

Certainty for Sale: The New Parasite of Pseudo-Political Discourse

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Abstract

This article interrogates the rise of a new genre of discourse: pseudo-political podcasting and punditry that commodifies uncertainty, repackaging complex geopolitical realities into digestible, monetizable narratives. Drawing on media theory, surveillance capitalism, and epistemic psychology, we argue that this phenomenon constitutes a parasitic epistemic industry that feeds on vulnerability, mimicking expertise while eroding public understanding.

1 Introduction

In recent years, a new rhetorical species has taken root in the digital ecosystem: the podcast intellectual, the pundit without portfolio, the oracular voice offering certitude amid global chaos. These figures do not merely comment – they narrate the world. With titles like “The Future of Syria” or “What They’re Not Telling You About Eritrea,” they offer epistemic fast food to an audience starved for clarity. Yet beneath the polished tone lies a troubling structure of exploitation.

This is not analysis. It is *certainty for sale* – and it thrives on the erosion of trust, the craving for closure, and the seductive mimicry of expertise. We aim to dissect this phenomenon and place it in conversation with larger forces: platform capitalism, post-truth culture, and the commodification of attention (McIntyre, 2018; Zuboff, 2019).

2 The Epistemic Marketplace

The digital economy no longer trades merely in goods or even data – it trades in *conviction*. Platforms reward what engages, not what enlightens. Attention becomes currency, and the

product is narrative certainty (Postman, 1985; Sunstein, 2007).

Podcasting, once a democratic medium of voices from below, now mirrors the very hierarchies it sought to subvert. Charisma and cadence outweigh credentials. The illusion of familiarity – “just two people talking” – conceals a monologue shaped by algorithms, not argument.

We define this as *epistemic rent-seeking*: the capture of public trust without the production of real understanding.

3 Surveillance Capitalism, Extended

Zuboff’s landmark analysis describes how digital platforms monetize *behavioral surplus* – the trace residues of our online actions (Zuboff, 2019). But a parallel process is now underway: the extraction and exploitation of *epistemic deficits*.

Where Google predicts your shopping, the new pundit class predicts your *beliefs*. They do not mine data, but doubt. They position themselves not as scholars, but as epistemic smugglers – offering contraband certainty through untraceable routes.

Surveillance Capitalism	Pseudo-Political Industry
Extracts behavioral data	Extracts epistemic insecurity
Monetizes prediction	Monetizes performative certainty
Nudges behavior	Nudges belief and allegiance
Creates power asymmetries	Creates narrative asymmetries
Bypasses autonomy	Bypasses critical reflection

4 The Pseudopolitics of the Present

To name-drop Syria, Iran, Eritrea, Sudan, and Somalia in a single breath is not analysis – it is tourism. Each of these regions bears a dense thicket of colonial histories, regional alliances, failed interventions, and internal complexities that defy neat synthesis.

What we witness instead is *discursive flattening*: the reduction of heterogeneity into digestible tropes – “failed state,” “proxy war,” “rogue regime.” Like cheap souvenirs from complex cultures, these narratives satisfy curiosity while distorting reality.

The result is not just misinformation but *epistemic displacement*: listeners believe they have visited a region intellectually, when they have merely skimmed a caricature (Mamdani, 2004; Bayart, 1993).

5 The Psychology of the Weak

Let us be clear: “weakness” here denotes vulnerability, not deficiency. The audience is not foolish – it is *overloaded*. In a climate of cognitive saturation, people seek guides.

These pseudo-sages exploit:

- Epistemic insecurity: Not knowing whom to trust.
- Moral fatigue: A desire for simple good/evil dichotomies.
- Cognitive overload: Outsourcing complexity.
- Parasocial intimacy: Trusting charisma over credentials.

This is not unlike addiction: a cycle of temporary relief followed by deeper confusion (Han, 2017).

6 The Role of Real Scholarship

True scholarship proceeds with humility, not bravado. It respects context, footnotes doubt, and resists compression. It does not scale easily – but it endures.

Whereas pundits offer *closure*, scholars offer *contours*. And while this may feel unsatisfying to those raised on soundbites, it is the only path to understanding.

There exists a vast and largely unread corpus of serious work on these regions – Bayart on the African state, Mamdani on political violence, Scott on the state’s epistemic failures (Mamdani, 2004; Bayart, 1993; Scott, 1998). These voices lack YouTube channels, but they illuminate far more.

7 Toward a Diagnostic Framework

How might we recognize a pseudo-political parasite?

- Topic-hopping: Syria to TikTok in 30 minutes.
- No citations: Confidence in lieu of bibliography.
- “What they’re not telling you” rhetoric: Manufactured dissent.
- Monetization model: Subscriptions, merch, ad reads.

- Audience flattery: “You’re one of the few who understand.”

The test is simple: *Can this person be wrong?* If not, it is not discourse – it is dogma.

8 Conclusion: A Call for Epistemic Vigilance

We live in an era where doubt is for sale and confidence is manufactured. The antidote is not more noise, but more care.

Let us teach our peers not to ask, “Do I agree?” but first, “*How do you know that?*”

Let us reward curiosity, not certainty. Reflection, not recitation. And let us remember that complexity is not the enemy of understanding, but its precondition.

The future may be uncertain. But that is no excuse for renting illusions. Let us not outsource our skepticism to those who profit from its absence.

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