Identification, Transparency, Interactivity: Towards a New Paradigm for Credibility for Single-Voice Blogs

Brian Carroll, Berry College, USA
R. Randolph Richardson, Berry College, USA

ABSTRACT

This article explores traditional conceptualizations of credibility relying on quantitative and qualitative analyses of data collected by the Institute for the Future of the Book, which conducted an online survey of readers of Pharyngula and Informed Comment, two popular, widely read, single-author blogs. The results suggest that a new pattern for online information credibility is emerging for blogs that supplements credibility’s traditionally understood dimensions of expertise, accuracy, and absence of bias with new, medium-specific or medium-enabled dimensions, including interactivity, transparency and, perhaps most significantly, identification. The responses indicate that mainstream news media may want to adopt more of the principles and techniques of blogging and readers of the two blogs appreciate the conversation each author facilitates. This preference for real human voices, especially when combined with the explosion of interest in and use of online social networks like Facebook and Twitter, indicates the need for a “re-voicing” of journalism.

Keywords: Believability, Blogging, Credibility, Identification, Interactivity, Objectivity, Transparency

INTRODUCTION

The relative ease and near-zero cost of blogging has fueled an explosion in the numbers of bloggers worldwide. This huge, in some ways unprecedented expansion of public voices has subsequently raised the issue of information credibility, including its identification and evaluation. Though credibility assessment as an area of study can be traced to the ancient Greeks, systematic empirical research of source, message and media credibility began in the twentieth century (Metzger, Flanagin, Eyal, Lemus, & McCann, 2003). Today, with dramatic shifts in the news media and the lack of sustainable revenue models, interest in the subject has only grown.

During the last decade, interest in information credibility has largely related to the phenomena of the Internet and the World Wide Web that reduced the amount of information undergoing editorial control. Newspaper sales have been decreasing since the early 1990s, and the declines have accelerated in recent
years (Metz, 2009). Although overall online newspaper readership tripled in 2007-09, newspapers are losing their young audiences (18-24-year-olds), according to a survey conducted by IBM’s Institute for Business Value (2010). In 2008-09, several national and regional American newspapers ended or reduced their print production to boost an online presence, including The Christian Science Monitor, The Capital Times (Madison, WI) and the Seattle Post-Intelligencer. By 2009, more than 80% of news organizations had converged their digital and traditional newsrooms (Pew Research, 2009), and according to the 2010 State of the News Media report, 60% of Americans reported reading online news from various media platforms daily (Pew Research, 2010).

This article explores traditional conceptualizations of information credibility relying on quantitative and qualitative analyses of data collected by the Institute for the Future of the Book, which conducted an online survey of readers of Pharyngula and Informed Comment, two popular, widely read, single-author blogs. The results suggest that a new pattern for online information credibility is emerging for blogs that supplements credibility’s traditionally understood dimensions of expertise, accuracy, and absence of bias with new, medium-specific or medium-enabled dimensions, including interactivity, transparency and, perhaps most significantly, identification.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Credibility as “a chief element of the information quality” (Rieh & Danielson, 2007, p. 344) has been widely researched in many disciplines, and for a long time. Pioneering research was conducted in the 1930s and 1940s, when warring nations became keenly interested in learning how to persuade through the means of propaganda and how to harness the newfound power of radio. This work continued after the war, notably with the work of psychologists Hovland, Janis and Kelley in the 1950s on mainly source credibility as opposed to message or media credibility. Building on the Yale team’s findings, McCroskey in the 1960s (McCroskey, 1966, 1969) led a movement away from uni-dimensional measures and toward a factor analysis approach, beginning a tradition that continues in mass communication research today.3

As mentioned, one reason for such sustained interest by news media in credibility research is the long-term decline in newspaper readership, which has been connected to a diminishing of credibility over time. Meyer (1988) pointed out in the 1980s that even after a great deal of research, there was no widely agreed-upon definition or operationalization of the term or concept of credibility. Meyer surveyed credibility research in mass communication and developed an index for the two dimensions of the concept he identified in the literature: believability and community affiliation (p. 567).

Believability, which Flanagin and Metzger (2000) found to be the most consistent dimension of media credibility, is based on the notion that news media present accurate, unbiased and complete accounts of news and events. Other dimensions of media credibility used by researchers identified by Flanagin and Metzger were accuracy, trustworthiness, bias, and completeness. Community affiliation encompasses a news organization’s efforts in unifying and leading the community it serves, efforts that require some degree of harmony in outlook or perspective. Meyer’s two dimensions are important to this study in suggesting that the public can disapprove of the way a media outlet or source covers a story but still believe what it says (1988, p. 568). They are also important in their inclusion of affiliation, which in rhetorical scholarship is strikingly similar to the concept or dimension of identification that is so important to this study.

The boom in Internet use since the Web’s popularization in the mid- and late 1990s fueled interest in research on online information credibility, scholarship that in the aggregate is serving to correct an historical imbalance. Prior to the proliferation of online media, credibility...
Related Content

The Effect of Using Class PC and Interactive Boards on Students' Academic Achievement and Creative Thinking: Applied Study on 2nd Grade Science Students at Private Schools
[www.igi-global.com/article/the-effect-of-using-class-pc-and-interactive-boards-on-students-academic-achievement-and-creative-thinking/206567?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/the-effect-of-using-class-pc-and-interactive-boards-on-students-academic-achievement-and-creative-thinking/206567?camid=4v1a)
Remaking Ancient Virtues for the Virtual World: A Case Study of the “Voice of Longquan”
[www.igi-global.com/article/remaking-ancient-virtues-for-the-virtual-world/136851?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/remaking-ancient-virtues-for-the-virtual-world/136851?camid=4v1a)

An Interactive Platform for Sustainable Supply Chains
[www.igi-global.com/article/an-interactive-platform-for-sustainable-supply-chains/214853?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/an-interactive-platform-for-sustainable-supply-chains/214853?camid=4v1a)

Mobile Interactions Augmented by Wearable Computing: A Design Space and Vision
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/mobile-interactions-augmented-by-wearable-computing/202002?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/mobile-interactions-augmented-by-wearable-computing/202002?camid=4v1a)