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Library and Information Services for the Study of Consciousness in the 21st Century[*]
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This presentation is grounded in the discipline of Library and Information Studies and addresses the ways which are available to us today to most effectively collect and spread the available academic information on the study of consciousness.

The rationale behind the vision presented here is the fact that there is a large amount of such information produced by researchers all over the world and stocked in various research libraries, but that the overwhelming majority of this information is neither received nor represented in the consciousness research and practice communities. Such communities have their own specific information needs and sources, which results in part from their unique positioning between the third and first person point of view.

I will first give an overview of the contemporary information landscapes, its sources and services, and then address some of the challenges that Consciousness Studies poses to conventional library and information contexts. Finally, I will present approaches to addressing more specifically the information needs of the Consciousness Studies community and close with a few thoughts on implementation.

The traditional information landscape is populated by public as well as research libraries with their physical card catalogues and more recent Online Public Access Catalogues (OPACs) as well as various specialized archives. The modern information landscape additionally features a whole host of recent developments in digital and/or online contexts. These include research paper platforms such as Academia.edu or ResearchGate, reference and literature management programs such as Mendeley, Zotero or Endnote, reference databases such as Psyindex, Open Access Repositories, preprint servers, citation searches like the Web of Science and so forth. Note also that today and for the digital natives, the main information source is the world wide web with its corporate companies like Google, YouTube and the various forms of Social Media platforms as well as Blogs, Mailing lists and so forth.

Thus, the contemporary information landscape offers us a large variety of possible information sources. If we consider even just the published academic information which is available today, this may be distinguished into monographs, collected volumes, journal articles and theses and dissertations – an important distinction since while all of these may contain important information on your subject of interest, you may have to search for them in different locations or different ways. Also note that many information sources today are available in print and/or online, which requires additional competency on behalf of the information seeker.

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[*] This text is based on my presentation at the Global Transpersonal Symposium III, entitled "Transpersonal Library and Information Services for the 21st century." While the original presentation focused more specifically on information services for the field of Transpersonal Psychology, the present text has been adapted and rephrased to speak more generally to the academic study of consciousness. Most of the points made here will also hold true for related fields characterized by the concurrence of scholar-practitioner viewpoints, transdisciplinary approaches as well as a location on the border regions of mainstream science (such as, for example, Contemplative Science or Consciousness Studies).

Now what kind of services do libraries and other information institutions usually provide to people concerning these sources? Such information sources may be located or retrieved, loaned, acquired and described in terms of their form or subject matter – the basic tasks of librarians. Furthermore, the already available sources may be maintained and preserved, and users or patrons may be instructed in finding and evaluating information sources, the latter which is referred to as "the teaching library."

With the contemporary information landscape with its sources and services in view, we are now ready to look at some of the challenges the field of Consciousness Studies poses to conventional library and information contexts. First of all, Consciousness Studies crosses the boundaries of research and practice. Thus, for example an information source published by an experienced practitioner on his subject may not be acquired by academic libraries since it lacks methodological rigor or for formal reasons, however the source may still contain vital information on its subject. Then, Consciousness Studies overlaps with some academic disciplines and excludes others. For example, there will be a greater overlap with Psychology of Religion or Philosophy of Mind than with Geography or Mathematics. Furthermore, Consciousness Studies often involve a transdisciplinary approach, while library and information services are usually structured across disciplinary lines, both institutionally as well as methodologically; and the novel and postconventional forms of scholarship of Consciousness Studies only exacerbate this situation. Currently, Consciousness has a weak institutional basis and thus lack the necessary information infrastructure, resulting in the absence of a clear picture of the field as a whole. Finally, a transcultural orientation leads to the need to include frameworks and concepts alien to Western modes of thinking.

For these reasons, one the one hand, information sources on Consciousness Studies may be underrepresented in more conventional information services, and on the other hand, consciousness researchers and practitioners may overlook research that is already available.

Rather than to call for a reform of the prevalent services and structures, I'd like to propose to look directly at what could be done to better meet the information needs of the community of consciousness researchers and practitioners. The resulting services which will be proposed here are all digital in nature, because this form greatly facilitates the availability, the access and the spread of information.

The most basic service takes the form of a bibliographic database, like a catalogue. Imagine, with one search request in such a database, you could identify all the available information sources on your favorite subject – even though you would still have to retrieve the actual source from elsewhere. If you add to such a database also the access to the digital full texts, we arrive at an online library. And if you add to this also advanced search functions, this results in a full and complete online resource. Note that whereas the bibliographic database provides only information *on* information, the online library *additionally* provides the sought information sources itself and the online resource provides the sought information *in new forms*.

Considering the amount of available information on consciousness as a topic of study, any such service will have to define fields of concentration, such as more scholarly or more practical orientation, the granularity of the service or how much attention will be given to detail, i.e. how "deep" to go into the metadata and/or full texts, as well as the scale of the service, i.e. whether it should include the most recent, the most popular, or even the complete information available. Thus, the various aspects of an information source may be captured to various depths in the various possible services outlined above.

There are a range of potential benefits of such services for both within and without the community. First of all, it would be an occasion to establish an information architecture relevant to Consciousness Studies contents, that is to say, those subjects and concepts that would arrange all of the information sources into a meaningful and interconnected whole. This structure could also be used to navigate and represent the current state of research in specific areas. The spread and public access and knowledge available in Consciousness Studies would be facilitated, which could also be used to demonstrate its research and evidence base. Finally, within the community of practitioners misunderstanding or misappropriation may be prevented.

Such a visionary form of library and information services for the field of Consciousness Studies would be implemented as a centralized information service with decentralized access, which is digitally available anywhere anytime and established by a consortium of key players, while protecting the intellectual rights of authors.

About the Author

My main interest and passion currently lies in the interdisciplinary and applied fields of Consciousness Studies and Transpersonal Psychology and their potential to provide a new paradigm for individual, social and cultural transformation based on traditional knowledge as well as modern science.

I hold an academic background in Tibetan and Buddhist Studies as well as Library and Information Studies from the University of Vienna and have completed various post-graduate studies with additional training in mindfulness-based, psychosocial and psychotherapeutic interventions. In the course of my studies, I have attended a library internship at the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center as well as a clinical research internship at the Oxford Mindfulness Centre.

On the basis of my previous work experience as librarian, editor and translator, next to occasionally teaching, lecturing and writing, I am currently engaged as a freelancer in various professional activities which provide contemplative training and academic information services.