Editorial

Special Issue Editor’s Introduction: Religious Faith and Social and Applied Sciences

Utah Valley University’s Woodbury School of Business organized the Religious Faith and Social and Applied Sciences Conference which was held from October 10 to October 12, 2013 in Orem, UT. The conference highlighted how religious faith has always been an important part of everyday life, in all social and applied sciences. To this end, it brought together researchers who worked on the impact of religion in various fields. Their interaction would certainly help in developing further their research. Furthermore, the outcome and findings of this research would also help policy and other decision makers to better understand these issues.

Researchers from various organizations, colleges and universities from the four corners of the world showed how religious beliefs influence many decisions that are made over the years: economic decisions, political decisions, legal decisions, decisions about health and many more.

Some of the papers presented at the conference were submitted for possible publication in a special issue of the journal. Based on blind reviews by specialists in the field, five of these papers were accepted to be published in this issue.

This special issue covers several areas: binge drinking in the US and religion, Islam and human life, text mining analysis of religious texts and the impact of religion on youth outcomes as well as learning to make good business decisions better. Following is the highlight of each paper.

Binge behavior has long been the focus of economic studies, and the debate continues as to what causes individuals to engage in such behavior. Christopher Westley (Jacksonville State University) and Falynn Turley (University of Alabama at Birmingham) examine the role of religion and region on binge drinking. They find that regional constraints are influenced in part by the dominant religion and also affect the likelihood to binge drink by adherents to minority religions. They also find that blanket prohibitions on drinking, whether explicit or implicit, may cause individuals to binge drink less regardless of their effect on drinking in general. Furthermore, they find both culture and region are predominant factors on binge drinking.

Current literature in both fields of history and legislation concentrates on how Islam came in response to a cultural need to civilize the ancient Arabs. Ebtisam Sadiq (King Saud University) explains the historic background that describes the life of the Arabs before the advent of Islam early in the 7th century AD. Depending on historic sources, the study highlights the fact that prior to the appearance of Islam, the Arabian Peninsula was steeped in intellectual darkness and cultural ignorance. Compared to the surrounding nations and civilizations, its people were less enlightened on all cultural levels, the intellectual, religious, political, social, and economic. She shows how Islam fits for all times and people and selects aspects of history across a broad spectrum of three historical periods and examines them in relationship to Islam’s legislative matter. Finally, the paper explains how and why Muslims have relaxed their hold on Islam despite its valuable precepts and thorough legislative coverage. She finds that this lapse is no fault of Islam but of the political, social and educational systems that diverted from the proper Islamic path. She suggests that Islam’s moral and religious values, political, economic, and judicial directives can be accessed as sources
of wisdom in structuring modern familial, social and ruling systems. Furthermore, she suggests if Muslims have chosen to neglect such treasure, Islam cannot be held responsible for such lapse.

Over the last two decades, automatic text processing has improved in part because of the growth in availability of digitized text. Daniel McDonald (Utah Valley University) explores similarities and differences between nine religious texts by applying techniques used in the analysis of business and medical texts. The methodology he uses is the current methods in text mining. He extracted and categorized noun and verb phrases from nine religious texts: the Book of Mormon, the Greater Holy Assembly, the New Testament, the Old Testament, the Popol Vuh, the Qur’an, the Rig Veda, the Tao Te Ching, and the Torah. He uses the extracted topics as input to a Self-Organizing Map and separates the results of his analysis by noun and verb topic analysis and finds many interesting results. For example, of the verb inputs, 35 percent of verb topics occurred in only one religious text and also 36 percent of the topics occurred in only one religious text.

The existing literature has shown a correlation between participation in religious activities and positive social behavior among youth. Bryson Pope (Brigham Young University), Joseph Price (Brigham Young University) and Dean R. Lillard (Ohio State University) use data from several nationally representative datasets to estimate the relationship between church attendance and risky behaviors and whether these associations vary when one accounts for selective participation. They use various empirical methods including propensity score matching, sibling and family fixed effects models, and instrumental variables models that exploit cross-state variation in blue laws. They find more frequent church attendance has a real impact on youth behavior, specifically on current substance use (smoking, alcohol, and drug use).

Finally, the paper by Larron C. Harper (University Birmingham Alabama) studies the value of adding religious faith considerations to business education and addresses how barriers and pitfalls to the application of the learning in the real world workplace can be confronted. He suggests that Christian colleges and universities should be more deliberate in including biblical teachings in their course curricula. They can stress to their students that following God’s will and biblical principles that foster neighborly love, fair and just treatment of employees and business associates and service to community need to be foremost in their minds. This should encourage students to seek out business decision-making models that enable them to handle multiple objectives that improve business outcomes. They are more likely to make the extra effort required to complete all the considerations embodied in the proposed stakeholder model.

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