

Uncertainty. Part 3

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Precisely when uncertainty is frightening, people tend to shout out or ignore it. For example, for newly converted believers, when uncertainty is yet to be sky high, it is ignored in a new faith that appears to be a certainty stronger than just hope or confidence. Or with new lovers, still very uncertain about each other's mutual devotion, but so happy to have (finally) found each other that they immediately move in together. It is from this mechanism that I think I understand Corona certainty, both the official policy (the "facts"), and the conspiracies/protesters. One is either in line with the (Mainstream Media) truth, or a "truth seeker", who questions everything. Digitization - dichotomous thinking - takes place because uncertainty is frightening. Issues full of ignored uncertainty can cause great division, even in friendships and marriages where normally anything can be discussed, causing families to break up and parents not to see their children and vice versa.

The psychology of uncertainty offers insight here. Radicalization is a kind of emergency ration, a first reaction to obtain (temporary) energy to be able to change direction. Perhaps the best-known example is falling in love. Falling in love helps you to change the (relational) course, for example to leave the parental home or to perpetuate family ties again by adding a new life partner. During infatuation one is (temporarily) blind to the imperfections of the other and partly oneself: love is blind! Dichotomous, all or nothing, so as not to experience cognitive dissonance. Expensive expenses, e.g. a house or car, also giving an urge as an uncertainty reduction to justify the correctness of the choice (called "post-decisional justification" in psychology).

Confirmation bias

In all of these cases, confirmation bias plays a role in this initial "radicalization": the tendency to prefer information that confirms one's belief as "facts" to contradictory information ("fake news"). People who have just switched to something new, vegetarianism for example, or who have just started a new study, can be very fanatical at first and want to lecture everyone. But no one has the energy to compete again and again on the cutting edge of the "game" (infatuation, new beliefs, etc.), so luckily the nuance returns with time. After the radical "infatuation" (outshout/ignore uncertainty), uncertainty regains its place and space is once again created for the human dimension, for solidarity and nuance. The couple in love who give themselves completely to each other eventually regains an eye for the rest of the world. I have been a vegetarian for over 50 years, so I never really talk about that anymore. Bias fades with time.

But this week I was shocked by exactly this radicalizing uncertainty-elimination mechanism in the case of Neil Young and Spotify. Spotify hosts the Podcasts of one Joe Rogan, a "truth seeker" with "alternative" content regarding Corona. Corona is still at the stage where most of us can't afford to question mainstream media/WHO facts and policies. Other ideas must be suppressed. Concerning Corona, uncertainties (fear) still drive us to think in extremes, dichotomous, in truths and pertinent untruths. But precisely in something about which there is still a lot of uncertainty, with increasing insight, the truth of today is partly doomed to be the falsehood of tomorrow. In both "camps" Cognitive Dissonance and Confirmation Bias still play leading roles. Prejudice still reigns, it's still too early for nuance. Neil Young does not want to be on one platform with a charlatan, so he removed his music from Spotify and asks all employees to resign.

Spotify has now largely given up. But should populists (other pop stars followed Neil) determine what should (not) be heard? I understand that a star gives a dusty image a booster shot! I don't understand why Wired (science) has already devoted 2 articles to transferring your playlist from Spotify to Apple music. Allowing uncertainty is giving the nuance a chance again, and none of this contributes to that!