



Name:

ACTIVITY THREE

Visualizing Data and the Database of Religious History

SUMMARY

The “Visualize” feature on the Database of Religious History (DRH) allows users to search for, compare, and graphically visualize the range of answers given to specific questions pertaining to different religious groups and practices. During this activity, students will follow a series of detailed instructions that will introduce them to this feature. They will then be asked to answer a number of questions to reflect on the experience.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this activity is to enable students to design and understand more complex queries by introducing the “visualize” feature on the DRH. This is a more advanced function than the “browse” feature introduced in Activity Two. After completing this activity, students should be prepared to refine their queries and manipulate data. This will help them to both use the DRH for future research, and improve their data literacy. Data literacy is an important skill that is required for many professional career paths.

INSTRUCTIONS

The following steps should be completed individually online:

1. Go to the DRH: <https://religiondatabase.org/>
2. Keeping in mind that the DRH data is a compilation of expert answers to specific questions, select a question that you find particularly intriguing. You can use one that you explored in a previous activity, or select a question from one of the poll templates, accessible here: <https://religiondatabase.org/landing/polls/overview-of-polls/3>
3. Click on the “Visualize” tab at the top of the screen.
4. Type or copy and paste your question into the search bar and press return. A selection of options will appear. Click the selection that begins with “Question”. This will build your query. Click Search.

5. Once the search results have loaded, you will be provided with a series of visualizations based on the answers that have been submitted to your question. You will see the answer distribution, which provides the numerical data based on the provided multiple choice answers to the poll questions. This usually takes the form of yes, no, field doesn't know, and I don't know. Below this section, you will see the map results. This colour coded map relates back to the answer distribution - in other words, regions related to entries where scholars have entered "yes" will be different colours than those for which scholars answered "no". In the final section, you will see the date range results. This is again colour coded based on the time in which the different religious groups related to your question were practicing. All of this data therefore helps you compare religious practices across time and space.

Based on this data, answer the following questions:

- a. How many answers to your question exist?:
 - b. What percentage of the answers were yes?:
 - c. Based on the map, is there a clear geographic distribution of the different answers?:
 - d. What is the date range for this data?:
6. Now you can consider refining your visualization. Under the answer distribution, next to, "Show", deselect three of the four answers. Notice how this changes the map and the date range results to highlight only the answer of interest. You can also use the sliders in the date range results to set a more defined time range to examine.
7. You can then redefine your search itself by clicking on "Edit Query", located near the search bar. Here you can set finite limits on the date, geographical location, types of entries you want to include, and more. You can also further limit your search by adding additional keywords to your query. If you wanted to compare the answers related to two (or more) different regions, for instance, you can add the names of these regions as keywords for your query in the search field. Once you have finished defining your search, click "Search".
8. Once you have refined your query, you can also view the longer comments, the descriptive information, related to the entered answers to your question. To view this, click on "Table View".
9. Once the Table View loads, you can further define the visible information by clicking "Customizable table view", and changing the highlighted selections. Feel free to explore

NB: You can share the results of your query by copying the URL at the top of your browser once your visual has loaded, and giving it to other people. If someone accesses that URL they will see the same results that you do.

Questions for Reflection

Read through the following questions and reflect on your answers independently. Then join a partner or a small group, and discuss.

1. Compare and contrast the “browse” feature with the “visualize” feature on the DRH. What types of information can you examine using the different features? Which one do you find more useful? Which one do you think you are more likely to use in the future? What types of questions could you answer using the different features?
2. In the table view, compare some of the longer comments to “yes” answers. How similar or different are the practices of these different religious groups?
3. Reflect more broadly on the value and limitations of quantitative and qualitative information. How does this complicate the study of religions and historical practices in general?