That’s Incredible

Student Evaluation of Web Site Credibility

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Brief Background

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

- 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?

- 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

- 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

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

- 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

- 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**

**Pre-Test Business Communication Class**

Descending, Credible to Incredible, n=22
On variable "Credibility, All Things Considered"

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Findings, Descriptive (Cont.)

Post-Test Business Communication Class

Descending, Credible to Incredible, n=20
On variable "Credibility, All Things Considered"

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**Findings, Descriptive (Cont.)**

### Pre-Post Business Communication Class

Descending, Credible to Incredible, n=16

On variable "Credibility, All Things Considered"

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Conclusions

- 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

- 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

- 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.)