

# That's Incredible

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## Student Evaluation of Web Site Credibility

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# Brief Background

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- Ancient Pedigree
- Modern Pedigree
  - Hovland, et al. (1953)
  - McCroskey (1960s – Present)
- Contemporary Considerations



# Theoretical Perspectives

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- Factor Model: To what extent the receiver judges the source as credible
- Functional Model: To what extent does a source satisfy an individual's needs
- Constructivist Model: What does the receiver do with the source's proposal



# Why Study Web Credibility?

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- Basic Questions of Persuasion & Attitude
- User Vulnerability
- Commercial Implications
- Wide Range of Information Quality
- Ongoing Growth and Evolution
- Relatively Few Empirical Studies



# Notable Interested Organizations

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- Universities (Stanford, Berkeley, Purdue, Illinois, Cornell, etc.)
- Consumers Union
- Pew Trust
- Online Computer Library Center
- Library of Congress
- WWW Virtual Library
- Librarian's Index to the Internet



# Web Site Credibility Criteria

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1. Authority
2. Accuracy / Reliability
3. Objectivity
4. Currency
5. Comprehensiveness
6. Design & Layout
7. Ease-of-Use / Navigability
8. Usefulness

# The Inquiry at Hand

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- 40-Minute Teaching Module (Handout)
- Web Site Selection (8)
- Evaluation Form (Handout)
- Design
  - Pre-Test/Post-Test, Independent Samples
  - Pre-Test/Post-Test Paired Samples
- Example Web Sites... [color transparencies here]

# Findings, Statistical

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- Independent Samples  
Pre/Post Comparison of Means,  $t$ -test : *ns*
- Paired Samples  
Pre/Post  $t$ -test: *ns*

*Where “\*” indicates legitimate sites on the following slides*



# Findings, Descriptive

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## Pre-Test Business Communication Class

Descending, Credible to Incredible, n=22

On variable "Credibility, All Things Considered"

	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Inst Hist Rev	1	7	3.1	2.0
Green Oasis	1	6	3.5	1.3
DataDyne	1	7	3.7	2.3
Golf Cross*	1	7	4.2	2.0
Boilerplate	1	7	4.3	1.7
Ova Prima*	1	7	4.3	1.7
McWhortle	1	7	4.4	2.3
Mankato	1	7	4.7	1.8

# Findings, Descriptive (Cont.)

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## Post-Test Business Communication Class

Descending, Credible to Incredible, n=20

On variable "Credibility, All Things Considered"

	Post	Pre	Mean	SD
Golf Cross*	1	4	4.0	1.9
Boilerplate	2	5	4.0	2.4
Green Oasis	3	2	4.1	2.1
Mankato	4	8	4.2	2.0
Inst Hist Rev	5	1	4.3	2.2
Ova Prima*	6	6	4.9	2.0
McWhortle	7	7	5.0	1.7

# Findings, Descriptive (Cont.)

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## ***Pre-Post Business Communication Class***

Descending, Credible to Incredible, n=16

On variable "Credibility, All Things Considered"

	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Golf Cross*	1	7	3.3	1.5
Golf Cross, Post*	1	7	3.5	1.8
<i>Inst Hist Rev (Post)</i>	1	7	3.9	1.8
<i>Boilerplate (Pre)</i>	1	7	4.0	1.8
Mankato	1	7	4.5	1.8
Mankato, Post	1	7	4.6	2.0
McWhortle, Post	1	7	4.7	2.0
McWhortle	1	7	4.8	1.9

# Conclusions

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- Students have difficulty evaluating credibility
- This 40-minute intervention was not effective
- So,
  - Blame the prof
  - Blame the students, or
  - Aim for a more sophisticated intervention and analysis, with larger sample sizes

# Future Research

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- Stanford's 4 Types of Web Site Credibility
  - Presumed (e.g., domain)
  - Reputed (3rd Party)
  - Surface (Simple Inspection)
  - Experienced (Past Experience)

<http://credibility.stanford.edu/>

# Future Research II

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- Stanford's 7 Factors (In order of perceived importance)
  - Real-World Feel (customer service; address; phone number)
  - Ease of Use (looks professional; navigable)
  - Expertise (credentials; references)
  - Trustworthiness (links; URL; policies)
  - Tailoring (email confirmation; customizing; recognition)
  - Commercial Implications (neg.)
  - Amateurism (neg.)