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Technology and Theology: A Qualitative Study of Social Media Use for Religious Education

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Abstract: This study examines the experiences of Unitarian Universalist religious educators learning to use social media for religious education purposes. Initial findings indicate that this learning impacts overall social media use.

Background and Introduction

Research into social media (also known as Web 2.0 tools) has multiplied at a rapid pace in the last five years (Piotrowski, 2012). These studies have addressed the integration of social media into programs in higher education and adult learning (Forkosh-Baruch & Hershkovitz, 2012; Hamat, Embi, & Hassan, 2012; Lenoue, Hall, & Eighmy, 2011; Ranieri, Manca, & Fini, 2012; Thompson & Loughheed, 2012). This body of literature indicates that social media is a significant site for research in the field of adult education.

Moreover, social media has become of increasing importance to the field of religious education as several studies discuss the relationship between theological education and social media (Delamarter et al., 2007; Graham, 2002; Heinemann, 2006). However, these studies are not very recent and do not directly address how social media impacts the training and ministry of those working in programs focused on religious education. Likewise, few studies simultaneously address adult learning, religious education, and learning with and through social media.

Moreover, no studies examine Unitarian Universalist professional religious educators as adult learners or educators utilizing social media in religious education. Thus, the purpose of this basic interpretive case study is to discover how adult religious educators' learning of social media for religious education impacts learning and teaching in Unitarian Universalist religious education programs.

Theoretical Framework

Social network theory investigates the relationships between and among phenomena (people, ecosystems, social networking sites, etc.) and the impact these relationships have on whole systems of relationships (Kadushin, 2012). Further, social network theory rests on three epistemological perspectives: 1) structural relationships are more important for understanding phenomena than attributes such as age, gender, or ideology; 2) that these relationships or social networks affect perceptions, beliefs, and actions through a variety structures which are socially constructed; and, 3) social networks and the structures through which they manifest are dynamic and continually changing through interactions between and among their constituent individuals, groups, and organizations (Knoke, 2008).

Methodology

Each participant had attended a weeklong workshop that focused on utilizing social media for ministry and outreach. I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with each participant. To analyze this data, I used the constant-comparative method in which elements in interview transcripts, documents, images and media are compared against one another until themes and subthemes in the datasets emerge.

Findings and Discussion

Initial findings of this pilot study indicate that learning to utilize social media for religious education purposes impacts overall social media use. Both participants in the study began to use social media platforms (specifically Twitter and Facebook) more often after attending the weeklong workshop. However, neither utilized these tools intentionally for religious education purposes. In fact, what both participants took from the workshop was a better understanding of how they might utilize social media for religious purposes in general.

While these findings do not adequately address the purpose of this study, we now have some support to suggest that religious educator learning of social media for religious education ministry can positively impact attitudes on social media in various ways. Nonetheless, it is still not clear, what if any impact this learning has on learning and teaching in Unitarian Universalist religious education programs.

These findings also lend some support to the propositions of social network theory, mainly that people who share common characteristics are more likely to be connected and interact with networks in predictable ways. In the case of this study, both participants were connected by a shared the characteristics of professional identity and workshop training. Thus, their common characteristics might inform the similar ways in which they interact with social media platforms. Future research should focus on religious educators' use of social media in only one platform to provide a more detailed picture of how this group understands social media as a tool for ministry.

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The Inequity of Women in Art History: New Structures for a Changed World in Adult Education

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Abstract: This study examines the social, economic, political, religious, and cultural climate of gender inequity in art history. The outcome of the study is intended to ultimately create a more inclusive contemporary art history course for adult learners. It is important to adult education because it supports the individual along with other benefits to both the learner and the facilitator. The body of research and its findings within this study will be of interest to adult educators, art historians, women studies professionals and students.

Objectives

A feminist pedagogy class room designed to include omitted women artist. The course will empower and privilege voices of women artist's contribution to their social, economic, political, religious, or cultural climate of their time in history. This model is more balanced and less dominated by male artists and more conducive to today's diverse classroom. It reforms the relationship between professor and student, it provides a curriculum that is structured with social meaning and the student's own purpose and goals are emphasized. The course's structure will reflect the disparities in current educational practices.

Target Audiences

This research will benefit the learner, adult education, higher education communities, and will help reform relationships between student and professor, build community, empower and privilege women artist's voices. The outcome of the study is intended to ultimately create a more inclusive contemporary art history course for adult learners. This study is important to the field of adult education and benefits the student and instructor by creating a climate for discourse, growth, and sharing.

Theoretical Framework

Through feminist research, I discover some of the women artists who have not been properly recognized as significant contributors of art history. These women are from all periods of art history that have gone missing, the study will unfold the possible reasons women's art work is not or was not in America's art history books and why their work is a substantial art contribution and is of social historical importance. With the information gathered, I estimate reasons why this underrepresentation of women artist existed and still persists today.