Description

A Very Plural Bias

Speaking in terms of a singular cognitive bias is an inaccurate but widely accepted practice. The term is used to describe inherent errors in thinking and judgment that humans make in processing information on a daily basis. There are actually multiple types of cognitive biases—too many to list in one post—but we have listed the most common ones below:

- ***Confirmation Bias*** – now often referred to as the "Internet Bias," this mode of behavior leads us to identify only those perspectives that agree with our pre-existing views, and ignoring any opinions on the contrary, no matter how valid they may be
- ***Bandwagon Effect*** – the groupthink phenomenon of "going with the flow" in response to inherent desires to fit in and conform
- ***Projection Bias*** – assuming, from an internal perspective that everyone thinks the same way as you do and will therefore agree with you—also known as the Consensus Bias
- ***Anchoring Effect*** – fixation on one value or number that then gets compared to everything else—also known as the Relativity Trap. In retail sales, for example, we have a tendency to focus on the discount percentage (What a great deal!) rather than the price itself
- ***Gambler's Fallacy*** – gambler's belief that probability is somehow cumulative so that you are increasingly "due" for a good card or roll of the dice after each bad outcome, when in reality the probability is the same each time
- ***Probability Neglect*** – an inability to process probabilities of risk in favor of our own pre-existing fears, such as being more afraid of flying than driving when flying is statistically much safer

The Power and Risk of Cognitive Biases

Putting the abstract psychological theories to one side, cognitive bias gives humans the ability to reach polar opposite conclusions about the same evidence. This is how separate religions are formed and wars are fought!

The human brain may still be the most powerful computer in existence, processing an estimated 1016 processes per second, but we're still capable of making highly questionable decisions and of convincing ourselves of the validity of those conclusions.

Some psychologists believe that these abilities are a carryover from the prehistoric days of "fight or flight" where we had no choice other than to jump to a decision with only limited information to stay alive, but research has shown that these cognitive biases can persist in the face of comprehensive evidence.

The Scientific Method

Scientific research has had a foundational tool to manage cognitive bias since the days of Aristotle,

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and many would even say before that. The Scientific Method has proven to be an effective mechanism for “winnowing the truth from lies and delusion.”

Simply recognizing your observations and hypotheses as being only tentative and then making predictions based on those hypotheses to test your version of reality can quickly illustrate how much of a discrepancy there is between your proposed theory and initial observation. However, the value of this mechanism quickly falls to zero when researchers elect to adjust the results to fit the theory rather than continuing to modify the theory until it matches the results.

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