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**M.Sc. Management of Information Systems**

**Books for the Illiterate:** Art as Information System: A Semiotic Evaluation of Medieval Stained Glass Windows as Information Systems and Lessons for the Future

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**Abstract**

Stained glass windows were used in Gothic cathedrals across Western Europe in medieval times. They depicted scenes from the Bible, miracles of the Saints, and other ecclesiastic subjects. Many historians believe that they were used for didactic purposes, and many art critics agree that they are an impressive medium that still resonates with viewers today. This paper explores the possibility that these stained glass windows constitute an information system and attempts to evaluate their effectiveness in that regard. The study of signs, or semiotics, is intricately related to the study of information systems, so Mingers & Willcocks proposed a semiotic framework for studying information systems in 2017. The framework involves analysing the signs in an information system from four different perspectives and the relationships among them: the personal, the social, the material, and the semiotic. Each perspective can be considered in segments that lend structure to the analysis, and allow the researcher to break the work in to smaller, more manageable pieces. This research concludes that stained glass windows do indeed constitute an information system, and that the system was very effective for four key reasons: the impact of the medium, scale of the images, accessibility of the visual code employed, and commonly held beliefs of the time. Furthermore, this paper provides evidence to support the proposition that the method put forth by Mingers & Willcocks is an effective one. Aside from confirming the method, this study aims to provide useful insight into what makes an effective information system. Analysis of modern day systems may benefit in the light of what made stained glass windows effective. Designers of new systems may be able to gain insight from these findings. In future research, it would be useful to take this line of investigation further by measuring the impact of stained glass windows on modern people and studying the particular mechanisms that are unique to the medium.