

Introduction: Teaching in Post-truth—Challenges, Lessons, and Innovations in Journalism Education

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Abstract

Educators across disciplines—including journalism, public relations, and advertising—have struggled with the potential influence of a “post-truth” era on their lesson plans, learning outcomes, and on epistemological examinations of content and context of their fields. This special issue addresses the challenges and solutions for working and teaching some 4 years into the most-recent age of “post-truth.”

Keywords

Donald Trump, education, “fake news,” pedagogy, post-truth, trust

This special issue addresses challenges and solutions for working and teaching in journalism and mass communications 4 years into the most-recent age of “post-truth” (see the Editor’s Note in this issue for more). Articles included in this issue range in type and geographic location. From essays and thought pieces to empirical work on practices to introduce students to post-truth realities, the voices come from geographies including the United States, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Jordan, India, Qatar, and Germany. Collectively, the issue’s contributions speak to one another about culture, context, and change.

An article by Jeff Tischauser and Jess Benn provides interesting and relevant attention to issues of truth by focusing on the history of and lessons from Black press in the United States, which fuels the complication of interactions of journalism and truth across cultures and communities. Two main elements of their presentation are most enlightening for the journalism educator. From this essay, we gain fruitful exercises and

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perspectives for teaching in post-truth, including seeing how journalists can be trained to be both mediators and translators of truth in cross-cultural environments and during moments of contestation.

Bruce Mutsvairo and Saba Bebawi present a meaningful analysis of how journalists are viewed among audiences and professionals in parts of Africa and the Middle East. The authors comment on pedagogical approaches in these parts of the globe, particularly in Africa, that deal with issues of “whether curriculums should be Eurocentric or Afrocentric.” In this sense, the question of “what constitutes professionalism?”—the authors write—remains a key concern for educators and students as it may be based in a variety of cultural settings and social norms.

In their article, Pradeep Nair, Harikrishnan Bhaskaran, and Harsh Mishra focus on pedagogical approaches for exploring post-truth among journalism students in India. Although journalism curricula largely focus on teaching industry skills in the country, the authors write, focus groups with journalism students showcase their abilities and their struggles with identifying and combatting “fake news.” Mainly, students seem resistant to evoke journalistic authority in identifying, defining, and counteracting fake news, which the authors suggest should encourage educators to increase the meaningful, cultural, and critical intellectual skills that are involved in journalism curricula.

Based on surveys and interviews with Millennials from throughout the Middle East and the United States, Rebecca Nee helps us to better understand how journalism educators may address how students—and younger audiences—interact with potential truths and falsehoods on social media. Educators who have not done so already need to recognize that social media platforms are the first place where many young adults gain information and news, she writes.

Yonty Friesem offers an interesting analysis of a semester-long undergraduate class in which students used project-based learning and activities to understand forms and functions of measuring source reliability, trustworthiness, and validity. Friesem’s article is as much a critical reflection on teaching and learning as it is a resource for educators wanting to learn more about critical digital media literacy activities and outlets.

From Germany, Klaus Meier and Jonas Schützeneder discuss the importance of blending practical training and scientific research as a means by which to create journalism that can withhold critique in a post-truth world. As much as the article presents an argument for using elements of a scientific method and rigor in reporting and validating news, the authors present methods by which educators can implement what they refer to as “interactive innovation research” that allows for researchers and practitioners to evaluate journalism through academic research.

Katherine Reed, Sara Hiles, and Peter Tipton, in a similar approach to Meier and Schützeneder, examine practices and approaches to journalism that can benefit from influence by students in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) areas of study. This analysis revolves around critical reflection of a joint project between journalism and STEM students that focused on science and information literacy. The authors’ article creates a clearly replicable example of teaching and learning that can be used throughout classrooms training future communication professionals.

Wrapping the issue, Amy Walker's article also presents ideas for engaged learning in journalism and communications classes that wish to advance experience and understanding related to trust and online content. Walker's piece speaks to others in this issue, particularly, Nee's article, in that it presents activities and approaches for investigating visual digital content. It is a welcome contribution to the issue in that it shares critical research and engaged pedagogy in ways that inform readers as they enhance their own curricula.

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