

AN EXAMINATION OF THE TECHNOLOGICAL DELIVERY SYSTEMS
USED BY U.S. RELIGIOUS GROUPS

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Abstract

The latest Pew Report* shows the religious composition in the United States consists of more than 13 Evangelical Protestant Churches, more than 11 Mainline Protestant Churches, more than six Historically Black Churches, and the following more general groups: Catholics, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Orthodoxes, Other Christians, Jewish, Buddhist, Muslims, Hindu, Other World religions, and other Faiths. The research will provide an overview of the dissemination process, and then focus on those institutions that have moved toward technological dissemination, specifically digitization. The research will focus only on those groups with at least one of the following descriptors. They are: (1) affiliated with seminary programs accredited by the Association of Theological Schools; (2) affiliated with a historical society or archive, recognized by the denomination; and/or (3) accredited by the American Alliance of Museums.

Keywords: Technological Delivery Systems, Religious, Mainline Protestant, Evangelical Protestant, Historically Black Churches, Catholics, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Orthodoxes, Jewish, Buddhist, Muslims, Hindu, Other World religions, Other faiths, Dissemination, Digitalization, Association of Theological Schools, archive, historical society, American Alliance of Museums, Institute of Museum and Library Services

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Overview

Both authors are affiliated with two U.S. mainline congregations; specifically, American Baptist Churches USA and United Methodists. We are sometimes more scholarly than “religious” and at other times, more religious than “scholarly.” We are also a part of the African-American population, brought up in historically black congregations, obtained graduate and post-graduate degrees, and want to explore the accessibility of digitized popular and scholarly religious materials on many levels. That is, we want to determine if documents stored by our own U.S. denominations are available to us in a digitized format; and also available to the world’s population and institutions. Conversely, we want to explore whether documents related to the world’s religious groups are also digitally available to us here in the U.S. As librarians, we know how millions of document are readily-available via the internet, JSTOR, the Google digitization project, Google Scholar, electronic databases, and other publically- and privately-held collections. The one of us who is also a pastor, also understands the importance of quickly accessing popular literature, art forms, and even audio duplications; for sermon and/or ministry development.

Review of the Literature – Library, Historical, Biblical, and Theological Foundations

In order to view the information service landscape, the authors conducted a search of the literature to present a historical and contemporary perspective on the state of document storage, retrieval, and digital dissemination. There are two electronic databases searched to track the evolution of storing/retrieving historical documents as well as digitizing/disseminating *all* documents.

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Yale is the only one of specific interest to our project, because of Yale Divinity School. They have received funding since 2004 with a grant and then continued in 2010, with a grant from Arcadia.

A review of the literature on digital dissemination of documents by religious groups is insightful. Catholic organizations, for example, have digitized documents on immigrating Catholics to the U.S. The American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives preserves not only the institutional memory of the Catholic University of America but also the documentary heritage of the American Catholic people. In addition to University records, the archives houses the papers and organizational records of hundreds of historically significant Catholics and Catholic organizations, particularly those related to Catholic involvement in the history of American labor, as well as more than 5,000 museum objects.

Within the past 20 years, there has been considerable discussion suggesting that the number of documents stored, retrieved, and disseminated in digital form, is rapidly increasing. From EBSCOhost, the first database we search was Library and Information Resources. The second database is Religion and Philosophy Collection.

Regarding Library Services, Leibsohn (2004) cited four prominent colleges/universities as having “leading digital collections.” and/or participating in “significant digital-imaging projects”:

Smith College: Size: About 8,500 images. Sources: Slides, photographs, textbooks, and museum holdings. Financing: Grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

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Vassar College: Size: About 5,000 images are being scanned and prepared for use.

Sources: Museum holdings. Financing: Independent grants.

Yale University: Size: About 21,000 images. Sources: Slides, photographs, textbooks, and museum holdings. Financing: Library and university funds.

Art Museum Image Consortium: Size: More than 100,000 images. Sources: An international selection of public, private, and institutional museums.

Yale is the only one of specific interest to the authors for further research because of Yale Divinity School. It has received funding since 2004 with a grant and then continued in 2010, with a grant from Arcadia. We believe upon further research, we will find many accredited seminaries and religious historical societies will have begun collaborating with other groups in order to gain/give access to valuable, detailed information documenting the lives of followers and leaders. We were not surprised that archives and academic institutions were quite active in digitizing, and it will be rewarding to see other groups catch up.

There is another significant report published around the time of Leibsohn's results, indicating opportunities in other areas of library services. In 2002, the Institute of Museums and Library Services (IMLS), suggests a bigger role for public libraries. This is of particular interest to those of us who pastor communities where they may be limited access to the scholarly collections, either onsite or via electronic assess. According to the report, "...small museums and public libraries

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have made dramatic progress although they still lag behind their larger counterparts.” (IMLS Survey, 2004, 121).

Some religious scholars argue that the religious experience transcends the format. Gedicks and Hendrix addressed the question about the effect of the “original” versus the digitized document by providing examples of popular/contemporary materials which have satisfied the researcher. They rejected the supposition that the true intent can only be experienced by seeing/examining the original documents. They ask, “can encounters with God really be evoked by something as mercenary and prosaic as a movie, a television show, or a rock DC?” (Gedicks and Hendrix, 2012, 131). They conclude, “...postmodernism has underlined the implausibility of achieving social consensus on reality and truth in the face of widespread and persistent religious difference.” This causes the authors to believe that, even in postmodernity, there will be more to gain by disseminating materials and leaving the perceived value to the end-user, rather than debate on the validity/effectiveness of materials based simply on format.

Perhaps Groys (2009) is the most eloquent voice:

Digital images have the propensity to generate, to multiply, and to distribute themselves almost anonymously through the open fields of contemporary communication. The origin of the messages is difficult, or even impossible, to locate, much like the origin of divine religious messages. At the same time, digitalization seems to guarantee a literal reproduction of a text or an image more effectively than any other known technique. (p. 8)

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Biblically, Paul's letter to Timothy regarding teaching parishioners study, can also apply today to the *process* by which we teach and learn. Paul says, "*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*" (2 Tim 2:15, *NKJV*)

I prefer the New King James Version for this passage because of the gender-free noun (i.e., worker vs. workman). For us, it can also be denomination-free, culture- and age-free, as well as any other delimiter we might want to impose. According to Wuests, "concealed" or "hidden" are translated in the Greek as " 'to escape notice, to be unknown, unseen, hidden, concealed.' " The Alpha in front of the word makes it the opposite. So, the "Greek idea of truth is therefore that which is unconcealed, unhidden, that which will bear scrutiny and investigation, that which is open to the light of day." Of all the electronic formats (i.e. microform, video reproduction technology), digitization is the purest reproduction. Organizations surveyed indicated the top three priorities for digitization are: (1) Photographs, (2) Images of items in the collection, and (3) Historical documents.

Digitization reflects the truth; the closest to the original/primary source.

Jesus, undeterred, went right ahead and gave his charge: "God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age." (Matt. 28: 18-20, The Message)

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For example: In one of the denomination's "Popular Posts," there is a link to an article, "The First Black Orthodox Priest in America." The author, Namee, found the article by searching for digitized newspapers articles. There is a good picture of The Very Rev. Father Raphael, along with a photo in a Jamaican newspaper in 1913. The picture is the truth. No distortions to alter his appearance. This is very important to those of us of African descent. We want to see accurate reproductions of our dark faces. Because someone was "diligent," history has been accurately recorded digitally and disseminated to a denomination website; and because of the internet, disseminated to members of other denominations as well. ((Namee, 2009,)

Theologically, God is omnipresent. Whether the end-users are Christian or non-Christian religious groups, the wide dissemination of digital materials brings us closer to answers of the Who, What, When, Where, and especially, How. Many Christians believe that they are made in the image of God. Therefore, the study of God further informs any Christian (whether student or teacher) of his/her own Godly attributes. Thus, archival and contemporary collections of religious materials informs us of an omnipresent God through an omnipresent process of digital dissemination. Black theologian and historian, Pinn, writes about the civil rights movement and the involvement of black clergy. According to Pinn, from 1970 to the present, the black ministers continued to receive considerable publicity as the movement leaders, yet it was the laity, who was called the "foot soldiers," - black and white - who came out in full force for the sit-ins, boycotts, marches, and meetings (Pinn 2002, 17). Imagine the ease with which Sunday School classes as well as seminary classes, worldwide, can learn if more digitized pictures, objects, and

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original documents were preserved, digitized, and disseminated. Because God is also a contemporary God, one must believe that technology is designed to reveal God in the most accurate depiction – whether through humanity or via digitized primary documents finally removed from basements and boxes.

Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

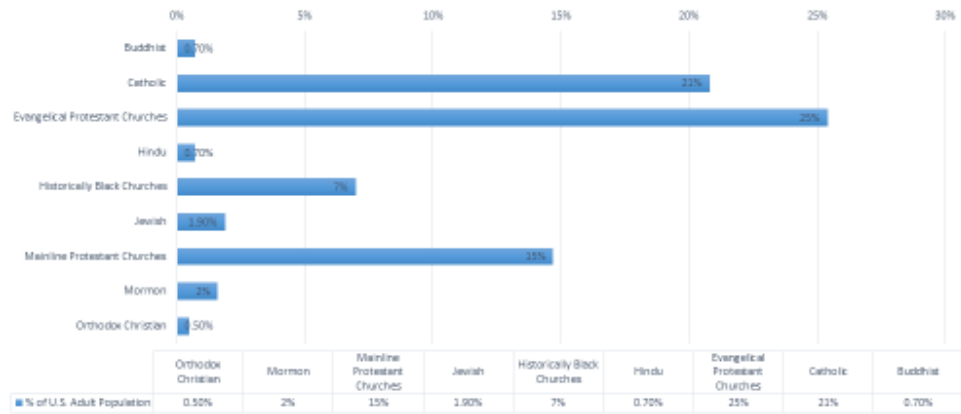
(John 10:10b) I believe God is in this plan for digital research and dissemination because God’s intent is for every person to be enlightened through the most direct process, individualized inquiries, whether remotely via a denomination’s website or onsite sifting through digitized collections open to the public.

Overview of Religious Groups and Denominations Selected for this Study

To provide a foundation for this and future research, it is important to think about the end-users, based on the Pew Report’s breakdown of religious groups: (1) Evangelical Protestant Churches, (2) Mainline Protestant Churches, (3) Historically Black Churches, (4) Catholic, (5) Mormon, (6) Jehovah’s Witness, (7) Orthodox, (8) Other Christian (e.g., Metaphysical), (9) Jewish, (10) Buddhist, (11) Muslim (i.e., “Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream”), ((12) Hindu, (13) Other World Religions, (14) Other Faiths (e.g., Unitarian), and (15) Unaffiliated, and (16) Don’t Know. (Appendix A)

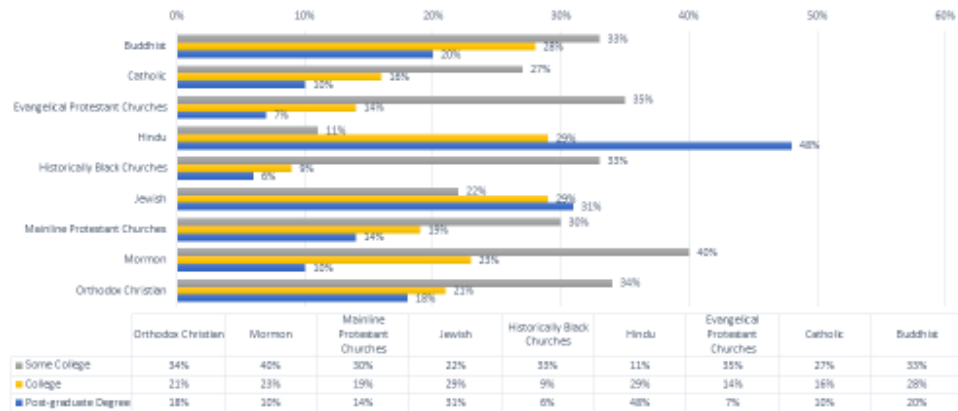
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Mainstream Religions Categories

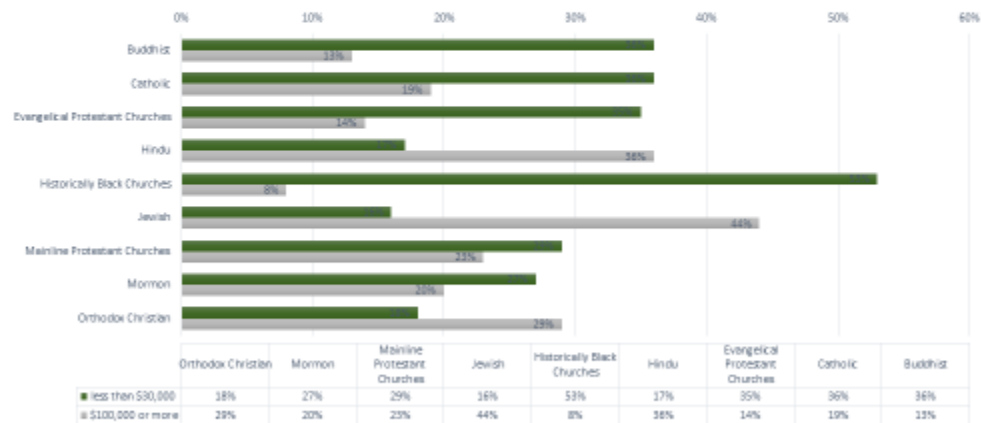


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Education vs Religious Categories

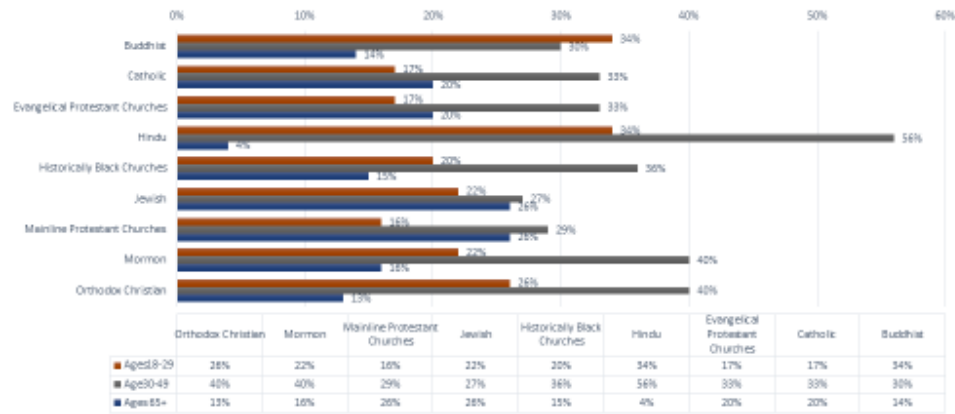


Income vs Religions Categories

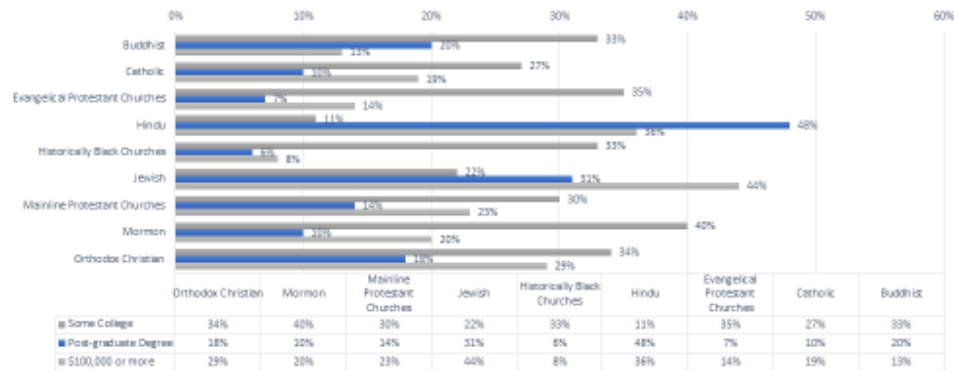


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Age vs Religious Categories

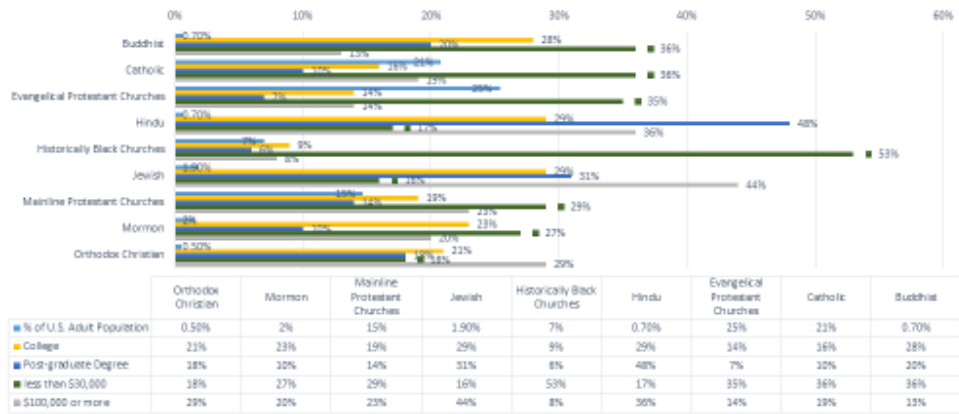


Religions Categories

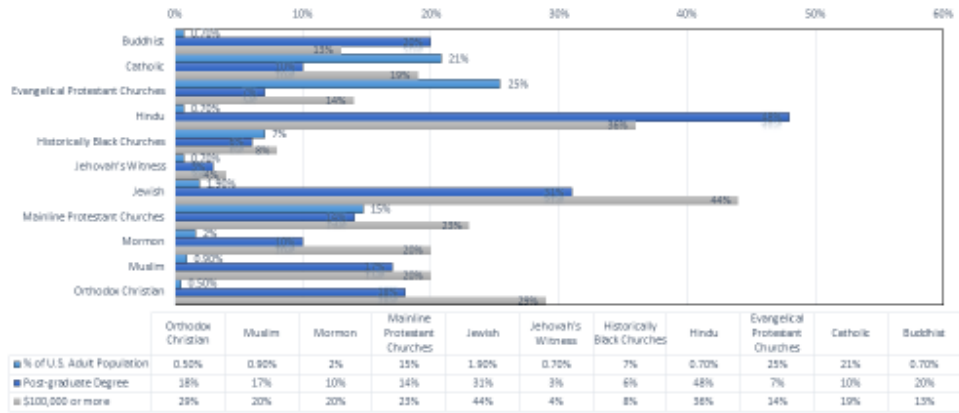


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Income & Education vs Religious Categories



Population, Post-Degree and Income vs Religious Categories



Time did not permit inclusion of all subgroups listed by the Pew Report. Therefore, two resources were selected to screen denominations for inclusion in the overview for this report. First, the

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authors selected the most densely-populated denominations as reported by the Pew Forum. Secondly, the Library of Congress listing of Religious Collections provided us with a good listing of acknowledged denominational depositories. Then, the authors used very basic criteria for determining if an organization met requirements for credible collections, storage, and retrieval of information. Finally, the authors examined the methods - if any - for digitizing and disseminating the digitized materials.

Delivery Systems and Moves Toward Digitalization

From the Library of Congress – Bibliographies and Guides – Religion

Find: Religion Collections

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/main/religion/>

While this is a guide to resources in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia; it is a good beginning for many centralized denominational collections.

<http://www.loc.gov/item/2011648826/>

Digital images of objects

Jewish

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/main/religion/hol12.mtml> (U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum Library)

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/main/religion/hol.html> (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives)

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Mainline Protestants

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/main/religion/npc.html> (National Presbyterian Church and Cener Library and Archives)

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/main/religion/wts.html> (Wesley Theological Seminary Library)

Other Site/Projects

Cleveland Public Library Digital Library

http://i1.wp.com/cpl.org/wp-content/uploads/images/departments/CDPL_Primary_Identity.gif

Conclusion

As librarians and Christians, the authors must face the challenge of *The Great Commission*, meeting the needs of both scholars, students, the curious, non-believers, non-Christians, and all other groups that have an interest in the voluminous religious collections in the U.S.

Based on the charts showing demographic breakdowns of religious groups, we find that the groups with the highest educational levels, also have higher incomes. The evidence also show that these groups would also have greater access to all research. However, those with low incomes and educational achievement, could also benefit if the materials were digitized. Regardless of educational levels, the U.S. religious historical and contemporary knowledge pool is invaluable. The delivery systems are available, yet

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scattered among academic institutions and religious archives. Federal funding supports the progress of digitalization projects at every level, including public libraries.

Further research is needed to delve into each religious group, examine via surveys, progress toward making collections available to everyone, even to the ends of the earth.

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