

# The hidden traps: How cognitive bias shapes our daily decisions.

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## Introduction

Every day, we make hundreds of decisions — what to wear, what to eat, how to respond in conversations, or whether to trust a news article. While we like to believe that these choices stem from rational thinking, the reality is far more complex. Beneath the surface of our consciousness, a set of mental shortcuts and distortions — known as *cognitive biases* — subtly influence our judgments, often leading us away from objectivity. These biases, rooted in our brain's attempt to process information efficiently, are the hidden traps that shape our daily decisions [1].

Cognitive biases are systematic patterns of deviation from norm or rationality in judgment. They emerge from the brain's need to simplify information processing. While such shortcuts are helpful in navigating a complex world, they can also lead to poor decision-making. Cognitive biases affect everyone — from ordinary consumers and students to scientists and policymakers. Recognizing them is the first step toward minimizing their impact [2].

Perhaps the most well-known, confirmation bias refers to the tendency to search for, interpret, and recall information in a way that confirms our existing beliefs. For example, a person who believes in alternative medicine may ignore scientific evidence that contradicts their view while embracing anecdotal success stories [3].

This occurs when individuals rely too heavily on the first piece of information they receive (the "anchor") when making decisions. For instance, if a shirt is Janked down from \$200 to \$100, buyers perceive it as a good deal — even if its true value is far less — because the original price anchors their perception [4].

We often judge the likelihood of events based on how easily examples come to mind. After watching a news report about plane crashes, someone might overestimate the danger of air travel, despite statistics showing it's one of the safest modes of transport [5].

People tend to prefer things to stay the same by default. This bias can explain why individuals stick with the same brand, job, or habits, even when better alternatives exist — because change feels risky and uncertain [6].

This is the tendency to be more confident in our abilities and judgments than is objectively justified. From traders making risky investments to drivers overestimating their road skills, overconfidence can have costly consequences [7].

Cognitive biases influence more than just trivial daily decisions; they have far-reaching implications in critical domains. A patient may refuse to take a prescribed medication after reading a few negative online reviews (availability bias), despite robust clinical evidence of its safety [8].

Investors may hold on to losing stocks longer than advisable because of loss aversion — a form of bias that makes the pain of losing more impactful than the pleasure of gaining. Hiring managers might unconsciously favor candidates who share similar backgrounds or traits (similarity bias), undermining diversity and inclusion. In personal conflicts, people often recall events that support their side of the story while ignoring contradictory evidence, fueling misunderstandings [9].

Today's digital landscape amplifies the effects of cognitive biases. Algorithms on social media platforms, for example, are designed to feed users content that aligns with their preferences — reinforcing confirmation bias and creating echo chambers. Similarly, the overwhelming volume of information can lead individuals to depend more on shortcuts like the availability heuristic, making snap judgments based on headlines or viral content without critical evaluation [10].

## Conclusion

Cognitive biases are not signs of flawed character but are natural outcomes of how our brains process information. Recognizing these hidden traps is essential in becoming better decision-makers — more reflective, open-minded, and accurate in judgment. Whether we are choosing what to eat or casting a vote, our decisions are rarely as objective as we assume. By learning to spot these biases, we take the first step toward a more thoughtful and balanced life.

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