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*Book review:*

## New health information literacies

*Anna-Maija Multas (2022). New health information literacies. A nexus analytical study. Acta universitatis Ouluensis B Humaniora 192, University of Oulu, Oulu*

The thesis consists of a long introductory chapter and four co-written individual articles, with Master of Arts Anna-Maija Multas as the first author of all four. The thesis has the title *New health information literacies. A nexus analytical study* and it addresses a topic of great importance – health information literacy in an increasingly digital society. The work aims to improve our understanding of new health information literacy as a sociocultural phenomenon. Anna-Maija Multas does this by examining health information literacy, both as a theoretical construct and as everyday online information practices. The thesis, like all theses, has strengths and weaknesses, but the strengths unquestionably outweigh the weaknesses.

The work has a qualitative character and aims to gain new insights rather than measuring them quantitatively. The thesis draws primarily on previous research from new literacy, practice theory, sociocultural theory, and health literacy. In her account of earlier research, Anna-Maija Multas combines a large number of earlier studies. This earlier work is combined with and placed within the analytical framework of nexus analysis, a form of mediated discourse analysis.

The nexus analysis consists of three stages: engaging, navigating and changing. During the engaging phase, the social action to be studied is identified, as well as the relevant parts and actors within this social action. The navigating phase is the main part of the nexus analysis and consists of data collection and analysis. Key elements in the analysis are historical bodies of the investigated people, the interaction order of the people in, and the discourses at play. The final phase is changing and the name indicates the underlying idea of nexus analysis to bring change in the practice of nexus.

The empirical work has been divided into two phases: Phase I is a systematic review of current research on health literacy in an online context. Through the systematic review, published in two separate articles, Anna-Maija Multas guides us through a huge amount of earlier literature. Phase 2, on the other hand, empirically explores young people's everyday discourses and health information literacy practices through interviews, video diaries, and YouTube videos of three video bloggers. The results from phase 2 are also published in two articles.

The thesis is a contribution to the growing body of information literacy research from a sociocultural and practice-oriented perspective. The most important contribution of this work to information studies is that it extends the scope of information literacy studies to various aspects of information creation, especially in relation to health information video blogging by young people. Another contribution is the analysis of the mechanism of authority construction.

The thesis provides many insights and makes without doubt an important contribution to information studies. Anna-Maija Multas has taken on a great task to include not only information studies research in the discussion, but also research from related fields interested in information health literacies. The topic of the thesis is of high relevance for today's society, and I am very pleased that a doctoral student in information studies is taking on a research problem that is important not only to her own research discipline, but to the academy as a whole. However, the research problem could have been described even more clearly at the beginning of the thesis.

In a subject like information studies, which depends so much on the publication of articles, it is sometimes difficult to make a whole out of the individual articles. This problem is solved very well in this thesis. Chapter Two presents a large number of studies in a coherent manner. When I first started reading the thesis, I sometimes thought that the chapter on previous research focused too much on descriptions, but by the end of the chapter it is clear how Multas also relates to the earlier research. Chapter Two forms the theoretical framing of the thesis and it is at the forefront of information studies.

The method chapter (Chapter Three) is very clear and nexus analysis is introduced as the framework. For me, nexus analysis has been a new acquaintance and the way it is presented in the thesis is an important contribution to information studies. The systematic review is described well, and the data collection on the everyday discourse and practice of information literacy among young video bloggers is carefully described with enough details and reflections. My objection to chapter three is that I am not convinced that phase one fits into the nexus analysis (as a phase of engagement).

The findings are presented in a transparent and convincing manner. A novel finding is the notion of information creation as a part of health literacy. I would also like to mention how Anna-Maija Multas highlights the different types of information - first-hand, second-hand, or a mix of both - and how these relate to the mechanism of authority construction. The ways in which reference to information can be seen as recourse to discourses that sometimes conflict with each other, as well as the different positioning of participants in relation to their expected audience, are central insights. Also of particular note are the reflections on the relationship between information literacy practices learned in school and the ways in which these are embodied and manifested in video blogs. These are all very interesting and important findings for information studies.

The conclusion is the last chapter. I have been a PhD student myself and I know how tired one can be at the stage of writing the conclusion. Therefore, I understand that the conclusion is only a page and a half long. However, that is a pity, because ideally the conclusion should be the grand finale of the

thesis. Instead, the conclusion is primarily a short summary. This is definitively not unique for this thesis, but is a quite common problem of theses.

My main objection to the thesis is what I consider to be an imbalance in the empirical focus of the thesis. I argue that the so-called first phase of the thesis – the systematic literature review - takes up too much space in the study (two articles) at the expense of what I consider to be the main contribution of the thesis – the second phase. This is also something that Anna-Maija Multas actually write herself. This does not mean that I think the systematic literature reviews are weak or that they do not contribute, but rather it means that not enough attention has been paid to the second phase of the thesis. The main findings of the thesis are based on three participants' sayings and doings. Although this is a qualitative work, the results could have been even more convincing if the empirical base had been stronger.

A note on structure: The summary of findings (Chapter Four) and the discussion (Chapter Five) is separated from each other. That is the traditional way to structure a thesis – to separate the result from the discussion. However, in a qualitative study such as this, I would say that such a separation is difficult to maintain. But the respondent argued very good case for this structure.

According to the guidelines, "University of Oulu Graduate School has defined that the doctoral thesis should show evidence that the doctoral student can independently and critically apply scientific research methods and generate new scientific knowledge." Anna-Maija Multas' *New health information literacies. A nexus* study undoubtedly meets all the requirements for a dissertation as formulated by University of Oulu Graduate School. At the public defence, we went over the various parts of the thesis. I also find the respondents' ability to publicly defend her thesis without any doubt satisfactory.

#### *Declaration of interest*

Olof Sundin served as external examiner at Anna-Maija Multas' thesis defence. The review does in large correspond to the opponent's formal statement as required by the Doctoral Education Committee at the University of Oulu.