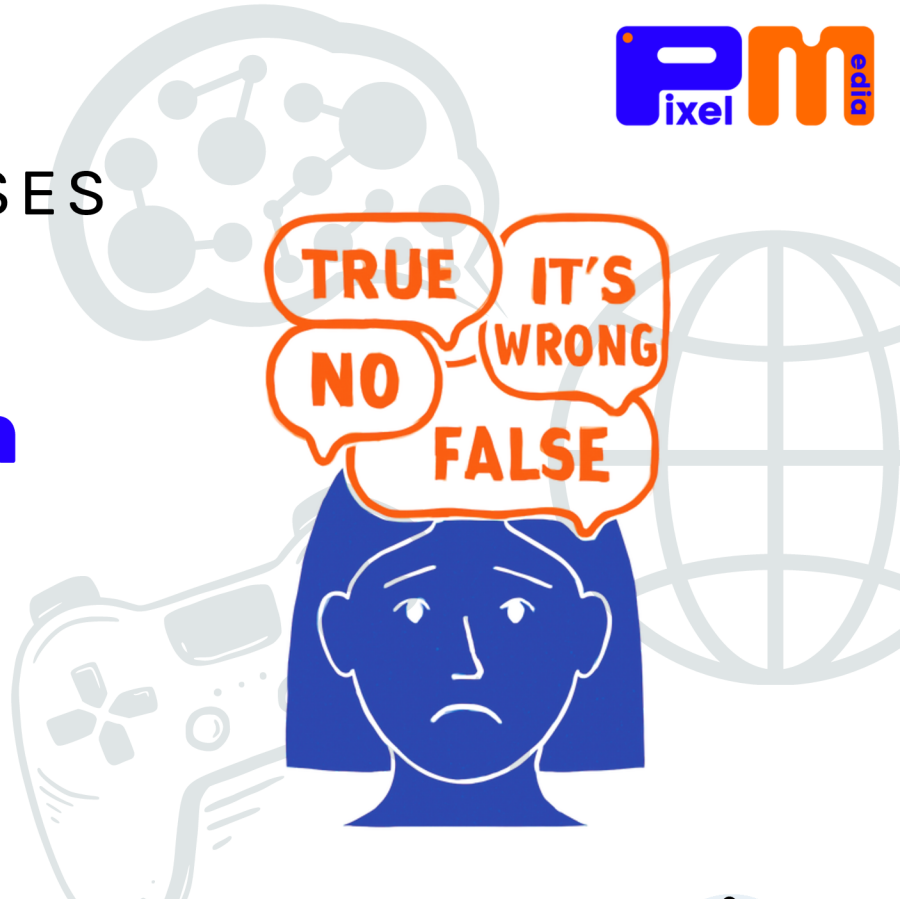# Illusory Truth Bias

KEY WORDS

misinformation | familiarity | repetition | believability

We take in hundreds of messages every day, from friends, school, social media, the news, ads, memes, and more. Some are accurate, others are not.
Since our brain tends to lean towards what feels familiar, hearing something over and over makes it seem more convincing, even if it's not true. That's why, with enough repetition, even a false statement can begin to sound like the truth.

"**I've heard it everywhere, so it must be true.**"

This is **Illusory Truth Bias**. It's the tendency to believe something simply because we've heard it multiple times. The more a statement is repeated, the more familiar it becomes, and the more likely we are to accept it as true. Our brains take shortcuts, and familiarity feels comfortable. We trust repeated information, even if it's not accurate. It's not about laziness; it's about making thinking easier. Familiar things feel safer, and that sense of safety tricks us into believing they are correct.

"Wait... I think I read that somewhere."

Imagine hearing something like "Drinking coffee helps you live longer". You come across it online, your friend mentions it, and then you see it again in an article. It starts to feel believable, even though there's no solid evidence to support it. Soon enough, you might find yourself repeating it to others.

This is how misinformation spreads. We don't always remember where we first heard something, but the more often we hear it, the more likely we are to believe it. Our brain mistakes repetition for truth.

A similar dynamic happens with propaganda, like the repeated narratives pushed by Putin's messages about the war in Ukraine. As these ideas are constantly repeated across various channels, people begin to accept them as facts, simply because they've been heard so many times, even if they don't stand up to scrutiny.
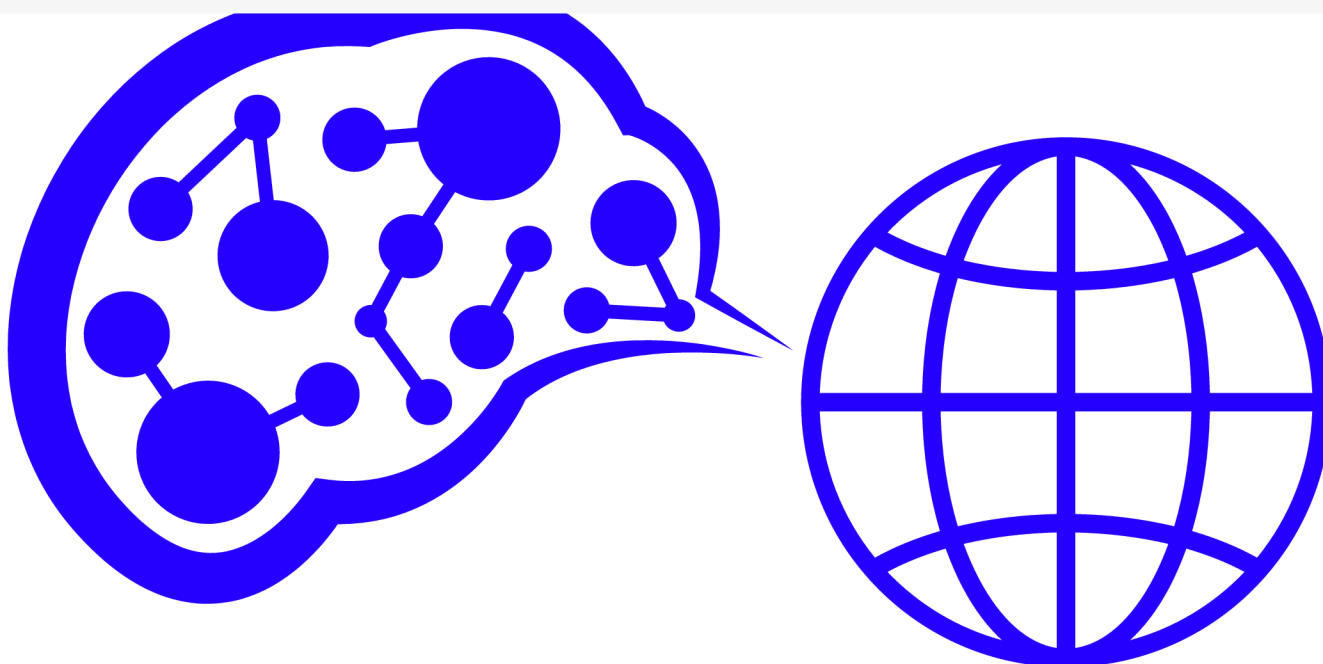
"Everyone says it, so I stopped questioning it."

This bias is everywhere:

- In **advertising**: "8 out of 10 dentists recommend this toothpaste" sounds always convincing, but we rarely know the full details behind the study.

- In **politics**: Leaders repeat statements like "This policy will reduce unemployment" so often that it starts to feel true, even without the data to back it up.

- In **everyday myths**: "We only use 10% of our brain", still believed simply because it's repeated so many times.

- **Online**: Think about the claim "Drinking lemon water in the morning helps you lose weight". Repeated across blogs and social media, it starts to feel true, even though it's not scientifically proven.
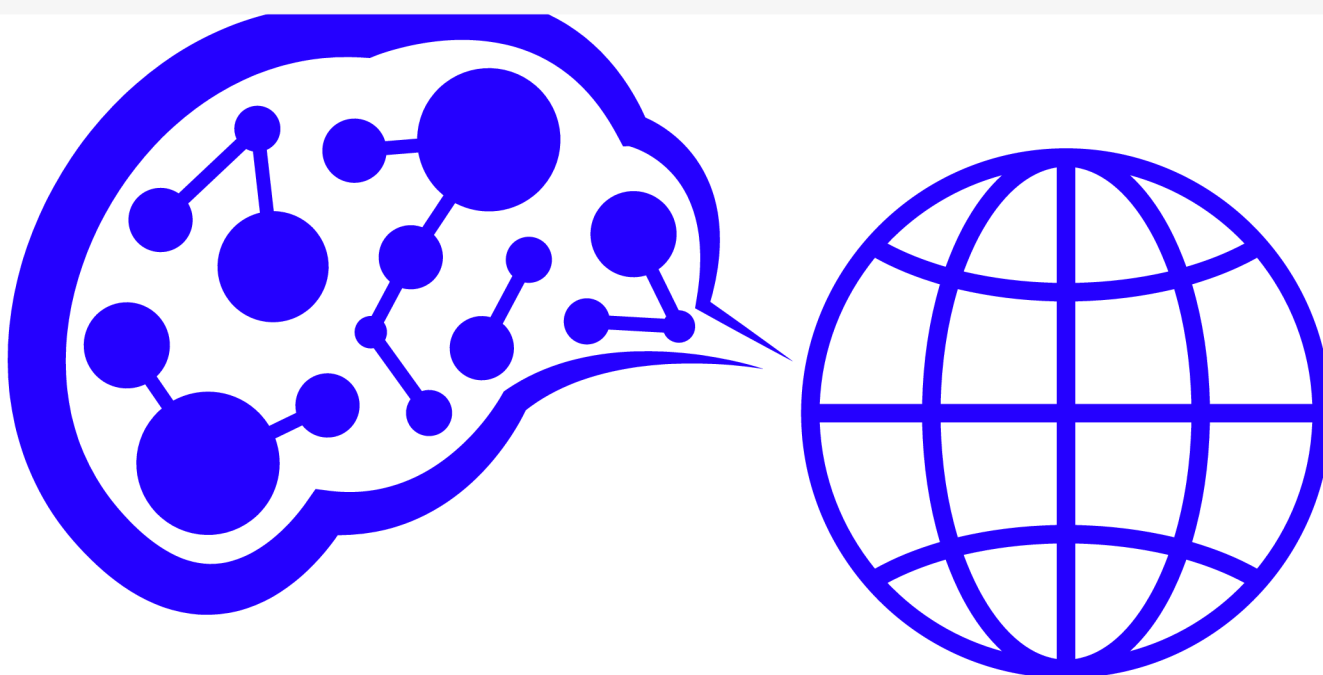
"I try to pause before I repeat what I've heard."

You don't have to question everything you hear, but taking a moment to think is important. Before passing something on, ask yourself:
- "Where did I hear this?"
- "Why does it sound true to me?"
- "Is this something I've checked for myself, or just something that feels familiar?"
- "Could there be another side to this story?"

When we stop questioning things just because we've heard them before, we leave the door open for propaganda, fake news, and harmful stereotypes.
Taking a moment to think critically isn't about hesitation. It's about making sure we're not just accepting things at face value.

Critical thinking doesn't slow us down, but it sharpens our judgment and helps us see the bigger picture!

COGNITIVE BIAS