



# RELIGIOSITY, COGNITIVE STYLE and INFORMATION SEEKING:

## Different Domains, Different Strategies

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### Introduction

As of 2012, 80.8% of Americans report believing in a personal God and more than half of the world's population believes in a form of God (Smith, 2012). It is irrefutable that religion can have a prominent impact on an individual's way of thinking. In fact, studies suggest a causal relationship between higher degrees of religiosity and an intuitive cognitive style (Pennycook, Cheyne, Seli, Koehler & Fugelsang, 2012; Shenhav, Rand & Greene, 2011). Other measures of cognitive ability, such as IQ scales, demonstrate a negative linear relationship between intelligence and strength of belief in God (Bertsch & Pesta, 2009; Lewis, Richie & Bates, 2011; Lynn, Harvey & Nyborg, 2009). However, little research (if any) has tested whether aspects of religiosity predict an individual's information seeking styles, particularly in other facets of life. Do those with a higher degree of religiosity utilize the same intuitive reasoning when faced with situations in other domains, such as shopping for grocery products or deciding a mechanic to use to fix their car? Or is this intuitive thinking style domain specific rather than domain general?

The current study is designed to examine the information seeking styles of people across several domains using one's degree of religiosity as a primary predictor. Our study is unique in the sense that it measures how one may seek information rather than how one may reason. Thus, we developed a novel measure- the Information Seeking Strategy Scale (ISSS) to tap into these previously unexplored aspects of information seeking behavior. The ISSS scored individuals on accepting, acting spontaneously and seeking empirical information. The goal is to identify if individuals rated higher in religiosity (assessed using various previously validated measures of religiosity) are less likely to seek information across various facets, or if this behavior is constrained to personal belief systems such as religious faith or political philosophy.

### Methods

337 participants (74% Christian/Catholic; 16% other religions; 10% Atheist/Agnostic) completed an online survey consisting of demographics and several measures assessing their degree of religiosity, cognitive styles, and information seeking strategies in seven different domains (social, financial, political, education, employment, medical, and religion). These measures were:

#### Measures assessing religiosity:

Emotionally Based Religiosity (Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999)  
Socially Based Religiosity (Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999)  
New Age Orientation Scale (Granqvist & Hagekull, 2001)  
Quest Scale (Batson & Ventis, 1982)  
Extrinsic/Intrinsic Religious Orientation (Allport & Ross, 1967)  
Religious Fundamentalism (Altemeyer, & Hunsberger, 1992)  
Loving and Controlling God Scales (Benson & Spilka, 1973)

#### Measures assessing cognitive style:

D- Dogmatism Scale (Ray, 1970)  
Locus of Control Scale (Rotter, 1966)  
Need for Closure (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994)

#### Novel Scale (outcome variable):

Information Seeking Strategy Scale (ISSS)

### Discussion

Information seeking strategies appear to be used differently across domains. The use of these strategies is influenced by one's religious affiliation and degree of strength in convictions. The ISSS is under further modification to increase reliability and test validity with other measures. Future directions include examining personality, as well as cognitive & religious traits.

### Results

RM ANOVAs confirmed that the information seeking strategies of **spontaneously acting** ( $F = 11.433, 1903.572 = 8.675, p < .05$ ) and **empirically seeking** ( $F = 10.582, 1767.243 = 2.539, p < .05$ ) differed across domains as a function of religious affiliation. The use of the **accepting** strategy varied across domains ( $F = 5.791, 1928.365 = 35.351, p < .05$ ), independently of religious affiliation.

Rotated Principal Component Analyses determined 5 composites for the religiosity and cognitive scales which were used to predict information seeking strategies in each domain : **Internal Religiosity** (fundamentally religious), **External Religiosity**, an **internal Need for Control**, **Intransigency**, and a **Need for Certainty** (discomfort with ambiguity). **Sex** , **political and religious affiliation** were also entered into regressions as predictors.

Individuals with greater cognitive intransigence showed lower levels of empirical information-seeking across all domains ( $\beta = -.359, t = -6.129, p < .001$ ), but those with greater internal religiosity and a need for certainty showed significantly higher levels of empirical seeking strategies ( $\beta = .168, t = 2.418, p < .05$ ;  $\beta = .197, t = 3.749, p < .001$ ). Specifically in the religious domain, greater intransigence again predicted lower levels of empirical information-seeking ( $\beta = -.232, t = -3.976, p < .001$ ) while those with an external sense of religiosity and a need for control reported greater use of empirically seeking strategies ( $\beta = .209, t = 3.864, p < .001$ ;  $\beta = .138, t = 2.682, p < .05$ ).

Those higher in internal religiosity ( $\beta = .191, t = 2.640, p < .05$ ) and external religiosity ( $\beta = .254, t = 4.483, p < .001$ ) reported greater use of acting spontaneously across all domains. Those higher in external religiosity ( $\beta = .40, t = 7.35, p < .001$ ) reported greater levels of accepting across all domains.

Christians were more likely to act spontaneously, ( $\beta = -.40, t = -7.54, p < .001$ ) whereas atheists and agnostics were more likely to seek empirically ( $\beta = .17, t = 2.88, p < .01$ )

### References

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