

RELIGIOSITY AND INFORMATION SEEKING ACROSS DOMAINS

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Introduction

As of 2012, 80.8% of Americans report believing in a personal God their entire life 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 strong 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 these associations are consistent with 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 which mechanic they should 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 variable. 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 higher in religiosity (assessed using various previously validated measures of religiosity) are less likely to seek information across various facets, or to see if this behavior is constrained to personal belief systems such as in religious faith or political philosophy.

Methods

453 participants (79% Christian/Catholic; 9% other religions; 12% Atheist/Agnostic) completed an online survey consisting of demographics and several measures assessing their degree and of religiosity, cognitive styles, and their information seeking strategies in seven domains (social, financial, political, education, employment, medical, and religious). These measures were:

Measures assessing religiosity:

Emotionally Based Religiosity (Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999)
Socialization 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)

Measures assessing cognitive style:

Information Seeking Strategy Scale (ISSS)
D- Dogmatism Scale (Ray, 1970)
Locus of Control Scale (Rotter, 1966)
Need for Closure Scale (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994)
General Decision Making Style (Scott and Bruce, 1995)
Decision Outcomes Inventory (Bruine de Bruin et al., 2007)
BFI Measure of Personality (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991)

Discussion

The results indicated that those with a greater degree of religiosity tend to seek empirical information less in the religious domain, but this pattern is not consistent in other domains. Therefore, empirical information seeking styles of religious individuals appear to be domain specific rather than domain general. Further analysis is underway to explore how the different information seeking strategies vary in each of the seven domains compared to the religious domain. In addition, we will expand the program of research to further explore the specific aspects of personality and cognition that may correlate with differences in information seeking. Demographics such as sex, income, and political affiliation will also be examined.

This study is very important to understanding how religious beliefs may influence the way people seek information and make decisions (or vice versa). By understanding where associations lie, we can dig deeper into the cognitive mechanisms that may contribute to the manifestation of religious traits, such as belief-biases, in order to seek information more rationally and clearly. This may also help us comprehend a great deal about why people seek information differently, and even how we change or manipulate the way we may want to naturally seek information.

Results

RM ANOVAs confirmed ISS strategies were applied differently across domains (intuitively accepting: $F(5.82, 2613.60) = 19.74, p < .05$; spontaneously acting: $F(5.63, 2535.99) = 16.89, p < .05$; empirically seeking: $F(5.83, 2624.08) = 28.81, p < .05$).

Principal Component Analyses determined composites for the religiosity and cognitive scales, which were used as predictors to determine whether different aspects of religiosity and cognitive styles predicted information seeking strategies in the religious domain and in all domains combined.

Individuals with greater dogmatic and religious fundamentalism showed lower levels of empirical information-seeking in the religious domain ($\beta = -.213, t = -3.347, p < .05$) and across all domains combined ($\beta = -.191, t = -2.866, p < .05$) but this was not a significant predictor of accepting information or acting spontaneously.

References

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* Scale references available upon request

