Web Credibility and Online Journalism

Information Technology and Social Life

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Ask where get news online

1. nature of news content is changing
2. way journalists do work is retooled
3. structure of newsroom and news industry is changing
4. realignment of relationships between news organizations, journalists, and publics (audiences, sources, competitors, advertisers, govts)

Credibility Study

- Flanagin and Metzger - study shows that newspapers still most trusted, but Internet same or similar to other media in credibility
- Method - survey; 1998-1999 - undergraduates and snowball sample; convenience sample
- Types have same level of credibility except commercial
- Experience with Internet increases credibility
- Little verification of Internet content is occurring beyond checking dates and completeness (and those are only occasional)
- Reference and news information more likely to be verified, no matter what medium
- Experience with Internet increases verification

Questioning Credibility

- Anyone can publish. It is often hard to assess credentials of online authors and sites.
- The Web makes it easy to develop a site that appears to be affiliated with a credible news source, through logo creation, similar domain names, design and format may be misleading.
- Economic Model of the Web is often transaction-based, could effect reporting and cause bias, i.e. product reviews or campaign material.
- Sites could have hidden sponsorships or corporate affiliations – conflicts of interest could arise.
- Advertisements can be presented to appear like news. Can't always tell the difference between news, editorials and ads, which is more distinct in print publications.
- Search engines often drop you in the middle of a sites content with little reference of source or credibility.
- Information might be out-of-date and it is sometimes difficult to assess when a site was published and updated.
- Information might be inaccurate or falsified – rumors spread easily on the Web.
- Difficult to enforce standards due to widespread nature of the Web. Media and reporters are expected to self police.
- Easy to change or update.
- Lots of information.

Show examples - Drudge Report

Frostbite site

Greening Earth Society

Son of Bush

Mark Perkel home page

Web Credibility

- Authority
- Accuracy
- Objectivity
- Currency
- Coverage and Intended Audience
- Presentation

Presentation

1. Is the site professional looking?

2. Is it free of grammar, spelling and punctuation problems? Is the writing style appropriate for the topic?

3. Is the format of the site meaningful and easy to use? Are there appropriate headings? Is navigation useful?

4. How do images and sounds work on the site? How do they support the content? Could they have been edited?

5. How did you find the site? Consider how the search engine works? For example, Alta Vista searches meta tags that are assigned by the author in the code and Yahoo uses a registration by author.

6. Can you tell if news, editorial, and advertisements have separate presentations on the site?

7. Look at the source code of the site. Is there anything in it that influences your impression? Meta tags, dates, comments, etc.

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Online Journalism

- Capabilities of older media - text, images, graphics, animation, audio, video
- New capabilities - interactivity, on-demand access, user control, customization
- Limits involving bandwidth, connectivity, credibility
- Implications for democracy
- Reporting in context; perspective; traditional media limited by space and time
- Implications of global audience

more engaged reporting, more complete information, news that better reflects the complexities and nuances of an increasingly diverse and pluralistic society.

Democracy depends on informed citizenry

shortened the news, and led to a newsroom culture in which most stories are reported in truncated form, telling each story from a single point of view and providing the audience with reports that purport to be the truth.

Concepts of truth/objectivity

Tupac example - Jonathan Katz p. 25

Contextualized Journalism Dimensions

- Breadth of communication modalities
- Hypermedia
- Heightened audience involvement
- Dynamic Content
- Customization

-text, audio, graphics, animation (many news organizations do not have training in these areas, don't view them as their area, don't have resources to add them

-links to related items, charts, maps, graphs, also non-linear story telling

-immersive environment

-dynamic content - changing, updated regularly

-personalization of content, financial info., sports scores, types of news, issues

Talk about definition of convergence

Convergence Defined

- Consolidation of ownership
- Media companies in partnership
- Multiple platforms, text, photos, audio, video, animation
- Skills necessary to perform in a converged environment
- Changes to media curriculum
- Advent of blogging and personal Web sites changes the nature of communication flow in media
- Content developed for a variety of platforms, wireless devices, cell phones, etc.

Converge - approach the same point from different directions

A movement toward union or a common conclusion

In information technology, convergence is a term for the combining of personal computers, telecommunication, and television into a user experience that is accessible to everyone.

Origins in science and mathematics

1983 - discussion of "convergence of modes" in communication technologies

1980 - "convergence of delivery mechanisms" in regard to First Amendment issues.

Used frequently in business press throughout the 1990s in reference to Apple and AOL/Time Warner merger.

Web Packages

- Audio and video accompanying stories
- Maps, timelines and resources - Blackhawk Down
- Links to related stories or sites
- Photo essays - Star Tribune Favorite Photos
- Interactive info graphics - USA Today
- Special Projects - Heroes of Public Safety
- Polls, Quizzes, and Games - Oscar Quiz
- Discussion, chats, email
- Good examples found at cnn.com, *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, Cyberjournalist.net

Blackhawk Down

Star Tribune Heroes of Public Safety

USA Today

Oscar Quiz -
http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2005/academy.awards/index.html

http://www.startribune.com/news/variety/favphotos/

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