

‘The earth is flat, believe me:’ The anatomy of consumption myths and alternative facts.

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the structure of a consumption myth in which ‘flat Earth’ proponents aim to convince consumers to discard scientific evidence in favor of an account in which the Earth supposedly is flat as opposed to round. Data constitute a netnography of flat-earthers focusing on the speech and video explanations introducing their beliefs. The analysis focuses on the rhetorical strategies that validate and authorize the flat earth myth as factual, because the structure of the myth is isomorphic to the narrative, which means that the myth is discoverable ‘within’ the account. The results show the anatomy of a mythos in which flat earthers curate the instructions for how to read their account as the truth. The discussion conceptualizes consumer myths as narratives of selective coherence, first appealing to the postmodern incredulity towards authoritative statements, second vetting what facts are allowed into the myth, and third instructing the audience ‘to do their own research’ via naïve empiricism.

Keywords

Postmodernism, consumer myths, post-truth, storytelling, conspiracy theories, alternative facts

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INTRODUCTION

This paper investigates the narrative structure of consumption myths (Stern, 1995; Brown, 2015), which are stories that address the nature of the world and the rationale for its social order. Myths are attractive because “...people think narratively rather than argumentatively or paradigmatically” (Weick, 1995, p.127), and often validate their personal beliefs by imposing a sense of order over the “contradictions and paradoxes” of the social experience (Levy, 1981, p.51). However, while most myths in marketing research are exclusively commercial, for instance explaining the Thanksgiving myth to consumers via ads (Stern, 1995), certain myths blend commercial products with pseudo-science and even conspiracies. For example, *antivaxers* believe in a conspiracy in which vaccines cause autism (Plotkin, Gerber, and Offit, 2009). The animosity towards scientific claims of knowledge and truth constitutes one essential flashpoint in the so-called ‘culture wars,’ as illustrated by the proliferation of myths challenging climate-change and evolution.

This paper draws from postmodernism to understand the interplay between narrative and truth. In postmodernism, contemporary social issues are hyperreal constructions that are alluring thus marketable (Firat and Dholakia, 2006; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Postmodern scholars are incredulous to authoritative claims over truth (Firat, Sherry, and Venkatesh, 1994, p.312), and instead argue that regimes are keen to control who has access to facts and who can claim to possess the truth (Foucault, 1980). Research on postmodernism peaked in the 1990s (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995), and declined over the last two decades (Cova, Maclaran and Bradshaw, 2013). However, recent political events renewed the discussion on who has the authority over facts and truth. Embedded in the likes of ‘fake news,’ ‘alternative facts,’ ‘urban legends,’ and ‘conspiracy

theories,' myths are shifting from the fringes of the media and society into the mainstream (Diaz Ruiz 2023; Diaz Ruiz & Nilsson 2024)..

This paper investigates the anatomy of one particular consumer myth, that the Earth is not round but flat, to understand the rhetorical strategies that proponents use to cast doubt against scientific consensus and supplant it with an account of their own. While several myths oppose scientific thought, the reason for investigating the flat earth myth is that its conception and circulation is public and can be documented contemporaneously, partly because of the amount of attention in mainstream media, including features in HBO Vice News, BBC, ABC, and NBC (see Table 1). The growing popularity of this myth can be found in *The New Yorker* (Burdick, 2018, 30 May) and *Scientific American* (Foster and Branch, 2018, 21 August). While the flat Earth conspiracy is not the first (or last) myth proposing an alternative worldview, the public nature of this myth, especially online, enables the analysis of its inception and evolution. While myths often emerge among secretive groups in the form of conspiracy theories, flat-earthers consider themselves freethinkers; thus they maintain a public profile online.

<i>Table 1: Vignettes featuring Flat Earthers in media</i>		
<i>SOURCE</i>	<i>DATE</i>	<i>TITLE</i>
HBO: VICE news	2018, 05 August	This Flat Earther Thinks NASA is Lying to You
HBO: VICE news	2017, 28 November	People From Around The Globe Met For The First Flat Earth Conference (HBO)
BBC News	2018, 23 February	Flat Earth? One man's rocket mission
ABC News	2018, 27 June	Inside a Flat Earth convention, where nearly everyone believes Earth isn't round
NBC News	2018, 1 February	Can Self-Taught Rocket Scientist Mike Hughes Prove Earth Is Flat?
The New Yorker	Burdick, A. 2018, 30 May	Looking for life on a flat earth
Scientific American	Foster, C.A and Branch, G. 2018, 21 August	Do People Really Think Earth Might Be Flat?
Esquire	Wilding, M. 2018, 11 September	Circle Or Sphere? Inside The UK's First 'Flat Earth' Conference

By focusing on the rhetorical strategies that flat-earthers use to convince their audience, this paper investigates how the myth is isomorphic to the narrative (Barthes 1957), which means that the myth is discoverable ‘in’ the account. Therefore, it is possible to identify the instructions for how to thread facts selectively into an authorized myth. We start by reviewing the literature on postmodernism and consumer myths.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Postmodernism on truth, power, and computers

Lyotard defined the postmodern condition as the “incredulity towards metanarratives,” (Lyotard 1984, xxiii). A metanarrative is a story “with a legitimating function” (Lyotard 1992, correspondence 31), which means that authoritative accounts, especially from science and government, legitimize themselves by appealing to a totalizing discourse in which central authority validates universal judgments. Lyotard’s *postmodern condition* distrusts claims of objective truth, and instead argue that facts intertwine into narratives to an extent in which the law, sciences, and politics are nothing else but a collection of fragmented stories. Because truth is arbitrary, those claiming to possess the truth are exercising power instead. The truth is neither objective nor accessible, and instead, we can deal only with *narrative truth*, a local version of the truth that is partial and always in the making.

The anchor of postmodernism is hostility toward consensus. Postmodern authors take the Baconian maxim that *knowledge is power* with redoubled seriousness, and further add that if knowledge is power, then metanarratives are the pillars upon which power rests (c.f. Firat, and Venkatesh, 1995; Firat, Dholakia, and Venkatesh, 1995). The postmodern program, thus, claims that the truth is relative and aims at liberating society by distinguishing the claims of truth and their use of power. Not only knowledge entails power, but power generates knowledge because power validates what counts as facts, and how facts should come together as narratives that in turn validate what counts as truths (plural). In Foucault's view, power, validity, and knowledge intertwine into a self-referential storyline operating as the control mechanism of society.

The abundant number of critics of postmodernism include conservative and liberal authors, who usually fail to agree on much, but they converge on their disdain for postmodernism. For Chomsky, postmodernism is the cultural logic of the late capitalism in which middle- and upper-class people can avoid responsibility by hiding in the privilege of thinking themselves as consumers rather than citizens. For conservatives, postmodernism is a boogeyman that undermines traditional doctrine by underscoring moral relativism and the erosion of values.

Following an extensive critique, formal philosophers buried postmodernism decades ago (Kirby, 2006). Nevertheless, the postmodern notion in which truth bends to power circulates in the public domain. For example, back in 2005 (October 12), the American comedian Stephen Colbert coined "truthiness," defined as "the belief in what you feel to be true rather than what the facts will support." Colbert's joke aimed at how politicians build narratives that ignore facts, mock experts, and instead peddle to the gut feeling of their constituency, "dictionaries are elitist by constantly telling us what is and isn't true. (...) I do not trust books; they are all fact and no heart." A decade later, in the context of democratic processes peppered with accusations of

disinformation and outright lies, the Oxford English Dictionary (2016) awarded “post-truth” as the word of the year, defining it as “circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.”

The coinage of “truthiness” and “post-truth” suggests that beyond the comedian’s jokes and the political conjuncture, lays the postmodern condition (Goulding, 2003; Lyotard, 1984) a state characterized by incredulity, fragmentation of narratives, and distrust against centralized authority. Perhaps Brown (2015), and Cova et al., (2013) were right when they argued that the reports on the demise of postmodernism were exaggerated.

Postmodernism in an online society

While postmodern authors aimed to liberate society from metanarratives, they rarely proposed any specific course of action. The exception was Lyotard who saw the democratization of computers as one likely solution to authoritarianism, “give the public free access to memory and databanks” (Lyotard 1984, p.67). In a society characterized by unrestricted access to computers, Lyotard thought, metanarratives would be obsolete. The public would be able to make decisions without the need for authoritative validation. While Lyotard theorized about the changes in the status of knowledge in computerized societies, his prescription, surprisingly, is not postmodern but modern. Lyotard assumed that when the public gets access to facts, individuals should come to rational conclusions. However, Lyotard couldn’t investigate empirically in the 1980s whether an online society is free from metanarratives.

Fast forward almost forty years from Lyotard’s *Postmodern Condition*; we live in a world in which computers are everywhere, not only on every home, as Bill Gates envisioned, but also on

smartphones, cars, and even domestic appliances. The democratization of computers, as Lyotard theorized correctly, not only disrupted who gets access to “memory and databanks,” but also changed who generates narratives. In a world in which every consumer is potentially a content producer, media influencer, and celebrity in the making (Holt, 2016), the postmodern condition is no longer anchored in incredulity, but in the fragmentation of stories and worldviews.

However, one problem that remains is that while postmodern authors aimed at dismantling the hold of authority over truth via the dissemination of computers, the remaining gap is investigating the emergence of narrative truths in an online world where all truth claims seem equally valid. Henceforth, one aspect that remains understudied is the dynamics that validate truth claims; in consequence, we investigate the narrative structure of myths to address how they justify the truth as an alternative to consensus.

Consumer myths are narrative knowledge.

An academic stream on myths emerged in the twentieth century (Barthes, 1957; Lévi-Strauss, 1955), and developed into a stream of consumer research (Johar, Holbrook, and Stern 2001; Tillotson and Martin, 2015). For Barthes (1957, p.107) the myth is an ahistorical mode of narrative that mediates points of opposition; henceforth, the myth is a somewhat coherent story, “myth is a type of speech.” For Barthes, myth is a metalanguage that connects signs into a narrative, and yet, it does this by repressing the construction of signs. Following Barthes, a narrative analysis of myths can investigate its internal consistency, in which narrative puts together words and bits of words with a very particular meaning, while simultaneously camouflages those relations from the casual observer. Barthes argues that myths remove history

from language, first by reducing a complex phenomenon to a few arbitrary connections, and then by taking the myth as a definitive interpretation.

Myths always contain an analogy that motivates them by co-opting how particular signs must be associated with a particular meaning. A second-order analysis can reveal how the sign and the meaning create an ahistorical narrative, a myth. Barthes's example is a French magazine cover showing a young black person dressed in what appears to be a military outfit issuing a military salute to an off-camera flag. At the first-order analysis, the picture *denotes* an event in which a soldier salutes the French flag. However, in a second-order analysis, at the mythological level, the image signifies something else. The young age of the character, the devotion on the expression and the angle of the camera, produces a *connotation* in which France is a multi-ethnic empire worthy of respect, and that everyone, regardless of age has civic duties to the homeland.

Myths provide a sense of order and continuity into a world full of contradictions, as Lévi-Strauss (1955, p.440) wrote: "mythical thought always professes from awareness of opposition." The fundamental oppositions are about social order and the human condition, including life versus death, young versus old, sacred versus profane. In the context of postmodernism, we could expand Lyotard's idea on the incredulity toward metanarratives, potentially, by investigating myths when incredulity emerges and metanarratives crumble, including, what drives alternative explanations for the pressing contradictions of society. When metanarratives lose currency, we theorize, a myth emerges from its fissures. Building upon Durkheim's (1912/1959) notion in which the extent in which myths are shared bind the group together, we theorize that metanarratives collapse by failing to address acute contradictions in society and that the fissures represent gaps for emerging myths that emerge in direct competition against the dominant metanarratives.

In a consumer society, brands often become the focus of myths explaining the contradictions of society (Holt, 2016), and giving consumers simplified ways to deal with anxiety. According to Holt, the brands that become iconic contribute to addressing the anxiety of the people and the times in which they live. Brands become myths that resolve the contradictions of society, at least superficially, by channeling desire and relieving anxiety. Holt refers to "myth markets" as the mechanisms in which consumption addresses ideological conflict through narratives.

METHOD

This paper analyzes the flat-earth's myth in which, against all scientific evidence, the Earth is not round but flat. While the flat Earth theory is preposterous given the overwhelming scientific evidence, a growing number of consumers distrust metanarratives to the extent that they are willing to entertain the idea that scientists would lie to obfuscate the flatness of the planet. Importantly, this research does not intend to validate the claim that the Earth is flat. Instead, the purpose of the empirics is studying the narrative structure that flat-earthers use to convince each other that the Earth is not round but flat. Since the planet's surface *feels* flat to the observer, despite all the evidence of the contrary, flat-earthers believe that the roundness of the Earth is a fabrication, a conspiracy.

Data collection

The data for the flat earth myth corresponds to the public dissemination of resources online that flat-earthers use to persuade an audience. The videography includes the following four types. 1. Video recordings of public speakers in which a flat earth proponent talks at length to an audience often in a religious congregation or in a flat earth meeting. 2. Documentaries in which an off-

camera voice explains the basic principles of the flat earth myth usually using stock photos. 3. Homemade experiments in which flat earth adventurers display the naïve experiments that ‘prove’ empirically their case for a flat earth. Importantly, the qualifier ‘naïve’ is a distinction between the formal experimental method requiring internal validity and multiple controls, and the experiential exercises that flat-earthers use appealing more to the senses of the observer. Finally, 4. Interviews in which senior members of the flat earth community broadcast their interviewing each other online; this format often emphasizes the personal trajectories and critical incidents of becoming a flat Earth believer. While the videography is the primary source, data include written material published by the community, interviews in mainstream media, and pictorial representations depicting the perceived flatness of the planet.

A narrative analysis of myths

When Stern (1995) investigated consumer myths in advertising, she introduced the literary narrative method to study advertising; specifically, she used taxonomy of literary conventions: comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony. Her narrative analysis extrapolates the taxonomy as follows: Comedic mythos lead to happy conclusions, tragic mythos lead to ambiguous endings, romance mythos lead to nostalgic endings, and ironic mythos lead to surprise endings. For Stern, ads reproduce the fundamental plot structures of western stories to become recognizable narratives to consumers. However, while Frye’s taxonomy applies to Thanksgiving ads, Stern (1995, p.183) called for further investigations of myths across multiple consumer stories.

Brown (2015) extends Stern (1995) by using a narrative analysis of myths. Brown (2015, p.446-7) criticized the rigidity of the framework, “the typology is very rigid. Texts are consigned to one

of the four categories and their copious subdivisions;” later, Brown extended the criticism to the lack of consistency between framework and myth, “second, Frye’s hugely ambitious attempt to pigeonhole the entire Western canon, from Homer to Hemingway, was largely confined to works of elite literature; popular culture’s face didn’t fit.” A further interpretation of Brown’s criticism is that Stern’s pre-existing framework does not emerge from the narrative itself. Instead of analyzing the structures that emerge from the myth, Brown (2015) proposed a second pre-existing framework; this time Moretti’s literary forms – horror, romance, mystery and science fiction. By doing so, Brown replaces one straightjacket for another, thus leaving open the question about the internal structure of consumer myths.

This paper draws from Stern’s (1995) and Brown’s (2015) narrative analysis with a crucial caveat. Instead of imposing a pre-existing external framework, this paper analyzes the internal logic of the flat-earthers’ account, including its patchwork of in-built contradictions and shortcomings. The reason is that, drawing from Barthes (1957), the myth is isomorphic to the narrative, and thus the way in which of proponents formulate their account, should permeate ‘in’ and be discoverable ‘within’ the narrative structure.

By building upon Stern’s narrative analysis, but also including Barthes’ notion that the myth is a type of speech, the narrative analysis of this paper focuses on the language games that authorize the flat earth account as a valid representation of the world. Importantly, we are not interested in whether the account is accurate; instead, we focus on the rhetorical strategies that proponents use to convince their audience of the ‘truthiness’ of their account. As a result, the structure of the flat Earth myth reveals a multilayered patchwork of contradicting accounts, each supporting and superseding multiple versions of the same myth.

FINDINGS

A heroic confrontation against power

For flat-earthers, power is never to be trusted. Echoing postmodern authors such as Lyotard and Foucault, the chief strategy that flat-earthers use is framing power as the preeminent source of mistrust. In the following quote, Roberts extrapolates Foucault's argument to an extreme generalization in which a person that holds a position of authority cannot be trusted.

“How many of you believe your government is 100% honest? And, how many of you know the military answers to their government? Okay, so they lie because they have power, and they lie to stay in power. Why would you trust them? They lie about everything, and this is the biggest lie of them all.”

Those in power are exerting control of the narrative so comprehensively, that they interweave a metanarrative encompassing a series of small falsehoods. The resulting myth is comprehensive enough that it includes other conspiracies. This is the case of the longstanding conspiracy in which the US military faked the moon landing. For flat-earthers, the only reason for this deception is to cover an even bigger conspiracy, in which there is no moon.

“Well I looked into the moon landings, and I don't believe that we landed on the moon. If our Government is willing to lie to us about this, then what else they lie about. It is all part of a big lie, and it all makes sense, it is to hide that the earth is flat.”

In contrast to their distrusted “elites,” flat earthers frame themselves as individuals that can be trusted because they do not have power; they are common people that sacrifice family and wealth to “liberate” others. Like Campbell wrote about the narrative construction of heroes, Flat

Earthers create narratives in which the obstacles that they face demonstrate their heroic drive as uncompromising visionaries and freethinkers. Flat-earthers often emphasize their personal journey and their sacrifices in their heroic journey.

“Discovering the flat earth has cost me much because people do not believe me. I also thought that the flat earth was a joke. It is a joke, right? That is where we start because we learn basic childhood facts, like one plus one, equals two and the earth is a globe. We learn this before almost everything else; and right there, this should give you a clue about how dangerous is the secret.”

The flat earther view creates a hero of each believer. They are heroic, not for doing anything special, but for having the courage to believe in something that diverges from the mainstream. Freethinkers, flat-earthers propose, should avoid the mainstream and follow a nonconformist belief; this is a test of purity via. Therefore, their evidence of success is not in accomplishing anything, but in facing the obstacles and tribulations that demonstrate the purity of their freethinking belief, including their heroic path to uncover the forces preventing them from believing.

For a reasonable reader, the sequencing logic that flat-earthers use is obscure, but within the myth, it makes sense. For flat-earthers, the “elites” in power use science to control truth to win a disinformation war against American Christian beliefs. For instance, if one subscribes to the myth in which scientists invented Evolution to deny that God used intelligent design to create humans and that scientists invented the Big Bang theory to minimize the creationist power of God, then the leap to the Flat Earth is small.

“It is the unholy trinity: The Big Bang, Evolution and the Round Earth. They invented the Big Bang to deny that God created everything, and they invented Evolution to convince you that He cares more about monkeys than about you. We know that. We also know that they invented the Round Earth because God cannot be above you if He is also below you,

and they invented an infinite universe, to make you believe that God is far away from you. But we know that God is right above us.”

Reverse the burden of proof

The burden of proof is the obligation in which the party that proposes a claim has the responsibility to justify it. As it is the standard process in science, the person proposing a shift in status quo must substantiate its claim with evidence. Henceforth, if flat earthers want to propose that the Earth is flat as opposed to round, they must prove their theory beyond reasonable doubt. However, because flat earthers operate within a myth, an account proposing a simplifying order, they reverse the burden of proof by requiring science to provide evidence. Because scientific accounts require evidence, flat-earththers treat their own view on flatness as the status quo and instead require scientific evidence for the globe proposition. In consequence, flat-earththers do not deny the burden of proof, but instead, they reverse its meaning, for instance by chasing inconsistencies in evidence for the round earth.

One way to do so is to attack images of Earth produced by NASA, a whole genre within the flat earth corpus. Flat-earththers discard images from space as fabrications, thus turning NASA, and their use of digital images, as a punching bag. For flat-earththers, every instance of digital manipulation is evidence that the earth is flat. The inquisitive observer may argue that there are several legitimate reasons for digitally enhancing images of Earth, and yet, for flat-earththers, the existence of digital images is proof that “debunks” the round earth as a theory. “Debunking” is an essential term within the flat earth repertoire, which reverses the burden of proof, from

providing evidence that the Earth is flat into challenging evidence that the earth is round. Hence, flat-earthers shift the responsibility to prove the globe back to scientists.

“Nearly everyone interested in space has seen this picture. It was released by NASA and has the iconic name the Blue Marble 2. You can find the picture everywhere, but one of the best places to find it is NASA's own website. This photograph is iconic because NASA says it is one of the most detailed true-color images of the entire Earth to date. To put it in a nutshell, the picture is iconic. Well, amazingly, it turns out a number of internet sleuths have now found compelling new evidence that the image is indeed a fake.”

In the following quote, a flat Earther treats their flat myth as if it was status quo, when it is the opposite. “I haven’t seen enough evidence that the Earth is round. I am not convinced, so I do not believe their theory.” By reversing the burden of proof, flat-earthers have the much simpler task of proving their point by debunking the opposition. Their basic strategy is to weaponize skepticism by asking a scientist to “prove the globe.”

“I’m going to show you some pictures from NASA. How they just completely and blatantly lie to our face. They make you believe. This is a literal picture from NASA that they released to the public. In their fake CGI imaging, right here, you can see that they’re taking this picture from behind their false moon, in their false world, and the sun is shining on them; on the earth, but it forgot to shine on the moon. There’s no Sun here; there’s no light here. There would be light here if the Sun was behind it. There should be. This should be illuminated, but it is darkened because it’s fake.”

The flat Earther strategy is to set up a strawman and hit it hard. In their narrative, NASA proves to be a valuable dummy, not because of what NASA does, but because of what it *could* do. With the budget that NASA receives, flat-earthers believe, they *could* fake the space experience, and this alone constitutes evidence that they do. For instance, consider the following example in which the existence of a Hollywood movie, Gravity, constitutes evidence for the technical capabilities to fake every single space of space.

Have you seen the movie gravity? Hollywood made it with about a hundred million dollars, give or take, and it's just a solid movie. Gravity that was pretty impressive, I saw it in an IMAX big screen, and wow! I felt like I was with Sandra Bullock flying around in space. Very impressive. Now think about it, this is what they can do with a hundred million dollars; imagine what NASA can do with tens of billions of dollars every year.

Literalism and naïve empiricism

Flat-earththers do not ask the audience to believe them; instead, they propose evidence on the truthiness of their account. What is interesting is what constitutes “evidence” for flat-earththers.

We find three primary sources of evidence that flat-earththers use: homemade experiments, appeal to the senses, and literal interpretations of authoritative sources.

The first set of evidence includes homemade experiments. Flat Earthers continuously ask their audience to not believe in what they say but to decide by themselves the validity of the flat Earth account. Flat-earththers ask their audience to conduct “experiments” at home showing that the earth is flat as opposed to round. Of course, these are not actual experiments, but observational games designed to shift the burden of proof. They supply pre-approved exercises designed to “debunk globalist lies.” The structure of their exercises is notable in that they are not meant to provide evidence supporting their flat theory, but instead, they attack the round earth; hence, supporting their own view by process of elimination. For example, in the video “Why I am a flat earther, 37 must-see experiments,” the author proposes a compilation of experiments that “debunk” the globe.

Experiment 1: “This is a very easy experiment that you can do at home to prove that the earth is flat. Take a tennis ball and soak it in water until it saturates. Now we got a wet tennis ball; let’s put it in a phonogram. Then make it spin rapidly, and you will see that it splatters water; if the earth would spin, then the water would splatter. This constitutes evidence that the Earth is not round.”

Experiment 2: “It is proven that the ship does not sink behind a hill of water, but that it is actually perspective which hides it. This demonstrates that the Earth is not a globe. There have been experiments where half-sunken ships have been restored by simply looking at them through telescopes, showing that they are not actually hiding behind ‘hills of water.’”

Flat-earthers continually appeal to the senses when discussing their view “What do your senses tell you? Do you feel that you are in a globe? I know that I do not feel to be in a globe.” For most flat-earthers, their evidence comes from first-hand observation and doing their own observations, something that they call “observational science.” This reliance on first-hand accounts can be defined as naïve empiricism in which truth can only be determined by observation; it is naïve because it over-relies on empirical observation as the source of generalization.

“I believe in what I see. They ask me to believe that water is around a ball, but I have never seen a ball keep water. When I look at the oceans, I see a container. If I chop a ball in half and make it a bowl, that’s a container. The water pours into the bowl, and it rises to the level. So optically, visually, I see a flat Earth. I can see a container, not a ball.”

“The best possessions of man are his senses and when he uses them all he will not be deceived in his survey of nature it is only when someone faculty or other is neglected or abused that he is deluded every man in full command of his senses knows that a level surface is a flat or horizontal one”

The third source of evidence is an overreliance on authoritative accounts. That flat earthers rely on some authoritative claims while denouncing other sources of authority as corrupt is a fascinating inconsistency that does not seem to bother flat-earthers. Mainly, the type of evidence that flat-earthers use is a literal interpretation of the Scriptures.

“The title of my sermon is the Flat Earth, and not the Flat Earth theory, because I don't believe it to be a theory. A theory is something that you can't prove. If this theory wasn't true, would I be able to find this much scripture on it? Two sermons worth of Scripture, 12 pages. Just right off the start of book one, almost in the first couple words of the Bible, we can disprove the whole globe model. (...) Genesis is the foundation of all that we believe in the Bible to be true. If Genesis is wrong, then it all crumbles under a faulty foundation. Genesis says nothing, zip, zero, nada, about the earth being set in motion orbital or rotational around the Sun. In fact, the Sun doesn't even show up until after the earth is already in place with life already in existence. (...) It's a huge lie to believe that

you're on a globe and that you're meaningless. The whole purpose of this lie is that you feel like there's no God. It is to make you feel unimportant.”

CONCLUSION

This paper contributes to the re-emergence of postmodernism in consumption (Cova, Maclaran and Bradshaw, 2013). Specifically, how consumers construct knowledge using postmodern methods. Postmodern consumers do research, but they do it in ways that are foreign to scientists and academics. Consumers do research in the postmodern sense, which means putting together pieces of evidence in direct opposition against a target metanarrative. This process gives the impression (or illusion) that the individual is subverting those in power, by weakening their claims to knowledge. When a consumer does her own “experiments” and trusts her senses above any other type of scientific evidence, then the conclusion becomes, irrevocably, a postmodern truth; the alternative fact that is local and personal: her truth, her knowledge.

Some of the essential discussions of our time, including global warming and the survival of democratic conventions, are muddled by our inability to discuss facts and instead perpetuate myths. By studying how flat earthers persuade their audience of the truthiness of their view, we are able to understand the mechanisms that perpetuate the construction and circulation of alternative facts and dismissal of scientific evidence. Notably, flat-earthers are able to be convincing, even if using flawed logic, by distorting what critical thinking means. By claiming to do critical thinking, and by asking their audience for first-hand observation, flat-earthers appear to propose a valid theory, which is not the case. Therefore, this study contributes to understanding the emergence of alternative beliefs, post-truth, and the construction of accounts claiming to be factual.

Finally, we conclude with a call for CCT as a field of research uniquely equipped to investigate the narrative structure of consumption myths (Stern, 1995; Brown, 2015), which are stories that address the nature of the world and the rationale for its social order. By analyzing the anatomy of one particular consumer myth, we can learn how proponents cast doubt against scientific consensus, and supplant it with an account of their own. Future CCT research can use existing expertise on myths beyond consumption to address some of the most relevant challenges of our time, which right now seem drowned in alternative facts.

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