



Phenomena Of Pseudohistorical News Information In The Post-Truth Era

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ABSTRACT

The impact of "Pseudohistory" is significant in the "Post-Truth era". False historical knowledge that is inaccurate or deliberately deceptive may affect our politics, governments, and our future policies. However, as time passes, knowledge of the past can shape our identities, nations, institutions, and perspectives on other people. A long-term phenomenon called "fake history" is becoming more apparent. The "real history" that contradicts "fake history" has slowly disappeared from public view, in contrast to the "real news" that confronts "fake news" every day in the public realm. Nevertheless, history is much more than a mere list of past events. The spread of misinformation and false news is still evident in "WhatsApp Universities," and even a program with majors in "fake news" and minors in paid journalism has developed. The idea of academic history conflicts with the rapidly growing discipline of Pseudo-History

Keywords: Post-Truth, Pseudohistory, Fake News, WhatsApp University, Misinformation, Historical revisionism

Introduction

The contemporary global landscape is marked by the proliferation of subjective narratives and the rise of "Post-Truth" and "Pseudohistory." The former is a phenomenon that denotes the prevalence of subjective opinions over factual evidence, which can sway public opinion and political decisions. The latter refers to the spread of historical narratives that lack empirical support and are often influenced by personal or ideological biases, rather than rigorous study. These occurrences pose a significant threat to the foundation of reliable historical discourse and undermine the pursuit of truth. It is therefore essential to analyze the interconnection between post-truth and pseudohistory in this context, as it highlights how these phenomena have affected our understanding of history and knowledge.

There Pseudohistory refers to the presentation of false or distorted historical information that is passed off as true or accurate This misinformation can be created and propagated intentionally to serve various agendas, including political, ideological, or economic motivations The spread of pseudohistorical information undermines the integrity of historical understanding and can contribute to societal division and misinformation. The rise of pseudohistorical news information poses a grave challenge to the credibility and accuracy of historical knowledge. In the age of pseudohistorical news information, it becomes increasingly crucial to critically examine and verify sources to preserve the integrity of historical understanding and prevent the dissemination of false narratives. Pseudohistory is a phenomenon that presents false or distorted historical information as true, often to serve specific agendas. It can be constructed from disparate pieces of information drawn from multiple sources to create a plausible but inaccurate narrative. There are many theories and ideas about pseudohistory, some of which have gained significant followings despite being widely discredited by mainstream historians. Pseudohistory often involves the distortion or misinterpretation of historical events and can be fuelled by political or ideological motives. It is important for individuals to critically evaluate the sources of historical information they encounter and to seek out reputable, evidence-based scholarship. By doing so, we can better understand the past and avoid being misled by Pseudohistorical narratives.

Objectives of the present study

- R1: To enquire about the phenomena of "Pseudohistory" and the consequences of the development of pseudohistorical news narratives.
- R2: To investigate the effects of pseudohistorical narratives on public perception and to determine how the propagation of false historical claims may influence public opinion.
- R3: To find the methodology to identify pseudo-historic information and how we can counter the spread of fake history that might advance fact-based knowledge of History.

Methodology

The following study aims to investigate the concepts of "Pseudohistory" and "post-truth" using descriptive research methodology. This method is chosen to gain insight into the present situation, trends, and characteristics of pseudohistorical News Information in the Post-Truth Era. To achieve this, the available literature on these topics is analyzed to determine the conceptual meaning of Pseudohistory and post-truth. Other related terms such as "Fake History," "Historical Revisionism," and "Religious Pseudohistory" are also examined to establish a conceptual framework. The study also considers the views of renowned academic experts and historians on the impact of Pseudohistorical information on society, including its potential to shape public opinion and create social disorder such as communal divide. Furthermore, the study seeks to identify a methodology for detecting pseudo-historic information and determining how to counter the spread of fake history.

Phenomena of 'Post-Truth'

The term "Post-Truth" has been used in the Western world since 2016 to describe the irregularities observed in politics and the media. This phrase signifies the concept that politics, in particular, has disregarded or fabricated its version of the truth (Tutal, 2017). In 1992, Serbian-American playwright *Stojan Steve Tesich* coined the term "Post-Tuth". In 2016, the Oxford Dictionary editors selected it as the word of the year, as its usage increased by 2,000% that year. The term "Post-Truth Politics" has been particularly popular recently. Oxford notes that this choice reflects a year dominated by highly-charged political and social discourse. The concept of "Post-Truth" has been gaining ground for some time, driven by the emergence of social media as a news source and an increasing mistrust of the facts provided by the establishment (Steinmetz, 2016). The term "Post-Truth" originated in the United States, referring to popular politics under the names "Post-Truth Politics" or "Post-Truth Society." It has since become a buzzword in various languages and is the subject of growing scientific interest and popular discussion. The majority of interpretations relate it to communication techniques such as fake or misleading news, rumors, hoaxes, and political lying. Factors like political polarization, dishonest politicians, unchecked social media, poor journalism, or even just the inevitable instability brought on by digital media technology are pointed out as contributing to the phenomenon. Post-truth is sometimes described as a societal and political state when people no longer respect the truth and instead embrace what they feel or think to be true. However, more precisely, post-truth is a breakdown of societal trust, which includes the news media, which previously served as the main institutional truth-teller or publicist. What is widely believed to be true is a flimsy sort of knowledge, an opinion founded on faith in people who are meant to be knowledgeable (Harsin, 2019).

The term "Post-Truth" is defined by Oxford Dictionaries as a state in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief. The prefix "post" does not imply that we have moved beyond truth in a temporal sense, but rather that truth has been eclipsed and is no longer relevant. While this idea may be controversial to some philosophers, it is important to note that it has significant implications beyond academic discourse (McIntyre, 2018).

Phenomena of Pseudohistory

American historians Michael Brant Shermer and Alex Grobman have defined pseudohistory as "the rewriting of the past for present personal or political purposes". The phrase "pseudohistory" is created by combining the word "pseudo" (meaning false or phony) with "history", and it refers to a style of historical storytelling lacking the rigorous methodology, supporting data, and academic standards usually found in real historical research. Pseudohistory includes a wide range of ideas, hypotheses, and claims that are presented as historical truths, but are not supported by evidence or critical analysis. Pseudohistory often results from incorrect assessments of historical events, deliberate fabrications of the truth, and the influence of personal prejudices, ideologies, or conspiracy theories. In short, pseudohistory is a form of historical distortion that distorts the truth for personal or political gain.

Pseudohistory has been used throughout history for various reasons. It has been used to promote nationalist ideologies, and political goals, support esoteric or religious beliefs, or even endorse conspiracy theories. Some examples of pseudohistory include Holocaust denial, theories about extinct aliens, or the manipulation of historical facts to suit a particular worldview. To uphold the integrity of legitimate historical knowledge and distinguish reality from fiction, it is essential to study pseudohistory. By understanding the characteristics and

sources of pseudohistorical narratives, we can more accurately evaluate historical claims and appreciate the importance of critical, evidence-based historical analysis.

When a political party rejects historical facts and distorts the past to promote its agenda, it is engaging in one of the most common forms of propaganda. To achieve this, they often use fabricated historical records, misleading figures, and questionable sources. The primary political goals of manipulating history are to mobilize the public, create an enemy image, demonize opponents, and give the impression of power. This tactic is known as "negationism" or "denialism" in academia (Fedor, 2021).

Historical revisionism

Historical revisionism refers to the practice of altering historical facts for political purposes without any support from science or factual information. It is considered a synonym of dishonesty, as it involves not telling the truth. In certain situations, historical revisionism can be used as a tool of control by political parties at the ideological extremes to advance their domestic agendas, imperialist foreign policy objectives, and authoritarianism. Narratives are essential for guiding people towards a collective memory and creating a normative vision of the future. Thus, state-led attempts to reconstruct history rely heavily on narratives (Arribas, 2023).

Religious Pseudohistory

Religious pseudohistory refers to the presentation of false information to support religious beliefs or to persuade others to accept or believe in certain religious views. In recent times, religious beliefs have become increasingly intertwined with the spread of fake news. While religion has been known to provide strategies for combating secular knowledge, it can also have a detrimental effect on media trust and hinder our understanding of surveillance policy issues. It has been observed that accurate political knowledge is more closely associated with religious and social trust, rather than with the distribution of information. In light of this, fostering civic trust, reducing social polarization, and depoliticizing political issues are of utmost importance. This is particularly relevant in confronting politicians and media elites who may have a vested interest in promoting distrust (Gaskins, 2021).

Pseudohistorical News Information

Differentiating between legitimate history and inaccurate or dubious accounts, popularly referred to as "weird history," has become an increasingly critical issue in contemporary times. The term "pseudo-history" is used to describe the combination of two factors. The first is reliance on proofs that are speculative, improbable, or based on questionable documents. The second is an interpretive approach that allows for the construction of arguments and narratives that appear to challenge what is most appropriately referred to as a "reasonable" interpretation of the evidence. The effective replication of the techniques and approaches employed by professional historians is a key characteristic of successful pseudohistory. The availability of such knowledge on electronic media and the internet, coupled with contemporary public relations and advertising strategies, can significantly elevate the standing of pseudohistory over the more cautious expert, who is inclined to qualify their statements. These shifts have resulted in non-professionals, who lack formal historical training, venturing into speculative historical enterprises, usually in periods where little is known or can be learned. Such changes pose a significant challenge for professional historians, who, while equipped with adequate training in historical methodology, often find it demanding to engage in the rhetorical contests that typify the marketplace of ideas (Melleuish, 2009)

Our contemporary world enjoys the benefit of being able to tap into an immense wealth of information via computers. Yet, this benefit is accompanied by a considerable amount of false, deceitful, obsolete, and partial information that can be manipulative and harmful. It can be difficult to distinguish between accurate and impartial information and flawed and biased data, particularly when there are countless sources to sift through. The internet is merely one of the many information sources that shape our society today, and disinformation has been disseminated through books, newspapers, magazines, radio, cinema, and television for a long time.

Many individuals are fascinated by mysteries, creativity, and unconventional concepts. Works of imagination and make-believe can often be more captivating and enjoyable than reality and factual information. Nevertheless, confusion can arise when people are unable to differentiate between what is real and what is imaginary or between what is factual and what is fictitious. Conspiracy theories and false information have become widespread in our society, and many remain unaware of these discrepancies. Regrettably, this is resulting in unwise decisions and actions. The term "junk cognition" or "junk knowledge," coined by Susan Jacoby in 2008, addresses this problem of misleading information. Other terms used to describe this issue are "counter-knowledge," "fringe" or "border" information, and "mumbo jumbo." This problem has existed in the past and continues to be prevalent today (Fritze R. , 2022)

Methodology to identify Pseudo-Historic News information.

American author and philosopher Robert Todd Carroll, has outlined several criteria to identify pseudo-historic information.

- 1. Lack of Reliable Sources:** Reliable primary and secondary sources are frequently absent from pseudohistorical works. Instead, they could depend on hearsay, unreliable eyewitness accounts, or ambiguous and skewed references.
- 2. Cherry-Picking of Data:** Pseudo-historians frequently choose and portray historical information in a way that is supportive of their thesis while disregarding or downplaying material that is in direct opposition to their assertions.
- 3. Conspiracy Theories:** Pseudo-historical works typically incorporate conspiracy theories, which postulate secret societies, repressed knowledge, and evil powers influencing historical events. These hypotheses frequently lack strong supporting data.
- 4. Extravagant Claims:** Pseudo-historical tales sometimes make wild assertions about historical persons or events that defy what most historians would consider to be reasonable. These assertions frequently lack solid facts to back them up.
- 5. Poor Peer assessment:** Pseudo-historians may not expose their work to rigorous academic examination or peer assessment. Authentic historical research is examined by subject-matter authorities.
- 6. Ignorance of Established Historiography:** Pseudo-historians may ignore or lack knowledge of recognized historiographical practices and procedures, including the use of cross-referencing, the critical study of sources, and the application of the scientific method to historical research.
- 7. Motivated Reasoning:** Rather than a dedication to objectively seek the truth, pseudo-historical works are frequently driven by ideological, political, or personal opinions. Authors' interpretations of events may be shaped by a prior goal.
- 8. Information gaps:** Pseudo-historians may take advantage of information gaps in the past or the appeal of the mysterious to claim that traditional history is concealing important secrets.
- 9. Rejection of Consensus:** Pseudo-historians typically disagree with historians' and experts' accepted viewpoints in favor of their outlandish notions.
- 10. Sensationalism:** Pseudo-historical works may put more emphasis on sensationalism than academic rigor to pique public interest rather than offer a fair and thorough account of the history (Carroll).

Media and Pseudohistory

The digital age has drastically altered the way we consume and interpret historical information. With the majority of our information coming from visual media such as the web, television, and mobile phones, we have relinquished control over what we pay attention to, allowing the creators and users of these platforms to dictate our focus. Unfortunately, historical information that circulates on the web is often stripped of context, devoid of analysis, and designed to advance political, ideological, financial, or personal agendas. This has created an environment where "fake history" can thrive, much like "fake news" in the journalistic world. Historians must navigate this complex communications environment if they are to reclaim the definition of history and promote historical literacy. Many historians are already attempting to do so by reclaiming real history from fake history, similar to the way journalists are attempting to reclaim real news from fake news (Steinhauer, 2017).

Pseudohistorical News Information in India

In India, fake news and disinformation are frequently disseminated via text and picture forwards on the messaging app, which is referred to as "WhatsApp University" in a derogatory manner. The Indian journalist Ravish Kumar is frequently credited with popularising the phrase in 2018. Memes and incorrect information on elections, politics, and religion are now widely disseminated. The justification behind the phrase "WhatsApp University" is that educational institutions serve as a conduit for knowledge and information. Similarly, WhatsApp is currently being used to convey information that is quite humorous and unrealistic, and it may contain serious sequences, as it has become India's favorite method of communication (Iyer, 2019). Academic historians aim to understand how the past differs from the present, while pseudo-historians seek to project their political vision onto the past. Unfortunately, the discipline of pseudo-history is rapidly growing and spreading, and platforms like WhatsApp University are fuelling this trend. This has resulted in a proliferation of fake news and paid journalism, which is antithetical to the rigorous standards of academic history. Unlike pseudo-history, academic history is created by professional historians in academic contexts, adhering to strict disciplinary guidelines, including peer review and expert examination of justifications, assertions, and publications (D'Souza, 2021)

Falsified History and Communal Divide

The political parties in India are leveraging religion to maintain their hold on power indefinitely. This has led to the rise of religious nationalism, which promotes historical revisionism by spreading false information and hoaxes in an attempt to discredit the country's ancient traditions. It is important to understand that India's history is a complex mosaic of many different traditions and influences, rather than a homogeneous monolith. Conflicts and peaceful coexistence have both been a part of India's history. To promote peace and harmony in a country as culturally diverse as India, it is crucial to have an accurate understanding of its history and appreciate the unique tapestry that makes up India's past.

This requires a sophisticated strategy to overcome the polarizing effects of pseudo-historical myths and promote a more inclusive future vision. The intentional falsification of history is part of a broader scheme to achieve the

necessary level of societal polarization and increase the gap between different groups. The objective of such historical fabrication is to hold the current Muslim leadership responsible for the purported crimes they committed. The WhatsApp Factory has repeatedly used propaganda by media to claim that Muslims are responsible for 96% of rapes in India, although India Today disproved the claim in 2018 (Asthana, 2021).

Throughout history, we have seen countless instances of disinformation, from Tipu Sultan to Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Jawahar Lal Nehru, and Mahatma Gandhi. Even in modern times, such misconceptions continue to be prevalent. False narratives that are exaggerated, minimized, or fabricated for ideological, communal, or political reasons are scattered throughout our civilization's history. Given the abundance of misinformation, a new field has emerged with the sole aim of exploring and debunking pseudohistory (Schandilla, 2022).

India is a multicultural nation with residents from several ethnic groups, varying culinary tastes, and, most notably, a vast range of religious practices. It is composed of several ethnic groups and religions. This is because, historically speaking, India's culture is always changing, with new ideas frequently displacing the outdated ones that give the country its peculiar beauty and secularism. The interpretation of Indian history is currently a contentious topic. Conflicts involving divergent interpretations of Indian prehistory or disputes between the faiths of ancient and medieval South Asia—arguments that belong at academic conferences elsewhere—have become the focal point of political rallies, mob rioting, and other acts of violence in India. In light of this, the institutionalization of fake news only serves to exacerbate the problem. Fake news has less of an impact than the false narrative of what actually occurred or is currently occurring (Thakur, 2020).

True History vs Pseudohistory discussion

The intricacies of history cannot be fully encapsulated by any one representation. As such, numerous civilizations have produced a variety of accounts of the past - from hagiographies and mythical depictions of heroes to romanticized retellings of conflicts, vague recollections of major migrations and natural disasters, as well as reasoned reproductions of facts, events, lives, regimes, and transitions. In light of the concerning trend of agenda-driven and hostile rewriting of history, it is important to reaffirm that the interpretation of the past should not be manipulated to serve any vindictive political ideology. The 20th century serves as a stark reminder of the dangers of pseudo-history, which was used to manipulate public sentiment and incite hatred, ultimately leading to the tragic events of the Holocaust (Devy, 2023)

Misinformation has become an unfortunate aspect of our daily lives. What was once dismissed as a ludicrous conspiracy theory and relegated to family-friendly entertainment has now found acceptance in academic circles. Inaccurate historical accounts have persisted for generations and have been uncritically accepted as truth. Politicians often prefer the narratives of bards over historians, who prioritize accuracy over storytelling. While poets may inspire pride in one's history, a historian must present the facts. While pride may influence votes, it cannot change reality. Some politicians claim that since India's independence, historians have had an unfair advantage over bards. This is because some notable historians have portrayed Buddhists as pacifists, Mughals as monument builders, Hindus as casteists, and the British as social reformers (Schandilla, 2022)

Renowned historian Romila Thapar spoke at an online event, 'In Defence of History', celebrating the 90th birthday of esteemed historian Irfan Habib. During her address, Thapar expressed concern that current attempts to validate distorted history for the sake of political ideology are prevalent and highlighted the importance of historians arguing that reliable evidence is more valuable than authority. She pointed out that this fictionalized history is being disseminated through various channels, including social media, TV, and publications, without distinguishing reality from fiction. Furthermore, it is being propagated in a more organized manner through the education system. Thapar emphasized that if India wishes to regain its former status as an intellectual, humanitarian, and secular society, the safeguarding of history is a crucial and urgent necessity. Irfan Habib also shared his opinion, arguing that having a false memory is similar to having a disease and that a fake history for a nation is simply a false memory for an individual. "If you're a normal person, you want your memory to be accurate. Similar to that, a nation needs to have a reliable memory (Bhattacharya, 2021).

Conclusions and suggestions

Addressing this Pseudohistory will require a nuanced strategy. Luckily, many of the tools used to detect and combat false news stories are also effective in identifying fake historical accounts. Currently, the bulk of these efforts are being spearheaded by tech experts, including Google and Facebook, as well as groups like Alt News that actively dispel online misinformation. However, scholars and historians can also play a role by taking a proactive stance. It's crucial to inundate the internet, social media, and television with accurate research and historical information.

The field of history communication was established to share historical knowledge with a wider audience through various mediums such as print, video, and audio. Historians, who are similar to science communicators, move beyond academic settings to engage with decision-makers and participate in public discourse. They advocate for the use of historical research to inform policymaking and teach essential skills like source analysis, argumentation, and evidence evaluation to students.

History communicators play a crucial role in safeguarding history from oversimplification, distortion, or manipulation. They simplify complex concepts through the use of metaphor and analogy, while also conveying fundamental historical ideas. With impressive communication skills, including oratory prowess and rhetorical finesse, they captivate audiences on both an emotional and intellectual level.

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