

Glossary

Worldview

A theory of the natural (and supernatural) world, that can be expressed as set of beliefs which we hold about the basic construction of reality that provides the foundation on which we live.

Echo Chamber

An echo chamber is a community with little variance in opinion. It is a place where there is no desire, or a means, to access a different point of view

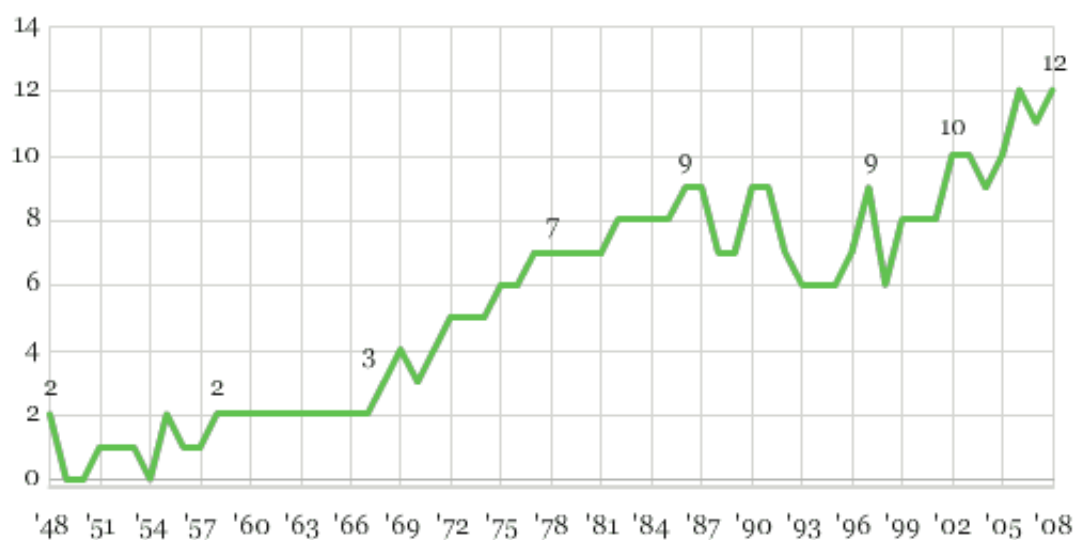
Filter Bubbles

Filters on the internet that fundamentally alter the way we encounter ideas and information by through hyper-personalization of content. These can be found in news, social networks, search engines, and many other websites.

Introduction

Religion, whether you like it or not, is a huge influence on the world's population. While the number of people calling themselves athiests has increased on the rise, especially in the West, over the past half century (see Figure FIGLAB), it is difficult to deny to importance of religion in the public sphere. Over 80% of the world is religious, with Christians and Muslims making up over 50% of the world's population INLCI.

Percentage of Americans With No Religious Identification: 1948-2008



Gallup Poll yearly aggregates

GALLUP POLL

Figure FIGLAB: Graph showing the rise of Americans with no religious identification, from Gallup
<http://news.gallup.com/poll/117409/easter-smaller-percentage-americans-christian.aspx>

To those believers, those religious beliefs do not affect just their actions within a church or a mosque, but they make up a large part of their world view. Religion shapes thoughts. Therefore, it makes sense that understanding the religious beliefs of those around us is, in general, a useful thing to do. However, at times, we might think that discussing God or religion will be fruitless; that it will only end in debate, shouting and, ultimately, an impasse. Just look to any newspaper comments section; people bicker and fight seemingly endlessly (see Figure FIGLAB).

Stonemushroom

19 hours ago

Banning any book is wrong and is always going to cause problems, however, in the bible's case, it should always have an 18 certificate attached to it. We need to protect children from it.

Reply · Share · 7 replies

+4 likes

peterdaria

15 hours ago

What is it you find so distasteful about the bible

Reply · Share · 2 replies

0 likes

Edden

15 hours ago

Peterdaria.....the answer is probably because he does not believe it!

Share

-2 likes

Jonely

6 hours ago

Apart from the exhortations to exterminate adulterers, witches and homosexuals, there is the very nasty idea that we are born guilty because of crimes committed by people thousands of years before we were born.

Distasteful.

Another is the idea that if we believe in Jesus, we can be absolved of responsibility for any immoral acts we commit, instead of accepting responsibility for them ourselves.

Very distasteful.

Test

But this is not a new issue. Herodotus, a seminal Ancient Greek historian, tells of a similar impasse when two groups discuss burial customs over 2000 years ago:

"When Darius was king, he summoned the Greeks who were with him and asked them what price would persuade them to eat their fathers' dead bodies. They answered that there was no price for which they would do it. Then he summoned those Indians who are called Callataie, who eat their parents, and asked them (the Greeks being present and understanding by interpretation what was said) what would make them willing to burn their fathers at death. The Indians cried aloud, that he should not speak of so horrid an act" INLCIbook3ch38

However Karl Popper, in *The Myth of the Framework*, rejects the notion that this confrontation was fruitless. While he agrees that "mutual understanding was not achieved" INLCIch2pg37, he points out that even without conversation, this confrontation can begin to breed tolerance and respect to those different from ourselves and, over time, this can bear fruit; the fruit of

understanding INLCIch2pg37.

While this example is extreme, it is a picture you might be scared of. As you look at news article comment sections, or at Dawkins, or to Israel and Palestine, you might be put off by others' worldview. But these extreme examples are the ones that stick out most in our mind because we rarely actually see the beliefs and practices of those close to us. One's worldview, almost by definition, affects the way we see life, and so likely affects our day-to-day life. And yet, our clearest picture of someone practising Islam (or, at least, their version of Islam) is a guy blowing himself up in central London. The comedian Lee Mack makes this point, when being interviewed on the BBC Radio 4 show *Desert Island Discs*:

"I think it's quite odd that people like myself, in their forties, quite happy to dismiss the Bible, but I've never read it. I always think that if an alien came down and you were the only person they met, and they said, 'What's life about? What's earth about? Tell us everything,' and you said, 'Well, there's a book here that purports to tell you everything. Some people believe it to be true; some people [do] not believe it [to be] true.' 'Wow, what's it like?' and you go, 'I don't know, I've never read it.' It would be an odd thing wouldn't it?" INLCI42mins

The Nutrionist

We consume our news like gluttons. We gorge ourselves with the junk food of the newsroom - a new sex tape, or the newest celebrity spat. The scholar Danah Boyd chalks this up to our biology, saying that we're "programmed to be attentive to things that stimulate: content that is gross, violent, or sexual and that gossip which is humiliating, embarrassing, or offensive". Just like we crave fatty

As sociologist Danah Boyd said in a speech at the 2009 Web 2.0 Expo "Our bodies are programmed to consume fat and sugars because they're rare in nature. In the same way, we're biologically programmed to be attentive to things that stimulate: content that is gross, violent, or sexual and that gossip which is humiliating, embarrassing, or offensive. If we're not careful, we're going to develop the psychological equivalent of obesity. We'll find ourselves consuming content that is least beneficial for ourselves or society as a whole."

The Christian

This piece will show why Christians shouldn't create a bubble around themselves.

While I don't like taking verses out of context from the Bible, let us use 2 verse from the gospel of John as a starting point, both of which support the other.

The first is 3:16, likely the most famous verse from John's gospel, often seen around stadiums during American sports games. The verse itself is a clear and concise description of Christ's role in the faith:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." INLCI



Figure FIGLAB: American footballer Tim Tebow, with John 3:16 painted below his eye during a playoff game
<https://www.cnsnews.com/blog/michael-morris/tim-tebow-316-stat-line-playoff-win-people-say-coincidence-i-say-big-god>

The second is 20:30-31. This comes near the end of the gospel, and is an explanation by John as to why he curated the signs (miracles) of Jesus the way he did:

"Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

From these two verses we see three beliefs central to the Christian faith:

1. God has one son, Jesus, who he gave to the world.
2. This son, Jesus, is messianic. That is to say, he is some sort of saviour figure in Christianity.
3. If you believe in Jesus as the Messiah, and as God's Son, you can have eternal life in his name.

The important belief to us here is the third. It is clear that belief in Jesus is clearly important to Christians; to believe in Jesus is to gain access to an everlasting life after this one. Then, for the Christian, the role of dialogue is to help others to know and understand Jesus. Some may call this dialogue proselytizing. However, proselytizing brings up images of megaphones on street corners; proselytizing is coercive and pushy. Dialogue, on the other hand, is the Christian sharing their faith, answering questions and so forth, in order to help people make up their mind about Jesus properly. So, when Jesus says to "love your neighbor as yourself" INLCI in Matthew's Gospel, I would call this form of dialogue more loving than the man shouting on the street corner.



Figure FIGLAB: A street preacher with a megaphone

However, I would argue, to not share your faith as a Christian is also an unloving act. In doing this, the Christian believes that they have eternal life, yet they care so little about those around them that they do not want to help anyone else in understanding Jesus. Penn Jillette, Las Vegas magician and advocate for atheism, agrees with this sentiment. In a video on the subject he said this:

"If you believe there is a heaven and hell, and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life or whatever, and you think it's not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward...How much do you have to hate somebody to not [tell them]?" INLCI

When we look online though, we see that it is easy for anyone, Christian included, to stay in a bubble online. Eli Parisier, in *The Filter Bubble*, says that these exist because of the personalization algorithms found across the web. However, Parisier says, the bubble is "a cozy place, populated by our favorite people and things and ideas" INLCI. Ultimately, like anyone, Christians can be scared of what people will think of them, and they don't like being challenged. In addition, with religion specifically, this isn't solely who you engage with on Facebook; almost all your media consumption can be within a Christian bubble. At a conference, Mark Scott, the Former Managing Director of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, explained the issue as follows:

"The new media environment presents a great risk for Christians to retreat. There will be in a media sense, a massive global market for Christians to listen to Christian music, to read Christian books, to see Christian films, to partake in Christian blogs, to comment on each other's Christian Facebook pages and to live in that Christian world." INLCI

For Christians then, there is tremendous comfort in staying within the bubble, and there is enough media to allow you to stay there for as long as you want to. Thus there seems to be a clash in the minds of Christians, between (somewhat selfishly) staying within the bubble, and (more selflessly) sharing your faith for the sake of those around you.

This clash can be seen in a 2017 study by Brubaker and Haigh INLCI. In the study, 335 Christians participated in an online study about their engagement in religious content and community online. With regards to how much Christians see Facebook as a platform for dialogue, they found that "those who use [Facebook] for religious purposes recognize the potential for visibility and therefore reach out to people with diverse beliefs and varying commitments to those beliefs" INLCI. However a second, more interesting insight is that "people who were more religious were also more likely to minister to others online" INLCI. This seems to back our hypothesis above; those who are more religious are more certain of an everlasting life after this one, so will think it more crucial to try to tell people about Jesus, and that new life. In contrast, those who are less sure themselves, are more likely attracted to the comfort the bubble provides, rather than sticking their neck out for the sake of those around them.

So, from this, we have seen that the Bible backs up the case for dialogue (rather than proselytizing), and yet Christians are conflicted. On the one hand, they want to start a dialogue out of a sense of love for those around them. Yet, there is comfort in staying still, and dangers (either perceived or real) of sharing their faith online.

The Network Theorist

'Birds of a feather flock together' as the saying goes. This is homophily; the tendency of individuals to associate with those similar to them. And homophily is hardly a new concept. However, social networks provide an extensive dataset to study homophily. Thelwall INLCI looked at a sample of 2,567 members of Myspace to see patterns of behaviour. While he found not evidence of gender homophily, he found significant evidence of homophily in many other areas, including religion TODO.

However, social networks do more than just provide data; they change the very nature of the connection between members. In *The Filter Bubble*, Parisier says that online filter bubbles "tend to dramatically amplify confirmation bias" INLCI. Why? Well we become frustrated by information that challenges our assumptions, and so we tend to instead flock towards information that we agree with. Thus, we have a tendency toward those who hold a similar viewpoint to us; those of the same religion, or even of the same denomination within that religion. Thus, since online filter bubbles personalize, they amplify things we have a tendency towards, so amplifying confirmation bias INLCI.

But how does this compare to the offline world of homophily? Take the example of stratified housing communities, where the rich and the poor live in different districts. So, each district is like it's own filter bubble, amplifying confirmation bias within it. However, the difference lies in the fact that each member is not confined to their own district. Naturally, people live in different contexts, and move between these contexts daily. While these contexts may be related (those who are rich may have different hobbies to those who are poor), each context is skewed in different ways (as can be seen in Figure FIGLAB). So, while your affinity toward certain people still exists (as seen by the thickness of the lines in the figure), you end up interacting with people from different religious beliefs. In the offline world, however, you hold one identity - one

profile. Facebook founder, Mark Zuckerberg told journalist David Kirkpatrick for his book *The Facebook Effect*:

"The days of you having a different image for your work friends or coworkers and for the other people you know are probably coming to an end pretty quickly." INLCIpg199

So it makes sense that, on Facebook, there is one context where you have no direct control. And, when all the contexts are aggregated (see Figure FIGLAB), online filter bubbles amplify those you have an affinity for, so your feed becomes skewed towards views similar to you in a different way to the offline world. It would seem reasonable, then, to suggest we split the internet back into different contexts. An example is the forum site Reddit, where there are a number of smaller forums (called subreddits). You choose which subreddits to join, and the front pages of each subreddit are aggregated to form your feed. The difference with this compared to Facebook, for example, is that your feed is not altered based on which subreddits you look at regularly, so your experience is much more broad.

The issue here is that you choose which subreddits you are part of (See Figure FIGLABEL). While in the offline world, you had little choice over who you interact with in some contexts (world colleagues aren't always going to be Christian, for example), on Reddit you choose which communities of people to be a part of. Looking back at Figure FIGLABEL, we see that the offline communities of "badminton" and "Christianity" become the subreddits joined. This may not seem like a problem, because these two communities are disparate; badminton players are religiously diverse, and Christians play a lot of different sports. However,

Conclusion is to have a deliberate mixture of opinions in subreddits (eg DebateReligion) (however people need to choose these), and then to sort by new. Mixture of opinions solves choosing problems, sorting by new, since you will see voices statistically correlated to the percent of ppl.

A second insight can be found in 2011 analysis of the Facebook network INLCI. Here, they found that the amount of clustering in Facebook is very high. In the literature, clustering is measured as a coefficient between 0 and 1. A coefficient of 1 indicates that all of your friends are also friends with each other. In the 2011 analysis, they concluded that "for users with 100 friends, the average local clustering coefficient is 0.14, indicating that for a median user, 14% of all their friend pairs are themselves friends" INLCI. This coefficient as found to be "five times greater than the clustering coefficient found in a 2008 study analyzing the graph of MSN messenger correspondences, for the same neighborhood size" INLCI. Another finding was the small average path length between users. As seen in the graph in Figure FIGLABEL, 99.6% of users are connected in 6 links or less, with the average distance being 4.7 links. This apparent contradiction is explained by a seminal paper by Strogatz and Watts INLCI. Here they called these networks, with a high amount of clustering and a small average path length, 'small-worlds' networks. The explanation is the existence of 'hubs'. These are individuals who have a supremely large number of links within the network, who become the 'glue' between different disparate clusters.

Relying on hubs to start the conversation. However, conversation will be emotional and heated, most likely Issues RE Spiral of Silence, and wanting not to offend. TODO

The Linguist

SOLUTIONS

3 Conversation/friendship - non-religious communities being the starting point? Stories about the others day, their religious activity etc

We can then examine communication between these groups:

1 Polysemy theory means that there is a natural communication barrier (the word God, atheism as anti-religious, Christian "lumping" (no true Scotsman))

2 Specific group language (jargon)

3 Framing

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/april/fabricio-alvarado-loses-costa-rica-president-evangelicals.html> Loses vs wins

<http://freethinker.co.uk/2018/03/28/police-remove-evangelical-pest-from-new-jersey-gymnasium/> pest

Solutions

DELPHI?

Framing?

Misc

Attempts to codify the beliefs of the Christian worldview have existed almost since the beginning of Christianity itself. Creeds are sets of beliefs that Christians agree on, and often recite together. The Apostles Creed is a common example, still being said by Christians today, Catholic and Protestant alike. The Old Roman Form was in use by the middle of the 2nd century, with the earliest written record from 341 AD INLCI. It reads as follows:

"I believe in God the Father Almighty. And in Jesus Christ his only (begotten) Son our Lord, who was born of the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary; crucified under Pontius Pilate, and buried; the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of the Father, from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost; the holy Church; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; (the life everlasting)." INLCI

This is then an urgent message to those Christians stuck in a bubble - get out!

I could say this message to Christian hermits.

But also there are examples of Christian bubbles.

There are also examples of Christian bubbles in online Christian culture.

The call then is to get out. Christians have been willing to do this (John Eliot, Hudson Taylor), going so far to die for the message. And even today, Christians do the same (CU, other examples)

