The post-truth discourse and the politics of memory in the contemporary media spaces

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ABSTRACT

This article concerns the emergence, definition, and characteristic of the phenomenon of "post-truth" and how its characteristics are used in connection with historical narratives by various political forces for their own goals. The article's goal is to identify how historical narratives are used by the spreaders of post-truth for various results in domestic and foreign policy, or, in the case of the post-truth spreader being a contesting politician vying for power, for electoral support. The research utilizes historical-narrative and historical-comparative methods, alongside methods of discourse and content analysis. After reviewing the literature, it is observed that from the point of view of historical politics, the methods of spreading the post-truth pose a tempting prospect of ensuring the ideological unity of the nation (or a part of it). The creation of an ideological and informational climate in which history consisted only of the heroism of "Us" and the various affronts and capture of "our old territories" by "the Other" contributes to internal stability. However, such historical politics, while useful in an "information bubble" in domestic policy, can be easily exposed and deconstructed by the neighboring powers decried as "the Other", blamed for various historical grievances (in the case of a reigning regime using post-truth historical narratives), or by political rivals debunking false claims (in the case of a contesting political force using such narratives in a democracy). The post-truth relies on charisma and cognitive bias, rather than specific historical knowledge, and can be used to strengthen existing political support, more so than converting others. Post-truth accelerates the involvement of media consumers and the growth of their confidence in the correctness of the ideology. However, regardless of its utilitarian positives for political forces, a choice in favor of post-truth is a voluntary choice in favor of misinformation, anti-intellectualism and deception.

Introduction

The phenomenon of post-truth emerged in the world media space at the end of the 10s of the 21st century, and now, due to the active use of this term in scientific discourse, it has spread widely in various fields: from humanitarian disciplines to medicine discourse. Perception of historical events through the prism of post-truth has become an important part of history studies, moreover, it is inextricably linked with the main purpose of post-truth – the satisfaction of certain political interests.

Discussing the topic of "post-truth", it is almost impossible to avoid the question: what distinguishes the definition of post-truth from the definition of propaganda from the general historical experience of mankind? According to the philosopher M. Bakhtin, even in the so-called communist regimes of the 20th century, a "monological" discourse was established, in which the "truth" was formed abstractly and on the basis of the dominant ideology, which excluded the possibility of alternative views (*Bakhtin, 1981: 15*). But does that even relate to modern idea of post-truth? We can see an echo of the "Soviet-

centric monological discourse" that became widespread in the other "communist" regimes with the new wave pro-Moscow rhetoric of politicians who are often associated with this phenomenon, but that similarity is mostly observational. More importantly, the similarity of the old Sovietc propaganda with the modern "post-truth" will be in a similar political goal – to create an atmosphere in which "everyone in their world can have their own truth", so that the image of the world of "alternative facts", built upon conspiracy theory and a sense of one's own heroic resistance to the system, would demand the same respect as objective reality, which is reminiscent of the situation with the demand for respectful treatment of the Soviet-centric "socialist system" of the Cold War era. Such a connection is easy to see for researchers from the countries of the former "Eastern bloc". For example, the Czech author D. Černín noted the growth of pseudoscientific theories and false narratives in history and other humanities in the "post-truth era" of the second half of the 10s of the 19th century (*Černín, 2018*).

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American researchers mostly associate the term with the course of their 2015-2016 presidential election campaign, which was then reflected around the world, a constant stream of fake news that is easy to debunk, yet still spreads, conspiracy theories and outright lies that opponents take "literally, not seriously", while supporters listen to them "seriously, not literally", so even a debunked statement becomes a sort of allegorical truth (*Sismondo, 2017*). American authors also turn to Eastern European topics, noting the common features of the Trumpist and Putinist approaches to propaganda - the idealization of the president and the apparatus controlled by him as an alternative to the "power of the oligarchs", the creation of neologisms to avoid comparisons with negative images ("sovereign democracy" instead of "dictatorship", " alternative facts" instead of "false data", "true hyperbole" instead of "boasting and slander", etc.): "Has Russia succeeded in pushing Trump and other demagogic leaders to copy its methods? Certainly when Kellyanne Conway famously spoke of 'alternative facts' we can't but observe similarities to Orwellian contradictions in Russia's politics, such as its definition of itself as a 'managed democracy.'" (*Skillen, 2019*).

Recent monographs on the phenomenon highlight the influence of postmodern culture in creating a distrust of the press and science, with the result that "alternative facts" replace real facts and feelings are given more weight than evidence (*McIntyre, 2018*). There are also thorough works that question whether researchers need to worry about fundamental differences in methods of combating disinformation within the framework of the "new era of propaganda" at all, but at the same time argue: just wait for the fact that "the trend will pass by itself" , also incorrect (*D'Ancona, 2017: 9*). A rather original explanation of the post-truth is given by D. Nally in 2022 essay: instead of a single definition, a list of characteristic features of the post-truth phenomenon is proposed, including disinformation, a "climate of anti-intellectualism", as well as fragmented socio-cultural cohesion (*Nally, 2022: 277–278*).

However, this research's tasks concern more than just a question of how to define post-truth. To discuss the connection of post-truth propaganda with the historical narratives, one first needs to research: what are the political forces (whether ruling regimes or contesting politicians) that are connected to the post-truth phenomenon; whether these political forces utilize historical narratives in their propaganda; what are the goals of said propaganda and whether the political actors are able to achieve those goals (and in which manner).

The ***purpose of the article*** is to identify how historical narratives are used by the spreaders of post-truth for various results in domestic and foreign policy, or, in the case of the post-truth spreader being a contesting politician vying for power, for electoral support. The results are to be discussed on the merits of whether there is any utilitarian positive usage for the post-truth methods regarding history, for a conclusion on the practical merits of researching and combating, or, alternatively, considering the utilization of said methods.

Research methods

The article is primarily based on a review of literature on the topic of post-truth, both those concerned with the terminology, and the practical meanings of the term (par-

ticularly the place of history policies in the information space in the context of post-truth), including academic articles and the results of the international analytical research projects. The works concerning examples from American, Muscovite, Hungarian, and, partially, Ukrainian and Polish experiences, show the degree of effectiveness of "historical post-truth" as a factor in domestic and foreign policy, were grouped and reviewed via the historical method, along with the comparative method allowing to show similarities and differences between Europe and America, dictatorships and democracies, and in-between states of the discussed republics. The methods of discourse and content analysis were further used to define the various tactics used by politicians associated with the "post-truth" phenomenon to spread their message and reach their audience.

Discussing the results, specifically the "utilitarian positive usage" of history policy and post-truth media tactics, the study, admittedly, qualifies "positive usage" from a statist point of view (specifically, as methods of influencing the population and unifying the country in the name of a political agenda by state actors), which may not be agreeable to non-state and anti-statist perspectives. This is necessary to provide recommendations to state actors, of whether the utilitarian positive usage of post-truth outweighs the risks involved. The qualifications for "positive" merits of post-truth come from analyzing the differences in political stability between the state actors using post-truth methods for political gain (particularly regimes with tight control over history policy), and those that end up victims of such methods (often government officials in democracies, marginalized groups, vilified countries). The risks are discussed in the conclusions.

Results and Discussion

It can be surmised, that the essential difference between the "post-truth era" and the previous experience of propaganda manipulation is in the significantly greater opportunities of post-truth consumers to obtain truthful information compared to the historical experience of victims of propaganda, who were technologically and politically limited in their ability to receive news about the outside world from sources beyond the control of the state. The Internet and globalization have broken the traditional boundaries between information spaces. Nowadays in order to receive information outside the borders of state control, it is enough for a resident of Moscow to familiarize oneself with VPN technology (with secure transmission of information using encryption to access websites blocked by the state and Internet service providers) and to have access to Russian language news sites, despite the blockings of Roskomnadzor. and in social networks there are ample opportunities to receive information directly from residents of other countries. However, in a situation of hypothetically unlimited access to information, such endless messages from around the world lose their importance for the user. Oversaturation of information forces one to ignore a certain part of it, to consume it in an abbreviated form (reading the more convenient and "loud" attention-grabbing headlines or small messages instead of detailed articles). In addition, in this situation, when choosing mass media to receive most of the information, a person is guided not by qualitative parameters or the objective need to study news about a certain country, but by his or her own

cognitive bias. A person tries to choose sources close to him in view of origin, education, ethnic, religious and national identity. In this situation, the origin of the received information from a "patriotic" source will already be positive for some people and negative for others, besides, for example, American communists and supporters of the 45th US President Donald Trump would rather trust the pro-Kremlin media than the messages of the current presidential administration in USA. The tendency to choose mass media that are "close" to the consumer, even in the presence of choice, was proven experimentally in 2008 (*Wise, Bolls, Schaefer, 2008*).

The aforementioned pro-government media contains unchallenged statements about historical grievances, the loss of territories and the ultimate need to return them, completely consistent with Moscow's behavior in the international arena; which has already been analyzed in relation to the overt and implicit falsification of historical facts in Vladimir Putin's personal articles and speeches representing the ideological basis of the Kremlin's policy (*Knispel, 2022*). However, the active opposition of the population to the establishment of such a policy based on the falsification of history has not been noticed, in fact, if there is a feeling of the absence of retribution for the dictatorship's information and foreign policies, the population is more likely to support such policies, and is ideologically ready to believe in the mission of "heroic struggle against the West" (*Smeltz, Wojtowicz, 2022*). Similar results of the consolidation of power by a regime built on post-truth have been noted by European researchers studying Hungary's "post-truth laboratory" (*Krekó, 2019*). As in the case of Putin's regime, the government of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán feels comfortable in the atmosphere of rampant territorial claims against neighbors "justified" by the government's memory politics. Orbán relishes in outspoken, public controversy, such as indirectly claiming the entire territory of Croatia, without which it is impossible for Hungary to have access to the sea, with such statements not meeting any significant opposition from the population (*Kuzmanovic, 2022*).

Discussion. Although a number of authors claim that the new term "post-truth" is just an attempt to give a different name to the existing methods of influence, in the modern context of globalization and informatization, propaganda activity acquires truly new characteristics. History as a priority discipline from the point of view of justifying modern political activity through an appeal to historical experience occupies almost the most important place in this context. Accordingly, politicians in the post-truth era try to use historical memory as an ideological basis for establishing their power. Their "excursions" into history may contradict the facts, here the accuracy of expressions, the confidence of the speaker and the correspondence of his message to the picture of the consumer's world are more important. It is important to be able to "grab" individual facts, pulling them out of a wider context. A vivid example is New Yorker Donald Trump's appeal to the positive features of the figure of Confederate general Robert Lee, targeting the feelings of voters from the historical South of the U.S., especially Lee's homeland of Virginia. However, such actions did not help Trump win the elections in Virginia, but provided him with support only in states that were already "deep red" electorally, that is, those that mostly voted for the Republican Party of the United States of America. But this is precisely what characterizes propaganda in post-truth

conditions: less emphasis is placed on gaining new supporters thanks to an appeal to facts, and more on radicalizing the existing, real base of supporters, by confirming that the candidate understands and perceives history on an intuitive level, just like them (*McLaughlin, 2021*).

There is another question that begs an answer: why are post-truth tactics so successful in conjunction with governments' reliance on history policy? The aforementioned study by Austrian authors of the Hungarian experience of the so-called post-truth laboratory, which is not difficult to connect with Muscovite similarities, showcases the characteristic post-truth tactics. Firstly, the authorities sought to obtain as much control as possible over mass media available to people, and then, already in the created information climate, radicalized society by believing in "historical grievances", which the representatives of the ruling party are trying to avenge (*Krekó, 2019*). This differs from the American experience, where society has competing versions of historical memory narratives (for the sake of the discussion, we'll describe them as "unionist", or mainstream, and "insurgent", or the underdog narrative), which are appealed to by competing politicians, with no single news media having complete control over the country's information space, and government-controlled media are de facto absent. That makes post-truth in America a method of the "insurgent" narratives, rather than the "unionist" ones, content with the mainstream status quo. The existence of competing narratives allows to safeguard democracy, but also breeds social division, The "insurgent", counter-mainstream discourse is becoming widespread among the opposition groups in both the U.S. and Europe. The supporters of radical parties often prefer the propagated image of Moscow as the new "savior of the white Western world", opposed the liberal "globalist" paradigm. This is well exemplified on their usual coordination and discussion forums online, such as 4chan.org's and 8chan.org's /pol/ boards, or reddit.com's now-banned /r/the_donald and /r/greatawakening, which allowed European radicals fast and easy communication with like-minded people in the United States. Such forums are often "fed" propaganda with fake quotes from Vladimir Putin celebrating ethnic nationalism and a racist outlook on immigration (something that Putin's government does not tolerate among their own homegrown nationalists, prosecuting such sentiment under article 282 of the RF's Criminal Code). People visiting these Internet forums come to actually prefer direct Muscovite influence to the boogeyman of a "Jewish globalist state" (associated in their narratives with NATO and the European Union), a label under which any Moscow-opposing entity may end up. This topic requires further research, as there is a lot of factual evidence of how Internet soft power can influence masses of people and result in increased support for whole movements and political parties through information warfare. These appeals to radicalism are mostly targeting fringe parties and Internet users, while the broader audience beyond the worldwide web is presented a "distilled", happier image of Moscow and its relations with neighboring countries (*Mieliekiestsev, 2020*). As investigated by Innokentiy Arkhipov for "The Insider", the "History of Russia pavilion" at the Moscow VDNH expocentre has been altered in 2019 to downplay the "unwanted" pages of history. A table of dates, titled "History of Russia from Rurik to Putin", dating the country's creation from the mythical Varangian warlord,

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had four dates painted over with a white color. The censored dates from Putin and Medvedev presidencies ended up being the "Kursk" submarine catastrophe, the Dubrovka and Beslan incidents, and the "Georgian-Ossetian conflict". Evidently, state authorities would rather have the Muscovites forget these bloody pages from the recent past, including the one in which Kremlin could be characterized as invading another country's territory (*Arkhipov, 2019*).

While criticizing the aforementioned regimes, it should be noted that from the point of view of historical politics, the methods of spreading the post-truth pose a tempting prospect of ensuring the ideological unity of the nation. The creation of an ideological and informational climate in which history consisted only of the heroism of "Us" and the various affronts and capture of "our ancient territories" by "the Other" contributes to strengthening the country's internal stability, the unity of the population behind the political force etc. This applies not only to authoritarian regimes, but also to democracies: the change of parties in power in Poland from "Solidarity" to "Civil Platform" and to "Law and Justice" took place while maintaining a single national historical and ideological platform. Post-truth, on the other hand, accelerates the involvement of media consumers and the growth of their confidence in the correctness of the ideology.

Conclusions

The demonstrated results of strengthening internal unity in the described governments may increase the interest in replicating the propaganda version of history thanks to modern methods of spreading the post-truth in an information age society. Having control over the mass media and providing financially inexpensive penetration of loyal agents of influence into social networks, it is possible to strengthen the confidence of the population in the heroism of their own history and the ability of the modern government to take revenge on the "Other" for the "grievances of the past". However, this is a misleading perspective. For all of post-truth's potential for historical politics, it poses a threat to authentic preservation of historical memory. The study of historical memory can demonstrate that part of the history of a people or territory that does not fit into the paradigm of state-centric history. While researchers can preserve and analyze these elements of historical memory from an academic standpoint, the post-truth paradigm will avoid sharp corners. Hence the forgetting of facts, for example in Hungary relating to the resistance of the peoples of the idealized "Greater Hungary" to Hungarian rule, in Poland – regarding the results of the "pacification" policy of the Second Polish Republic, in the South of the USA – on Robert Lee's ownership of slaves, and in Muscovy – about the genocide of Circassians, Chechens, Ukrainians, about mass repressions, about the largest number of collaborators with Nazi Germany compared to other republics of the USSR. In the end, it is a voluntary choice in favor of misinformation and deception.

It is characteristic that such historical politics can be easily exposed and deconstructed by the neighbors, the same "Others" who are "appointed" to be the enemies in the post-truth information space. And using the examples of Ukraine and Moscow, Croatia and Hungary, we see that in the wider, "globalized" English-speaking information space, the sympathies of people and organiza-tions outside the information space controlled by propagandists will be on the side not of those who refer to history to confirm territorial claims, but of those being threatened right now. Moscow's propaganda against Ukraine inside its own infospace is strengthened by historical politics in the context of post-truth. However, in the international arena, attempts to explain one's policy not only with claims of "protecting one's fellow citizens" (this could cause, at least, a pause due to the need to find out whether there are anti-Muscovite excesses in Ukraine), but also with references to "historically our lands" and "actually one people" immediately expose the insincerity of the "defense" statements, the aggressiveness of the intentions and the targeting of expansionism.

Practical recommendations for solving the mentioned problem should be taken into account by all influencers of the formation of historical policy in the state. Although it is impossible to imagine a situation where there is no propaganda about historical past in a country (countries, nations by their very nature need a myth about their own endurance through the ages), we must definitely refuse to repeat the experience of historical politics based on post-truth, despite certain opportunities for unification and stabilization of the nation. The self-confidence of the people and the authorities can be costly in a real confrontation with the antagonized "Others". Therefore, in determining the future priorities of Ukraine's foreign policy, it is important not to repeat the mistakes of our neighbors and to appeal to modern realities and principles of international law, and not to ancient claims and centuries-old grievances. This, however, does not exclude the demonstration of positive pages of the history of Ukraine for internal and external audiences, especially those that nullify the informational influence of the remnants of the European historiography from the age of empires.

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Дискурс постправди та політика пам'яті у сучасному медіапросторі

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У цій статті йдеться про виникнення, визначення та характеристику феномену «постправди» та про те, як різні політичні сили використовують її характеристики у зв'язку з історичними наративами для власних цілей. Мета статті – визначити, як саме розповсюджувачі постправди використовують історичні наративи для досягнення різних результатів у внутрішній і зовнішній політиці, або, у випадку, коли поширювач постправди є політиком, який бореться за владу; як постправду використовують в пошуках електоральної підтримки. У дослідженні використовуються історико-наративний та історико-порівняльний методи, а також методи дискурс-аналізу та контент-аналізу. Ознайомлення з літературою призвело до висновків, що з точки зору історичної політики методи поширення постправди створюють спокусливу перспективу забезпечення ідейної єдності нації або її частини. Внутрішній стабільності сприяє створення ідеологічного та інформаційного клімату, в якому історія складалася лише з героїзму «Нас» та різноманітних образ і захоплень «наших старих територій» «Іншим». Однак така історична політика, хоч і корисна в «інформаційній бульбашці» у внутрішній політиці, може бути легко викрита та деконструйована сусідніми державами, засудженими як «Інші», звинуваченими в різних історичних образах (у випадку правлячого режиму, який використовує постправдиві історичні наративи), або політичними суперниками, які розвінчують неправдиві твердження (у випадку, коли політична сила використовує такі наративи в демократії). Постправда спирається на харизму та когнітивну упередженість, а не на конкретні історичні знання, і може бути використана для зміцнення існуючої політичної підтримки, більше ніж для навернення інших до своєї політичної платформи. Постправда прискорює залучення медіаспоживачів і зростання їх впевненості в правильності своєї ідеології. Однак, незважаючи на утилітарні позитиви для політичних сил, вибір на користь постправди є добровільним вибором на користь дезінформації, антиінтелектуалізму та обману.

Ключові слова: інформаційна війна, інформаційне протистояння, історична пам'ять, історична політика, історія України, політика пам'яті, постправда, пропаганда.