Inclusion of “Cognitive Biases” in Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Teaching-Learning Resources

by Ramon R. Tuazon and Therese Patricia C. San Diego
07 June 2018
Integration of MIL in the curriculum: the MIL initiative with the widest coverage in the Philippines

MIL is a core course in the Senior High School program
Gaps in MIL education in the Philippines

- Focus on educational technology
- Mass media-centric concept of “media”
- School administrators and teachers’ lack of training on MIL
- Lack of materials for the MIL course

- Emphasis on biases from media text or information sources
- No mention of cognitive biases of users of media and information
Other core areas of MIL not covered in the DepEd curriculum

- Media representation
  - Awareness of stereotypes in the media and content that dehumanizes minority groups
  - Ability to understand other cultures and divergent views

- Intercultural dialogue

- Addressing disinformation
MIL skills are “all the more crucial given that biased and polarising content is often sophisticated and hard for verification systems to detect as it increasingly splices truth and fiction and circulates in hard-to-track formats”

(European Commission, 2018)
Architects of Networked Disinformation

“professionalized and hierarchized group of political operators” who “design disinformation campaigns” and “mobilize click armies” for political clients

(Ong & Cabañes, 2018)
Deconstructing users’ biases: A gap in MIL education?

In addition to learning about biased content and disinformation, don’t media and information users need to learn about how their own biases can affect the way they think and behave?

persuasive technology
trigger-action-reward
sense of progress
social approval
When one’s feed is curated with news items that the user is likely to agree with, won’t this create an echo chamber in which the user is no longer exposed to other perspectives?

Could this lead to the inability to become open to divergent views?
“Individuals empowered to screen out material that does not conform to their existing preferences may form virtual cliques, insulate themselves from opposing points of view, and reinforce their biases.”

(Alstyne & Brynjolfsson, 1996)
The next generation needs to learn how to enhance their ability to actively listen to and understand perspectives that contradict theirs, and how to engage rather than “block” or alienate others.
Exploring the Cognitive Theory of Media Literacy
(Potter, 2004)
Interaction with the media: “almost always in a state of automaticity” (Potter, 2004)

**Past**

The media condition people to think that certain things are important whereas others are not

**Present**

The media can *also* track people’s routines and preferences and use this data to influence their thoughts and behaviors
Thus, users of media and information need to avoid “traps in meaning construction” (Potter, 2004)

- butterfly effect
- confirmation bias
- projection bias
If students have increased knowledge about their own cognitive biases as users of media and information, can this improve their media and information literacy?
Inclusion of “cognitive biases” in teaching and learning about MIL

Multi-disciplinary efforts in the enhancement of MIL education and research: collaboration between media and communication scholars and neuroscientists, behavioral psychologists, and experts from other social sciences