

Exercise 9 Instructions

By Joe Stubbersfield

Background

When researching the influence of cognitive biases in the cultural evolution of narratives, it can be valuable to examine the frequency of bias-related content in 'real-world' data. As in Exercise 9, this exercise involves the coding of real material, not material that has been created or manipulated by a researcher. By assessing the frequency of bias-related content it is possible to examine which biases are likely to influence the transmission and evolution of a narrative types.

The Exercise

To complete the exercise, read the materials provided. The materials are examples of genuine news (Real News or RN) and stories from identified 'fake news' websites (Fake News or FN). They are provided as document files featuring just the text, and as individual PDFs which more closely resemble how they would appear online. Use the coding guide below to code the materials for bias-related content and enter this coding in the work sheet. Based on this coding write some comments about what patterns you have observed. You can then compare your coding to the model answer. After completing the exercise, reflect on the key questions below.

Coding guide

Code the material for the presence (1) or absence (0) of elements which would exploit the listed cognitive biases as below:

Material	Bias content					Total
	Sex/ relationships	Social information	MCI	Threat	Disgust	
FNXX	1	1	0	0	1	3

In the above example a fake news (FN) item has been coded as featuring content which could exploit biases related to sex/relationships, social information, and disgust, but features no content which could exploit biases for MCI or threats. You do not need to identify which parts of the text are exploiting the biases, and biases should not be counted more than once, just coded as present (1) or absent (0).

Coding key:

Bias	Coding definition
Sex/relationships	Content relevant to sex or sexual or romantic relationships
Social information	Content which relates to interaction between third parties or provides relevant information about a third party
MCI	Content which breaches intuitive concepts
Threat	Content related to threats
Disgust	Content likely to evoke the emotion disgust

See relevant lectures for more details on each bias.

Key questions:

Why do you think coding such as this would be useful?

This kind of coding can be useful for getting a better understanding of the narratives you're interested in as they exist in the 'real world', without experimenter manipulation. They are the products of natural cultural evolution and transmission. By assessing how frequent bias-related content is, it can be informative about the nature of these biases and the contexts in which they work.

Discrepancies with the model answer?

Did your coding differ from the model answer? As in Exercise 4 research like this is likely to use multiple coders, including ones who are unaware of the hypothesis to determine *inter-coder reliability*.