

2017 no. 27

# USO

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THE *POST-TRUTH* ERA:  
*reality vs. perception*

## DEVELOPING IDEAS

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### **José Antonio Zarzalejos**



He is a licensed attorney, graduate of Deusto University and journalist, as well as Editor-in-Chief of *El Correo of Bilbao*, Secretary-General of Vocento and Editor-in-Chief of ABC in Spain. He works in connection with LLORENTE & CUENCA as a permanent **external Adviser** and served as managing director of the firm in Spain. He received several awards, including the Mariano de Cavia award, the award presented by Federación de Asociaciones de la Prensa Española (Federation of Press Associations of Spain), the Godó de Periodismo and the Luca de Tena awards. [Spain].

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### **Anthony Gooch**



Took over as the **OECD's Director of Public Affairs and Communications** in 2008. He coordinated the process of reflection which culminated in the redefinition of the organization's mission. He previously worked in the European Commission for 13 years as a trade relations negotiator between the EU and Latin America and as a special consultant to Pascal Lamy. Prior to this, he headed the EC's Media and Public Diplomacy operations in the USA and the United Kingdom. Holds a postgraduate degree in Political Science and International Relations from Sciences Po Paris and an MA in Modern History from Cambridge University. [Spain – United Kingdom].

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### **Adalberto Palma**



Is the **Executive Director of The Aspen Institute Mexico**, a civil society organization that develops activities linked to education, leadership and public policy, by encouraging open, pluralist and non-partisan dialogue about important issues and matters for society. He is also the Chairman of the Board of the Mexican Financial Institutions Union, A.C. and Founding Partner of the companies APERTURE, S.C. and Proxy Gobernanza Corporativa, S.C. He has collaborated with Anáhuac University with its leadership programs and has taught as a professor in Corporate Governance. He participates as an independent adviser in non-profit corporations and organizations [Mexico].

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### **Victoria Prego**



Is the **President of the Madrid Press Association**. She is also the Assistant Director of the digital newspaper *El Independiente.com*. She has previously worked in television, radio and in print media. She worked at the daily newspaper *El Mundo* for 16 years as Assistant Director. She is considered an icon of Spanish journalism and the best rapporteur of the Spanish transition—a milestone that has served as the basis for two of her books: *Así se hizo la transición (How the Transition was Done)* and *Diccionario de la transición (Dictionary of the Transition)*. She has been the recipient of several awards: the Luca de Tena for her career achievements, the Antena de Oro for her endeavors in radio and the Victor de la Serna. [Spain].

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### **Armando Medeiros**



**Vice President of ABCPública** - The Brazilian Association for Public Communications, Master in Communications Science from the USP, and was Marketing and Communications Director at the Banco do Brasil and Communications Secretary for the President of the Republic. [www.conexapublica.com.br](http://www.conexapublica.com.br). [Brazil].

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# WHO *ARE* OUR *contributors?*

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## ***Fernando Berckemeyer***

**Editor of the daily newspaper *El Comercio*** since November 2014. He has also written for *Perú 221*, *El Nuevo Herald* (Miami), *El País*, *CNN en Español* and the magazine *Expansión*. He is a lawyer from PUCP and has a Master in Law from Harvard University. He holds a degree in Philosophical Studies from PUCP as well as a Masters in Ibero-American Literature from New York University. In addition, he was a Senior Associate at Estudio Olaechea. [Peru].

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## ***Manuel Cruz***

Is one of Spain's most renowned contemporary philosophers. **Chair of Philosophy at the University of Barcelona and spokesperson for the PSOE in the Education Commission of the Congress of Deputies.** He has also been a visiting professor at European and American universities. As author of thirty philosophical essays, he has been awarded the Premio Anagrama in 2005 (*Malas pasadas del pasado [Tricks from the Past]*), the Premio Espasa in 2010 (*Amo, luego existo [I Love, Therefore I Am]*), the Premio Internacional de Ensayo Jovellanos in 2012 (*Adiós, historia, adiós [Goodbye, History, Goodbye]*) and the Premio Unamuno in 2016 (*La flecha hace blanco en la historia [In History, The Arrow Hits the Target]*). He was president of the Izquierda Federalista (Spanish left party) in Catalonia, being one of the most reputable thinkers of *El País*, *El Confidencial* and other publications. [Spain].

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## ***Miguel García Sánchez***

Holds a PhD in Political Science from Pittsburgh University and a Masters in Political Studies from the Institute of Political Science and International Relations (IEPRI) of the National University of Colombia. He is currently an associate professor at the Department of Political Science at the University of the Andes and **Co-Director of the Democracy Observatory.** He has published a range of articles and book chapters, given a multitude of lectures and participated in research projects about electoral studies and public opinion, relating to the impact of social contexts on individual political behavior, and the formation and change in public opinion. [Colombia].

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## ***Albert Medrán***

**Communications Director of *Change.org* in Spain.** Specialized in corporate, technological, digital and political communications, he has been a member of the digital team for Hillary Clinton's campaign. He began his career at LLORENTE & CUENCA, where he was an online communications consultant. He regularly collaborates as a political analyst in media organizations such as *La Sexta* or *Ràdio Flaixbac*. [Spain].

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### **Eduardo A. Quirós**



**President of Grupo Editorial El Siglo & La Estrella de Panamá.** He graduated in Law and Political Science from Panama University. He was Deputy Finance Minister of the Economy and Finance Ministry, member of the National Economic Advisory Board, Alternate Governor of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Minister of Public Works and a former member of the Panama Canal Authority management board. He worked as a professor of Constitutional Law at the Latin University of Panama, for eight years. is a member of the International Business School ADEN-Panama advisory board and Regional Vice President of the Inter-American Press Association (SIP/IAPA) for Panama from 2011. [Panama].

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### **Carlos de Angelis**



**Sociologist, political analyst and consultant.** Professor in Sociology of Public Opinion at the Social Sciences Faculty at Buenos Aires University. Specialist in applied statistics to Social Sciences. Researcher in areas related to public opinion, press, social and cultural environment. Director of the Public Opinion and Social Studies Center of Buenos Aires University. Author of *Radiografía del voto porteño [An X-Ray of the Buenos Aires Vote]* (Atuel, 2010) and co-author of *Investigación social para el análisis de la Opinión Pública y el comportamiento electoral [Social Research to Analyze Public Opinion and Electoral Behavior]* (Editorial Antigua, 2013). Columnist in *Diario Perfil* and a collaborator of newspapers in various parts of the world. [Argentina].

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### **Carolina Pina**



Law Graduate from University of Alicante, has a Masters in International Law and Comparative Law from the City of London Polytechnic and a postgraduate degree in Public Affairs Management from the ICADE. She has also obtained the title of Industrial Property Agent. Since 1997, she has worked in the **Industrial and Intellectual Property Department at Garrigues**, of which she became a **partner** in 2005. She has been awarded the International Prix Monique by the UIA (Union International des Avocats) in 2009. Is the author of many books about media and sports law. Carolina has been recommended in the Legal 500 ranking and Chambers of Intellectual Property, Brands, Sports, Information Technology and Media. [Spain].

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### **Rosa Townsend**



Political and research journalist in the United States. She has been editor and reporter at *The Miami Herald /El Nuevo Herald* since 1988, and was part of the team that won the Pulitzer Prize in 1993. A decade later, she worked as a U.S. correspondent for *El País*, covering different stories ranging from the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and even Guantánamo. Furthermore, she has covered the American presidential elections for twenty years. Throughout her career, she has written for other news organizations such as *Yahoo News*, *BBC*, *Agence France-Presse* and *The Sun Sentinel*. She returned to **The Herald** four years ago as a **columnist**, an activity which she reconciles with being a CNN political presenter and other television stations. [USA - Spain].

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### ***Iván Weissman***



**Founder and Director of *El Mostrador Mercados***, Chile's first electronic daily business newspaper, as well as Subdirector for the electronic daily *El Mostrador*, launched on March 1, 2000. It is the first exclusively digital Chilean newspaper. Iván was Managing Editor for Europe, Africa and the Middle East for the Bloomberg news service, as well as being the Head of Television in the UK for the same company. He had previously performed the role of Senior Producer for CNBC Business news. He holds a BA in Economics and Political Science from the University of California in Berkeley, as well as a Masters from the American University. [Chile].

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### ***Francisco Rosales***



**Founding Partner and President of Corral Rosales Carmigniani Pérez**. Doctorate in law and lawyer from the Catholic Pontifical University of Ecuador. Extensive experience in legal consultancy for companies and businesses. He was Minister for Industry, Commerce and Integration, as well as a board member and president for banks and several industrial and commercial companies in Quito, Guayaquil and Cuenca. He performed the role of feature writer for 36 years, in newspapers such as *El Comercio* and *Hoy*, in Quito, commenting on political, economic and international affairs. [Ecuador].

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### ***Myriam Redondo***



**Journalist and doctor** with a thesis on "the Internet as an information source in international journalism". He is a Associate Professor in Social Media and Cyber Journalism at Camilo José Cela University, Associate Professor in Political Science and International Relations at the Complutense University of Madrid and a member of the editorial committee of *La Revista de ACOP* (Association of Political Communication). [Spain].

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### ***Arturo Pinedo***



**Partner and Managing Director of LLORENTE & CUENCA Spain and Portugal**. With more than 27 years experience as a consultant, he is an expert in crisis and corporate communications. He has managed communications for national and international companies and organizations and advised senior management, both in the design of comprehensive communications strategies as well as in risk management. Graduate in Journalism and with a Masters in Marketing & Communication, he was Managing Director of Issues Consultores de Comunicación and Director of Agencia A. He also worked for seven years as a journalist in Cadena Ser's news service. He is currently Vice President of Dircom (Association of Communications Executives). [Spain].

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### ***Iván Pino***



(A Coruña - Spain 1974). He is **Senior Director of the Digital Area at LLORENTE & CUENCA**. Journalist, graduated in Information Sciences from the Complutense University of Madrid. Holds a Masters in Corporate Sustainability and Responsibility from the UNED-UJI, over twenty years of experience in corporate communications and reputation and is a digital communications specialist. Co-author of *Claves del nuevo Marketing (The key to New Marketing)*. *Cómo sacarle partido a la Web 2.0 (How to get the most out of Web 2.0)* (2009, *Gestión 2000*). Conference speaker and professor of the Masters in Corporate and Institutional Communications of the Carlos III University and Unidad Editorial. [Spain].

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# THE *POST-TRUTH* ERA: *reality vs. perception*





José Antonio Llorente

Founding Partner and Chairman of LLORENTE & CUENCA / USA – Spain

“*New ways of relating to public opinion emerge and alternative media become established*”

In 2016, “post-truth” was named word of the year by the Oxford Dictionary. This should come as no surprise to many people, with 2016 being a year of controversial surprises and unexpected events. The political and social panorama during the next few months will be marked by this post-truth climate, where objectivity and rationality give way to emotions, or to a willingness to uphold beliefs even though the facts show otherwise.

In Europe, there were setbacks that few predicted, such as the British population’s decision to leave the European Union, or Italy’s ‘no’ in the referendum on constitutional reform proposed by Matteo Renzi. And it is also worth mentioning the growing support for political parties like France’s National Front, led by Marine Le Pen, or Holland’s Liberal party (PVV) led by Geert Wilders.

On the other side of the ocean, there’s the fake populist rhetoric, or surprises such as the Colombian rejection in the FARC peace deal referendum, or Trump’s controversial victory in the U.S. elections.

All of these milestones have a common denominator: personal beliefs—which for many are irrefutable—have gained strength in the face of logic and facts, and have become established as assumptions shared by society, causing bewilderment in public opinion.

In this climate, new ways of relating to public opinion emerge and alternative media become established. Traditional journalism methods are losing ground with the emergence of new communication channels like personal blogs, YouTube, instant messaging channels such as WhatsApp, Telegram and Facebook Chat, or social media networks like Snapchat or Twitter. A simple tweet can now mobilize the masses and bring about results which would have been inconceivable a few years ago.

The spread of fake news leads to lies becoming commonplace and hence, the relativization of truth. The value or credibility of the media has somewhat faded in comparison to personal opinions. The facts themselves take second place, while “how” a story is told takes precedence over “what”. It is therefore not about what has happened, but rather about listening, seeing and reading the version of facts which more closely fits with each person’s ideology.

In this edition of UNO, we take a look at this uncertain scenario and what the role of the media should be in connecting with audiences.







# COMMUNICATION, **JOURNALISM** AND **fact-checking**



José Antonio Zarzalejos

Journalist, former Director of ABC and *El Correo* / Spain

Since August 2016, before the start of the U.S. presidential election debates and up to the eve of voting day, checking platforms were busy performing what is referred to as “fact-checking”. They counted up to 217 untruths in the candidates’ speeches and statements—79 percent of which were attributed to Donald Trump and 21 percent to Hillary Clinton. Univision News’ Data Unit in Miami determined that, a week prior to the presidential election, for every lie told by the Democrat candidate, the Republican candidate told four. Journalist Borja Echeverría systematically and comprehensively provides the statistics in the latest edition (January 2017) of *Cuadernos de Periodistas*. He is currently the Managing Editor of Univision Digital News, which is based in Florida. Borja has become a reference in the sector of communication and journalism by calling for a relatively new activity to fight against fake news, alternative truths and hoaxes. All of these concepts take refuge under the semantic umbrella of post-truth. However, fact-checking would be the antidote against the word—better described as a concept—that the Oxford Dictionary has considered as 2016’s newest and most utilized expression.

Post-truth is not synonymous with lying; however, it describes a situation where, when creating or manipulating public opinion, the objective facts have

“*Univision News’ Data Unit in Miami, determined that, a week prior to the presidential election, for every lie told by the Democrat candidate, the Republican candidate told four*

less influence than emotions and personal beliefs. Post-truth consists in the relativization of truth, in the objectivity of data becoming commonplace and in the supremacy of emotional speeches. It is far from being a new phenomenon. Ralph Keyes had already written about it in 2004 in the book, *Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life*; as well as by Luis Meyer

in *Ethic* magazine in February this year (*Don’t call it post-truth, call it post-journalism*). His colleague Eric Alterman conclusively defined it as a “political weapon of disinformation”. This author quotes Noam Chomsky who, avoiding the term post-truth, developed a famous list: *10 Manipulation Strategies*. This includes emotionally softening message techniques, aiming at short-circuiting citizens’ critical and analytical senses.

Confusion over reality, management of conspiracy tactics to arouse suspicion or hostility in social groups, victimhood and political mythomania, are all instruments of mass persuasion that date back to ancient times. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they caused the worst disasters—two of them being genuine catastrophes in human history: Nazism and Stalinism.

*The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*—a fable against Judaism written during the last era of Tsarist Russia—became one of the most groundless levers used

by Hitler in the interwar period to introduce anti-Semitism in Germany and other European countries. We are still paying for it. In reality, all political movements that discredit the conventional ruling classes and liberal representative democracies, draw upon elements that are more sentimental than rational. Not only do they exploit unrest, but they also decisively contribute to creating and magnifying it. Populism nowadays—as it always has—plays more to emotional persuasions than to the criteria of rationality and truth. Rigor and populism are contradictory concepts.

Nevertheless, there has been a confluence of circumstances which has given rise to widespread concern: the truth does not triumph and depictions that are not compatible with it—or do not even come close—do triumph and, furthermore, go unpunished. As the writer Adolfo Muñoz affirms (*El País*, February 2, 2017) “political hoaxes triumph because they have the necessary qualities to do so, turning into what Richard Dawkins refers to as “memes.” A meme is a unit of viral knowledge devised by an author who disseminates it regardless of whether it is true or not. We live in a universe of memes and we lack the criteria to distinguish true from false, certain from probable, definite from ambiguous. And we ask ourselves increasingly unsettling questions: is Photoshop, for example, a post-truth technique? Is decontextualization a falsifying device? Can an insult be considered as a mere description? Are cinema’s special effects, for example, or virtual reality experiences, an attack on the integrity of truth as we have understood it up to now?

These are relevant questions because populist trends require that power be obtained as an end in itself, regardless of the methods used. The British have decided to leave the European Union believing—or accepting as true—affirmations that are false or probable at best. Similarly, Americans have given credence to gross untruths because with them, they have challenged the power of the ruling classes, bringing them down. This theory is also by Luis Meyer.

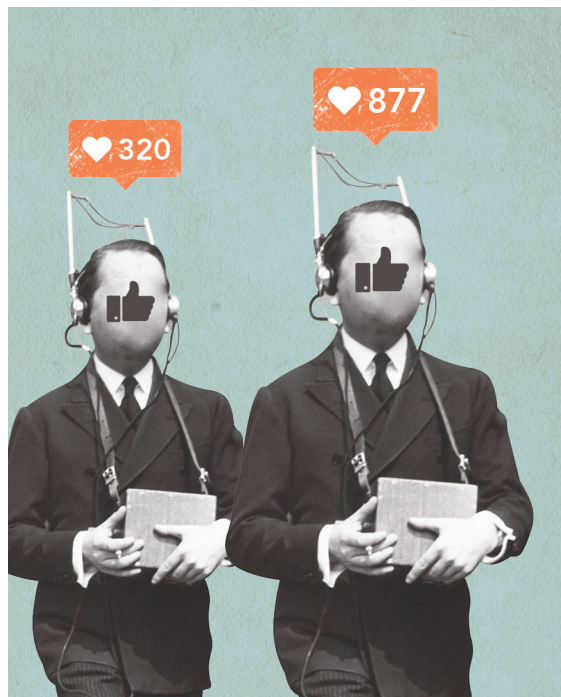
“*Post-truth consists in the relativization of truth, in the objectivity of data becoming commonplace and in the supremacy of emotional speeches*”

Indeed, in politics, lies or half-truths are resources that have always been handled with aplomb. But now, the response to the political and economic status quo has been to introduce sentimental and emotional elements, with their false messages carrying a sweeping force. A master of these new techniques is the American Steve Bannon—one-time director of the news portal *Breitbart News*, spokesperson for the All-Right extremists. Bannon inspired the rupture in the conventional paradigm that reigned in American politics—in Western politics. He has been building a huge bubble of tension and hostility, creating the energy needed by a politician such as Trump to become completely unpredictable. This is the reason why the public culture of the most developed democracies’ political systems was turned on its head.

Post-truth is not just a practice that develops in the political arena. It also dangerously and arbitrarily develops in advertising and in the corporate environment. Communications of large companies—especially in strategic sectors such as energy and finance—should review their protocols of action. Their communications should not only involve—neither chiefly, perhaps—transmitting knowledge, but also dissipating hoaxes, alternative versions, rumors and, sometimes, blatant untruths. Politics and business—in reality, the entire society—have lost a defense mechanism against post-truth: journalistic intermediation. Few reflections are more appropriate in this respect than that written by Katharine Viner, published in *The Guardian* on July 12, 2016, entitled “*What is the truth? Reflections on the state of journalism today.*” This writer maintains that the transition

from paper to digital media has never been solely a technological question. True: it has essentially been a question of a loss of professional ethics, the abandonment of truth-telling, the acceptance of lies and rumors into the information circuit. Technology, with the obliteration of journalistic intermediation, has demoralized the journalistic narrative and has blurred the attributes that once gave it the role of social supervision as a barometer of truth.

From now on, new communications and new journalism will focus not so much on storytelling, but rather on verification. This is because the former can already be done by citizens using the extensive choice of technology available, whereas the latter cannot be done by them. Systematic fact-checking will be done using some of the many platforms that already exist (tenfold in the United States). Borja Echevarría reminds us that one of the most recent Gallup polls showed daunting figures for the mass media: only 32 percent of those interviewed still trust them. The only way to envisage future journalism and corporate communications consists in checking data and the premise of statements, and in informative proactivity to detect untruths, to destroy them and to deprive them from gaining any standing. In other words, journalism on the one hand, and ethical communication on the other hand, should go back and rescue the true story, restrain sentimentalism, subdue and contour the worst instincts and proclaim the superiority of intelligence over viscerality. This is what fact-checking is all about.



“*Post-truth is not just a practice that develops in the political arena. It also dangerously and arbitrarily develops in advertising and in the corporate environment*”



# IN *PURSUIT* OF THE *truth*



Anthony Gooch

Director of Public Affairs and Communications, OECD / Spain-United Kingdom

Long ago, six curious Hindu wise men gathered to discover what an elephant was like. They were blind, and decided to search for this pachyderm to dispel any of their doubts. After a long walk, they found an enormous and tame elephant. Each wise man approached the animal eager to touch it. The first caressed its trunk, and immediately compared it to a snake. The second touched its tusks which made him think of a spear. The third rested his hand on the hairy tail, believing it to be a brush. And so forth until six different descriptions of the same animal were given. They all believed that they knew an elephant's true appearance but without managing to come to an agreement. By changing positions, they realized that there was more than one way of looking at the animal.

The moral of this short story is to illustrate and remind us that the notion of truth and the search for it are complex and inherent to human beings. In fact, truth requires the analysis of objective facts and a discussion of the evidence—requirements that bestow it with great value which professionals in any field have a duty to preserve.

In recent months, numerous media outlets have been debating over the growing devaluation of truth with reference to politicians' narratives,

*“Seizing the opportunity that digitalization offers us to channel our collective intelligence, thus avoiding the drift towards collective stupidity*

influencers and media outlets that play to sensationalism and the convenience of selective information. This phenomenon, baptized as post-truth, has been defined by the *Oxford Dictionary* as a circumstance where the objective facts have less influence in public opinion than emotions and personal beliefs. It was declared Word of

the Year for 2016. Consequently, concepts such as “alternative facts” and “fake news” have burst onto the scene in recent weeks.

It is worth remembering that the commonplaceness of lies is not an innovation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Nevertheless, what is new is the deep entrenchment of post-truth in the information society and its effervescence in the context of political disaffection and disillusionment, in light of globalization which, in some cases, is out of control.

Today, access to informative content, as well as its immediacy and volume, has no precedents. The impact of digitalization in the world of communications has brought about a revolution in a way that people can produce information themselves. One significant example of this democratization of the media is: citizen journalism. Similarly, it has changed the way they consume and assimilate it. According to a study by the

PEW Research Center in 2016, 62 percent of the American population would use social media to keep themselves up to date. The paradox is that, due to the incessant flow of news, we could become even more misinformed than before.

In last September's issue of *The Economist*, the front cover "Art of the Lie" was dedicated to post-truth. Among the pages of this edition, it is worth highlighting a graph<sup>1</sup> showing that Facebook content with false information was shared the same number of times as true information. This phenomenon becomes even more alarming when we consider the influence of algorithms and financial pressures. Algorithms generate virtual ecosystems that reflect like-minded opinions, and in many cases encourage people to create their own truth. Meanwhile, the competition to rank at the top of search engine results rewards the number of likes. As Katherine Viner, Editor-in-Chief of *The Guardian*, points out, in her article "How technology disrupted the truth" virality takes precedence over quality and ethics<sup>2</sup>.

The so-called post-truth permeated the presidential elections in the United States and even prior to that, the referendum in the United Kingdom. The OECD experienced the latter first hand.

We presented a report<sup>3</sup> at the London School of Economics, months before the vote, about the possible economic consequences of Brexit for the British economy. What happened? Sensationalist press distorted our statistics to strengthen their position over a restrictive migration policy and the need to "get the country back". The Leave campaign pointed out that the "general population" no longer trusted the "experts", including those of the OECD and those that sought to discredit them, alleging that the said organization was funded by the EU.

These are important lessons learned from this experience.

The first is that self-criticism is essential. We asked ourselves if it was a mistake to produce an in-depth report full of economic data, against a backdrop of emotional appeals and hopeful (but illusory) promises. We were preaching to the converted by going to London instead of taking our message to the most skeptical of citizens outside of the great metropolis. We didn't emphasize enough the positive advances in the quality of life of British citizens, in relation to the country's membership in the EU. The time has come to develop objective data that is more relevant to societies which have witnessed growing inequality and lack of opportunities for some time now. A combination of invoking the soul and people's logic.

The second lesson is that we must dedicate more time to the frequently forgotten side of communication—listening. To be interested in what others perceive, transmitting but also receiving. Civic technology and digital platforms such as the OECD's<sup>4</sup> Better Life Index allow us to better understand the people's well-being priorities through participation and civic engagement. To be more inclusive, in order to become more relevant, and in this way, to connect our work with people's aspirations and concerns.

In summary, in the face of excessive media noise and lack of trust, we can learn to be better guides and allow ourselves to be guided. Seizing the opportunity that digitalization offers us to channel our collective intelligence, thus avoiding the drift towards collective stupidity.

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<sup>1</sup> Art of the Lie, *The Economist*. September 10, 2016.

<http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21706498-dishonesty-politics-nothing-new-manner-which-some-politicians-now-lie-and>

<sup>2</sup> How technology disrupted the truth, *The Guardian*, July 12, 2016.

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/jul/12/how-technology-disrupted-the-truth>

<sup>3</sup> Report: *The Economic Consequences of Brexit. A Taxing Decision*. OECD, April 28, 2016. [http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/economics/the-economic-consequences-of-brexit\\_5jm0lsvdkf6k-en](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/economics/the-economic-consequences-of-brexit_5jm0lsvdkf6k-en)

<sup>4</sup> *Better Life Index*, OECD. <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/es>







# WHEN THE *FUTURE* CATCHES UP WITH US, THE PAST WILL NO LONGER BE VALID. *Descartes* COULD BE A YARDSTICK<sup>1</sup>



Adalberto Palma

Executive Director of The Aspen Institute Mexico / Mexico

Let's be truthful: before journalism in the post-truth era came along, not everything that came from the press was "the absolute truth". And it couldn't have been any other way, because if we only abide by the definition offered by the Royal Spanish Academy, journalism—in addition to being a profession—"consists in the collection and written, oral, visual or graphic processing of information in any of its forms and varieties." They should have added that this activity is carried out by human beings who are susceptible to having different ideas about reality (not "alternative facts") despite exerting the objectivity to which its protagonists are obliged.

But make no mistake and neither should we leave any room for distortion. A different perception of reality is not in any way the same as the intentional lies that we witness today—repeatedly—from the highest level of government of the most powerful country in the world. And these outright lies, later explained as disguised hidden truths, are rigged with traps that seek to discredit the formal press and avoid—unsuccessfully—being exposed time and again. Examples abound.

An attempt at distorting confrontation between historical, legal and official truths was recently noted in Mexico, in the case of 43 students who disappeared in Iguala. This was when, on

**“***We ask ourselves then, what the communicator's ideal method and role in a digital era of high technological consumption should be today*

January 27, 2015, the former Head of the Attorney General of the Republic referred to the "historic truth" as a way of relinquishing his responsibility in the matter.

Sometime previously, the role of spokesman to former President Vincent Fox could have been considered as a predecessor of post-truth to a certain extent. But by no means is it comparable to any attempt to induce a blatant lie, just to save face during exposure before the press. In his book *La Comunicación Presidencial en México* (Presidential Communication in Mexico)<sup>2</sup>, the author—remembered for his phrase "what the President meant to say"—explains that when former President Fox referred to, for example, "two-legged launderers" or "jobs that even blacks don't want" in the United States, he did so deliberately with a communication strategy in mind. These were—in my opinion—, a basic, colloquial or simplistic form of expression far from wanting to confuse society with an unrealistic assertion.

"Radio is closer to the people" was the slogan on a radio campaign when television began its inevitable boom. What it alluded to was that listeners in the

<sup>1</sup> Editorial support by César Rojas Belaunde.

<sup>2</sup> *La Comunicación Presidencial en México*, Institute of Social Research and the Coahuila government.

countryside or workers who did not have time to watch television could always count on the radio or their pocket transistors for their daily news. The technological advances that have developed information signs from paper to electromagnetic waves, have gone hand in hand with a structural evolution of information itself. It has gone from hard facts to the search for emotional empathy with the recipient of the information.

Stating the facts today is not enough. It is now essential to involve the recipient in these facts, so that they display their “endorsement” of them with a simple click and are able, like never before, to spread an opinion or new piece of information. This will find its way back to the market—whether true or false—to compete with information created by journalists.

It should be added that requirements for transmission have become extremely daunting. This is because of the required standard of quality in the shortest possible time—to get ahead of the competition and obtain the largest number of responses before any other similar transmission.

Thus, journalism has an infinite number of competitors starting with each other, and also with the technology itself, which helps it to transmit and deliver to the recipients of the information. This, in fact, could achieve greater resonance than the most meticulous of formal media outlets.

We ask ourselves then, what the communicator’s ideal method and role in a digital era of high technological consumption should be today. There is only a short time span for analysis, yet massive competition in the production of news information, with immediacy being a benchmark.

Resorting to philosophy and historical references may not be in vain. In his *12 Rules for the Direction of the Mind*<sup>3</sup>, René Descartes could be a useful reference—if not essential—in all journalistic writings. This is to avoid losing oneself in the inevitable and endless



technological twists and turns and the emotional requirements of today’s readers.

In his first rule, he indicates that the objective of research is to provide the mind with a steady direction that allows it to form true and sound judgments about the subject under analysis. In the second rule, he suggests that we strictly adhere to areas in which we are competent enough to obtain “certain and evident cognition”, without the shadow of a doubt, with respect to the matters in question. The third rule recommends that we concentrate our efforts on areas in which we can offer opinions with clarity, justification and conviction in the same way that one acquires scientific knowledge.

<sup>3</sup> *12 Rules for the Direction of the Mind* by René Descartes.  
<http://www.cs.buap.mx/~agarcas/descargas/ReglasDM>



The fourth and fifth rules indicate the need for an appropriate method to research the facts of the matter. This starts with analyzing—moving from simple to complex—and always (rule number six) reducing complicated concepts to simple ones. And then, this is followed by researching them in their prospective order, to later methodically account for and number them according to rule number seven.

The eighth rule suggests not overlooking something we don't understand, but to pause at this point until fully comprehending its meaning to avoid undertaking superfluous tasks. And the ninth rule suggests methodically working from the least important and easiest until we have acquired the habit of distinctly and clearly discerning the truth through intuition.

To become more astute, according to rule number 10, one needs to exercise what has been done by others and explore the arts and crafts which reinforce our own skills. Then, according to the next rule, with the aim of fine-tuning our knowledge, it is worth going through the conclusions one by one, as well as all together, going so far as to conceive of several of them at a time using different approaches, if possible.

Lastly, rule number twelve recommends that we should employ all the benefits of comprehension, imagination, the senses and memory to gain intuition of simple propositions. These can also be used to establish an appropriate link between the things we already know and those we are searching for, in order to better identify them.

“With the aim of fine-tuning our knowledge, it is worth going through the conclusions one by one, as well as all together

Descartes became familiar with print in its early stages, but not so with radio, television or the digital era through which current information is continually transmitted. His rules, nevertheless, transcend technological advances because he was right in assuming that man himself has to continue improving regardless of his role in the communications spectrum, as a broadcaster or as a recipient.

It is time to draw on the past despite the challenges that the present has shaped, and that the future of communications does not enable us to foresee how or where emotions and truth will meet.

# Informative BUBBLES



Victoria Prego

President of the Madrid Press Association / Spain

As if journalism didn't already have enough threats to face, information now faces a growing phenomenon that has been piously named with an obvious euphemism: post-truth. Now is the time when journalism is setting off down an unknown path, which has been marked by constantly changing new technologies in a globalized world and in communications whose limits—if they exist—remain to be seen.

We are talking about lies, regardless of how many Anglo-Saxon terms we use to describe what in Spanish has a multitude of exact equivalents that summarize the word used at the beginning.

The multiplication of fake news is a fact that seriously threatens the health of democratic systems as we have known them up to now, in the face of which honest information professionals feel helpless. And in truth, they are helpless against it. Because the undisputed truth is that traditional media has lost credibility with the majority of the population. The trust they once placed in the media has been substituted by a practically boundless faith in the information they receive through social media.

*“There is no exposure to ideas that differ from their own standpoint regarding any general interest subject. This is because these ideas do not appear in their bubble, or if they do, it is to discredit them*

Yet citizens' enthusiastic and surrendered bias towards the new way of communicating and receiving information, is understandable because it does away with the middlemen who, up until now, were newspapers or televisions. Citizens are now master and authors of their own informative environment.

But it is precisely here that the problem lies; Internet services such as Facebook send each person information that suits their needs and interests, in a way that the recipient lives permanently enclosed within a vacuum or in a bubble that they don't need to—or in reality are not able to—get out of. In this environment, all information and communications received are targeted to reinforce their passions, interests and opinions. There is no exposure to ideas that differ from their own standpoint regarding any general interest subject. This is because these ideas do not appear in their bubble, or if they do, it is to discredit them.

In this way, citizens become part of compact and impenetrable groups.

This in itself is serious in the way that it produces an atomization of infinite or self-referential, monolithic bubbles where there is no place for divergent opinions.

In this atomized world that is self-strengthening, it is actually a huge weakness because it is the perfect breeding ground for spreading fake news—nowadays called post-truth. This is because there is no need to confront the reality which would reveal the lie because the person receiving fake news accepts it to be true as it reinforces their own opinions and beliefs, and they resend it to those who share their own bubble. This means that there are billions of fake news items circulating at breakneck speed, galloping through social networks, without even the slightest possibility that this duplicity can be exposed. And even though the phenomenon is as old as the digital platforms themselves, it was only during the course of the U.S. presidential campaign and Donald Trump’s victory, when the problem came to the forefront of consciousness of part of Western public opinion.

It is true that projects to check facts have been successfully carried out in recent years—referred to as fact-checking in the Anglo-Saxon world. But as long as this method is not incorporated into large companies such as Google or Facebook, the fight against the viralization of lies and half-truths will have an almost irrelevant social effect. This is because the activity of fact-checking, carried out by dedicated journalists, is still confined to very small consumption levels—primarily the elite—and not the general public.

*“This is because the activity of fact-checking, carried out by dedicated journalists, is still confined to very small consumption levels—primarily the elite—and not the general public*

Inasmuch as the population is not massively engaged in the fight against biased manipulation, based on showing how certain false information items have the main objective of coercing citizens towards specific directions or standpoints, journalism will be seriously under threat. And as long as journalism is threatened, so too will be the health of Western democracies. Or rather, the free world.





# THE DANGER OF *INDIFFERENCE* TO *truth*



Armando Medeiros

Vice President of ABC Pública / Brazil

Emotional appeals that activate personal beliefs are more efficient at winning over public opinion than objective facts. This is the meaning of post-truth, Word of the Year for 2016, according to the Oxford Dictionary.

But what really is new about this definition?

The focus on people absorbing content through a memorization process and selective perception, according to their set of beliefs, was present in the communications theory that, in the last century, sought to unravel the paths to persuasion.

Psychoanalysis shows the power of subjective and subconscious elements in individual actions. Misunderstandings are also frequent in the scientific paths of political, economic and social theory and the confrontation with social reality that is full of re-readings and reinterpretations of the certainties produced by objective knowledge.

In Brazilian politics, there is another phrase whose authorship is attributed to several *raposas mineiras* (astute politicians from Minas Gerais, including Antônio Carlos de Andrade, José Maria Alkmin, Gustavo Capanema, Tancredo Neves) that says: “in politics, the version is more important than the facts”.

“*The concept of post-truth was invigorated by the information explosion generated or reproduced on the Web*”

While it is not an entirely new discovery, the concept of post-truth was invigorated by the information explosion generated or reproduced on the Web. The phenomenon produces disturbing warning signs. On social media, the

absence of an institution to establish filters, separate the wheat from the chaff and put different views into perspective, creates an environment conducive to not believing in anything anyone says and holding onto your own convictions.

New technologies connect family, friends, discussion groups. In this terrain—where Facebook and WhatsApp are the main vectors—we discover beliefs, thoughts and values that reference people and communities, whether near or far, even distant relatives. We establish complicity and memes confer humor and irreverence. But surprises and disappointments develop in this space. Heated and bitter discussions become everyday events. Ties are broken. Only patient spirits imbued with higher tolerance levels manage to delight in it. The irreversible context of post-truth infringes on a space which could promote sociability and dialogue.

In the post-truth era, filled with major developments such as Great Britain’s exit from the European Union and the contentious American electoral campaign, it is clear that warriors of “truth” and warriors of



“*The fundamental challenge lies in journalism’s capability to weaken those who fabricate biased half-truths or total falsehoods*”

“lies”—both switching positions—prosper in highly flammable and radicalized situations. The dispute between those that shout “it is a coup” and those that shout “it is constitutional” in Brazil, during the fall of Dilma Rousseff, gives shape to the idea that the world revolves around passions and beliefs; where truth is no longer needed.

The phenomenon raises the question of how journalism—or the press—coexists in these new, extremely polarized times, as well as being characterized by fragmented and dispersed audiences.

The Brazilian scenario prior to Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment and Trump’s path to becoming President of the United States reveal different realities in which controversial post-truth involved official sources and the press.

In Brazil, during the impeachment process (a phenomenon clearly riddled with alternative truths), promises for a bright future—especially for the economy—brandished by anti-Dilmistas, were endorsed with a low degree of debate by large part of the Brazilian press. The president at the time contributed little to this war of narratives and her most resounding reactions in the field of communications took place only in the month of March 2016, three months after the order for impeachment was received in the Chamber of Deputies.

While the Brazilian president not so much as wagged a finger at the press, the opposite stance has been adopted by the current American president.

In the United States, the candidate and now occupant of the White House fired harsh criticism about the press’s behavior in order to support his narrative. Trump, who is known for spreading extremist approaches and beliefs, makes extensive use of social media networks, where fact-checking criteria is slack. It is precisely across social networks that the president and his hard-core associates shout to the four winds what he himself considers “truth”—“the press are liars.” Tensions have built to the point where Trump himself declares journalists as the most dishonest species on the planet.

In both cases, the critical argument is about who has the power to establish the “truth” in the post-truth era. This is a reality in which news broadcasters—in the context of examining, checking, listening to different voices—are no longer easily identified.

In the new chapters of the communicative equation, the State, press and citizens are mainly characterized by the appropriation of the digital buzz of social media and public brawls over the “truth” (arguments with the press).

For journalism, post-truth represents both threat and opportunity.

In the first instance, journalism is weakened in this scenario where everyone is a content creator and whose obligation is to immediately share it on social media. Few people normally read an entire post. They rarely check the source’s credibility, question its content or raise questions. The most important thing is to click and spread headlines that, as a general rule, contain the guilty parties, create scapegoats and offer shallow solutions for complex matters.

And then afterwards, with so much conflicting information, one can only hope that a strict verification of the report's inconsistencies will take place. The trivial exercise of checking the authenticity of information—in the context of journalism as a social good and public service—could restore journalism's role as a trustworthy source of information. This is so in a model adapted to the new era, in which the reproduction and emission facts would be under the auspices of the new networks. The fundamental challenge lies in journalism's capability to weaken those who fabricate biased half-truths or total falsehoods.

For journalism to be able to regain its benchmark as the circumstantial truth, investment, innovation and structured teams are needed. The current situation is one of an industry in a financial and identity crisis, whose cost-cutting measures weaken hopes that a force of new post-truth warriors will emerge. In contrast, what we see today, even on television news programs, is an undermined journalism that just thrown fuel onto burning passions and beliefs.

In any case, the time to separate the wheat from the chaff provides an opportunity for disbanding the tricks woven by spin doctors, or of political and ideological interests, dispersed into the anonymity of the social networks. There are those who are eager to stimulate radical beliefs, cultivate prejudice and extreme stances that are embraced with enthusiasm, mainly on social media where haters, trolls, fake portals or pages specialized in rumors abound. Not to mention the many who take advantage of anonymity.

In these polarized circumstances—when the majority of society is at the mercy of agents with the ability to create smokescreens and manipulate information—social protection mechanisms should be considered. More advanced regulations are necessary, allowing the punishment of those who invent lies and half-truths.



Declaring beliefs based on misinformation is understandable, but has its risks. When people no longer believe that truth exists, or anything that resembles it, when all that matters is simply believing our own reasoning, it seems as if truth is being abolished or expelled from social coexistence.

The social consequences of this context are disturbing. In politics, the deterioration of the notion and value of truth is a danger to society. The most likely script indicates increasing intolerance and stimulation of totalitarianism.

Post-truth could prove costly.

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# THE *post-truth* LIE



Fernando Berckemeyer

Editor of the daily newspaper *El Comercio* / Peru

It is fashionable to talk about post-truth. Just as anything new usually is; however, post-truth is nothing more than a rehash of something that already existed. It is a new wineskin that perchance wants to appear contemporary—or rather “post-modern”—for a vintage as old as public opinion itself. One of these terms that human knowledge specialists, from one area or another, invent to make their jargon sound more esoteric, thus making the knowledge more exclusive. Or as Nietzsche called it: “Spirits that muddy the water to make it seem deeper.”

The Oxford Dictionary chose the term “post-truth” as Word of the Year for 2016, affirming that it is used to refer to “circumstances where objective facts have less influence over public opinion than appeals to emotions and personal beliefs.” So, following this prestigious institution, it becomes difficult to contemplate that political academics have discovered a new planet within their galaxy with this word. There are good reasons why democracy began and, consequently, the relevance of what the public would think (as limited as their understanding may be). And there are also reasons why those who taught the art of speaking in town squares—the Sophists—also became known as “tricksters”.

“*The emotional element, on the other hand, is nothing new; few tactics have been more efficient or practiced than manipulating emotions in order to “reinforce prejudices”*”

As recently written in a clever article in *The Economist*, the difference between post-truth politics and that of simple lies is that in the latter, “the truth is not falsified or contested, but of secondary importance”. This is because it deals with “reinforcing prejudices”, giving a sophisticated distinction, but in truth, it is nothing more

than endless hot air. There has not been a populist politician in the history of mankind—and, again, populists have been around since ancient Greece—who has not considered the truth as “of secondary importance” and “reinforcing prejudices” as the basis of their success.

The emotional element, on the other hand, is nothing new; few tactics have been more efficient or practiced than manipulating emotions in order to “reinforce prejudices”.

Thus, I believe that Alex Grijelmo is along the right path when he writes that “we could ask ourselves if post-truth wasn’t, above all, part of what the word itself alleges; otherwise it would move towards more outrageous terms, such as ‘lie’, ‘scam’, ‘hoax’ and ‘falsehood’.” I would also dare to add that not only can we ask ourselves the question, but we can also answer it ourselves.

Having said that, one peculiarity I believe we can associate to our times is that the usual populists and lies have much greater firepower today than before. Social networks have given the audience a megaphone in the political debate, to millions of people who could only participate in it within the limited reach of their houses, jobs and neighborhoods before. People that can make real-time contact with those who think—or don't think—in the same way as them, and create a real "opinion trend" that can change the direction of political debate.

From the most pessimistic perspective, you could agree with Umberto Eco, in that the Web and social networks have given "legions of idiots the right to speak," whereas before they had no voice. Nevertheless, as authorized as it is, this point of view is still prominently elitist. After all, intellectual sophistication does not always go hand in hand with wisdom, and vice versa. Maybe they are more susceptible, in general terms, to emotional "arguments," but by no means do the great masses have a monopoly on prejudices, in the same way that the elite doesn't have one on clarity. It means something that Professor Eco's declarations didn't take long to go viral on the same social networks to which he referred.

Whatever happens, one thing is clear given the artificial concept of post-truth: like all fashion, it will go out of fashion. And when it is gone, we will all go back to talking about lies in the public domain. We will not have advanced much in the meantime, but we will have been liberated from the mysterious cloak that this pretentious term has concealed, and Nietzsche can smile with relief wherever he may be.

*“Whatever happens, one thing is clear given the artificial concept of post-truth: like all fashion, it will go out of fashion”*









# POST-TRUTH: BETWEEN *falsehood* AND *deceit*



Manuel Cruz

Chair of Philosophy at the University of Barcelona / Spain

What discursive reach can be attributed to the outbreak of current debates about the term “post-truth”? To rehearse an answer, as approximate as it may be, offers no choice but to wander into the land of nuances. In this respect, it should be clarified that those who applaud the so-called new theory of post-truth, uphold that the classic notion of truth has become obsolete. According to them, as a result of this, its decline has also dragged down what is usually considered as its undeniable partner—the lie—which would no longer constitute something condemnable per se as it too, has been relativized.

Clarification becomes fundamental not only to adequately interpret the terms under discussion, but also to correctly understand the different impact that the debate is having, as such, within the context that it is presented. Because, starting with the latter, it is no coincidence that this questioning of the truth has provoked more fuss on the American cultural scene. Due to the centuries of pressure from puritanical traditions (George Steiner has written enlightened pages on this subject in *No Passion Spent*), lies are considered unacceptable on all counts, both in the public and the public sphere. It seems clear, by contrast, that in our culture—Catholic, to simplify—things do not tend to be considered

“*Lies are considered unacceptable on all counts, both in the public and the public sphere*”

in exactly the same way. As such, it is a fact that the same behavior—for instance, deception in private matters—would be judged with huge benevolence by ourselves and would frankly receive less social rebuke. This would

be in clear contrast to the Anglo-Saxon world, which would result in banning its protagonists from public life.

That said, and contextual differences pointed out, the content of the terms under dispute should be examined in detail. Supporters of post-truth have probably benefited, in a manipulative way, from a critical element that should not cause any great problems if used correctly. Criticism of certain “strict” uses of the truth were undoubtedly welcomed in their time in many contexts. As such, what works in the positive scientific field of knowledge cannot be transferred, at least mechanically, to any other field. In the end, The Truth—absolute and in capital letters—has been associated with dogmatism for some time now. Facing truth, virtually no one has raised the issue that—to cite just one example—it is as inevitable as it is convenient to introduce the right dose of relativism in the cultural scene.

But to extrapolate this essential point of anti-dogmatic skepticism and turn it into a total denial

of ever possibly reaching an agreement—about what is true and what isn't, what is information, what is a mere opinion, what is a true description and what is in the interpretation—, is an unacceptable fallacy on all counts. A fallacy based on confusion, or the belief that the lie is the partner of truth in the scientific field, when in reality, falsehood has assumed this role. Scientific “errors” are not lies but falsehoods and, indeed, it seems that nobody questions their status. Or would somebody consider the question of a serious decline to be a plausible post-truth? For their part, lies are spread in the human environment and conflict with sincerity. If this had to be articulated in a clear and simple way, we would say that “something” is false, while “someone” tells a lie. To make it even more succinct: lying is an error that depends on the speaker; one doesn't lie unintentionally..

Let's not shy away from giving examples: information used by supporters before the Brexit referendum to convince the British public of the convenience of an exit from the EU was false in itself. And in addition, a lie, from the moment it was disseminated by those who learned of it first, despite knowing it to be false. To refer to these in terms of post-truth is nothing but beating around the bush, if you excuse the colloquial expression.

But at the same time, we should reject any plan that leaves no other option than to raise the matter on either scientific or moral grounds—the former too indisputable and the latter too ambiguous. In the face of such a quandary, it may be worth introducing the hypothesis that the ultimate value to be protected is neither truth nor sincerity. The ultimate value is communication in the public domain, within the context of democratically debating matters that concern everyone. Any theoretical/political proposals should be dealt with in this perspective, post-truth included. From there, it is worth trying to

“*A fallacy based on confusion, or the belief that the lie is the partner of truth in the scientific field, when in reality, falsehood has assumed this role*”

refine, using the most balanced wording possible in order to avoid getting mired in hardline and frequently confused dichotomies, such as those already mentioned—not to mention the very recent concept of alternative facts, coined by Kellyanne Conway, senior adviser in Donald Trump's administration.

Maybe the fact of proposing things in terms of post-truth, which is a long way from clarifying anything, fulfills his provocative rumblings somewhere between epistemology and morality. The goal is to distract us from what is the most important, which is nothing more than the constraint that public debate should adhere to. Let me just put it this way, to wrap up: misleading citizens in the public domain should not be allowed under any circumstances.

TO THE COLOMBIAN *peace agreement*



Miguel García Sánchez

Co-Director of the Democracy Observatory at the University of the Andes / Colombia

From the events of 2017, the armed conflict between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) has evidently come to an end. Almost six thousand guerrillas have moved towards the concentration sites and the process of arms surrender will shortly begin. At the same time, Congress is working on the legislative agenda that has been designed to implement the content of the agreements. This includes the amnesty law, transitional justice mechanisms and guarantees for the ex-combatants’ political participation, among other aspects.

Despite the Government and the FARC having reached an agreement following four years of negotiations, only four months ago, the consolidation of peace seemed uncertain. 50.22 percent of those who voted in the referendum on October 2<sup>nd</sup> rejected the agreements made in Havana. Why did Colombians reject an agreement that ends 50 years of war?

The Colombians’ opinion of “peace” is complex and multidimensional. The survey carried out by the Democracy Observatory of the University of the Andes, the Barometer of the Americas, shows that since 2004, nearly 60 percent of Colombians support a negotiated solution to the conflict. From this point of view, the referendum results would be surprising. Nevertheless, according to the 2016

**“***Why did Colombians reject an agreement that ends 50 years of war?*

version of this study, only 40 percent of those interviewed supported an agreement between the Government and the FARC. This is due to the fact that less than 20 percent accept the political participation of ex-

combatants. In a nutshell, Colombians support the idea of negotiation to resolve the conflict, but they are reluctant to accept any kind of concession that benefits the FARC. The Colombian Government did not have an easy task in “selling” an agreement which is seen by many as extremely generous towards the rebels.

This difficulty to “sell” the agreement amounted to a polarized political atmosphere. In 2010, Juan Manuel Santos won the elections with a platform that was set to continue the hardline policy against Álvaro Uribe’s guerrillas. Once he was president, Santos changed the Government’s direction and announced the first talks with the FARC—a decision not well received by Uribe, who had already led strong opposition to the Government’s peace policy in 2012. Alienation between Santos and Uribe led to a process of polarization among the elite which had repercussions on public opinion. Since 2012, confidence in political institutions has declined among the former President’s supporters, as it did in relation to his support of a negotiated end to the conflict. In 2016, 5 out of 10 “Uribistas” supported a negotiated end to the conflict. In contrast, 8 out of 10 “non-Uribistas” supported this alternative. If the

“*The presidential elections of 2018, promise to be something of a second referendum on peace agreements*”

opposition to Uribe is explained by the enormous popularity of the former and the lack of charisma of the latter, it is easy to understand how the former President's leadership led to many voters rejecting the agreement.

Ultimately, the “no” campaign managed to trigger a fear of the agreement. While the advocates of “yes” set about disseminating the main elements of a long and complicated agreement, the “no” supporters were very adept at drumming up fear of the agreement. In a country where less than 10 percent of citizens would vote for a FARC candidate, the “no” campaign convinced many that the agreement would pave the way to an imminent change of regime. In addition to announcing the arrival of Castro-Chavism to Colombia, those opposed to the agreement were skilled in disseminating lies and half-truths. Transitional justice was presented as total impunity; pensioners were falsely told that peace would be financed by taxes on their monthly payments; workers were sold the equally false idea that the ex-combatants would be paid more than the minimum salary. In a country where large part of the population are not experiencing war, the “no” campaign managed to convince many that the cost of peace would be higher than continuing the conflict.

In light of this reflection, the most remarkable thing is that an unpopular president has managed to convince half of the Colombians about the benefits of making a peace agreement with an organization which only 6 percent of the population trusts. The referendum's stumbling block was overcome and agreements are being implemented. Support for peace with the FARC will probably increase as citizens see that the cost of peace is not as high as initially insinuated. Nevertheless, given Uribe's huge influence on public opinion, while opposition continues towards “*la paz de Santos*” (President Santos's peace proposal), the future of the agreement remains uncertain. The presidential elections of 2018, promise to be something of a second referendum on peace agreements.



# IN THE KINGDOM OF *POST-TRUTH*, *irrelevance* IS THE *punishment*



Albert Medrán

Communications Director of Change.org in Spain / Spain

Even though a lie is disguised as post-truth, it is still a lie. As a society, we have decided to succumb to Orwell's world. We accept the imposition of new language with the use of concepts that do nothing more than hide an extremely unattractive reality. We accept being controlled by millions of screens that watch us every day. We accept, day by day, abandoning our place in the defense of free and democratic societies. We do so without even noticing. Sweetening the reality with concepts that act as the placebo of a trending topic. Post-truth is nothing more than a kingdom of lies.

Post-truth is not a new phenomenon. Not by a long shot. What we call post-truth today, in other decades was called propaganda. The creation of alternative realities under the media's command and control. Alternative realities that are not based on facts, but on emotions. Alternative realities based on perception and not on data. The difference compared to other eras is that we now have a double-edged tool within our reach. First, they do not allow access to the sources of information required to point out and combat lies. And at the same time, they give lies an unprecedented boost, spreading like wildfire and floating on the surface for years. It is possible and impossible at the same time.

*“What we should discern is how we can use all of the tools within our reach to ensure that the truth prevails, and that we can live in solid democracies*

But we cannot blame the Internet. Internet is nothing more than a channel. A tool. The place where it happens. It is the usage by those who want to create this alternative reality that should be brought to center stage. What we need to analyze is why we allow those that want to fabricate a reality based on lies to get away with it. What we should discern is how we can use all of the tools within our reach to ensure that the truth prevails, and that we can live in solid democracies. And communication has a great deal to say about all this.

Since Donald Trump's rise to the United States presidency, an image appears like a rash all over my Facebook timeline. It is a simple graphic with the logos of this country's main media outlets, organized according to trustworthiness and their ideological spectrum. This image intermittently appears every day on the walls of millions of people. It only serves to remind us that on the day that we gave up on having a better education, we lost the battle without even setting foot on the battlefield.

Our societies still don't offer better educational tools to be able to distinguish the truth from lies. We live in societies with abysmal reading levels, with educational programs plagued by budgetary





cuts and where online methods are only just coming into classrooms. If we do not educate ourselves, we are vulnerable to lies. We could be literate, but we will be ignorant. Perfect conditions for the virus of lies to spread.

We no longer trust in institutions, politics and companies. Levels of confidence which were previously almost untouchable have done nothing more than decline over the last decade. We are vulnerable to lies and we do not trust those who are the object of these attacks. If in the past, an institution had the benefit of the doubt, today others have that benefit.

Thus, we have a breeding ground that can only do us harm. To the institutions, to the governments, to the companies... to our society as a whole. And the answer to this threat cannot be found in tradition. Post-truth cannot be fought with a press release. Nor with an article in *Expansión*. The Internet is the battlefield for this war. Tanks are useless.

This war is waged in its own territory. Lies must be attacked right where they are being fabricated. Don't expect that any action in other fields allows you to reach all those who have already believed it at face value. There is no time to evaluate if being present on the Internet or not is a good or bad decision. And there is no time to believe if one or the other social network is good for a spokesperson or not. Lies travel at a staggering speed and the battle must be waged in the same territory.

This war needs a new feedback culture. Institutions should lose their fear, once and for all, and engage with citizens. Companies must understand that the best way to increase sales is to engage with clients. When lies can damage a reputation, and hence, the confidence that people have in an institution or company, it is crucial to respond. At Change.org, as a platform, we see how many people create petitions against institutions or companies on a daily basis. Not handling these

“ *This war needs a new feedback culture. Institutions should lose their fear, once and for all, and engage with citizens* ”

petitions and deciding not to respond to the person questioning the institution itself would be suicide. We have the tools to respond. We cannot shield ourselves with communicative artillery from the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

We should speak as normal people to normal people. Speak in the same place where others are talking about us. Debate our reasoning with emotion. If not, institutions on which our democracy is based run the risk of becoming irrelevant. This is the great danger of post-truth. To be attacked and disconnected to such an extent that institutions and companies become irrelevant. That their alternative reality based on lies becomes the alternative to reality.

# FAKE NEWS VS. FREE AND *independent journalism*



Eduardo A. Quirós

President of Grupo Editorial El Siglo & La Estrella de Panamá / Panamá

Never before have human beings had so much information within such easy reach, and neither have societies been so interconnected. All of this has happened at such a speed that the actual middle-aged generation—40–50 years—has witnessed mankind’s greatest technological revolution. It is fast, but reflection on this is limited.

The world now has the practical ability to leverage scientific knowledge, which was unthinkable a few decades ago. Imagination has been the spark that set off the motor of life-changing achievements.

Without analysis and reflection, even the greatest advances can turn into huge disasters. One of the most important expressions about using imagination as a source of innovation and creativity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was by Walt Disney: “If you can dream it, you can do it.” In his magical world, there is one attraction that is one of the oldest which still remains open—the “Carousel of Progress” that, according to Walt Disney’s biographers, was his favorite.

This carousel depicts the life of an American family throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and how technological changes have transmuted family life, up to the present day. It leaves the audience with

“*Polarization and the incapacity to listen to another’s opinion lead them to an arena where public opinion is not formed, but rather deformed*”

the uncertainty as to whether these fantastic advances and automation in life are really useful or a tragedy. Every person forms their own opinion at the exit.

We are facing the same dilemma in the era of the Internet, social media, information in real-time and other devices that allow us— or oblige us—to stay permanently connected. The only difference here is that we cannot get off at the next station and leave this world, which is as invasive as it is dynamic.

If, as individuals we have little time to distinguish or reflect on how influential these new realities are in our lives, as societies, we have even less. How difficult is it, as a community, to reflect on what makes rational sense with regard to the emotional components? Where images or memes are now not only worth more than a thousand words, but they make it impossible to create arguments or they are read before a “general opinion” is formed.

During the 2016 referendum to consult the Colombian people about the peace agreements, one of the conclusions that I reached was that Colombia didn’t have a proper debate, despite the numerous and interesting arguments from each sector. When I went to observe the referendum, I got the impression—to put it figuratively—that the



“YES” camp were tuned into AM, and the “NO” camp to FM, as they couldn’t find common ground for a fruitful discussion.

Colombia and Brexit are examples of contradictions in hyper-connected societies with extensive communicative interaction. But at the same time, polarization and the incapacity to listen to another’s opinion lead them to an arena where public opinion is not formed, but rather deformed.

The infamous fake news makes an impact in this kind of scenario. In other times, we may have called them rumors, satires or even propaganda. What they do have is a strong impact, mainly through massive circulation and by finding fertile audiences that accept them with no questions asked. The strength of a rumor or a hoax depended on the credibility of the person spreading it. Today, this strength lies in the facility and sheer scope of distribution, and the desire to believe by those receiving it. So much so, that well-known fake news creator, Paul Horner, said, “I think it is my fault that Donald Trump is in the White House.” In the United States, more than a few analysts attribute him with a decisive role in the recent electoral race.

It is worth saying that the majority of fake news does not have an ideological, political or proselytizing genesis. Thereafter, its distribution is another thing, the origins are mainly chrematistic. Journalist Samantha Subramanian uncovered the case of the boy in Veles, Macedonia who, with two pro-Trump websites, made up to \$4,000 a month with online advertising, similar to Google’s AdSense. *The Guardian* revealed that in Veles, a town 55 thousand inhabitants, more than 100 pro-Trump websites were registered, with sensationalist content. When Subramanian interviewed the Macedonian boy, she realized that he had no interest in whether Donald Trump won or lost, he just wanted to make money.

“*The continued existence of media outlets that are committed to fulfilling their responsible role in democratic societies is essential*”

In light of this situation, the continued existence of media outlets that are committed to fulfilling their responsible role in democratic societies is essential, so that citizens can check the veracity of information and find spaces for expression. It is also true that the media needs self-criticism, as well as to raise good practices that ensures trust and credibility from their audiences.

The reality is complex and daunting. Technological advances placed in the service of humanity require reflection. If we add to this reality, the interests gained from lies, manipulation, demagoguery and populism, citizens have very limited tools to defend themselves and protect democracy. The main tool, as in other times during history, is the freedom associated with the practice of free and independent journalism. If this freedom is preserved, the rest will be safeguarded.

# THE RISE OF *POST-TRUTH* AND HOW TO *build* CUSTOMIZED *gods*



Carlos De Angelis

Sociologist, Political Analyst and Consultant / Argentina

The same idea of post-truth could possibly, at first glance, become a short-lived fashion following the election on the part of the Oxford Dictionary as the most relevant word of 2016. Nevertheless, hidden behind this concept are profound changes that undermine the very idea of society, because if humanity has spent centuries looking for the “truth”, it now aims to relativize it.

One of the most important transformations of humanity was the transition from polytheistic to monotheistic religions. In the Greek and Roman traditions, there were an endless number of gods to be worshiped, each one protecting some human activity or other. The rise of Christianity was an organizer of collective wisdom, generating “true” references. The Church became the central element in the regulation of people’s social and intimate lives, producing relative stability in the generation of truth. Nevertheless, from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, a new alternative came into being. Copernicus, Descartes and Darwin, among many others, would produce a new system of truth: science, replacing belief as an explanation for natural facts.

The “bourgeois revolution” led to the end of absolute monarchies and to the rise of nation states, with the appearance of new sources of “truth”: legal

“*If humanity has spent centuries looking for the “truth”, it now aims to relativize it*

and statistical. New players also flourished—bureaucracy, the political system, public opinion and journalism. Public opinion became the social space for legitimization of socially accepted truth.

From the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a radical change in the contemporary societies began to take place. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet bloc marked the end of a world divided into two opposing blocks. Later, the information and communication technological revolution based on the Internet, accelerated time in a world that is becoming globalized at an unprecedented rate. Media outlets proliferate, as do the mediums that transport an incessant and discordant body of information.

Nevertheless, and as a paradox, far from complying with new global values, subjects turn towards individualization and the surge of personal fulfillment. One of the shifts that mark the terrain of this change is the transition from religion to spirituality. While religions usually sustained a rigid doctrinal body, new forms of spirituality are flexible. They foster the “live in the present” philosophy, stimulating sentiments and emotions that instill “self-fulfillment”, instant gratification, and “looking good” as an essential step to “feeling good”.

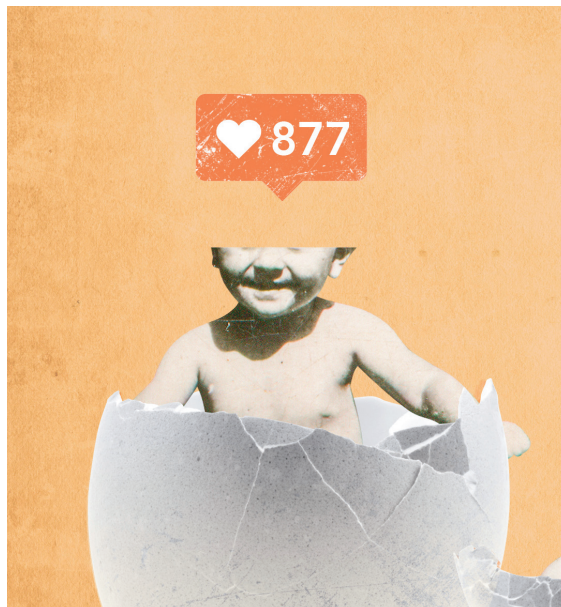
The trade-off to individualization is giving up the feeling of being part of a community, developing a growing apathy for public affairs. Conversely, people tend to emotionally involve themselves in social media via affinities that strengthen their point of view, and tend to break or reduce their relationships with the world offline. A frail association with the social environment means that subjects have superficial and fragmented knowledge of what happens out there. As a result, the opinion polls, a great measurement tool of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, find contradictory information with large variations in a short space of time. They eventually “fail” in their predictions, precisely because it is impossible to predict the future about the behavior of this new subject—until now unknown in history.

As a result, during the first few decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century we are witnessing the emergence of a figure with potential access to all available information, an avid consumer, dissatisfied and suspicious of politics as a means for change. They have given up the idea of “changing the world”, the predominant ideology of the 60’s and 70’s.

In this new era, universal truths are abandoned, and the idea of objectivity is rejected, even when supported by real facts. The subjects feel capable of creating their own truths and beliefs—their own customized gods—independent of values that in other times seemed unquestionable. Old formulas for questioning the social body with arguments and discursive rationale fall on deaf ears as they no longer mean anything. They are now replaced with short effective phrases and suggestive images as new formulas that stimulate emotional strains and that target fear and irony.

“*In this new era, universal truths are abandoned, and the idea of objectivity is rejected, even when supported by real facts*”

Critics of post-truth suggest that this state of affairs facilitates the manipulation and deception of a population susceptible to believing in fake news, considering unfounded rumors as true and readily supporting extreme stances such as Neo-nationalism or religious fundamentalism. All of this without analyzing the long-term consequences—a term practically eliminated in our present culture. Nevertheless, the social dynamic itself in an uncertain world, prepares the terrain for a future that is today, unimaginable.









## LEGAL LIMITS OF *fake news*



Carolina Pina

Partner in the Industrial and Intellectual Property Department and jointly manages the Media & Telecom practice areas at Garrigues / Spain

In law, post-truth does not exist; only the truth exists. There is no place for alternative facts, but for facts only. And fake news doesn't exist either, only news that are untrue.

In the wake of the last American elections, the debate regarding the impact of fake news on our societies is being constantly revived. We live in hostile times in relation to truth and objectivity.

The so-called post-truth has invaded public debate, but it is not a new concept, in the same way that fake news isn't either. What we are dealing with is just propaganda, disseminated with the most spurious intentions: to manipulate public opinion or simply, profit economically from the increase in traffic to the websites that disseminate this type of "information".

While universal access to information and opinions thanks to the Internet should be welcomed, it has also meant that not only the mainstream media transmit information and opinions, but rather anyone can now promote a wide range of statements, whether true or not. This is where fake news appears; it looks like news, but it isn't news.

**“***In legal terms, fake news becomes a problem when it produces a conflict of rights*

From a legal point of view, a judgment of veracity should essentially be applied to any journalistic news item, which doesn't imply that this item must be true. Unfortunately, we have known that truth can be elusive since Plato's times,

something difficult to achieve by those of us who live in caves and see only shadows of reality. As a matter of fact, how does the Law define truth? What are the limits of the freedom of expression and information in this context?

In legal terms, fake news becomes a problem when it produces a conflict of rights. Such conflicts arise between the information transmitted and the fundamental rights of the people affected by that information, especially in terms of honor and privacy. Until now, Spanish jurisprudence has gone to great lengths to develop criteria for consideration. In fact, we can even trace back to a judgment by the Supreme Court in 1912, to settle a conflict provoked by a—fake—news item published in *El Liberal* that reported that a friar had kidnapped the Mayor's daughter, who some months before had given birth to his child. The Supreme Court, in terms used in that era, went on to declare that the newspaper, by publishing information that was proved to be false, had slandered the Mayor's young daughter, causing her moral damage.

**“It is not wise to listen to the clamor for more regulation. Regulatory exuberance would only bring greater uncertainty**

Nowadays, the Constitutional Court (TC) declares that, in the case of defamation, the following should be examined: (i) the general interest of the information, which should be analyzed on a case-by-case basis within the context of news, and (ii) the veracity of the information.

The veracity of the information is the key point of interest here. As we already mentioned, veracity doesn't mean that information is completely correct, but rather, it is derived from the diligence demonstrated in verification by the author of the information. In this way, according to Spanish jurisdiction, a piece of information is true even though revealed to be erroneous afterwards, as long as the informer: (i) has displayed the highest level of professional diligence required, and (ii) has performed an adequate fact-checking exercise. This diligence by the informer will depend, in any case, on the object of the news, on the source of the news or on the possibility of cross-checking it. Fulfilling these requirements, information will be safeguarded by freedom of information, as recognized in Article 20.1.d of the Spanish Constitution.

As far as freedom of expression is concerned, this is limited by those restrictions necessary in a democratic society to protect the reputation or the rights of other people. In the words of the Constitutional Court, freedom of expression does not cover insults. For this reason, even though opinions are not subject to the judgment of veracity, they must not include content that is

abusive, offensive or damaging to a person's dignity, reputation or honor, slandering them. In any case, the most recent jurisprudence by the European Court of Human Rights, in the *Losantos* judgment, reveals that the informers' freedom of expression enjoys a wide margin for exaggeration and provocation—sometimes hurtful.

For manifestations of greater intensity, the Spanish lawmakers have configured certain offenses: mainly slander—consistent with a false charge of committing a crime—and injuries—statements that are intended to seriously damage a person's reputation. In addition, criminal legislation also punishes statements that fuel the so-called hate speeches—racially motivated, for example—or rather, extol terrorism and humiliate its victims. In this last area, the courts have recently condemned the authors of certain texts on social media that justified terrorist violence, for seriously infringing the values of tolerance which inspire our legal system.

With the emergence of news that does not comply with minimum standards of veracity, we should highlight the role of authentic journalism—duly adapted to new technological contexts—as the watchdog of democracy. And that, in the words of Thomas Jefferson, indeed one of the founding fathers of the United States—today so threatened by political manipulation—: “If I was allowed to choose between a government without newspapers or newspapers without government, I would have no doubt in choosing the second.”

In any case, it is not wise to stigmatize social media because a minority of users employs it to disseminate information of questionable veracity. Social media is an informative tool and, above all, a reflection of our society. We cannot ask social networks to become judges of the content published on them. This is mainly because the European regulations on the



subject—the Electronic Commerce Directive—expressly prohibits the legal configuration of a general obligation of content supervision for the information they host. In fact, faced with these problems, the main social networks already include terms that ensure that legality and the above-mentioned principles are observed in their terms of use.

This information caused by fake news could be a social problem, but considering the tools that our system has for protecting freedom of speech and information, it is not wise to listen to the clamor for more regulation. Regulatory exuberance would only bring greater uncertainty. On the contrary, it would be better to improve protection of the rights that we enjoy, as well as the methods that the Law has to guarantee such protection.



Rosa Townsend

Journalist and Columnist in the daily newspaper *The Miami Herald - El Nuevo Herald* / USA - Spain

Donald Trump has spent his whole life disrespecting the truth. It has worked very well for him in business, in reality shows and in politics. And even though the size and audacity of his falsehoods have become the epicenter of a global post-truth earthquake, it is undeniable that lies are an old political tool all over the world. The most striking change is in the level of acceptance in a sector of the United States electorate. Until now, this was unthinkable in a country that had never forgiven mendacity, as shown by Watergate and many other high-profile cases of idiosyncratic American Puritanism.

How then, can the “Trump phenomenon” be explained, the paradigm change that this means for our society, and its possible disruptive consequences? It would take volumes to be able to respond to the complexity of the situation, but in a nutshell, what has happened is that political entertainment and levity have taken over Washington. This has been endorsed by 62.9 millions of Trumpist voters who are allergic to the “disastrous way of thinking”, sadly invoking contempt towards the thinking classes—the eggheads of the McCarthyist era.

### “*Political entertainment and levity have taken over Washington*”

Indeed, anti-intellectualism has always been a latent force in the United States, it sporadically raises its head, but never had it swept the nation as savagely as it did in the 2016 presidential elections. On this occasion, it was strengthened even further by the dominant wave of emotional politics, which puts personal beliefs before objective facts, before the truth. By people who vote with their guts and welcome everything that confirms their own prejudices, even though they receive it in the form of scandalously false news, disseminated by scores of online sites such as National Report, Liberty Writers News, Breitbart, Empire News, InfoWars or Civic Tribune. And then repeated by an army of Alt-right activists (white supremacy), and by President Trump himself and the assessors that surround him.

But first of all, it is important to put the numbers in context: the general population of the United States is officially 325 million—including non-nationalized legal residents. 231.6 million have the right to vote, of which only 138.8 million exercised that right, while 92.7 million opted to stay at home. In other words, Trump was elected by only 27% of the voting population and 19% of the general population.



The numbers explain the perplexity in which the majority of the U.S. population lives. The sensation of being characters from Orwell's 1984—this year's bestselling book—, captives, in addition, of what historian Fritz Stern called "irrational popularity", which makes the masses yield to the "mysterious charisma of dictators". Trump does not seem like a dictator, for now, but his populist demagoguery has an increasingly autocratic flavor.

Thirty-seven years after the undesirable society that Orwell imagined, the White House has created its own Ministry of Truth from where our Winstons—like the character of 1984—try to inoculate us with huge lies that the propaganda minister Kellyanne "Winston" Conway, goes unpunished by calling them "alternative facts". Just as when they assured us that millions of people had attended Trump's inauguration ceremony—apparently ghosts because nobody saw them. Or the five million—also phantasmal—that according to the president himself, fraudulently voted for Hillary Clinton. Not forgetting the whoppers that egotistical Trump tried to make us believe, that Obama had been "born in Kenya", and that the former President, along with Hillary Clinton, were nothing more than the "founders of the Islamic state."

And so, one example after another (Trump told 132 falsehoods in his first month, according to *The Washington Post*) this Orwellian presidency is revealing a disturbing strategy: to substitute the objective truth with an alternative, silence mainstream media and purge all dissidence. This is the perfect formula for manipulating public opinion, during the post-truth times that we are in. At least this is what they intend.

“Only time will tell who the true public enemy is—the press or Trump

But among all the recriminations, nothing beats his fight to the death against mainstream media, now officially considered by the White House as "the opposition". To the extent that during one of his bouts of insomnia at 04:32 a.m., Trump declared the press as "the public enemy" via Twitter.

In Trump's dictionary, "enemies" are journalists who have the audacity to tell the truth, to investigate facts, to monitor abuses of power and to expose corruption. For this reason, eroding his credibility is critical. Until the moment arrives when a large part of society believes only in the president and his subservient media.

It is now exactly a century since Lenin published an essay titled "The Public Enemy" in Pravda. It is very ironic that a president of the United States uses an identical rhetoric against one of the institutions that plays a critical role in the world's oldest democracy.

Only time will tell who the true public enemy is—the press or Trump.

# TRUTH, *TRANSPARENCY* AND STORYTELLING VERSUS *truth*



Iván Weissman

Founder and Editor of *El Mostrador Mercados* / Chile

IN LATIN AMERICA, WE HAVE EXTENSIVE EXPERIENCE WITH POST-TRUTH AND POPULISM

*The Economist* describes the concept of post-truth as trusting affirmations that “feel like the truth” but are not based on reality. Trump’s victory in the U.S. presidential elections and the triumph of Brexit led to its being chosen as Word of the Year by the Oxford Dictionary.

Chile’s Finance Minister, Rodrigo Valdés, remarked on the phenomenon at the end of last year and warned about the dangers of the “belligerent atmosphere” in public debate. Perhaps giving free rein to mounting frustrations, he claimed that the exaggerations are toxic and are not helping to create a space where public policy can positively develop.

Unfortunately, everything suggests that in the forthcoming presidential campaign this year, it will be post-truth that prevails, and not the facts.

Outside of Chile, Trump’s first few months in the White House confirm that the multimillionaire businessman is playing on emotions and not with facts. He is confident that we now live in an era when people have less patience for facts, data and truths.

“*Media editors and directors around the world are asking themselves how they should react in the face of mistrust and lack of credibility*”

This era, when emotions and “statements that ‘feel like the truth’ but are not based on reality” prevail over what is objective and real, is an enormous challenge for the media.

Media editors and directors around the world are asking themselves how they should react in the face of mistrust and

lack of credibility, and what to do to keep connecting with their audiences. Audiences that have made it clear that they want greater transparency and greater participation. Audiences that are skeptical towards the technocrats (for which the technocrats themselves are largely to blame) and who want to be consulted and to participate in the solutions to their problems.

This is not only a challenge for the media. It is also one faced by companies and political leaders.

Human beings have always enjoyed listening to good stories. Whether orally—like our cavemen ancestors—, in 30-second videos or in 140 characters. The media are challenged with telling good stories.

And Trump and the rest of the populists, who are threatening the liberal model based on rationality that has reigned in the West since the end of the Second World War, understand this very well.

As the British former Prime Minister Tony Blair eloquently put it in recent times: “for them and their followers, reason and facts are an irritation, evidence is a distraction and the emotional impact of what they say and promise is the only thing that matters.” These movements become a “retreat from reality” and an excuse for not facing it.

What we are experiencing is a huge wave against what people perceive as the unfairness of globalization and against the elite. And what the populist leaders do is to convince the disaffected—and there are many—that they have the answer for this, and that it is the only answer. And what’s more, that they are the only ones who are “telling it as it is” about what’s happening, when in reality they are doing exactly the opposite.

The media that I represent strongly believes in the battle of ideas. We have always been committed to offering interpretive journalism and with passion, but—and this is very important—based on facts and truth. We are in the business of interpreting and refining arguments, transforming them into stories that arouse emotions, but always based on truth. The truth and facts are indeed important.

And it is for this reason that our formula to remain relevant and influential is more truth, more reality, more transparency and a commitment to tell stories passionately. The power of the people should not be underestimated. If there are ideas, stories, reports that cause impact and arouse emotions, people will react.

The Western press’s mistake with both Trump and Brexit was to belittle the stories, the gloom and the challenges faced by many people who have not gotten real, practical benefits—or have not felt them—from globalization, capitalism and the digital era. The press became technocraticized, and without realizing it, became part of the elite—the same power that they should scrutinize

“*The power of the people should not be underestimated*”

and supervise as part of their duty and mission. They showed the numbers, facts and realities, but not all of them and with no emotion.

Something similar is happening here in Chile, but also different at the same time. The dominant press, have always been part of the power structure, and never an inquisitor. Their mistake was to focus on telling macro stories that demonstrated the undeniable progress and boom experienced in the country over the past 30 years. In many ways, they were just reflecting the official report by the elite government’s and the corporate sector. But they didn’t tell the story of the underprivileged, of the inequality, of the abuse and corruption. All areas that, bit by bit, have had their legitimacy taken away by the model and the system, and have made room for post-truth to enter the debate.

My answer to this challenge is that we can only respond, as I mentioned before, with more truth, better stories and with tales that arouse emotions.







# POST-TRUTH, A NEW WAY OF *lying*



Francisco Rosales

Founding Partner and President of Corral Rosales Carmigniani Pérez / Ecuador

The expression post-truth has not been around that long, but it has become viral—as it is called on social media—and as such, is now popularly used in the wake of the presidential campaign of the current U.S. president, Donald Trump. Its massive use has led to it being selected as Word of the Year for 2016 by the Oxford Dictionary. It is true that this description doesn't necessarily mean that it is correct or legal, but it somewhat underestimates the ethical principles upon which the post-truth concept impinges.

The concept of post-truth is usually defined as “that which is apparently true, becomes more important than the truth itself.” Gregorio Cano Figueroa points out in *Clarín*, November 22, 2016, that post-truth is the phenomenon in which the “objective facts have less influence over public opinion than appeals to emotions and popular beliefs.” This means that societies, dazzled by speeches and propaganda, put fact-checking and analysis aside, to cautiously accept as true the messages delivered by leaders, politicians and charlatans.

Indeed, post-truth distorts the basic principles of human coexistence, such as the cult of truth and honesty, favoring misleading and lying behavior in order to promote its own interests and greed.

“*Post-truth distorts the basic principles of human coexistence, such as the cult of truth and honesty*”

It is either the truth or it is not. Half-truths do not exist, and neither does subjective truth. To speak of “my truth” is an assault on reason. Opinions can exist, and in this sense, every person has every freedom to express their

own, and on any subject. But when dealing with objective facts, such as, for example, the number of inhabitants in the country, its gross national product, its citizens' level of education, a company's financial situation, public debt, or the budget deficit, only the objective reality counts—and there is only one. Everything that is disguised as the truth, whether grossly modifying it—such as the manipulation of statistics—, hiding facts that misinform the reader, or leveraging devices that distort accounts, are adulterations of the truth. Distortions and deception have been around throughout history. It is worth remembering Ramón de Campoamor's (1807–1901) well-known stanza: “in this treacherous world, nothing is either true or lie; everything depends on the color of the crystal that one looks through.”

If post-truth refers to the prevalence of sentiments and emotions over objective reality, and if the culprits are mainly demagogic politicians and populists seeking citizens' support, what we are seeing is a gross distortion of reality in pursuit

## “*Protests against Trump’s preliminary decisions are widespread in the United States*”

of popular support. And the consequences are apparent—a favorable vote for Trump has meant that the world’s leading power is headed by someone with an ambiguous track record, who is controlled by his impulses and who seems to govern through Twitter. Admittedly, the United States has a complex and rather incomprehensible system, as Clinton actually won the majority of the popular vote. This is the result of an emotion-based campaign that pushed aside objective analysis and logic. Although it is true the alternative candidate was not the best, it is outrageous that this has happened in the oldest democracy on the planet and that its perpetrators try to hide—with cynicism around the arena—behind post-truth. Demagoguery and populism, which obscure reality and are overflowing with empty and unrealistic promises in search of votes, have been more typical of Latin American countries than their Anglo-Saxon counterparts. But Europe has not been without this phenomenon: Hitler and Mussolini, with the brutal effects of the Second World War, were a result of the subjugation of Germans and Italians fascinated by their leaders’ discourse.

Trump’s election, the UK’s majority vote to leave the European Union—Brexit—and the rejection of the fundamental reforms proposed by Italian former Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, are all consequences of Neo-populism.

Protests against Trump’s preliminary decisions are widespread in the United States. The United Kingdom faces its eventual disintegration due to the possible separation of Scotland, who wants to stay in the European Union. Once again, Italy is immersed in extremely dangerous political instability.

Together with the need to go back to fundamental principles and standards such as honesty and truth, universal society—now so closely integrated—should reject and condemn deception and lies—post-truth—that foster the spread of authoritarian and corrupt regimes. Private practices whose sole objective is to make money, regardless of the methods used to get it, also undoubtedly benefit.

VERIFY *AFTER*  
THE *global storm*



Myriam Redondo

Journalist and University Professor / Spain

Between 2007 and 2016, some 20,000 journalists lost their jobs due to dismissal or forced abandonment in the United States, as stated by Scott Reinardy, a professor at the University of Kansas. According to the Madrid Press Association (APM), between mid-2008 and October 2015, the Spanish media said goodbye to 12,000 employees. They are traces of the perfect storm brought about by a combination of the digital revolution and the economic crisis that has affected many countries. When Lehman Brothers crashed in 2008, few people guessed that the iconic photo featuring one of its employees taking away his belongings in a cardboard box would be a future reality for many newsrooms.

It will shortly be a decade since then, and well-known media outlets as well as new ones have spent the whole time worried about the viability of their new business model. In the ferocious competition detonated by the crisis, we have seen a magnificent wave of creativity, projects and new languages. We saw the arrival of interactive infographics, multimedia storytelling and virtual reality. The readers came out on top, benefiting from this exciting offer. In addition, they have established themselves as

*“Once the exhaustive search for reasons why Donald Trump won the 2016 elections began, the dangers of poor-quality information became readily apparent*

broadcasters with the arrival of Web 2.0 (around 2004), based on user friendliness of content management systems that opened up Internet publishing to everyone.

But with reduced workforces, neither traditional media outlets nor newcomers could cover everything in the Internet that was overwhelming in its immensity. There were increases in Internet connections, connection speed, access from mobile phones and user-generated content (UGC). Amidst this maelstrom of change, things got lost and it was only a matter of time before they reappeared worse for wear, above all where quantity became more important than quality.

The fact that many of the new publications were professional didn't necessarily mean that their content was. But once the exhaustive search for reasons why Donald Trump won the 2016 elections began, the dangers of poor-quality information that was circulating on the Web became readily apparent. The ordinary media agents had disappeared and, parallel to the fragmentation of audiences, society had polarized politically. Then, there was great discussion of ideological bubbles, biased algorithms, post-truth, propagandistic



“*The journalist-source dance is a tricky art and, to avoid being distracted in the real world, the rules should be maintained when the source is an individual behind a social media account or website*

bots, hoaxes and fake news. These were more successful than real news in Facebook during the campaign, to the Republican candidate’s benefit. Issued by sources that appear to be legitimate but are not—based on non-existent facts and information—, they usually come from sites that were created with the sole intention of making money through clicks and publicity. It is difficult to spot the difference, when comparing them to an established media website.

The expression fake news has been infinitely abused in political debate over how much this information has influenced Trump’s victory. But if anything has been achieved by it, it is that journalism should reinforce one of its basic tasks: verification. Media collaboration with organizations that are specialized in tracing digital deception is growing, and they will need to do even more.

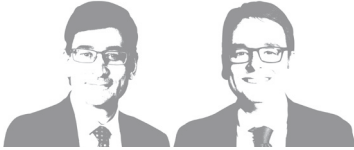
In many of the EREs (authorization for company layoffs in Spain) that affected journalists during the crisis years, the “last in first out” rule was not observed. Those who were the first to go were experienced writers who were deemed incompetent to handle new digital technology. The younger writers knew how to record a video and quickly post an audio on the web, but could be unskilled in other basic teachings with regard to professional routine. In particular, the journalist-source dance is a tricky art and, to avoid being distracted in the real world, the rules should be maintained when the source is an individual behind a social media account or website.

FirstDraftNews, the international coalition that globally coordinates the fact-checking effort, uses many working tools that aim to trace sources: their history in and outside of the Internet, their contacts and exchanges with other players, their geo-localization. New methods are used to return to the origins.

The credibility of the media is lower than ever and its obituary is being written in the face of the rise of social media. The media is mistrusted in 80 percent of the countries analyzed by the 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer. Nevertheless, an Ipsos/Buzzfeed study performed in January this year shows that while 55 percent of adults in the United States read the news via Facebook and not through the media, only 18 percent consider content available via this route to be reliable. Credibility is therefore a battle for everyone—new and established platforms alike. And systematic verification (analogue and digital) could be a sign of quality that distinguishes true journalism and allows it to reconnect with audiences in both cases.

# HOW TO TELL *MY TRUTH*?

## A FRESH *opportunity*



Arturo Pinedo

Partner and Managing Director of LLORENTE & CUENCA Spain and Portugal / Spain

Iván Pino

Senior Director of the Digital Area at LLORENTE & CUENCA / Spain

In his compilation of articles *Viajes imaginarios y reales de la existencia* (*Imaginary and real travels of existence*) during the time of French King Louis XIV, Cunqueiro (Álvaro, 1911-1981) wrote of a so-called “false Cabinet”. Headed by Finance Minister M. Colbert, renowned chroniclers set about writing fantastic descriptions of nonexistent countries on the African and Asian coasts. Once the country was described and an inventory of its natural resources taken—always with an emphasis on the meekness of indigenous people and their monarchs’ generosity—this discovery was then promoted in order to attract investment. Once the money was obtained, it was actually used to fund expeditions to other highly dangerous and hostile countries of West Africa and the Orient. The illustrious Galician journalist and writer thus shows us that the temptation to replace reality with appeals to emotions and personal beliefs—which is how blogger David Roberts has defined post-truth—is as old as humanity itself.

But if post-truth is not new, neither is it real. The suffix “post” denies the very essence of the concept, given that it means to show us that it would be following on from periods in which the truth prevailed. In other words, everything that predated—in the political, economic and social

“*The temptation to replace reality with appeals to emotions and personal beliefs—which is how blogger David Roberts has defined post-truth—is as old as humanity itself*”

world—the moment when Roberts came up with this term, would have happened during an era of sincerity. Does anyone believe that? Is anyone still gullible enough to defend the veracity of George Bush Jr.’s statements in relation to Iraqi arms, or those of Zapatero denying the ferocity of the economic crisis,

or the false promises or rally-style outbursts of many in recent decades? The answer is obvious: they should not exist, although... be careful! So often have we associated post-truth with Trump, Farage and others of the same species, that we run the risk of clearing the names of hundreds or thousands that came before them using trickery—even though it may have not have been called post-truth then. For them, it was simply a question of “lies”, “manipulation” and “demagogy”.

Another risk, although no less dangerous, is to believe that the triumph of “alternative facts”, as defined by Trump’s current presidential adviser, Kellyanne Conway<sup>1</sup>, is only attributable to those who practice it. The media, political, educational and social environments have generally provided the essential fertilizer for the outbreak of this phenomenon. The progressive degradation

<sup>1</sup> *El Mundo*, Donald Trump nombra a su directora de campaña consejera presidencial. <http://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2016/12/22/85bdde2468aebc1758b461f.html>

of arguments has opened doors to frivolity, inconsistency and total lack of rigor. While we constantly hear concepts such as transparency, engagement or ethics, the flow of communication now crosses a wasteland where anything rational is discredited. And there are those that can be held responsible. They are the media outlets which, due to the profound crisis affecting them, have gambled on deprofessionalizing their newsrooms, exchanging experience and authority for job instability and low costs. They are abandoning their news selection criteria based on social interest and substituting them for what the audience wants (based on the power of the click and trending topics). They may also have championed causes—whether political or corporate—far off from what citizens are really interested in. As a consequence, readers, listeners and spectators are increasingly skeptical—before the futility of their role models—and opt for the convenience of approving only news that best suits their beliefs or desires.

Social networks are also responsible as, together with undeniably positive contributions, they are nevertheless provoking an unprecedented mutilation of content quality. Eye-catching and fast impact replaces reasoning; audacious and surprising headlines win over any trustworthy idea that opposes it; video is killing words. Influencers, YouTubers and bloggers have taken over the places of any expert or authority, and the citizen is completely mesmerized by the overwhelming emotional pull. So, in that case, why do we need the truth?

In this scenario, the question is, what can be done by those who wish to transmit their ideas or actions in an intelligent, straightforward and honest way? What options do they have to convey their messages in a way that they will be heard and accepted? The way forward is certainly not to adapt to the wave of trivialization, but rather to follow the slower and more complicated path of generating trust. It is true that excessive

“*The media, political, educational and social environments have generally provided the essential fertilizer for the outbreak of the relevance of the “alternative facts” phenomenon*”

communication is based on adjusting our message to the context and using the formula that our recipients accept. These conditions do not necessarily imply a process of deteriorating of our content quality. New ways and multiple channels are today essential in order to reach our desired interlocutors, who are no longer merely passive recipients. The same should be true for the exchange of positive ideas and comparable, true facts that help to build credibility that is beneficial for everyone who takes part in the dialogue.

The nature of the Internet itself provides underlying opportunities for communication that we do not always take advantage of, by applying the same rules that we used for mass media. It is no longer enough to declare the veracity of our messages to ensure its trustworthiness—something that was guaranteed just by publishing it in a media channel. Now, more than ever, it is necessary to work from the source—from corporate communications—on the strength of the arguments that we want to make public, by implementing a firm verification system. But the same goes for the ability to respond to different issues that may arise in online conversations. And this is inherent to the Internet’s nature because it has empowered all individuals to access an enormous wealth of information (and misinformation), and share it incrementally through their personal connections on social media. Access to information and the ability to disseminate that was previously restricted to a few players: media, social organizations and public administrations.





*“Veracity and responsibility have become urgent obligations which are transforming companies by introducing guidelines used by the media or social organizations themselves*

Veracity and responsibility (which comes from the Latin “*respondere*”) have always been ethical requirements in corporate communications. But now, in addition, they have evolved into practical conditions for the performance of business functions. Both have become urgent obligations which are beginning to transform companies themselves. They have been integrated into some of their processes and resources, the media’s own guidelines (with respect to veracity) or those of social organizations (with respect to

responsibility). Large consumer goods companies like Red Bull or Lego have become communication groups. And other emerging brands, like Whole Foods or Tesla, build their business model on mobilizing causes such as organic foods or sustainable mobility, respectively.

Beyond these concrete examples, trends indicate that the post-truth phenomenon, accelerated by technological disruption, is also finding answers in deep organizational changes. These go far beyond communication techniques and formats (storytelling), and are much more related to interactive methods and experiences with their interest groups (storydoing).





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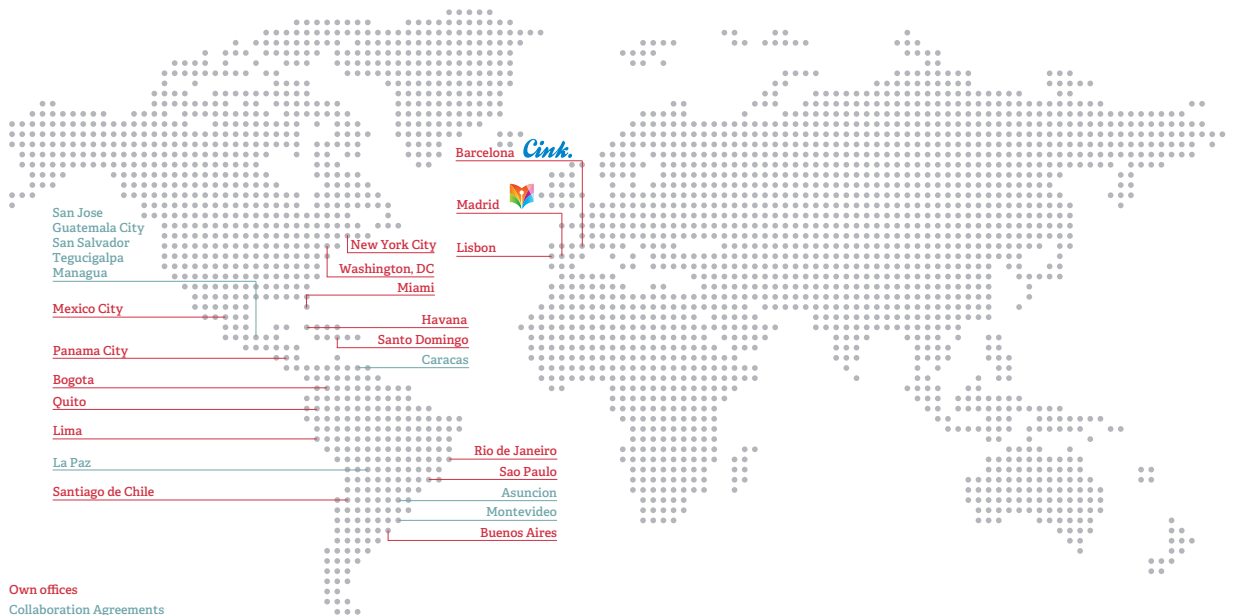
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## CORPORATE MANAGEMENT

**José Antonio Llorente**  
Founding Partner and Chairman  
jalloriente@llorenteycuenca.com

**Enrique González**  
Partner and CFO  
egonzalez@llorenteycuenca.com

**Adolfo Corujo**  
Partner and Chief Talent and  
Innovation Officer  
acorujo@llorenteycuenca.com

**Carmen Gómez**  
Corporate Director  
cgomez@llorenteycuenca.com

## MANAGEMENT - AMERICAS

**Alejandro Romero**  
Partner and CEO Americas  
aromero@llorenteycuenca.com

**Luisa García**  
Partner and COO Latin America  
lgarcia@llorenteycuenca.com

**Erich de la Fuente**  
Partner and CEO United States  
edela Fuente@llorenteycuenca.com

**José Luis Di Girolamo**  
Partner and CFO Latin America  
jldgirolamo@llorenteycuenca.com

## TALENT MANAGEMENT

**Daniel Moreno**  
Chief Talent  
dmoreno@llorenteycuenca.com

**Marjorie Barrientos**  
Talent Manager for Andes' Region  
mbarrientos@llorenteycuenca.com

**Eva Pérez**  
Talent Manager for  
North America, Central America  
and Caribbean  
eperez@llorenteycuenca.com

**Karina Sanchez**  
Talent Manager for  
the Southern Cone  
ksanches@llorenteycuenca.com

## SPAIN AND PORTUGAL

**Arturo Pinedo**  
Partner and Managing Director  
apinedo@llorenteycuenca.com

**Goyo Panadero**  
Partner and Managing Director  
gpanadero@llorenteycuenca.com

### Barcelona

**María Cura**  
Partner and Managing Director  
mcura@llorenteycuenca.com

**Muntaner, 240-242, 1<sup>o</sup>-1<sup>a</sup>**  
08021 Barcelona  
Tel. +34 93 217 22 17

### Madrid

**Joan Navarro**  
Partner and Vice-president  
of Public Affairs  
jnavarro@llorenteycuenca.com

**Amalio Moratalla**  
Partner and Senior Director  
amoratalla@llorenteycuenca.com

**Jordi Sevilla**  
Vice-president of Economic Context  
jsevilla@llorenteycuenca.com

**Latam Desk**  
**Claudio Vallejo**  
Senior Director  
cvallejo@llorenteycuenca.com

**Lagasca, 88 - planta 3**  
28001 Madrid  
Tel. +34 91 563 77 22

### Impossible Tellers

**Ana Folgueira**  
Managing Director  
ana@impossibletellers.com

**Diego de León, 22, 3<sup>o</sup> izq**  
28006 Madrid  
Tel. +34 91 438 42 95

### Cink

**Sergio Cortés**  
Partner, Founder and Chairman  
scortes@cink.es

**Muntaner, 240, 1<sup>o</sup>-1<sup>a</sup>**  
08021 Barcelona  
Tel. +34 93 348 84 28

### Lisbon

**Tiago Vidal**  
Managing Director  
tvidal@llorenteycuenca.com

**Avenida da Liberdade n<sup>o</sup>225, 5<sup>o</sup> Esq.**  
1250-142 Lisbon  
Tel: + 351 21 923 97 00

## UNITED STATES

### Miami

**Erich de la Fuente**  
Partner and Managing Director  
edela Fuente@llorenteycuenca.com

**600 Brickell Avenue**  
Suite 2020  
Miami, FL 33131  
Tel. +1 786 590 1000

### New York City

**Latam Desk**  
**Erich de la Fuente**  
edela Fuente@llorenteycuenca.com

**Abernathy MacGregor**  
277 Park Avenue, 39th Floor  
New York, NY 10172  
Tel. +1 212 371 5999 (ext. 374)

### Washington, DC

**Ana Gamonal**  
Director  
agamonal@llorenteycuenca.com

**10705 Rosehaven Street**  
Fairfax, VA 22030  
Washington, DC  
Tel. +1 703 505 4211

## MEXICO, CENTRAL AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN

### Mexico City

**Juan Rivera**  
Partner and Managing Director  
jrivera@llorenteycuenca.com

**Av. Paseo de la Reforma 412, Piso 14,**  
Col. Juárez, Del. Cuauhtémoc  
CP 06600, Mexico City  
Tel: +52 55 5257 1084

### Havana

**Pau Solanilla**  
Managing Director  
psolanilla@llorenteycuenca.com

**Lagasca, 88 - planta 3**  
28001 Madrid  
Tel. +34 91 563 77 22

### Panama City

**Javier Rosado**  
Partner and Managing Director  
jrosado@llorenteycuenca.com

**Sortis Business Tower, piso 9**  
Calle 57, Obarrio - Panamá  
Tel. +507 206 5200

### Santo Domingo

**Iban Campo**  
Managing Director  
icampo@llorenteycuenca.com

**Av. Abraham Lincoln 1069**  
Torre Ejecutiva Sonora, planta 7  
Tel. +1 809 6161975

## ANDES' REGION

### Bogota

**María Esteve**  
Partner and Managing Director  
mesteve@llorenteycuenca.com

**Av. Calle 82 # 9-65 Piso 4**  
Bogotá D.C. – Colombia  
Tel: +57 1 7438000

### Lima

**Luis Miguel Peña**  
Partner and Senior Director  
lmpena@llorenteycuenca.com

**Humberto Zogbi**  
Chairman  
hzogbi@llorenteycuenca.com

**Av. Andrés Reyes 420, piso 7**  
San Isidro  
Tel: +51 1 2229491

### Quito

**Alejandra Rivas**  
Managing Director  
arivas@llorenteycuenca.com

**Avda. 12 de Octubre N24-528 y**  
Cordero – Edificio World Trade  
Center – Torre B - piso 11  
Tel. +593 2 2565820

### Santiago de Chile

**Claudio Ramírez**  
Partner and General Manager  
cramirez@llorenteycuenca.com

**Magdalena 140, Oficina 1801.**  
Las Condes.  
Tel. +56 22 207 32 00

## SOUTH AMERICA

### Buenos Aires

**Daniel Valli**  
Managing Director and  
Senior Director of New Business  
Development for  
the Southern Cone  
dvalli@llorenteycuenca.com

**Av. Corrientes 222, piso 8. C1043AAP**  
Tel: +54 11 5556 0700

### Rio de Janeiro

**Maira Da Costa**  
Director  
mdacosta@llorenteycuenca.com

**Rua da Assembleia, 10 - Sala 1801**  
RJ - 20011-000  
Tel. +55 21 3797 6400

### Sao Paulo

**Marco Antonio Sabino**  
Partner and Brazil Chairman  
masabino@llorenteycuenca.com

**Juan Carlos Gozzer**  
Managing Director  
jcgozzer@llorenteycuenca.com

**Rua Oscar Freire, 379, Cj 111,**  
Cerqueira César SP - 01426-001  
Tel. +55 11 3060 3390

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