

Dangers of confirmation bias and how it affects society



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Theories play an integral role to better help people understand the world around us. Through theories we systematically present a way of understanding events, behaviors and/or situations. The theory that I will be exploring into further detail is the confirmation bias theory. The confirmation bias theory helps explain why people view the world selectively. It states that people view the world selectively by viewing or choosing information that reinforce their views. The application i'm exploring for this topic is how confirmation bias can have dangerous impacts on our society. Confirmation bias can have harmful effects in multiple fields such as politics, healthcare, law, social media, and religion. We can see the effects of biases in political arguments for example, it would be as if a republican was to only watch fox news to get their information. Due to fox news being a republican media outlet, the information that the person would receive would only confirm their own views. This theory is important for many reasons that help shape our understanding of one another. Let's take gun control as the context for this example. Let's say that Tyler is in support of gun control, and therefore he seeks out news stories that reaffirm his belief that reform is necessary. Then when he hears about school shooting violence, he interprets this in a way of reaffirming his beliefs. This theory is very important in understanding that some people don't want to have their beliefs contradicted. Even when presented opposing information on the topic, confirmation bias has a way of disputing this and confirming an even stronger belief of past views. Potentially leading to a polarization of views by an individual, which may manifest into extremism. This is significant especially in the United States where our political views have never been more polarized. Social media also plays a major role in providing large amounts of information to the public.

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Often playing a big role in influencing one's opinions, biases, and views. I think it's extremely important to keep our opinions open and listening to differing point of views, so we can make educated decisions. As well as better understand one another and therefore make better decisions.

Confirmation bias is an important theory to explore due to the implications that the theory covers including social media, politics, and healthcare.

When exploring confirmation bias we must look at human nature, and how we form biases in the first place. At a very young age we as humans slowly learn to navigate social situations. Factors that influence this learning process include learned skills, values, morals, and ideas. Over time these learned beliefs and values are challenged, honed in and developed. As we go through life we tend to align our opinions based off these learned experiences. We tend to befriend people who share these similar ideas and opinions surrounding ourselves with these people. But according to Doctor Bettina Casad a professor at the University of Missouri , " humans have difficulty processing information in a rational, unbiased manner once they have developed an opinion about the issue"(Casad 1). Taking this in account, when humans disagree with one another they tend to discredit the other sides argument. Often ignoring and minimizing the information as dumb. This is where confirmation bias takes hold, rather than comparing the two arguments rationally most humans make an instinctive decision on the matter. Many times this differing of opinions make the person believe more strongly about their side. People use cognitive dissonance to try and avoid the threatening information. The threatening information hurts one's self-esteem, and the discomfort pushes people to seek information that support

their existing belief. It becomes an 'us-versus-them' mentality, isolating oneself to only not seek out contrary information. This mentality can become strong and widespread, showing up in multiple contexts. Whether it be one's political stance, preferred health diagnosis, or even information outlets. This is important to examine because, it can lead to misinformation from a non-credible source. Therefore affecting people's decisions that may cause them serious harm. Generating a cycle of biases that can be potentially destructive. In a society where social media and technology has become more prevalent we are bombarded with an information overload. The outlets we choose to get his information from is important and plays a big role in our society. It affects the way we see the world, and therefore affects the way we live. It can affect our own personal relationships as well. Destroying personal relationship with loved by with the use of false interpretations. One party can become convinced of a certain perceived truth, and no matter the amount evidence that contrast the point of view many people are unwilling to change their mind. If someone believes something to be true then naturally they find ways to confirm this. No matter the words said, actions taken, or non-verbal cues can change the person's mind.

Additionally, with the rise of social media being a major information producer for a large amount of the population. It is pertinent to examine the role that social media plays in how we see the world. Specifically, where we choose to get this information and examining the credibility of this source. According to Axel Westerwick a professor at the University of Ohio State, " The internet has created a political communication context in which ample low-credibility sources are displayed alongside high-credibility sources" (Westerwick 2).

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Considering this, people who are under the influence of confirmation bias may give the same weight of a low-credibility information source to that of high-credibility sources. Resulting in people being misinformed and isolating oneself from perceived threatening information. Social media plays a big role in this by using deliberate algorithms to conform to past searches. Therefore enhancing confirmation of current beliefs and thoughts. Further polarizing pre-existing views among internet users. Let's take political affiliation as the context in a hypothetical scenario. If someone who is a pro-Trump supporter see's that he put a trade tariff on China. Then that same person will go to social media and find reasons why the trade tariff is good for our country. Supporting their pre-existing viewpoint on why Trump is the right man for the presidency. Rather than looking at the controversial issue rationally and unbiasedly finding evidence that supports both points of view. The person will further isolate themselves in an information bubble that is familiar and comfortable. But this is not how we learn, and grow as society. If we do not question and examine controversial topics then we can fall into groupthink which is dangerous. Furthermore, research from the article ' Turn a blind eye if you care' states that the stronger and more valued the issue is to a certain person the stronger the bias. Westerwick goes on to state that those who feel strongly on a topic are more likely to find information that has low-credibility. Where those who have low feelings on a topic are more likely to find information that has higher credibility on the topic. In addition, those who feel more strongly about a topic are more likely to find more extreme standpoints than those who don't. Therefore influencing one's viewpoint on certain topics toward the realm of extreme biases and opinions. Which all boils down into political attitudes towards certain topics. Further influencing

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one's political stance and affecting judgement. Corresponding with the pre-existing bias and affecting their voting decisions. Consequently influencing elections and then the policies those politicians enact. The phenomenon of confirmation bias of only exposing oneself to confirming has potentially serious consequences of influencing our reality. The power of confirmation bias is incredibly strong, it's important to recognize this in our own lives. Such as our own health, and how we perceive our well being. Take a doctor for example, many times doctors will have a preliminary hunch to diagnose a patient of an illness from their symptoms. The initial diagnosis and hunch can prevent the doctor from seeing other signs and treating the patient effectively. Patients in turn also can be victim of this by supporting the diagnoses that is their preferred outcome. These examples simply demonstrate the power that confirmation bias has.

Furthermore, the potential dangers of confirmation bias don't just lie within the contexts explained above. It impacts how we view the world such as work, interpretations on literature, religion, and even our neighbors. When we dive too deep into one polarized viewpoint we can often tiptoe the line of extremism. Take for example the rise in hate crimes over the past ten years. As well as the rise in terrorist acts in the name of religion over the past twenty years. Confirmation bias affects the way we view the world, therefore affecting the way we interpret the bible and other religious textures. Take the Muslim extremist as an example of misinterpretations of the Quran. When people become convinced of one viewpoint and become isolated in that thinking it can become dangerous. Take the incident in Jordan in 2016, when a man was murdered over sharing a cartoon over facebook that was

deemed by the killer as offensive to Islam. They did not know each other personally, and a man's life was taken because of this extreme interpretation by the killer. Social media again influenced this scenario where a man was able to be motivated simply by something he saw on the internet. This may suggest that social media may influence racist and hateful behavior. But social media isn't entirely to blame for this man's actions to take another life. Social media influenced his decision, but that man on his own developed his own extreme viewpoint. But according to Abdallah Alsaad a professor at Jadara University, "social media can deepen user's pre-existing biases by consuming online content that supports their racial ideologies, which in turn may stimulate and motivate them to become lone wolf extremist" (Alsaad 42). While there isn't empirical evidence to prove this theory. It has to be taken into consideration when dealing with people from polarized views from both sides of the spectrum.

Furthermore, it's important to recognize the power of confirmation bias when considering topics. Specifically, controversial topics that may bring out emotional responses. Rather than react on instinct it's important to take a step back, and listen to both sides of the argument without bias. As well as evaluating the source that this information comes from, and finding the credibility of the information outlet. While we can easily see the impacts that biases can have on the applications of politics, healthcare, law, and religion. It is also important to evaluate our own lives in how we interpret everyday scenarios. Such as remaining unbiased when meeting someone new regardless of what others have said about them previously. Don't immediately take a strong stance on either end of the spectrum. For it can

have a negative impact on how we live our everyday lives. Confirmation Bias theory is simply a theory that helps explain the world around us. Through theories we systematically present a way of understanding events, behaviors and/or situations. But these theories don't define every scenario in black and white. Or good or bad, right or wrong, there is usually a grey area too.

Evaluate social media sources for what they are with an unbiased opinion.

It's important to surround ourselves with different points of view than our own so we can become educated, and make the best decisions for ourselves and our society.

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