A Web Site

Burmese Mountain Dog

Information: Truth or Fiction?

How do you know?
The “Credibility” Problem

- The Web is comprised of over a billion Web pages.
- These Web pages are written by several million individuals:
  - Professional Web designers
  - Scientists, doctors, lawyers and other professionals
  - High school students
  - General public
- There are no controls for:
  - Who publishes on the Web
  - What is published on the Web
  - The quality of information published on the Web

THE BIG QUESTION: How does a user know which Web sites to believe?
The BIG Question

- How does a user know which Web sites to believe?

- Take out a piece of paper. Write your name on it.
- Answer this question for yourself.
- (I’ll collect these at the end of class today. These won’t be graded.)

What Do People Think Makes Them Think a Web Site Provides Credible Information?

- According to BJ Fogg and his colleagues (2001) at Stanford University...
  - Conducted a survey on the Web with 51 items
  - 1441 people completed the survey
  - Gender: 44% female; 56% male
  - Median age: 33 years
  - Roughly half from US; half from Finland
  - Average years online: 3.7 years
  - Average hours online per week: 13.9 hours

Evidence of Connecting to a Real Person or Organization...

- Evidence of Connecting to a Real Person/Organization
  - Site provides a quick response to a user/sends you an email confirming a transaction you’ve made
  - Site lists the organization’s physical address
  - Site gives a contact phone number
  - Site gives a contact email address

Ease of Use, Expertise...

- Ease of Use
  - Site lets you search past content (archival information)
  - Site is arranged in a way that makes sense to you

- Evidence of Expertise
  - Site lists authors’ credentials
  - Site lists citations and references
Trustworthiness, Currency...

- Evidence of Trustworthiness
  - Site is linked to by a site you think is believable (cf. Google)
  - Site states its policy on content
  - Site links to outside material and sources
  - Site represents an organization you respect

- Evidence of Currency
  - Site has is frequently updated

Restrained Commercialism and Professionalism

- Restrained Commercialism
  - Site makes it easy to distinguish ads from content
  - Site doesn’t automatically pop up windows with ads

- Professionalism
  - Site has no typographical errors
  - Site is always available
  - All of the links work
Summary

- Not all information is equal – some information is better (more credible) than other information
- There’s a lot of information on the Web, created by millions of people, with no checks on the quality of the information
- The quality of information on Web sites can be evaluated by criteria such as: source, accuracy, completeness, and currency
- “Cues” to these criteria can be exploited to create Web sites that appear credible even when they are not
- We are judging two sorts of things:
  - The information provided on a site
  - The person or organization represented by a site
- The bottom-line: Information user beware!

A Web Site

Burmese Mountain Dog