The Cycle of Hedonism: Why Echo Chambers Perpetuate a Lack of Contentment

Aadi Shah
AP Seminar 2022-23

Social Media's Effect

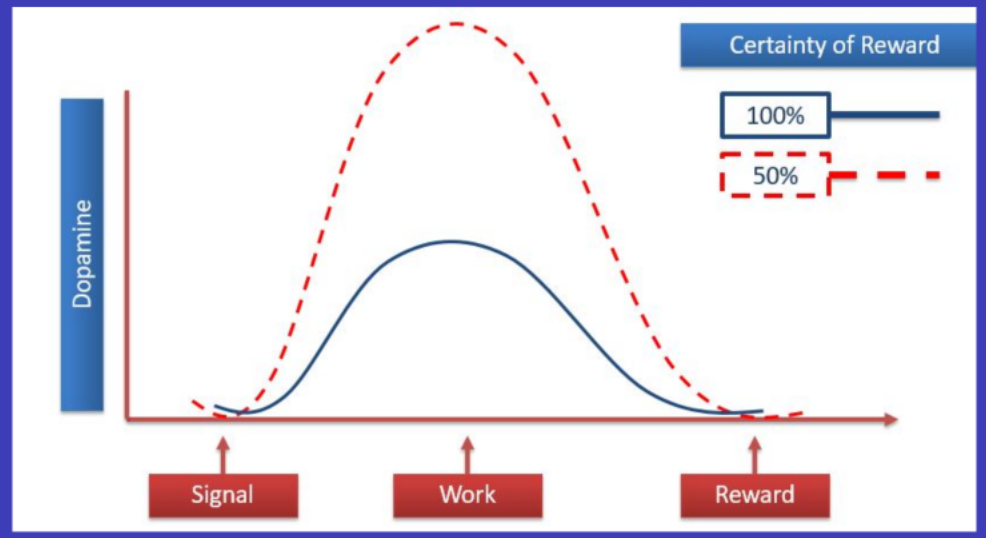
~97% of teenagers use social media

making them "feel more connected"

Social Media's Addictive Nature

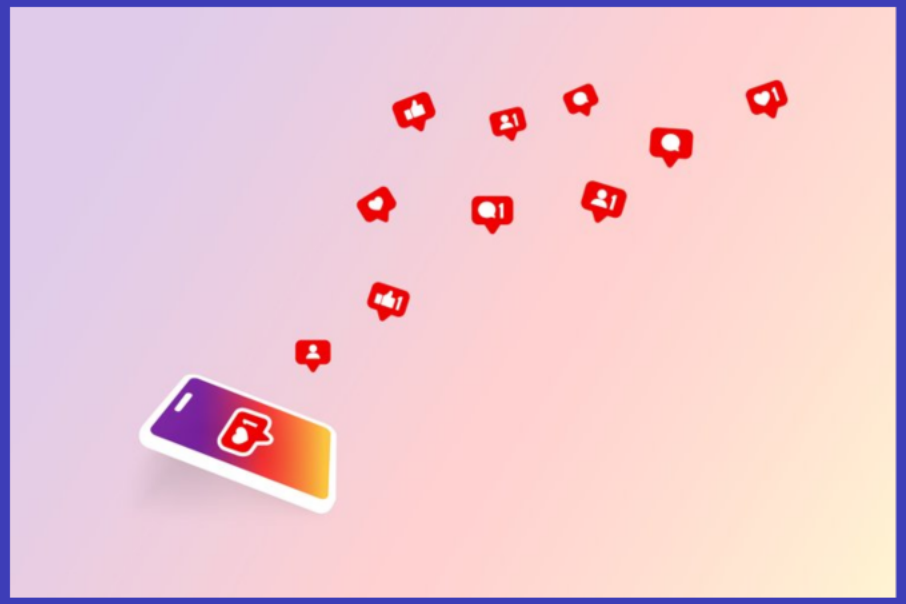
"...it would be difficult to give up social media..."

Dealing with Anticipation, not Pleasure



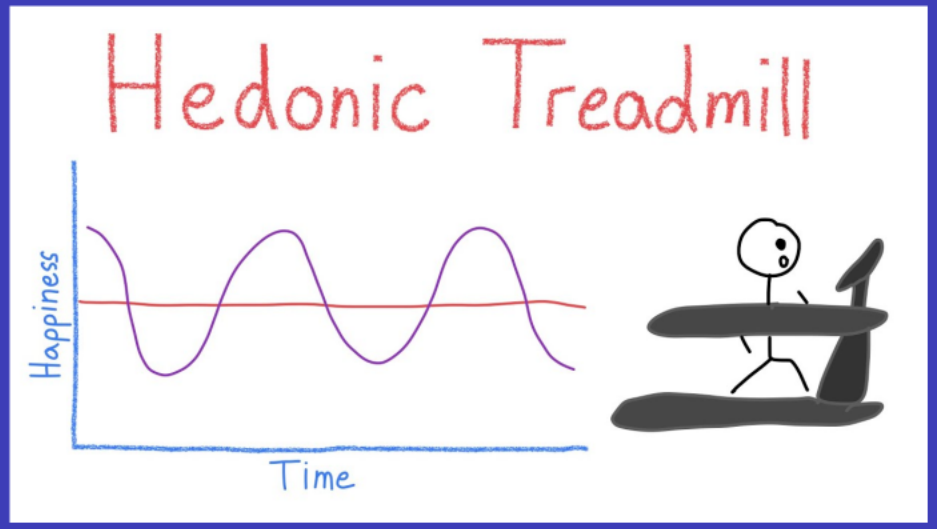
Desire causes more neural stimulation than pleasure.

The unpredictable nature of social media leads to high anticipation.



...Leading to Dissatisfaction

The goal of social media is to pursue pleasure, an idea similar to the "hedonic treadmill."



Pleasure derived from this state is temporary and far lower than the desire for pleasure.

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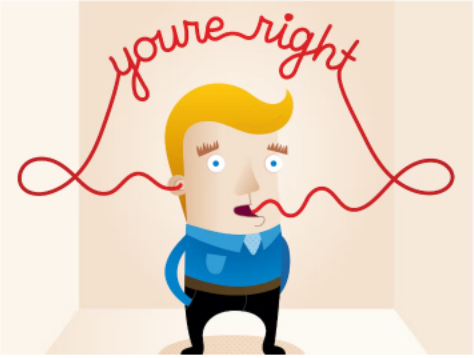
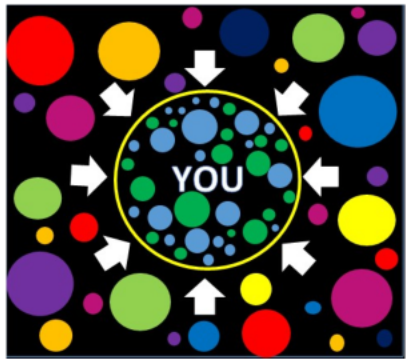
What are Echo Chambers?

Echo chambers form when

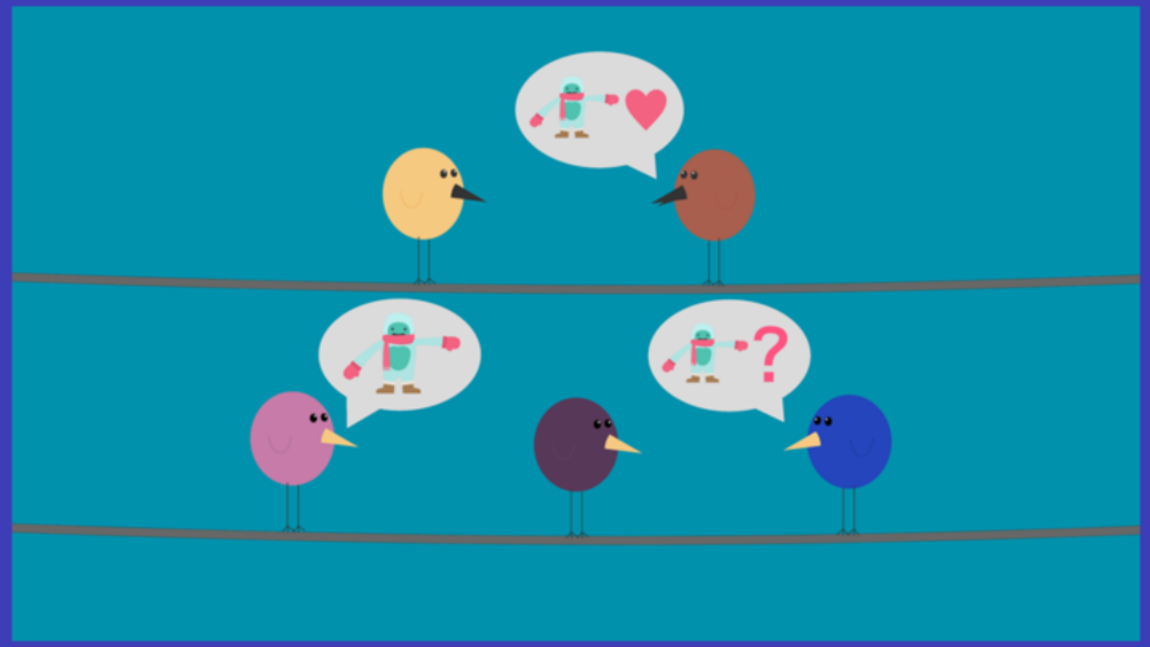


exposure to diverse opinions is limited



like-minded users frame and reinforce narratives

Social Media vs. Echo Chambers



Echo chamber response is similar to social media response but without the risk of backlash.

At the same time, anticipation is decreased as any present biases become known quite quickly.

...Leading to the Research Question:

To what extent do the falsities within social media’s echo chambers affect today's teenagers’ capability to maintain long-term states of contentment?

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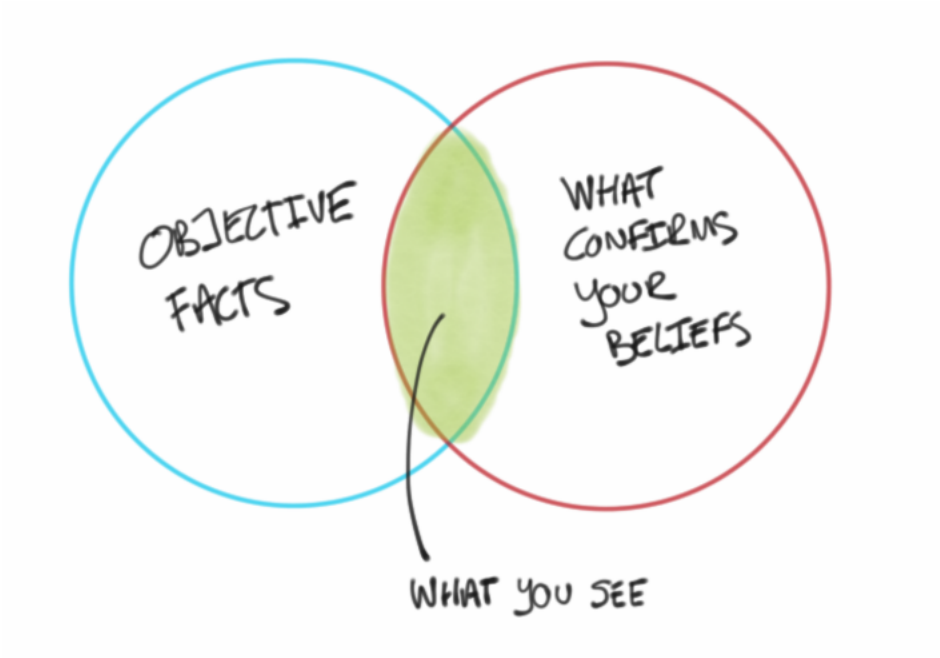
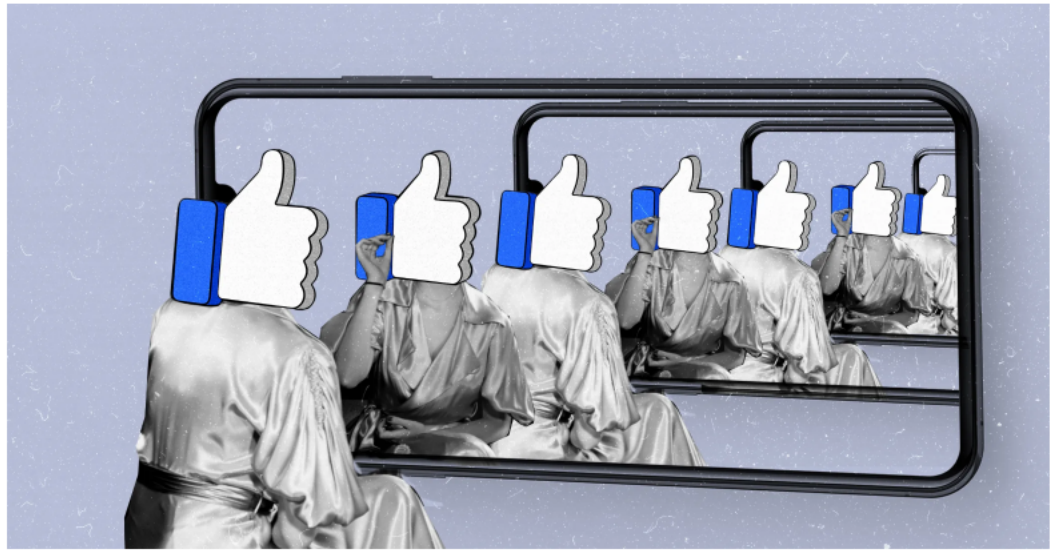
How Echo Chambers Promote Bias



similar opinions/positive reinforcement leads to confirmation bias

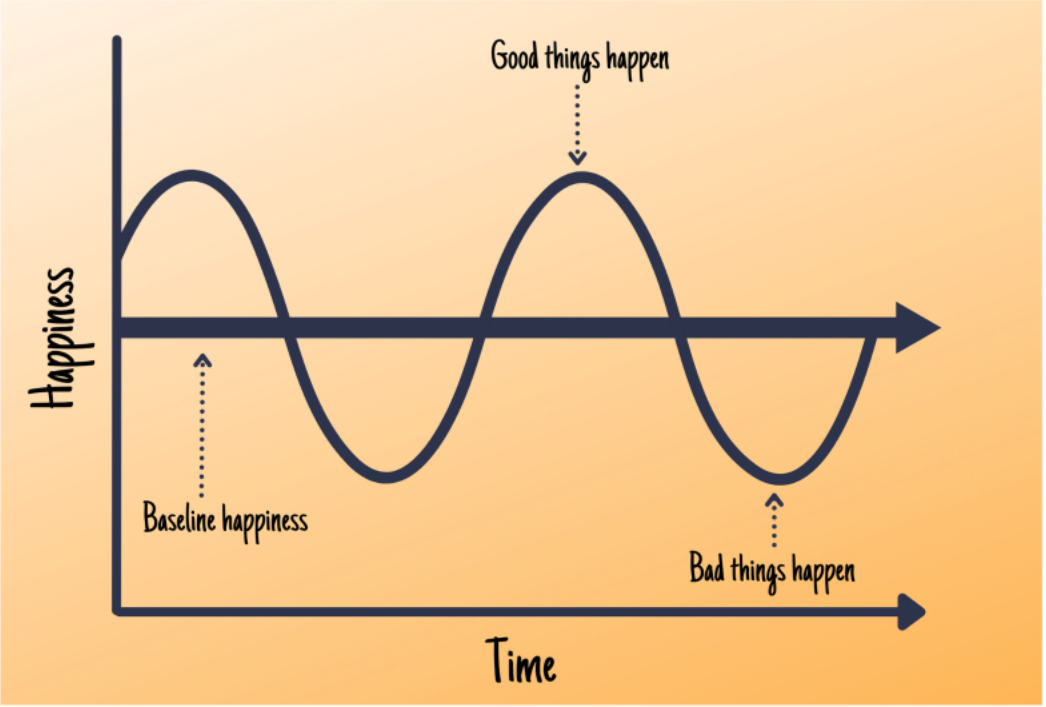
eventually, this reinforcement loop eliminates opposing information and replaces it with falsified information

Tolerance to Satisfaction Gain



Desensitizes users to positive feedback

As echo chamber usage increases, the amount of usage necessary to gain pleasure increases proportionally.



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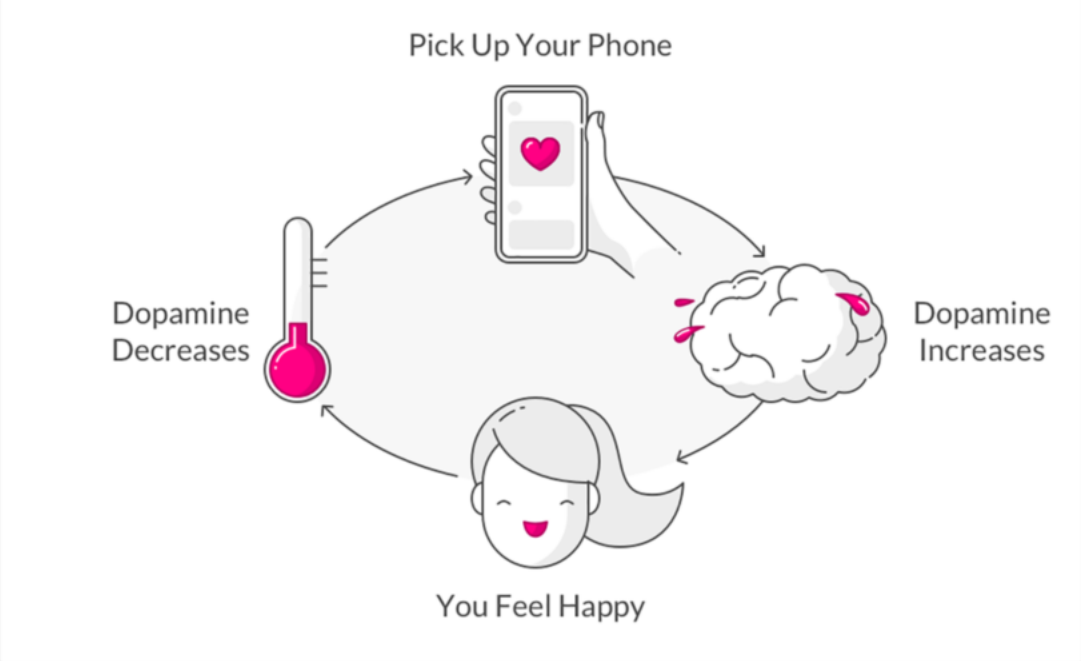
Pleasure Cycle



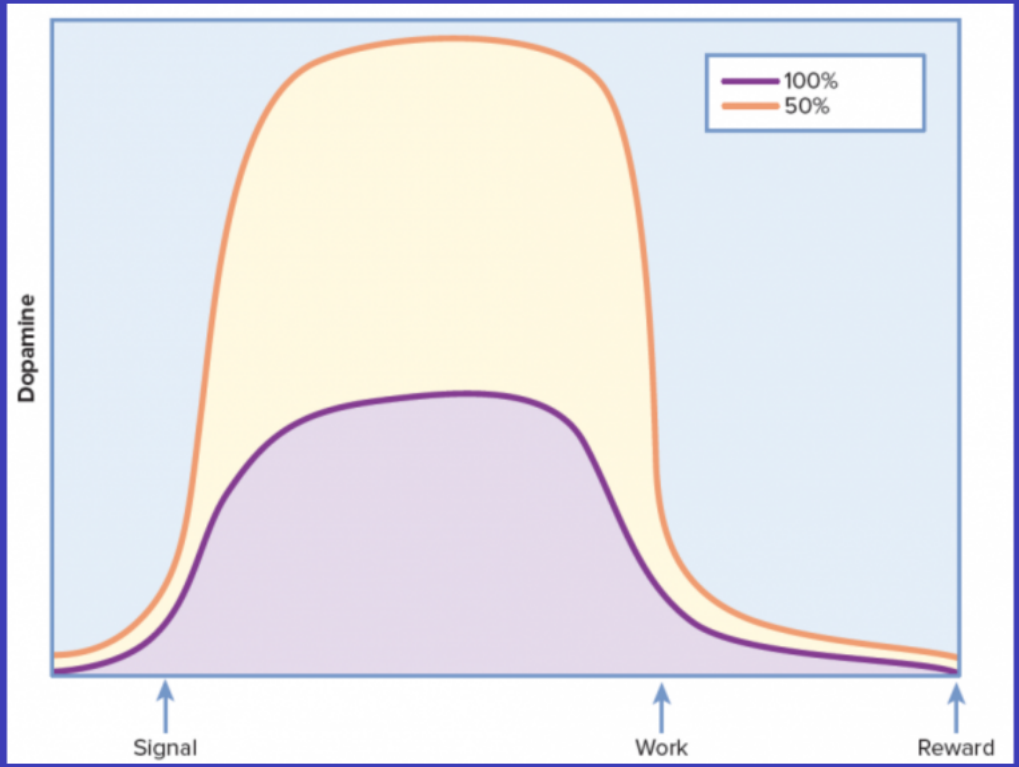
during the use of echo chambers

Breaking the Pleasure Cycle is Hard

Even getting in the mindset to break it is difficult, as those who do often face symptoms not unlike withdrawal.

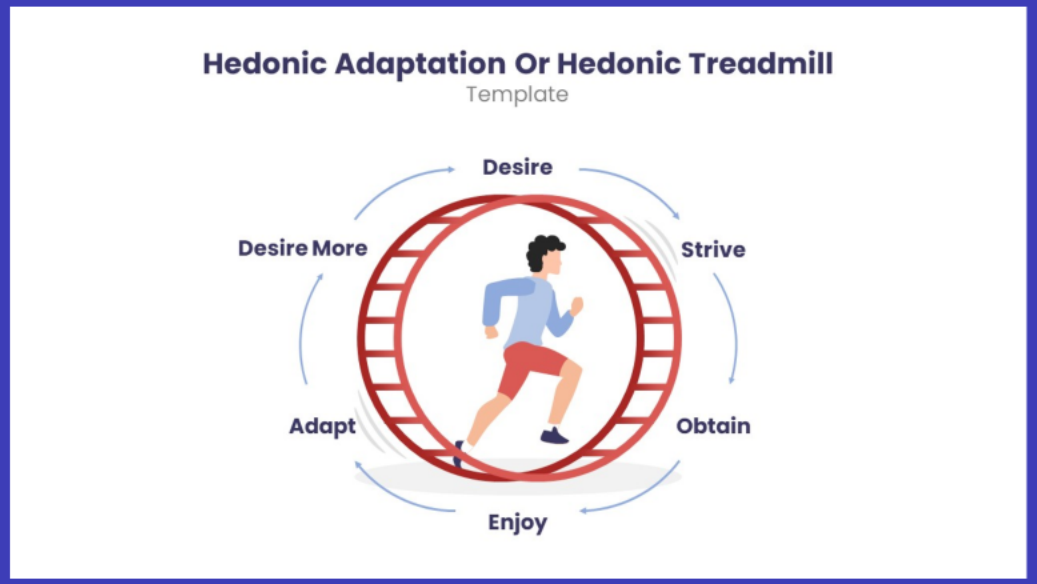
It is extremely difficult to overcome a negative state of mind without support.

Rebuttal



Some critics believe that the decrease in anticipatory effect in echo chambers means that a cyclic "addiction-like" effect should not occur.

Refutation



The pleasure cycle effect can occur with only the dopamine system in use.

The anticipation for content still exists, even though opinions are polarized, so the anticipatory system is still used.

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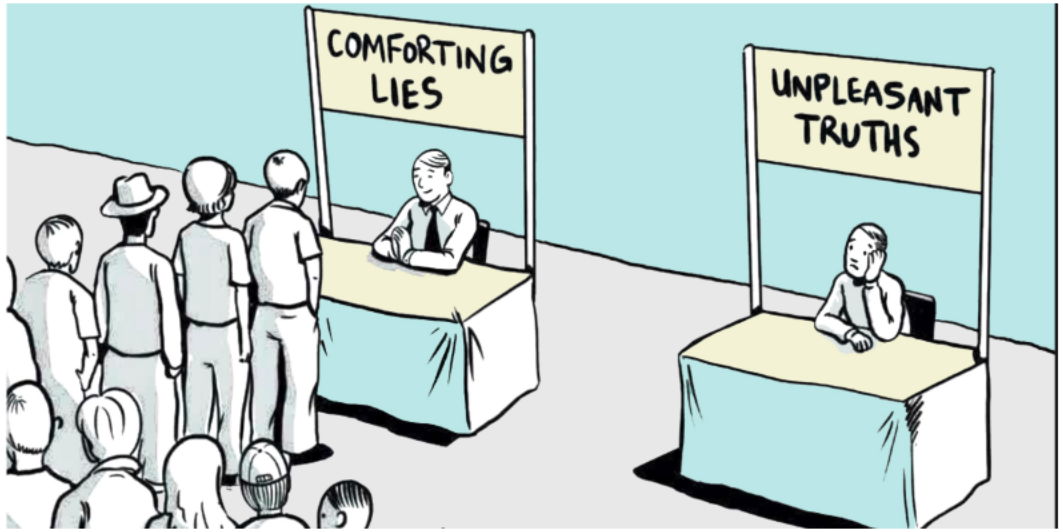
Counterargument



Some critics believe that members of echo chambers use them as "safe spaces."

Echo Chambers are NOT "safe spaces"

Members use echo chambers like havens, staying in them nigh-permanently.

The only way to pull members out of echo chamber falsity is by destabilizing their worldview.

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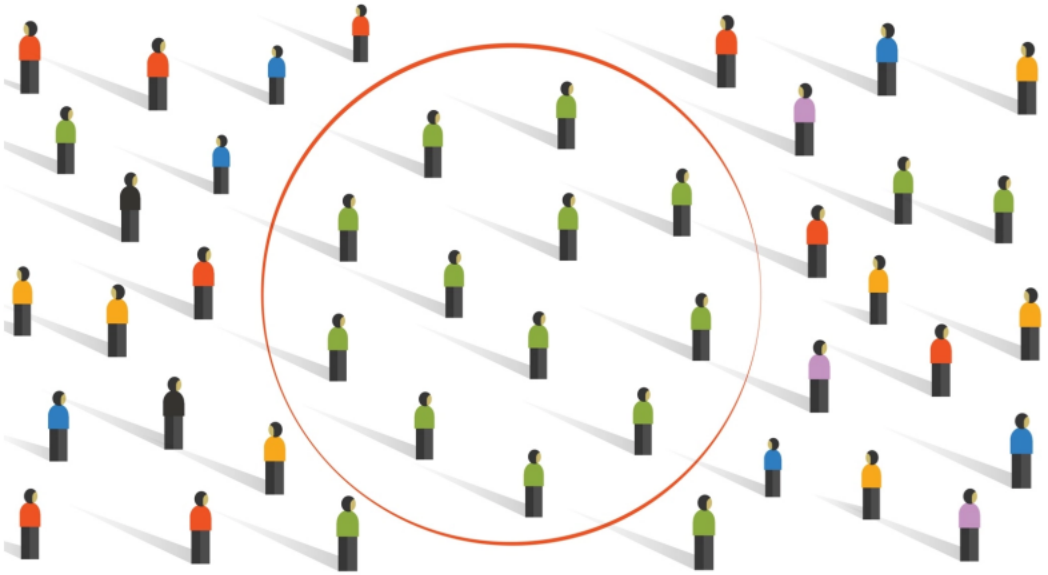
Conclusion



Those who are trapped in echo chambers will never find themselves content.

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