



SEARCHLIGHTS AND SUNGLASSES

LEARNING LAYER

Theories behind “comfort news”

Why is it that people seek out “Comfort News?” Academics propose a number of different theories. Here are four:

Information deficit fallacy: Facts don’t always motivate people. Simply put, giving citizens more facts does not always change their opinions or behaviors.

Motivated reasoning theory: People are prone to confirmation bias (accepting information that confirms their beliefs) and disconfirmation bias (ignoring information that undermines beliefs). There is a natural mechanism in the brain that gives a pass to information we believe and makes us more likely to challenge information that we don’t.

Belief perseverance dynamics: People often have trouble remembering which ideas are true or false over time. They may discuss the strange story in which linebacker [Manti Te’o’s dead girlfriend](#) not only isn’t dead, but didn’t exist, but over time, they may only remember that Manti Te’o’s girlfriend died.

Power of particular sources: People are more likely to accept new factual assertions when they come from sources that are perceived as trustworthy and hold the same general values. This explains the popularity of social media and certain trusted media brands.

Class discussion: After reviewing the theories, consider which one seems strongest. Could they all be true?

Do you think people only consume comfort news, or are they still interested in fact-filled “hard news” about things they don’t know. Take a peek inside Emilie Ritter Saunder’s [digital life](#). How does it compare to yours?