

***What Lies Under the White Lights:* A Screenplay Exploring the Effects of Post-Truth Found in False Allegations Online Using the Crime Genre**

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ABSTRACT

Post-Truth can be easily observed manifesting in the current era in various forms. False allegations serve as one form of this theory taking place, one which impact can be prominently seen today. This creative work, a screenplay of the crime genre, discusses this by using it as an ever present dread present in multiple aspects of the story. Alexander Nugraha is faced with a false allegations case rooted in Post-Truth, where he is constantly thwarted with other forms of Post-Truth in his city. It hinders his success in figuring out the case until he is forced to realize his reality and starts to see the world for what it is, full of Post-Truth and falsehoods. With this realization, Alexander is able to figure out the right path, solve the case, and defeat the Post-Truth problem in front of him.

Keywords: crime genre, false allegations, post-truth

INTRODUCTION

In the current age, a large concern is the rampant uprising of online falsehoods, such as fake news, false allegations, and misinformation. With the rapid development of the internet also comes the rise of biased journalists and generative AI, resulting in the navigation of the internet without seeing something doctored or artificially generated to be a labor rivaling that of Sisyphus and his boulder. It is increasingly obvious that over the recent years, the fast and explosive development of social media have witnessed the extensive growth in the number of fake news. It has profound impacts on both individuals and society as a whole. Fake news is mostly dangerous due to its volume, variety, and velocity, resulting in difficulties to its detection. As a result, this biased and false information can destroy people's faith in the authorities, experts, and even the government. (Zhang & Ghorbani, 2020)

False allegations towards an individual or a group of individuals can heavily impact their reputation, and can be especially dangerous concerning real world matters. For example, during the 2024 United States presidential election campaign, Republican vice president nominee JD Vance propagated false rumors where Haitian immigrants in the town of Springfield, Ohio, were stealing and eating pets such as cats or waterfowl. This rumor spread quickly online and resulted in an increase in racist rhetoric online, even among fellow political figures (Olmstead, 2024). When the hoax was eventually disproven, Vance himself claimed in an interview that he needed "to create stories so that the... media actually pays attention to the suffering of the American people" (Helmore, 2024). This claim signified that he had indeed fabricated the story to rile up the populace for his own personal benefit. This had nearly no effect on the election, considering he and Donald Trump emerged victorious. The devastating impact of these falsehoods is palpable, which is why this creative work aims to unravel the cause of their creation and showcase the severity of their impact, encouraging readers to be more aware and to take precautions when encountering unproven allegations, especially in the political landscape.

This creative work is in the form of a screenplay. Screenplay, also sometimes called a film script, is a form of written work that is created to be realized on a screen, whether the big screen of a cinema or the small screen of a home television. According to Field (2005) “the nature of the screenplay deals in pictures, and if we wanted to define it, we could say that a screenplay is a story told with pictures, in dialogue and description, and placed within the context of dramatic structure. That is its essential nature.” (p. 20) This essential nature will prove to be helpful to showcase the problem that will be discussed in the creative work. This screenplay is approximately 70 pages, which would equate to 70 minutes in real time when transitioning into a televised product.

This story is of the crime genre. Sandberg (2024) wrote that “Crime has been a central feature of literature for as long as there has been something that can be referred to by that name. Some of our oldest stories contain, or are built around, behaviour that can be considered criminal” (p. 37). Crime film is a broad genre, as one can argue films in which a story hinges on a crime can be considered a crime film, however, the specific type of story used is a classic detective story with a detective stumbling upon a case and hunting down the criminal. Popular examples of films of this genre are the Sherlock Holmes film adaptations directed by Guy Ritchie starring Robert Downey Junior, film adaptations of Agatha Christie’s Hercule Poirot books by Kenneth Branagh, and the Knives Out series by Rian Johnson. These films focus on a detective, sometimes with a sidekick, as they either solve a crime of a client’s request, or stumble upon an active crime scene, which they ultimately are able to solve by careful deduction and planning, bringing the audience along for the thrill of the mystery.

The screenplay is about a man named Alexander Nugraha, a journalist turned small-time private investigator who solves crimes and writes about them in his online blog. He encounters a politically-charged crime where Reyhan Ramayana, a people’s representative who has been doing good for the city, gets falsely accused of being a homosexual. The false accusation was posted in a blog by a cyber-criminal group known as Blacklight, in an attempt to bring down Reyhan’s reputation to get him fired. Alexander aims to solve this case with the help of his sidekick, Penelope. After twists, turns, and troubles, Alexander ultimately discovers that Blacklight was hired by Markus, a fellow representative in Reyhan’s party. Markus admits that a part of his motivation was due to Reyhan’s success overshadowing him. The screenplay ends with the truth coming out and Markus confessing his crimes, creating a new story for Alexander’s blog.

Post-Truth

Post-Truth, in essence, is a political theory in which what the public claims to be the truth is not necessarily true, where in most cases, the real truth is obscured due to personal beliefs and emotions instead of facts, data, and evidence. While Post-Truth as a whole has been sowing its seeds in decades of human history, it has exploded in recent times due to the current political and informational climate raising its traffic where more people are discussing the matter. In 2016, the Oxford Dictionary even declared “post-truth” as The Word of the Year due to its frequency in usage all across the internet and social media in that year, where it was given the definition of “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” (Oxford Languages, 2016). In recent times, it is becoming increasingly obvious one cannot go online without witnessing Post-Truth in some way or form, from hoaxes, unproven allegations, and lies, especially in the political landscape.

According to McIntyre (2018, p. 7-8), there are multiple stages people subvert truth, the first stage, “falsehoods” which are most of the time unintentional mistakes people might say.

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The second stage, “willful ignorance” where people do not care if something is true or not and cannot be bothered to find out if that information is factual or not. Lastly, the third stage, “lying,” where a falsehood is intended to deceive an audience. In the lying stage, one’s intent is to manipulate someone into believing something one knows to be untrue, turning from a mere interpretation of facts into falsification. This is what Post-Truth is all about, and how it entangles innocent people into partaking in it. McIntyre also mentions that nowadays the lines between the stages are getting blurred, where one can quickly slip into another seamlessly. According to Harsin (2018), Post-Truth:

...emphasizes discord, confusion, polarized views, and understanding, well and misinformed competing convictions, and elite attempts to produce and manage these “truth markets” or competitions. (The) idea is not that lay citizens see the world falsely through the ideology of ruling-class thinkers, but that “popular” conceptions of reality have become confusing or suspicious because of the saturation of reality representation with games of expertly researched and thus exclusive strategic deception—of pan-partisan nature.

This is how Post-Truth forms and ultimately spreads. The response of people who might not know better creates the environment into which it breeds, preying onto their fears or other forms of affirmations to create the phenomenon of deceptive communication we know today.

According to Ball (2017), there are multiple spreaders of Post-Truth, or as he calls it, “bullshit.” First are the politicians, where “political scandals and corruption regularly lead the newspapers, and politicians of virtually every stripe are more than happy to tell you their opponents are corrupt, incompetent, or worse.” (p. 58) Post-Truth runs rampant in the political environment, as previously mentioned with the JD Vance issue, and multiple other scenarios all across the period of the 2024 elections, both in the United States and Indonesia. Second are the different forms of media, old or traditional media, such as from radio, newspapers, and television, which play key roles in shaping one’s view of the world and its events.

“Often, outlets propagate bullshit despite their efforts to do the opposite – outlets focused on objectivity can struggle to deal with politicians and campaigns not wedded to the truth, or to communicate in a way that reaches modern audiences. Other outlets, whether due to their political agendas or their own economics – the two often run together – play an active role in propagating stories and narratives they know to be dubious.” (p. 70)

The new media, such as the ones found online in sites or blogs. “Both (old and new media) face similar pressures in terms of reaching audiences, in terms of trust, and (often) in terms of advertising models – and a lot of the pressures from the way social networks operate”(p. 85). The so-called “Fake Media” or in other words, fake news. “Within months of first entering popular usage, ‘fake news’ has become routinely thrown around by social media users to dismiss negative stories about politicians they support; from fringe outlets... to political leaders;” (p. 98) And lastly, Social Media, where:

“Mainstream and partisan media court social networks to grow their audience. Fake news relies on social sharing to survive. While Facebook and Twitter may insist they’re technology companies, not media companies, they’re an integral part of the media ecosystem – and a big part of how bullshit information spreads. (p. 110)

All of these spreaders do what they do nearly always for their own benefits, politicians need the people's approval and support, media outlets need views, clicks, and approval from their sponsors, and people on social media are infatuated with likes, comments, and shares, resulting in this rapid propagation of Post-Truth.

While Post-Truth can be an imposing force, it is not an impossible force to combat. Edmans (2017) concluded his TED Talk with:

"So we must ensure that we have the very best evidence to guide us. Only if it's true can it be fact. Only if it's representative can it be data. Only if it's supportive can it be evidence. And only with evidence can we move from a post-truth world to a pro-truth world."

His method to finding truth is simply analyzing and critically examining pieces of information one might get at any point of time and obtaining evidence of its truth. Either from a book, journal article, documentary, or even a simple post on social media, stopping to think rationally and researching its credibility goes a long way. In this age of anti-science sentiments filled with faulty AI overviews and poorly generated images, research might prove to be an uphill battle, as Levitin (2017) said, "True knowledge simplifies our lives, helping us to make choices that increase our happiness and save time." (p. 219)

Post-Truth has been historically utilized in crime stories, for what is a detective if not someone who seeks the truth? "Detectives, to be successful, must produce answers that eliminate other possibilities in order to allow their case to be closed" (Watson, 2021). A good detective would use his abilities to reveal the real truth and bring those who spread post-truth to justice. An example of this can be found in Agatha Christie's *The Murder on Orient Express* (1936) and both its film adaptations, where the detective Hercule Poirot is entangled in a web of lies by the suspects he interrogates to find the murderer. Eventually he was able to pierce the suspects' lies concerning their identities and unravel the fact that all of them had partaken in the murder. In a politically-charged situation, the presence of Post-Truth can be way more prevalent in which the detective would need to properly identify statements of politicians to find out who is telling the truth and who is telling a lie.

The theory of Post-Truth will be featured in the creative work as the main driving force of the story's conflict, where it manifests in the form of the false allegations posted online towards Reyhan. From there, the information will further spiral online with news media, fellow politicians, and even the public discussing it and propagating this untruth even further, threatening Reyhan's job and plans for the city. The detective, Alexander, initially struggles to see behind the veil of Post-Truth, his naïveté an easy prey for the falsehoods around him. In the end, the Post-Truth is uncovered by a combination of evidence with help from unexpected places.

Mob Mentality

A concept related to Post-Truth that will also be explored is the concept of mob mentality, sometimes also called herd mentality. The concept was first coined by social psychologists and group think pioneers Gabriel Tarde and Gustave Le Bon in the 1800s. "Mob mentality happens when an individual in a group loses self awareness and begins to experience deindividuation, or put simply, their individual values and principles have been replaced by those of the group" (Brush, 2019).

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An example of a type of mob mentality often seen today in the internet is the phenomenon known as cancel culture, which has been a large driving force for several online movements, usually concerning celebrities and other popular individuals where they are canceled due to what they did or said in the past. Clark (2020) explains cancelling as an “expression of agency, a choice to withdraw one’s attention from someone or something whose values, (in)action, or speech are so offensive, one no longer wishes to grace them with their presence, time, and money.” This can stem from a variety of cases, from racism or other forms of bigotry to crimes such as sexual assault. More often than not this properly ruins a popular artist’s career depending on the severity and fanbase, leading to the artist in question getting boycotted or blacklisted by certain companies or industries, due to the mob mentality of social media netizens. However, this act of “cancelling” may not always be the correct action to take, especially when lies and misinformation are involved.

In the screenplay, this phenomenon will take hold with the citizens of the city, where the people, even those who were previously supportive of Reyhan, are outraged by the allegations. In the story, they appear as they protest to take him off his position as a politician, hurl insults and slurs at him, and spread even more falsehoods amongst themselves about Reyhan.

CONCEPT OF THE CREATIVE WORK

The screenplay is at its core a crime story, which materializes itself in every aspect of the story to further drive my themes. “Crime fiction is deeply interested in the investigation aspect of criminal justice. It is in fact frequently referred to as detective fiction, thus emphasizing the processes of investigating crime rather than crime itself” (Sandberg, 2024). This can be observed in my overall story, with crime and the threat of more crime pushes the detective into action, an investigation, to protect his client, the victim, and to stop the culprit from harming any more innocent people. The screenplay has a lot of crime and detective based inspirations, where the main conflict is a criminal running rampant performing a series of crimes from behind the scenes, where the investigator, our main character, has to solve the case and stop the culprit from committing any more crimes. I decided to add some elements that are a bit comedic and slightly unrealistic, however they do not stop the story from imparting its heavy theme, somewhat inspired from the depiction of Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes found in Guy Ritchie’s *Sherlock Holmes* movie (2009) and its sequel *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2011). Alexander, the investigator in the story, will be the main force in figuring the culprit of the crime. His character is a clever detective, resourceful, empathetic, and has a mild penchant for theatrics, yet he holds a certain naivete due to his relatively upper-class upbringing. In this tale, Alexander races against time and the media to prevent the criminal, Blacklight, from further condemning Reyhan, the victim of the crime and a politician aiming for the betterment of the city.

Genre Codes and Conventions

As this story is a story of the crime genre, a number of codes and conventions of this genre are present in the screenplay. The elements of the screenplay are according to these codes and conventions as follows.

The characters of a crime story typically include the detective: “You cannot have detective fiction without the detective.” (Sandberg, 2024, p. 40) Depending on the type of crime story the rest of the cast varies, but usually include a culprit and a victim, and on some occasions, a sidekick or assistant for the detective. In the screenplay, the detective role is filled by Alexander Nugraha, the victim by Reyhan Ramayana, and the culprit by Markus Muaraga. Penelope is also present as Alexander’s assistant.

The setting, both of place and of time, also vary by subgenres in the vast crime genre. For this screenplay, reference was taken from the hard-boiled subgenre, in which the setting is

not strictly one location, but multiple in a given locale, usually a city. (Pepper, 2024, p. 140-151) In terms of time, the screenplay takes place in the current year, 2025.

The events taking place in a crime story also carry a lot of variance, as it "...can and does articulate a range of possible explanations for criminal behaviour, favouring some over others depending on a range of factors from historical period to authorial preference." (Sandberg, 2024, p. 92) Typically, one starts with the detective discovering the crime, investigating for clues, with some difficulty along the way, and ending with a case solved and the culprit revealed. In these stories "...mystery tends to trump adventure, and readers expect to be invited to solve the case - along with the detective." (Rzepka, 2010, p. 3) The screenplay follows these series of events in its plot, getting its readers to follow Alexander and Penelope along as they try to find out who smeared Reyhan's name and why.

Premise

A detective finds himself entangled in a politically-charged crime as a mastermind hiding behind the screen of the internet who relies on false allegations sets their sights on a politician who aims to improve the city. It's up to him to unmask the culprit once and for all and clear the politician's name.

Creative Principle

The creative principle of this screenplay is to show how devastating the spread and effect of false allegations can be.

Synopsis

Alexander Nugraha is a journalist turned private investigator who solves crimes and posts about them on his blog. He stumbles across a politically-charged crime where Reyhan Ramayana, a people's representative working to improve the city, gets falsely accused of being a homosexual. The false accusation in the form of a blog was posted by a cyber-criminal group known as Blacklight, in an attempt to bring down Reyhan's reputation and to prevent his proposed projects from being enacted. Alexander aims to solve this case with the help of his sidekick, Penelope, in an effort to keep him as a representative. After twists, turns, and troubles, Alexander ultimately discovers that Blacklight was hired by Markus, a fellow representative in Reyhan's party. Markus admits that he hired Blacklight due to Reyhan's success overshadowing him. Markus confesses and Alexander writes down their stories in his own blog.

Characters

Main Character:

Alexander Nugraha

Age: Late 20's

The detective. Formerly an investigative journalist. After getting laid off from his work at Channel 18, he creates a blog titled "Papillon's Powder" where he solves minor cases around the city. He has dark hair and an average build. He wears a long sleeved coat and a fedora like a classic detective. Has a dry sense of humor and can often be blunt when addressing other people.

Supporting Characters:

Reyhan Ramayana

Age: Late 30's

The victim of the crime. A People's Representative campaigning for a few policies to make some changes to the city. He goes around helping the people in the Outskirts of Invarta City to the chagrin of other politicians. After the false allegations were spread on the internet his

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position as a politician and his policies was at risk. He has light brown hair and is below average height. Charismatic and ambitious, but often has problems controlling his passion and emotions.

Markus Muaraga

Age: Late 40's

The culprit. A fellow Representative and Reyhan's senior and mentor. Plays the part as a wise old man, but holds a lot of contempt in his heart. He holds jealousy of Reyhan's achievements overshadowing him which led him to be manipulated to hire the cyber-criminal group under the moniker of Blacklight to smear Reyhan's name. Soft spoken and well mannered to those he deem worthy, but cruel to those he does not.

Penelope

Age: Early 20's

The sidekick. A young woman in her early 20's. Alexander's assistant who specializes in technology and social media and helps Alexander manage the blog. Due to her role in one of Alexander's former cases she is now officially recruited into the fold and lives in his apartment building. Witty and often sarcastic, sometimes to Alexander's annoyance.

Kathryn

Age: Early 40's

Reyhan's secretary. Stoic and mature. Helps by compiling names for the detective. Tries to rein Reyhan in when he starts to lose control of his emotions.

Blacklight (Shadowy Figure)

Age: Unknown

A cyber-mercenary group operating across the continent. The organization contributes to human greed by creating chaos for a price. Markus hires them to smear Reyhan's name. The shadowy figure taunts and congratulates Alexander for finding them quickly, but disappears soon after.

Additional side characters that play a part in the story include Christopher, Silt, Snow, and Filip.

Conflict

The main conflict in this story is Man vs Man. This is a type of external conflict where two opposing people are in conflict with one another, most commonly the protagonist and the antagonist (Thompson, 2018). In this story the conflict is seen with the protagonist's side, consisting of Alexander, Penelope, and Reyhan, setting out against Blacklight, who was hired by Markus. Another prevalent conflict is Man vs Society. "This type of conflict is an external conflict that involves a protagonist at odds with a ruling body, or social or cultural norms" (Thompson, 2018). This conflict is seen with Reyhan and how people within social media and real life act towards him due to crimes he did not commit being spread falsely on social media.

CONCLUSION

This creative thesis aims to bring awareness of Post-Truth and false allegations into the public conscience. As shown in certain aspects of the story, Post-Truth takes its form in many different aspects, from falsehoods, willful ignorance, and lies. It spreads from many sources, from words, to news broadcasts, to even social media. This is the threat we are facing now. Through his process and development, Alexander represents a man who rises above Post-Truth to defeat those who spread it. In the real world, we can see from elections of certain presidents to the insanely and frankly disgusting development of AI generated media, Post-Truth keeps finding its way to worm itself into human society, and unfortunately, it's working. For all who

walk in the path of truth, stay true. Read up, study, think, don't let falsehoods fool you, stay informed and always question whatever comes your way. This way, Post-Truth will never be able to catch you off guard.

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