

The Post-Truth Condition in Sudan: A Study of History and Critical Thinking

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ABSTRACT : This paper examines to analysis Sudan's "post-truth" reality, a deeply rooted issue stemming from a history of state-sponsored media manipulation combined with the rapid spread of digital misinformation. The study argues that successive regimes systematically controlled information, creating a societal vulnerability that modern digital platforms have exploited.

The 1989 coup, led by Omar al-Bashir, marked the start of a 30-year period of severe media repression, with the regime dismantling independent media and using state-controlled outlets to promote its ideology. The 2018-2019 revolution saw social media become a crucial tool for mobilization, bypassing censorship. However, this new digital landscape also became a "virtual propaganda warzone,". The paper concludes that overcoming these challenges is essential for Sudan's future. It suggests that a free and independent press, combined with fact-checking initiatives and education on responsible digital citizenship, is crucial for combating misinformation and restoring a shared, fact-based understanding of reality.

KEYWORDS - post-truth, politics, media, history, Sudan

I. INTRODUCTION

The post-truth era is an epoch where the boundary between truth and lies became blurred. The current generation increases their self-capabilities by lying. People tend to rule out the truth to hide self deficiencies and guilty feelings (Modreanu, 2017). Ralph Keyes, in The Post Truth Era, explained that youths tend to lie to improve their sense of self ability or to cover up mistakes to become famous (Keyes, 2004).

The term "post-truth" refers to more than just propaganda or lies. A situation where "facts are subservient to ideology and partisanship" and where "objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" are described by Lee McIntyre in his groundbreaking book Post-Truth (McIntyre, 2018).

Although some contend that it is new, academics such as Hannah Arendt offer an important historical perspective in her studies of totalitarian governments, showing that the creation of alternative realities and the political use of lying are not novel aspects of power but rather enduring characteristics (Arendt, 1972). Therefore, the current "post-truth" state can be viewed as a democratization and intensification of these earlier types of deceit, where information and disinformation are disseminated at a never-before-seen size and speed thanks to technology and social media. Post-truth can be studied in political communication and other derivative studies such as journalism and communication technology. In the perspective of journalism, post-truth politics engender fake news as the primary object (Hannan, 2018). Fake news can be overspread virally in quick time by creating a sense of false reality or propaganda. In this case, the communicators, categorised as the government, political parties,

individuals and political institutions, play a role in propagating the alternative facts that contribute to mass consumption.

Furthermore, a culture that is exposed to false information can spread it to others. Fake news is currently spreading widely and is used to denigrate or discredit organizations, parties, or people. The argument between subjectivity and objective facts is frequently sparked by fake news. Understanding post-truth politics through the lens of media as a communication technology (rather than media as content) helps one to comprehend how the advancement of communication technology facilitates the spread of false information. Regretfully, it is challenging to recognize and validate the data. Fake accounts have emerged as a substitute for hoax distribution with the advent of social media (Al Rodhan, 2017). Deception over facts is not a new phenomenon. In the post-colonialism era, Sudanese leaders are accustomed to manipulation. Manipulations were habitually propagated by Sudanese leaders to gain mass support. Government-owned national media is the legacy of colonialism. Therefore, Sudanese leaders manipulated facts and spread false truth through mass media easily. They acted on behalf of anti-colonialism and violence to construct society stating how imperialists have committed cruelty. On the other hand, private media - which did not support the partial facts by the government - were suppressed by the ruling party (Gumede, 2017).

Sudan continues to suffer from political and tribal conflicts. Political conflict has become the main target for social media platforms, used to spread information and incite the warring parties. In this situation, the public has come to doubt the truth of the information being circulated.

This paper will delve into the dynamics of post-truth politics occurring in Sudan. The choice of Sudan as a primary focus for this study is due to the high level of complexity that the post-truth era in Sudan has taken on because of political and economic instability. The paper will present evidence based on historical facts to analyze how the post-truth era unfolded, from the post-colonial period to modern times. It will also critically discuss how to deal with this phenomenon.

II. DEFINING "POST-TRUTH"

The concept of "post-truth" extends beyond mere falsehoods or propaganda. Lee McIntyre, in his seminal work post-Truth, defines it as a phenomenon where "facts are subservient to ideology and partisanship" and where "objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (McIntyre, 2018).

While some argue for its novelty, scholars like Hannah Arendt, in her analyses of totalitarian regimes, provide a crucial historical lens, demonstrating that the political utility of lying and the construction of alternative realities are not new, but rather persistent features of power (Arendt, 1972). The contemporary "post-truth" condition, therefore, can be understood as an intensification and democratization of these older forms of deception, where technological advancements enable unprecedented scale and speed in the dissemination of information and misinformation.

III. THE DYNAMICS OF THE POST -TRUTH ERA IN SUDAN

3.1 The History of Media Development in Sudan

Sudan's media history is a complicated, frequently tumultuous tale that is closely related to the political development of the nation. From its beginnings under foreign domination to its involvement in recent upheavals, Sudanese media has served as a tool for governmental control, a mirror reflecting social tensions, and occasionally a potent voice for change. From the press to radio, television, and now social media, this article explores how political pressures have influenced Sudanese media's development over significant historical junctures. It also looks at how public life has been influenced by this media. According to the research, Sudan's media landscape is marked by a continuous conflict between extended, oppressive periods of official control and restriction and

times of vibrant, uninhibited expression. This conflict has been a major factor in the spread of a post-truth culture in Sudan ([MENA , 2023](#)).

3.1.1 The Press's Birth: Colonialism and the Emergence of Nationalism (Early 20th Century–1956):

The origins of organized media in Sudan can be traced back to the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium. The first official newspaper, "The Sudan Government Gazette" or "Al-Ghazetta," was founded in 1899. This newspaper served as a means of disseminating government orders and laws, reflecting the colonial administration's need for communication and control. At its core, it was a tool of governance rather than a platform for public discourse, with the colonial government manipulating and disseminating information through the paper to control public opinion. ([Salih, M. 1965](#)).

The real beginnings of a fledgling Sudanese press emerged. Several newspapers, frequently run by Syrian or Lebanese businesspeople, followed the 1903 publication of the bilingual English/Arabic journal *Al-Sudan*. But it was trailblazing Sudanese authors like Hussein Sharif—who is frequently regarded as the founder of Sudanese journalism—who started to turn the press into a vehicle for national awareness. Established about 1918, his publication, *Hadarat al-Sudan* (Civilization of Sudan), became as a crucial forum for national ambitions ([Bashar, I. 1992](#)). The colonial authorities, sensing the press's growing influence in advocating for liberation, quickly moved to impose control. The Press Ordinance of 1930 gave the Governor-General sweeping powers to curtail and censor publications, a pattern of state suppression that would define Sudanese media for decades to come. Despite these restrictions, the press became a key battleground for competing political ideologies leading up to independence, with newspapers like *Al-Ray al-Amm* and *Al-Maydan* representing different national and ideological factions ([Galander, M.2001](#)).

Brief periods of democracy are interspersed with extended periods of military administration in Sudan's post-independence media history. The press flourished during the first democratic era (1956–1958), with numerous independent and party-affiliated journals relishing their newfound independence. This time of free discussion, though, was brief ([Galander, M. \(2021\)](#)).

General Ibrahim Abboud's first military takeover in 1958 quickly ended this independence of the press. Only a small number of "independent" newspapers were permitted to publish under strict surveillance after Abboud's dictatorship banned all political media. Newspapers frequently reflected the ideological and political conflicts that had resurfaced in the nation, and the press flourished during the ensuing popular uprising in 1964, which momentarily restored a democratic atmosphere ([Babiker, M. 1985](#)). Gaafar Nimeiri's military takeover in 1969 ended this democratic era once more. To guarantee that the media adhered to the government's philosophy, Nimeiri's government nationalized the main press, such as *Al-Ayyam* and *Al-Sahafa*, and set up a licensing committee. To "mobilise the people in line with the May Revolution" ([Ayalew, 2021](#)), state media, including the just launched television program in 1963, turned into a blatant propaganda instrument. A major step toward the full state capture of information was taken under Nimeiri's reign; his successor would refine this approach ([Galander, M., & Starosa, W. J. 1997](#)).

3.1.2 The Al-Bashir Era: State Control and Digital Resistance (1989 - 2019):

The 1989 coup, led by Omar al-Bashir, was the beginning of a 30-year period of severe media repression. The regime immediately banned all newspapers, dismissed more than a thousand journalists, and systematically dismantled the independent media sector. State-controlled media became a key tool for promoting the regime's Islamic ideology and suppressing dissent. The government also exploited the media and the emotions of the Sudanese people to entrench the ideology of Arabism and the Islamization of the state to remain in power, which was the main reason for all of Sudan's current problems ([Philip Obaji Jr. 2023](#)). Despite this repression, a new media front—the internet—arose in the late 2000s and early 2010s. As more people have access to the internet, blogs and online news sites have become important sources of information. But the authorities reacted quickly,

establishing a "Cyber-Jihadist Unit" to keep an eye on social media, harass dissidents, and disseminate false information (Mary, M., & Lina Y, 2022).

The 2018-2019 revolution marked a turning point. Social media platforms, especially Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp, became a vital tool for mobilization and information dissemination, effectively bypassing state censorship. This period demonstrated social media's ability to act as an alternative to state-controlled traditional media, fundamentally changing the relationship between the public and information. During this time, online channels and social media accounts affiliated with both sides of the conflict emerged. These channels manipulated information through systematic misinformation and the dissemination of mixed facts. The concept of "alternative facts" became prominent, which contributed to entrenching the idea of a "post-truth" era.

Following the ousting of Al-Bashir, Sudanese media experienced a brief but significant period of liberation. The transitional government's 2019 constitutional declaration included provisions guaranteeing freedom of expression and the press, leading to the reopening of many independent newspapers and the establishment of new media outlets. The systematic pre-publication censorship by the NISS was finally abolished, creating a new sense of hope for a truly free press. However, this fragile window of opportunity was short-lived. The political transformation in October 2021 immediately reversed many of these gains. Internet shutdowns became a regular tactic to suppress protests, and journalists were once again targeted with arrests and harassment (Paris: UNESCO, 2020). In this vacuum, social media has once again become the primary source of information for many Sudanese, but it has also become a "virtual propaganda warzone" (TIME P, 2023), flooded with disinformation, hate speech, and conflicting narratives from both sides. The current crisis has not only physically decimated the media infrastructure but also created a profound information crisis, making it nearly impossible for citizens to access accurate and reliable news (Hamid. K, 2025).

One of the most prominent deceptions used by the leaders of the rebel Rapid Support Forces (RSF) to justify their rebellion and appeal to the emotions of Sudanese society was their claim that "this is a war for democracy." The narrative later shifted to "it is a war for the people of the marginalized regions." In response, government leaders resorted to using terms like "a war of dignity" and "a war for national security." This was all aimed at gaining the support of the Sudanese people and the sympathy of the regional community (Philip Obaji Jr. 2023).

IV. The Role of Critical Thinking:

In the context of a post-truth world, critical thinking becomes a vital civic and cognitive ability. The objective analysis and assessment of data to decide is a component of critical thinking. It requires abilities including evaluating sources, spotting logical fallacies, separating opinion from reality, identifying prejudice, and placing information in a historical and social context (Facione, 1990). Beyond only being able to think critically, critical thinking also involves having a certain mindset, such as being open-minded, willing to question one's own beliefs, and dedicated to truth and reasoned discussion. The development of critical thinking is the main intellectual safeguard against the deterioration of reality and the swaying of public opinion in a society overflowing with opposing viewpoints.

Understanding the post-truth condition in Sudan necessitates a theoretical framework that acknowledges both continuity and rupture. The historical deployment of propaganda, censorship, and the state-sanctioned fabrication of reality under various Sudanese regimes laid a fertile ground for the current post-truth environment. This historical precedent created a deep-seated public skepticism towards official narratives yet simultaneously fostered an environment where the skills and resources for independent verification were systematically suppressed. The contemporary digital landscape, while offering new avenues for information, also leverages these historical vulnerabilities, accelerating the spread of emotionally charged, unverified content that resonates with pre-existing biases and distrust.

Sudan's modern history is replete with instances where information was strategically controlled and manipulated to serve political agendas, laying the groundwork for the current post-truth challenges, for example, these examples can be listed as follows:

4.1 Colonial and Post-Independence Propaganda.

To control the large and varied region, the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium (1899–1956) actively used divisive narratives. For example, the "Southern Policy," which promoted different administrative and educational systems, aimed to divide the Arabized and Islamized north of Sudan from the largely non-Muslim, non-Arab southern region (Woodward, 1991). This policy was reinforced through selective historical accounts and media portrayals that exacerbated ethnic and religious differences, creating a legacy of suspicion and animosity that continues to plague the nation. Following independence in 1956, successive Sudanese governments, both civilian and military, often inherited and repurposed these divisive tactics. State-controlled media frequently promoted a singular national identity that marginalized non-Arab and non-Muslim communities, effectively using propaganda to consolidate power and legitimize policies that often led to internal strife and civil war.

4.2 The Nimeiri and Bashir Regimes.

The military regimes of Gaafar Nimeiri (1969-1985) and particularly Omar al-Bashir (1989-2019) perfected the art of state-controlled media and pervasive propaganda. Under Bashir's Islamist regime, media outlets were tightly controlled, dissent was suppressed, and a strict censorship apparatus ensured that only official narratives permeated the public sphere. Television, radio, and state newspapers relentlessly promoted the regime's ideology, often portraying opposition as foreign-backed conspiracies or un-Islamic (Warburg, 2003). This systematic control of information aimed to forge a singular, official "truth," making it exceptionally difficult for citizens to access alternative viewpoints or critically evaluate government claims. This era profoundly shaped public perception and ingrained a deep-seated distrust in official channels, while simultaneously diminishing the capacity for independent information processing.

Perhaps one of the most insidious forms of disinformation in Sudan has been the weaponization of history to justify political violence and consolidate power. The conflict in Darfur, which began in 2003, offers a strong example. The Bashir regime, facing an insurgency, actively promoted narratives that racialized the conflict, depicting it as a clash between "Arabs tribes" and "Africans tribes" rather than a struggle over resources and political marginalization (Mamdani, 2007).

Government officials and state media promoted claims that non-Arab rebel groups were tools of foreign powers, which legitimized counter-insurgency campaigns. A similar approach is being used in the current war, where the rebellious Arab tribes are being framed as non-Sudanese. These misleading historical and ethnic narratives have helped obscure the regime's responsibility and rally support among segments of the population, demonstrating how selective historical interpretation can be a powerful tool in a post-truth environment (Jowett, 2007).

While historical precedents shaped Sudan's vulnerability to disinformation, the advent of digital media has profoundly altered the speed, scale, and nature of the post-truth condition. The rapid growth of internet penetration and social media usage (platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Telegram) in Sudan, particularly since the 2010s, has created an entirely new information landscape. These platforms, while providing unprecedented avenues for communication and mobilization (as seen during the 2019 revolution), have also become super-spreaders of unverified information, rumors, and hate speech. The ease with which content can be shared, often without critical scrutiny, allows false narratives to go viral, quickly overshadowing factual reporting and creating echo chambers where misinformation thrives (Youngman, T., & Patin, B. 2024).

The digital realm has introduced new actors and more sophisticated tactics into Sudan's information warfare. Beyond state-sponsored propaganda, political factions and various other non-state actors are now actively engage in online disinformation campaigns. These include the use of troll farms, bot networks, and coordinated inauthentic behavior to amplify specific narratives and manipulate public opinion ([Stanford Internet Observatory, 2023 reports on Sudan](#)).

Tactics like these often prey on existing societal divisions—whether ethnic, regional, or political—to create conflict, incite violence, and worsen divisions, especially during times of political instability or war. For instance, in the conflict that started in April 2023, both the Sudanese Armed Forces and rebel Rapid Support Forces have heavily used social media. They've spread conflicting information, depicted their rivals in a negative light, and gathered support. This has made it incredibly difficult for the average person to figure out what's really happening ([Human Rights Watch, 2023 reports on Sudan](#)). A key characteristic of digital post-truth in Sudan is its profound emotional and psychological impact. Disinformation campaigns are expertly designed to exploit deep-seated emotions like fear, anger, loyalty, and a sense of injustice. Narratives that confirm existing biases or connect with personal experiences are easily believed and shared, even if they're not true. This emotional connection makes false information incredibly hard to correct with facts. The non-stop stream of emotionally charged content, often created to provoke strong reactions, can overwhelm people. This leads to a feeling of powerlessness, which further reduces their ability and desire to think critically. ([Piksa, M., Noworyta, K. & others. 2024](#))

V. CONCLUSION

The history of media in Sudan is a powerful testament to its dual nature: a vital part of national identity and a constant target of political control. The state of post-truth in Sudan is a complex and deeply rooted reality, not just a contemporary deviation. It's a huge challenge that stems from the powerful combination of a historical legacy of state-sponsored media manipulation and the rapid, often unchecked, spread of information and misinformation in the digital age. Successive regimes have systematically established an environment of information control and suppressed critical inquiry, leaving a societal vulnerability that modern digital platforms have exploited and worsened. The result is a fragmented information system where objective facts struggle to compete with emotionally charged, and often divisive, narratives.

The study argues that a free, vibrant, and independent press is the cornerstone of combating misinformation in the post-truth era. International and local efforts should support Sudanese journalists and media organizations by providing training, resources, and protection from harassment. Investing in independent fact-checking initiatives is also crucial to quickly debunk false claims and provide verified information.

In addition, encouraging responsible digital citizenship includes educating users about the ethical implications of sharing information online, the dangers of echo chambers, and the importance of verifying content before publishing it. This can be achieved through civil society initiatives and targeted online campaigns. Despite the challenges, working to establish mechanisms that hold perpetrators of large-scale harmful disinformation campaigns—whether state or non-state actors—accountable can serve as a deterrent and contribute to a healthier information environment.

In conclusion, the researcher believes that Sudan's future and its ability to navigate its complex political transitions and build a stable, democratic society—depends heavily on its capacity to overcome the insidious challenges of the post-truth era. Restoring a shared understanding of reality, one grounded in facts and critical inquiry, is not just an academic exercise; it is an existential necessity for achieving peace, development, and justice in the country.

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