

with U. of I. psychology professor Jesse Preston and graduate student Ivan Hernandez.

The findings are also in line with other studies linking greater levels of social connectedness to higher well-being, Ritter said.

“Religious communities are very social. Just being a member of a religious group connects people to others, and it may be this social connection that can make people happier,” Preston said. “On the other hand, atheists had a more analytical thinking style in their tweets than Christians, which at extremes can make people less happy.”

Previous research has found a positive association between religion and well-being among Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and Muslims. But most such studies rely on individuals to report how satisfied they are with their lives or their experience of positive and negative emotions at a given time.

“What’s great about Twitter is that people are reporting their experiences — good or bad — as they occur,” Preston said. “As researchers, we do not need to ask them how they feel because they are already telling us.”

Christians appear to be happier than atheists on Twitter, but the authors caution that the results are correlational and “this does not mean atheists are unhappy overall or doomed to be miserable,” Preston said. “If religion improves happiness indirectly through other factors, those benefits could also be found outside religious groups.”

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