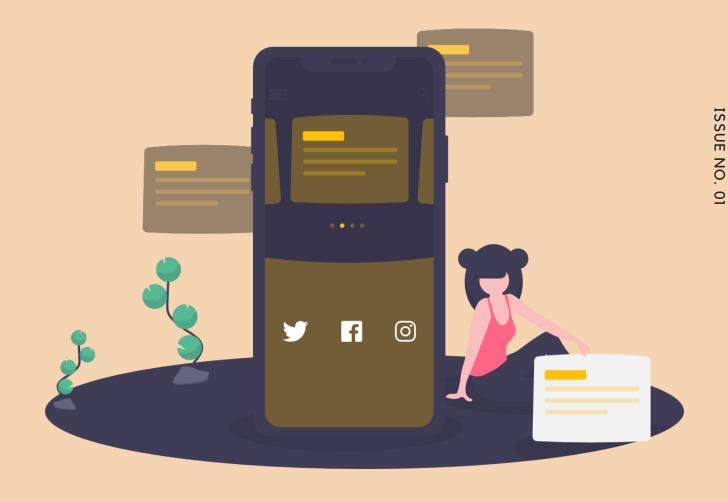
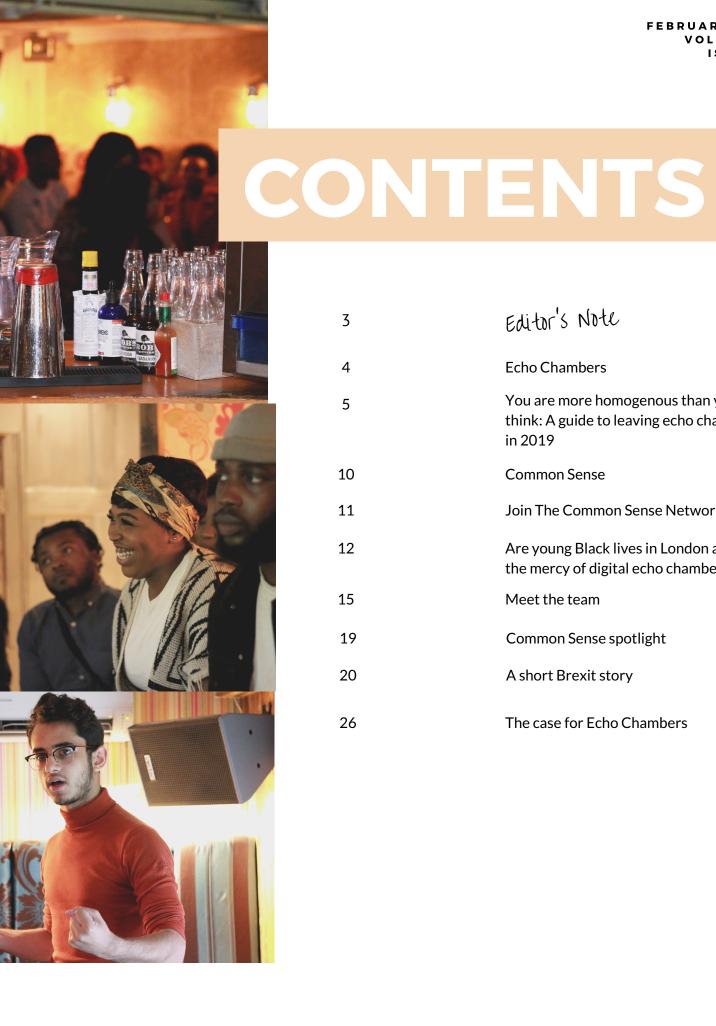


1. Echo Chambers





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The case for Echo Chambers

EDITOR'S LETTER

@MikeOmoniyiCS

In an age of hyper information, one would be forgiven for expecting a growing number of information sources to result in a more informed and considered demos.

In fact, the opposite is true. People are more polarised and disenfranchised than they have ever been. Don't believe me? Take a look at the Brexit vote in June 2016 where 51.89% of 46,500,001 voted Leave and 48.11% voted Remain. A clear depiction of the United Kingdom's stark division. What has transpired since, for the most part, is a heel digging into ideological trenches and a general unwillingness to learn about the 'other side'.

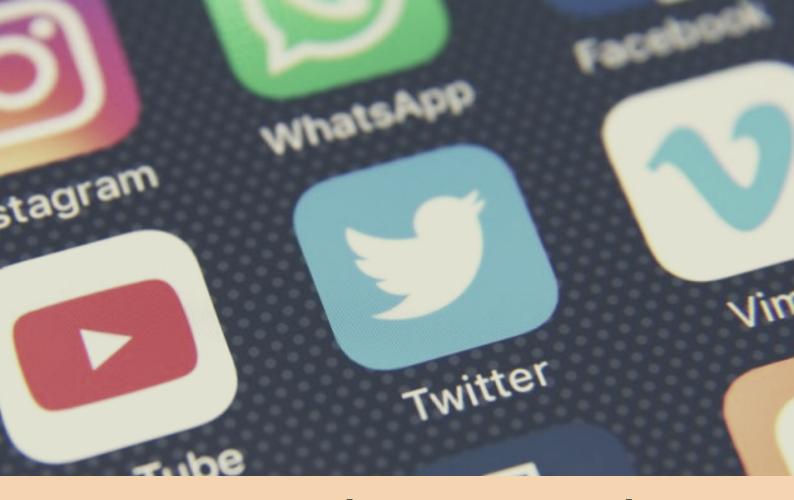
Now, I should temper this early apocalyptic claim with an acknowledgement that division isn't new. It is as old as speech itself. However, the emergence and proliferation of tech has exacerbated division, and led to the creation of new online echo-chambers, where opposing views don't meet. This why we created **The Detail.** At *The Common Sense Network*, we believe you deserve to hear all the sides of a debate before you make up your mind. Especially debates this important.



Here's The Detail:

"ECHO CHAMBER" IS A TERM WIDELY USED IN TODAY'S LEXICON, THAT DESCRIBES A SITUATION WHERE CERTAIN IDEAS, BELIEFS OR DATA POINTS ARE REINFORCED THROUGH REPETITION OF A CLOSED SYSTEM THAT DOES NOT ALLOW FOR THE FREE MOVEMENT OF ALTERNATIVE OR COMPETING IDEAS OR CONCEPTS.





You are more homogenous than you think: A guide to leaving echochambers in 2019

WORDS BY

Mike Omoniyi

THE COMMON SENSE NETWORK

Founder

Division and politics have always been interchangeable; this isn't new. This is why when The Pew Research Center, which for two decades has tracked demographic and partisan differences, reported that 'partisan identification is now a bigger wedge between Americans than race, gender, religion or level of education', I was startled.

This report was published in 2017, however, it startled me, sitting in my Manchester office on a Monday morning in 2019. It got me wondering how fervent political identification must now be if it alone had usurped race and gender as the biggest wedge between people. As a political actor myself, I wondered what part I might have played in ushering in this new reality.

Whatever your view, there does appear to be a greater awareness of partisanship these days. For the most part, we can attribute this to the age of hyper-information we live in. The internet and social media spread information around the globe like wildfire. A few taps on my phone and from my fingertips and I'm able to share my views on vegan sausages to over 26,000 people directly. Whether they care is not important, all that matters is that there is now an audience for my views and its free of charge to communicate with them. That was ironic, I'm not narcissistic really, I just enjoy the attention and virtual applause of strangers online. Here is another truism; this would have been the stuff of dreams 50 years ago and yet today it has become a daily reality for many.

The early days of the internet promised a mind-expanding utopia, where users could freely exchange new ideas and contemplate other points of view. Even in those days of heady optimism, there were already a few sceptical academics who were worried that this vision pivoted on too high-minded a picture of human nature. Since that initial prophecy, things haven't materialised in the way utopian claimants had imagined. Whilst there is no doubt that the internet and social media has widened political participation with more people giving hot takes on political issues, it is less conclusive whether it has deepened participation. What seems to be more apparent is an 'ugly tribalism' which social media is either creating or exacerbating. In either case, it has real dangerous impacts. In a tragically poetic way, Storey's story illustrates this.

Hurricane Harvey was hours away from devastating Texas when an assistant professor at the University of Tampa, Ken Storey sent a tweet about who he thought the culprit might be: Republicans. He said "I don't believe in instant Karma but this kind of feels like it for Texas," he tapped out on Twitter, only to later tweet, "Hopefully this will make them realize the GOP doesn't care about them."

True to the platform, that tweet spread like wildfire. It ricocheted across conservatives circles and it wasn't long until right-wing activists found the tweet online. It even became the subject of several Fox News segments and soon had right-wing activists up in arms at his place of employment. The result? The tweet would cost him his job as an adjunct sociology professor at the University of Tampa, incite death threats, strain his relationship with his parents and, nearly a year later, leave him living on two part-time jobs that pay less than a third of what he used to earn. His rent, car payments and electric bills are all past due, he said in a recent interview.

This seems high punishment for what was at worst a tongue-in-cheek joke and at most a revelation that Storey might be a liberal in at a relatively right-leaning University. This ugly incident perfectly illustrates a deeper problem: the alarming ease with which social media and the internet as a whole can be abused, and used to prop up dubious narratives but also used to manufacture fake outrage and used by a small number of people to make a lot of noise. Perhaps Storey's joke was tasteless, however, I'm not convinced it warrants him losing his job and struggling thereafter to find another job. "If you search my name on social media, that is what comes up," Storey said, explaining that he believes the Twitter episode has hurt him as he struggles to find new work. "I thought it would blow over."





Echo Chambers

Now, it should be noted that abuse is a ubiquitous problem and isn't particular to any one social media app or the internet for that matter. However, in 2019, after a year of revelations involving cyberbullying, troll factories, campaigns of misinformation and more, we should urgently be questioning our use of online space. To counter these threats we need to examine the greatest one: our own cosy online bubble.

Social media makes it remarkably easy for users to filter who's voices they see on their feed. Twinned with algorithms on tech sites that also reward users with more content consistent with their consumption trends, we have a dangerous recipe. In the real world, one would have to work hard to avoid disagreeable folk, however, online, it is remarkably easy to do this.

"Echo chamber" is a term widely used in today's lexicon, that describes a situation where certain ideas, beliefs or data points are reinforced through repetition of a closed system that does not allow for the free movement of alternative or competing ideas or concepts. In an echo chamber, there is the implication that certain ideas or outcomes win out because of inherent unfairness in how input is gathered.

Are we crying wolf?

I have to admit, to some degree, ideological bias is also inescapable and can hardly be blamed solely on the internet and social media. Newspapers, for example, have always catered to their audience. Nowhere is this clearer than in the UK, which has arguably the most partisan press in the world and in turn one of the least trusted in Europe. Eurobarometer, the polling arm of the European Commission, found in its latest public opinion survey that trust in papers in Britain was a dismal 20% - less than half the EU average of 46%, but up by 5% on last year. No less than 75% said they "tended not to trust" the written press.

Despite whatever editorial leanings publications may have, a robust legal and – in some cases regulatory – framework places media outlets under compulsion to at least report facts when it comes to news. Whatever the faults of the mainstream media, they do not have carte blanche to concoct fictions, libel or slander.

This is not the case with social media, as *The Reuters Institute* for the Study of Journalism research found, with 51% of people with online access used as one of their news sources. Of the 18-to-24-year-olds surveyed, 28% cited social media as their main news source, compared with 24% for TV. The report, now in its fifth year, is based on a YouGov survey of about 50,000 people across 26 countries, including 2,000 Britons.

What social media and the internet have done is facilitate the emergence of alternative news sites. And here, factual accuracy can no longer be taken for granted. Untethered from journalistic ethics, some outlets thrive by telling their audience precisely what they want to hear. And social media allows the rapid growth and spread of everything from the ludicrous Pizzagate conspiracy theory to rampant climate-change denial. There is no regulator, no arbiter and like in a true wild west model, anything goes.

Why do we believe them?

You'd be forgiven for thinking that avoiding fake news online is as simple as not following these outlets, however, you'd be wrong. Part of the problem is our reliance on tech giants – and their vested interest in rewarding us with what we like to see. Everything from our Google searches to our Facebook news feeds are tailored to keep us engaged and generate profit. But while there is limited evidence that filter bubbles might reduce diversity, the data suggests that we play the lead role in driving our own polarisation. We are much more homogeneous than we think and tend to interact more with people who echo our beliefs.

A recent study found that we tend to engage most with information that flatters our ideological preconceptions and that this accounted for much more selection bias than algorithmic filtering.

Increased use of social media for news and political purposes, especially by young people mean that their formative years are likely to be spent in echo chambers. A whole generation is at risk of developing political outlooks and dispositions without meaningful access to a diverse range of views and thoughts across the political spectrum. In turn, political debates are debased, leading to a trivial and fickle culture. Once we are settled in our echo chambers, it's easier to demonise the other side and believe stories, even false ones that give our side the win and hand the other side losses.

This proliferation of urban myths and conspiracies would perhaps be laughable if they weren't so uniquely dangerous. An estimated 61% of millennials garner news primarily through social media. But in the process, we trigger algorithms that curate our feeds. These cherry-pick things with which we are likely to agree and jettison information that does not appear to fit our preferences – often at the cost of accuracy and balance.





Seeing Echo Chambers for what they really are

It doesn't have to be this way. Echo chambers may be comforting, however they ultimately lock us into perpetual tribalism and do nothing but tangible damage to our understanding. The safety guaranteed by echo chambers is an illusion. They promise temporary solidarity and protection, whilst actually offering those who seek refuge in them more misery in the long term. This is because the safety they are supposed to ensure is a transient and fleeting one. In this age of hyperinformation, it is more important than ever to be able to decipher fact from fiction. Echo chambers don't help us sharpen our objectivity. Instead, they make people intellectually lazy and ideologically obtuse. Believing whatever is convenient and not necessarily what is true.

Michael Wolff, author of Fire and Fury, the bombshell book about the first year of the Trump White House, said in an MSNBC interview of the stories in the book, "If it feels true, it's true." Essentially, he was telling people to believe their feelings more than their minds, with no empirical evidence to either confirm or debunk the passages that seemed (to each individual reader) like something Donald Trump would do.

That is the crux of the problem: we are now a feeling-based society. If we don't like facts, we don't believe them. If we do like something presented to us as fact, even if it is false, we tend to believe it. This is why disinformation campaigns targeting people on both sides of the political spectrum are so effective. They can fire up opposing online posses and watch sparks fly between them!

To counteract this, we need to become more discerning at analysing our sources – something we are currently poor at doing. More difficult perhaps is that we must learn not to cling to something solely because it chimes with our beliefs, and be willing to jettison any notion when it is contradicted by evidence – no matter how comforting the disproven idea may be. We must always question the motivations of news outlets and sources, considering their angle and how this might affect the news being reported. Lastly, we must support organisations which are directly challenging the echo chamber phenomenon and offering credible solutions to the problem. This is the work we are doing at The Common Sense Network.

As the great physicist Richard Feynman once observed, we ourselves are "the easiest person to fool". This adage should never be far from our minds in our interconnected world. From the dying embers of 2017, we must resolve to make 2019 the year of questioning not only our opponents' sources but our own.

AS THE WORLD
BECOMES
INCREASINGLY
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ONLINE AND
OFFLINE FOR
FOLKS WHO
DON'T SEE EYE TO
EYE TO ENGAGE
CRITICALLY

We help millennials leave echo chambers. The future of our democracy depends on it. Join the common sense revolution now.

The Common Sense Network





Are young Black lives in London at the mercy of digital echo chambers?

BY THOMAS KINGSLEY

With the recent killing of 14-year-old Jayden Moodie in Leyton 8th January, the debate around finding practical solutions to London's knife crime epidemic is truly reignited. And rightly so; violence in the capital saw over 130 people lose their lives as victims of knife or gun crime in 2018, with the total homicide toll rising to its highest level in a decade.

Multiple solutions have been suggested to tackle London's surging violence - both from the community leaders and the government: increased stop and search, censoring violence-encouraging music (namely, drill music), increased community support, increased police partnership with vulnerable communities.

Violence in London isn't a new issue, though. Neither is there any novelty in responses such as increased police powers - particularly boosts in the use of stop and search. Justin Finlayson, a former bus driver, founded United Borders – a youth program to unite rival gangs in North London. He said of calls to boost police stop and search, "When you're dealing with white people from out of the community policing the community culturally, they're not sensitive to the needs of the community".

In a panel discussion on Good Morning Britain, featuring Justin Finlayson, I saw what I believe could be at the crux of our failed response to violence in the capital – echo chambers. When Finlayson was asked by Piers Morgan whether he accepts that the vast majority of knife attacks in this country are by young black males on other young black males, he answered by citing the lack of attention to violence in Lincolnshire. This is a 'whataboutery' that does nothing to advance a crucial conversation, and serves as a telltale sign of the paralysing powers echo chambers can have on any subject that can divide.



Echo chambers are like someone shouting their opinion in an empty cave and having it echoed right back to them. The danger of echo chambers - also known as thought bubbles - is that due to constant amplification of certain ideologies, alternative concepts or beliefs from other thought bubbles are distrusted and rejected.

In the context of the response to London's violence epidemic, we can examine the main ideas from each side of the political spectrum and see how their echo chambers are perpetuating knife crime in the capital.

Echo chambers are causing a deadlock in the search for effective solutions to London's violence epidemic. Key voices from these two ends of the political spectrum are not listening to each other, and this is largely to do with the different echo chambers they reside in. Generally speaking, there are two opposing views in the debate around solutions to knife crime. The right wing approach: increased police power, banning drill and grime music, harsher punishments for any involvement in knife crime. Then there's the left wing approach: implementing a more holistic response, more support for disenfranchised ethnic minority groups, closer partnerships between police and most vulnerable communities.

Both sides make fair points: would it do more harm than help to censor music explicitly perpetuating an extremely violent message? Is it fair to target an entire race group with boosted police stop and search, especially in the case of the many innocent people targeted? Unfortunately, though, the existence of echo chambers in this debate don't allow such questions to be answered with an open mind from key players involved.

"WHEN YOU'RE DEALING WITH WHITE PEOPLE FROM OUT OF THE COMMUNITY POLICING THE COMMUNITY CULTURALLY, THEY'RE NOT SENSITIVE TO THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY".

JUSTIN FINLAYSON





"Back out my shank and dip it, push in my shank and twist it," are the lyrics from popular drill song, Next Up by the rap group, 1011. Little has to be done in the way of translating these lyrics. They're particularly eyebrow raising to say the least. Last year five members of 1011 were arrested after being caught carrying baseball bats and machetes, to which they later pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit violent disorder.

With that in mind, one can at the very least appreciate why the group have been handed a court order that bans them releasing music without police permission. The song, Next Up, received over one million views on Youtube, many of which would have probably been from young people who are quickly developing a glorified, and ultimately false image of gang lifestyle.

At one point in November, there were five fatal stabbings in six days in London. It certainly wouldn't solve the root problem, but in the immediate term at least, having tighter restriction on music which encourages violence may reduce some of the fuel being poured on this wildfire. If there are songs like Next Up which explicitly mention and provoke rival gangs, in this state of an epidemic, censorship will surely do more help than harm.

By no means can these bans be sold as long term solutions, but blind outrage from those with opposing views hardly allows for an opportunity for positive conversations between the government and the platforms which freely host explicitly violent music.

Rapper, AM, from London 410 crew said on banning drill music, "There are deeper problems going on in the communities, and until those problems are solved, the violence is going to keep going on.

"The media, the government – the people at the top – they don't want public attention on those negative externalities of the economy, they don't want people to see what's going on. But drill music is drawing attention to it. We're going to keep pushing the music, until something is done about the actual problems".

This shows exactly the negative implications of echo chambers. The response to censor violent music could pacify, at the bare minimum, some of the violence, but to someone with the directly opposing view, this idea, along with it's potential prospects, are discarded and viewed with nothing more than malicious intent. It may be, it may not be, but without a level of trust toward an alternative take, how would a working relationship be built to move things forward?

Meet Our Team

Mike Omoniyi

Founder + CEO



Alex Davenport





Afshan D'souza-Lodhi

Editor In Chief





Alfie Habershon Executive Manager



Zweli ChibumbaPR and Logistics

We are a team of over 60 (and growing) ordinary freelance, journalists, bloggers, commentators, illustrators and news reporters, who like you, are fed up with mainstream media and want to do something about it.



On the other end of the political spectrum, however, there are cries for a more holistic approach to tackling violence in the capital. Programs and initiatives that seek to support vulnerable communities are in high demand, especially those that support at risk young people. Instead of a boost in stop and search, the likes of Justin Finlayson are urging the Police force to develop a stop and engage attitude in the areas they police; in a hope to work alongside with community leaders.

For a long time people living in high poverty and high crime areas in London - particularly those targeted by the police, predominantly young black men - have felt heavily ostracised and unfairly treated by police. This has undoubtedly caused a strained relationship between law enforcement and the black community. This strain needs to be resolved otherwise many young black men will continue to feel ostracised, uncared for, and undervalued, and as result find themselves engaging in a life of crime and violence.

According to figures from the London Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC), black people make up 15.6% of London's population while white people make up 59.8%. Yet, in 2018, 43% of searches in London were of black people, compared to 35% of white people. Interestingly though, for white Londoners, 30.5% of searches led to further action, whereas for black Londoners this figure was lower at 26.7%, according to analysis of MOPAC figures by Dr Krisztián Pósch from the London School of Economics. Dr Krisztián Pósch said, "The data shows that police are not just stopping black people more disproportionately, but are less likely to detect crime when they do compared to when they stop white people".

David Lammy, MP for Tottenham, spoke on this saying, "Stop and search disproportionately and unfairly targets young black men. It destroys trust between police and the communities they serve".

Barry, a 14-year-old boy from Tottenham, spoke about his experience of being stopped and searched by police. "I dropped my keys on the pavement and police officers came over asking me if it was a knife," Barry said. "They turned my bag upside down on the street.

"It was so ridiculous. I have rights, so I don't understand why they would stop and search me for something so ridiculous."

At the age of 14-years-old to already feel that the police don't respect your rights is extremely saddening. The long spanning criminalisation, racial profiling and quite frankly, harassing, of black people by the police is one of the largest causes to failed responses to tackling violence in London.

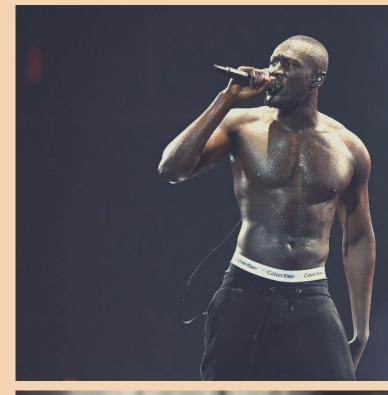
The likes of Piers Morgan, who is in support of increased police stop and search of young black males, hears the statistics of disproportionate targeting, hears the strain of police targeting on it's relationship with the black community, but still fails to understand why increased police stop and search of black people will not resolve London's violence epidemic.

Speaking on the Good Morning Britain panel discussion, which included Justin Finlayson, Morgan said, "You've only got to worry about stop and search if you're carrying something, haven't you? If you haven't, what's the problem?"

"If 90% of the knife crime in this capital city right now is being conducted by young black gang members, what is wrong with stopping and searching young black youths who look like they might be in a gang?"

We see the different echo chambers at work here again because instead of seeking to understand "what's the problem," with increasing stop and search of young black men, Morgan imposes that there shouldn't be one at all.

This is a blatant disregard for the struggles black people face due to police targeting, and as a result provides minimal opportunity to have constructive conversation around finding solutions to build bridges between the police and those most affected by violence in London. And as tensions remain, ultimately, the prospect of resolve becomes farther out of reach.







How Do We Destroy the Echo Chambers at Work?

Key players in the discussion and work towards tackling violence in London have to break out of their virtual cliques.

Commentators in both mainstream and social media also need to terminate their online tribalism and step outside of the constant feedback loop of their own opinions.

In regards to finding a long term solution to London's violence epidemic, the strained relationship between the police and the communities they protect must be resolved. Those who believe in boosts to police stop and search, or simply just banning a genre of music, as a long term fix need to take the time to genuinely consider the deep rooted problems in these communities. Especially, the effects of unfair targeting of black people by the police. From this position a more holistic approach can be developed to help community leaders partner with the police, social workers, charities and schools who can provide resources and funding to support programs that educate and alleviate poverty.

In the immediate term however, more has to be done to protect at risk young people. A valuable lesson can be learnt from that of rap group 1011, and it cannot be overlooked that there may be many other cases like theirs that the police are unawares to. At the very least, an ad hoc censorship of drill music, could see some benefits.

For a problem as deep rooted as this one, cooperative and open discussion is needed from both sides of this debate. And to loosen the grip of echo chambers, both sides need to be willing to accept the truth of alternating views, despite how they might discredit their own. This, and only this, will allow the development of a practical response, both short and long term, to the violence in London.



A SHORT BREXIT STORY

BY FRANKIE WALKER | THE COMMON SENSE NETWORK CULTURAL EDITOR



A SHORT BREXIT STORY.

The 2016 United Kingdom European Union membership referendum also known as the Brexit referendum saw the beginning of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union. The implementation of Brexit so far has been far from smooth sailing. Many voters have demanded a second referendum to be called because, so far, Brexit has failed to deliver a stable and independent Britain.

The demand among voters for a second referendum has raised questions concerning the effectiveness of democracy within Britain. Why are voters changing their minds in relation to Brexit despite already voting in support of Brexit? I argue that this is because voters failed to engage with the pros and cons concerning the Brexit debate. We were prevented from having a heterogeneous debate that cuts across the political isle as result of echo-chambers. As a result, people spoke about each other rather than to each other.

An echo-chamber is an environment in which a person only encounters or engages with ideas and beliefs that coincide with their own so that their existing views are reinforced and alternative ideas are not considered. Social media has helped to create echo chambers with the use of cookies which have allowed social media networks to tailor content to meet ones likes, dislikes and values leaving the user surrounded only by views like their own.

This is a problem for democratic states like the UK because what it means if that we no longer engage with views that oppose our own views. We no longer use opposing arguments to help with our decision making. We isolate ourselves with ideas like our own. We are no longer making rational decisions, Instead important decisions become fuelled by emotion as opposed to knowledge and facts.

Echo-chambers have had a detrimental impact on the debate surrounding Brexit. Many who once supported Brexit are now backtracking after realising that they did not weigh up the pros and cons of such a decision properly. According to YouGov in 2017 the number of people who believed the referendum concerning Brexit should be honoured plunged from 51% to 28% between June and October. The Independent also reported that 1.1 million of leave voters wish they had not voted the way they did. As the Brexit debate raged across the country, members of the public tended to engage in discussion with those who shared similar views. This is supported by evidence collated by City researchers who found that from their twitter study of 15,299 twitter users 69% of pro leave messages were interactions with other pro leave accounts.

As Krasodomski-Jones notes, "the ability to process a diverse range of opinion and, above all, an acceptance of some kind of shared reality and truth are central to a functioning democracy." If we do not engage with both sides of debate, we weaken democracy we put decision making in the wrong hands. If we continue to make uniformed and under-researched decisions, we will continue to have an unstable democracy where we backtrack against every decision we make.





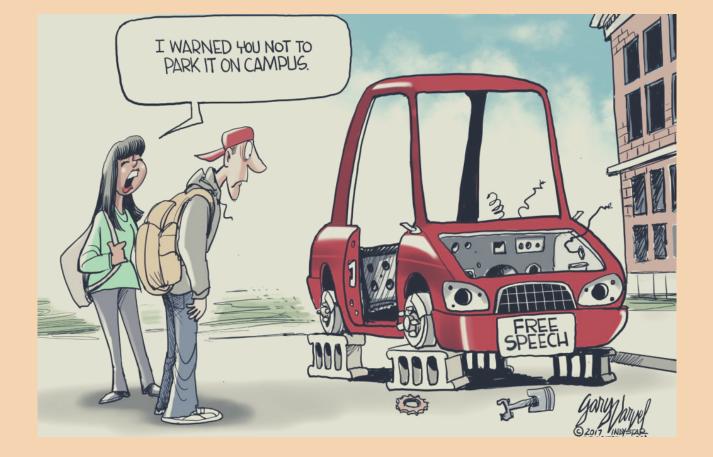
KRASODOMSKI-JONES:

THE ABILITY TO PROCESS A DIVERSE RANGE OF OPINION AND, ABOVE ALL, AN ACCEPTANCE OF SOME KIND OF SHARED REALITY AND TRUTH ARE CENTRAL TO A FUNCTIONING DEMOCRACY

Alex Krasodomski-Jones writing on the Demos website.







Stepping outside of our echo chambers, for most of us, means that we are putting our own existence up for discussion. The conversation very quickly becomes about us and our bodies. And yet the strain on our mental health gets ignored. We don't talk about the way in which seeing your brothers and sisters die by the hands of the state, or how there are men in white hoods that want you dead affects our mental health enough. It can be exhausting. It is exhausting to constantly talk about it, to battle racists and sexists and homophobes and remember statistics, because that's what you're supposed to do, remember statistics.

Is 'leave your echo chamber' code for 'break up safe spaces that we have no access to'?

Diversity and inclusivity agendas saw a rise in BAME (Black Asian Minority Ethnic) only spaces, LGBT+ spaces and women only spaces. The need for a 'safe space' for marginalised people was clear - for a while. Then people started asking why they weren't allowed in them. I used to run the National Black Writers Conference and would constantly be asked why I wasn't running a white writers conference, or what I would say to people running a white writers conference. My response? Simple. All conferences are white writers' conferences and this conference was to rectify a problem. The goal for safe spaces or exclusive 'echo chambers' like these isn't for them to always exist. The idea is that once people gain a certain amount of recognition or confidence the mainstream will begin to accept them. We need to be able to carefully support marginalised people in order to build a network and lessen the disparities. We can only do this in a 'safe space' in an 'echo chamber', so we don't exclude those who are already excluded.

THE CASE FOR ECHO CHAMBERS

AFSHAN D'SOUZA-LODHI

Both casual and heavy users of social media must be aware of a term that has become ubiquitous on platforms all over the internet: "Echo Chamber". In a similar fashion to "free speech" conversations which exploded online during the fall of 2017, a new echo chamber debate seems to have been taken up by certain right-wing fractions as a way of forcing the rest of the us into accepting their political ideologies which harms and displaces minorities at the expense of a privileged few. Donald Trump, Brexit and the rise of the fascist movements seems to be at the forefront of the echo chamber conversation.

Apparently, lefties need to be open to debate and conversation and ironically need become more accepting of intolerant views. This would be laughable, if It wasn't so tragic. The echo chamber debate has become another dogmatic attempt by the right to cajole everyone else, however, this time, the lefties are not falling for it.

Here's the problem with the 'leave your echo chamber' rhetoric.

BURNING OUT

As well as being Editor-in-Chief of the Common Sense Network (Scribe), I also like to think of myself as an activist. I fight for women's rights, queer rights and have run countless conferences/festivals and events, attempting to rectify the racial imbalances that exist in the arts. I've sat on too many panels arguing for 'diversity' and 'inclusion' and 'accessibility'. I've put my own identity on the line for interrogation and have endured personal attacks when trying to put forward ideas of justice. I do not live in an echo chamber at all. Sure, it may be a 'liberal' echo chamber, where everyone is a slightly different flavour of left, but even within the arts, a seemingly liberal area, there is still a right wing and a left wing.

In the UK and US, the rise of the right wing if often attributed to white people. White women were the largest demographic that voted for Trump and pundits argue that a major cause of this was the Democrats 'ignoring' white workingclass people in brown belt states for too many elections. The same argument is often touted here in the UK when considering Europe and the referendum results. The blame for this seems to be on the safe spaces that BAME people have created for themselves by being exclusionary. Because white working class feel excluded, they feel that Britain isn't their's anymore, they voted to leave, or rather for the immigrants to leave the UK. (While we can sit and dispute the actual reasons many voted to leave, it would naïve of us to not consider the impact that the antiimmigrant rhetoric had). Is this to say that safe spaces should be abolished, and that we should all move outside of our echo chambers?

Let me put it another way, if you break up with your partner, you'll most likely want to go to the friend who will bring you ice cream and wallow with you. You won't want to go to the friend who will say 'I told you so,' and want to challenge you on all of your behaviour. It is natural to want to build up our confidence before we go out into the world and face it. It is natural for us to seek a support system, to speak to those who echo what it is we are saying.

Comedy and stand-up is only great when we can all relate to it. Those echo chambers are cathartic, it gives one validation. So why, why must we step out of them to be constantly challenged?

Let us heal in the ways we want, let us keep our safe spaces and stay within our echo chambers until we are strong enough to not need them.



Advice

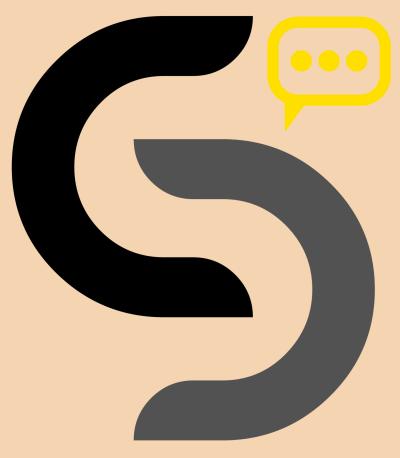
To expose oneself to opposing viewpoints is tricky. If we digest information from a news source geared toward an angry base whose views differ from ours, we'll get even angrier at the "lies" they are spreading. If we go to a neutral news source, we will read/watch/listen with our own ideas in mind and our confirmation bias will cause us to hear what we want to hear within the information.

Reading rational commentary from both sides of the aisle in the Editorial section of major (and local) newspapers is a good way to see both sides of an issue without being overloaded with propaganda.

But, most importantly, read everything presented to us as being fact with a discerning eye. Do the research. Google it. Examine the story elements. Does it add up?

Even it feels true, it might not be true.

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