

Religious Studies Scholarship is Not Widely Available via Open Access, but Some Authors Share Their Work through Institutional Repositories or Social Networking Sites

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Evidence Summary

Religious Studies Scholarship is Not Widely Available via Open Access, but Some Authors Share Their Work through Institutional Repositories or Social Networking Sites

A Review of:

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Abstract

Objective – To examine the current state of open access scholarship among the most highly rated religious studies journals.

Design – Quantitative analysis.

Setting – Research articles published in 2014, in the ten most highly rated religious studies journals.

Subjects – 377 peer-reviewed articles.

Methods – Using the SCImago Journal & Country Rank, the researcher identified the top ten most cited religious studies journals from mid-2015. Articles published in these journals during 2014 were evaluated. The researcher identified 377 research articles through online databases and journal websites. The researcher then used both Google and Google Scholar to search for these articles using titles and authors. If the article was not found, other search strategies were employed, such as the use of additional search terms, limits, and quotes, as well as other search engines.

Main Results – Open access (OA) versions were found for 132 of the 377 articles (35%), and the percent of OA articles by journal ranged from 5% to 100%. The researcher found 70 OA articles in institutional repositories (53%), 70 in Academia.edu or ResearchGate.net (53%), 19 from organizational websites (14.4%), 13 on personal websites (9.8%), and 4 on other sites (3%). The researcher found 44 articles in more than one location (33.3%). Of the 132 OA articles found, 87 (65.9%) were found by both Google and Google Scholar, and 43 (32.6%) articles were found by either Google or Google Scholar, but not both.

Conclusion – Overall, the research results reveal that finding OA content can be done via Google and Google Scholar. While articles in religious studies journals are not typically accessible through OA, authors who tend to publish in these journals who support OA may use institutional repositories or social networking sites to make their work available.

Commentary

As noted by the author, the growth rate of OA journals has far exceeded the growth of journal publishing overall, with the most web-accessible OA articles coming from the sciences, such as medicine, physics, social science, biology, chemistry and math (Avery, 2018). Studies have also shown that open access articles related to the humanities were few, representing only 4% of the total journal output (Avery, 2018). Among the published articles that explore open access growth among certain disciplines, there has been little investigation into OA for religious studies journals.

The study was evaluated using the CRiSTAL checklist for appraising a user study (n.d.). The research is focused on a specific topic: the OA availability of articles published in religious studies journals. Based upon the literature review and lack of evidence available related to the author's specific interests, the author provided a clear justification for this study. The study methodology was clearly described and a list of the top religious studies journals

was included, making this research easy to replicate.

While the author used Google and Google Scholar to find 132 OA versions of the 377 identified articles, perhaps there are other open access articles that could be discovered by using additional search engines. For a broader perspective, the author could continue this study by researching the journals in more recent years, as the articles analyzed here were published in 2014. As the OA movement continues to grow, the number of OA religious studies articles is most likely increasing with each year that passes.

A drawback of this study is that the author did not differentiate green open access from other types of open access, such as posting full-text on academic social networks or personal websites. The latter does not comply with open access requirements of most funding agencies. Only gold open access (OA through publishing in OA journals or hybrid journals) and green open access (depositing in institutional or subject repositories) comply with the OA requirements (Avery, 2018). Further, it did not provide OA information on subject repositories.

The study findings are relevant to theology librarians and academic librarians, especially those working as liaisons to religious studies departments. The evidence suggests that while some religious studies scholarly articles are available via OA, the bulk of the literature is still behind a pay wall. Furthermore, the data provides support for librarians to educate those faculty who are likely to publish in religious studies journals about OA and ways to share their scholarship, such as institutional repositories and social media. Because some faculty may not be familiar with OA or have hesitations about making their work freely accessible, librarians should also use the opportunity to educate faculty about copyright and how it relates to OA. Finally, because the study found that other types of OA (e.g., academic social networks and personal websites) were used more often than green open access, librarians can also educate users

on the types of OA and how to comply with OA requirements.

Reference

CRiSTAL checklist for appraising a user study.
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