

What does imho mean?

By Robinson Meyer

- 1 It's impossible not to like *imho*. If you've spent any time online, you've seen the word at least a dozen times. It usually sets off an opinion from the text around it: *Those jeans don't look very good, imho*.
- 2 But it's a pliable little devil. Depending on its context, *imho* can function as a gentle nudge or a punch in the gut. It can ease you into the persuasive mode: *This is all smart but imho you need to talk to him again*. It can spring-load sarcasm: *imho this column is Absolutely Correct*. It can set off a punch line: *Nuclear war sounds pretty bad imho*. Much like *lol* or *omg*, it can 35. It can even be a little phatic.
- 3 Yet on Wednesday *imho* suffered an apparent crisis. Employees at *BuzzFeed* reportedly could not agree on what the letters in *imho* represented. Some staffers claimed they meant "in my humble opinion." Others said that *imho* stood for "in my honest opinion." They turned it into content and posted a poll (which is silly, because democracy alone cannot determine correct usage). The debate soon metastasized across the English-speaking internet.
- 4 At press time, their poll showed "honest" in the lead with about 11,000 more votes. Here at *The Atlantic*, my esteemed colleague Alexis Madrigal has already weighed in on the debate: According to dozens of guidebooks dating back to the early days of the internet, *imho* stands for "in my humble opinion." What's more, there are many books that list *humble* alone, and many that list *humble* and *honest*. But there are none that list only *honest*. Etymologically speaking, Alexis is correct. The *h* in *imho* clearly did originate from *humble*.
- 5 But he's wrong about what *imho* means today. (Sorry, Alexis – I'm just being honest.) Think about it: *Honest* and *humble* have two wildly different meanings. They're not even talking about the same quality. *Honest* conveys something about the truth value of the statement that follows. *Humble* communicates its tone and emotional charge. If *imho* could legitimately mean either *humble* or *honest* – and half of us have been using it one way, and the other half the other – then we live in semantic anarchy. We were all typing, *clickety-clacking* with our fingers, but we weren't communicating anything. If *imho* can mean *humble* or *honest*, then the internet is full of noise and empty of soul: little more than a broadband Tower of Babel.

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