



4 FACT SHEET CONFIRMATION BIAS

OBJECTIVES OF THE CURRICULUM

DISCIPLINE AND LEVEL CONCERNED

ERC (Elementary 3rd cycle)

Theme: Members of society

- Explain how members of a society influence each other.

ERC (Secondary 1st cycle)

Theme: Autonomy

- Promote the conditions for autonomy: critical judgment, common sense, moral responsibility, the ability to choose, authenticity, etc.

TARGETED DIMENSIONS OF THE DIGITAL COMPETENCY

- Develop and mobilize information literacy;
- Exploit the potential of digital technology for learning;
- Develop critical thinking regarding digital technology;
- Produce content with digital technology;
- Innovate and show creativity with digital technology.

SUGGESTED DIGITAL TOOLS

- To reflect and react: Mentimeter;
- To draw a sketch note: Tayasui Sketches or Paper;
- To create computer graphics: Canva.

EDUCATIONAL INTENTION OF THE GUIDE

By the end of these activities, the student will be able to recognize his or her own cognitive biases and use tools to get around them.

OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTIVITIES

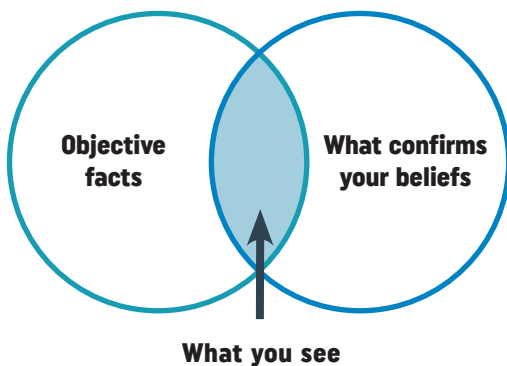
- Think about the consequences of using social media to obtain information;
- Develop a sketch note to define the profile of a personal filter bubble;
- Create computer graphics that present good practices for escaping a filter bubble.

INTRODUCTION

Why are we inclined to believe fake news? Certainly not because we aren't intelligent or enlightened! In fact, we can largely blame this problem on the human brain.

The brain is subject to cognitive biases. These are filters that cloud our reasoning and critical perspective. One of these filters is directly linked to the science of fake news: confirmation bias. Everyone lives with this bias. To get around it, we simply have to develop the right reflexes.

CONFIRMATION BIAS



Confirmation bias pushes us to favour information that reinforces and confirms our values, our lifestyle, etc. It's much quicker and easier for us to reject information contrary to our beliefs. In short, we want to know what we already know.

That's why confirmation bias plays a major role in spreading fake news. Most fake news is designed to be consumed by people who are already favourable to the subject addressed.

Examples

- People who oppose immigration will not tend to fact check a story claiming that an immigrant committed a crime.
- But immigrants and their defenders will believe the news is false or exaggerated. They'll fact check this information almost automatically.
- Animal rights activists may not fact check a story claiming that a factory slaughters cats to make coats with their fur.

- But fur producers and companies potentially affected by the story won't believe it on the first reading. They'll do the necessary fact checking.

EFFECT OF THE FILTER BUBBLE AND ALGORITHMS

The people immediately around us reinforce confirmation bias. Why? Because we all reflexively associate with people who think like us. That's normal. But the result is a filter bubble where everyone prefers the same information... and ignores information that doesn't suit them. That makes it difficult to have a realistic picture of what's happening around us.

For example, our close relations practice the same religion as we do. They have instilled us with its values. Our friends often share our passions, cultural tastes and political opinions.

In other words, this bubble is our information comfort zone.

When the Internet clouds reality

Have you noticed that the content you consult regularly on social media doesn't appear in chronological order? Social networks are partly run by algorithms. An algorithm is a set of operations that determine the first articles, images, videos and publications to appear on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube or other social media.

The social networks accumulate your data (beliefs, tastes, centres of interest, friends, location, date of birth, gender, etc.). Then they sort the content and the advertising suggested to you.

If you mainly see the posts of your friends and close relations, that's because the algorithm knows they're likely to interest you. The algorithm although knows what could annoy you. So it hides whatever doesn't reflect your values, opinions or beliefs.

Examples

- You often communicate with your friend Suki. Two days ago, she published some travel photos on Instagram. You don't communicate regularly with your cousin Carl. He published a photo of his wedding this morning. When you open Instagram, you'll see Suki's photos first, even though she published them longer ago.
- A YouTube user who thinks the Earth is flat will probably only see videos that correspond to his beliefs. They'll also encourage conspiracy theories. He's likely to believe that most people think like him.
- In an election period, a person who is clearly on the left of the political spectrum won't see publications that favour right-wing parties. She's likely to have a mistaken vision of the real political landscape. She could even be inclined to believe that everyone thinks like her. That's because she isn't exposed to the opposite opinion.
- A woman on Facebook is part of several xenophobic groups and only likes content related to her prejudices. Her news feed will only show this type of publication. That's why she might believe that most Internet users share her world view.

HOW TO GET AROUND YOUR CONFIRMATION BIAS

The serious media have a duty to be objective. However, the public also has the duty to be as well informed as possible. They need to get out of their filter bubble and develop the necessary reflexes to get around their own confirmation bias.

Here are some tips:

- 1. Recognize that we all have a confirmation bias.** It may seem hard to believe that we unintentionally sort the information we consume. But everyone does it!
- 2. Refute, refute, refute...** even when the information seems to agree with our beliefs. Creators of fake news know how to trap people: by telling them exactly what they want to hear. So check out the opposite of our assumptions, our ideas and the information we share.
- 3. Get out of our information comfort zone.** Here's a good tip. Watch what's happening in media you don't usually consult. Read or listen to media with different editorial lines you don't necessarily agree with. Then you'll be sure to have an overview of the world around you.
- 4. Force yourself to weigh serious news you don't like.** You can try this practical exercise: put the news into your own words.

EXERCISES

EXERCISE 1

Several studies show that more and more Canadians get their news through social media. What are the consequences of this habit?

You can use the Mentimeter platform for this discussion and reflection activity. For example, the teacher can use the “word cloud” or “open questions” modes to get students to react on their initial concepts of the situation. After this first step, they can do research on the Web on the consequences of reading articles on social media. To conclude the activity, it may be relevant to use the Mentimeter again. This time create a document that summarizes the results of the students’ research. Then you can compare their previous knowledge (developed in the first document on Mentimeter) with what they learned from their research on the Web.

EXERCISE 2

Produce a profile of your filter bubble. These questions could help you find some answers:

- Start with the basics: age, gender, social problems you care about, support for a sports team or a political party, etc.
- What type of content interests you the most?
- What kind of pages, groups or accounts do you follow on social media?
- What type of content are you offered on social media and YouTube?
- What discussion topics come up most often with your friends? Your family?
- What news media do you consult most often?
- What publications do you see first on social media?

To create a profile of their original filter bubble, suggest the students produce a sketch note or use a drawing app like Tayasui Sketches or Paper.



EXERCISE 3

Identify two ways of getting out of your filter bubble.

The students may create computer graphics to present good practices for getting out of their filter bubble. The Canva platform can make it easier to format the computer graphics.

ANSWER KEY

1.

Possible answers:

- Distorted view of reality (we only see the publications that correspond to our beliefs and values);
 - We risk missing a lot of essential information;
 - It's important to know other points of view;
 - May encourage xenophobic, extremist behaviour and conspiracy theories.
-

2.

Not applicable

3.

Consult different (but serious!) media. Go directly to news media sites. Read newspapers. Study the editorial lines of the media most often consulted in our region. Broaden our fields of interest. And so on.