

Christians Tweet More Happily, Less Analytically Than Atheists

A computer analysis of nearly 2 million text messages (tweets) on the online social network Twitter found that Christians use more positive words, fewer negative words and engage in less analytical thinking than atheists. Christians also were more likely than atheists to tweet about their social relationships, the researchers found.

The findings are reported in the journal *Social Psychological & Personality Science*.

"Whether religious people experience more or less happiness is an important question in itself," the authors of the new analysis wrote. "But to truly understand how religion and happiness are related we must also understand why the two may be related."

To identify Christian and atheist Twitter users, the researchers studied the tweets of more than 16,000 followers of a few prominent Christian and atheist personalities on Twitter. They analyzed the tweets for their emotional content (the use of more positive or negative words), the frequency of words (such as "friend" and "brother") that are related to social processes, and the frequency of their use of words (such as "because" and "think") that are associated with an analytical thinking style.

Overall, tweets by Christians had more positive and less negative content than tweets by atheists, the researchers report. A less analytical thinking style among Christians and more frequent use of social words were correlated with the use of words indicating positive emotions, the researchers also said.

"If religious people are indeed happier than nonreligious people, differences in social support and thinking style may help to explain why," said University of Illinois graduate student Ryan Ritter, who conducted the research