The Credibility of Internet Sources for Academic Research

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The Internet has become an integral part of everyday life and an invaluable research tool for academics. However, the issues of credibility of the Internet sources remain unsolved. This essay will cover the basic principles of choosing credible references online among websites using various domains, Wikipedia articles, and academic databases to help researchers produce high-quality papers.

The history of the Internet is complicated and convoluted as the academics cannot agree on the definition of the world wide web. For this research, only the Internet that was created in the 1990s will be considered. Its significant influence on the academic world comes in the form of quick and easy access to millions of research publications. According to Siegler (2013), in the future, the libraries as we know them will not exist, since they will become obsolete in the digital world, and it will be economically inefficient to support them. With the increase of online sources' citations in academic works, the issues of their credibility arise.

Purdue Online Writing Lab (2016) defines credible sources as those that are trustworthy, accurate, and reliable, without regard for their origin. The quality of academic papers relies on the quality of the cited sources as they support vital arguments. Due to the Internet's democratic nature, anyone can publish an unsubstantiated opinion on any issue. The abundance of opinionated but unsupported online blogs and articles makes using the Internet for research a lengthy and complicated endeavor.

The first credibility test most websites do not pass is the domain name test. According to the University of Wisconsin (2016), "some domains, such as .com, .org, and .net can be purchased and used by any individual. However, the domain .edu is reserved for colleges and universities, while .gov denotes a government website" (para. 6). Therefore, information

gained from sites with .edu or .gov domain names can be reliable. There are exceptions to this rule as most large newspapers and magazines also possess domain names within .com domain extension, for example, https://www.nytimes.com or http://time.com. Researchers should be confident about their credibility when writing about current issues.

Most professors do not allow students to cite Wikipedia as they do not believe its articles to be credible. However, according to Hilles (2014), the level of accuracy and reliability of the information found on Wikipedia is high, despite small errors in some articles. Most entries are of the same quality as official encyclopedia publications, and the professors' bias has more to do with the lack of understanding of the Wikipedia's principles than the reliability of the information provided.

Despite the bias, academics can use Wikipedia articles for research. Instead of citing the public encyclopedia entries, they can rely on the list of references provided at the end of the article. Students can enjoy the benefits of Wikipedia and provide credible citations that are not rejected by the professors. This makes Wikipedia an invaluable research tool for academics of different standing.

Academic databases are the safest repositories of credible research resources, including full-text versions of articles in peer-reviewed journals. Google Scholar is the popular choice, though most articles come with abstracts only, and their full-text versions are often difficult to find. However, there are many other scientific databases, including Academia.edu, Academic Search Complete and university libraries' databases. The latter provide access to numerous otherwise unavailable resources for students and alumni.

The availability of peer-reviewed research articles is one of the significant benefits the Internet offers to scientists. Where before they had to spend hours upon hours in libraries manually looking for sources, now they have access to millions of articles with a few

keystrokes. Besides scientific publications, databases like Google Books and Amazon ensure the availability of books, both old and recent, for academics without the need to go to the local library or travel the closest university to get access to the books.

In conclusion, despite the ambiguity of the Internet history, over the past three decades, it has become a mainstream research tool for academics around the world. At the same time, the credibility issues arose, necessitating careful analysis of all online sources before they are used in research. Domain extension is only one of the factors academics should consider when choosing references. While Wikipedia is not universally accepted as a credible source, numerous academic databases allow access to abstract and full-text versions of the articles published in reputable peer-reviewed journals. Even though the Internet accelerates the research, future and current academics should be careful about choosing reliable sources to support their arguments.

References

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