

## The Influence of Cognitive Biases on Belief and Knowledge

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### ABSTRACT

*The paper seeks to examine how cognitive biases influence belief and knowledge. Cognitive biases, such as confirmation bias and the bandwagon effect, can have significant influences on our beliefs and knowledge. These biases can lead us to interpret information in ways that confirm our existing beliefs, rather than seeking out information that challenges them. We may be influenced by social factors, such as the views of the majority, which can lead us to hold beliefs that are not based on evidence or reason. By being aware of these biases, and actively seeking to overcome them, we can improve our ability through certain strategies to form accurate and well-informed beliefs and knowledge.*

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**Keywords;** *Cognitive biases; Belief; knowledge; Cognitive bias strategies; sources of knowledge.*

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### INTRODUCTION

In our global digital society, we are constantly bombarded with information from a variety of sources. It can be difficult to separate fact from fiction and to determine what information is accurate and reliable. In a bit to sort out facts from abundance of information, we also have to contend with our own cognitive biases, which can influence how we process and interpret this information. The nature of knowledge has been a central problem in philosophy right from the

earliest. More often than not, we claim to know one thing or the other. It was to this natural desire of man that Aristotle asserted that all men by nature desire to know. It is this possession of knowledge that gives man dominion over other beings. No one prefers to be ignorant of things. No one prefers to have dubitable and infantile knowledge of things. There are so many questions we need to think and reflect upon as regard what we know, how we know, why we think we know, et cetera.

This paper, therefore, explored the influence of cognitive biases, on belief and knowledge, and thereby offers strategies for overcoming these biases and forming more accurate beliefs.

### **THE CONCEPT OF KNOWLEDGE**

In the beginning, it was thought that knowledge was impossible. The reason was that faith and belief were the order of the day. Knowledge latter became a subjective issue following the sophists of the ancient period. During the Socratic era the emphasis was on self knowledge. Commenting on this, Akpan (2012) remarks:

Socrates the Greek Philosopher had earlier maintained that knowledge is Virtue and ignorance is a vice. He believed that ignorance was the cause Of was wrong doing; Wickedness is due to ignorance,for anybody who knows. It is right would do it and no one ever does evil evil wrongly.  
(Our Journey to Maturity in the Christian Family, p.61)

Socrates in examining knowledge looked at it from a point of view of self knowledge. The possession of knowledge should guides one to live a virtuous life. Onyiloyah(2004) still on Socrates opines:

The inscription on Delphic temple, which was popularized by Socrates states that a man should know thyself. Yet another one that served as a caveat later followed this psycho-ethical injunction: an unexamined life is not worth living. In context, there is rather an invitation to humanity to embrace reason in order to meaningfully, resourcefully and virtuously lead a fulfilled life.  
(God,Thou and I,p,108)

Beside this self knowledge proclaimed by Socrates, knowledge covers everyday usage including among other things acquaintances, familiarity with someone and something. This is said to be knowledge from every day usage. Knowledge from the technical point of view otherwise called philosophical point of view must be certified. Technically, knowledge can be defined as information or awareness gained through experiences or education. Knowledge involves a collection of data pertaining to any particular field. Human being naturally desire to know. In this desire one goes in search of knowledge about self, existence and any other thing.

## **SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE**

Basically there are two main sources of knowledge. These main sources are represented by two classical schools of thought, namely: Empiricism and Rational

**(i) Empiricism**

Empiricism as a classical school of thought holds that our knowledge comes from the senses. Notable, the five senses of touch, sight, hearing, testing and smelling are the windows through which the human mind receives information about the external world. The major proponents of empiricism are the British philosophers like John Locke, David Hume and George Berkeley.

**(ii) Rationalism**

Rationalism is a philosophical school of thought that holds that knowledge is derived through logico-mathematical reasoning. That is reason or ratiocinative process. According to Ozumba(2001) this kind of postulation can be nothing but a result of deep intellectual deduction from intuited apprehension. This is the kind of thing that the rationalists believe in.

The continental rationalists include Rene Descartes, Benedict Spinoza and Goffried Leibniz. These three philosophers are united in their thoughts that knowledge comes not from experience but a mental process that is intuited and deductive. They held that there are certain innate principles that exist prior to experience. Experience only confirms their reasonability and logicity and is on way reasonable for their existence.

Apart from these main sources, every other sources of knowledge are subsumable under them. Such includes intuition, authority, revelation, inferential, and conceptual knowledge.

## **CONCEPT OF BELIEF**

Belief is a firmly held opinion. It does not required any information as in the case of knowledge. Belief revolves around certain principles. It has faith as the factor that governs. In most religions belief is a core principle. It is this belief that makes people true followers of particular religion. Thus belief is based on religious faith. The core belief in the resurrection according to Egbuogu(2006) for instance is animating and strengthening Christians in their struggle against evil and its attendant effects of pain in human existential situation. It could be said that our beliefs shape our reality. It creates reality. From the law of attraction, what we believe to be true is demonstrated to us in the physicality. The universe is therefore a mirror reflecting back to us what we hold as belief both consciously and subconsciously.

## **TYPES OF BELIEF**

The main types of beliefs are the core belief and the fundamental belief.

The Core Belief

Core beliefs are definitions, understandings, and perspectives that we accepted as truth about our individual self, others and the world as it relates to us. There are so many core beliefs. There are:

**1. Core belief about our capabilities.**

This relates to what we have accepted to be truth about our abilities, talents and gifts in life. It is the commonly used declarations “I can” or “I can’t”. For example for can confidently believe saying: I can always learn new skills or I can realize my own dream in life.

**2. Core belief about our deservedness**

Deservedness is a state of having earned our right to something. If we hurt our spouse for instance, we may believe that we do not deserve to be loved.

**3. Belief about worthiness**

Worthiness is a birth right that belongs to us just by virtue of who we are as human and spiritual beings. If we accept the belief of being worthy of love, then we are love. But if we accept the belief of being unloved then we are affected by it. Unworthiness and shame can cause low self esteem and lack of confidence.

**4. Belief about our physical and emotional safety**

Here one try to avoid emotional or physical pain subconsciously since the human brains are wired to avoid physical danger and emotional pain. In this case we also avoid what we so desire. For example some people may will believe that if they have money they will be the target of robbery and kidnapping. This belief will affect them to remain poor.

Beside this, core belief can also be non-beneficial. The adjectives describing the nature of the non-beneficial belief are false, counterfeit, limiting and disempowering belief.

1. False belief are those concepts, perspectives, definitions that we have accepted as truth but they rather contradict the truth of the source.

2. Counterfeit beliefs are those ones deceiving us and yet we accept them as truth. However they contradict the higher perspective truth.

3. Limiting beliefs as the name implies, limit our manifestation power. They place barriers to manifesting everything we so desired.

4. Disempowering beliefs as the name indicates make us feel powerless and often time make us feel victims. For instance when we believe that we are a failure or that life is so hard that we can make it successfully.

Fundamental belief on the other hand are various categories of other beliefs which are influence by our religions, culture and traditions. This includes beliefs about what happens after death, who the supreme being is, who we are as human beings, etc.

## **DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BELIEF AND KNOWLEDGE**

When it comes to meanings and connotations, knowledge and belief are two concepts that are often confused and misunderstood. Strictly speaking, there are some differences between them. According to Omoregbe(1998) belief is not the same as knowledge because knowledge must be based on conclusive evidence and consequently it must be certain while belief is not based on conclusive evidence.

Although knowledge begin with belief but knowledge is not identical with belief. Below are the differences between belief and knowledge;

1. Belief is cultural bound and natural to man while knowledge is a certified belief. Knowledge is belief tested, proven, and experimented upon.
2. Belief deals with uncertainty while knowledge is certain.
3. Belief is subjective and personal while knowledge is always objective and universal.
4. Knowledge involves a collection of data while belief does not involved data collection
5. Belief has faith as the factor that governs while knowledge has nothing to do with faith.
6. Knowledge arises out of self experiences and the state of things while belief arises from what another person preaches.
7. While knowledge has its basis in intellect, belief has its basis on religious faiths.

## **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BELIEF AND KNOWLEDGE**

Belief is considered to be a necessary but not sufficient condition for knowledge. One can not know something unless you believe it, but just because you believe it does not necessarily mean you know it. This is because knowledge is typically thought to require both belief and justification. Thus, we need to have a good reason to believe something in order to know it. Hence, belief is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for knowledge.

Beside this relationship, the main difference between belief and knowledge is that belief is subjective, while knowledge is objective. Cheek (2021) opines that people think that they see things as they are in ‘objective reality’, and they impute bias and other negative qualities to those who disagree. Nevertheless, beliefs are things we hold to be true based on our experiences and perspectives, while knowledge is objective facts that can be proven true or false. For example, someone might believe that malaria exists, but that does not mean that they know nor suffer from malaria- they just believe it to be true. More so, someone might know that water boils at 100 degrees Celsius, because that is a proven scientific fact. Thus, belief is based on opinion, while knowledge is based on facts.

## **THE INFLUENCES OF COGNITIVE BIASES ON BELIEF AND KNOWLEDGE**

There are several ways in which cognitive biases can influence belief and knowledge. According to Allport (2013) bias is a human trait resulting from our tendency and need to classify individuals into categories as we strive to quickly process information and make sense of the world. Chegg(2016) asserts that people have a bias blind spot in that we think our own judgments and decisions relatively free of motivational and cognitive bias. The desire for knowledge and understanding is therefore a basic human motivation. (Cheek,2022). One common bias is confirmation bias, in which people tend to seek out and interpret information in a way that confirms their existing beliefs, rather than challenging them. This can lead to a confirmation trap, where individuals only seek out information that reinforces their existing beliefs, leading to further polarization. Another cognitive bias is bandwagon effect, where people tend to adopt the beliefs of the majority, even if they are not supported by evidence. Some other examples that of cognitive biases that influence belief and knowledge include;

- \* The anchoring effect, where people tend to rely too heavily on the first piece of information they received.
- \* The backfire effect, where people hold onto their beliefs more strongly when confronted with evidence that contradicts them.
- \* The hindsight bias, where people overestimate their ability to predict events after they have already occurred.
- \* The framing effect, where people make different decisions based on how information is presented to them.

## **POSSIBLE STRATEGIES TO REDUCE THE INFLUENCE OF COGNITIVE BIASES ON BELIEF AND KNOWLEDGE.**

There are several strategies that can help to reduce the influence of cognitive biases on belief and knowledge. One of such strategy is actively seeking out information that challenges one's existing beliefs, rather than only seeking out information that confirms them. Another strategy is to use critical thinking skills to evaluate information and evidence, rather than accepting it at face value. In addition, it can be helpful to be aware of one's own biases and to actively try to correct for them. Moreover, it is important to consider the source of information and whether it is reliable and credible. Other strategies include;

- \*Developing an awareness of one's own blind spots and areas of ignorance.
- \*Evaluating information from multiple perspectives.
- \*Being aware of common logical fallacies, such as appeal to authority or ad hominem arguments.

\*Using systematic and methodical approaches to information gathering and analysis.

\*Learning about heuristics and their limitations.

\*Engaging in open-minded inquiry and dialogue with others.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is evidence that cognitive biases can have a significant impact on our beliefs and knowledge. However, by recognizing and understanding these biases, and taking steps to mitigate their effects, we can develop more accurate and well-informed beliefs. It is imperative to note that knowledge is always evolving and that it is a lifelong process of learning and discovery. As new information becomes available, our beliefs may change and adapt. This ongoing process of discovery and adaptation is what makes knowledge so valuable and exciting.

## **POSSIBLE RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. It is true that belief shapes our reality. Thus we should assess and question what we believe'
2. We ought to depend much on information gained from knowledge rather than belief.
3. Individuals should remain curious and open-minded, and maintain a willingness to learn and adapt their beliefs.
4. We should be aware of our own biases and be mindful of how we may influence our thinkings.
5. We should be critical of information and use evidence and reason to evaluate claims.
6. We should seek out a variety of perspectives and sources of information.
7. We should engage in a respectful and open manner.
8. We should encourage critical thinking and open discussion of ideas in educational and professional settings.

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