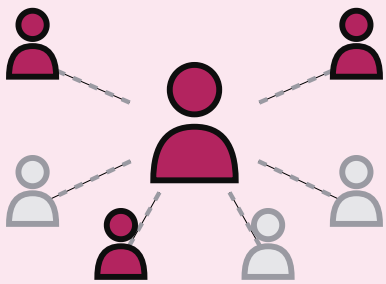
Concept

False consensus effect

The tendency to believe our opinions and choices are more common than they are, and to see those who choose differently as odd.



In Spanish
Efecto del falso consenso

Origin
Ross, Greene and House (1977)

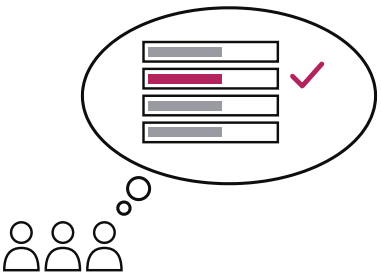
What problem it addresses

Explains why a team assumes everyone will use its product the way it does, and underpins the idea “you are not the user.”

An example

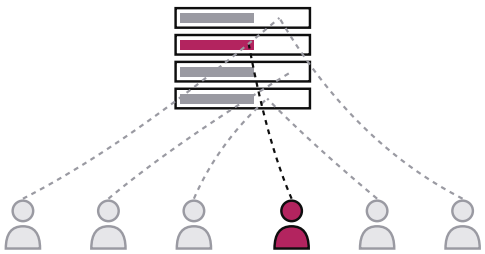
An illustrative example: a team decides how to order an app’s menu.

What the team assumes



Because it’s obvious to them where each option is, they believe almost everyone will feel the same. **We take it for granted.**

What happens when you test it



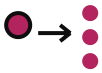
Many people look for the option somewhere else and get lost. **We check it.**

The team wasn’t careless: it was projecting its own way of thinking onto others.

Why it happens

1 

We start from what we would do.

2 

We use it to estimate what others will do.

3 

And we find it odd when someone chooses differently.

Applications in design

Use it like this

When someone says "everyone gets it," test it with real people before deciding.

Avoid

Using the team, your friends or yourself as a sample of your users.

Don't fall for it

Knowing the bias exists doesn't remove it: you need outside data.

62% vs. 33%

What the research says

Students were asked to walk around campus wearing an advertising sign. Those who agreed thought 62% would agree; those who refused thought only 33% would (Ross, Greene and House, 1977).

●●● **Solid evidence.** A meta-analysis of 115 tests confirmed the effect, with a moderate size that changes depending on how the question is asked (Mullen et al., 1985).

Connections

Used in

- UX research
- Personas
- Usability testing

Authors and works

1977	**Lee Ross, David Greene and Pamela House**	Demonstrated it with stories and with a real request; in every case, each person believed their own choice was the most common.
1985	**Brian Mullen et al.**	Pooled 115 tests from 23 studies and confirmed the effect is consistent.

Sources

Original sources

- Ross, L., Greene, D., & House, P. (1977). The “false consensus effect”: An egocentric bias in social perception and attribution processes. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 13(3), 279–301. View source (https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-1031(77)90049-X)

Academic reviews

- Mullen, B., Atkins, J. L., Champion, D. S., Edwards, C., Hardy, D., Story, J. E., & Vanderklok, M. (1985). The false consensus effect: A meta-analysis of 115 hypothesis tests. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 21(3), 262–283. View source (https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-1031(85)90020-4)

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