The Mandela Effect Explained

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Introduction

The Mandela Effect (ME) is a recent phenomenon most commonly described as a collective misremembering of events or traits seen by many. The effect was first documented with the misremembering of Nelson Mandela's death in prison, an event that did not occur. Many were confused to learn that Mandela was alive and said they even had memories of the aftermath of Mandela's death in prison, with riots happening in South Africa.

The effect seems to be mostly observed relating to pop culture events and seen through pictures. For example, the monopoly man has often been misremembered as having a monocle in his design, even when this piece is not present.

How Does It Happen?

The ME stems from effects seen in psychology and neuroscience for many years, called the misinformation effect or the false memory effect. These phenomena are present when the human brain creates memories of events that simply did not happen. This effect has also been researched through giving participants lists of words where all the words relate to one topic, like candy. The list of words may include words like sweet, skittles, chocolate, Twix, and a participant may misremember words being there, like snickers, sour, or any number of words relating to said topic. "Memories can be penetrated, invaded, altered, and ordered in such a way as to match prescribed paradigms. Current research reveals that memories and histories — in consequence, belief — are not static, fixed, or linear, but rather processes which are constructive, malleable, and changeable" (French, 2018). Through research on the VME (Visual Mandela Effect), we have found that participants tend to forget most often parts of a character or line that they are not as focused on. Subjects who made erroneous judgments investigated the

manipulated areas less than those who made correct judgments, suggesting that VME is driven in part by a lack of attention towards these features. These results demonstrate that there are certain images for which people consistently make the same false memory errors, despite only having seen the veridical image." (Prasad & Bainbridge, 2021)

The Conspiracy

The ME was seen by many first in 2012 or 2013, when the internet sparked a conspiracy about whether or not we were living in an alternate universe, and the items that are misremembered are simply present in another universe.

Wilma Bainbridge, a professor at the University of Chicago (referenced above), conducted a study on the Mandela Effect to see if it held any weight with what many people on the internet were speculating about. "In our drawing study, we asked people if they had heard of Pikachu or Mr. Monopoly before, and if they said no, we would show them a picture. Then, after a short delay, we asked them to draw them from memory. Even those who had never heard of them still made some of these errors, like the tail and the monocle. These people had this false memory right after learning about the characters! Which shows that this effect can happen even without going across parallel dimensions." (Prisco, 2023)

Conclusion

While many have speculated on the validity of the conspiracy surrounding the fascinating Mandela Effect, it is clear through research that the human brain is simply malleable to a point where it can misremember anything, from big pop culture moments or what you had for breakfast last week.

Bibliography

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