Information: Truth or Fiction?

How do you know?  
For that matter, what is truth?

Why Do We Search for Information?

- Information is that which reduces uncertainty in our lives
  - One could say, then, that misinformation can be information (temporarily) because it can reduce uncertainty for someone at the time—even if it isn’t correct
- Information gives us a deeper understanding of the world or changes our knowledge on some topic
  - Misinformation may give us a skewed view of the world
  - But remember, information to one person/culture may be misinformation to another
- We have an immediate need for information
  - A research paper, a project, etc.

Where do we go to find the Information we need?

- Our friends
- An expert
- A bookstore
  - Either in person or through the web
- The library
  - Again, either in person or through the web (e.g. UW Gateway)
- The Internet
  - Search Engines (Google)
  - Directories (Yahoo)

What is Truth?  Knowledge?

- Truth to you may be fiction to a person in another class, another culture, another city, etc.
- Knowledge?
  - One definition could be:

  Justified
  True
  Belief
Trust and Credibility

- You decide to go to the Web to get your information
- The Web consists of billions of Web pages
- These Web pages are written by several million individuals
  - Professional Web Designers
  - Researchers, doctors, scientists, lawyers and other professionals
  - High school students, elementary school students
  - General Public
  - If you have access to web server space and an IP address—
    you’re on!
  - There are no controls for who publishes, what is published or
    the quality of the content put out on the Web

Information or Misinformation?

- The billions of pages that are out there are searched by several hundred million users

Question:
How does a user know which sites to believe?

What is Credibility?

- According to BJ Fogg and his research partners at Stanford, credibility is a perception based on 2 factors:
  - Trustworthiness and Expertise
    - http://www.webcredibility.org/
  - Highly credible web sites have high levels of perceived trustworthiness and expertise
- Different kinds of credibility:
  - Presumed
  - Reputed
  - Surface
  - Experienced

What do People think makes a web site credible?

- In 2001, a report* was released by BJ Fogg
  and his colleagues from Stanford University
  - Web survey results were studied to identify what is
    people think makes them think a web site provides
    credible information
  - The results broke down into the following categories…

  York: The ACM Press.
Is anybody there or am I just talking to myself?

- Evidence that they are connecting to a real person or organization...
  - Site provides quick response to users (e.g. sending an email to confirm a transaction)
  - Physical address is listed
  - Phone number is listed
  - Email address is listed

Ease of Use and Show of Expertise

- Ease of Use
  - Ability to search archives (past content)
  - Arranged in a way that makes sense to you

- Evidence of Expertise
  - Site lists the authors credentials
  - Site lists citations and references

Trustworthiness, Currency…

- Evidence of trustworthiness in a web site
  - Linked to by a site you think is believable
  - States its policy on content
  - Represents an organization you respect

- Evidence of Currency
  - Site is frequently updated

No More Ads, PLEASE!

- Commercialism of the site is at a minimum
  - It is easy to distinguish ads from content
  - No automatic pop up windows with ads
Professional Feel

- No typographical errors
- Site is always available
- All the links work

Trust and Deceit on the Web

It doesn't take much to manipulate surface credibility
Trust online

- Researchers (Rand) checked out 6 health Web sites and 12 sites dedicated to specific diseases.

- How frequently Web sites are complete and accurate:
  - Breast cancer 63%
  - Depression 44%
  - Obesity 37%
  - Childhood asthma 33%

Misunderstanding = Misinformation?

- One sees misinformation passed in many forms. Some might be:
  - Incorrect facts regarding historical information
    - But who writes history?
  - Inaccurate financial information related to "scams" and other shady business dealings
  - Gossip/Partial Facts
    - A fact starts out accurately and is slowly skewed each time it is repeated
  - Not enough depth to the coverage of the topic
  - Inaccurate associations based on lack of context (not understanding the environment) ….
Summary

- Information is NOT Democratic.
  - Not all equal
  - Some Information IS better than others (more credible)

- Take into consideration WHY you want the information when you go out to search for it

- Since there are no checks on general web content, if you REALLY need accuracy, double check it against other sources

- We have ways to evaluate sites using criteria covers all forms of credibility
  - But many of these can be exploited

- Misinformation spreads like wildfire, on and off the web

- We judge two things on sites:
  - The information provided
  - The person or organization represented