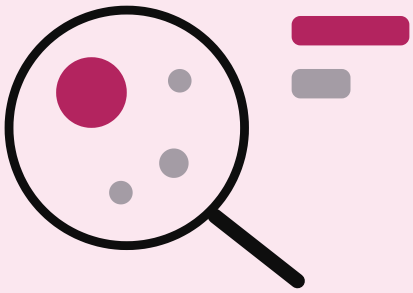
Concept

Availability heuristic

We judge how frequent or likely something is by how easily examples come to mind.



In Spanish
Heurística de disponibilidad

Origin
Tversky and Kahneman (1973)

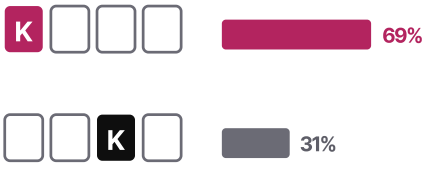
What problem it addresses

It explains why we overestimate striking or recent risks and underestimate the ones we don't easily remember.

An example

In English, are there more words that start with K or that have K as the third letter?

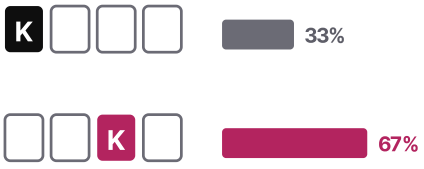
What people believed



What people believed (105 of 152 people)

For most of five letters, K among them, 105 of 152 people **thought more words start with them.**

What actually happens



What happens in a typical text (about twice as many)

In a typical text there are about **twice as many with K as the third letter.**

It is much easier to recall words that start with K. That ease feels like frequency to us.

Why it happens

1 

To estimate, we search for examples in memory.

2 

If they come up easily, we assume they are frequent.

3 

What is recent, striking or repeated comes up first, even if it isn't more common.

Applications in design

Use it like this

Pair striking cases with baseline data so people can calibrate.

Avoid

Highlighting only extreme cases to make something seem more common or more dangerous.

Don't fall for it

Before estimating a risk, look for the data, not the example you remember.

81%

What the research says

Participants who, after hearing a list of men's and women's names, believed there were more of the sex whose names were famous, even though there were fewer (Tversky and Kahneman, 1973).

●●● **Solid evidence.** They showed it with several different tasks: letters, names and word lists.

Connections

Used in

- Behavioral design

Related to

- Anchoring
- Negativity bias

Authors and works

1973	**Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman**	Described the heuristic and tested it in several experiments.

Sources

Original sources

- Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D. (1973). Availability: A heuristic for judging frequency and probability. Cognitive Psychology, 5(2), 207–232. View source (https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0285(73)90033-9)

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