic relationship with truth.

“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” (Mcintyre, 2018, p. 62). Identifying and understanding cognitive factors that shape and intermittently manipulate knowledge acquisition is crucial to addressing the post-truth phenomenon. This study highlights how cognitive structuring and underlying mental processes contribute to the challenges posed by *post-truth*.

From *Doxa* to *Post-Truth*: Foibles of the Mind

“Nothing is so easy as to deceive oneself;
for what we wish, we readily believe.”³

Demosthenes (384-22 BC)

It is evident that establishing an indisputable definition of philosophy, a discipline characterized by its breadth and depth, is a formidable task. However, an examination of the term’s etymology suggests a reasonable proposition for its definition: the knowledge that the philosopher loves and aspires to is the knowledge of truth. Throughout history, a fundamental epistemic pursuit has been identifying barriers to truth and developing methodologies to overcome them. Philosophers have consistently emphasized that human reasoning is susceptible to social conventions, emotional influences, and cognitive distortions, leading to misperceptions of reality. Thus, cultivating awareness of cognitive biases and implementing rigorous analytical strategies is imperative for mitigating epistemic fallacies. This longstanding philosophical discourse remains instrumental in addressing the devaluation of truth in the post-truth era.

Given the study’s scope, a comprehensive account of all philosophical perspectives is unfeasible. Instead, an analysis of select thinkers will illustrate key cognitive vulnerabilities, biases, and epistemic pitfalls inherent in human cognition. This examination aims to demonstrate the enduring philosophical discourse on the cognitive barriers that obscure or distort the pursuit of knowledge and truth.

In ancient Greece, the term *doxa* was used to describe the opinions widely held by the people. In ancient Greek philosophy, the concept of *doxa*, with meanings such as opinion, conviction, misjudgement, half-knowledge, as a step lower than knowledge, can be traced back to Xenophanes and Parmenides (Peters, 2004, p. 74). Plato’s critique of the Sophists’ relativistic understanding of knowledge, his determinations regarding the

³ Demosthenes quoted by Bach, 2009, p. 782.



difference between *doxa* and *episteme*, and his views on the negativities that judgements based on *doxa* can cause on the ethical/political plane contain many determinations that continue to resonate in current post-truth debates. Plato defines *doxa* as beliefs, not to be confused with true knowledge, that are generally unquestioned but widely accepted by society.

Plato identifies *doxa* as a fundamental obstacle to truth, asserting that many beliefs stem from the misuse or manipulation of reason. In his critique of the Sophists, he highlights how those in power exploit cognitive weaknesses to shape public perception for their own interests. Rhetoric, he argues, can serve as a potent tool for mass persuasion.⁴ Beyond exposing deception as a political strategy, Plato underscores the inherent manipulability of human cognition. His insights suggest that the epistemic vulnerabilities underpinning post-truth discourse are not novel but deeply rooted in human intellectual history—a claim supported by historical precedent.

The so-called lie has naturally entered the structure of news. One of the reasons leading to this is that people are biased in their tendencies of opinion and belief. (...) If one's tendency, one's attachment to an opinion or a belief binds one to oneself, one accepts whichever of the news one receives at first suits one's tendency. This tendency and favouritism becomes a veil in the eyes of a person who is able to see the truth. It prevents criticism and the effort to examine. And it leads to the adoption and transmission of lies.⁵

The fact that these sentences, which at first glance appear to be quotations from the contemporary post-truth literature, were in fact written by the fourteenth-century philosopher Ibn Khaldun, means a lot in the context of the lack of rational basis of human behaviour (Güven, 2020, p. 23). Again, Augustine points out that the human will is easily led by

⁴ In this context, Plato's defence of the 'noble lie' in the 3rd book of his work *The State (Politeia)* while presenting the ideal state order is meaningful. According to Plato, the strategic utilisation of the 'noble lie' to ensure state order and maintain harmony among citizens cannot be considered morally wrong. The 'noble lie' is not intended to manipulate the public, but rather to guide individuals who have not yet attained a state of rational thinking towards a higher moral or political ideal through the use of fiction, metaphor or myth. It is evident that Plato's legitimisation of a particular form of the lie, which he himself characterises as 'noble', is ethically controversial, despite the criteria he establishes.

⁵ Ibn Khaldun quoted by Güven, 2020, p. 23.



passions and desires, which can distort the workings of reason and create obstacles to discerning the truth:

It must be that this is how they love the truth: they want what they love, whatever that might be, to be the truth; and because they do not want to be deceived, they do not want their mistakes to be exposed as such. So they hate truth for the sake of the thing that they love as truth. (Augustine, 2019, pp. 181-182).

A defining feature of modern philosophy is its recognition of the limitations of human knowledge. The emergence of alternative epistemological frameworks reflects concerns about the consequences of misusing reason. Descartes' epistemology, centred on the pursuit of certainty, highlights the fallibility of sensory perception, the distortions introduced by prejudice, and the need to reject erroneous beliefs. For Descartes, cognitive biases, sensory judgments, and unverified assumptions constitute unreliable knowledge. He emphasizes that individuals often form conclusions based on prior experience, authoritative opinions, or societal norms rather than direct, certain knowledge. Cartesian thought underscores the inherent fallibility of human cognition and advocates for systematic methodologies to counter epistemic distortions and attain truth.

Francis Bacon made a similar observation when he said "The human understanding is like an uneven mirror receiving rays from things and merging its own nature with the nature of things, which thus distorts and corrupts it" (Bacon, 2003, p. 41). In *Novum Organum*, Bacon categorizes the cognitive illusions that distort truth into four idols: Tribal Idols, where emotions influence reasoning; Cave Idols, shaped by personal experience and environment; Marketplace Idols, arising from linguistic misinterpretations; and Theatre Idols, reflecting blind acceptance of tradition or authority. These classifications closely align with modern psychological concepts of cognitive bias. Immanuel Kant discussed the same issue under the concept of "self-deception". The philosopher defines "self-deception" as the conscious or unconscious manipulation of one's thoughts in the process of reasoning, and suggests that people may distort facts in order to confirm their own desires and interests (Papish, 2018, p. 67).

Throughout history, philosophers have observed that human cognition tends to distort truth in alignment with individual aims, desires, and



interests. The recognition of cognitive biases as obstacles to truth is not unique to the post-truth era but remains essential for understanding its complexities. Addressing this multifaceted issue requires a thorough analysis of its underlying mechanisms. Notably, post-truth is rooted in internal cognitive processes –beliefs, desires, and psychological needs– rather than solely in external manipulation. Thus, it concerns the consumption of misinformation rather than its mere production (Demirkol, 2022, p. 141).

Just as a fictional work's meaning may transcend authorial intention, so every message that you bring into the world is subject to the interpretations and emotions of the people who receive it. Once the words leave your lips, they no longer belong to you. We have a monopoly only on our own thoughts. The act of speaking is not a conquest, but a surrender. When we open our mouths, we are sharing with the world –and the world inevitably interprets, indeed sometimes shifts and distorts, our original meaning (Luntz, 2007, p. x).

Therefore, the primary step in combatting post-truth phenomena should be to identify the cognitive mechanisms that influence human knowledge acquisition processes. Indeed, studies of prevalent cognitive bias and the potential methodologies to effectively combat them seem to be a pivotal component of contemporary post-truth literature.

Mental Triggers of *Post-Truth*: Cognitive Biases

As discussed above, philosophical insights reveal that the pursuit of truth has long been hindered by various cognitive impediments. Chief among these are cognitive biases, which arise from the interplay of biological and cultural factors. These biases distort reality perception, facilitating the spread of falsehoods and misleading narratives.

It is generally accepted that human reasoning exhibits various systematic deficiencies; deficiencies that generally do not need special motivation to manifest themselves. For example, people overgeneralize from small data samples, overweigh data that confirm their antecedent beliefs, treat recently encountered examples as representative of an entire phenomenon, and see patterns in random data and imagine causal connections between successive but unrelated events (Bach, 2009, p. 789).

From antiquity to the present, cognitive tendencies –including myth, dogma, social misconceptions, and scientific error– have obscured truth.



These cognitive limitations extend beyond individual mistakes, shaping collective decision-making and historical trajectories. In the post-truth era, technology and social media have amplified their prevalence, depth, and impact.

One of the deepest roots of post-truth has also been with us the longest, for it has been wired into our brains over the history of human evolution: cognitive bias. (Mcintyre, 2018, p. 35).

Understanding cognitive biases is essential for strengthening critical thinking and resilience against information manipulation in the post-truth era. Beyond individual benefits, such awareness fosters a more robust information ecosystem. This section examines key cognitive biases contributing to post-truth dynamics and explores both individual and societal strategies for mitigating their effects.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory

One of the most basic impulses involved in the emergence of our cognitive tendencies is the desire to feel uncomfortable and to avoid psychologically distressing thoughts and situations. “It just feels better for us to think that we are smart, well-informed, capable people than to think that we are not” (Mcintyre, 2018, p. 36). In this context, recognizing inconsistencies in thought and behavior creates internal tension. Festinger’s research on this phenomenon led to Cognitive Dissonance Theory, which examines the discomfort individuals experience when their beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors conflict, as well as their coping mechanisms. The core hypotheses of this theory are articulated as follows:

1. The existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance.

2. When dissonance is present, in addition to trying to reduce it, the person will actively avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance (Festinger, 1962, p. 3).

Cognitive Dissonance Theory asserts that individuals strive to resolve inconsistencies between their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours. Beyond explaining this specific tendency, the theory provides a broader framework, illustrating how such cognitive processes stem from the pursuit of mental harmony and internal consistency.



As numerous studies in the literature on social judgment persuasion have shown, information is more likely to be accepted by people when it is consistent with other things they assume to be true (Lewandowsky et al., 2012, p. 112).

Indeed, each of the cognitive tendencies that will be discussed below can be considered a mental strategy or shortcut adopted to avoid the tension caused by cognitive dissonance. In this respect, Festinger's theory provides a fundamental conceptual framework for comprehending the pervasiveness and resilience of cognitive tendencies.

Motivated Reasoning

Cognitive science identifies motivated reasoning as a significant weakness in knowledge acquisition, decision-making, and judgment. This bias leads individuals to form opinions based on personal desires, beliefs, or emotional attachments rather than objective evaluation. While appearing rational, their reasoning is unconsciously shaped to align with preferred conclusions. "Motivated reasoning is the idea that what we hope to be true may colour our perception of what actually is true. We often reason, that is, within an emotional context" (Mcintyre, 2018, p. 45).

A key driver of motivated reasoning is result-oriented motivation, which leads individuals to distort or disregard evidence to support desired conclusions. For instance, when faced with criticism of a favoured politician, individuals may dismiss the critique or question its credibility. This bias also fosters selective perception, making individuals more receptive to information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs.

You can have the best message in the world, but the person on the receiving end will always understand it through the prism of his or her own emotions, preconceptions, prejudices, and pre-existing beliefs. It's not enough to be correct or reasonable or even brilliant (Luntz, 2007, p. ix).

In this context, people's preference for information that supports the beliefs they already hold is called "Confirmation Bias", while ignoring, downplaying or harshly criticizing opposing views is called "Disconfirmation Bias".

Those holding strong attitudes actively counter argue contrary facts, figures, and interpretations, while uncritically accepting attitudinally congruent information –a disconfirmation bias–and they actively seek out



supporting information so as to bolster and protect their priors –a confirmation bias. As a consequence, both biases lead to attitude polarization, especially among the sophisticated and those with strong priors (Lodge et al., 2006, p. 27).

Another aspect of motivated reasoning is rationalization, where individuals construct seemingly logical but biased arguments to defend emotionally significant beliefs. Rationalization is particularly insidious, as the modern glorification of rationality obscures the fallacies embedded within such reasoning, making them harder to recognize and challenge. Rationalization is “the process of fabricating plausible but phony reasons for rejecting the warranted proposition and for buying into the preferred alternative” (Bach, 2009, p. 787).

Rationalization involves selectively interpreting propositions using pseudo-logical reasoning, leading individuals to believe their judgments are purely rational, uninfluenced by emotion or impulse. This cognitive trap exploits the notion of rationality to obscure falsehoods, fostering self-assurance and auto-rhetoric, where individuals justify flawed reasoning. Effectively recognizing and countering rationalization is essential to mitigating its epistemic distortions.

Motivated reasoning is a cognitive bias that shapes thought to reinforce existing beliefs and emotional attachments, hindering the establishment of a shared rational or objective framework. This deepens social polarization and is a key psychological mechanism underpinning the post-truth environment, where decisions are driven by personal beliefs and emotions rather than objective facts.

The Backfire Effect

The Backfire Effect is a cognitive bias that distorts truth perception by reinforcing pre-existing beliefs when confronted with contradictory information. Nyhan and Reifler (2010) describe it as a mental defence mechanism where individuals dismiss opposing evidence as unreliable and reaffirm their original views, further entrenching them. This effect explains the persistence of misinformation in the post-truth era, as individuals prioritize emotionally congruent narratives over objective facts.

The *Backfire Effect* is especially pronounced when beliefs are closely tied to identity and social belonging. Core beliefs, central to self-concept



and life practices, are perceived as under attack when challenged, prompting individuals to defend them more rigidly. This phenomenon highlights how emotionally entrenched beliefs resist rational scrutiny and remain impervious to counterarguments.

Social Conformity and Social Pressure

Humans are inherently social, and their cognitive processes, emotions, judgments, and beliefs are deeply shaped by social structures. Research indicates that the extent to which social environments influence – and even manipulate – factual judgment is significantly greater than previously assumed.

In “Opinions and Social Pressure”, Asch (1955) presents a landmark experiment on social conformity. University students were shown two cards: one with a single black line and another with three lines of varying lengths. Tasked with identifying the matching line, participants initially responded correctly. However, after several trials, one unknowing subject faced unanimous but incorrect responses from the group. Asch observed that social pressure induced hesitation, anxiety, and, ultimately, conformity, as some participants aligned with the majority despite clear sensory evidence to the contrary. The results of the experiment, conducted with a total of 123 subjects from three different universities, revealed that;

Whereas in ordinary circumstances individuals matching the lines will make mistakes less than 1 per cent of the time, under group pressure the minority subjects swung to acceptance of the misleading majority’s wrong judgments in 36.8 per cent of the selections (Asch, 1955, p. 33).

This significant shift in responses highlights the profound impact of social pressure and the imperative of social cohesion. Beyond mere coexistence, social cohesion shapes behaviour by aligning individuals with collective perspectives, sometimes at the expense of truth. The tendency to distort reality for group acceptance, driven by the need to belong or fear of exclusion, underscores the intricate dynamics of social influence. In Asch’s words, “that we have found the tendency to conformity in our society so strong that reasonably intelligent and well-meaning young people are willing to call white black is a matter of concern” (Asch, 1955, p. 34).

In the post-truth era, social pressure plays a crucial role. When majority opinions dominate, expressing dissent risks social isolation, requiring



considerable courage. Individuals may align with erroneous viewpoints to avoid exclusion rather than uphold factual accuracy. Thus, effective strategies against post-truth must address this tendency by implementing mechanisms that mitigate the isolating effects of social conformity.

Dunning-Kruger Effect

The Dunning-Kruger effect, identified by Dunning and Kruger (1999), refers to the inability of individuals to accurately assess their competence. This bias can be summarized as “the less one knows, the more one believes they know”. Those lacking expertise fail to recognize their deficiencies, leading to an inflated self-assessment. Insufficient knowledge thus not only impairs competence but also obstructs the awareness of one’s own limitations.

Conversely, highly knowledgeable individuals often underestimate their competence, as they better grasp the complexity of their field and the extent of their ignorance. They frequently question their own understanding, asking, “Am I truly correct?” or “Do I need deeper knowledge?” This awareness can lead to excessive caution, causing them to undervalue their expertise. As a result, ignorance breeds unfounded confidence, while knowledge is tempered by humility.

Dunning and Kruger’s research indicates that as individuals acquire more knowledge, they become increasingly aware of their limitations, leading to a decline in unfounded self-confidence. Those with deeper expertise develop a more balanced self-assessment. These findings suggest that the Dunning-Kruger effect can be mitigated through education, enabling individuals to recognize their own inadequacies over time.

Availability Heuristic

The Availability Heuristic, introduced by Tversky and Kahneman (1974), describes the tendency to assess an event’s likelihood or significance based on how easily it comes to mind. Frequently repeated or salient information can overshadow objective truth, leading to false generalizations and misjudged probabilities. This bias distorts risk perception and decision-making. For instance, constant exposure to news of violent incidents may cause individuals to overestimate crime rates and develop excessive fear.

This fallacy is particularly susceptible to exploitation by those seeking to manipulate public opinion for political or economic gain. Repetition of



specific messages can shape perceptions, reinforcing particular narratives. Social media influencers exemplify this phenomenon, as companies leverage their reach to enhance product visibility and create the illusion of necessity, effectiveness, or desirability through constant exposure.

The Echo Chamber Effect

The Echo Chamber Effect occurs when individuals are repeatedly exposed to information that reinforces their existing beliefs while excluding alternative perspectives. This creates a monophonic information flow, where one hears only affirmations of pre-existing views. McIntyre suggests that this tendency is an extension of the desire to avoid cognitive dissonance because “just as we seek to have harmony within our own beliefs, we also seek harmony with the beliefs of those around us” (McIntyre, 2018, p. 39).

The Echo Chamber Effect is amplified in digital communication, particularly through social media algorithms that curate content based on user preferences. These algorithms, alongside user-controlled filters, ensure exposure primarily to like-minded perspectives. Consequently, individuals are continually reinforced in their existing beliefs, making it increasingly difficult to encounter alternative or critical viewpoints.

Yet these days we have the luxury of choosing our own selective interactions. Whatever our political persuasion, we can live in a ‘news silo’ if we care to. ... These days more than ever, we can surround ourselves with people who already agree with us (McIntyre, 2018, p. 60).

Due to the Availability Heuristic, individuals’ views are continually reinforced, creating the illusion that their beliefs are widely shared. Cass Sunstein warns that social media algorithms and filters, beyond reinforcing bias, pose a significant threat to the foundational principles that sustain democracy.

In a democracy, people do not live in echo chambers or information cocoons. They see and hear a wide range of topics and ideas. They do so even if they did not, and would not, choose to see and to hear those topics and those ideas in advance. These claims raise serious questions about certain uses of new technologies, above all the Internet, and about the astonishing growth in the power to choose –to screen in and to screen out (Sunstein, 2007, p. xi).



Exposure to unchosen and potentially unsettling content is essential for a functioning democracy. Encounters with unfamiliar perspectives foster critical discourse, preventing ideological isolation. Without such engagement, like-minded individuals will increasingly converse only among themselves, leading to greater polarization and radicalization (Sunstein, 2007, p. 5).

How to Overcome Cognitive Bias?

The cognitive biases discussed above form an interconnected network, collectively shaping information acquisition, judgment, and decision-making. The human mind is not compartmentalized; biases reinforce one another. For instance, Motivated Reasoning can lead individuals to filter social media content, intensifying the Echo Chamber Effect. Repeated exposure to similar information fosters the Availability Heuristic, while the need to avoid Cognitive Dissonance distances individuals from opposing views. Increased certainty reinforces the Backfire Effect, while overconfidence in one's perspective may limit further inquiry, activating the Dunning-Kruger Effect.

Cognitive biases profoundly shape how individuals perceive, evaluate, and accept facts. Truth-seeking is often replaced by the desire for epistemic comfort within a self-affirming, coherent belief system. Like Narcissus enamoured with his reflection, individuals seek pseudo-truths that align with their preferences rather than objective reality. This dynamic underpins the post-truth condition. Addressing post-truth requires strategies to counteract cognitive biases by identifying their underlying causes and developing methods to weaken or eliminate their influence.

For whatever reason, we must recognize that a plethora of cognitive biases are just part of the way that our brains are wired. We have no choice about whether we have them ... [C]ognitive bias is part of our human inheritance (Mcintyre, 2018, p. 55).

Overcoming passive susceptibility to cognitive biases requires awareness of these mechanisms and recognition that beliefs may serve as defence mechanisms rather than reflections of truth. These biases are not abnormalities but inherent, evolutionary features of cognition. Understanding them as natural yet surmountable limitations can foster a more critical and reflective epistemic stance. As psychoanalytic theories suggest, bringing



unconscious mechanisms into consciousness enables individuals to confront and mitigate their effects. Similarly, awareness of cognitive biases serves as a safeguard against both deception and self-deception. Recognizing these biases is the first step toward escaping a comfortable yet artificial construct of truth, fostering a more authentic engagement with reality.

The next step is developing cognitive skills that foster an accurate relationship with truth. Addressing cognitive biases in the post-truth era requires tailored strategies, as each bias operates through distinct mechanisms. However, a unifying skill underlies all approaches: critical thinking. Beyond countering individual biases, critical thinking enables a deeper understanding of the cognitive processes driving them. Recognizing its foundational role and placing it at the core of this effort is essential. The practice of critical inquiry, central to philosophy, enables individuals to assess information with coherence and accuracy. Developing critical thinking skills and fostering the courage to question, despite social pressures, is both an intellectual habit and a form of emancipation. A critical thinker actively seeks deeper understanding rather than accepting readily available information. Thus, critical thinking remains our most effective tool in overcoming epistemic obstacles in the post-truth era.

A critical thinking based educational culture requires broad social awareness and cultural transformation. Updating curricula is essential for fostering both individual and collective critical thinking skills. Early exposure to cognitive biases and reasoning methods equips individuals to resist both external and internal manipulation. Additionally, states can promote awareness through public service campaigns across traditional and social media platforms.

Each cognitive bias operates through distinct mechanisms, necessitating tailored strategies to mitigate the post-truth phenomenon. Cognitive Dissonance Theory suggests that individuals experience discomfort when confronted with contradictory information. Minimizing this discomfort can reduce resistance to new ideas. Thus, beyond content, the presentation of information influences receptivity. Avoiding authoritarian or condescending rhetoric and framing opposing views in a non-confrontational manner can help weaken cognitive dissonance. Constructive



communication is therefore essential for mitigating post-truth effects and fostering open discourse.

Social media and digital platforms amplify Motivated Reasoning by using algorithms that reinforce biases. To disrupt this cycle, digital ecosystems must ensure exposure to diverse perspectives. Additionally, making accurate information both accessible and persuasive can weaken Motivated Reasoning. Since complex truths often struggle against emotionally compelling falsehoods, truth must be conveyed through meaningful narratives rather than mere logic. People do not abandon beliefs solely because they are incorrect; they change when they connect with a more compelling and resonant truth.

Research on the Backfire Effect suggests that resistance to belief change can be overcome over time. Redlawsk et al. (2010) found that even strong convictions may reach a tipping point after repeated exposure to corrective evidence. This highlights the importance of strategic approaches in addressing cognitive biases. Truth should be conveyed not merely as correction but as a meaningful, contextualized narrative, fostering emotional engagement. Framing truth as a solution rather than a threat reduces resistance, while empathetic communication –acknowledging underlying fears and identity needs– enhances receptivity. A truth-teller should foster dialogue as a partnership rather than a contest.

To counteract Social Pressure and Groupthink, individuals must have safe spaces to express opinions without fear of judgment or exclusion. Such environments foster intellectual diversity and the emergence of truthful ideas. Instead of penalizing dissent, society should view differing perspectives as valuable. Reshaping social norms is also crucial –those who challenge misinformation and uphold truth should be socially recognized and supported. When communities reward truth-telling over conformity, social pressure weakens, empowering individuals to defend factual integrity.

In an era of post-truth, we must challenge each and every attempt to obfuscate a factual matter and challenge falsehoods before they are allowed to fester. (Mcintyre, 2018, p. 157).

Overcoming the Dunning-Kruger Effect requires fostering an understanding of knowledge as an ongoing journey. Recognizing that knowledge is always evolving helps individuals assess their own competence more



realistically. Education plays a crucial role, but it must go beyond information delivery to cultivate self-criticism and openness to learning. Encouraging individuals to see intellectual humility as a virtue reinforces the idea that acknowledging one's limits is essential, as the pursuit of truth begins with recognizing the boundaries of one's knowledge.

Combating the Availability Heuristic requires changing how individuals engage with information. Critical questioning –evaluating sources, context, and frequency of exposure– helps build mental filters. Diversifying information sources fosters deeper understanding while reducing susceptibility to manipulation. Digital platforms should prioritize algorithmic diversity, ensuring exposure to multiple perspectives. Additionally, expanding access to verification tools encourages critical engagement, enabling individuals to assess information reliability more effectively. Strengthening these habits reduces dependence on misinformation and fosters a more informed epistemic environment.

Overcoming the Echo Chamber Effect requires fostering openness to diverse perspectives and embedding this value into social consciousness. This necessitates both individual effort and broader societal change, including revitalizing a culture of open debate. Social media algorithms should be redesigned to expose users to alternative viewpoints, disrupting self-reinforcing cycles of bias. Additionally, media literacy is crucial –individuals must critically assess sources, objectivity, and underlying biases. Recognizing that all information is filtered enables the construction of a more balanced and comprehensive knowledge network.

Conclusion

As emphasized throughout the study, the problem raised by the concept of post-truth cannot be reduced to an issue focused solely on the production of lies. "Post-truth is not about reality; it is about how people respond to reality" (Mcintyre, 2018, p. 172). Throughout human history, cognitive biases inherent in our mental structuring have accompanied and continue to accompany the epistemic tension between opinion and truth. Indeed, thinkers in every age have pointed out that arriving at truth is an arduous journey. In order to be revealed, truth requires the presence of a number of qualities such as sincere effort, self-criticism, and the ability to reason correctly. However, in order to have these qualities and establish a



correct relationship with the truth, we must first become aware of the mental mechanisms and cognitive bias that damage our relationship with the truth. This is a long and difficult process that requires the individual to confront his or her own limitations and weaknesses. Awareness of cognitive bias is an epistemic shield that protects the individual from both self-deception and manipulation by others. Critical thinking, on the other hand, is the courage to use this shield to seek the truth. Truth may not always be obvious and easily accessible, but critical thinking acts as a compass to guide the individual on this challenging journey.

On the other hand, critical thinking should not only be seen as an individual virtue, but the social importance of this skill should also be taken into account. In the post-truth situation, social and cultural change is as necessary as individual efforts. Reforms are needed in many areas, from education to media policy, from digital platforms to social norms. At the societal and structural level, education systems must focus not only on imparting knowledge but also on cultivating the cognitive skills necessary to evaluate information. Information technology and media policies should be reformed to enhance public resilience to disinformation, with measures such as transparent moderation mechanisms, diversified algorithms, and the promotion of media literacy being implemented to prevent the propagation of misinformation on social media. Digital platforms should weaken echo chambers by providing a flow of information that is open to different views, and steer individuals away from cognitive shortcuts that are open to manipulation. All these efforts will create an environment of awareness that enables individuals to better understand both their own thought processes and social dynamics. Critical thinking empowers individuals to fight against their own biases, tendencies and weaknesses, as well as against external manipulation. The search for truth requires individuals to leave their mental comfort zone and have the courage to see what is, rather than what they want to see. The practice of critical thinking not only liberates the individual intellectually, but also enables him/her to become a more socially conscious and active actor. Critical thinking is therefore not only an individual necessity but also a social responsibility.



It is our decision how we will react to a world in which someone is trying to pull the wool over our eyes. Truth still matters, as it always has. Whether we realize this in time is up to us (Mcintyre, 2018, p. 172).

In conclusion, defending the truth in the post-truth era is possible not only by disseminating accurate information, but also by transforming the mental processes of individuals. This transformation will occur when individual awareness and critical thinking become the social norm. The search for truth requires commitment and determination at both individual and societal levels. But it is the basis not only for defending the truth, but also for building a more just, conscious and free society.

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Öz: Post-truth, çağımıza özgü faktörlerin yanı sıra insanlığın biyolojik ve kültürel tarihine en başından beri eşlik eden unsurları da kapsayan çok yönlü ve çok katmanlı bir sorunsal ifade etmektedir. Post-trutha ilişkin mevcut literatürde büyük ölçüde siyasi manipülasyonlar, medya stratejileri ve sosyal dinamikler gibi dışsal faktörlere odaklanılmakta, ortaya çıkan epistemik krizde merkezi rol oynayan bilişsel eğilimler ise genellikle sadece kısmi ve sınırlı bir şekilde ele alınmaktadır. Oysa hakikatin değerden düşmesinin yegâne nedeni dış manipülasyonlar değil, aynı zamanda zihinsel yapılanışımıza içkin bilişsel eğilimler ve bunların etkisiyle ortaya çıkan epistemik zafiyettir. Bu tespit, post-truth olgusunu yalnızca bir yanlış bilgilendirme sorunu olmaktan çıkarıp, insan zihninin yapısından kaynaklanan bir meseleye dönüştürmesi bakımından önemlidir. Nitekim çalışmanın temel amacı bilişsel eğilimlerin bireylerin bilgiyi seçme, yorumlama ve reddetme biçimlerini aktif olarak nasıl şekillendirdiğini ortaya koymak ve bu eğilimlerin olumsuz sonuçlarıyla mücadele etmek için kullanılabilecek bireysel ve toplumsal stratejileri ele almaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Post-truth, zihin, bilişsel eğilim, epistemik zafiyet, eleştirel düşünme.

