

Making a decision

Psychology



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Heuristics are the limited strategies adopted by people when they are in a difficult situation and require to make a judgment on frequency and probability. According to Tversky and Kahneman (208), an individual is said to be using availability heuristic when he or she makes judgement on frequency and probability based on the ease with which related associations are brought to mind. According to Baumeister (102), availability heuristic is the tendency to predetermine the likelihood of an event depending on the ease with which other instances which are relevant to the current one come to mind. They are the related events that come to the forefront of an individual's thought when he or she is trying to make a decision. Availability heuristic is demonstrated in real life is expressed through scenarios and events that one goes through or observes day in day out. The process is metacognitive such that an individual arrives at a decision with ease based on previous instances that can be imagined by the individual. Recall availability allows individuals to judge events on the basis of their likelihood to be recalled. This essay will highlight an example of the availability heuristic and different aspects associated with its influence in the decision making process. An example of a scenario is in the united states, people think there are more instances of deaths resulting from shark attacks than from being injured by falling parts of a crashing airplane. According to Ruscio (111), statistics show that falling parts of airplane cause deaths at the frequency of 30% more than those resulting from shark attacks. The biases in estimating are because deaths resulting from shark attacks are widely publicized through the media while deaths resulting from injuries by falling airplane parts are rarely reported. Moreover, shark attacks are easy to recall compared to those caused by airplane parts probably

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because of the difference in media coverage. The nature of shark attacks is traumatizing to witnesses and thus makes it easy to retrieve the memories and recall the instances. Seeing a shark attack is frightening and leaves the individual with an emotionally charged memory of the entire occurrence (Tversky and Kahneman 209). A scenario availability entails the ease with which an individual can call to mind the scenarios related to a certain event's occurrence. For example, if an individual who witnessed a shark attack goes on vacation where he or she is supposed to swim as part of the activities, visualization of the previous attack is likely to make the individual to avoid swimming even if the water is not shark infested. Individuals relate shark attacks with activities that take place in water bodies like swimming.

According to Ruscio (112), an individual can use the availability heuristic of shark attacks when he or she is choosing a vacation destination. The decision becomes heuristic when the first thought that crosses his or her mind is the danger he or she will be exposed to should he be attacked by a shark. In such a scenario, the individual overlooks the frequency of the reported attacks, exact location and safety precautions that can be taken to avoid the instance. Moreover, the decision also becomes heuristic when the individual thinks about the frightening scenario he or she witnessed and is afraid of going through the same. The use of availability heuristic enables an individual to predict the likelihood of an event, frequency of the occurrence and guides retrieval of memories in situations where an individual witnessed the event or there was wide media coverage. For instance, in the case of shark attacks, an individual can be scared off by the frightening memories to avoid water related retreats. In addition, sharing the experiences with other people is likely to influence their decision making and most likely make them

cautious when visiting water bodies. In this scenario, people consider what they recall when making decisions as well as the ease with which media reportings or prior experiences come to mind as part of the additional information to help them draw a conclusion on a certain decision. Individuals judgement is based on what comes to mind first and leaves the strongest impression. Moreover, individuals are unlikely to take time to delve into the actual situation to understand the facts and use them in decision making. Reliance on heuristic availability guides people in making decisions on desirable outcomes and expected occurrences from both individual and collective point of view. However, over reliance on availability heuristics can lead to biases in retrieval of instances like a shark attack whose memories are easily retrieved is considered to be more frequent as compared to being hit by falling airplane parts. In addition, decisions are made on the bases of imaginability and correlation and this may lead to biases in the decisions arrived at. The biases in decision making results from the imaginary memories an individual has about a prior event rather than the event itself. Availability heuristic leads systematic biases and decisions are arrived at subjectively without factual evaluation and analysis of the situation at hand. Works cited Baumeister, Roy. Social Psychology & Human Nature Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, Inc., 2008. 161-162. Ruscio, John, Clear thinking with psychology: Separating sense from nonsense Pacific Grove, CA: Wadsworth, (2002). Tversky, Amos, & Kahneman, Daniel Judgments and Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases. Science, New Series, 1974. 185 (4157), 1124-1131,