

ABSTRACT

Author: Peter J. McEachern
Title: FACEBOOK, TWITTER, AND INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY
Thesis Advisor: Jessica Suckle-Nelson
Department: Department of Psychology
Year: 2019

Intellectual humility (IH), defined as an acceptance of the fallibility of one's closely held beliefs and an openness to changing them when appropriate, has been a construct of interest to philosophers for millennia. Recent study in psychology has revealed relationships to a host of prosocial personality traits (e.g., empathy, universalism, non-authoritarianism) as well as better meta-cognitive abilities. Yet, applied research on IH has focused primarily on religious contexts despite potential applications to the study of political polarization. Meanwhile, social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter play a large role in current political discourse. Their adversarial and highly emotional structures, as well as the ease with which users can filter out information with which they disagree, signal a potential relationship between use of such sites and intellectual humility. Using a survey distributed via Amazon Mechanical Turk ($n = 204$), this study confirmed the existence of a social media use-IH relationship. Individuals lacking political IH were more emotionally reactive to politically-charged social media posts and consumed content reflecting a narrower set of opinions on their social media feeds. Additionally, a non-context-specific IH measure found that use of Facebook and Twitter for gathering information about current events predicted greater confidence in one's ideas and greater hostility to challenges thereof. Social use of the sites mostly—though not always—predicted less IH as well. Though this research cannot confirm a causal direction, results suggest that social media use generally harms intellectual humility more than it helps.