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The Spectrum of Reliability: Critical Evaluation of Sources in the New Information Universe

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/jvesterm/5/
Abstract
How can we encourage young researchers to exercise critical thinking about the concepts of “authority” and “reliability” in the new information universe? As wonderful as the internet is, the democratic and heterogeneous nature of the online world has clouded the ability of today’s students to quickly and clearly determine a given resource’s trustworthiness. This academic panel talk will demonstrate a visual, interactive and scalable classroom-based method of evaluating a myriad of resources and concepts in order to provoke thought and discussion in small settings, and poll-based participation in large ones.
The Spectrum of Reliability
Critical Evaluation of Sources in the New Information Universe

Jesse Vestermark
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Summer 2010

more reliable
.gov
no ads
author has masters degree
5+ pages

found in database
many citations
recently updated

found on Google
cool graphics

Wikipedia citations
Wikipedia entries

Poor spelling
old/not recently updated

less reliable

...early stages
2012 Fall Quarter Introductory Course: *Environmental Design (EDES) 101*

400 Students from Five Majors:
- Architectural Engineering
- Architecture
- Construction Management
- City & Regional Planning
- Landscape Architecture

Extravagant Luxuries:
Instructor Cooperation
Two Class Visits
EXTENSIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY
AUTHOR’S EXPERTISE IS VERIFIABLE
POOR GRAMMAR OR MULTIPLE TYPOS
SELF PUBLISHED
FIRM OR COMPANY WEBSITE

FROM A NEUTRAL SOURCE
(left empty for student suggestions, e.g. Wikipedia)

1 LESS  2 RELIABLE  3 MORE  4 RELIABLE  5

LIBRARY-SPONSORED RESOURCE
CASUAL USE OF LANGUAGE OR IMAGES
PHOTOS ARE UNCREDITED
?
WRITTEN IN LANGUAGE SPECIFIC TO PROFESSION
TRUSTED PUBLISHER
Mean = 2.87
Standard Deviation = 0.83

FROM A NEUTRAL SOURCE

1 LESS 2 RELIABLE 3 MORE 4 RELIABLE 5

Votes

11
45
90
33
5
Mean = 1.93
Standard Deviation = 0.84
EXTENSIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

Mean = 3.98
Standard Deviation = 0.64
Mean = 4.01
Standard Deviation = 0.70

Author’s expertise is verifiable

1 LESS 2 RELIABLE 3 MORE 4 RELIABLE 5
Mean = 1.24
Standard Deviation = 0.63

POOR GRAMMAR OR MULTIPLE TYPOS

1 LESS 2 RELIABLE 3 MORE 4 RELIABLE 5

Votes

157 15 6 4 4
Mean = 2.02
Standard Deviation = 0.64
Mean = 3.25
Standard Deviation = 0.74

FIRM OR COMPANY WEBSITE

1 LESS 2 RELIABLE 3 MORE 4 RELIABLE 5

Votes
8 33 75 62 16
STUDENT RATINGS

1. FROM A NEUTRAL SOURCE
2. Wikipedia
3. EXTENSIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY
4. AUTHOR'S EXPERTISE IS VERIFIABLE
5. POOR GRAMMAR OR MULTIPLE TYPOS
6. SELF PUBLISHED
7. FIRM OR COMPANY WEBSITE
FROM A NEUTRAL SOURCE

Wikipedia

EXTENSIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

AUTHOR’S EXPERTISE IS VERIFIABLE

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FIRM OR COMPANY WEBSITE

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STUDENT RATINGS

LIBRARIAN RATINGS
Deep Thoughts
By Jesse Vestermark

Accuracy and reliability are related, but not synonymous.

Is neutrality *always* preferable to bias?

There are few easy answers…

Still to be gathered:

1. Anecdotal evidence from students in the form of reflections.
2. Quantified assessment data, potentially including:
   • Pre-discussion vs. post-discussion.
   • Pre-assignment vs. post-completion.
   • Start of school year vs. end of school year.
3. Pedagogical precedents.