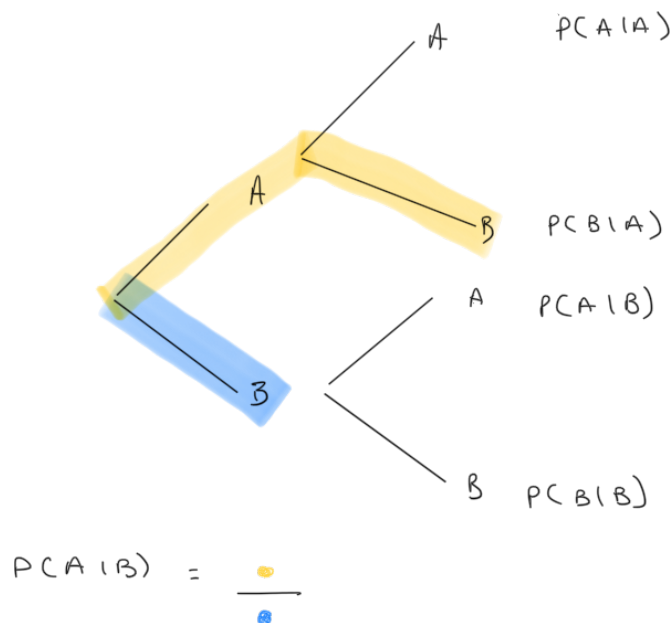


The phrase “social connections” has an abstract meaning in my life. Had this same question been asked to me before the pandemic, I suppose that the answer would have been clearer. However over the last few years as the world has adjusted to this new digital environment, one aspect seems to have been discounted. For over 1 year, we as primarily social animals were isolated within our own bubbles during the lockdown restrictions onset by the global pandemic. The way we interact, build relationships and share information with one another has been redefined and as a result so has the notion of the social connection.

I see learning from others to aggregate multiple perspectives and life experiences in order to create a sound understanding of the reality that we live in. The more diverse this pool of inputs, the more realistic the world view that one can adopt. However, a question that I always asked myself was how you selectively choose which information to let yourself be influenced by? It is easy to only select information which confirms your prior world-belief and succumb to a life of ignorance; however I believe that the act of learning or even having the potential to learn new things is the spark of innovation. Ignorance was not an option.

Fortunately, this question was answered for me at a random moment during my Neuroeconomics class at Bocconi University. This was a challenging class to say the least which explored whether behavioural economic models could be mapped by your various brain circuits (they can!). However one thing to note was that everything that we learnt was entirely normative and preference based. One particular topic came where the professor said “If there is one thing that you take away from this class and into your life, it needs to be this” – Bayes Theorem. As soon as I heard this, being a student from BAYES business school I felt slightly anxious. This was not because of the weight of the Business School’s reputation, but because I did not really understand what Bayesian updating was, despite being an ambassador from a School named after this theory. I could recite the formula off by heart and answer exam questions on it “ $P(A|B) = [P(B|A)*P(A)/P(B)]$ ” but what did it *really* mean!?

Well to get to the answer to this, I decided to draw a probability tree:



Now this was something that I could understand, yellow divided by blue. The probability of A given B changes as the probabilities of each individual action changes. That is, as one receives new information as signals, one should update their “equation” and form a new (updated) world-view. Bayesian updating in its most normative sense should be able to liberate oneself from the influence of overconfidence and erroneous information, if you update towards all pieces of information that you encounter.

With this new perceptive model that I was equipped with, I decided to reflect back on some of the experiences that I had at the business school where I met people from all across the world. Not only did they come from different cultures, but they had also been in lockdowns in their own respective countries. The one thing that we all had in common is that we were all siloed for a period of our lives. During these lockdown periods the only information that was given to us was from our social medias, which is built on algorithms that promote polarisation of thoughts. What this meant was that everybody who I had interacted with had been the most “extreme” version of themselves, simply because that is what they had been cultivating for a significant period of time.

With the reopening of the economy and the mixing of perspectives, those extreme influences and perspectives now have the power to update the belief systems of others in a profound way. The minds of those interacting with us have concentrated their weights on certain specific attributes of self, as opposed to an equally weighted rational brain. Having learnt the

power of Bayes Rule, I learnt that taking this perspective into your life allows you to create a “Bayesian Brain”. Learning how to update in the right direction is a difficult task, but an important one.

In this age the social connections that we form are different to the ones of the past. Today’s society represents one which is highly informed and educated. The people we are surrounded by are able to articulate their points well. The logic of their speech may “sound” good, however the assumptions have to be questioned, a conscious approach has to be taken in life to ensure that you update accurately to new information as opposed to only selectively filtering information that confirms your prior beliefs.

It was the connections that I made with my Professors, right from the beginning with Dr Caroline Wiertz’s Critical Thinking module which exposed me to the power of Bayes theorem. It was only a year later that I learnt to appreciate how it can be used. I still have a long way to go to learn how to use it in my daily life. However, I have been exposed to one of the greatest lessons provided by the help Thomas Bayes: *This game of life requires constant evolution of the mind, and to do that, information is required, choose carefully.*