

Cognitive Errors of Unbelievers in the Holy Quran: A Methodological Approach to Disbelief

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Abstract

Cognitive errors are systematic deviations in the judgment and decision-making structure of humans that occur due to a failure to see some information in favor of other information. The Holy Qur'an describes unbelievers as those who responded negatively to the calls of the prophets and opposed their logical arguments. The question of this research is whether, by carefully reflecting on the verses of the Holy Qur'an, it can be said that unbelievers share common cognitive errors that cause them to refrain from joining the multitude of believers. To address this question, a descriptive-analytical method and a cognitive psychology approach were used. Verses from the Holy Qur'an that discuss the words and actions of unbelievers were collected and analyzed to identify traces of well-known cognitive errors. The findings of this research suggest that, among the forty-nine recognized cognitive errors, certain errors—such as conservatism, self-inflicted blindness, beliefism, and the overconfidence effect—are repeatedly reflected in the behavior and speech of unbelievers. These cognitive biases, along with others, can be considered common characteristics of unbelievers from the perspective of the Qur'an.

Keywords: disbelief, cognitive error, cognitive bias, conservatism, beliefism, unbelievers, Quranic interpretation.

Introduction

Cognitive science is a multidisciplinary field that studies the mind and mental activities, such as thinking, reasoning, decision-making, and the processes that enable these activities (Thagard 2018). The general belief is that humans, as rational beings, consistently act logically in their decisions, making optimal choices based on evidence, reasons, and logical proofs. However, in recent decades, cognitive scientists have concluded that this long-standing perception does not always align with reality. In many cases, humans make flawed and harmful decisions, often repeating the same mistakes multiple times. These mental errors are known as cognitive errors or biases (Dobelli 2015, 14).

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Cognitive errors, or biases, help humans make quick decisions when necessary, contributing to the survival of our species. However, this feature can also cause harm and pose threats in social life. In many cases, cognitive biases distort people's understanding of the truth (Hammond et al., 2005, 178). Therefore, scientists recommend that people, by becoming aware of these biases, work to limit their impact when dealing with mental and rational matters.

Cognitive biases assist humans in four practical areas: when a person needs to make a quick decision, cannot recall all the information, is overwhelmed by excessive information, or encounters things that hold no particular meaning for them. In these situations, cognitive biases help individuals find the best, fastest, and most vital solution with minimal effort. However, the best and fastest solution is not always the wisest one. Therefore, it is essential for people to develop the ability to recognize cognitive biases through self-awareness and practice, particularly in matters requiring deep reasoning and reflection, and to avoid making decisions based on these biases (Moradian 2019, 17). Some people have mastered this skill, while others have not. Those who cannot overcome cognitive biases are often seen as lacking the full benefit of reason.

One of the groups whose lack of wisdom is emphasized in the Holy Qur'an are the unbelievers. In several verses, God describes the unbelievers as those who lack reason: "The example of those who disbelieve is like that of one who shouts at what hears nothing but calls and cries—cattle or sheep—deaf, dumb, and blind, so they do not understand" (Quran 2:171); "But those who disbelieve invent falsehood about Allah, and most of them do not reason" (Quran 5:103). Many Muslims view disbelief primarily as a matter of belief. However, reflection on certain verses of the Holy Qur'an reveals that disbelief is not solely an issue of faith. Rather, the disbelievers (at the time of the revelation of the Qur'an) are generally a group comprising People of the Book and polytheists, whose common trait is not a particular belief but rather their approach to the new religion and the teachings of the Prophet of Islam. Several verses of the Holy Qur'an emphasize that disbelief is related to perception and knowledge, for example: "Allah has set a seal upon their hearts and upon their hearing, and over their vision is a veil. And for them is a great punishment" (Quran 2:7).

According to the Holy Qur'an, unbelievers are not rational. Can it be argued that unbelievers possess certain cognitive errors that block their path to knowing and understanding the truth? This research seeks to explore whether a set of cognitive biases can be identified among unbelievers by reflecting on the verses of the Holy Qur'an through content analysis, and whether these biases can be introduced as a common and prominent feature among them.

To answer this question, a list of the most well-known cognitive biases is provided. Then, using a cognitive psychology approach, the verses of the Holy Qur'an that discuss unbelievers were examined to identify signs and traces of each bias.

This research is based on the hypothesis that, according to the Holy Qur'an, unbelievers are those whose mental engagement with the concepts and teachings of the divine religion is not grounded in facts or a rational method. Therefore, examining the words and deeds of unbelievers as reflected in the Holy Qur'an may reveal that some cognitive biases are much stronger in unbelievers than in believers and that they have not been able to clear their minds of these biases or avoid their complications and consequences.

The purpose of this research is to demonstrate that disbelief depends on the method of perception, cognition, and thinking, rather than on its content. From this perspective, any person can be a believer or an unbeliever regardless of their religion or beliefs. In fact, it is the type of perception, cognition, judgment, and decision that defines disbelief and faith, not the input and output data of the mind. Moreover, in the Holy Qur'an, disbelief is attributed to some Muslims in addition to polytheists and People of the Book: "Indeed, those who reject the message after their belief and then increase in disbelief..." (Quran 3:90).

Some Muslims, emphasizing the religious aspect of disbelief, conflate the jurisprudence of disbelief with these presuppositions, leading them to excommunicate other Muslims and justify encroachments on their lives, property, and wealth. The result of this research may challenge these presuppositions, separating disbelief from theological and jurisprudential contexts, and reclassifying it as a spiritual and moral issue. This perspective could offer a foundational strategy for Muslim reformers to address the growing phenomenon of *takfir* (excommunication).

Literature Review

Despite the significance of disbelief and disbelievers in the Qur'an, no research has been conducted in identifying the psychological characteristics of disbelievers as described in the Holy Qur'an. Therefore, the present article is considered the first in this field. While several studies have explored the concept of disbelief and its semantic origins, these topics are distinct from the focus of the present research and will not be discussed.

On the other hand, investigating cognitive errors in the Holy Qur'an is not unprecedented. The closest research to the present topic is the article "Cognitive challenges in Saadi's ghazals" (Hokmabadi and Kazemian 2013), which examines cognitive errors in an ancient Persian literary text. Although cognitive errors are commonly addressed in research, the specific focus of this project—investigating the cognitive errors of a specific group within a sacred text—has not been pursued by any researcher.

Cognitive Biases

Cognitive error or bias is a systematic (i.e., non-random and therefore predictable) deviation from rationality in judgment or decision-making (Blanco 2017). This definition

clarifies that cognitive error is primarily a deviation. Although the perception system may become accustomed to this process, it does not align with the correct state that common sense confirms, and the outcome of this cognitive process may not adhere to rational standards. Additionally, cognitive error is a systematic deviation, meaning that the human cognitive system typically employs this process in a non-random manner. As a result, many people are unaware of these biases and errors and unconsciously perceive these cognitive processes as rational.

In another definition, cognitive bias is described as a defect in perception, measurement, judgment, or other cognitive activities caused by overlooking or neglecting some aspects in favor of others (Kharrazi and Dolati 1996). This definition highlights that cognitive error stems from a defect in the human cognitive system. It also addresses the root causes and contributing factors of these errors, such as inadequate and unprincipled data collection, neglect of certain data, and incorrect emphasis on other data.

Of course, these biases are not viewed as defects or weaknesses from an evolutionary perspective. Instead, they have enabled humans to adapt to their environment across different eras and ensure the survival of their species (Haselton et al., 2015). Recent research has shown that cognitive biases are not unique to humans; similar biases are observed in some animals (Harding et al., 2004). These studies indicate that humans use simple strategies in decision-making, known as brain shortcuts. These shortcuts help manage the complexities of our decision-making environment. While brain shortcuts are generally useful, they can also lead to significant errors (Bazerman and Moore 2016). Some scientists even suggest that developing certain positive cognitive biases may enhance life satisfaction (Cummins and Nistico 2002).

Cognitive biases can be explained from an evolutionary perspective for three reasons. First, these biases offer useful brain shortcuts that are effective and beneficial in many situations. Second, they present solutions with lower costs compared to unbiased alternatives. Third, they arise in situations where the human brain is not equipped to understand or solve complex problems (Haselton et al., 2015). Additionally, four main reasons for the emergence of cognitive biases can be identified: 1) limitations of human memory, 2) the need for quick reactions, 3) the lack of meaning in many phenomena around us, and 4) the overwhelming amount of information we encounter. These factors have created conditions where the brain's cognitive biases help address these challenges. However, cognitive errors can prevent us from understanding the world accurately, leading to incorrect evaluations and decisions based on distorted information (Moradian 2019, 10).

Cognitive biases can be categorized based on different criteria. Some biases relate to human cognition and behavior within groups, while others pertain to individual human

domains. Certain biases are specific to decision-making, others influence judgment more broadly, some particularly affect memory, and others are related to human motives.

It should be noted that cognitive errors are distinct from fallacies. Cognitive errors pertain to methods of perception and thinking, whereas fallacies refer to reasoning, especially in arguments with opponents. A fallacy is typically intentional and aimed at defeating a competitor, while a cognitive error is unintentional and not necessarily aimed at winning an argument (Heick 2022).

Cognitive Errors of Unbelievers

In this research, among the large number of cognitive errors, the following forty biases were examined to determine if evidence of their presence can be found in the behavior, speech, and thoughts of the disbelievers as reflected in the Holy Qur'an: Confirmation bias, anchoring bias, availability bias, bandwagon effect, belief bias, blind spot bias, choice supportive bias, clustering illusion, conservatism, declinism, framing effect, fundamental attribution error, hindsight bias, illusory correlation, negativity bias, ostrich effect, outcome bias, overconfidence effect, pro-innovation bias, recency illusion, selective reception, self-serving bias, shared information bias, survivorship bias, zero sum bias, gambler's fallacy, difference of correlation with causation, biased collection of information, halo effect, horn effect, contrast effect, historical bias, placebo effect, Dunning-Kruger effect, wrong generalization, heroization effect, concentration error, cheerleader effect, and the curse of knowledge.

In the review of verses addressing disbelievers, references to eleven specific cognitive errors were observed. We will now examine these cognitive errors and the corresponding verses related to each category.

1. Conservatism

Conservatism is a state of mind where a person attributes greater authenticity and credibility to their long-held beliefs, information, and attitudes, and is thus reluctant to consider new data that challenges these established views (Moradian 2019, 38). The mind prefers to avoid the complexities of new information, favoring its existing mental patterns and previous beliefs (Edwards 1968). In this state, the mind does not logically analyze old and new propositions but tends to regard the old propositions and data as more valid, thereby avoiding the stress of rational and logical analysis.

According to the Holy Qur'an, the most significant cognitive error of unbelievers is conservatism and a tendency to adhere to previous and outdated mental patterns. This issue is addressed from several angles:

a) Strong attachment to the beliefs of the predecessors: In verse 6 of Surah al-Baqarah, the description of disbelievers highlights this point: "Indeed, those who disbelieve—it is all the same for them whether you warn them or do not warn them—

they will not believe” (Quran 2:6). The unbelievers have resolved not to believe, regardless of warnings. This verse indicates that the unbelievers’ adherence to their previous beliefs makes new information irrelevant to their perceptive system, as their foundation is rooted in conservatism and the preservation of old ideas.

In another verse, the Holy Qur’an rebukes the Jews of the time of the Holy Prophet for their pre-decided disbelief in the new religion and for concealing the truth they recognize: “And believe in what I have sent down confirming that which is [already] with you, and be not the first to disbelieve in it. And do not exchange My signs for a small price, and fear [only] Me. And do not mix the truth with falsehood or conceal the truth while you know [it]” (Quran 2:41-42). These disbelievers have chosen to oppose the new religion, even if they acknowledge its truth, because it contradicts their established beliefs while affirming and reforming their previous knowledge.

Additionally, God warns the believers against following the unbelievers, as it would lead them back to previous ignorant beliefs: “O you who have believed, if you obey those who disbelieve, they will turn you back on your heels, and you will [then] become losers” (Quran 3:149). This also reflects the conservatism and resistance to change seen in the unbelievers.

b) Declaring the adequacy of the previous attitude for a happy life: In verse 104 of Surah Māida, it is stated that unbelievers believe the intellectual findings of their ancestors are sufficient for life and, due to extreme conservatism, see no need to revise these opinions and thoughts: “And when it is said to them, ‘Come to what Allah has revealed and to the Messenger,’ they say, ‘Sufficient for us is that upon which we found our fathers’” (Quran 5:104). A similar type of conservatism is also expressed by Pharaoh and his entourage: “They said, ‘Have you come to us to turn us away from that upon which we found our fathers?’” (Quran 10:78).

c) The speech of the predecessors as the criterion of correct speech: The disbelievers are so conservative that they regard the words of their predecessors as the standard for correct speech: “We have not heard of this among our forefathers” (Quran 23:24). They consider the words of their predecessors to be so valid and inviolable that they find contrary propositions surprising: “Has he made the gods [only] one God? Indeed, this is a curious thing” (Quran 38:5). They also openly express their opposition to new teachings: “He said, ‘Even if I brought you better guidance than that [religion] upon which you found your fathers?’ They said, ‘Indeed we, in that with which you were sent, are disbelievers’” (Quran 43:24).

2. Ostrich Effect

The ostrich effect refers to a type of cognitive bias in which a person deliberately avoids and denies encountering information or situations that challenge their emotional or intellectual point of view (Karlsson et al., 2009, 95). This term

describes a state where people tend to “bury their heads in the sand” and avoid information that may be unpleasant, thereby avoiding psychological discomfort and irritation (Webb et al., 2013).

a) Curtain on the senses: The seventh verse of Surah al-Baqarah provides a clear explanation of this state of unbelievers: “Allah has set a seal upon their hearts and upon their hearing, and over their vision is a veil” (Quran 2:7). Similar verses, such as “Those are the ones over whose hearts and hearing and vision Allah has sealed” (Quran 16:108) and “[God] has set a seal upon his hearing and his heart and put over his vision a veil” (Quran 45:23), describe a veil that prevents the unbelievers from understanding the truth. Commentators suggest that this curtain is the result of the disbelievers’ own actions, which caused them to become detached from the truth (Māturīdī 2005, 1:377; Ṭabāṭabā’ī 1970, 1:52).

Sometimes, they may listen to the Prophet but appear to neither hear nor understand, as their ability to comprehend is obstructed: “And among them are those who listen to you, but We have placed over their hearts coverings, lest they understand it, and in their ears deafness...” (Quran 6:25; similar phrases in 17:46, 18:57, 31:7). The unbelievers from the People of the Book describe their hearts as “ghulf,” meaning “curtain and veil,” which signifies their inability to listen to the Prophet’s message (Ṭabāṭabā’ī 1970, 1:220). When a prophet arrives whom they already know and have awaited for years, they deliberately turn a blind eye to this truth: “And they said, ‘Our hearts are wrapped.’ But, [in fact], Allah has cursed them for their disbelief, so little is it that they believe. And when there came to them a Book from Allah confirming that which was with them—although before they used to pray for victory against those who disbelieved—but [then] when there came to them that which they recognized, they disbelieved in it; so the curse of Allah will be upon the disbelievers” (Quran 2:88-89). One of the most significant grievances of God’s prophets is that the disbelievers would block communication and intentionally close their eyes and ears to the new message: “And indeed, every time I invited them that You may forgive them, they put their fingers in their ears, covered themselves with their garments, persisted, and were arrogant with [great] arrogance” (Quran 71:7).

In fact, unbelievers deliberately avoid understanding and reflecting on the Prophet’s words, rendering themselves blind and deaf to these new messages: “Those whose eyes had been within a cover [removed] from My remembrance, and they were not able to hear” (Quran 18:101); “So have they not traveled through the earth and have hearts by which to reason and ears by which to hear? For indeed, it is not eyes that are blinded, but blinded are the hearts which are within the breasts” (Quran 22:46); “Who hears the verses of Allah recited to him, then persists arrogantly as if he had not heard them” (Quran 45:8). The term “self-imposed blindness” is clearly applied to this group in some verses: “And whoever is blind in this [life] will be blind in the Hereafter and more astray in way” (Quran 17:72).

b) Similarity with animals in terms of not understanding: In another verse of Surah al-Baqarah, it is clearly mentioned that the ways of receiving information are closed to unbelievers: “The example of those who disbelieve is like that of one who shouts at what hears nothing but calls and cries cattle or sheep—deaf, dumb and blind, so they do not understand” (Quran 2:171). Here, disbelievers are compared to sheep that, while hearing the shepherd’s call, do not understand its meaning or benefit from it (Rāzī 1988, 2:289). This comparison of disbelievers with livestock is also made elsewhere in the Holy Qur’an: “Or do you think that most of them hear or reason? They are not except like livestock. Rather, they are [even] more astray in [their] way” (Quran 25:44).

c) Consciously concealing the truth: In another verse, God reprimands the unbelievers for knowingly and willingly attempting to hide the truth: “O People of the Scripture, why do you disbelieve in the verses of Allah while you witness [to their truth]? O People of the Scripture, why do you confuse the truth with falsehood and conceal the truth while you know [it]?” (Quran 3:70-71). Although they know and testify that the revelations revealed to the Prophet are from God, they choose to pretend not to know and not see. They are so determined in their self-imposed blindness that even if a divine book were revealed to them in the clearest form, they would still dismiss it and find excuses to conceal it: “And even if We had sent down to you, [O Muhammad], a written scripture on a page and they touched it with their hands, the disbelievers would say, ‘This is not but obvious magic’” (Quran 6:7). The verses of the Qur’an also show that disbelievers encourage each other in this self-imposed blindness: “And those who disbelieve say, ‘Do not listen to this Qur’an and speak noisily during [the recitation of] it that perhaps you will overcome’” (Quran 41:26). This indicates their awareness and deliberate concealment of the truth.

3. Beliefism

Belief bias or beliefism is a type of cognitive bias in which a person tends to accept propositions and arguments that align with their prior beliefs and rejects information that challenges those beliefs (Evans et al., 1983, 295). In this cognitive error, individuals avoid or dismiss reasoning or conclusions that contradict their previous beliefs (Moradian 2019, 45). Research shows that when people encounter a logical argument that does not challenge their beliefs, they tend to confirm it, reinforcing their prior beliefs. However, if the same argument leads to a conclusion contrary to their beliefs, far fewer people accept it, as their beliefs obstruct the acceptance of logical arguments (Dube et al., 2010, 831). Another manifestation of this cognitive bias occurs when individuals focus only on parts of an article that support their beliefs and ignore the rest. In this cognitive error, the acceptability of information is influenced more by its alignment with existing beliefs than by the strength of its logical arguments.

a) Paying attention only to the compatible parts of the new belief with the previous belief: The Holy Qur'an frequently highlights this cognitive error among unbelievers. In verse 91 of Surah al-Baqarah, it is stated that the unbelievers among the People of the Book, when called to embrace Islam, acknowledge only those aspects of Islam that align with their own religious teachings and reject the rest: "And when it is said to them, 'Believe in what Allah has revealed,' they say, 'We believe [only] in what was revealed to us.' And they disbelieve in what came after it" (Quran 2:91). This verse illustrates the degree of beliefism within this group, as they explicitly accept only those propositions that align with their pre-existing beliefs.

b) Obedience only to those who accept their previous belief: Another verse describes how a faction among the People of the Book instructs their followers to trust only those who share their religion: "... do not trust except those who follow your religion..." (Quran 3:73). This reflects the cognitive bias of beliefism among these unbelievers, who are only willing to accept and follow individuals who affirm their existing beliefs: "... saying, 'If you are given this, take it; but if you are not given it, then beware'..." (Quran 5:41).

c) A total refusal to give up a previous belief: Another example is the response of the people of Hud to their prophet: "O Hud, you have not brought us clear evidence, and we are not ones to leave our gods on your say-so. Nor are we believers in you." (Quran 11:53). This verse illustrates the cognitive bias of beliefism among these disbelievers, who explicitly refuse to abandon their previous beliefs solely based on the prophet's message.

d) Unwillingness to hear a word contrary to previous beliefs: Unbelievers show a reluctance to hear anything that challenges their long-held beliefs: "And when you mention your Lord alone in the Qur'an, they turn back in aversion" (Quran 17:46). This verse highlights how unbelievers avoid hearing any mention of God's monotheism, as it directly contradicts their belief in multiple gods.

4. Overconfidence Effect

Overconfidence effect is a cognitive error where individuals overestimate their reasoning and decision-making abilities (Moore and Healy 2008, 503). This bias manifests in various ways. For example, people often believe they are above average compared to others; a notable study found that ninety-three percent of American drivers rated their driving skills as above average (Svenson 1981, 143), suggesting a widespread overconfidence error. Another manifestation is the "illusion of control," where individuals mistakenly believe they have more control over events than they actually do (Langer 1975, 311).

a) Considering themselves superior to the prophets: In the Holy Qur'an, the overconfidence of disbelievers is clearly illustrated. Iblis, a prominent figure of disbelief, views himself as superior to Adam, the divine caliph, leading him to defy

the command to prostrate: “And [mention] when We said to the angels, ‘Prostrate before Adam’; so they prostrated, except for Iblis. He refused and was arrogant and became of the disbelievers.” (Quran 2:34). The disbelievers among the Children of Israel exhibited similar overconfidence by openly rejecting divine commands: “And [recall] when We took your covenant and raised over you the mount, [saying], ‘Take what We have given you with determination and listen.’ They said [instead], ‘We hear and disobey’” (Quran 2:93). Their arrogance extended to claiming that they were God’s chosen people: “The Jews and the Christians say, ‘We are the children of Allah and His beloved.’” (Quran 5:18). Additionally, disbelievers like ‘Ad are described as those who deny any power greater than their own: “As for ‘Ad, they were arrogant upon the earth without right and said, ‘Who is greater than us in strength?’” (Quran 41:15).

b) Considering themselves superior over the followers of the prophets: The disbelievers in Noah’s time refused to associate with his followers, dismissing them as the lowest class: “They said, ‘Should we believe you while you are followed by the lowest [class of people]?’” (Quran 26:111). Similarly, during the time of the Prophet of Islam, the disbelievers believed that if there were any merit in the new religion, they would have been the first to embrace it: “And those who disbelieve say of those who believe, ‘If it had [truly] been good, they would not have preceded us to it’” (Quran 46:11). Moreover, they assumed that their wealth and offspring made them immune to punishment: “And they said, ‘We are more [than the believers] in wealth and children, and we are not to be punished’” (Quran 34:35).

c) Assuming they do not make any wrong decisions: Their overconfidence may reach a point where they perceive their vile deeds as good: “Then is one to whom the evil of his deed has been made attractive so he considers it good...” (Quran 35:8). They also believe that the path they follow, and which they invite others to, is the best and most correct: “... Pharaoh said, ‘I do not show you except what I see, and I do not guide you except to the way of right conduct’” (Quran 40:29).

5. Fundamental Attribution Error

Fundamental attribution error is a type of cognitive bias in which observers overlook situational and environmental factors influencing a person’s behavior and instead emphasize personality traits. Also known as the “labeling error,” this bias leads the human brain to attribute a mistake made by another person to their personality and identity, rather than considering the numerous factors that may have contributed to the specific behavior (Moradian 2019, 76).

a) Labeling the previous prophets: This is one of the prominent errors of the disbelievers, as highlighted in the Holy Qur’an. When many unbelievers were confronted with the messages of the prophets and found the content contrary to their beliefs and desires, they began to label the prophets and attribute their words to

supposed personality or identity traits. Noah's people, for example, used labels such as misguidance—"Indeed, we see you in clear error" (Quran 7:60), madness—"and they denied our servant and said, 'A madman'" (Quran 54:9), stupidity, and lying—"Said the eminent ones who disbelieved among his people, 'Indeed, we see you in foolishness, and indeed, we think you are of the liars'" (Quran 7:66). The labeling of other prophets is also reflected in the Holy Qur'an.

b) Labeling the Prophet of Islam: The contemporaries of the Holy Prophet often labeled him in various derogatory ways. They sometimes called him a sorcerer (Quran 10:2), at other times a poet (Quran 21:5), and occasionally demeaned him with the label of "soothsayer" (Quran 69:42). They also introduced him as a myth writer and storyteller (Quran 25:5) and, at times, considered him insane, attempting to discredit his words (Quran 68:51).

6. Historical Bias

Historical bias refers to having a positive or negative presupposition about the past or future and extending it to our judgments (Moradian 2019, 152). Some people view the past as wise and knowledgeable, attributing special wisdom to all its actions, even justifying wrong behaviors that were common. Conversely, others have a negative view of the past, considering it superstitious and ignorant, believing that its traditions should be revised. Both of these assumptions stem from historical bias (Moradian 2019, 152).

a) Prejudice towards the traditions of the predecessors: One of the most significant cognitive biases of unbelievers mentioned in the Qur'an is this bias. Unbelievers are often unwilling to abandon the beliefs of their ancestors, and having grown accustomed to those traditions, they oppose anyone who questions them—even if their ancestors lacked wisdom: "And when it is said to them, 'Follow what Allah has revealed,' they say, 'Rather, we will follow that which we found our fathers doing.' Even though their fathers understood nothing, nor were they guided?" (Quran 2:170).

b) Prejudice towards the ancient gods: Unbelievers often hold a strong prejudice towards the gods worshiped by their ancestors: "They said, 'Have you come to us that we should worship Allah alone and leave what our fathers have worshipped?'..." (Quran 7:70). Their primary concern with the new religion was that it would challenge the beliefs of their ancestors. Unwilling to have the innocent image of their forebears disturbed, they refused to accept the Prophet's religion: "They said, 'You are not but men like us who wish to avert us from what our fathers were worshipping'" (Quran 14:10).

7. Selective Perception

Selective perception is the tendency to ignore or quickly forget stimuli that cause discomfort or contradict previous beliefs (Griffin 2013, 259). This cognitive bias

leads a person to examine and judge information in a directed and biased manner (Moradian 2019, 109).

The unbelievers described in the Holy Qur'an are significantly influenced by this cognitive error. They tend to focus only on the aspects of the truth that do not offend them: "And when you mention your Lord alone in the Qur'an, they turn back in aversion" (Quran 17:46). Their selective perception causes them to accept parts of the Qur'an while rejecting others: "... So do you believe in part of the Scripture and disbelieve in part? ..." (Quran 2:85). They desire that divine revelations be revealed according to their preferences: "And when a sign comes to them, they say, 'Never will we believe until we are given like that which was given to the messengers of Allah'..." (Quran 6:124).

8. Choice Supportive Bias

Choice supportive bias is a cognitive bias where a person emphasizes the positive reasons for their choice while downplaying or rejecting the negative reasons, in order to justify their decision and make it appear correct (Moradian 2019, 51).

When people make a decision, they tend to emphasize statements that affirm the correctness of their choice while ignoring or undervaluing information that questions their decision (Brehm 1956, 384).

Some verses of the Holy Qur'an reflect the presence of this bias in unbelievers. In verse 156 of Surah Al 'Imran, the disbelievers claim that those who participated in Jihad and were martyred would have survived if they had stayed behind like them: "O you who have believed, do not be like those who disbelieved and said about their brothers when they traveled through the land or went out to fight, 'If they had been with us, they would not have died or been killed'" (Quran 3:156). This indicates that the disbelievers are seeking to justify their own choices.

In another verse, the unbelievers attempt to justify their disbelief in the Prophet by labeling him as a man affected by magic: "When they are in private conversation, the wrongdoers say, 'You follow not but a man affected by magic'" (Quran 17:47). Additionally, another verse highlights an interesting reason for the unbelievers' idolatry practice, which they use solely to support their decision: "And they said, 'If the Most Merciful had willed, we would not have worshipped them'" (Quran 43:20).

9. Illusion of Knowledge

Illusion of knowledge refers to the cognitive bias where a person overestimates their knowledge and understanding of a subject, believing they know more and better than they actually do (Kalamazh and Avhustiuk 2018, 109). This bias leads individuals to place excessive trust in their own knowledge and information, often resulting in incorrect judgments and decisions.

a) Commenting on what they do not know: The existence of this illusion among some unbelievers is highlighted in several verses of the Holy Qur'an. In Surah al-Baqarah, disbelievers from the People of the Book are reprimanded for expressing knowledge about matters they do not truly understand: "Or do you say that Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Descendants were Jews or Christians? Say, 'Are you more knowing or is Allah?'" (Quran 2:140). Similarly, another verse rebukes the disbelievers from the Children of Israel for arguing about matters beyond their knowledge: "Here you are—those who have argued about what you have some knowledge, but why do you argue about that of which you have no knowledge?" (Quran 3:66).

In other verses, we observe that unbelievers confidently comment on matters beyond their knowledge, despite lacking expertise in those areas. For example, they assert: "[They say:] Life is not but our worldly life—we die and live, but we will not be resurrected" (Quran 23:37). Such statements illustrate a tendency to make definitive claims about subjects they do not truly understand.

b) Mocking what contradicts their limited knowledge: Despite their limited understanding, unbelievers often believe they possess comprehensive knowledge and mock teachings that challenge their narrow views. For example, the Qur'an states: "And when their messengers came to them with clear proofs, they [merely] rejoiced in what they had of knowledge, but they were enveloped by what they used to ridicule" (Quran 40:83).

10. Illusion of Validity

Illusion of validity is a cognitive bias where a person overestimates their ability to interpret and predict outcomes accurately when analyzing information (Kahneman and Tversky 1973, 238). This error involves believing oneself to be an expert, despite the fact that this belief is merely an illusion.

One of the characteristics of unbelievers in the Quran is this cognitive bias. They predict the future with certainty and claim that the hereafter is impossible: "[they say:] and we are not to be punished" (Quran 26:138). Pharaoh also exhibited this illusion, believing that he was leading the people on the right path: "... Pharaoh said, 'I do not show you except what I see, and I do not guide you except to the way of right conduct'" (Quran 40:29).

11. Halo Effect and Horn Effect

The halo effect and its opposite, the horn effect, are types of cognitive bias where a person's overall perception of a phenomenon (such as a person, country, or company) influences their subsequent judgments and feelings towards that phenomenon (Nisbett and Wilson 1977, 250).

In the halo effect, a previous positive impression causes a person to unconsciously maintain this favorable view, leading to judgments and feelings that may not reflect reality.

In the horn effect, a person tends to process new information in a way that preserves a negative impression they previously formed. For example, if a teacher views a student as “lazy,” this negative perception will influence how the teacher interacts with the student and judges their performance.

a) Self-righteousness due to apparent superiority: The unbelievers, perceiving themselves as more beautiful and distinguished with higher social status than the believers, thinking that their opinions were more valid and correct: “And when Our verses are recited to them as clear evidences, those who disbelieve say to those who believe, ‘Which of our two parties is best in position and best in association?’” (Quran 19:73).

b) Denying the truthfulness of the Prophet due to the apparent meanness of the Prophet’s followers: The unbelievers, who did not find the Prophet’s call appealing, extended this sentiment to their judgments and even objected to simple matters such as examples in the Qur’an: “... But as for those who disbelieve, they say, ‘What did Allah intend by this as an example?’” (Quran 2:26).

When the people of ‘Ad were confronted with Hud’s invitation to a new religion, they labeled him as foolish and a liar because they disliked his message: “Said the eminent ones who disbelieved among his people, ‘Indeed, we see you in foolishness, and indeed, we think you are of the liars’” (Quran 7:66). Similarly, Noah’s people considered him and his followers to be liars, influenced by their negative perception of his companions: “So the eminent among those who disbelieved from his people said, ‘We do not see you but as a man like ourselves, and we do not see you followed except by those who are the lowest of us [and] at first suggestion. And we do not see in you over us any merit; rather, we think you are liars’” (Quran 11:27).

Conclusion

By examining the verses of the Holy Qur’an that address unbelievers, we find that certain cognitive errors are prominently evident among them. Conservatism, ostrich effect, beliefism, and overconfidence effect are four primary cognitive errors visible in the speech and behavior of unbelievers. Additionally, fundamental attribution error, historical bias, selective perception, choice supportive bias, illusion of knowledge, illusion of validity, halo effect, and horn effect are cognitive errors observed at a deeper level in the thought processes of unbelievers.

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