

## Echo Chamber? What Echo Chamber?

Written by The Conversation

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The recent emergence and success of political movements that appear to be immune to any factual evidence that contradicts their claims – from climate change denialists through Brexiteers to the ‘alt-right’, neo-fascist groups supporting Donald Trump – has reinvigorated claims that social media spaces constitute so-called ‘[filter bubbles](#)’ or ‘[echo chambers](#)’.

On social media, the theory goes, the adherents of these ideologies gather to furiously agree with each other, to the exclusion of all non-believers. And there’s a new name for what circulates in these spaces – ‘post-factual’ information – although in reality what we are talking about is anything but new, and used to be known simply as propaganda.

But there’s a problem with the echo chamber argument: it is itself not particularly well supported by the available facts. You might even call it ‘post-factual’ in its own right.

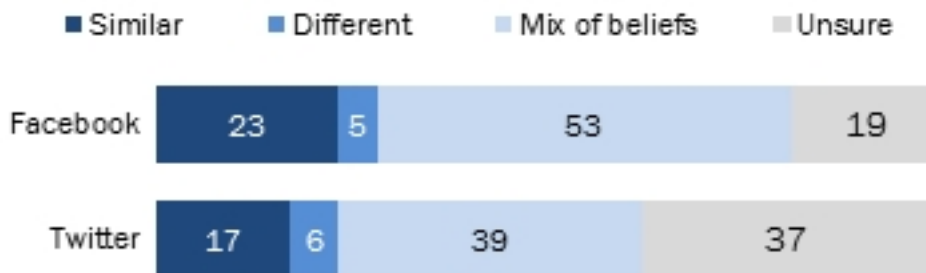
Shortly before the U.S. election, the venerable Pew Center released [the results of a representative national survey](#) of U.S. adults that explored the political environment on social media. The results of the study (originally conducted in July and August 2016) are, at first glance, unsurprising: approaching the end of a long and spiteful campaign, American social media users are resigned and frustrated with the tone and content of election discussions.

Who could blame them? One can only imagine how much more stressed they must feel now, as political discourse in the United States descends to previously unimaginable lows including [over public racism](#) and [actual Nazi chants](#).

But something here doesn’t add up. If the echo chamber argument holds true, users should rarely encounter political content they disagree with – and should therefore have little reason to feel so frustrated. Instead, however, Pew reports, 50% of social media users have been surprised by one of their social media connections’ political views, and only 23% of users on Facebook and 17% on Twitter now say with confidence that most of their contacts’ views are similar to theirs.

## Most Facebook and Twitter users' online networks contain a mix of people with a variety of political beliefs

% of Facebook/Twitter users who say that most of the people in their networks have political beliefs that are \_\_\_ to theirs

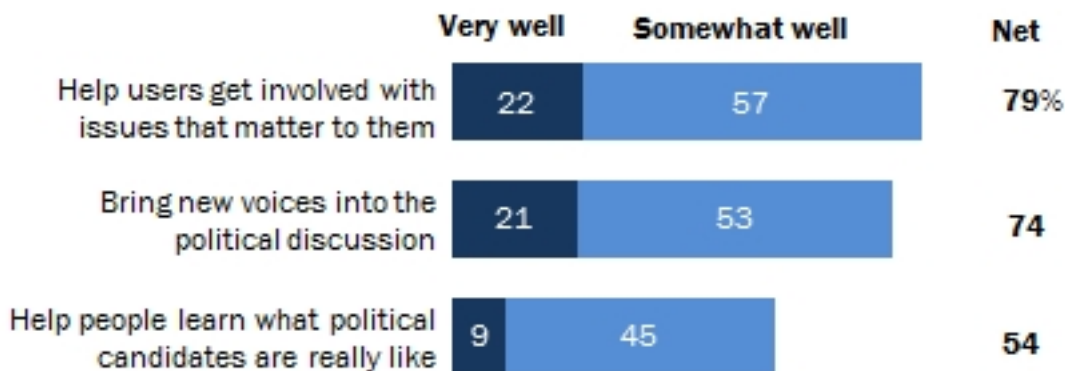


Source: Survey conducted July 12-Aug. 08, 2016. "The Political Environment on Social Media"

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## Majority of users feel social media help to get people involved with issues they care about, bring new voices into the political conversation

% of social media users who feel that these sites \_\_\_ very/somewhat well



Source: Survey conducted July 12-Aug. 08, 2016. "The Political Environment on Social Media"

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*This research is supported by the ARC Future Fellowship project "Understanding Intermedia Information Flows in the Australian Online Public Sphere". Axel Bruns is collaborating with The Conversation in the ARC Linkage project "Amplifying Public Value: Scholarly Contributions' Impact on Public Debate".*

**Read more** <http://theconversation.com/echo-chamber-what-echo-chamber-69293>