

Heuristics: Easy Identifier, Easy Understanding

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There are four types of heuristics: representativeness, availability, anchoring and adjustment, and status quo. As discussed in the textbook, *Social Psychology*, heuristics are, “simple rules for making complex decisions or drawing inferences in a rapid and efficient manner” (Branscombe, N. R., & Baron, R. A., 2016). Although these heuristics may seem beneficial for making decisions quickly, they can sometimes result in deceitful results.

The easiest way to understand a representativeness heuristic is to think of it similar to a stereotype. Features such as the way someone looks, dresses, acts, or even live by can cause an inference of what they may do in their lives, such as their occupation or the type of personality they may have. An availability heuristic, however, is applying extravagant world events to their own personal life. This may also be seen as an egocentricity approach to the news that occur around us.

An anchoring and adjustment heuristic is where the person aims higher or lower than an anticipated amount and adjusts accordingly (Branscombe, N. R., & Baron, R. A., 2016). This essentially is revolved around how people tend to spend money and are persuaded by worthy deals. The final heuristic is the status quo heuristic. This heuristic depends primarily on the emotional bias towards something. Although these brief explanations may seem only slightly tangible, some in-depth examples may clarify exactly what each heuristic is used for.

Stereotypes, which are ways that humans automatically classify someone or a group of people, has the same concept as a representativeness heuristic. Suppose while walking down a high school corridor, a teenage girl passes by. While passing, there are several features that may have stood out about the girl. Her blonde hair framed her attractive features perfectly, and her figure was slim. Since she was surrounded by other girls, it can be deemed that this girl is

extremely social and has a popular status. By combining mere physical and apparent features, this girl had quickly been characterized as a typical cheerleader persona. By allowing the brain to quickly classify people, judgments are instinctively made.

For the availability heuristic, it, “suggests that the easier it is to bring information to mind, the greater its impact on subsequent decisions or judgments” (Branscombe, N. R., & Baron, R. A., 2016). In other words, it can be seen as the subconscious implementing of world events into the individual’s daily life. For example, say a mother was planning on taking her kids to the beach in California. Just before leaving, however, she hears on the news about a shark attack in Florida. Once arriving to the beach, the mother refused to let her kids get too far in the water, and she was constantly looking for sharks in the water. Although this event didn’t occur anywhere near her, she subconsciously withheld the shark attack footage and caused her anxiety to be raised while at the beach.

The anchoring and adjustment heuristic is more often than not represented through money. Humans are consistently on the lookout for deals and bargains while either buying a house, or on a casual trip to the local grocery store. Often, the heuristic is used when the seller aims high, while the buyer aims low. Although neither the buyer nor the seller believes the price would be agreed upon, they will be willing to adjust to find a price that fits their liking. One example of a common sale that stores have, especially online stores, are discounts. If a person came across a designer jacket whose asking price was \$100, they would be less inclined to purchase it, as opposed to the same jacket with a \$200 price tag with a \$100 off sign. Although the prices and the object are the exact same, humans are easily blindsighted by sales.

Finally, the status quo heuristic is probably the most unique; this is because it directly revolves around emotions. This heuristic is commonly formed around the inability to change and

to stick with a more familiar object. For example, if a child were to grow up wearing the shoe brand, Converse, and continued to wear them all throughout high school, it would be likely that they would continue wearing them into their adulthood. Their emotional bias prevents them from exploring new options, and overall maintains a bias for the brand.

Obviously, these heuristics seem farfetched, but people still allow these to subconsciously enter their mind. For the representative heuristic, many negative stereotypes are still being influenced to the population, whether it be from family, friends, or the media. Racial and sexist stigmas that have haunted people for years are still in effect today. Although most people know these assumptions aren't true, they are the claims that are heard every day. Relating to the news as well, the availability heuristic isn't as extreme as the representative heuristic. Even though the likelihood is low on an event in the news occurring to them, humans are stuck within their egocentric mind. This can cause unnecessary anxiety and stress on both the mind and body.

Companies consistently take advantage over naïve buyers, which is why the anchoring and adjustment heuristic can be dangerous for some individuals. Although the sale may sound great, being cautious about sales is essential when saving money. Similarly, the status quo heuristic can cause a financial issue. The prices of the object that is being repetitively bought may increase in price or become difficult to find. This heuristic may also result in a negative impact on trying new things, and just being secluded to a particular brand.

Overall, heuristics are an essential part of social psychology. They may seem helpful at first for quickly classifying information, but overall can have a negative impact on others' lives. It is important to clearly analyze the events occurring throughout each personal event, and to withdraw from making quick assumptions.

References

Branscombe, N. R., & Baron, R. A. (2016). Social Cognition: How We Think About the Social World. In *Social Psychology* (14th ed.). Pearson Education .