Chapter 13

Trust and Credibility
Analysis of Websites:
Role of Trust and Credibility in Evaluating Online Content

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ABSTRACT

Trust on any online information is psychosomatic and hidden by nature. The choice is in the hands of the information seeker to consider, evaluate, and confirm the contents of the websites before using it. This makes a sharp concern for websites dealing with sensitive topics like health, research, or academics. There is no benchmark or tool that tells or characterises about making these “trust” decisions. Although web users make such decisions after considering numerous factors, still there are no such criteria to fulfil the underlying principle to deal with such decision making. This chapter is an effort to resolve the problem of how to measure the content provided by any website in terms of its credibility. Various models have been projected in this chapter to identify several factors pertaining to the credibility of content and users’ trust on any website and accordingly analyse the identified factors to assess the websites.

INTRODUCTION

In today’s age of ‘Information era’, information is available to any user on a press of a button. He/she is returned with several website’s links which claims to have a relevant information. It is a concern of TRUST and CREDIBILITY for him/her to decide that which data can be relied on from the huge pool
of data and information. The credibility of information promotes trust of an individual. It is said that trust is a primary and central virtue which is assessed and acquired while evaluating any organization. This is also necessary for web associations. A web association refers to the development of information and the data-searching through websites which are provided by the search engine on a relevant search query. We can describe it in following steps (also depicted in Figure 1):

1. Entering a search term in search box of a search engine.
2. The search engine returns websites which are associated with the search term entered by the user.
3. User shortlists these websites according to his/her own needs.

Mostly search engines use many complex and unrevealed algorithms with best mechanisms to define and store all these websites for easier retrieval, but none of these factors and task ensures that web links provided on the top are more trustworthy or credible than the links which are appearing in the last.

Previous studies have declared that there is no such controlling legalization on all the information and data available on the web links because of their enormous size (Marchand, D. 1990, Alexander, J. E., Tate, P. 1999, Hernon, P. 1955, & Calvert Phillip J. 2001). Mostly the users and the internet consumers of information do not have sufficient time to cross check and validate the contents provided by any web page. This is a matter of great concern when the searched topic is related to sensitive areas and terms like medical or health symptoms. Based on a renowned study, “eight out of 10 Internet users have, at one time or another, searched for health info on the Web, in part because they feel their healthcare needs are not being adequately addressed by increasingly busy physicians” (Prescient Digital 2015). Pew Internet and American Life Project reported that 50% of the people who have used the Internet for health and medical symptom analysis informs that the acquired information has improved the way they take care of themselves (Prescient Digital 2015).

Studies also create a significant question mark on the security and faith while using this information by stating that “identifying quality patient information isn’t always easy (Lewis, T. 2006, Baker, L., Wagner, T. H., Singer, S., & Bundorf, M. K. 2003, Eastin, M. S., & Guinster, N. M. 2006)”. They point that the health seekers don’t follow any search strategy before consuming the overwhelming information; which one has to take care of, if it isn’t assessed medically, as there might be some business profits rolling in the darkness.

For concern in information evaluation when the query is related to academics or about gaining some information for taking an important decision, many surveys were conducted on the various group of people to understand their perspective towards TRUST and CREDIBILITY of websites. A survey was conducted on students to know: “How students evaluate information and sources when searching the World Wide Web for information” (Walraven, A., Brandgruwel, S., & Boshuizen, H. 2009). Figure 2 presents the average time one student spends on searching (44%), scanning(31%), processing (16%) and organising (9%) while analysing the website.

Figure 1. A web association
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