"A Culture of Fear..?" Fact-Checking in the Social Sciences

"... the constant threat of unpredictable dangers like plane crashes or random shootings pervade our lives....

...IS the world really such a dangerous place?...

Doubt it!

Source: Culture of Fear. Talk of the Nation, National Public Radio
http://search.npr.org/cf/cmn/cmnpd01fm.cfm?PrgDate=11/09/1999&PrgID=5
Objective

To explore some strategies to check/verify facts, find and evaluate information from the web, online and traditional library resources.
How do we Know?… ways to answer questions

- Using Common Sense/ Guessing
  - Usually not enough to completely answer the question
  - Doubts creep in if differing points of view are presented
  - A guess is only a guess… not supported

“Everybody gets so much information all day long that they lose their common sense.”
-- Gertrude Stein

“Common sense is the most fairly distributed thing in the world, for each one thinks he is so well-endowed with it that even those who are hardest to satisfy in all other matters are not in the habit of desiring more of it than they already Have.”
-- René Descartes

(Katzer 1982)
... ways to answer questions

- Asking or Seeking Advice
  - Of friends, colleagues, acknowledged leaders, professionals, etc.
  - May not answer your question completely
  - How did they gain their experience...was it haphazard?
  - Are these their impressions or insights?...
  - Do they remember them accurately?
  - Are they over-generalizing? Who should you believe?

*I always pass on good advice. It is the only thing to do with it.*

*It is never of any use to oneself.*

--- Oscar Wilde

(Katzer 1982)
… ways to answer questions

- **Conducting your own research**
  - Can be a good way to answer a question
  - Surveying/Asking your question to a set of (right?) people to get their responses
  - Compile, study and evaluate these responses and you may find the answer.
  - Can be a very Time-consuming process

*If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?*

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*--- Albert Einstein (1879 - 1955)---*

*(Katzer 1982)*
… ways to answer questions

Searching the Literature/ Published works

- If your question has been studied before you might get important information from a literature search.
- This is your preliminary step to any research. You should know what has been written about the question you are asking.
- Search, locate and collect information about your topic.
- Assess what you find....go beyond the information you read and try to draw your own conclusions.

*It is in fact nothing short of a miracle that the modern methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curious of inquiry. It is a very grave mistake to think that the enjoyment of seeing and searching can be promoted by means of coercion and a sense of duty.*

-- Albert Einstein (1879 - 1955)

(Katzer 1982)
Search for What?....Looking for Information

*can be found from*

facts, ideas, articles, opinions, interpretations, discourses, speeches, statistics, survey results...........

What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence, a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention and a need to allocate that attention efficiently among the overabundance of information sources that might consume it.

-- Herbert Simon, Economist
Looking for Social Science Information

Knowledge is of two kinds: we know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find information upon it.

-- Samuel Johnson (1709 - 1784)

On The Web

- Use subject directories
- Use Search Engines
- Use subject collection websites/portals
- Use metacrawlers

On Library Indexes and Databases

- Use Subject specific indexes/databases
- Use Electronic Journals
- Use subject guides for reference and other compiled information

On the Library Catalog

- Use Browse & subject searching
- Use Keyword searches
Searching for Social Science Information

On The Web

Use subject directories

Yahoo Directory listings: www.yahoo.com

Use Search Engines

Google, Altavista

Use subject collection websites/portals

SOSIG: http://www.sosig.ac.uk/social_science_general/
Dmoz project: http://dmoz.org/

Use meta crawlers

http://www.profusion.com
On Library Indexes and Databases

*search for articles from journals, magazines and newspapers*

- Use Subject specific indexes/databases
  - *Academic Search Premier* (EBSCOhost)
  - Criminal Justice Abstracts
  - Social Science Abstracts
  - Social Sciences Citation Index (Web of Science)
  - *Sociofile*

- *Related Databases:*
Searching for Social Science Information

- **Use Electronic Resources:** Electronic Journals, Online
  - Newspapers, ……
    - These resources help you find information from multiple perspectives, ….
    - Rutgers Libraries “Electronic Reference Resources” is a great place to look for online newspapers information.

- **Use subject guides** for reference and other compiled information
  - e.g. …try Journalism & social sciences subject guides available from several university libraries.
  - [http://www.library.arizona.edu/mfeeney/journal.htm](http://www.library.arizona.edu/mfeeney/journal.htm)
Searching for Social Science Information

- Search for statistics
  - Use social sciences (esp. economics) subject guides
    - e.g. Rutgers Libraries’ subject guides on Economics
    - select Data and text resources:
      - Also, try www.scc.rutgers.edu for numeric guides and statistics
      - Such Guides cover both internet/web resources and restricted resources available!
  - Bibliographies from journal articles of related topics
    - are sometimes very helpful
How do you Search? ….Ways of Searching

- Simple or keyword searching

- Advanced / Power Searching
  (traditionally called “Boolean Searching”)

Triveni Kuchi
kuchi@rci.rutgers.edu  04/2002
Simple OR Keyword search

- **Fast**
  Type in keywords/search terms, hit search, the results of your search are displayed within seconds

- **Flexible**
  Type terms/words anyhow ... no strict rules to follow

- **Especially Relevant** for Distinct word searches
  e.g. Xylophone
When you type in a keyword in a search engine you will get a screen of results listing all the web pages that have your keyword on their page.

The results set can be very large, unorganized, confusing and tedious to browse.

If your search

- has no distinctive words, or phrases
- or you are searching for an overview to cover a broad topic
- or need a narrow aspect of broad or common topic

Simple Search can be frustrating

...try an advanced search
Google Advanced Search

Advanced Web Search

Find results
- with all of the words: word1 AND word2
- with any of the words: word1 OR word2
- with the exact phrase: "word1 word2"
- without the words: NOT word3

Occurrences: Return results where my terms occur
Language: Return pages written in
Domains: Only results from the site or domain
SafeSearch: No filtering

Page-Specific Search

Boolean

In Google you don't need to type AND, OR, " " NOT
I DON'T UNDERSTAND IT, BUT I'M IMPRESSED.

(Katzer 1982)

Look at your topic..No..no…LOOK @it....
Look at your topic..No..no…LOOK @it

• When we **approach** a topic to research we may **already** have an opinion or maintain a certain view about it…

• ….as we search and read more about it, we build/modify our position based on the information we get.

*The process of modifying or changing our position/opinion/belief as we gain more information helps us **understand** the issue/topic better.*

*(Brem 2000)*
Checking for Information and evaluating it for accuracy is very much testing a hypothesis…. But BEWARE it can also be self-fulfilling (that is….once we have an opinion/make a judgement, we tend to look for information/articles that supports this opinion/belief)

Consciously look for/think of opposite view points and consider carefully what is being written/said about your topic

(Brem 2000)
“Consider the *structure* and *reliability* of a source”

**Structure**
- Is the information contained/restricted/developed within the database?
  If so, is the information better? Does it have better standards?

**Reliability**
- Remember you are including “this reference” in your paper…is it reliable?

*(Brem 2000)*
Which one would you consider yourself to be?

“Absolutist”
You consider issues as “black-and-white”- unconstrained of any perceptions and valuations

“Multiplist”
You consider issues as having multiple potential with almost equal validities

“Evaluativist”
You consider issues as having “some better and some worse answers and ....can identify them by weighing the evidence”.

(Brem 2000)
Hope you chose….. “Evaluativist”

Evaluate!

Evaluate!

Evaluate!

“The years have it.”

“Take your information to the CAFÉ”

Challenge, Adapt, File & Evaluate

(Harris 1997)
### The CARS Checklist for Research Source Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Credibility</th>
<th>trustworthy source, author’s credentials, evidence of quality control, known or respected authority, organizational support. Goal: an authoritative source, a source that supplies some good evidence that allows you to trust it.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>up to date, factual, detailed, exact, comprehensive, audience and purpose reflect intentions of completeness and accuracy. Goal: a source that is correct today (not yesterday), a source that gives the whole truth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasonableness</td>
<td>fair, balanced, objective, reasoned, no conflict of interest, absence of fallacies or slanted tone. Goal: a source that engages the subject thoughtfully and reasonably, concerned with the truth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>listed sources, contact information, available corroboration, claims supported, documentation supplied. Goal: a source that provides convincing evidence for the claims made, a source you can triangulate (find at least two other sources that support it).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table Source: [http://www.virtualsalt.com/evalu8it.htm](http://www.virtualsalt.com/evalu8it.htm)

(Harris 1997)
References


Thank You!

Please feel free to contact me

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Questions?