POSTERS

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Impact of cultural and religious literacy: Implications for information literacy

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Abstract

Today, more than ever, there is an abundance of information and points of access that can complicate the information seeking process, even in religious communities and cultures. People are overwhelmed with information and tend to seek information from those they trust; consequently, individuals are oftentimes blindly trusting these sources. It is important, therefore, to create awareness of misinformation in religious communities/cultures, including ways it can be spread, and the role of critical thinking as a defense against it. This study looks to examine the relation of information literacy within religiously enforced cultures.

KEYWORDS

cultural literacy, information behavior, information literacy, religious literacy

1 | STUDY DESCRIPTION

The objective of this study is to discover how information literacy compliments religious and cultural literacy in a broad context. Religious literacy impacts many aspects of a person's life and is important because it influences their everyday lives. Religiosity can often be based in tradition, and consequently, people most often learn religion in a traditional way. However, just because it can be rooted in tradition does not mean that the traditional teaching is always best. In fact, students from the Harvard Divinity School are finding ways to meld religious literacy with socially popular platforms. They are taking the word of God and projecting the message in ways that are culturally and socially popular, like podcasts and social media platforms such as Twitter (n.d.b). This example highlights how both cultural and religious literacies can be used to benefit people. The students wanted to share traditional, religious

information and also had a good idea of how to reach their audience due to cultural trends.

The purpose of this study is to explore how information literacy is incorporated in populations heavily influenced by religion and religious culture. The study will determine how people who identify with certain religions receive their information and what they do to verify that information. This study will also show that religion and culture can influence information and the ways people seek information. This poster describes the preliminary organization of an in-depth study.

2 | EXAMINING THE LITERACIES: INFORMATION, CULTURAL, AND RELIGIOUS

There are many governments and environments around the world that are heavily influenced or even controlled

by religion. Many of these environments can be considered a culture of their own. One observation made by spending time within these environments is that people tend to trust the words of religious officials or those who seem to possess significant religious knowledge without questioning the source. Critically thinking about what that person is saying and referencing the source text is rarely done. In other words, if a religious leader advises that something is against the religion, unethical, or immoral in accordance with the religious standards, the person will usually trust that and adapt their lives accordingly, without trying to confirm the information themselves.

2.1 | Information literacy

Because information itself is broad, information literacy is a very broad term with many definitions. For purposes of this study, the term information literacy strictly focuses on the compilation, evaluation, and distribution of information. As cited in Burch (2016) "the American Library Association (ALA) defines information literacy as enabling an individual to 'recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information' (ALA, 1989)." With this, there is also the implication that critical thinking is a large component of information literacy; this is emphasized through effective evaluation and use of information. There are a number of reasons why information literacy is an important skill; one of the most highly considered reasons would be the validity and credibility of the information. This is the most basic benefit of information literacy. According to a study conducted by Ross, Perkins, and Bodey (2016), students who were information literate actually showed higher rates of academic motivation: "Information literacy is a core skill set required for both academic achievement and also more broadly for effective intellectual functioning in an information dense world" (p. 8).

2.2 | Cultural literacy

Religious institutions themselves tend to create a culture of their own; within any particular group of people who follow a certain system, one can find norms, similar mentalities, habits, and a general status quo. These can be formed by the religious institutions themselves, especially if the members have been attending the institution for a long period of time; many people are born into the institution and stay there because it is what is comfortable and familiar.Therefore, it is the unique context of culture

and environment that are the focus of this study rather than the religion as a whole..Religion is influenced by culture, and culture is also influenced by religion. So, within this study, it is important to realize that it is not a particular culture that is being analyzed, but the culture that emerges from the religious environment. Cohen and Hill (2007) explain this beautifully by framing it as a "collectivistic culture":

> Collectivistic cultures that are more often studied (e.g., Hindu India and several East Asian countries), certain religious cultures value social connections as an integral element of religious life, and group affiliations are seen as important, even defining, parts of religious identity. In collectivistic religious cultures, people are seen as fundamentally connected with each other and their communities. (Cohen & Hill, 2007)

2.3 | Religious literacy

"Religious literacy entails the ability to discern and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses. Specifically, a religiously literate person will possess: (a) A basic understanding of the history, central texts (where applicable), beliefs, practices and contemporary manifestations of several of the world's religious traditions as they arose out of and continue to be shaped by particular social, historical and cultural contexts and (b) The ability to discern and explore the religious dimensions of political, social and cultural expressions across time and place (Harvard Divinity School, n.d.a, para. 2)." This definition of religious literacy shows how heavily religion is influenced by outside factors, but specifically culture. This is why one cannot study or analyze religious literacy without taking culture into account.

2.4 | Implication for the field

Due to the vast amount of information being shared and consumed today, understanding issues surrounding information literacy is becoming increasingly pressing. Traditional religious cultures are being impacted by this change in our collective information culture in ways that are not yet fully understood, and this study proposes to fill that gap. Information literacy has been studied within many contexts, however it has been somewhat neglected within the fields of religion and culture. This study will help determine how information literacy is regarded within

religion, culture, and religious culture and it will also help determine how the different types of information are prioritized. By understanding how information, religious, and cultural literacies are implemented in these environments, we can begin to understand the information needs of these populations and how to cater to their needs.

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