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 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 understanding of the environment
Truth or Fiction?

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

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