

**S.U.R.E SKILLS SERIES FOR SENIORS:**

# **SAFEGUARDING YOUR MIND AGAINST FAKE NEWS**

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**National Library Board**  
Singapore



# LEARNING AGENDA

- Introduction to S.U.R.E. Skill Series for Seniors
- Psychological reasons behind the spread of fake news
- What can we do about?

# INTRODUCTION TO S.U.R.E. SKILLS SERIES FOR SENIORS

Fake news can do real harm - destroy trust, damage learning culture, and even intensify social conflict. Why are we susceptible to fake news? How can we help those who unwittingly share them? Find out more about the psychological reasons behind the spread of fake news, and more importantly, what you can do about it.

This workshop is Part 1 of the S.U.R.E Skills Series for Seniors::

- **Part 2: Factchecking Dubious Emails & Messages (15 September 2021, 3-4pm)**
- **Part 3: Verifying Images & Videos (11 November 2021, 3-4pm)**
- **Part 4: Spotting Deepfake Images & Videos (7 December 2021, 3-4pm)**

# WHAT IS S.U.R.E.?

Watch the video here:

<https://sure.nlb.gov.sg/blog/fake-news/fn0004>

# Psychological reasons behind the spread of fake news

# WHAT ARE COGNITIVE BIASES?

- A cognitive bias is a systematic error in thinking that affects the decisions and judgments that people make. Some of these biases are related to memory or attention span.
- Cognitive biases are often a result of your brain's attempt to simplify information processing. They are rules of thumb that help you make sense of the world and reach decisions with relative speed.
- Cognitive biases can be caused by a number of different things, but it is these mental shortcuts, known as **heuristics**, that often play a major contributing role.
- Social pressures, individual motivations, emotions, and limits on the mind's ability to process information can also contribute to these biases

# PSYCHOLOGY & MOTIVES BEHIND FAKE NEWS

Watch the video here:

<https://go.gov.sg/nlb-sure-biases>



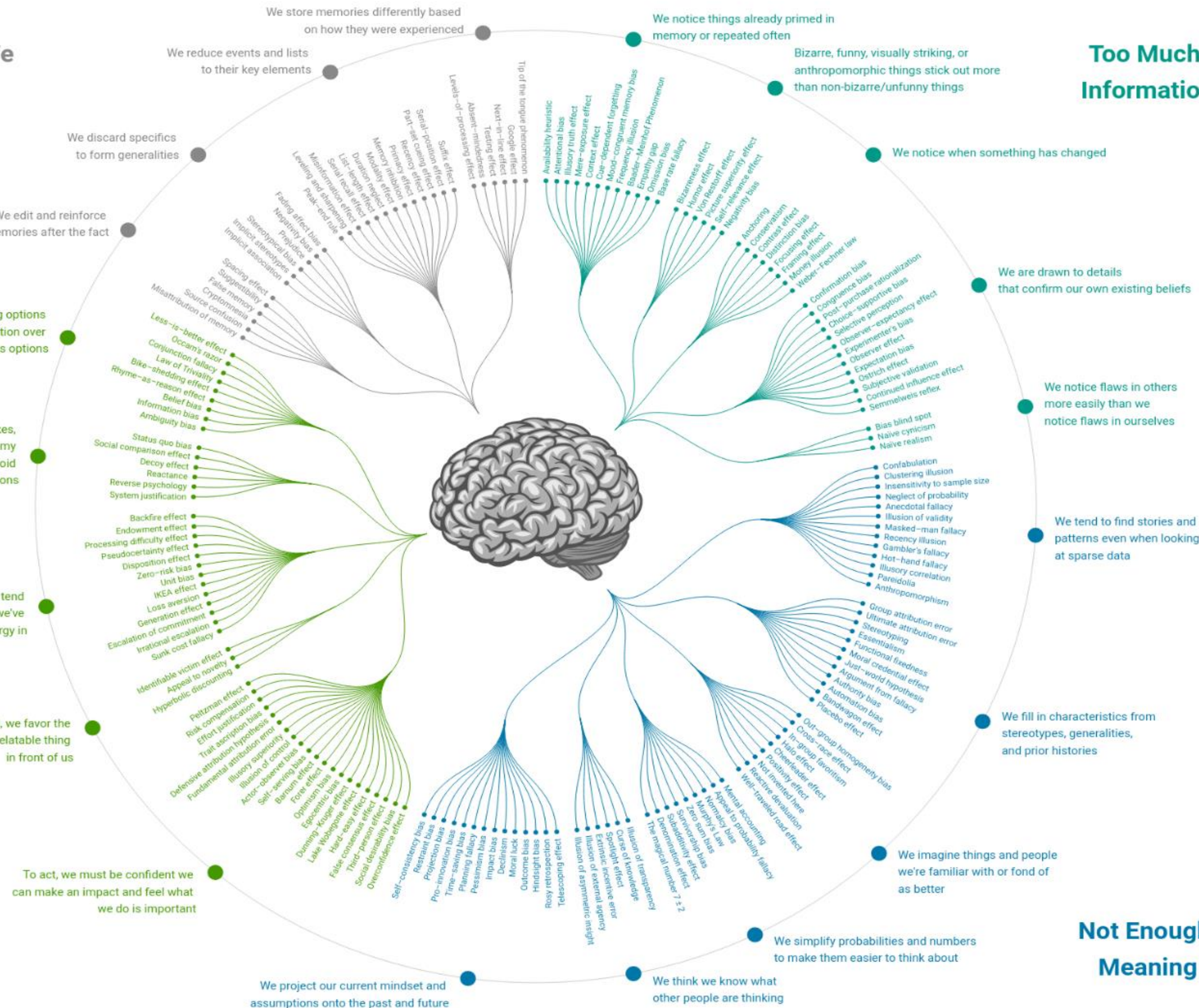
# THE COGNITIVE BIAS CODEX

## What Should We Remember?

## Too Much Information

## Not Enough Meaning

## Need To Act Fast



## FUNCTIONS:

- What to remember
- How to react faster
- How to overcome info overload
- How to make sense and find meaning

Source: <https://www.teachthought.com/critical-thinking/the-cognitive-bias-codex-a-visual-of-180-cognitive-biases/>



# THE PSYCHOLOGY OF FAKE NEWS

**Why do we fall prey to fake news?** We are constantly flooded with too much information online – our brain can only deal with a finite amount. To avoid getting overwhelmed, our brain uses some tricks - mental shortcuts, biases or “heuristics”. Let’s learn about one of the shortcuts, **confirmation bias**, and how to overcome it!

## What is Confirmation Bias?

We only choose to read news that agree with our initial beliefs.



See Example:

<https://www.technologyreview.com/2021/01/07/1015858/capitol-invasion-antifa-conspiracy-lie/>

## What is Bandwagon Effect?

We imagine that big groups agreeing to a point (such as a news headline) means it cannot be wrong.



If a lot of people share, that means its true!



See examples:

- <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/singaporeans-rush-supermarkets-after-malaysia-announces-lockdown>
- <https://mustsharenews.com/supermarkets-dorscon-orange/>
- <https://singaporeuncensored.com/china-supermarket-customers-crawl-in-to-snatch-supplies-looks-like-zombie-movie/>
- <https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/toilet-paper-limits-empty-shelves-back-virus-surges-74264233>



# Familiarity Bias

Our tendency to assume that if something is familiar, it must be good and safe. People would rather accept familiarity rather than a difficult truth.



## FAMILIARITY BIAS: EXAMPLES

See example:

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/health-environment/article/3135754/coronavirus-singapore-residents-look-sinovac-shot>



# Backfire Effect

When your core beliefs are challenged, it can cause you to believe it even more strongly.



## BACKFIRE EFFECT: EXAMPLES

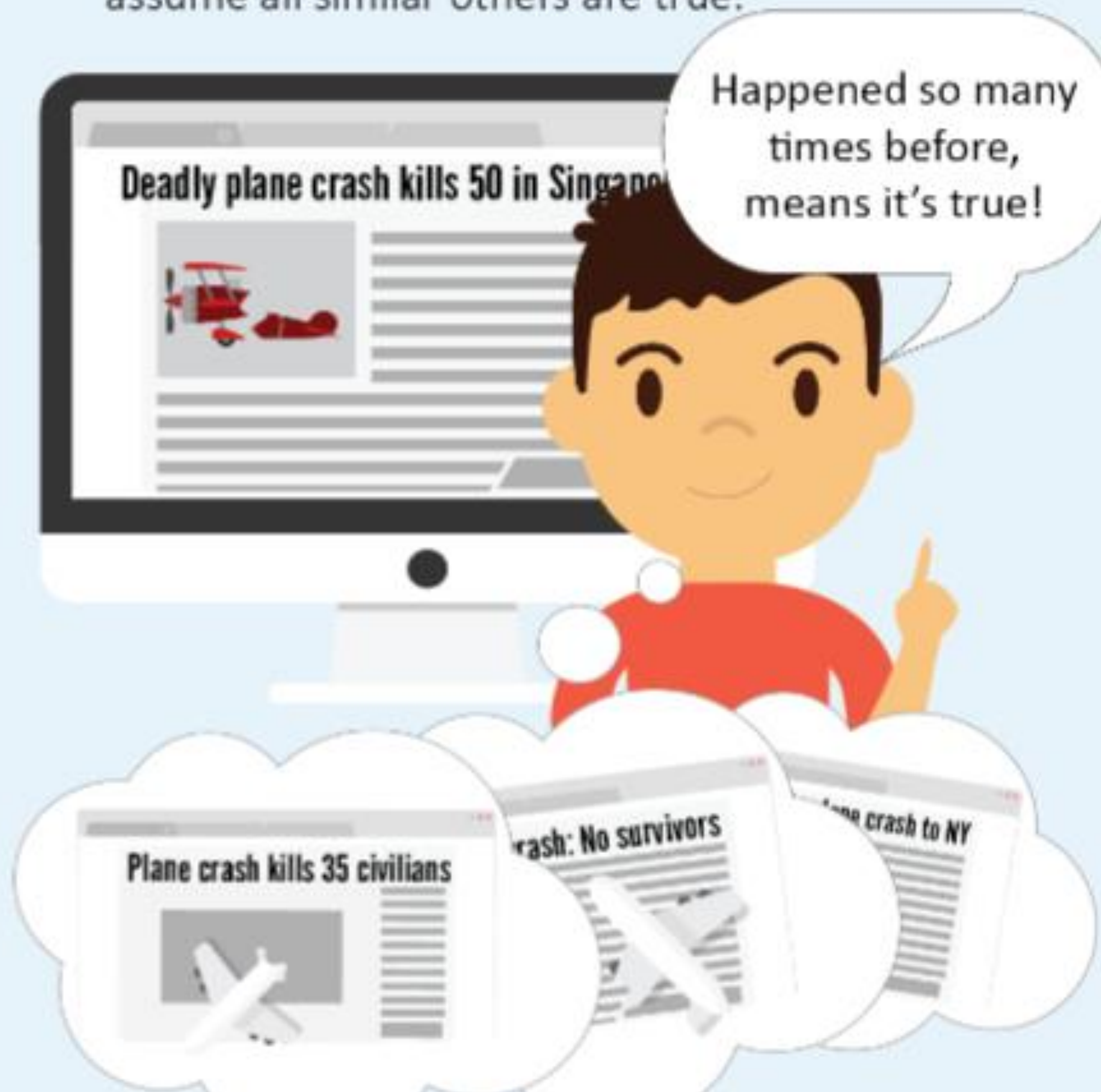
See examples:

- <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/briton-charged-not-wearing-mask-psychiatric-assessment-022728229.html>
- <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/woman-without-mask-at-mbs-gets-14-new-charges-015845266.html>
- <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/some-unvaccinated-people-not-moved-pressure-new-covid-19-rules-those-allergic-hope>



# Availability Heuristic

When we are exposed to certain events in the news, we easily recall these events, and assume all similar others are true.



## AVAILABILITY HEURISTIC: EXAMPLES

See examples:

- <https://mothership.sg/2021/07/covid-19-update-july-14/>
- <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/uncovering-the-ktv-butterfly-effect-in-singapore-as-covid-19-cluster-grows-to-88-cases>
- <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/irresponsible-behaviour-of-ktv-cluster-not-the-reason-for-return-to-tighter-covid>



## Optimistic Bias

We believe we are less susceptible to risks than others.



## OPTIMISTIC BIAS: EXAMPLES

See examples:

- [4 in 5 Singaporeans confident in spotting fake news but 90 per cent wrong when put to the test: Survey, Singapore News & Top Stories - The Straits Times](#)
- <https://citynomads.com/if-i-die-i-die-why-we-think-singaporeans-have-been-going-out-despite-coronavirus-fears/>
- <https://mustsharenews.com/siam-diu-ktv-cluster/>



# [KAHOOT!] PHONES & 6 COMMON BIASES/HEURISTICS

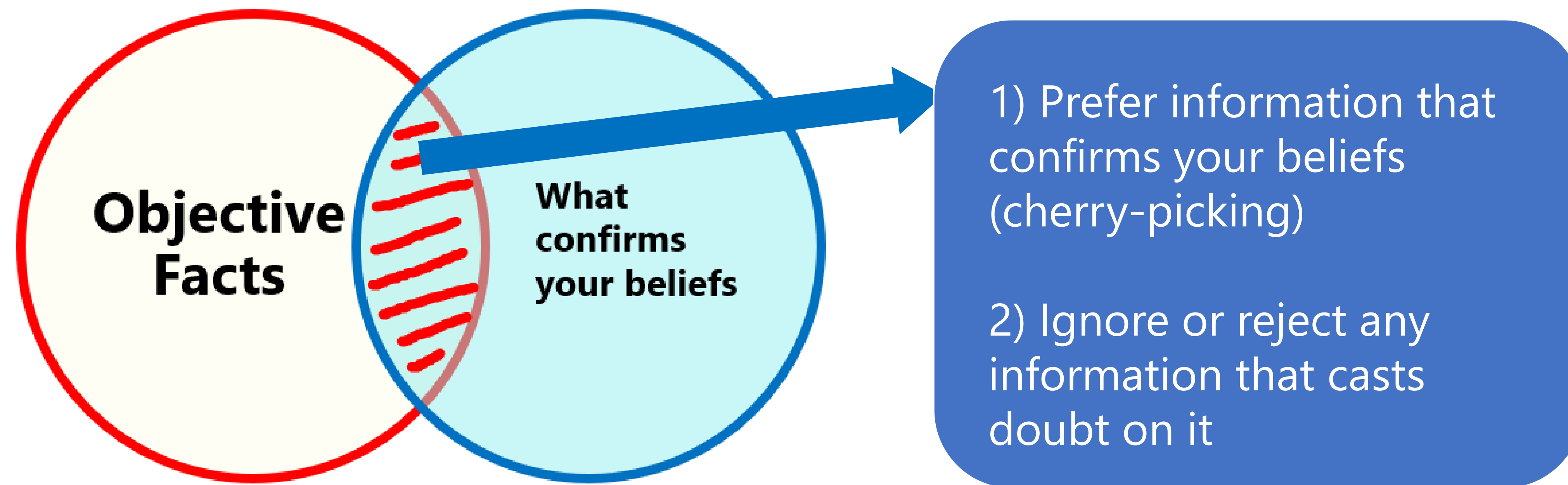
1. **Confirmation bias**, e.g. *Apple products are the best*
2. **Bandwagon effect**, e.g. *everybody buys iPhone, I also buy (see long queue outside telco)*
3. **Familiarity bias**, e.g. *better model of phone is out but I will still buy iPhone*
4. **Backfire effect**, e.g. *tech reports show Apple deliberately slows down older iPhone but I don't believe or care*
5. **Availability heuristic**, e.g. *News report: "Samsung phone explodes!" (Heng man, I buy iPhone only)*
6. **Optimistic bias**, e.g. *i have iPhone so not likely to get malware or virus; I use Samsung so long never kena virus before*

# WHICH OF THE 6 BIASES IS MOST IMPORTANT?



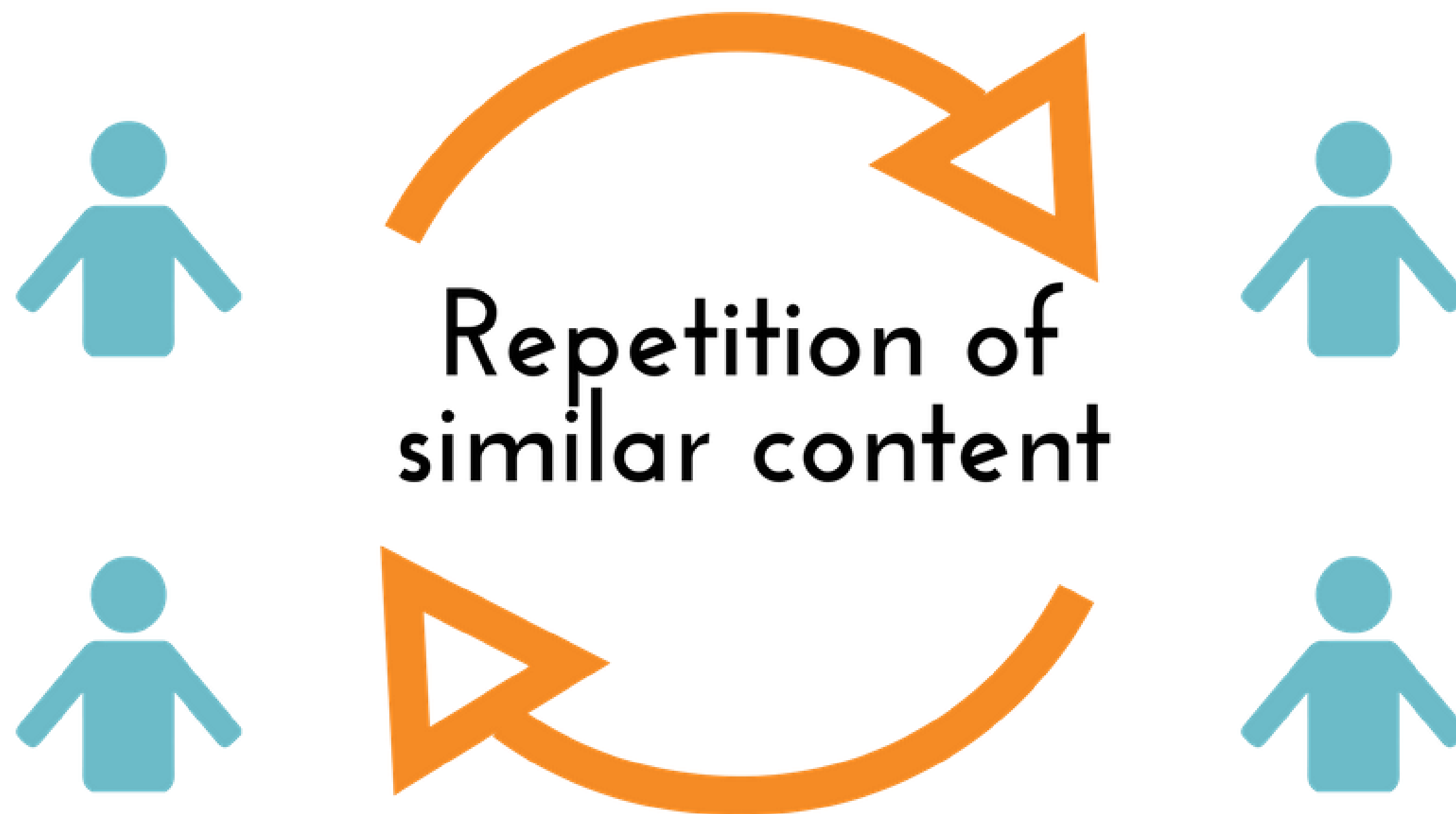
# Confirmation Bias & Fake News

- **Bias** is a tendency to believe that some people, ideas, etc., are better than others.
- **Confirmation bias**, or the **selective collection of evidence**, can be most entrenched around beliefs and ideas that we are strongly attached to or that provoke a strong emotional response.



# Confirmation Bias & Echo Chambers

- A situation where **beliefs and ideas are reinforced** through repetition of a closed system that does not allow for the free movement of alternative or competing ideas or concepts.



- 1) Algorithms in search engines and social media amplify the effect
- 2) Ignore or reject any information that casts doubt on it

Source: Cornell University Library  
[http://guides.library.cornell.edu/evaluate\\_news/bias](http://guides.library.cornell.edu/evaluate_news/bias)

# Where can you find Echo Chambers?

- Social media, e.g. FB groups
- Discussion forums, e.g. Hardware Zone, Reddit
- Chat groups, e.g. WhatsApp & Telegram
- “Like-minded” friends
- Any closed group with groupthink or a dominant view with no room for dissent
- Search algorithms, e.g. Google search results (especially if you log in)



# Case Study: Echo Chambers

This video from the Southern Poverty Law Center shows how the **Google searching algorithm effectively narrowed the perspective** of Dylann Roof because he searched for white supremacy information

Watch the video at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qB6A45tA6mE>

# What can you do about Echo Chambers?

- 'Like' everything. Algorithms can't categorize you if they can't determine what you really like.
- Set up alternate social media accounts and 'Like' different things
- Limit the number of pages you follow to credible and reliable ones
- Sign out of your Google account before searching
- Keep yourself updated on the latest fact-checked articles (e.g Black Dot)

For more tips, visit:

<https://www.wired.com/story/facebook-twitter-echo-chamber-confirmation-bias/>



# What can we do about?

# How to overcome Confirmation Bias?

## How to Overcome Confirmation Bias?

ONE



**FIND OTHER SOURCES** Look for ways to challenge what you see. Seek out information from a range of sources.

TWO



**TALK ABOUT IT** Discuss your thoughts with others. Surround yourself with a diverse group of people, and don't be afraid to listen to their views.

THREE



**ANTICIPATE** Embrace surprises when they happen. When you feel that something didn't go as expected, consider other options.



# How to overcome Bandwagon Effect?

## How to Overcome Bandwagon Effect?

ONE



**RECOGNISE** Be wary of viral and widely-shared news. Read news directly from the news website instead of a social media feed, where the number of likes and shares are displayed.

TWO

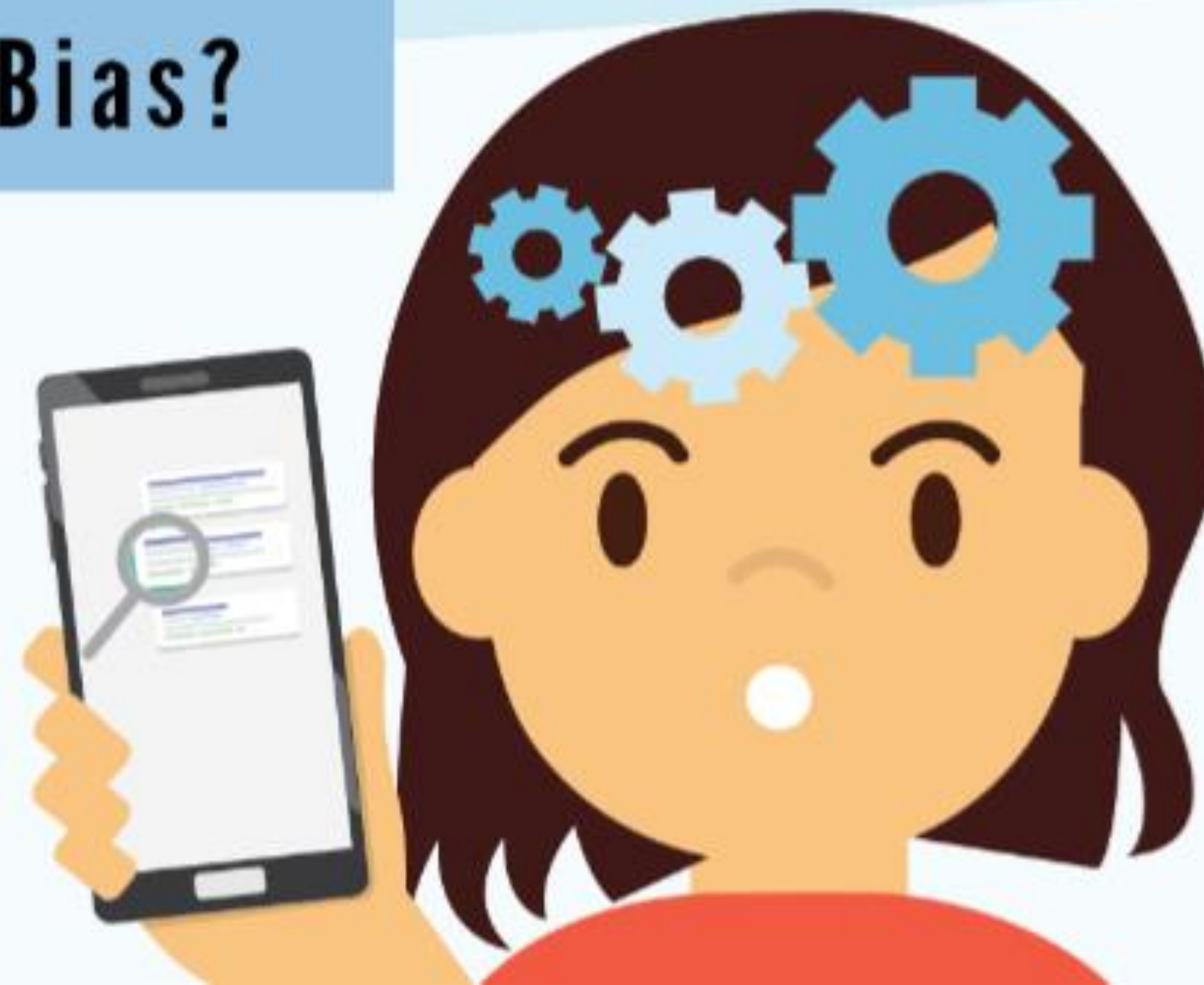


**TAKE SOME TIME ALONE** Make decisions when you are not surrounded by many people, so that you can think more clearly on your own.

# How to overcome Familiarity Bias & Backfire Effect?

## How to Avoid Bias?

- ✓ While it can be difficult at first, be open to **alternative ideas** and learn to face **unfamiliar information**.
- ✓ Be open-minded and **seek out further information** when in doubt.





# How to overcome Availability Heuristic & Optimism Bias?

## How to Avoid Bias?

- ✓ **Be aware** of our **tendency to overestimate** our knowledge, and **tendency to assume** the validity of events based on past knowledge.
- ✓ Be open-minded and **seek out further information** when in doubt.



# HOW TO TALK TO FRIENDS & FAMILY ABOUT SHARING FAKE NEWS

## 1. Be civil & polite

Use an empathetic and respectful tone. Avoid being judgmental or simply telling someone they are wrong. If a person replies with aggressive or sarcastic language, don't respond in kind.

## 2. Take your time

Firing off a knee-jerk response might be tempting, but pause and take a step back. Do your homework. Research the claim and find reputable fact-checking organizations or credible expert sources to share, which research shows is key to effectively correcting misinformation online.

## 3. Find common ground

Try putting yourself in your friend or loved one's shoes. Why might they have posted this? Did they have good intentions? Consider pointing out shared concerns or feelings in your response. Misinformation exploits our beliefs and values to elicit an emotional reaction. But you can also focus on these underlying principles to establish your own good intentions in reaching out.

\* Adapted from “*How to speak up without starting a showdown*” by The News Literacy Project



# HOW TO TALK TO FRIENDS & FAMILY ABOUT SHARING FAKE NEWS

## 4. Lay out the facts

Rather than simply posting a link to a fact-check, clearly summarize the main findings of the debunk first, then add the link.

## 5. Public or private?

Decide how you want to post your response. Public comments can reach a bigger audience, but a private message may be more appropriate in some situations.

## 6. Be patient (and persistent)

Research shows we're more likely to believe fact-checks from people we know. View fact-checking as an ongoing debate rather than a fight to "win" at all costs. Even when someone seems unconvinced, calling out problematic content over time can plant a seed of doubt and prompt loved ones to work through important questions. While one corrective reply may not stop friends and relatives from sharing misinformation, consistently speaking up can help them think twice before sharing.

\* Adapted from "*How to speak up without starting a showdown*" by The News Literacy Project

# HOW TO TALK TO FRIENDS & FAMILY ABOUT SHARING FAKE NEWS

Helpful phrases to get started:

- *"Oh, I saw this and initially thought it could be true, too. But..."*
- *"Figuring out what's true online isn't easy. But I did some digging and thought you'd want to know that it looks like this is misleading ..."*
- *"Hmm, this image/meme/article is kind of shocking, but I'm not sure if that it's real ..."*
- *"Do you know where this information came from? How did you find out about this?"*
- *"This image looks like it may not actually be what it seems. Here is a link to another version of the image, which shows something different. What do you think?"*
- *I know we're all trying to be extra cautious because of all the bad information circulating on [insert subject]. Here is what I found ...*

\* Adapted from *"How to speak up without starting a showdown"* by The News Literacy Project



# STAY TUNED FOR THE NEXT SESSION!



## **S.U.R.E Skills Series for Seniors #2:**

Factchecking Dubious Emails & Messages (15 September 2021, 3-4pm)

E-mail us at [sure@nlb.gov.sg](mailto:sure@nlb.gov.sg) to express interest.

We will notify you when the registration link is up on NLB's Eventbrite page

# Thank you

