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
1. FROM A NEUTRAL SOURCE
2. EXTENSIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY
3. AUTHOR’S EXPERTISE IS VERIFIABLE
4. POOR GRAMMAR OR MULTIPLE TYPOS
5. SELF PUBLISHED

6. FIRM OR COMPANY WEBSITE

1. LESS
2. RELIABLE
3. MORE
4. RELIABLE
5. TRUSTED PUBLISHER

LIBRARY-SPONSORED RESOURCE
CASUAL USE OF LANGUAGE OR IMAGES
PHOTOS ARE UNCREDITED
?
WRITTEN IN LANGUAGE SPECIFIC TO PROFESSION
TRUSTED PUBLISHER

(left empty for student suggestions, e.g. Wikipedia)
Mean = 2.87
Standard Deviation = 0.83
Wikipedia

Mean = 1.93
Standard Deviation = 0.84

Votes

1. LESS
2. RELIABLE
3. MORE
4. RELIABLE
5.

Votes:
1. LESS: 74
2. RELIABLE: 71
3. MORE: 31
4. RELIABLE: 13
5: 5
EXTENSIVE

E BIBLIOGRAPHY

Mean = 3.98
Standard Deviation = 0.64

1 LESS 2 RELIABLE 3 MORE 4 RELIABLE 5

Votes

4

5

45

98

45
Mean = 4.01
Standard Deviation = 0.70

AUTHOR’S EXPERTISE IS VERIFIABLE

Votes

1 2 3 4 5
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

15
Mean = 2.02
Standard Deviation = 0.64
Mean = 3.25
Standard Deviation = 0.74

Votes

1. LESS 2. RELIABLE 3. MORE 4. RELIABLE 5.

FIRM OR COMPANY WEBSITE
LIBRARIAN RATINGS

1 LESS 2 RELIABLE 3 MORE 4 RELIABLE 5
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.