College of Information Science and Technology

Drexel E-Repository and Archive (iDEA)
http://idea.library.drexel.edu/

Drexel University Libraries
www.library.drexel.edu

Please direct questions to archives@drexel.edu

Markers of Credibility on Citizen Journalism Websites

Kirsten Johnson

Abstract

Credibility in mainstream media continues to wane, giving rise to new forms of journalism supported by the Internet. One of these new forms of journalism is citizen journalism. This is a form of journalism in which content is produced by ordinary citizens, usually on websites. One of the most popular citizen journalism websites in the world at this time is OhMyNews. com. Like mainstream media, this site, as well as ones like it, have credibility obstacles to overcome. In this study the researcher tests whether or not the presence of information about a writer and sources used to write a story on a citizen journalism website affects the perceived credibility of the story.

One hundred and twenty subjects were asked to read three stories from OhMyNews.com and then rate those stories in terms of their perceived credibility. Some of the subjects were presented with information about the writer's background and a picture of the writer, some were able to follow hyperlinks imbedded in the story to verify information contained in it, and others were presented with both. The results from the groups were compared to see if the additional information given to subjects had an impact on their perceived credibility of the story. This research will help online journalists understand how to increase the credibility of the stories they write, and will add to the understanding of the factors that influence perceptions of information credibility.

Why Important?

- Citizen journalism is growing in popularity

- Trust in mainstream media is declining

- Citizen journalists need ways to add credibility to their news stories
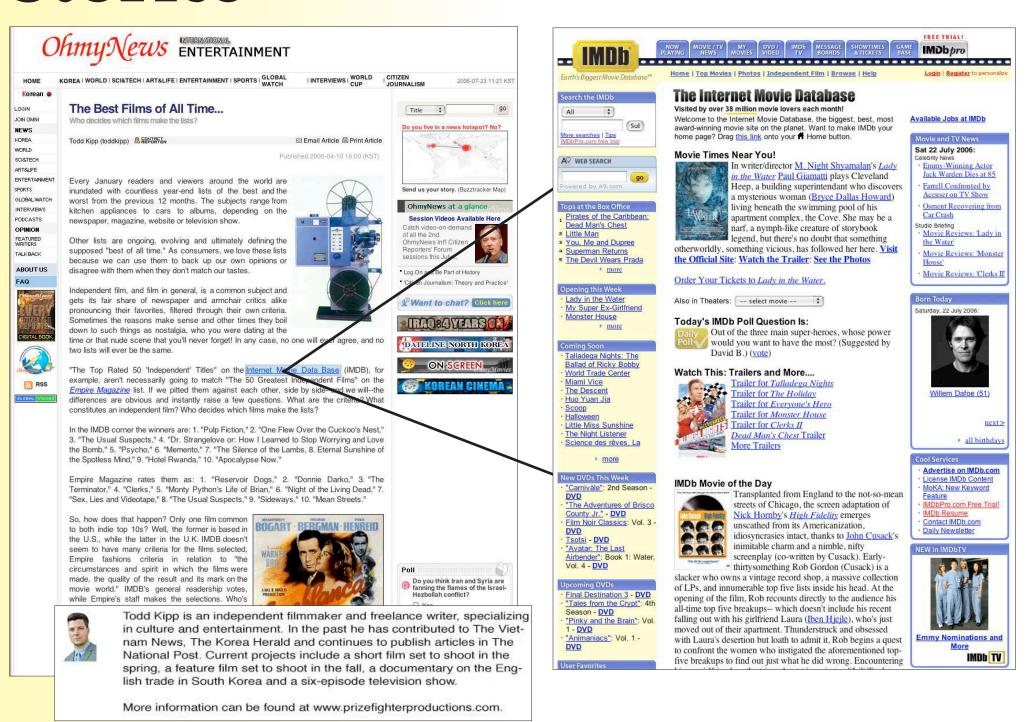
Research Questions

RQ 1: To what extent does providing information about a writer's background and providing a picture of the writer on a citizen journalism site affect the perceived credibility of the story?

RQ 2: To what extent do hyperlinks that allow users to verify information contained in a story on a citizen journalism site affect the perceived credibility of the story?

RQ3: To what extent does providing information about a writer's background, a picture of the writer, and hyperlinks that allow users to verify information contained in a story on a citizen journalism site affect the perceived credibility of the story?

Group	What Participants See
Green	**Story Only**
Red	**Story +Writer Information**
Yellow	**Story + Hyperlinks**
Blue	**Story + Writer Information + Hyperlinks**

Stories

Questionnaires

Key Findings

- If writer and hyperlink information is included in a story the perceived credibility of the story is higher than when that information is not included.

- Markers of credibility increase perceived credibility more when included in hard news, as opposed to feature stories.

- Writer information plays a larger role in perceived credibility than hyperlinks. The average number of hyperlinks subjects clicked on was .42.

- There is a significant positive correlation between whether or not subjects thought the writer in the picture looked credible and their perceived credibility of the story.

References

Bowman S., & Willis, C. (2003). We media: How audiences are shaping the future of news and information. Retrieved October 20, 2005, from http://www.hypergene.net/wemedia/weblog.php

Flanagin, A. J., & Metzger, M.J. (2003). The perceived credibility of personal web page information as influenced by the sex of the source. Computers in Human Behavior, 19, 683-701.

Fogg, B. J., & Tseng, H. (1999, May 15-20). The elements of computer credibility. Paper presented at the Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems CHI '99, Pittsburgh, PA.

Gaziano, C., & McGrath, K. (1986). Measuring the concept of credibility. Journalism Quarterly, 63, 451-462.

Gillmor, D. (2004). We the media: Grassroots journalism by the people for the people. Retrieved May 20, 2006 from, www.authorama.com/ we-the-media-1.html

Hovland, C. I., & Weiss, W. (1951). The influence of source credibility on communication effectiveness. The Public Opinion Quarterly, 15(4), 635-650.

Johnson, T. J., & Kaye, B.K. (2004). Wag the blog: How reliance on traditional media and the internet influence credibility perceptions of weblogs among blog users. Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 81(3), 622-642.

Nardi, B. A., Schiano, D. J., Gumbrecht, M., and Swartz, L. (2004). Why we blog. Communications of the ACM, 47(112), 41-46.

Newhagen, J., & Nass, C. (1989). Differential criteria for evaluating credibility of newspapers and tv news. Journalism Quarterly, 66, 277-284.

Rosen, J. (1999). What are journalists for? New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Wilson, P. (1927). Second-hand knowledge: an inquiry into cognitive authority. London: Greenwood Press.

Zelizer, B. (1993). Journalists as interpretive communities. Critical Studies in Mass Communication, 10, 219-237.