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

Problem Solution?

❖ 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…

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
Trust and Deceit on the Web

It doesn’t take much to manipulate surface credibility
Researchers (Rand) checked out 6 health Web sites and 12 sites dedicated to specific diseases.

- Breast cancer 63%
- Depression 44%
- Obesity 37%
- Childhood asthma 33%

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 (understanding of the environment) ...
This "last tourist photo of the World Trade Center" was an elaborate hoax.

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

Truth or Fiction?

- Rent-A-Stalker
- Aluminum Foil Deflector Beanie
- Pol Pot Exile
- Aids Facts
- Americans with No Abilities Act
- The Taxonomy of Barney