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

Jesse Vestermark
Architecture and Environmental Design Librarian
Cal Poly San Luis Obispo
Summer 2010

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  
EXTENSIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY 
AUTHOR’S EXPERTISE IS VERIFIABLE  
POOR GRAMMAR OR MULTIPLE TYPOS  
SELF PUBLISHED  
FIRM OR COMPANY WEBSITE

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
Mean = 1.93
Standard Deviation = 0.84
EXTENSIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

Mean = 3.98
Standard Deviation = 0.64

Votes

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<th>5</th>
<th>45</th>
<th>98</th>
<th>45</th>
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1 LESS 2 RELIABLE 3 MORE 4 RELIABLE 5
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

POOR GRAMMAR OR MULTIPLE TYPOS

1 LESS 2 RELIABLE 3 MORE 4 RELIABLE 5

Votes:
- 157 votes for 1
- 15 votes for 2
- 6 votes for 3
- 4 votes for 4
- 4 votes for 5
Mean = 2.02
Standard Deviation = 0.64
Mean = 3.25
Standard Deviation = 0.74

Votes

- 1: 8
- 2: 33
- 3: 75
- 4: 62
- 5: 16

FIRM OR COMPANY WEBSITE
1 LESS  2 RELIABLE  3 MORE  4 RELIABLE  5

FROM A NEUTRAL SOURCE
Wikipedia
EXTENSIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY
AUTHOR’S EXPERTISE IS VERIFIABLE
POOR GRAMMAR OR MULTIPLE TYPOS
SELF PUBLISHED
FIRM OR COMPANY WEBSITE

STUDENT RATINGS
LIBRARIAN RATINGS
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.