What Makes a Website Credible?

A Two-Week Learning Module

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Overview

This two-week learning module gives students a practical and theoretical grasp of what makes a website credible. The module includes instructor presentations, group discussions, classroom activities, and homework assignments.

Suggested time

Class time: ~5 hours (4 class periods of 75 minutes)
Homework: ~2 hours of homework between class periods

Learning objectives

In this module students will:
- Learn the meaning of *credibility* and *captology* – and how they relate to each other.
- Understand why designing websites for credibility is important.
- Become familiar with guidelines for credible website design.
- Learn about research insights relating to Web credibility.
- Gain a theoretical understanding of how people evaluate credibility.

Materials needed

- **Lecture Slides** (available from BJ Fogg)
    - o Lecture #1 -- "Introduction to Web Credibility"
    - o Lecture #2 -- "10 Guidelines for Designing Credible Websites"
    - o Lecture #3 -- "Insights from Web Credibility Research"
    - o Lecture #4 -- "A Deeper Understanding of Web Credibility"

- **Assignment Descriptions** (available from BJ Fogg)
    - o "Most Credible Website Contest"
    - o "Best Example of a Guideline"
    - o "Credibility Redesign Project"

- **Readings**
    - o Chapters 6 & 7, *Persuasive Technology: Using Computers to Change What We Think and Do*
    - o *Prominence-Interpretation Theory: Explaining How People Assess Credibility Online* (available at http://credibility.stanford.edu/pdf/PITheory.pdf)
    - o Note: For a list of supplemental readings, see http://www.bjfogg.com/webcredreadings

- **Two Resource Packets** (Instructor simply photocopies student work to compile these packets)

Outline of Curriculum

Class Period #1   *"Introduction to Web Credibility"*

Class period #1 helps students think clearly about Web credibility, laying the foundation for later work.

In this class students will:

- Learn the meaning of *credibility* and *captology* – and how they relate to each other.
- Understand why designing websites for credibility is important.
- Start thinking deeply about the topic

Class Period #2   *"10 Guidelines for Designing Credible Websites"*

Class period #2 allows students to discuss credibility and become familiar with elements that boost perceptions of credibility.

In this class students will:

- Learn that credibility is a perception – and not everyone has the same perceptions.
- Become familiar with a handful of high-credibility websites.
- Gain some competency talking about issues related to website credibility.
- Learn about 10 research-based guidelines for designing credible websites.

Class Period #3   *"Insights from Web Credibility Research"*

Class period #3 familiarizes students with the methods and results of various large-scale studies on Web credibility.

In this class students will:

- Get more practice talking about issues related to website credibility.
- See methods for two types of quantitative research.
- Become familiar with the findings from the research.
- Be prepared for a deeper understanding of credibility, presented in the final class.

Class Period #4   *"A Deeper Understanding of Web Credibility"*

Class period #4 gives students a deeper understanding of Web credibility.

In this class students will:

- See various examples of how websites can be redesigned to boost credibility.
- Become familiar with a simple and useful theory about evaluating credibility: Prominence-Interpretation Theory.
- See how Web credibility frameworks can help design for credibility.
- Discuss what they have learned during this module.

Class Period #1   **"Introduction to Web Credibility"**

Overview & Learning Objectives

Class period #1 helps students think clearly about Web credibility, laying the foundation for later work. In this module students will:

- Learn the meaning of captology and credibility – and how they relate to each other.
- Understand why designing websites for credibility is important.
- Start thinking deeply about the topic

Suggested time

- 50 to 75 minutes

Materials needed

- Lecture slides #1
- Handout explaining the "Most Credible Website Contest"

Class Outline

1. Start with a discussion

- Ask students: Do you believe what you find on the Web?
  - o Why? Why not?

2. Explain purpose of module

- Purpose: To help students think clearly about what makes websites credible.
  - o This ability is useful for designing websites.
  - o It's also useful for assessing information quality – understanding why humans misjudge information quality on websites.

3. Present Lecture #1, allowing for discussion

- Use lecture slides to introduce captology and credibility.
- Ask questions and allow for discussion during lecture.

4. Make homework assignment: "Most Credible Website Contest"

- Explain the contest (offer a prize for the winning team).
- Give handout & answer questions.
- Assign teams (random assignment works well).
- Give students 5 minutes to coordinate their strategy and schedules.

Class Period #2   "10 Guidelines for Designing Credible Websites"

Overview & Learning Objectives

Class period #2 allows students to talk about credibility and become familiar with elements that boost perceptions of credibility. In this <u>module</u> students will:

- Learn that credibility is a perception – and not everyone has the same perceptions.
- Become familiar with a handful of high-credibility websites.
- Get practice talking about issues related to website credibility.
- Learn about 10 research-based guidelines for designing credible websites.

Suggested time

- 75 minutes

Materials needed

- Lecture slides #2
- Handout explaining the "Guidelines" assignment

Class Outline

1. Give teams 5 minutes to do last-minute coordination before the contest begins.

2. Begin student presentations on "Most Credible Website Contest"

- Give each team 90 seconds to show the class their website and explain why they think it's the "most credible."
- Conduct a class vote after all the presentations: Which site is the "most credible"?
  - o Have students vote for one website – it can't be their own (note: the voting is done before discussion. Also, secret ballots are more fun than public ones.)
  - o Announce the winning team and give out prizes.

3. Conduct class discussion on the "Most Credible Website Contest"

- Which site do you think is the most credible? Why?
- What were your criteria? Why is there disagreement?
- Do you think the right website win the most votes? Why?
- What did you learn about how you judge credibility? How others judge credibility?

Collect homework assignments—one-page writeups on "most credible."

4. Present lecture on the 10 Guidelines

- Use lecture slides to introduce research-based guidelines for designing for credibility.
- If possible, refer back to the websites students presented earlier as examples of guidelines.
- Ask for student comments on each guideline as you go (optional)

5. Make homework assignment: "Best Example of Guideline"

- Assign students to find the best example of one of the guidelines – handout of assignment
    - Assign each student one guideline.
    - Have them find the best example of that principle. Extra credit: bring one website that is a bad example of that guideline.
        - Note: You may want to require the students to send the URL for their example well before class, so you can launch the website quickly during class.
    - Bring each one back on a separate sheet of paper (these can be copied and distributed during the next class period).
- Assign readings in *Persuasive Technology*
    - pages 121 - 131 (first part of Chapter 6)
    - pages 147 - 163 (first part of Chapter 7)

Class Period #3   "Insights from Web Credibility Research"

Overview & Learning Objectives

Class period #3 familiarizes students with the method and results of various large-scale studies on Web credibility. In this <u>module</u> students will:

- Get more practice talking about issues related to website credibility.
- See methods for two types of quantitative research.
- Become familiar with the findings from the research.
- Be prepared for a deeper understanding of credibility, presented in the final lecture.

Suggested time

- 75 minutes

Materials needed

- Lecture slides #2 and #3
- Handout
- A list of websites for the "Credibility Case Study" assignment
- Packet to hand back to students with their "Most Credible Website" candidates

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Class Outline

1. Go through 10 Guidelines and "Best Example" from students

- Present each guideline again, one by one, using slides to focus attention.
- Have at least one student explain their "best example" of that guideline.
    - o   Have student show website to everyone, if possible.

2. Collect homework assignment on "Best Example of Guideline"

- Discuss what students learned in searching for their "Best Example of a Guideline."
- Explain that you'll copy these papers and distribute them later as a packet.

3. Pass out packet with "Most Credible Web Site" candidates

- Discuss how students can use the packets in the future
    - o   The examples in these packets can help them design for credibility.

4. Present Lecture on Web Credibility Research

- Use lecture slides to discuss research method and results
    - o   Note: The reading students were assigned to do before today's class covers much of the research methods and results. So this lecture can be to review or critique the work, or to allow for deeper discussion..
- Optional: Discuss what research in Web credibility the students would like to do.
    - o   "What do they think is the most important think to know about credibility?"
    - o   "How could you find the answer?"

5. Assign homework:

- Assign "Credibility Redesign Project"
    - Assign the students a Web site you've selected for the redesign project.
        - Note: Alternately, you can have students select their own site.
    - Students should prepare a one-page summary of how they would redesign a specific site to boost its credibility perception.
    - Students should prepare to explainhow they would redesign the site to boost credibility—as though they were presenting to a client or colleague.
- Assign readings in *Persuasive Technology*,
    - pages 131 - 141 (last part of Chapter 6)
    - pages 163 - 177 (last part of Chapter 7)
- Assign reading of two-page paper
    - *Prominence Interpretation Theory: Explaining How People Assess Credibility Online* (available at http://credibility.stanford.edu/pdf/PITheory.pdf)
- Optional: Extra credit opportunities
    - Read *How Do People Evaluate a Web Site's Credibility? Results from a Large Student.(available at*
    - Find other research related to Web credibility.

Class Period #4   "A Deeper Understanding of Web Credibility"

Overview & Learning Objectives

Class period #4 gives students a deeper understanding of Web credibility. In this <u>module</u> students will:

- See various examples of how websites can be redesigned to boost credibility.
- Become familiar with a simple and useful theory about evaluating credibility: Prominence-Interpretation Theory.
- See how web credibility frameworks can be of practical help in redesigning web sites.
- Discuss what they have learned during this module.

Suggested time

- 75 minutes

Materials needed

- Lecture slides #4
- "Best Example of a Guideline" packets to hand out to students

Class Outline

1. Pass out packets of "Best Example of a Guideline" papers

- Discuss how students can use the packets in the future
    - o The examples in these packets can help them design for credibility.

2. Ask students about their redesign project and process

- What surprised you in doing your website redesign?
- What was the hardest thing about redesigning the web site?
- What was the easiest thing?

3. Ask students to volunteer to present their redesign solutions.

- Facilitate student presentations, as time allows
- Discuss student projects
- Ask: "How can you use your redesign in the future?"
    - o Students can include the work in a design portfolio.
    - o This is excellent material for discussion during job interview.

4. Present P-I Theory

- Powerpoint slides
    - o Review previous studies
    - o Show how studies examined different things
- Discuss P-I theory
    - o How is this theory practical?
    - o How can it help you make sense of web credibility perceptions?

5. Present frameworks, as time allows

- Powerpoint slides
- Discuss frameworks
    - o   How can you apply these frameworks?
    - o   How can these frameworks help your future work?

6. Ask questions to bring module to close, showing students what they've learned

- What has been the most useful thing in this module? Why?
- What was the least useful thing in this module? Why?
- What has surprised you most about this material?
- Do you look at web sites any differently now?
- What knowledge or skill do you still lack? How can you fill this void?

Options for Continued Work in Web Credibility

Those interested in going beyond the two-week curriculum have various options available, including the following:

- Perform a study to learn more about credibility
- Find additional research relating to Web credibility
- Write an analysis and critique of Web credibility research
- Redesign a small website for inclusion in a design portfolio
- Redesign a small website, testing credibility before and after
- Write a paper or a create a presentation about a case study in Web credibility