

Confirmatory Silos in COVID-19-Related Attitudes and Behaviors

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Abstract

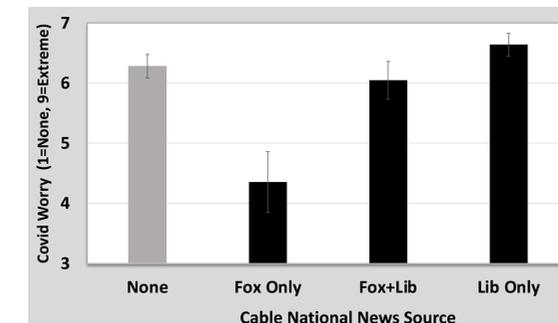
Confirmation bias is a pervasive phenomenon. We hypothesize that confirmation bias plays a role in our choice of news media, which may lead to the creation of confirmatory silos. These silos may create closed feedback loops that may shape attitudes and behavior. The purpose of this study was to explore the extent to which these confirmatory silos may extend to COVID-19 attitudes and behavior. This correlational survey study was completed by 389 USF undergraduates from psychology classes. Participants provided information about attitudes toward COVID-19, self-reported COVID-related behavior, cable media news sources, and political outlook (conservative vs. liberal). We found that liberal outlooks lean toward consumption of more liberal media (CNN, NPR, MSNBC), while conservative outlooks lean toward viewing of more conservative media (Fox News). As expected, we found that consumption of more liberal news was associated with higher levels of COVID-19 worry, while viewing of more conservative media predicted less COVID-19 worry. This relationship extended to behavior. Viewing of more liberal media was also associated with more self-reported COVID-19 protective behaviors (e.g., social distancing and hand washing), while consumption of more conservative media correlated with fewer protective behaviors. These findings provide evidence of confirmatory silos in the context of COVID-19. Attitudes and behaviors were consistent with the messages within the silo. Silos may reinforce a single point of view and limit awareness of alternative points of view.



Methods and Materials

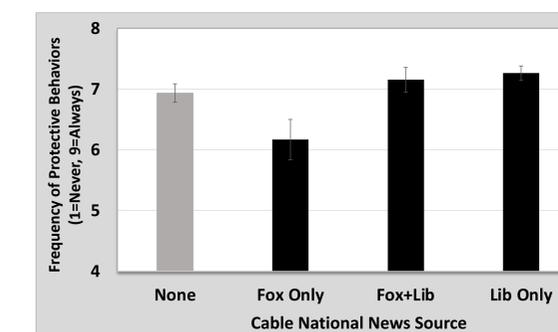
Participants	Examples of Measures
389 undergraduates from psychology classes at USF.	Worry Scale: 1 (not worried at all) to 9 (extremely worried) When thinking about yourself or someone you care about, how worried are you about getting coronavirus? Preventive Behavior Scale: 1(never) to 9(all the time) When you are in situations involving people you don't live with, how often are you: washing hands for 20 seconds; maintaining social distancing of 6 feet; avoiding touching your eyes, mouth, and nose; wearing a face mask; using a hand sanitizer
Design	News Sources: Click on all that apply Where do you typically get your news? Fox, MSNBC, CNN, NPR... Political Outlook: 1 (highly liberal) to 7 (highly conservative). In general, what is your political outlook?
Correlational Study	

Covid-19 Concerns for Self or Others as a Function of Source of News Consumption



Fox Only viewers reported having significantly less Covid-related worry than all other groups who showed similar higher levels of concern.

Average Frequency of Five Protective Behaviors When in Social Situations as a Function of Source of News Consumption



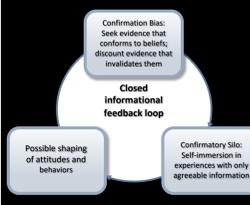
Fox Only viewers reported significantly lower frequency of protective behaviors, suggesting selective news consumption reinforces confirmatory action tendencies.

Introduction

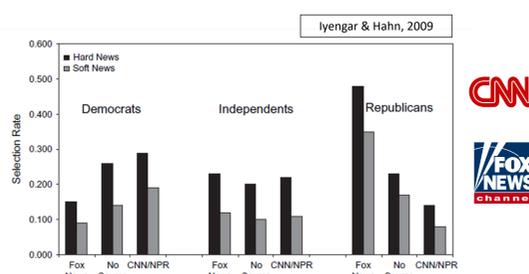
Confirmation Bias:

"A ubiquitous phenomenon in many guises (Nickerson, 1998)"

- Biases information seeking process
- Leads to biased information exposure
- May result in creation of confirmatory silos



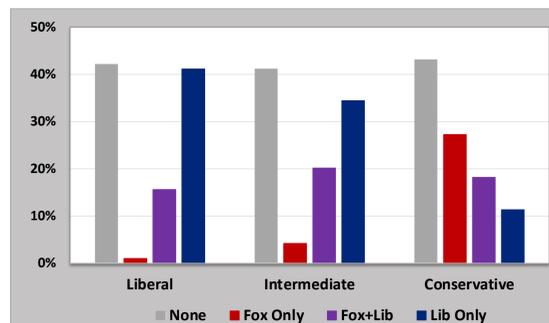
Confirmatory Information Consumption



- Iyengar & Hahn (2009) showed that people prefer news stories (ostensibly) published by a news source favorable to their political outlook
- Biased preferences may create confirmatory silos of closed, informational feedback loops that may then also shape attitudes and behavior
- We set out to explore this phenomenon in the context of COVID-19

Results

Cable Media Preference as A Function of Political Outlook



A large proportion of participants with a liberal outlook viewed more liberal media, while many of those with a conservative outlook viewed more conservative media.

Conclusions

- We find evidence consistent with confirmatory silos.
- Attitudes regarding COVID and related protective behaviors tend to be aligned with information from within an individual's silo.
- This suggests an insulated pattern of information-seeking that reinforces a single point of view and diminishes regard for alternative points of view.
- Confirmatory silos may play an important part in cognitive and social processes, shedding light on how individuals perceive their own and others' points of view (e.g., Knobloch-Westernwick et al., 2020; Meppelink et al., 2019).



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References

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