Capital as the outcome of information practices: a study of devotees and monks of a Theravada Buddhist Temple

Hilary Yerbury

Pethigamage Perera

Michael Olsson

Abstract

- Purpose

  The outcomes of information behaviours have traditionally been conceptualised as use or effects. The adoption of a sociological stance, based on a practices approach, provides the opportunity to challenge these understandings. The non-Western setting further enhances the possibilities for conceptualising the outcomes of information practices as forms of capital.

- Design/methodology/approach

  This ethnographic study uses a Bourdieusian approach to investigate the information practices of diasporic devotees and monks of a Theravada Buddhist Temple in Sydney, Australia. The insider position of one researcher brought strong insights to the data, while the theoretical approach shared with the other researchers reinforced an outsider perspective.

- Findings

  The Temple's online sources and personal communication with other devotees provide a diverse range of sources that devotees use in information-based cultural practices and everyday life information practices. These practices lead to outcomes that can be identified as economic, social and cultural capital. *Pin* or merit emerges as an important outcome of practices which is not easily accommodated by the concept of outcome, nor by Bourdieu's categories of capital.

- Originality

  Adding to the small number of studies concerned with information practices in a spiritual context, this study shows the value of a Bourdieusian approach in identifying the outcomes of information practices as capital, but highlights the shortcomings of applying Western concepts in non-Western settings. It proposes the possibility of a new form of capital, which will need to be tested rigorously in studies in other spiritual settings.

Keywords: Information Practices; Bourdieu; Capital; Buddhism; Spiritual Information Practices; Ethnography

Article type: Research paper

Introduction

Information practices as an approach to studying people's interactions with information is a well established scholarly approach (Case and Given, 2016). Yet, the conceptual foundations of information practices studies are diverse (Zhong, Han and Hansen, 2022) and there has been limited attention to consolidation of theory (Savolainen and Thomson, 2021). An information practices approach has been seen as an alternative to an approach based on information behaviour. Much of the research in information studies using the information practices approach has focussed on practices in the moment of practice (e.g. Olsson and Lloyd, 2017; Vesga Vinchira, 2019; Poole, 2022), and although studies may have attempted to address the theoretical basis of a specific approach to information practices, they have done so with limited success. Relatively few studies have gone beyond the moment of practice to explore the outcomes of practices in the context of a theoretical base in sociology. Traditionally, studies of outcomes in information behaviour tended to consider outcomes as examples of use. Kari (2007), however, argued for the importance of separating use and effect. Case and O'Connor (2014), in their review of studies of information use, identify outcomes as effects, such as a change in knowledge or emotional state or an action of decision based on information as well as giving examples of that do not meet the criteria for being considered outcomes.

The study presented here adds to the small number of studies that have moved away from an exploration of practices in the moment, to consider the implications of the findings about information practices and their outcomes in the context of a broader understanding of a theory of practice.

This paper is concerned with understanding capital, the outcome of practices according to Bourdieu (1986). It takes as its focus the information practices of the devotees and monks of a Sri Lankan Buddhist Temple in Sydney, Australia. In so doing, it acknowledges Kari and Hartel's emphasis (2007, p. 1133) on the importance of including "the higher things in life" in studies of everyday information practices. It uses Bourdieu's notions of habitus and of capital as the outcome of practices (Bourdieu, 1984) as analytical tools or thinking tools and as a result, proposes that the Bourdieusian forms of capital are inadequate to categorise the outcomes of information practices identified in this insider study.

This study demonstrates that merely describing information practices in the moment of practice gives only part of the picture of engagement with information; further, by showing the importance of the worldview of study participants in the interpretation of the outcomes of information practices, it calls into question the narrowness of the cultural basis from which the original categories of capital emerged. From its foundation as an insider study, this study concludes that a particular outcome can be identified as a form of capital that is here labelled Karmic capital, but in so doing acknowledges that on the basis of one study, it is difficult to determine whether Karmic capital can stand along alongside economic capital, social capital and cultural capital, or whether further insider studies of the practices of people holding

specific cultural norms and standards will indicate that Karmic capital is a local instance of some form of a new form of capital, spiritual capital, or of an existing capital, cultural capital.

Capital and Information Practices

Savolainen's model for everyday life information seeking (1995) was influential in the development of research into information practices. In this early model, his debt to the work of Bourdieu and the concept of habitus is explicit. Here, he states that habitus refers to socially and culturally determined ways of thinking, which impacts on a way of life, where "way of life" is the "order of things", where he identifies central factors as "a relationship between working and leisure time, models of consumption of goods and services and [the] nature of hobbies" (Savolainen, 1995, p. 263). Based on his model, one might loosely equate these to the pursuit of economic capital, social capital and cultural capital, identified by Bourdieu (1984, 1986) as the outcomes of practices.

Neveu noted that capital, whether used as a "well-defined concept or as a loose metaphor" is extensively used in the social sciences, and commented that the more a concept is used, the more it may be "hollowed out", that is, to be developed in ways that move it away from its original definition (2018, p. 347). He proposes a minimal provisional definition of capital, in its Bourdieusian sense, for use in the social sciences, which is valuable in the context of this study of information practices. Capital(s) is "a collection of goods and skills, of knowledge and acknowledgments, belonging to an individual or a group that he or she can mobilize to develop influence, gain power, or bargain other elements of this collection" (Neveu, 2018, p. 347)

Zhong et al.'s work identified Bourdieu as something of a bit player in information practices research, with much of his influence coming through Savolainen's 1995 model. Pilerot et al. (2017) linked Bourdieu's influence to studies in science and technology, through the work of Knorr-Cetina and Latour. Savolainen explained his own move away from Bourdieu's understanding of practices and its link to habitus and his adoption of Schatzki's practice theoretical approach as being based on the flexibility of Schatzki's approach and the need to move away from the notion of deeply engrained habits inherent in the 'ways of life' to a more open notion encapsulated in the lifeworld of the individual (Savolainen and Thomson 2021, p. 516).

Here, we adopt Neveu's position that for Bourdieu concepts may be modified over time and are developed for solving problems (2018, p. 348). While it may be the case that ways of life are based on strongly held values, from Neveu's position, these would not seem to lead inevitably to dogmatic behaviours, nor to prevent individuals from making decisions and taking actions influenced by the context they find themselves in at the time, the "temporally evolving open-ended sets of doings and sayings" identified by Schatzki (2002, p. 87). However, it must be noted that Bourdieu's analyses of religious practices which take an institutional, power-based approach, do indicate the importance of the enforcement of accepted ways of doing things, minimising any opportunities for expressions of opinion (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 167). The present study adopts an approach drawing on the perspectives

of these three authors, combining the outsider Western conceptions of two of the authors with those of the insider researcher.

Capital in Information Studies

There is an extensive literature in the field of information studies that draws on notions of capital (Goulding 2008), but apart from the study from which this paper is drawn, none has focussed specifically on people brought together by religion or spirituality. Among the earliest approaches to capital in information studies, situated in the approach to organisational studies of the time, was the work of Machlup (1979, 1980, 1982, 1984), with its microeconomic emphasis on information and knowledge in the development of economic capital and human capital. This influential work encouraged the view that an organisation's knowledge should be considered an asset which could be monetised. To some extent, this idea has been taken up in studies of gaming in the virtual world, where an information economy is at play (Harviainen and Savolainen, 2014).

Social capital is the focus of many studies; Neveu observes that in Anglophone scholarship in the social sciences, the literature "has become a cottage industry" (2018, p. 355). As Lloyd (2017) sets out in her proposal for the concept of the fractured [information] landscape, these studies (e.g. Alencar and Tsagkroni 2019; Caidi and Allard 2005; Yan and Schroeder2021; Buchanan and Jardine 2022) are more likely to draw on Putnam's understanding of social capital (2000) and its emphasis on the institutions of a society that support its development, building trust among community members, than on Bourdieu's approach, with its focus on power. As Wojciechowska (2021) explains, there are several distinct influential conceptualisations of social capital. As a consequence, there are many ways to explore relationships between (public) libraries and social capital. Wojciechowska, like Lloyd (2017) identifies Vårheim (2009) and his emphasis on the importance of access to informational resources in helping to remove social inequality, as significant in shaping research into social capital and library services.

Information research involving cultural capital has been less common. Bourdieu's analyses of cultural capital identified that it existed in three forms: embodied cultural capital, which one might loosely refer to as the knowledge, learning and understanding possessed by an individual; objectified cultural capital which is represented through the recorded forms of knowledge and understanding, such as books or video recordings of talks; and institutional cultural capital, the ways in which embodied cultural capital is authorised and accredited and standards of cultural capital enforced. Thus, cultural capital can belong either to an individual or it can be encapsulated in the institutions of society. Early work (e.g. Davenport 1994) focussed on the individual, with its concern for the development of the cultural capital of scholars demonstrated through bibliometrics. Similarly, Cronin and Shaw (2002) focussed on the relationship between cultural capital demonstrated through citation practices and the symbolic power that arises from that. Goulding's focus is institutional. Having drawn attention to the lack of studies on libraries as fields of cultural production, she observed

(2008, p. 236) that existing studies might suggest that library use is an indicator of cultural capital and thus that libraries are fields of cultural production.

A key feature of Bourdieu's concept of capital was its ability to transform from one form of capital to another (Neveu 2018). This notion is not found widely in the literature of information studies. However, there are exceptions, and the following are offered as examples. Thomas (2017) in her work on artists and the publication of their work in book form, noted the tension between the economic capital accrued through the books and the cultural capital of the artists, through their expertise, skills and standing. Harviainen and Hamari (2015) in their studies of gaming and gamers found that information functioned both as currency (that is a form of economic capital), as cultural capital, (because of gamers' deep expertise in the field) and as symbolic capital, (through the power that emerged as a result the interplay between economic and cultural capitals). Veros (2015), in her exploration of the information practices of public librarians in relation to romance fiction, found that, although it might be expected that an interdependency between forms of capital existed, the practices used in the cataloguing of romance fiction prevented the development of cultural capital in readers and also hindered the creation of economic capital for authors.

Studies of Buddhists and their Information Behaviours or Practices

Everyday life information studies have tended to focus on those aspects of life which are separate from work or study (Agosto and Hughes-Hassell, 2005; Savolainen, 1995). Kari and Hartel (2007) emphasised the importance of undertaking research going beyond the problem-solving of everyday life, to engage with what they refer to as "the higher things in life" (Kari and Hartel, 2007, p. 1133). Since this early work, several studies (e.g.Chabot, 2019; Gorichanaz, 2015; Gaston, 2015; Guzik, 2018) have shown that religious and cultural aspects are emerging as trends in research into information practices. A key feature of this information practices perspective is that information practices are social and interrelated, and can include secular as well as non-secular aspects.

The few research studies on Buddhists and their information behaviours or information practices are recent, with most of the studies being conducted in Western contexts. None is specifically concerned with the development of capitals. Chabot's doctoral research (2019) focussed on the religious information practices of Kadampa Buddhists in Canada. His investigation into the everyday life spiritual information practices of Buddhists of the New Kadampa Tradition focused on the importance of spiritual information from the individual devotee's point of view, such as how they receive, describe, read, give and teach Dharma. Dharma is an essential part of the individual experience of attaining Nirvana. Gorichanaz explored the resources used by Zen Buddhists, in particular, the most popular ones: podcasts and iPhone apps. He found that their information landscape, defined as "sites where believers gather; religious objects and their use; social networks; prayers, rituals and sacred texts; rulings, exegeses, sermons and other interpretations; and books and other sources that relate religious belief and practice to everyday life" (2015, p6), was constructed through technological advancements and had changed over time, to the point where in this community, this form of Buddhism could seemingly be practised using entirely online tools.

A study of the everyday information behaviours of Buddhists in Laos (Gaston et al., 2015), found that religious and spiritual beliefs played a significant role in information activities for this group. The main contextual factors affecting the information behaviours of the participants were their social and cultural environments, with the religious context embedded within the social and cultural values playing a significant role.

Focussing on a different religious group, converts to Islam, Guzik (2018) used Goffman's practice theoretical approach and his ideas about the presentation of self (1959) to investigate how information practices help converts to develop and present Muslim identities during their conversion to Islam. In her study, she showed how participants brought together the relationship between material aspects of information practices and the interplay between the personal and the public, drawing on bodily and social participation among peer believers to demonstrate their new identities, having used a range of information resources to learn their religion. A key aspect of the findings was the participants' wish for their religious identity to be recognised by others. This finding mirrors that of Gorichanaz (2015), who found that the Zen Buddhists wished to be recognised as such by peer believers, family members, colleagues and the public. While neither of these studies is explicitly concerned with the creation of capital, nonetheless, it is possible to interpret the knowledge acquired as embodied cultural capital and these wishes to be recognised as being examples of the acknowledgement of reputation, a form of symbolic capital (c.f. Neveu, 2018).

Two other studies (Tremlett, 2012; Meintel, 2015) have explored how religious life has been altered and restructured through the use of technology. Tremlett observed a move away from place-based religious observances and practices, with these occurring anywhere and seeming ubiquitous. Meintel's study found that information technologies are used in four main ways to support information practices: building and maintaining contacts with other congregations and individuals within the same religious orientation on local and international levels; governance and management of religious groups at a distance; religious learning and training; and accessing spiritual/religious resources, such as prayers, sermons and forms of rituals.

Positioning the Research Question

Studies of people's interactions with information have long had a focus on outcomes, with an important emphasis on the effects of information. The attempt to take a broader sociological approach introduced various forms of capital as examples of outcomes, following an established trend in the literature of the social sciences. The adoption of a practice theoretical approach leading to the exploration of information practices has provided a solid foundation for a reconsideration of interactions between people and information, and the acknowledgement of spiritual practices as a valid focus of research in information behaviours or information practices has added another dimension to the notion of information interactions in everyday life. A third focus in the broader contemporary research field has been a concern for research in non-western contexts, including those focussing on information interactions in non-Christian religious settings. Yet, the promise of these

attempts to take a broader sociological approach has not yet been realised. Studies are largely descriptive and fragmentary in nature; those studies of information practices tend to be concerned only with the immediacy of information practices or with the form or structure of the information itself, rather than with the longer-term perspective of the outcomes of the use of information. This study aims to address gaps and weaknesses in the literature by asking, from the perspective of an insider researcher: what are the information practices of people in a given non-Western religious context, and what the outcomes of these practices. These insider findings are then used as the starting point for a discussion of the place of Bourdieu's concept of capital when studying non-Western communities and contexts.

Introducing the Study

This ethnographic study focusing on the Mahamevnawa Buddhist Temple in Sydney, Australia, was concerned with what the monks and devotees do and how they describe what they do, as well as with the outcomes of what people do, using the notion of capital as a conceptual tool to label them. Such a methodological approach can take both a micro and a macro approach, and taken together, these can demonstrate the complex interplay among a range of factors.

This is an insider study, with one of the researchers being a member of the diasporic Sri Lankan community associated with this Temple. Insider research provides a valuable contribution to theory and practice but is not without criticism, in particular that of "being too close" (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007, p. 60), so that a suitable critical distance become impossible. Being an insider had easily observable benefits. The cultural identity of the insider helped the researcher to extract insights into their information practices, as he had grown up with a similar background and with similar experiences as a member of the diaspora. On the other hand, the insider was brought back to being an outsider engaged in doing a scholarly study based on the temple community's information practices through his engagement with the other two researchers.

Data were collected in four ways, through interviews, participant observation, analysis of the Temple's websites and associated online media and the making of field notes. The Temple's websites and the other online sources provided important insights into the practices of the Temple community, providing historical background, a calendar of Temple activities both religious and community-based, access to the preachings of the Guru both recorded and in real time, the opportunity to buy the translations and writings of the Guru and much more. Participant observation included the insider researcher taking part in a number of temple activities at various locations, such as the main Cattai temple (where the monks reside), community halls, devotees' residences (where temporary programs are held either weekly or fortnightly) as well as parks.

An arms-length recruitment process led to 25 individuals taking part in the study, 10 monks, and 15 devotees, all based in Sydney. The devotees who took part in this study are all members of the Sri Lankan Buddhist diaspora. Some were students, others parents of small children and others still close to retirement age, even being grandparents. Some said that they had not been in Sydney very long, whereas others had been there may years. Although their reasons for coming to Sydney were not part of the study, some did reveal that they had come to Australia as refugees whereas others were classified in the government's category of skilled migrants. Some were familiar with

the main branch of the Temple in Sri Lanka and others had found the Temple through various online sources. All were well educated, as became apparent as they talked about the kind of volunteering they undertook. The monks were mostly aged between 30 and 40 and were highly educated, with professional experience before becoming monks, for example as an engineer or medical practitioner. They recognised that being a Buddhist monk involved travel from one monastery to another, and in the context of this Temple, that meant travelling from one country to another, and learning the language spoken in that country. The monks were skilled in using online communication technologies and most devotees emphasised the importance of these technologies in their engagement with the Temple and its community.

Content analysis of the data used a priori and emergent coding (Stemler 2000). Narrative analysis was also used on the transcripts of the interviews. Narrative analysis carried out over the course of the interview allows seemingly hidden stories to emerge (Bryman 2008) and is particularly useful when participants may not give direct and complete answers to questions but reveal the answers little by little through their storytelling, as is customary in Sri Lankan Buddhist culture.

The content analysis of the Temple websites was particularly important in identifying what those not familiar with Buddhism nor with the Temple and its workings needed as background information. The glossary developed from this became a useful tool for the outsider researchers, as there were many occasions when participants struggled to find English words and used the Sinhalese Buddhist vocabulary they shared with the insider researcher. A priori codes relevant to an understanding of capital drew from the work of Castells, Sassen, and Bourdieu, creating a Western-oriented and incomplete picture of the practices of monks and devotees and their outcomes. This analysis was supplemented by emergent coding, identifying those aspects of the interviews that did not fit neatly into these codes.

In the narrative analysis, the data were categorised and organised by the outcomes of what people do at the temple, and to achieve this, the interviews were taken as a whole. The outcomes of the narrative analysis were particularly useful, showing how participants described how information practices might lead to from one outcome to another, or how two distinct outcomes might occur more or less at the same time. In conceptual terms, this mirrored the transformation of capitals from one mode to another.

With an insider researcher and two outsider researchers, the process of analysis and interpretation was not without its challenges. While the insider learned the importance of not making assumptions about practices, but spelling them out and justifying the interpretation, the outsider researchers had to learn the importance of going beyond a Westernised outsider understanding in creating labels for Sri Lankan Buddhist practices, and not to dismiss an interpretation of the data because it did not fit established conceptual models.

The Mahamevnawa Temple is a global organisation with its headquarters in Sri Lanka and one of its branches in Sydney, Australia. The members of the Temple in Sydney form a diasporic community that is quite tightly knit, but at the same time, its members guard their privacy. To maintain the confidentiality of the participants, given that any one piece of information could reveal an individual's identity to a member of the Temple community and be linked to other information they already have, all quotes from monks are attributed only to monk, and quotes from devotees are attributed only to devotee, without further distinction.

Findings

Information Practices of Devotees

The findings are presented in two parts. The first part is concerned with the information practices of the devotees. The second part is concerned with the outcomes of these practices and links them to forms of capital.

The Temple provides an information rich environment for devotees and monks. It uses a range of methods to spread dharma news across the world, including face to face communications, distributing magazines and papers and publishing and selling books; it also uses information and communications technologies such as its multi-language websites, media networks, online TV, Radio, email, Facebook, Live web casts, YouTube videos, online forums, Skype, digital magazines and so on. A devotee explained how (s)he became involved in the Temple through engaging with information in a wide range of forms:

> *They have books and also they have a library, so we joined the library, and we bought some books and CDs then we heard* [the Guru] *was doing his preaching on the TV, Radio and Audio Cassettes, MP3s and most of the time in Live sessions.*

This devotee is not unusual in the range of sources of information (s)he uses. Another devotee said:

> *I use not only their websites, I watch lots of things on YouTube and Shadha TV online, I follow their Facebook pages. Usually, I go to the Sri Lanka Page. There are quite a lot of articles, if I need to find local stuff, I go to Sydney page.*

The descriptions devotees give of their interactions with information are impressive in the breadth of sources they use, but these interactions are commonly found in the literature of information practices. Devotees can search in several sources provided by the Temple as an organisation, for information related to their Buddhist practices, and for information about community-based activities. They can read, watch, listen and interact; they can buy recordings of preachings and chantings, and take part in meditations; the monks use the vernacular of the country they are in, and the Guru of the Temple places an emphasis on preaching in Sinhala, the language of contemporary Sri Lankan Buddhists, rather than Pali, the ancient language of Buddhism. Finding information *on the internet*, that is on the Temple website or its Facebook page, can be important for engagement with the community-based activities, both of which have some bi-lingual material. Some devotees acknowledge that they particularly value the live streaming of preaching because *We can connect and ask questions*, that is, the practice involves a level of interaction.

There is, however, another significant aspect to engagement with information, described by the devotees. Talking, meeting and sharing are verbs that occur very frequently in the interviews. Just two of the many examples are:

> *We talk about lots of things and share information with each other.*

> *When we go to different programs, we also have intervals or break times. During those times, we see people ... and then we start talking.*

Information-based cultural practices are significant, as might be expected in such a community. Devotees and monks describe activities as diverse as meditating, giving or attending Dharma talks, reading, watching and listening to devotional material, taking part in Temple activities, including working bees and blood donation, and supporting the monks. That these are information-based practices is clear from statements such as *I got to know those programs through emails* or *I watch a lot of things on YouTube* or *I follow their Facebook page*, which are common throughout the interviews from devotees.

A monk emphasised the importance of information technologies in the provision of information about devotional activities, explaining that when devotees may not be able to attend a special occasion, *we record and upload later on YouTube*; and where there is no branch, *we get them [the devotees] all in one place and use Skype to do the preachings. It is a group call.*

To some extent, these practices of Buddhism depend on what devotees have learned from childhood, and this desire to ensure that cultural knowledge is maintained is clear from the interviews:

> *I want my children to grow up in Buddhist culture and learn what the life is all about. So, [that] they make right decisions for their own life. That's what makes [us] go to this temple.*

However, in the context of a diasporic community, the multi-generational links with cultural knowledge may be broken. The insider researcher describes the difficulties of not knowing how to perform particular rituals, such as the death memorial ceremony, *the first time that* [he] *had to organise something like this on his own at his residence in a foreign country* and how he gained the knowledge necessary to perform the ceremony (Perera, 2021). He received advice from the monks and from his friends, and acknowledged the expertise of one of his friends, who already had experience in preparing this ceremony. Importantly, he found that the caretakers of the Temple not only gave him detailed instructions for the ceremony, but also were able to lend him the various necessary artefacts.

The information practices of this diasporic community of devotees and monks also provide evidence of everyday life information practices, as well as information-based cultural practices. Everyday life information practices are embedded in the social interactions that devotees describe, centred on their devotional activities or on their engagement in community-oriented activities, and often going beyond them. The importance of information sharing outside the context of Buddhism is clearly expressed by one devotee:

> *We get to know about other things and information through* [our friends] *not only related to Buddhism but also something that could be helpful for your career along the way. The communication is very broad in that place.*

According to another devotee,

…there are many occasions that [people] *attempt to talk about their backgrounds and their work, hobbies. Sometimes we talk about other temples and other places and* [even] *things* [that] *happened … in Sri Lanka.*

Outcomes seen as Capital

In this study, participants express the view that information practices lead to an outcome, such as friendship. Following Bourdieu, these outcomes can be seen in terms of capital. In this study, there is evidence of social capital, economic capital and cultural capital, as well as a form of capital that does not fit easily into the established categories of capital.

The development of social capital is clearly expressed by participants who link the sharing of information to the development of shared interests and ultimately friendship and belonging to a community. One devotee, having spoken about talking with others said:

We will find the people with same interests. If you do something together in peace, it will help to develop the friendship. I love making friends in the temple.

A similar idea is echoed by another:

So, it's more like I'm looking at the temple not as a religious place but also to find good friendships and also to get together with your community and to be a part of something like great social work.

The development of economic capital can be seen as the outcome of two practices of the devotees – the making of donations to the Temple, and the purchase of books of preachings and other devotional materials. Donations are often referred to as alms-giving. It is acknowledged that the monks do not touch money, but they are able to accept *all the medicine and dry food we had collected*, and, as donations can be made in many forms: *you can sponsor the meals for any day during the year.* That the Temple requires economic capital is a point made by one devotee who says: *There are lot of legal affairs to fulfil … We should think about the mortgage with Upasthayaka committee. All these buildings are on mortgage agreements.*

The information practices of the devotees support the development of economic capital as they buy books based on the preachings and translations of the Guru, published at the headquarters in Sri Lanka. A devotee talks about the Temple's book shop, where the popularity of books is clear: *Probably* [the new book by the Guru] *has been sold out already*, and although new translations are expected to arrive soon, *people will snap it up quickly.* While most devotees talk in terms of alms giving and supporting the lives of the monks, there is some recognition of the need for money: *Alms also consisted of donations that my wife and I made to the monks' temple maintenance.* Thus, the practices of the devotees lead to the development of economic capital.

The information practices of the devotees and monks also lead to cultural capital. The engagement with the publishing program and the online presentation of devotional material (objectified cultural capital) allows devotees to develop their own cultural capital (embodied cultural capital) as the Temple itself creates cultural capital (institutionalised cultural capital)

through these programs. The children's programs presented by the monks are powerful sources for the children of this diasporic community to learn about Theravada Buddhist culture of their parents, and the books for children are popular. Children and young people are involved both as consumers of cultural capital and as multipliers of cultural capital: *Young children normally maintain and take the responsibility to maintain the website under our supervision, recording and live streaming.*

The information practices of devotees and monks also allow them, as members of a diasporic community, to maintain emotional and ideological links with their cultural background, to maintain a sense of belonging: *It is very nice to* [take part in activities organised through] *the temple and at other places we gather. We can meet the people with same ideology.* They can also take steps to learn new cultural information from time to time, that is, to create new cultural capital, as the insider researcher's experience with the death memorial ceremony demonstrated. Similarly, as the devotee who commented on the importance of gaining career information hinted, information shared could also increase the sense of belonging to the new country, creating cultural capital based on knowledge about making an Australian life.

Merit as Capital

The devotees and monks are clear from their insider perspective that the *outcome* of the spiritual activities in this group is gathering merit. This is an intrinsic part of Buddhism, through which the results of certain actions will not only improve this life but will affect future lives. A devotee explains: *That was the place where I could cultivate the good habits and practices and be engrossed with the dharma knowledge and a place where I can gather merits.*

This link between gathering merit and devotional practices, is echoed by several devotees:

> *We believe that serving monks, cleaning temples and offering alms giving,* [should] *be a part of what they're doing, it's all to get that good karma*

> *We see Sangha* (monks) *at the temple, we can collect lots of pin* [Merits] *by helping them, by listening to dharma, meditations.*

The gathering of merit, which is central to the practices of the monks and devotees, can also be the outcome of other activities. One devotee suggests that the provision of information helps to create a sense of transparency and therefore to build trust and encourage participation in activities: *Lots of my friends are doing major part in organising those charitable works or* sill *[devotional activities].* Sharing information and taking part in socially oriented, community-based programs and activities such as blood donations, clean ups and working bees are ways of gaining merit, as is volunteering one's skills as a plumber or electrician for example. One of the monks remarks:

> *We have done heaps of things as volunteers towards the environment and towards the local society of Australia. ... The message that we try to give through all these programs is "how to live the life meaningfully".*

Discussion

Outcomes, Capital and the Insider Researcher

The findings of this study, with its conceptual focus on a practice approach, will inevitably consider outcomes differently from the approaches of Kari (2007) and Case and O'Connor (2014). Thus, they have shown that the information practices of the devotees and monks of the Mahamevnawa Temple, which include seeking information mostly for spiritual purposes and sharing information, as well as the creation and dissemination of information resources, lead to a range of outcomes, including economic capital, social capital, cultural capital (Neveu, 2018) as well as the anomalous capital that the devotees and monks refer to as merit. It could be argued that the economic capital accrued by the Temple is of a different order from the social capital and cultural capital accrued by devotees. However, it seems appropriate to include it here; the devotees are buying the container of the knowledge and expertise of the Guru (objectified cultural capital), and in so doing, they are increasing their (embodied) cultural capital, not only through ownership of the container, but also through access to the content of his translations and preachings.

The findings have also shown that same practice can lead to different capitals, the principle of fungibility (Neveu, 2018, p. 361). Under this principle, capitals co-exist in the way that Harviainen and others (Harviainen and Hamari, 2015; Harviainen and Savolainen, 2014) described them co-existing in the world of gamers. The cultural capital of the Guru, documented in books and recordings of preachings, becomes economic capital for the Temple when the containers (books, CDs and so on) are bought from the temple shop or online. When read or listened to and reflected on they become part of the cultural capital of the individual devotee as well as of the group involved in the particular Dharma preachings. The casual conversations and information sharing during community-oriented activities, such as Clean-Up Australia day, or temple maintenance activities, such as working bees, lead to the development of social capital, as well as potentially enhancing cultural capital.

The devotees and monks themselves make the link between their information practices and the gathering of merit. And, in this study, it is the linking of information practices not only to the outcome of cultural capital or social capital, but to the outcome of the gathering of merit that is noteworthy. Merit is the relatively limited English translation of notions of *Pin*, (In brief, Pin, which accumulates through good deeds and worthy thoughts, acts as a protective force and helps to lead to to rebirth at a higher status with the ultimate goal of attaining enlightenment.)

The challenge of the scholar as an outsider is to turn insider perspectives into rigorous scholarly observations, in this case through the use of Bourdieu's thinking tools. The Bourdieusian notion of capital as the outcome of practices is important in developing a conceptually-based interpretation of this particular outcome. Further, it provides a language for expressing such an observation as capital. Bringing together the specific insights of the researcher as insider with the perspective of the outsider, the outcome can be labelled Karmic capital.

Returning to Neveu's "minimal, provisional" definition of capitals ("a collection of goods and skills, of knowledge and acknowledgments, belonging to an individual or a group that he or she can mobilize to develop influence, gain power, or bargain other elements of this collection"), it can be seen that Karmic capital fits within this definition. The devotees talk easily about how they gain merit through spiritual practices that they have developed the knowledge and skills to perform; they acknowledge their own good deeds, for example volunteering at a working-bee, giving blood or alms or being part of a committee, and those good deeds of others. Their aim, in gathering merit, is to attain Nirvana, that is, to achieve the ultimate end of Buddhism, the state where the self ceases to exist and the individual is released from the cycle of death and re-birth. Until a Buddhist achieves Nirvana, he or she is on the path towards it, and the actions, the pin or merits gathered together, are referred to as Karma. Thus, the outcome of information practices focussed on a future life and its label of Karmic capital is fitting from the perspective of a scholar who is also a Theravada Buddhist.

Considering Karmic Capital as an Outcome

The question, then, is whether an argument to support Karmic capital as an outcome of information practices can be sustained from the perspective of a scholar who does not share the same beliefs. The argument must be made in the context of people and their engagement with information, as well as in the context of Bourdieu's practice theory.

In the context of people and their engagement with information, this outcome fits the criterion of focus on effect, in this case, on emotional state. It also encompasses the actions or decisions based on information, identified by Case and O'Connor (2016, p. 651) as a characteristic of an outcome of information behaviour. On the other hand, it does not fit well with the characteristics of the outcomes of information behaviour Case and O'Connor identify because it is future-oriented, something they list explicitly as not being a characteristic of an outcome. From the examples given by Case and O'Connor, it would seem that the reason is that there is no certainty that an individual will take a particular action; the promise to use the information to choose a school could merely be empty words. However, such a focus on the future does not indicate empty words for the participants in this study, but is, rather, an expression of a deeply held view of a way of life (cf Savolainen, 1995).

Considering Karmic Capital as a Capital

Turning to practices and their outcomes, Neveu cautions against engaging in the competition of "going beyond" Bourdieu's ideas (2018, p, 366) by adding a new capital to the four proposed by Bourdieu, although, he notes, such a position would not preclude the identification of a local form of capital. He asserts that any new capital is really only a variety of the existing capitals, that is, economic capital, social capital and cultural capital, as well as symbolic capital, a 'transfiguration' of one of other three capitals (2018, pp. 369-370).

Karmic capital has elements that could align it with economic capital; individuals work to gather it, accruing it over their lifetime, but it does not have an exchange value and cannot

effectively be traded. It has elements of cultural capital, to the extent that it requires a level of learning, knowledge and understanding of the Dharma, but from the insider's perspective, there is no human mechanism for the legitimation of this knowledge. It does not require social capital, because although human interactions may be involved in gathering merit, there is no expectation that these interactions develop into social relationship, and equally they can occur between strangers who will never meet again.

Studies of information behaviours or of information practices have acknowledged that a concern for spirituality or "the higher things of life" (Kari and Hartel, 2007) constitute a legitimate area of study. The relatively few studies that have emerged have suggested that in this context, expressions of embodied cultural capital may be significant in processes of cultural legitimation. Gorichanaz (2015), who compared the practices of Zen Buddhists with those of Catholics emphasised the significance of what could be interpreted as embodied cultural capital to each group, but importantly identified differences in what constituted what Bourdieu had referred to as embodied cultural capital. Using the metaphor of information landscapes, he suggests that a religion moulds its information landscape (p. 14), since, in his interpretation, for Catholics authority comes from the printed word of the Bible and from the validation of regular attendance at Mass, whereas the Zen Buddhists coming from an oral tradition of Dharma teaching and preaching, do not vest ultimate authority in the printed word nor in validation by monks, but rather focus on the practice of meditation and of carrying out good works. This study sought to discover the information practices of the monks and devotees of a Theravada Buddhist Temple with a branch in Sydney, Australia, and the outcomes of those practices. It was not concerned with comparisons among and between people with differing religious beliefs and practices, nor did it pursue Gorichanaz's idea of religions influencing the interactions between people and information in different ways.

Its findings on the outcomes of practices differed from Bourdieu's. Bourdieu's treatment of religion was largely concerned with aspects of power and domination, especially in the Catholic Church in France, and to the extent that it was linked to capital, it took the form of institutionalised cultural capital (Rey, 2007). This study focussed on individuals and their information-based practices and the outcomes. Its ethnographic approach allowed the voices of participants to be heard. Devotees speak of the Guru as someone to be revered and of the Temple as an organisation that supports their needs for spiritual development. They value the objectified cultural capital the Temple provides through its publishing program, TV station, YouTube videos and so on. They speak clearly, too, of *pin* or merit as the outcome of their practices, an outcome labelled here as Karmic capital. This must be distinguished from the karmic capital written of in the popular context of Western entrepreneurship, where an act of generosity or philanthropy may lead to financial success. It can only exist as an outcome in this context of Buddhist systems of belief.

Conclusion

The study has made three contributions to the field of information studies, in taking an information practices approach to the exploration of interactions in the Mahamevnawa Temple located in Sydney. Firstly, it has demonstrated that it is possible to identify the

outcomes of these information practices, using Bourdieu's approach that capital is the outcome of practice. Secondly, it has shown the potential shortcomings of applying concepts developed in Western cultural contexts in non-Western settings. Its findings on the importance of the future-oriented merit as an outcome of practices, including information practices, is at odds with the commonly accepted exclusion of future-oriented statements of action from definitions of outcomes in information behaviour.

Thirdly, and importantly, it proposes that a new form of capital can be identified in this Buddhist context, Karmic capital. This approach to naming underlines its duality: on the one hand, signalling the importance of defending the necessity of acknowledging the local; and on the other hand, flagging that this study may have identified indicators of another form of capital. Further studies will be required to test out the forms of capital emerging as the outcomes of the information practices of adherents of other spiritual practices.

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