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Senior Thesis

Dr. Leacock

September 16, 2018

Question Storm

General topic area:

Cognitive Dissonance

Research Topic:

Cognitive dissonance regarding the flat earth movement on YouTube.

Research Angle:

Who are you in relation to this project? In other words, what aspects of your identity or experience may drive or shape your approach to this topic? Write approximately one paragraph on your personal angle.

I consider myself a skeptic, and I enjoy observing online conversations and debates about controversial topics. One of the things I get frustrated about the most, though, is when people display their cognitive dissonance in a conversation. Sometimes this takes form in merely making up a counter argument on the spot, or it can be as extreme as flat out ignoring the other side's argument. When you ask the experts of each side, I've seen that both sides claim that their opposition is victim to cognitive dissonance and they don't have an open and honest mind. Even questions that have an objectively true solution, such as "What shape is the earth?," have two sides that claim that the other is absolutely insane for believing what they believe. The scientist in me makes me inexplicably frustrated at the scientific illiteracy of the Flat Earth Society. With frustration or not, cognitive dissonance is very interesting to me since it's the opposing view from skepticism, and I would like to investigate it and understand it.

Question Storm:

What is cognitive dissonance?

How do psychology experts describe it?

Why do we fall victim to cognitive dissonance?

Is there a way to avoid cognitive dissonance?

Does knowing about it help prevent it?

Or does knowing about it make a person more confident in their beliefs?

Does cognitive dissonance have benefits?

Is there an evolutionary advantage to cognitive dissonance?

Can people with the factually correct beliefs also be victim to cognitive dissonance?

Are there different degrees of cognitive dissonance?

Can extremists ever be convinced that they're wrong?

How does cognitive dissonance affect a person's violence towards their opposition?

Is there a genetic factor to cognitive dissonance?

Is cognitive dissonance voluntary?

Is there a correlation between cognitive dissonance and intelligence?

What kinds of issues are prone to cognitive dissonance?

Review/Evaluate:

Use GREEN to color or highlight those questions or parts of questions that are potentially “essential questions”. Use BLUE to color or highlight the questions that have some potential to guide part or all of your research question. For now, ignore questions that are factual or simplistic. You'll need to answer these, but they won't help you design your project.

Essential Questions:

1. What is cognitive dissonance?
2. Does knowing about cognitive dissonance help avoid it?
3. Is cognitive dissonance voluntary?

Research Question:

Does knowing about cognitive dissonance help avoid it regarding the flat earth movement on YouTube?