The Presumption of Guilt in Suspect Interrogations: Apprehension as a Trigger of Confirmation Bias and Debiasing Techniques

Moa Lidén, Minna Gräns, and Peter Juslin
Uppsala University

This research tests whether a police officer's decision to apprehend a suspect triggers confirmation bias during an interrogation. The study also tests two strategies to reduce confirmation bias: (1) decoupling decision to apprehend from interrogation and (2) reducing cognitive load for the interrogating police officer. In Experiment 1, Swedish police officers ($N = 60$) were faced with 12 scenarios in which they either had to decide for themselves whether to apprehend a suspect or were informed about the corresponding decision by another police officer or a prosecutor. Participants then prepared questions for a suspect interrogation and evaluated the trustworthiness of the suspect's denial or confession. The same method was used in Experiment 2 but with law and psychology students ($N = 60$) as participants. In Experiment 3, psychology students ($N = 60$) prepared interrogation questions either by freely producing their own or by choosing questions from a preset list. Overall, apprehended suspects were interrogated in a more guilt presumptive way and rated as less trustworthy than non apprehended suspects. However, the tested debiasing techniques, primarily reducing cognitive load for the interrogating police officer, hold some potential in mitigating this bias.

Public Significance Statement
Even though suspects have a right to be presumed innocent until they have been convicted, this research suggests that, already during the criminal investigation, police officers ask more guilt presumptive questions if the suspects are apprehended. Possible ways to reduce this guilt presumption is to have another police officer conduct the interrogation than the one who apprehended and to make the interrogation less cognitively demanding for the interrogating police officer.

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Does "putting on your thinking cap" reduce myside bias in evaluation of scientific evidence?

Caitlin Drummond[a,b] and Baruch Fischhoff[c]

[a]Department of Social and Decision Sciences, Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA, USA; [b]Erb Institute for Global Sustainable Enterprise, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA; [c]Department of Engineering and Public Policy, Institute for Politics and Strategy, Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA, USA

ABSTRACT

The desire to maintain current beliefs can lead individuals to evaluate contrary evidence more critically than consistent evidence. We test whether priming individuals' scientific reasoning skills reduces this often-observed *myside bias,* when people evaluate scientific evidence about which they have prior positions. We conducted three experiments in which participants read a news-style article about a study that either supported or opposed their attitudes regarding the Affordable Care Act. We manipulated whether participants completed a test posing scientific reasoning problems before or after reading the article and evaluating the evidence that it reported. Consistent with previous research, we found that participants were biased in favor of evidence consistent with their prior attitudes regarding the Affordable Care Act. Priming individuals' scientific reasoning skills reduced myside bias only when accompanied by direct instructions to apply those skills to the task at hand. We discuss the processes contributing to biased evaluation of scientific evidence.

Dialogic Argumentation as a Vehicle for Developing Young Adolescents' Thinking

Deanna Kuhn and Amanda Crowell
Teachers College, Columbia University

Abstract

Argumentive reasoning skills are featured in the new K–12 Common Standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010), yet with little said about their nature or how to instill them. Distinguishing reasoning skills from writing skills, we report on a multiyear intervention that used electronically conducted dialogues on social issues as the medium to develop argumentive reasoning skills in two cohorts of young adolescents. Intervention groups demonstrated transfer of the dialogic activity to two individual essays on new topics; argument quality for these groups exceeded that of comparison groups who participated in an intervention involving the more face-valid activity of extensive essay writing practice, along with whole-class discussion. The intervention group also demonstrated greater awareness of the relevance of evidence to argument. The dialogic method thus appears to be a viable one for developing cognitive skills that the comparison-group data show do not routinely develop during this age period.

Solitary Discourse Is a Productive Activity

Julia Zavala and Deanna Kuhn
Teachers College, Columbia University

Abstract

Young adults received information regarding the platforms of two candidates for mayor of a troubled city. Half constructed a dialogue between advocates of the candidates, and the other half wrote an essay evaluating the candidates' merits. Both groups then wrote a script for a TV spot favoring their preferred candidate. Results supported our hypothesis that the dialogic task would lead to deeper, more comprehensive processing of the two positions, and hence a richer representation of them. The TV scripts of the dialogue group included more references to city problems, candidates' proposed actions, and links between them, as well as more criticisms of proposed actions and integrative judgments extending across multiple problems or proposed actions. Assessment of levels of epistemological understanding administered to the two groups after the writing tasks revealed that the dialogic group exhibited a lesser frequency of the absolutist position that knowledge consists of facts knowable with certainty. The potential of imagined interaction as a substitute for actual social exchange is considered.

Research Article

Fighting COVID-19 Misinformation on Social Media: Experimental Evidence for a Scalable Accuracy-Nudge Intervention

Gordon Pennycook[1,2,3], Jonathon McPhetres[1,2,4], Yunhao Zhang[4], Jackson G. Lu[4], and David G. Rand[4,5,6]

[1]Paul J. Hill School of Business, University of Regina; [2]Kenneth Levene Graduate School of Business, University of Regina; [3]Department of Psychology, University of Regina; [4]Sloan School of Management, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; [5]Institute for Data, Systems, and Society, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; and [6]Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Abstract

Across two studies with more than 1,700 U.S. adults recruited online, we present evidence that people share false claims about COVID-19 partly because they simply fail to think sufficiently about whether or not the content is accurate when deciding what to share. In Study 1, participants were far worse at discerning between true and false content when deciding what they would share on social media relative to when they were asked directly about accuracy. Furthermore, greater cognitive reflection and science knowledge were associated with stronger discernment. In Study 2, we found that a simple accuracy reminder at the beginning of the study (i.e., judging the accuracy of a non-COVID-19-related headline) nearly tripled the level of truth discernment in participants' subsequent sharing intentions. Our results, which mirror those found previously for political fake news, suggest that nudging people to think about accuracy is a simple way to improve choices about what to share on social media.

Preregistered Direct Replication

How Accurate Are Accuracy-Nudge Interventions? A Preregistered Direct Replication of Pennycook et al. (2020)

Jon Roozenbeek[1], Alexandra L. J. Freeman[2], and Sander van der Linden[1,2]

[1]Department of Psychology, University of Cambridge, and [2]Winton Centre for Risk and Evidence Communication, University of Cambridge

Abstract

As part of the Systematizing Confidence in Open Research and Evidence (SCORE) program, the present study consisted of a two-stage replication test of a central finding by Pennycook et al. (2020), namely that asking people to think about the accuracy of a single headline improves "truth discernment" of intentions to share news headlines about COVID-19. The first stage of the replication test ($n = 701$) was unsuccessful ($p = .67$). After collecting a second round of data (additional $n = 882$, pooled $N = 1,583$), we found a small but significant interaction between treatment condition and truth discernment (uncorrected $p = .017$; treatment: $d = 0.14$, control: $d = 0.10$). As in the target study, perceived headline accuracy correlated with treatment impact, so that treatment-group participants were less willing to share headlines that were perceived as less accurate. We discuss potential explanations for these findings and an unreported change in the hypothesis (but not the analysis plan) from the preregistration in the original study.

The Heart Trumps the Head: Desirability Bias in Political Belief Revision

Ben M. Tappin
Royal Holloway, University of London

Leslie van der Leer
Regent's University London

Ryan T. McKay
Royal Holloway, University of London

Understanding how individuals revise their political beliefs has important implications for society. In a preregistered study ($N = 900$), we experimentally separated the predictions of 2 leading theories of human belief revision—desirability bias and confirmation bias—in the context of the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Participants indicated who they desired to win, and who they believed would win, the election. Following confrontation with evidence that was either consistent or inconsistent with their desires or beliefs, they again indicated who they believed would win. We observed a robust desirability bias—individuals updated their beliefs more if the evidence was consistent (vs. inconsistent) with their desired outcome. This bias was independent of whether the evidence was consistent or inconsistent with their prior beliefs. In contrast, we found limited evidence of an independent confirmation bias in belief updating. These results have implications for the relevant psychological theories and for political belief revision in practice.

Keywords: confirmation bias, desirability bias, motivated cognition, belief updating, politics

Supplemental materials: http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/xge0000298.supp

RESEARCH ARTICLE

WILEY

"To hope was to expect": The impact of perspective taking and forecast type on wishful thinking

Jason P. Rose[1] | Olivia Aspiras[2]

[1]Department of Psychology, University of Toledo, Toledo, OH

[2]Department of Health, Wellness & Behavioral Sciences, Clarke University, Dubuque, IA

Correspondence
Jason Rose, Department of Psychology, University of Toledo, Toledo, OH 43616, USA.
Email: jason.rose4@utoledo.edu

Abstract

When forecasting future outcomes, people tend to believe that the outcomes they want to happen are also likely to happen. Despite numerous attempts, few systematic factors have been identified that consistently and robustly reduce wishful thinking (WT) effects. Using elections and sporting event outcomes as contexts, three experiments examined whether taking the perspective of a political rival or opposing fan reduced WT effects. We also examined whether making deliberative (vs. intuitive-based) forecasts was associated with lower WT effects. Online adult samples of U.S. citizens from Mechanical Turk and U.S. college students provided their preferences and forecasts for the U.S. presidential election (Experiments 1 and 2) and a sports competition outcome (Experiment 3). Critically, some participants received perspective taking prompts immediately before providing forecasts. First, results revealed reductions in WT effects when participants engaged in perspective taking. Interestingly, this effect only emerged when intuitive-based forecasts were made first (Experiment 3). Second, intuitive-based forecasts revealed stronger evidence of WT effects. Finally, we found that perspective taking and forming forecasts deliberately promoted a shift in focus away from preferences and toward a consideration of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the entities (i.e., candidates and teams). Theoretical implications for understanding WT effects and applied implications for developing interventions are discussed.

Seeing Meaning Even When None May Exist: Collectivism Increases Belief in Empty Claims

Ying Lin[1], Y. Charles Zhang[2], and Daphna Oyserman[1]
[1] Department of Psychology, University of Southern California
[2] Department of Business Administration, University of California, Riverside

People often find truth and meaning in claims that have no regard for truth or empirical evidence. We propose that one reason is that people value connecting and fitting in with others, motivating them to seek the common ground of communication and generate explanations for how claims might make sense. This increases the likelihood that people experience empty claims as truthful, meaningful, or even profound. Seven studies ($N > 16,000$ from the United States and China) support our prediction. People who score higher in collectivism (valuing connection and fitting in) are more likely to find fake news meaningful and believe in pseudoscience (Studies 1 to 3). China–U.S. cross-national comparisons show parallel effects. Relative to people from the United States, Chinese participants are more likely to see meaning in randomly generated vague claims (Study 4). People higher in collectivism are more likely to engage in meaning-making, generating explanations when faced with an empty claim, and having done so, are more likely to find meaning (Study 5). People who momentarily experience themselves as more collectivistic are more likely to see empty claims as meaningful (Study 6). People higher in collectivism are more likely to engage in meaning-making unless there is no common ground to seek (Study 7). We interpret our results as suggesting that conditions that trigger collectivism create fertile territory for the spread of empty claims, including fake news and misinformation.

Keywords: collectivism, culture, communication, misinformation, social cognition

Supplemental materials: https://doi.org/10.1037/pspa0000280.supp

Who Is Susceptible to Online Health Misinformation? A Test of Four Psychosocial Hypotheses

Laura D. Scherer[1, 2], Jon McPhetres[3, 4], Gordon Pennycook[3], Allison Kempe[1], Larry A. Allen[1], Christopher E. Knoepke[1], Channing E. Tate[1], and Daniel D. Matlock[1, 2]
[1] School of Medicine, University of Colorado, Anschutz Medical Campus
[2] VA Denver Center of Innovation for Veteran-Centered and Value-Driven Care, Denver, Colorado, United States
[3] Department of Psychology, University of Regina
[4] School of Management, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Sloan

Objective: Health misinformation on social media threatens public health. One question that could lend insight into how and through whom misinformation spreads is whether certain people are susceptible to many types of health misinformation, regardless of the health topic at hand. This study provided an initial answer to this question and also tested four hypotheses concerning the psychosocial attributes of people who are susceptible to health misinformation: (1) deficits in knowledge or skill, (2) preexisting attitudes, (3) trust in health care and/or science, and (4) cognitive miserliness. *Method:* Participants in a national U.S. survey ($N = 923$) rated the perceived accuracy and influence of true and false social media posts about statin medications, cancer treatment, and the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine and then responded to individual difference and demographic questions. *Results:* Perceived accuracy of health misinformation was strongly correlated across statins, cancer, and the HPV vaccine ($rs \geq .70$), indicating that individuals who are susceptible to misinformation about one of these topics are very likely to believe misinformation about the other topics as well. Misinformation susceptibility across all three topics was most strongly predicted by lower educational attainment and health literacy, distrust in the health care system, and positive attitudes toward alternative medicine. *Conclusions:* A person who is susceptible to online misinformation about one health topic may be susceptible to many types of health misinformation. Individuals who were more susceptible to health misinformation had less education and health literacy, less health care trust, and more positive attitudes toward alternative medicine.