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VC Research Digest provides updates on current and ongoing research projects of Villa College staff and students, and provides fresh research ideas and snippets to help expand the horizon of research and inquiry

EDITORIAL

A Few Thoughts on Reshaping the Trajectory of Social Research in the Maldives

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Research may not be considered as glamorous compared to many other activities we engage in as professionals. Doing research is a time-consuming and a laborious undertaking, which in turn produces results that may appeal to just a few. Often, the only pull factor that drives researchers is their inherent curiosity and desire to create new knowledge. Many of us engaged in the field of social research appreciate that our work contributes to the timeless study of the human condition which attempts to understand various dynamics, forces and channels of influence in our society.

As scientific and technological progress creates new solutions to humanity's problems and challenges, various contexts in which people connect with each other and interact are also going through drastic shifts. Hence, the ability of social researchers to capture these dynamics and produce a sharper, focused and deeper knowledge of the society can be enormously beneficial. As a research community, it is indispensable that we give a more serious thought on the future trajectory of social research and how we can ensure that its direction is optimal and relevant to the current and future needs of the society. Appreciating the enormous scope of potential actions in this direction, here are a few thoughts on how social researchers can help shape that trajectory.

Mapping out our current understanding of the society from a knowledge point of view and then extrapolating that understanding towards the future can be the first step in setting a future research agenda. Setting out on developing a better understanding of the possible routes and directions that the Maldivian society is likely to take within the global potentials and opportunities can help us sharpen our focus in relation to research undertakings. While such a mapping is being done, it is vital to develop a strategy to cross-fertilise various research methodologies at the institutional or

national levels to help build complementarities across research disciplines. Use of multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary research methods can help identify intricate linkages across a wide variety of social phenomena, that could in turn support emerging domains of research in the social sphere.

Capacity development of researchers is an essential action that requires concerted effort from research institutions and the broader national institutions. Building technical capacity for researchers in areas of research methodologies, data analysis and other aspect of research is essential. At the same time, promotion of industry support for interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary training, which builds the spirit of collaboration and cross-pollination of ideas can go a long way in building synergy among researchers. Identifying and nurturing talented young minds to take up meaningful and impactful research projects is another fundamental action we must take. Developing and nurturing a culture of support and collaboration among researchers of different disciplines and those at different levels of research experience across multiple institutions is another vital action that can drive the research agenda forward.

Finally, at the national level, ameliorating the demand-side for research output is of the essence. Policymakers, business community and the public must demand high quality social research output that meets the expectations of intellectual and scholarly rigour. Institutions can take the initiative of creating new career paths for researchers and support them to achieve research excellence, which are aligned with the market trends for research. Establishment of an online social research hub where researchers of different disciplines and affiliations can network and share their research ideas would also help strengthen collaboration and offer a more enriched engagement and dialogue on research activities.

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The Use of Children's Drawings as a Research Tool

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Qualitative researchers employ a range of methods for gathering rich and thick data. How challenging do you find qualitative data collection? Qualitative researchers engage in data collection through means such as observations, participation, story-telling, and other sources through which thick data can be obtained from children. For example, having an informal conversation with children during focus group discussions and actively engaging in observation while they are at play can help derive more nuanced data than through numerical data.

Mayaba and Wood (2015) highlight the importance of methods chosen to be age appropriate when researching with children so that it enables children to contribute their ideas in the research process. This is due to the fact that they may not be able to understand interview questions or express their ideas fully to gather the required data. At times, research exploring children's learning capabilities, have used drawings or other visual methods to study phenomena related to toddlers or young learners. Moreover, such visual methods have had a rapid increase since the end of the 20th century (Leavy, 2018; McNiff, 2018). Drawings by children can have their own advantages over many other forms of gathering data, due to the cognitive ability, moods, and temperaments of the children. It can be an exemplary tool to portray children's voices and has been considered a valid instrument for content analysis by Cohen Manion and Morrison (2000). Analysis of this method requires carefully developed protocols that can be used to eliminate any bias elements during interpretation of these drawings

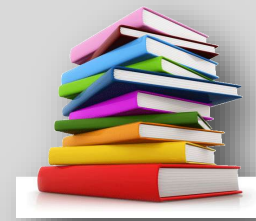
As drawings can be either subjective or objective, it is not always easy to interpret the intentions of the illustrations (Lyon, 2018). Although drawings can be an essential source for gathering data that voices the children's concerns and is a systematic tool that can be adapted to suit any focus, there needs to be a more detailed insight into the children's feelings and

thoughts rather than just depending on one-faceted perspective of interpretation by a researcher. The analysed data from the drawings could be misleading as there is no narration regarding the illustrations from the children validating the data. Hence, it is important to validate this method by means of triangulation using dialogic drawings which provides additional information about the drawings from the respective illustrators (Virole & Ricadat, 2022). Moreover, it is apparent that drawings alone can only contribute to part of the story, and the researcher's engagement with children through dialogues is required for the complete analysis of the story that the child has to or wants to tell.

In this regard, using drawings can be improvised to make the data more meaningful and valid. This could be achieved utilising the dialogical drawings during data collection, which is an appropriate way of accessing abstract phenomenon (Virole & Ricadat, 2022). This combination of visual and dialogic method adds to compensate for the drawbacks of any misinterpretation of the drawings of young children. This is enhanced through democratic dialogue which saves the researcher from asking questions that may be otherwise ambiguous for children, as during an interview. The conversations that occur between the researcher and the child are, thus, normal, flowing, and comprehensible. Gibson's (1977) 'shared affordance of power and direction' complements the method. Through the use of dialogic drawings, the drawings are saved and returned to, by both parties for building shared meaning of the illustrations. The key to this method is patience, which involves careful and close listening, pace and direction in the conversations and the digital capture of voice and body.

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FROM THE WORLD OF RESEARCH

Addressing Social, Emotional Development, and Resilience at the Heart of Teacher Education

Marianne D'Emidio-Caston

ABSTRACT

Teacher education has found new direction in the demonstrated need for social-emotional development as a focus in our public schools. This article chronicles historic approaches to social-emotional development with references to various fields of study, leading to the recent consensus on what knowledge and skills define an appropriate education for the 21st century. A case study of one teacher education program that successfully integrates a focus on social-emotional learning is presented, using telling cases taken from teacher candidates' fieldwork and thesis projects. Additional evidence of successful preparation of teachers who attend to the social-emotional development of their students in their own classrooms is also presented. Teacher education programs interested in deepening and expanding a focus on social-emotional development will find both supporting theory and effective practices to obtain that outcome.

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SCAN ME



Planning for Strategic Publishing

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One of the very first strategic decisions to make regarding publication is whether your research will be serving your objectives best as an academic book (academic monograph) dedicated solely to your research topic or an academic journal submission. Each decision comes down to one thing: the impact of each publication on your career, in both the short and long term (Mund, 2021), and on the larger social impact and community engagement with your research from publication. Hence, it is infinitely worth developing your publishing strategy in deep consultation with experienced mentors, colleagues and professional publishers who have walked this road before.

Why is getting published important?

There are certain behaviours associated with academics who are passionate about publishing their work. These behaviours include, being excited about their research, thinking about ideas that actually can change their discipline, change practice in their discipline or change ways of thinking about their discipline, and having a really important contribution to make to and beyond academia.

Getting published is increasingly important if you are starting as Early Career Researchers (ECR) and you want to start building that track record of publication. Having a publication record is important to get an academic job and progressing in academic careers (Stiles et al., 2022). It is also crucial in terms of promotion and in some ways, it is a sign of prestige and recognition within one's discipline and academics are required to publish to build up their profile. This stimulates knowledge sharing, research and development partnerships, investments in research, and in the long-term, contribute to national growth and prosperity.

What should you be looking for in a journal?

There are so many academic journals out there, hence, it can get quite overwhelming to decide which journal to pick and which journal is going to be best suited for your research. There are a couple

of things to consider. One is context and the other is the audience. Consequently, you need to think about how your research idea is going to tap into a particulate audience (Welzenbach, 2022). Once you have a clear understanding of the context and audience, then you can look for journals that seem to suit or match the type of research you want to disseminate and publish.

There are ways of going about choosing a journal. Certain types of research will only suit certain journals. There are great journal finders and databases that give specific information about the impact, reach and quality of each journal (Welzenbach, 2022). If your research is not going to have any impact then it kind of loses the value of publishing it in the first place.

What can I expect during the publication process?

One thing to think about is timeframes, which can be a lot longer than what you think or expect. [SCImago](#), for example, provides information to authors about the submission process like how to submit, who to submit and also the format of the manuscript (Enago Academy, 2017). Usually, in high-quality journals, the manuscript goes to specialists in the field, where your paper will be read by two (sometimes three) specialists and they will write a report for the editors or the editorial committee of the journal. Based on this report, the editors will decide to either invite you to go ahead with the submission, and it may require minor or major revisions that you might have to make, which is something that you should expect (Balch et al., 2018). A journal will rarely accept the initial submission outright.

Even when you do get accepted, the timeframe can be very long in some disciplines. There have been papers that took two and half years from the point of submission and publication. So, you need to think about how long it might take for something to be published because, in times of the datedness of the research (concern for being out of date by the time it gets published), your paper might be needed to come

out quite quickly (Welzenbach, 2022). In addition, one of the biggest challenges that you have to expect as well is rejection. Hence, you need to think about how to deal with rejection and what you do with that in terms of how you move on at that particular.

How can I capitalize on getting my research published?

Getting published is a huge achievement and you should feel proud and should capitalize on it. There is a lot of self-promotion via online profiles like [Google Scholar](#), [Academia](#), [ResearchGate](#), etc. Often, pre-publication in a kind of draft form (e.g. working papers) boosts where your research goes. It can boost your citation metrics and the value impact of what you are publishing (University of Leeds, 2022). Thus, it is important to have those profiles so that when you do get something accepted for publication, you can upload your paper to capitalize on it.

Top tips about the publishing process.

There are three main tips to consider when targeting your publication (American Journal Experts, 2022).

Aligning your manuscript to the scope of your target journal: Do your research on the process of submission and also on where you are targeting. For example, what is it that this journal seems to publish? Look at previous issues to check what they have published in recent years. Check for patterns in the ideas and debates that authors have published to see whether your research fit with that journal. Simply cold-calling a bunch of journals and sending out multiple submissions is a bad idea and should be avoided.

Dealing with rejection: Rejection is really hard to take some time, but there can be a positive side to it too. Be positive about some of the constructive criticism given in the reader reports. Sometimes, rejection is just as important as acceptance and within each rejection, there are important nuggets of knowledge for you to be self-reflexive, for example, even if the paper was rejected, you can take the constructive criticism given to you. Some of the hardest-hitting and most cutting-edge pieces of research published were actually those that originally got rejected.

Maintaining consistency with your publishing: It is really hard for a researcher to balance quantity with quality. These two things often rub up against each other and are not always compatible, but it is really important to be consistent. Once you get accepted, it is important to use your experience to move on an upward trajectory to start having some top successes in publishing in top-tier journals.

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A Guide to Choosing a Research Design

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Research design details how a research study is planned to be conducted and is considered as one of the most crucial part of the research proposal. A research design provides structure and directions to achieve the research objectives. Even though the terms are interchangeably used, it is not the same (Maxwell, 2009). Research design deals with logical problems and influences the type of data that is gathered for a study. Hence, it is imperative to understand and be well versed in different types of research design. Knowledge about the different types of research designs will enable a researcher to choose the right data collection and analysis techniques to achieve the research objectives.

This article discusses the two broadly used research designs – quantitative and qualitative research design, the philosophical assumptions, data collection strategies, and sampling adopted in qualitative and quantitative research, keeping in mind most researchers choose to mix methods from both approaches, to obtain maximum validity of their research data.

Difference between quantitative and qualitative research

Quantitative research

Quantitative research determines if the phenomenon under investigation can be measured. Analysis of quantitative data is mostly done through statistical analysis and mathematical techniques that are different when compared with the analysis techniques applied to non-numeric or qualitative data. Important entities in quantitative research are variables, and hypotheses, which cannot be separated from the research. Variables in quantitative research are concepts that are assumed to have a variation which can be measured. The fundamental aim of hypotheses are to make assumptions that there could be an association between the expected variables

which can be measured and tested (Saunders et al., 2009; Watson, 2015). Often, researchers identify independent variables such as age, height, gender, type of employment, social class, ethnic background, place of residence etc and measure or test dependent variables and their effect on other identified variables.

Qualitative research

Qualitative research focuses on understanding the phenomenon under investigation through inquiring about people's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour. In doing so, qualitative research explores the phenomenon through lived experiences and deals with non-numerical data, to gain a deep understanding of the topic that is investigated. The most common qualitative designs are phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, case study, narrative inquiry, and action research.

Philosophical assumptions

Research philosophy as a whole is about giving rigour to the methodological choices applied within the research. There are several layers of critical questions that arise when undertaking research. These include questions such as the reality of how the problem is viewed by the researcher – ontological level.

Ontology deals with the nature of reality and to a researcher this depends on the worldview of how the researcher views the research problem. There are many different types of realities within the entire spectrum of ontology. It is about the researcher's belief how something makes sense. Hence, reality of the problem ranges from an objectivist viewpoint on one end of the spectrum to a subjectivist viewpoint on the other end of the spectrum.

Quantitative research stems from positivism where the researcher assumes that there is only one truth. In

other words, the reality is objective, tangible and holds a single truth. On the other hand, a qualitative researcher holds the belief that there are multiple truths and the reality is subjective when the entities of the research problem are internal to the social actors and the researcher deals with the nature of reality is based on interpretivism and constructivism (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Epistemology is the branch of study that deals with the 'theory of knowledge'. Some key questions a student should ask is what constitutes to be knowledge as far as the research is concerned? What are the sources of knowledge? Answers to these questions will address epistemological position. Quantitative researchers work with the knowledge being objective and they cannot influence how knowledge is constructed. However, qualitative researchers are actively engaged on knowledge construction. They interact with participants, understand participants' worldviews, and co-create knowledge with the participants.

Axiology is the role of value in research. For example, quantitative researchers work with facts as their means of meaning making. Facts are considered as the reality and single truth. Often quantitative researchers discard the value of subjectivity and considers subjectivity as a hindrance in their study. In contrast, qualitative researchers are aware of their own biases and that narratives are collaboratively created (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Axiology is shaped by the researcher's beliefs, attitudes and actions towards the research and research participants in providing meaningful interpretations.

Methodology

Methodological choice for research generally depends upon the research questions (or the objectives to be achieved in a research). Nevertheless, any chosen methodology is built upon a solid philosophical foundation where the underlying reasons explain all the technical details of how the research questions are fundamentally answered. Quantitative research is deductive in nature and provides objective interpretations. The most common quantitative research methods are experimental research, quasi-experimental research, correlational research, cross-sectional research, and longitudinal research. On the

other hand, qualitative research is inductive in nature and provides in-depth understanding of the phenomenon through rich thick descriptions of participants viewpoints (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Population and sampling

A common goal of quantitative research is to gather data that is representative of the population. Samples are a subset of the target population that is selected for the study. Every research is intended to understand, study or explain the targeted group for the study which is a subgroup of the population. This is one of the advantages of quantitative research is the use of smaller samples to make inferences to the entire population that would have been impossible to study (Bartlett et al., 2001).

There are two main approaches to selecting samples for research and they are probability sampling – where each and every case within the targeted population has an equal chance of being included in study and non-probability sampling – where different cases have different chances of being in the samples.

Probability sampling is necessary in most quantitative studies to generalize results from a sample to the targeted population. All types of random sampling fall under probability sampling see here for details (Saunders et al., 2009). Non-probability sampling is used in qualitative studies where the researcher selects the sample for a purpose or convenience. Researchers select participants who have gone through lived experiences under investigation and participants who are willing to provide rich descriptions of their experiences. Hence, the sample is selected with a purpose.

It is also important for researchers to be aware of inherent biases, when the target sample is selected based on convenience, such as accessibility to the researcher. For example, convenience sampling excludes outliers such as those in power or in influential positions in society.

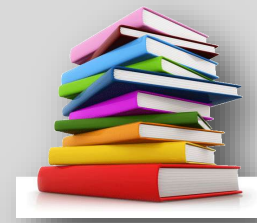
Conclusion

When choosing a research design, it is important to understand the core differences between quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative research is about measuring variables and determining the results

based on those measurements, whereas qualitative research is exploring in depth understanding of issues through people's lived experiences by understanding their feelings, thought process and behaviour. The major philosophical assumption of quantitative research and qualitative research varies in ontological, epistemological, methodological, and axiological stance. It is advisable for beginner researchers to adopt a suitable research design that matches with their philosophical assumptions. More advanced researchers combine quantitative and qualitative – known as mixed method to understand complex social problems.

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FROM THE WORLD OF RESEARCH

A Review of Using Machine Learning Approaches for Precision Education

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, in the field of education, there has been a clear progressive trend toward precision education. As a rapidly evolving AI technique, machine learning is viewed as an important means to realize it. In this paper, we systematically review 40 empirical studies regarding machine-learning-based precision education. The results showed that the majority of studies focused on the prediction of learning performance or dropouts, and were carried out in online or blended learning environments among university students majoring in computer science or STEM, whereas the data sources were divergent. The commonly used machine learning algorithms, evaluation methods, and validation approaches are presented. The emerging issues and future directions are discussed accordingly.

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SCAN ME



Principles of Cultural Historical Activity Theory- Part I

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While Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) has developed over generations and through variants, there are common principles that has guided this school of thought. These principles have stemmed from the Marxist ideology and were mediated through the work of Vygotsky (Avis, 2007). The central underlying idea of CHAT is the unity of human consciousness. According to Kaptelinin (1996), CHAT is a framework that allows humans to investigate human beings in their natural environment, guided by the principles that have developed over decades. The principles discussed in the following section are not only common through the various developments of CHAT but are critical to framing research. In this first part of the principles of CHAT will layout two of the principles that are most fundamental to research and understanding social phenomena.

Object orientation

Activity is the fundamental concept of CHAT, understood as a relationship between the subject, an actor, and an object, represented as 'S < - > O' and understood as a "unit of life" (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2012, p. 12). In other words, activities are oriented towards a specific object and learning and doing support each other, are prompted by an intention, and these intentions are aimed towards achieving the object of the activity. The object is transformed into an outcome as effort is made to achieve the object of the activity. These outcomes provide the motive for the activity. There is a dynamic relationship between the object and the activity as the object of the activity influences how the activity is carried out and this reciprocally affects the object. Depending on the nature of the object, which requires engaging in specific activities, this changes the role of consciousness. For example, the way the Interactivity Whiteboard (IWB) is utilised in the classroom depends on the object the lessons are meant to achieve. For a history lesson on prime ministers of Australia, internet websites related to the topic and videos on YouTube could be viewed by the learners in order to gain the information.

Through engagement with the visual technology, the human consciousness of the viewer is changed temporarily. Students also could make a flip chart on the IWB using these videos, photos and documents from the internet. By actively engaging in the construction of knowledge, their consciousness is altered permanently. In a mathematics lesson on subtraction, pupils could play subtraction games and do a matching worksheet on the IWB. Therefore, depending on the object of the lesson, the activity takes its form and, depending on how the activity is planned and carried out, what is achieved and what the learners accomplish depends on whether their consciousness is affected by the activity.

Animals, including humans, interact with their environment with the intention of fulfilling a goal. Actions, before being carried out, are planned at least tentatively, meaning (for CHAT theorists, at least) there is always an intentional object to consciously act upon. These plans might change as the activity unfolds. According to CHAT, intentions arise from contradictions as individuals become aware of in their world; for instance, the "difference between what they believe they need to know in order to accomplish a goal and what they do, in fact, know at any point in time" (Jonassen and Rohrer-Murphy, 1999, p. 65). From this perspective, the use of IWBs in teaching and learning in schools needs to be pre-planned around how the IWB will be utilised as a tool. CHAT also implies that planning the learning activity alone is not sufficient; who will engage in what role (community and division of labour) and what guidelines will be followed (rules and regulations) also need to be considered in order to ensure that the object of a lesson is achieved.

The hierarchical nature activity

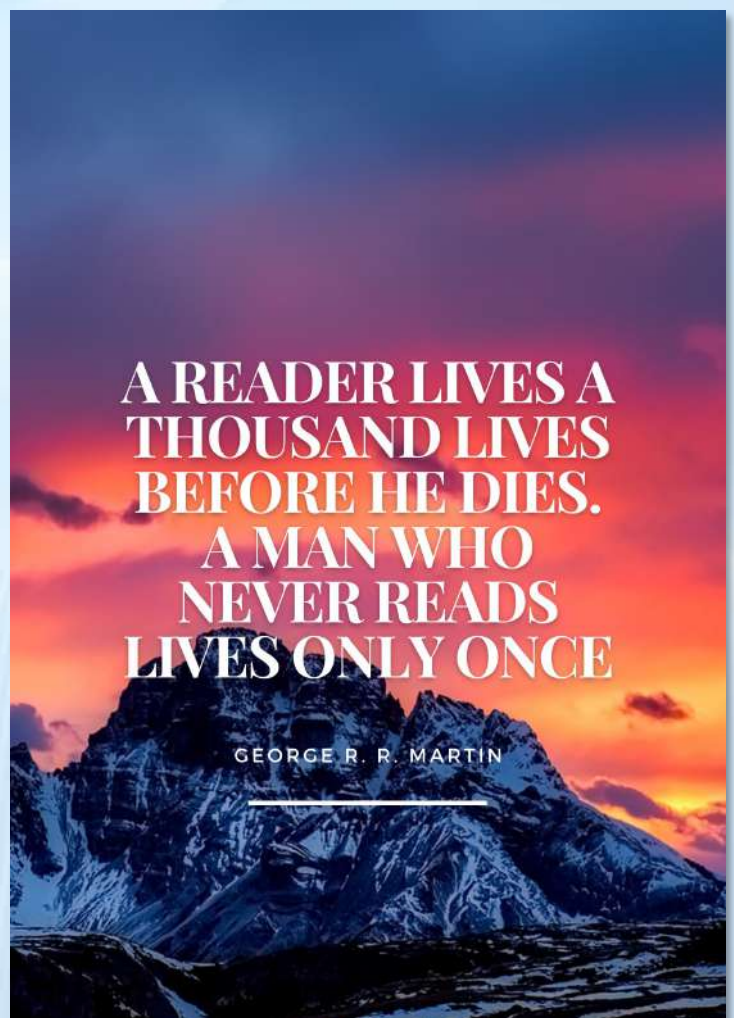
According to Leont'ev (1978), activities consist of a three-tier hierarchical structure: activities, actions and operations (see Figure 1). This three-tier structure is explained thus: activity is an object-

oriented and socially mediated process comprised of chain of actions, where actions are conscious, tool-mediated, and goal-oriented; whereas operations are routinized and therefore unconscious components of actions of a subject in response to concrete conditions. Operations are “the methods for accomplishing actions” (Leont'ev, 1978, p. 65). Leont'ev elaborated on this idea in his famous primeval collective hunt example. When an individual participates in a primeval collective hunt their role may be as a beater, and is to frighten animals and direct them towards other hunters, hiding in an ambush. This example illustrates that the division of labour supports the distinction between what motivates a person (in this case, food) and to what the person's actions are directed (in this case, making animals run away) and the conditions in which the person conducts their actions (Leont'ev, 1981).

In applying this structure in a learning activity in the context of IWBs, mediation can be explained as actions in the form of a sequence of operations (drag and drop, click, scroll, cut and paste, data entry). Operations, when first performed, are actions, because they initially require conscious effort to perform. Through practice and internalisation, activity subsides into actions, and actions into operations. For example, novice users performing simple *operations* such as drag and drop on an IWB are undertaking an *action* that requires accurate touch, and they sometimes drag it without releasing and letting it go on the exact position; to effectively complete the task of shifting material on the screen, they need to constitute what they are doing as a discrete *activity*, requiring conscious mental effort and even advice from another person. Over time, however, this activity subsides into an action, and eventually to automatic operations, where not much mental effort is required to achieve the task. However, it is important to be aware that this dynamic is bidirectional, as represented by the arrows in Figure 1; this means that operations can be disrupted and collapse *outward* into actions and actions into activity.

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Submissions to the VC Research Digest should meet the following guidelines:

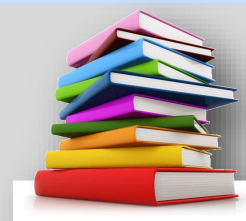
- Be between 700-850 words in length
- If a completed research project, it must at minimum include:
 - ⇒ Research title
 - ⇒ Research background and problem statement (including lit. review)
 - ⇒ Aims and Objectives
 - ⇒ Research question/hypothesis
 - ⇒ Methodology
 - ⇒ Findings
 - ⇒ Conclusions
- If an ongoing research project, it must at minimum include:
 - ⇒ Research title
 - ⇒ Research background and problem statement (including lit. review)
 - ⇒ Aims and Objectives
 - ⇒ Research question/hypothesis
 - ⇒ Methodology
 - ⇒ Expected findings and implications
- Articles on research methods should focus on any one (or few) aspects of high quality research and provide in-depth and practical insights
- Contributors can also forward links or details of significant research articles published in refereed journals to be included in the Research Mesh section.
- Submissions can be in either English or Dhivehi.



Submit your papers/ articles by going to this link.

<https://forms.gle/BgPT5TuijxMNriuD8>

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FROM THE WORLD OF RESEARCH

The Perils of Politicized Religion

David E. Campbell

ABSTRACT

In the United States, religion and partisan politics have become increasingly intertwined. The rising level of religious disaffiliation is a backlash to the religious right: many Americans are abandoning religion because they see it as an extension of politics with which they disagree. Politics is also shaping many Americans' religious views. There has been a stunning change in the percentage of religious believers who, prior to Donald Trump's presidential candidacy, overwhelmingly objected to immoral private behavior by politicians but now dismiss it as irrelevant to their ability to act ethically in their public role. The politicization of religion not only contributes to greater political polarization, it diminishes the ability of religious leaders to speak prophetically on important public issues.

Read on... <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48590942>

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