



True Enough: Learning to Live in a Post-Fact Society

Farhad Manjoo

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Why has punditry lately overtaken news? Why do lies seem to linger so long in the cultural subconscious even after they've been thoroughly discredited? And why, when more people than ever before are documenting the truth with laptops and digital cameras, does fact-free spin and propaganda seem to work so well? *True Enough* explores leading controversies of national politics, foreign affairs, science, and business, explaining how Americans have begun to organize themselves into echo chambers that harbor diametrically different facts—not merely opinions—from those of the larger culture.

True Enough: Learning to Live in a Post-Fact Society Details

Date : Published March 1st 2008 by Wiley (first published January 1st 2008)

ISBN : 9780470050101

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Format : Hardcover 250 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Politics, Sociology, Psychology, History, Science, Technology, Philosophy



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From Reader Review True Enough: Learning to Live in a Post-Fact Society for online ebook

Wil Wheaton says

True Enough is a quick and accessible read that never drags or becomes uninteresting. It's all very well-researched and very interesting, but I just wish that, having explained *how* and *why* we've come to live in a post-fact society, Farhad Manjoo had spent at least a few pages talking about *how* we can dig ourselves out of a world where Truthiness has taken over.

I thought this was a great companion to Drew Curtis' It's Not News It's Fark: How Mass Media Tries to Pass Off Crap As News (disclosure: Drew is a close friend of mine) and would encourage you to read them together.

Chris says

"Have you ever noticed that anybody driving slower than you is an idiot, and anyone going faster than you is a maniac?" --George Carlin

"This isn't about what is . . . it's about what people *think* is. It's all imaginary anyway. That's why it's important. People only fight over imaginary things." --Neil Gaiman, American Gods

"If they think it's the truth, then they believe it, and if they believe it long enough, then it becomes the truth." --Jason Carter Eaton, The Facttracker

"Each of us thinks that on any given subject our views are essentially objective, the product of a dispassionate, *realistic* accounting of the world. This is *naive* realism, though, because we are incapable of recognizing the biases that operate upon us. . . . The bias we see in the news isn't strategic. It's real. It's real to us, at least, and that's as real as it gets. . . . We all harbor a different idea of what an objective news story should look like. . . . we all want objectivity, but we disagree about what objectivity is." --Farhad Manjoo, True Enough

Naive realism is just one of the dynamics Manjoo considers in this book as he looks at the polarization and fragmentation of opinions in modern society, opinions not just about how we should react to facts, but about the very facts themselves. It's a fascinating exploration, weaving together psychological studies and explanations, stories and examples from many realms, and major political examples. Was John Kerry a war hero or coward? Was the 9/11 World Trade Center attack planned by our government? Was there vote tampering in the 2004 presidential election? It all depends on who you listen to and how you interpret what they have to say. Those might seem like fringe examples, but Manjoo also considers much more everyday situations and makes a convincing case that there is no way for anyone to escape these dynamics. And that our modern media and connectedness has exacerbated them significantly.

While the title says the book is about "Learning to Live" in this kind of world, it's only in the epilogue ("Living in a World without Trust") that Manjoo really goes into what we should do about it. In this case, knowing is at least half the battle. We spend so much energy and time arguing about our convictions, convinced we're right, never realizing just all the factors at play in making us so. We would be better served

if we'd all spend a bit more time carefully examining ourselves and our sources of information, uncovering the biases inherent in all of it, and being a little less strident about insistent upon our correctness.

What arises from all this, finally, is the condition Stephen Colbert diagnosed as "truthiness." Truthiness means you choose. But you're not just deciding a reality; you're also deciding to trust that reality--which means deciding to distrust the others. Whenever you choose, you're making a decision to form a particularized trust. This is the essence of the new medium. Navigating it requires forming bonds with those who are going the same way you are and rejecting those who've decided to see things differently.

Choosing means trusting some people and distrusting the rest. Choose wisely.

If you're not familiar with Colbert's concept of truthiness, you can watch the video where he defined it here (or read the Merriam-Webster definition [here](#)).

If you're intrigued enough to keep reading, I think Manjoo sums up his book really nicely in this excerpt:

Investigating the rise of carelessness toward "reality" is, of course, the headlong purpose of this book. But I've been driving at a theory more pervasive than the peculiar psychology of one president, the transgressions of a single dominant political machine, or the aims of certain powerful players. The truth about truthiness, I've argued, is cognitive: when we strung up the planet in fiber-optic cable, when we dissolved the mainstream media into prickly niches, and when each of us began to create and transmit our own pictures and sounds, we eased the path through which propaganda infects the culture.

Video news releases and satellite media tours suggest the ultimate cultural expression of these forces: they show us what might become of the world--or, indeed, what has become of the world--in an age of easy lying. Today, marketers, political operatives, and others who want to convince you of the virtue of some thing or idea--whether it is a Swiffer duster, a Nokia headset, a presidential candidate, a certain education policy, or the "truth" about global warming--can go about the business of persuasion covertly, without divulging their motives or even the fact that they're engaged in persuasion. Propagandists have become experts at mining the vulnerabilities of the many-media world (for instance, the dubious ethics of bottom line-watching local news operations). They've adopted a range of methods to exploit the current conditions--some are as benign as the covert placement of products in films and TV shows, but others are more questionable, such as planting VNRs on the news, or buying up pundits, or spreading their messages anonymously and "virally" through blogs, videos, and photos on the Web.

Technically, what these operatives aim to do is capture one or many of the forces I've discussed so far: selective exposure, in which we indulge information that pleases us and cocoon ourselves among others who think as we do; selective perception, in which we interpret documentary proof according to our long-held beliefs; peripheral processing, which produces a swarm of phony experts; and the hostile media phenomenon, which pushes the news away from objectivity and toward the sort of drivel one sees on cable.

In practice, what propagandists are doing is simpler to describe: they've mastered a new way to lie.

Matt says

This was my election 2008 attempt-to-escape-the-news read. And it served its purpose well. It covers an awful lot of ground, but its main point is this. People tend to interpret and understand new information in a

way that accords with their existing views. Just as fans of opposing teams "see" different football games (and blame referees accordingly), consumers "see" different news reports. And although we look for truth (to a point), we are seeking information that jibes with our beliefs and affirmation of our views. And because the modern infosphere allows us all to get our news from any number of niche outlets (encouraging fragmentation and competition), it's created an atmosphere that is excessively partisan, and an atmosphere where conspiracy theories can thrive.

And so, there aren't red states and blue states, but there is certainly red news and blue news. The silver lining, perhaps, is that sometimes the truth is hard to lie about. When the Dow falls 6000 points over the course of a year, or gas prices go up 40 percent, it's hard to spin those facts. But are we winning the war on terror? Is there global warming? Is globalization hurting the country? Is Obama a socialist? These are harder questions to answer (and measure), and so they are susceptible to truthiness. And we believe who we want to believe. Reality splits along the lines of our preexisting beliefs.

Manjoo is also careful to point out that it's not just cult-following rednecks who are susceptible. The book reminded me of a Stephen Jay Gould reading which discussed the generational differences in scientific communities. If a new theory comes about, the old guard will forever try to make facts better comport with their existing worldviews rather than overhaul their existing belief system. And so it goes with everyone.

And I rather enjoy reading about and understanding human foibles. Except that when it goes along with a trend of anti-intellectualism, and when Americans are approximately as likely to believe in flying saucers as in evolution, it's not so heart-warming a story.

At this point in time, then, I would like to thank my parents for encouraging my curiosity, funding my education, watching PBS, and for not joining a cult. Amen.

The book is written so an eighth grader could understand it, but it borrows from a lot of social science scholarship. I would recommend it to any lay-person who thinks most television news is f-ing nuts.

BLACK CAT says

Know who is sponsoring the information and where it is coming from.

Be aware of cognitive behavioral biases.

Try to be objective.

Read from source you don't normally read to enrich your point of view.

Open your mind a be ready to embrace different information and create an informed opinion.

Hapzydeco says

Copyrighted in 2008, some things might sound dated. But this short and easy read is well researched. If Manjoo accomplishes nothing else, let hope people will think twice about trusting what they just read.

Atila Iamarino says

Foi escrito em 2008, mas explica esse ano de 2016 tranquilamente. Ainda na linha do *The Internet of Us: Knowing More and Understanding Less in the Age of Big Data*, mas explicando porque controvérsias persistem, resolvi ler e não me arrependi.

Farhad Manjoo pega uma série de controvérsias americanas, como o passado de John Kerry durante a guerra do Vietnã e o 9/11 para mostrar como controvérsias são criadas e a que servem. E como, depois que isso acontece, atingir um consenso é impossível.

A explicação de como estamos voltando ao tribalismo de interesses próximos e portanto de versões convenientes de verdades é bastante triste. Ainda mais porque ressoa com as notícias falsas e a polarização política que estão crescendo sem sinais de parar. Serve como um bom par para o *The Internet of Us: Knowing More and Understanding Less in the Age of Big Data*, contando como aceitamos versões da "verdade" – a truthiness do Stephen Colbert – que mais são convenientes.

Recomendo para quem quer refinar aquele amargor contra a humanidade.

Kusaimamekirai says

Written 10 years ago, before Trump and “fake news” and when Facebook and Twitter were still in their infancy, this book made the argument that we’ve become a nation of individuals that have barricaded ourselves into to our respective ideological corners. We interact only with those who agree with us, we search for news that only fits our worldview, and when we find a divergent viewpoint we either ignore it or choose from an endless stream of online information that seemingly refutes it. Rather than clarify what is true and what is not, the author argues persuasively that with the glut of information available to us today, we can now start with a belief and scour the web until we find something that validates it, no matter how spurious the information we find may be. It’s not truth in the end that matters as much as a desire to find something, anything, that says we are right. Since few of us travel outside of our ideological echo chambers, fact becomes less important than belief.

If anything, America has become even more ideologically fragmented and distrustful of information from the mouths of “experts”. Don’t like what CNN or FOX tells you? You can find a guy holed up in a basement somewhere on the web who will tell you what you want to hear if you look hard enough.

Even if you were to strip the dated references to 9/11 conspiracy theory, Swift Boat Veterans, and the 2006 election from this book, the ideas presented here are arguably even more relevant than 10 years ago. It has become a nation where truth is what “I feel” rather than what can objectively shown to be fact. The author highlights some of the ways we’ve gotten to this point and the consequences but whole reading this book with horror, I can only imagine what he would think of the logical extension of his ideas in 2017.

Eric says

If you like Malcolm Gladwell-esque social science books about how other people think and why they act the way they do, this is the book for you. If you’ve ever wondered how people can be so blind to the facts, or draw such stupid conclusions, or watch Fox News, “True Enough: Learning to Live in a Post-Fact Society” explains it all.

Manjoo, who now writes for Slate (but who wrote for Salon when the book was published) uses real-life case-studies to illustrate and illuminate how bias in the media, selective perception and selective exposure (two different things), cognitive dissonance (you think you know what it means but chances are you don't), "biased assimilation" and the brilliantly coined "Amatuerization of Expertise" conspire to make people believe things like the "Swift Boat Veterans for Truth" and the 9/11 "Truthers." Lest you think Manjoo just bashes the Right, he also discusses the reportedly rigged 2004 Ohio vote count that supposedly stole the vote from John Kerry and, hilariously, Mac fanaticism. (This may be the only serious social science book you'll ever read that uses the phrase "...Bill Gate's balls.")

After reading this, you'll never look at other people's opinions the same way again, and you'll be able to question and evaluate how you form your own.

Tim Chang says

this book spotlights some terrifying implications around the fragmentation and silo-ing of media...and the effects can already be clearly seen in the flavoring of news programs, blogs, etc. :(

Key points for me:

- selective exposure: psych coping mechanism to reinforce listening to what one wants to hear and already believes. E.g. Smoking/cancer test in 60s, Alive & Well AIDS,
- media fragmentation: people can live in their own parallel versions of realities not based on fact/science (John Kerry Swift Boat)
- social media can empower anyone to be a micro-Hitler?!
- people typically bias towards strong consonant and weak dissonant (easy to knock down), don't like strong dissonant. But conservatives are more picky, and stick to strong & weak consonant info
- social reality: (niche) group belief cements idea as fact and gives social proof. Used to be driven by propinquity, now online? (?? From local, to online tribe, back to locating selected tribe locally?). We choose people who suit us!

??? why isn't this stuff taught as the real "social studies" in school?!?

- selective perception: see the same thing, but experience it differently: ex: Archie from All in Family seen as hero to some?!
- danger of digital tools: will become harder to prove something is fake or real than shouting that it's real or fake?O -fragmentation of "experts" - hard to validate, can pick your own expert or stat to confirm your bias! Esp when how you say something > what you're saying
- impact on decision making process: central route (proper due diligence) vs peripheral route like Consumer Reports (shortcuts, cues, emotions, endorsements, experts)
- recognition heuristic: assume something you've heard of is more valuable...BUT these can easily be misleading: faked credentials or assumed expertise (being well-known for being well-known?)
- polarization on the news is national response to info fragmentation? Too many choices/channels, so each channel has to be more distinct in its angle/niche: biased assimilation

**too much conflicting data reinforces desire to seek out "friendly" data, further cements your own position!

- fundamental attribution error: we assume people do what they do because that's how the "are"
- people don't want objective reviews or news, but extreme validation of their biases/views??

-1996 was start of media/news fragmentation: Fox, MSNBC, DrudgeReport, etc: "mass media = thinly engaged audience"?

?? is there an opportunity to exploit need for hotly opposing views, creating artificial opponents and owning both? Equivalent of Virus and Anti-virus writing?

- "we all want objectivity, but disagree about what objectivity is"

-easier to intro bias into grand, sprawling subjects where info is complex, hard to make sense of, more than one interpretation

-Colbert's "Truthiness": feels good in your gut vs. Makes sense in your head!

-new ad format is like advertorial disguised as sensationalist news clip with fake expert? Subtle propaganda!

Ex: Get Government of Our Back front campaign engineered by DCI Group for tobacco companies...who claimed no credit for it but got all other credible groups behind it.

-Stealth PR is new propaganda agent to "launder ideas" and distance the corporation from the message/agenda

???what's next? "DCI meets Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc"?? Or maybe ARM: (engineered) alternative reality marketing?? + analytics + biased demographic-based recruiting?

- modern info tools have splintered factions, emphasized truthiness, altered grasp of reality, empowers engineered deception, dissolves fabric of social trust --- social capital turning into "particularized trust" (ultimate result of social graph ala "people like me"??)...destroys Generalized Trust by creating stronger Us vs Them polarization (ala Small Town syndrome)

-you get to choose the reality you believe in now and burrow in!!

Will says

When you are watching your favorite sports team, you may be seeing a completely different game than the spectators on the other side of the field. Through selective perception, people perceive reality based upon their personal biases; thus, an individual creates his or her own reality. Farhad Manjoo's *True Enough* provides insight into the dangers of a fragmented society. Manjoo discusses the 1951 football game between Princeton and Dartmouth. Fans on both sides walked away from the game with divergent views of what happened. They subconsciously chose to see - or not to see - certain actions in the game, depending on which team they supported. Princeton fans complained about penalties that Dartmouth fans could not even see. Manjoo suggests, "it was a matter of visual perception: their eyes were taking in the same game, but their brains seemed to be processing the events in two distinct ways."

True Enough unsettles me. The media's influence in society continues to grow stronger, especially as technology advances at rapid speed. Because there are so many different media sources, an individual will choose the source that best fits his or her preconceived beliefs. By choosing different news channels or newspapers, people may be exposed to different versions of the same story. Then, corporations and government agencies can create propaganda to exploit these discrepancies and manipulate the news that reaches an individual. The very concepts of truth and reality are being brought into question. *True Enough* is deeply troubling: if we subject ourselves to different versions of reality, then how can we discern between what is true and what is just true enough?

AdiTurbo says

Enlightening look at how we consume and process information, and what influences our choice of media outlets and content. Manjoo explains very clearly our biases, and how modern technology and historical changes affected the ways we now decide what is true. Very well-written, easy to understand, full of fascinating anecdotes and examples.

Philip says

There's really nothing new in Manjoo's book. Yes, I realize that I'm always being sold something. Yes, I realize that I have a pre-existing mindset. I know that there are right wing lobbyists that are always up to their nefarious ends...

The book wasn't bad though. It just reiterated what I already knew. It relied heavily on some sociology experiments that were rather fun to read about, and heaven knows I would never pick up "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology," or "Journal of Medical Education."

My biggest problem with the book was that it purported that it was, "not a partisan endeavor" on page six. Then it went on to be 88% left wing. Interestingly enough, one section talked about how the left was more open-minded than the right when receiving their media. (Selective Exposure.) I wondered if Manjoo was telling me I should put down the book, being a crazy right winger and all.

Not that it's ALL leftist propaganda. He says that Bush legitimately won the Presidency, and that 9/11 was not an inside job. And maybe all you lefties out there will say that's proof that he's really a right-wing nut. But all throughout the rest of the book it's left, left, left. Read it yourself and see.

Nicholas Karpuk says

Not living up to the title irks me, even if the book remains thought-provoking and readable.

When you entitle a book with something like, "Learning to Live in a Post-Fact Society", there's an implication that you might drop a few bits of wisdom on what the hell you should actually do about the current state of affairs.

Farhad Manjoo sets up his arguments quite well, asserting that the changes in media and the way humans think has led to a fractured culture where people don't merely disagree but develop different versions of reality, but that's where it stops.

The slims last chapter discusses how much trust and optimism factor into a cultures' success were great, but it felt like the jumping off point for much deeper waters.

All the science on how people select data and how deeply biases run was all quite thought provoking, there

are bits that will linger with me for a long time, but I finished it feeling like I left the drive through and found out too late that they forgot something I ordered.

With a more decisive conclusion this could have easily been a four or five star book.

Margaret says

I didn't like this book much, even though I entirely agree with the author's premise. I'm interested in the media and societal theories Manjoo discusses, but the writing was a bit dull and didn't hold my interest. I didn't learn anything from it that I didn't already know, probably because I'm already quite familiar with this subject.

Roger Leonhardt says

Do we twist the things we read and watch to match our own beliefs? Do we dismiss those things that do not fit in our worldview? This book says "yes".

This Book was OK, but claiming to be non-partisan, he still has a bias. Those on the right are considered unintelligent (Rush Limbaugh) but the left just bend the truth (Truthers). He claims, according to research, Republicans are more likely to be bias in their information than Democrats.

He believes that those who disagree with Global warming are the ones who are bias. (Al Gore uses more power for his mansion than my whole neighborhood) John Carey was a war hero (who was a war protester who accused our soldiers of heinous atrocities). George Bush knew there were no WMDs. He even quotes left-wing "Salon" as a source of information, but does not do the same with the right.

He says that there is a Right-wing Bias in the news. One instance will prove that wrong - CHRIS MATTHEWS - On election night coverage, he said he was thankful for the hurricane in NY (because it gave Obama the election). He claimed Obama as the Messiah and has a man crush on him. I could name dozens maybe hundreds of other instances of people who are bias toward the left in the media. I'll bet I could count on one hand how many conservative stories I have seen on the major networks.

The problem with a book like this is, if you criticize it, the author would respond that you are trying to bend the information in this book to fit your bias. Does the author not have his own bias, or is he the only one who can overcome his presuppositions. There is just as much bias in this book as Fox News or MSNBC.

It is worth reading, but definitely not non-partisan. Read it with discernment.
