

An aerial photograph of a city skyline at sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and blue. The city below is densely packed with buildings, and a river or body of water is visible in the lower left corner with a small boat.

# Reconceptualizing Churches of Revelation

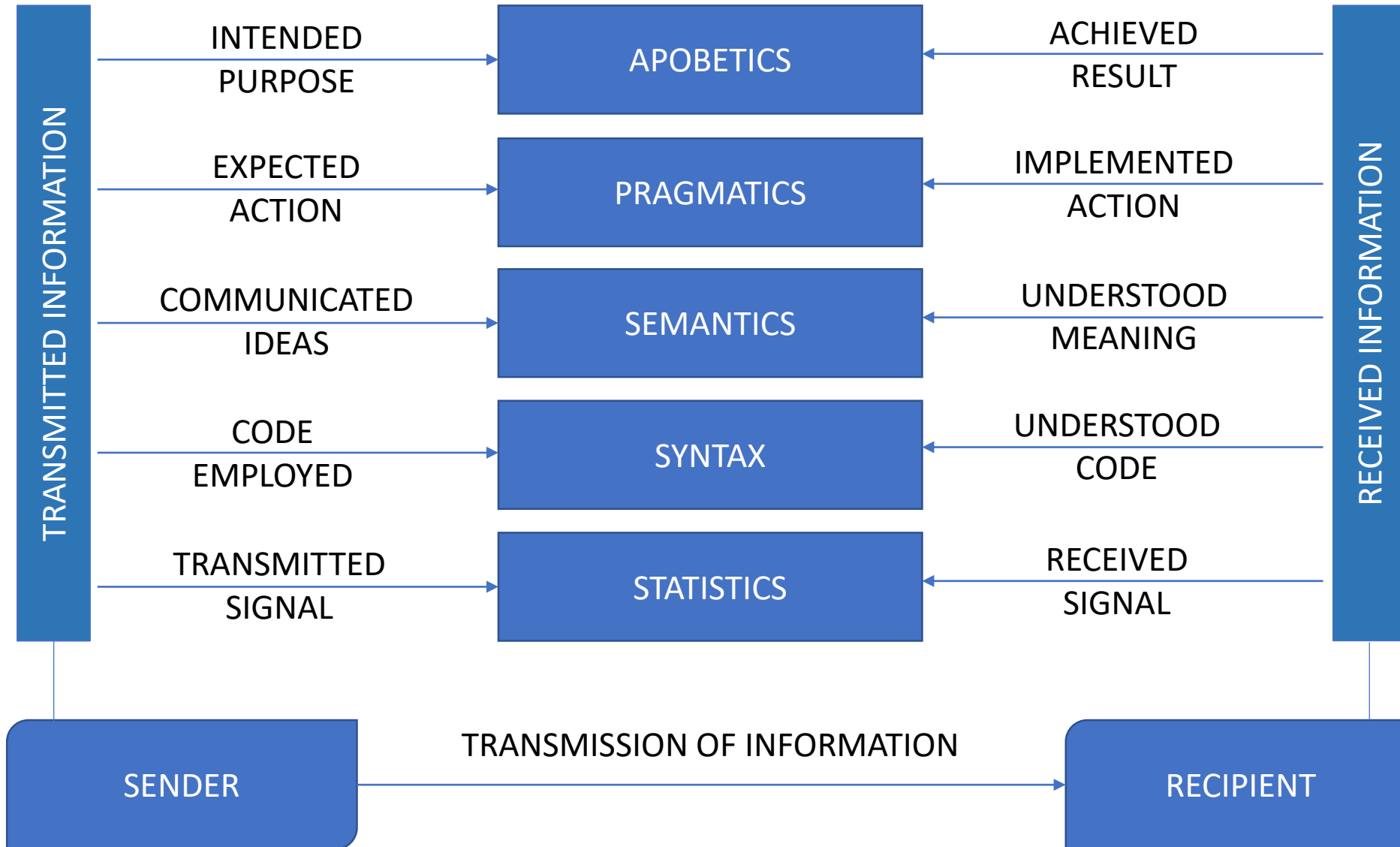
## Media Pastor as an Agent for Change

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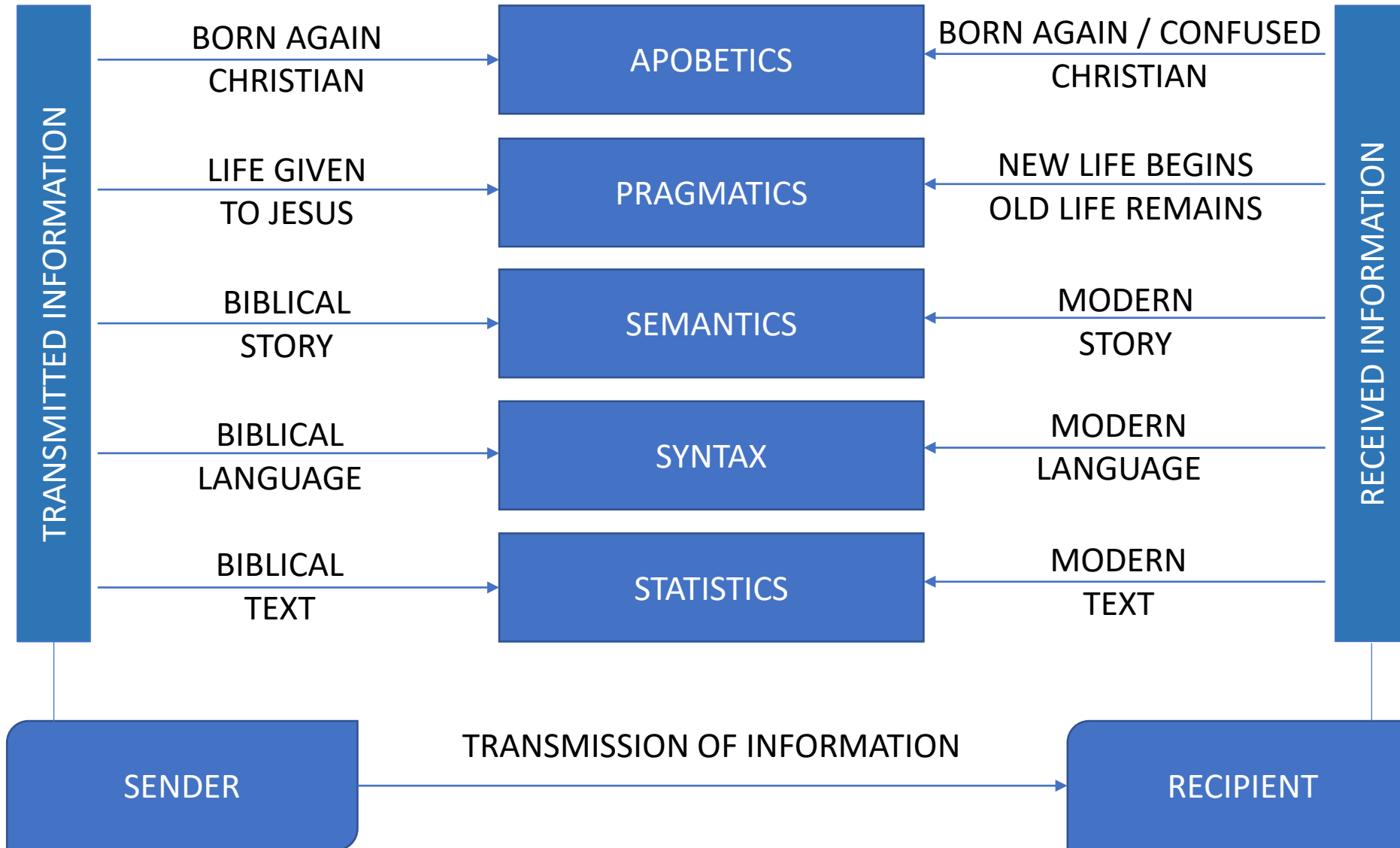
# Information Theory

1. Statistics: any random sequence of symbols that is regarded as information, whether meaningful or not, and without regard to its origin (e.g. *“fwiw” in social media*).
2. Syntax: all structural properties of the process of setting up information, and concerned with the actual set of symbols and rules governing the use of symbols such as grammar (e.g. *“fwiw, the cost of building ...”*).
3. Semantics (Greek semantiko,j): Any piece of information transmitted from sender to recipient with a specified meaning (*fwiw = for what it’s worth*).
4. Pragmatics: Any intended action resulting from communication.
5. Apobetics: Any intended purpose why communication takes place.

# THE FIVE ASPECTS OF INFORMATION



# COMMUNICATION CAN BE DIFFICULT



# Modern Communication

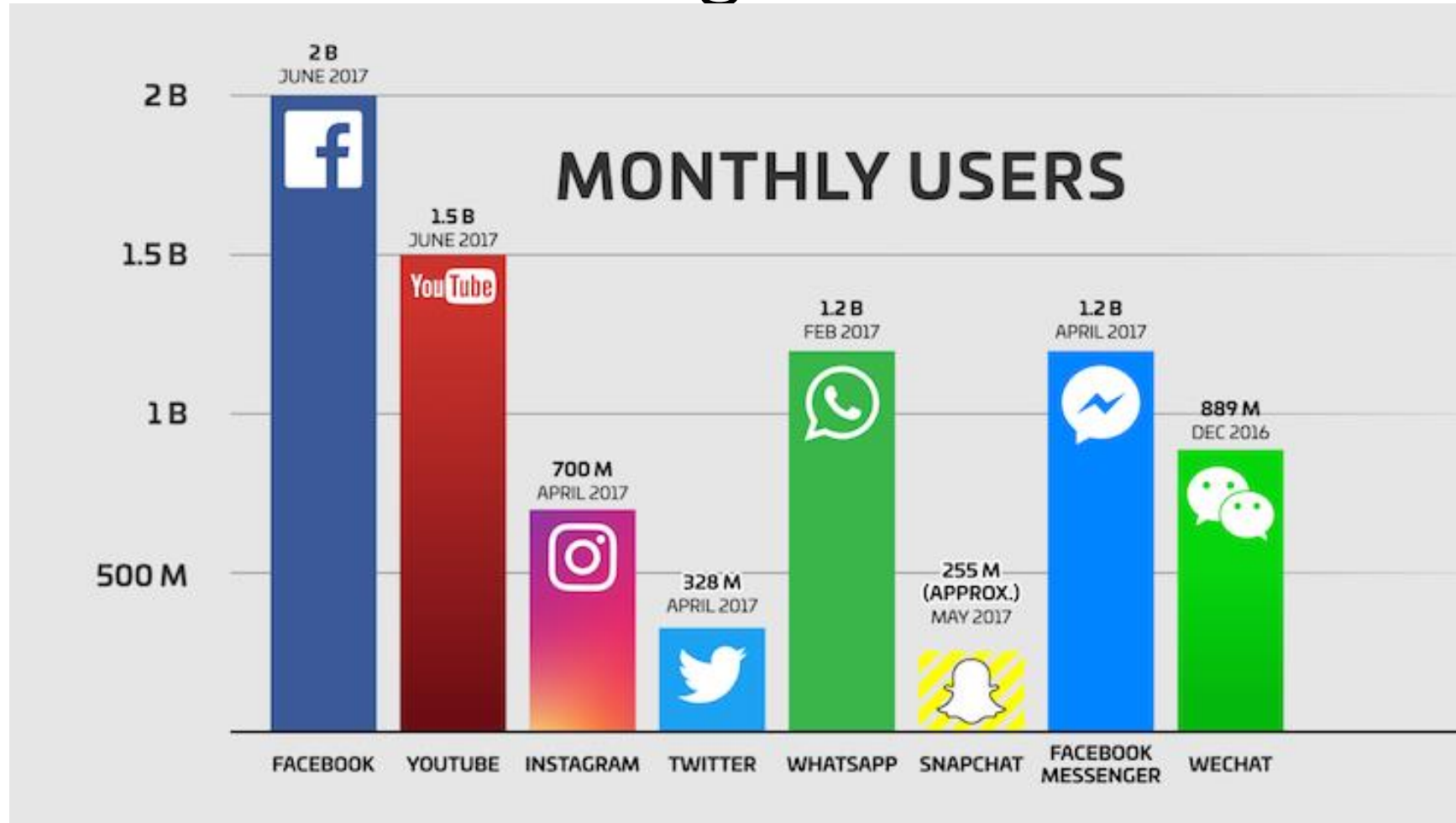
- It is highly visual. We are constantly being bombarded with visual presentations like Google Ads.
  - Apocalypse is well-suited for modern audience due to its highly visual character.
- It is rapid. Everything happens now. The audience has a short fuse for slowly moving content.
  - The Gospel of Mark reads like an action movie. Everything happens immediately (euvqu,j appears 42 times in NA28)
- It uses as many senses as possible.
- It tends to affect more the limbic system in our brain than the frontal lobe (emotion over reason).
  - This is a challenging reality since we are trying to reach the frontal lobe.

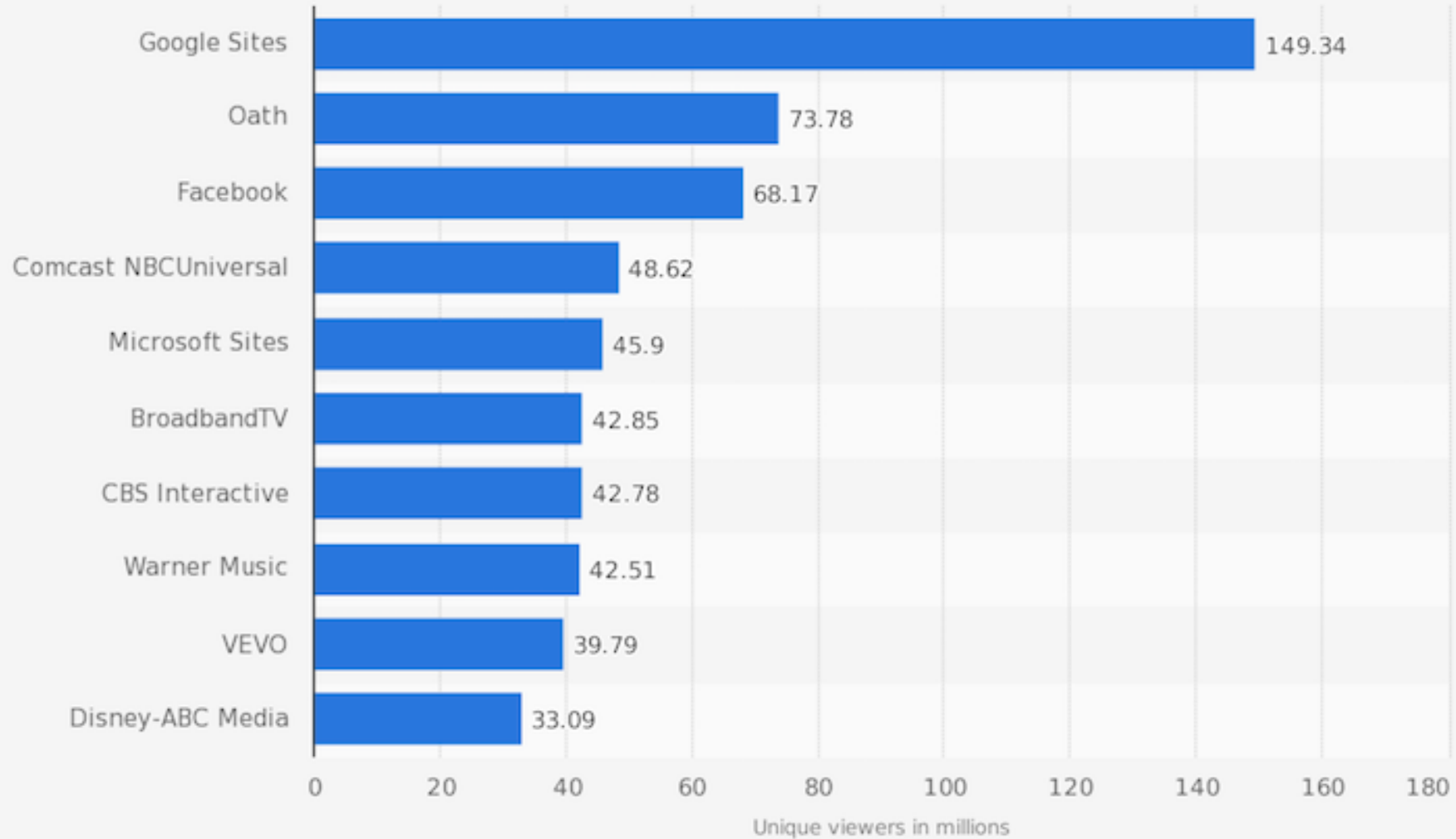
# Social Media

- Every human society develops its own internal code for information. Social media is no different.
  - While the alphabet is the same (statistics), the code used differs from everyday English words (syntax).
    - “g9 m8” means “good night, mate” (semantics).
    - “cua” means “see you around” (semantics).
  - Social media uses emoji to express feelings (sometimes to hide the real ones).
- Millennials *rarely if ever* use Facebook. They get their *news* mostly from Instagram, Snapchat, Reddit and Twitter.
  - Not on any of these platforms? You don’t exist (so the millennials say).
- YouTube is the number one source for information other than news.



# Social Media Usage





Source  
comScore  
© Statista 2018

Additional Information:  
United States; comScore; December 2017; desktop home and work locations



# YouTube

- YouTube is the world's favourite video platform.
  - European Space Agency gets 93-94 million views on their YouTube videos ***every single day*** (statistics May 2019).
- Over 2 billion users as of now.
- The average video length on YouTube is four minutes and 20 seconds, and there are approximately 7 billion videos on the website in total (58,000 years) as of Feb 2019.
- More than 20 percent of videos are switched off within the first 10 seconds of playback. You need to grasp attention immediately.
- While most viewers use mobile devices, the world watches at home, during prime time, and on horizontally oriented screens (cp. Netflix).

# Communication can Fail (No Worries!)

- "He [Moses] *supposed* that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand." (Acts 7:25) ➡ *sender issue*
- "But they [disciples] understood *none* of these things. This saying was *hidden* from them, and they *did not grasp* what was said." (Luke 18:34) ➡ *recipient issue*
- "But they [disciples] *did not understand* the saying, and *were afraid* to ask him." (Mark 9:32) ➡ *recipient & social issue*
- Communication fails all the time. It is no reason not to communicate.

# Some Reasons for Failure to Understand

- “This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.” (John 10:6)
  - Recipient is unfamiliar with the *semantics* used.
- “His disciples did not understand these things *at first*, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.” (John 12:16)
  - The life setting and personal history affect how one receives the message and acts on it (*pragmatics*).
  - Media pastor *needs to incarnate* into the life setting of the millennials in order to make any sense to them.

# Challenges

- Confusing new perspectives.
- Wrong presuppositions.
  - Social media does not work exactly the same way as other media. It has its own way of expressing things.
- Shame prevents clarifications.
  - Social media is replete with flame wars, because there is a tendency for over-emotional responses.
- Lack of knowledge.
- Deliberate misunderstanding.
  - One of the biggest challenges on social media.



# Written Media in the Early Centuries

- The basic medium for writings is a scroll.
- The codex represents the state of the art medium.
  - Codex is a precursor of the modern book form.
- 95 percent of pagan, Jewish, and Christian *non-biblical* writings were written on scrolls during the second and third centuries A.D.
- 90 percent of biblical texts were written on codices during the same time (the most up-to-date technology).
  - Christians used *the state of the art medium* to convey the sacred texts during the time of expansion of the Gentile mission, and sporadic persecutions.
  - Modern equivalent would be the Bible app on your smartphone, which for the millennials is not a device but an extension of their wrist.



# Local Culture in Biblical Texts

- "... as even some of your own poets have said, '**For we are indeed his offspring.**'" (Acts 17:28)
  - ... w`j kai, tinej tw/n kaqV u`ma/j poitw/n eivrh,kasin\ **tou/ ga.r kai. ge,noj evsme,nÅ**
  - A quotation from Aratus, *Phaenomena*, line 5, which is a 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. text on constellations and weather signs. Apparently Paul knew secular but culturally meaningful texts.
- "... I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? **It is hard for you to kick against the goads.**'" (Acts 26:14)
  - ... **sklhro,n soi pro.j ke,ntra lakti,zeinÅ**
  - A known Greek idiom found in Euripides, *Bacchae*, lines 794-795 (5<sup>th</sup> B.C.) used as an equivalent of Aramaic sentence used by Christ (dynamic equivalence).

# Local Culture in Biblical Texts

- "Do not be deceived: '**Bad company ruins good morals.**'" (1 Cor 15:22)
  - mh. plana/sqe\ **fqei,rousin h;qh crhsta. o`mili,ai kakai,Å**
  - A quotation from Menander, *Thais* Frg 165 (4<sup>th</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> B.C.), Kassel-Austin PCG VI 2.
- "What the true proverb says has happened to them: '**The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire.**'" (2 Pet 2:22)
  - sumbe,bhken auvtou/j to. th/j avlhqou/j paroimi,aj\ **ku,wn evpistre,yaj evpi. to. i;dion evxe,rama( kai,\ u-j lousame,nh eivj kulismo.n borbo,rouÅ**
  - A quotation from Heraclitus, Frg. B 13 (6<sup>th</sup> / 5<sup>th</sup> B.C.), Diels/Kranz.
- Paul and Peter used culturally appropriate sayings to convey the message. We can do the same.

# Being Discreet in the World

- Jesus prayed in John 17:15 “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.”
  - if the kingdom of heaven was to advance, His disciples would need to be in the world, anchored to Him and influencing society at the same time.
- Paul wrote in 1 Cor 9:22 “I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.”
  - Paul’s testimony does not encourage us to take in every creative expression on the horizon. Discretion, as well as a value system anchored in a biblical worldview, is critical as we engage culture and the arts.
- While we can and should use media, we need to be discreet in how we use it. The three angel’s message is still what our mission is about.

# Some Extra-Biblical Sources

- New Testament authors used the language of the people: most texts are written in vernacular or conversational style.
- New Testament authors made use of the idioms, concepts and sentences in contemporary Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.
  - People were familiar with such writings. They had become parlance in spiritual matters in the same way as saying "9/11".
  - Heb 11:37 says that some were sawn in two for their faith. Christians reading that would likely see an allusion to Martyrdom of Isaiah 5:11-14 (assuming that portion of Martyrdom is 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.)
- Social media savvy pastor would make use of modern stories and parlance to convey his/her message.

# Revelation 2-3

- John sends seven *open letters* to churches in Roman Asia.
  - Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22 all say that each letter was to be heard by every church, not just the one receiving it.
  - A public tweet would be a modern equivalent to this (Twitter). Think how Trump uses Twitter to express his views (and feelings).
- These open letters are among the less cryptic portions of Apocalypse. They contain a straightforward language.
  - Each letter could be seen as an episode of a drama series.
  - Each letter deals with real people facing real issues.
  - One could make a video series based on these letters that deal with moral issues we face today.



# Revelation 2-3

- These open letters seem to use concepts that have parallels in the life settings of those churches.
  - Sardis was a nearly impregnable city that had been surprised by sneak attacks in the past.
  - Philadelphia was so named because of a historical instance of brotherly love.
  - Laodicea was known for its lukewarm water and its eye medicines.
- God meets people where they are and we should try to understand what it was that God was trying to say to the original readers.
  - If we want to apply Apocalypse for the millennials in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Europe, we need to know the local life setting and the historical background of the millennials we are attempting to reach.

# Aspects of Communication

- The seven messages of Rev 2-3 seem to form a chiastic structure (A-B-A').
  - Ephesus (1<sup>st</sup>) and Laodicea (7<sup>th</sup>) seem to have similar problems.
  - Smyrna (2<sup>nd</sup>) and Philadelphia (6<sup>th</sup>) are described in positive terms.
  - Pergamum (3<sup>rd</sup>) and Sardis (5<sup>th</sup>) seem to be losing their way.
  - Thyatira (4<sup>th</sup>) seems to have two phases, one negative and the other positive, and what is written about Thyatira is twice as long as the messages to the other six churches.
- A - Ephesus
- B - Smyrna
- C - Pergamum
- D - Thyatira
- C' - Sardis
- B' - Philadelphia
- A' - Laodicea

# Aspects of Communication

- The chiastic structure puts the emphasis on the centre: Thyatira.
  - Such structures are present in music. Compositions often begin with the same musical score that they end with.
  - The message of Thyatira is one of contrasts, which you find in social media discussion forums (good/bad, positive/negative).
- John is using a literary device known to those of his readers who were familiar with the Old Testament, at least to some degree.
  - Not everybody will understand. It is enough that the target audience does.
  - The communication itself is well thought-out. Hence, media pastors need to prepare well thought-out content.

# Aspects of Communication

- The messages follow a common seven-fold format: address, description of Jesus, praise, censure, exhortation, promise to the overcomer, and an appeal to hear the Spirit.
  - Media pastor's message *cannot* be one-sided. The message should give credit when credit is due, and point out problems when needed, including the way forward.
- All seven elements are found to some degree in each message with a couple of exceptions. Smyrna and Philadelphia receive no censure, and Laodicea receives no praise.
  - There is a need to adjust the way we say things in order to fit the situation at hand. The know-it-all attitude irritates. In social media it is a cardinal sin (social media tends to be unforgiving).

# Aspects of Communication

- Jesus has special knowledge about each of the churches. Each letter contains the words "I know." (oi=da)
  - Media Pastor *needs* to know his/her audience and their life setting.
- The various characteristics of Jesus are applied to the churches, and each church gets a unique picture of Jesus. Jesus does not approach any of the churches in exactly the same way as He approached others.
  - Each communication is *unique*. There is no "one shoe fits all" here.
  - Many people feel that there is only one way to think, to act, or to be involved in a religious community. But that is not the picture one gets from the seven churches. Many ways are possible. 🙌 You can be creative.



# The Issues Involved

- Ephesus: battling against false doctrines.
- Smyrna: hostile environment.
- Pergamum: letting wrong things stay unchallenged.
- Thyatira: good and bad co-exists.
- Sardis: spiritually (almost) dead.
- Philadelphia: only a little strength.
- Laodicea: inauthenticity.

# Reconceptualizing the Issues

- Ephesus: I am the one who's right on this!
- Smyrna: Why I ever decided to live here?
- Pergamum: White lies are not too bad after all.
- Thyatira: Live and let everybody else live.
- Sardis: Not interested. We have always done it this way.
- Philadelphia: Less is more.
- Laodicea: I assume, therefore I am. Who needs more?!

# Reconceptualizing the Issues (video ideas)

- Ephesus: a married couple sees a counsellor.
- Smyrna: an immigrant coping with a change of country.
- Pergamum: letting your spouse to cheat on taxes.
- Thyatira: dysfunctional family holiday.
- Sardis: Brexit Agreement.
- Philadelphia: an exhausted person helps elderly into an open store.
- Laodicea: a blind person reads fake news.

(yes, these were just off the top of my head)

# Putting It All Together

- Use state of the art medium: YouTube.
  - Don't wait for people to come to you. Go where they are (Internet).
- Make a video that addresses recipients real issues (relevancy).
- Video should be short and to the point. Millennials have a short fuse.
- Use everyday language. Tap into the rich cultural heritage of your recipients.
  - It's okay to speak a non-church parlance. The apostles did so.
- Structure your message carefully in a way that is familiar.
  - You can take a look at famous vloggers. They keep it simple.

# Putting It All Together

- Keep in mind that Jesus is the answer to whatever is the issue. When you aim for a change, do not forget to tell the audience what they gain if their life changes.
- Use both reason and emotion, but ground your message to reason.
  - Audience expects your videos to be a holistic experience. It is not enough to have a dry lecture.
- Whenever you can, engage the millennials themselves in the production of your videos.
  - You can change their lives in the process (two birds with one stone!)



# Putting It All Together

- You can make references to culturally known phrases.
  - “A long time ago in a galaxy far far away” ➡ “Some time ago in a church far far away”
- Plan A: make a short video on a real issue in your local setting.
- Plan B: make a longer video where the millennials discuss about that real issue. Allow them to express themselves.
- Plan C: make a short follow-up video in which you present Jesus as the answer to the issue at hand, and end with a call to action.

# Practical Tips

- A good script!
  - Content matters! Even RED cinema camera won't help with poor content.
- At least a good DLSR like e.g. Sony a7, Panasonic GH5s, or Fujifilm X-T3.
  - Millennials expect your video to be of good quality. Cheap is no longer an option. (TV programmes are filmed with high-end cinema cameras nowadays)
- An external microphone (internal ones are not that good yet).
- Lighting equipment. DO NOT film in darkness (temporal and spatial noise).
- Millennials willing to help you! The more the better.
- If you don't know how to cut and edit your own videos, find somebody to do it for you, unless you are willing to learn it.
  - You can use DaVinci Resolve. It's free and professional.

# Practical Tips

- Video is a *visual* medium. Use its possibilities.
  - You can add graphics, lower thirds, animations, visual effects, green screen shots, colour grading etc.
  - Use appropriate sound effects and music in the background: cheerful, happy and relaxing music helps as we aim to give HOPE to the dying world.
  - YouTube contains a lot of how-to-do tutorials on all aspects of making a good quality video. It is easy to learn these things now.
  - Make the use of movement. Do not stay static all the time.
  - Aim for a documentary style filming with not-too-rapid changes of viewing angles.
    - Neurological studies show that switching the viewing angles constantly in rapid sequences just confuses the brain and shuts down the frontal lobe.

# Good Examples

- Lineage Journey ([www.lineagejourney.com](http://www.lineagejourney.com))
  - Each video is short and to the point.
  - Each video has a clear message.
  - Each video has a call to action.
- A secular example would be Linus Tech Tips
  - <https://www.youtube.com/user/LinusTechTips>
  - Deals with pressing issues on current computer technology.
  - Filmed with RED cinema cameras.
  - 8,7 million followers because he and his team are **relevant**, which means he has a lot of sponsors.

# Finally

- Every pastor should be a media pastor in some ways nowadays in order to be relevant for the 21<sup>st</sup> century Europe.
  - But don't neglect other parts of being a pastor. Social media is not a 24/7 job.
  - Find a balance between social media work and the rest of your time as a pastor.
- Personal note: media ministry should be part of the theological training.
- Thank you.