Jesse Vestermark

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


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

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...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
FROM A NEUTRAL SOURCE

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CASUAL USE OF LANGUAGE OR IMAGES

PHOTOS ARE UNCREDITED

?  

WRITTEN IN LANGUAGE SPECIFIC TO PROFESSION

TRUSTED PUBLISHER
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Mean = 2.87
Standard Deviation = 0.83

Votes

1 11
2 45
3 90
4 33
5 5

1 LESS 2 RELIABLE 3 MORE 4 RELIABLE 5
Mean = 1.93
Standard Deviation = 0.84
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

Votes

5 9 32 98 45
Mean = 1.24
Standard Deviation = 0.63

1 LESS 2 RELIABLE 3 MORE 4 RELIABLE 5

Votes

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

1 LESS 2 RELIABLE 3 MORE 4 RELIABLE 5

Votes

45 94 44

3 1
Mean = 3.25
Standard Deviation = 0.74
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.