



American Expression E2068 Cherry picking

IOTS Publishing Team
International Online Teachers Society
Since 2011

Cherry picking is a cognitive bias and a logical fallacy that occurs when someone selectively chooses or focuses on specific pieces of information or evidence while ignoring or disregarding other relevant data that may provide a more complete or accurate picture. It is a common error in reasoning and argumentation and can be misleading or deceptive.

The term "cherry picking" derives from the act of selectively picking ripe, desirable cherries from a tree while leaving behind the unripe or undesirable ones. In a similar fashion, individuals who engage in cherry picking intentionally select only the information that supports their preconceived beliefs, arguments, or agenda while ignoring contradictory or counterbalancing evidence.

Cherry picking can manifest in various contexts, including scientific research, debates, politics, and everyday decision-making. In science, it is crucial to gather and evaluate all available data and evidence to form a comprehensive and accurate understanding of a phenomenon. However, when researchers cherry pick data by emphasizing results that align with their hypotheses and omitting data that contradicts them, it can lead to biased conclusions and flawed scientific research.

In debates and arguments, cherry picking is often used as a rhetorical tactic to bolster one's position while discrediting opposing viewpoints. This can involve highlighting isolated examples or anecdotes that support a particular stance while ignoring the broader context or counterexamples. In politics, for instance, politicians may selectively present statistics or facts that favor their policies or campaigns while disregarding the less favorable aspects of their proposals.

Cherry picking can also occur in personal decision-making. People may choose to focus on information that confirms their preferences or biases while neglecting information that challenges their beliefs. This can lead to suboptimal decisions and a skewed understanding of reality. To avoid falling into the trap of cherry picking, it is essential to cultivate critical thinking skills and a commitment to objectivity. This includes actively seeking out and considering a wide range of information and perspectives, even when they may contradict one's existing beliefs. Fact-checking and verifying sources of information can help individuals make more informed and balanced decisions.

In academic and research settings, peer review processes and transparency in data collection and reporting are essential safeguards against cherry picking. Scientists and scholars must adhere to rigorous methodologies and provide access to their data and methods to ensure the integrity of their findings.

In conclusion, cherry picking is a cognitive bias and logical fallacy characterized by the selective emphasis on specific information or evidence while disregarding contradictory or complementary data. It can lead to biased conclusions, misinformation, and distorted perspectives. Being aware of this cognitive bias and actively striving for objectivity and comprehensive information gathering are essential steps in avoiding the pitfalls of cherry picking in decision-making and argumentation.

Questions for Discussion

1. How does cherry picking manifest in various aspects of our lives, from everyday decision-making to scientific research and political discourse?
 2. Can you share examples of cherry picking that you've encountered in public debates or discussions, and how did it affect the overall perception of the issue at hand?
 3. What are some strategies or techniques that individuals can use to recognize and combat cherry picking in their own thinking and decision-making processes?
 4. In the context of scientific research, what are the potential consequences of cherry picking data, and how can the scientific community work to mitigate this issue?
 5. How might the prevalence of cherry picking in today's information-rich society impact public understanding, trust in institutions, and the quality of decision-making on important societal issues?
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