E-ISSN: 1115 - 8425 P-ISSN: 3027-012X
MPRI-JAEE | INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION IN EDU.
VOL. 08 NO. 8 – APRIL. 2025

AN INSIGHT IN TO ACCESSING RELIABLE INTERNET SOURCE OF INFORMATION FOR EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATORS AND RESEARCHERS

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.70382/mejaee.v8i8.038

Keywords: Reliable Internet Source, Educational Administrators, Reshearchers, Accessing, Information.

Abstract

Educational administrators, researchers and other scholars are of the view that research is a systematic investigation or a careful study using material and resources that can reduce or remove uncertainties in order to establish facts, findings or report new knowledge or even reach a conclusion about issues. The internet as an unrestricted global and galactic information infrastructure, and also a mechanism for a source of information for research in order to achieve qualitative and reliable result considering the rate of misrepresentation of [redacted] information in the present-day world. This paper therefore looks at some factors to be considered when using the internet as a source of information for research from the perspective of credibility, accuracy, reasonableness, and support (C.A.R.S) checklist.

Introduction

There is no doubt on the fact that man is most favored creature in the world. This is because human beings right from the creations stand tall among the living creatures due to his ability to express and share his feelings an idea. This has help him to remove the state of uncertainty in his quest to conquer his physical and social environment. The era of technological advancement has

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ushered in another opportunity in form of information reservoir called "the internet" however, the extent to which the information is able to address out life challenges such as sourcing for reliable information devoid of falsehood and misrepresentation depends on the quality of the information retrieved from this large but crude information bank.

The internet is a worldwide system of computer networks in which users at any one computer can access any information from any part of the world. According to Liora (2015), internet is an extraordinary resource for gaining access to information of all kinds including education. Each day, a greater number of information becomes available online. The advantages that the internet offers researchers are so tremendous that many researchers especially the young ones may be tempted to bypass the textbooks entirely and conduct all the researchers through the internet alone. There is an extremely wide variety of materials on the internet ranging in its accuracy, reliability and value. Studies, carried out by a number of researchers have identified that the internet is an unregulated resources because many unreliable sources exist on the internet, that anyone including people who have no expertise at all in a subject area can post anything at any time (Lydia (2009), Becks (2016). It was concluded that many sources of information on the web has proven to be unreliable, bias and inaccurate. Unlike similar information founds in traditional information media like newspapers, textbook, television broadcast and other sources of information available on the internet are not regulated for quality r accuracy.

No one approves the content for website posting before it is made public as such it is the job of the researchers to evaluate what he or she locates on the internet, in order to determine whether it is genuine and accurate or not

Determining the quality of information located on the internet is not a clearly defined process. No single measure of validity, veracity, or value exists particularly when it comes to judging internet information sources (Liora, 2015). Since there are no rules governing the electronic publications, one will have to rely on clues that one can gather from a site to decide whether the information on it worth including in a research work. Based on this, there are certain important factors one must consider when using internet as a source of information to ensure the credibility of the information being used.

Statement of the problem

The internet is a worldwide system of computer networks in which users at any one computer can access any information from any part of the world. The advantages that the internet offers researchers are so tremendous that many researchers especially the young ones. However, the abuse of opportunity created such the information bank has been responsible for the spread of falsehood such as hate speeches and other unguided information responsible for social disharmony among people and communities especially in developing countries. This form the bases why the researcher decided to have an insight in to factors to be considered while sourcing information from the internet. Therefore, educational administrators who shoulder the responsibility of overseeing research activities of students and researchers need to be very careful while sourcing and utilizing information from the internet as some of the content are characterized by vagueness and inaccuracy.

Factors to be considered when using the internet as a source of information

Harris (2015) listed the CARS checklist as factors to consider when using the internet as a source of information. CARS as an acronym stands for Credibility, Accuracy, Reasonableness and Support. The checklist is designed for ease of information usage from the internet. Many other researchers have also adopted Harris' CARS checklist as a verifiable means of accessing quality information from the internet (Lydia, 2009), Becks (2016). Harris' explained the four checklists as follows:

1. **Credibility**

   due to the fact that people have always made important decision based on information gathered, evidence of authenticity reliability, credibility, authority or believability has always been important.

   Authors credentials, according to Harris (2015), are often the first factors that point to be credibility of information. The evidence of the author been knowledgeable, reliable, and truthful should to some extent to be established.

   Some clues that point toward this includes:

   i. Author's credentials: this involves:
      - Contact address of the author (email/ phone number)
      - Organizational authorship from a known or respected organization

- Authors reputation or standing among peers
- Authors position (job functions or titles).

Note that the sponsor of a site is often responsible for the content. You can quickly determine a site's sponsor by looking for references at the top and/or bottom of the page. Closely connected to the author's credentials in establishing credibility is the site address-URL. This mean uniform resources locator. The site address also can give clues to the sponsorship of the site. One can determine who is sponsoring the site by truncating the URL to its root addressing to identify where the site is been hosted. Another clue to establish site credibility is the type of site whether there is a (tilde) symbol is the URL. The symbol usually indicate that the site is a personal web page and information therein should be given careful scrutiny (Beck.2016). (e.g. http: www.nmu.edu/-franklynd/home.html)

ii. Evidence of equality control

Most educational journal/articles pass through a peer reviewing process whereby several whereby several readers must examine and approve content before it is published e.g. Theories of Educational management by Tony Bush, peer reviewed by national council of professors of educational administration (NCPEA). Evidence of quality control is established when information presented on organizational web site include:

- Online journal that use referring (peer review) by editor or other.
- Posting of information taken from books or journals that have a quality control process

iii. Metainformation

This is information about information. This includes all the shortened form of information such as abstract, content summaries or even table of contents (Liora 2015). This type of information gives a quick glance at what a work is about and allowed consideration of different sources without having to go through them completely. It also includes recommendation, ratings, reviews, and commentaries.

There are also indicator to show lack of credibility for online materials. Sometimes, one can tell by the tone, style or competence of writing whether or not the information is credible. This can be done using the following clue as indicated by expert:

- Anonymity
- lack of quality control
- bad grammar or misspelt words
- emotional earnestness are accompanied by exaggeration or absolutes.
- Claims for unique secret information, etc.

2. **Accuracy**

The goals of accuracy texts, according to Harris (2015) is to ensure that the information is actually correct and up to date, factual, detailed, exact and comprehensive. Information given twenty years ago may likely not be correct today or a reputable source might give-up-to-date information but the information may be partial, and not the full story. Closely collected with accuracy of issues are:

i. Timeliness: According to Lydia (2009), some works are timeless like the classic novels and stories, through provoking philosophical works or scholars, some theories etc. in this regard, one must be very careful to note when the information was created and then decide whether it is still a value and how much value? Other findings indicate that an important idea connected with timeless is the dynamic, fluid nature of information. The fact that an information current today, might not be tomorrow especially in science and technology, medicine, business, education etc. hence, it must be taken into consideration to always check for update on fact regarding when the content of the page was created to avoid using old and absolutes data. Information that is outdated maybe incorrect or incomplete. A well-maintained website will generally tell you at the bottom of the initial screen when it was originally created and made available on the web (Georgian university library (GUL,2016).

ii. Comprehensiveness: Studies have indicated that for information to be comprehensive, it must include important fact on consequences

or alternative for further information or additional knowledge. According to GUL (2016), an information website in which all the hyperlinks are broken might not be a very reliable resource. That broken link are not uncommon, due to ever changing nature of the web. Where there are many broken links on a website it might be an indication that the site isn't maintained on a regular basis. Hence one should, according to Beck (2016), asked the following question: is the page dated? Can you find the last time it was updated? Are the links correct and do they point to existing page etc?

iii. Audience and purpose: For whom this information is intended and for what purpose? If for example you find an article "how to use the internet" and children are the intended audience, then the material maybe too simplified for a PhD class.

Closely connected to audience and purpose for check of accuracy factor is the domain suffix, which provides a clue about the purpose of a website. The research series (2016) maintained that the domain suffix might also give a clue about the geographic origin of a website. A site from say Nigeria for example will have a domain suffix of .ng that of the United Kingdom is .uk etc. other example include:

- .com: indicating a commercial site. The information provides here will most probably shed more lights on the product it promotes. E.g www.zenithbank.com
- .edu: this indicates educational institution of all levels. E.g www.uniabuja.edu.ng
- .gov: this indicate government. It provides information about governance and government related data. E.g www.cbn.gov.ng
- .org: this is traditionally a non-profit organization such as American red cross, or public broadcast system. The information here is credible and unbiased although there is need to be careful still. E.g www.unicef.eg
- .mil: military. This is used by the various branches of armed forces. Hence, information here is related to their activities. E.g www.navy.mil.ng

- .net: network. This act as a catch for all sites that do not fit into any of the above domain suffixes. Information from these sites should be given carefully scrutiny.

Indicators of inaccuracy of a material include:

- Absence of date on the document
- Vague or sweeping generalization
- Old date on information known to have change rapidly
- Very one side view that does not acknowledge opposing views or responds to them (Harris, 2015).

3. **Reasonableness**

The test of reasonable involve examining the information for fairness, objectivity moderateness and consistency (Harris, 2015).

- Fairness: include a balanced, reasoned argument not selected or slanted. Opposing idea or claims should be presented in an accurate manner, without attempting to get people emotionally worked up. Pay attention to the tone and be cautious of highly emotional writing. Any writing that attempt to inflame your feelings to prevent you from thinking clearly is also unfair and manipulative.
- Objectivity: Liora (2015) posits that there is no such thing as pure objectivity. That a good writer should be able to control his or her biasness or prejudice because one of the hinderances to objectivity is conflict of interest. Sometimes, the author maintaining an information may benefit in some way usually financially or politically just to get you accept information even if it is not the real truth.
- Moderateness: this is a test of the information against how the world really is. Since most truth are ordinary, claims that seem to rung against established natural laws require more evidence. In other words, there is need for a reality check of information before it can be use as an authority for research.
- Consistence: consistency test simply require that the argument or information does not contradict itself. Sometimes when people spin falsehood or distort the truth in consistency or even contradiction shows up. There is the evidence of unreasonableness.

Indicators of lack of reasonableness include:

- Intemperate tones or foul language e.g stupid jerks.
- Over claims e.g thousands of children are murdered everyday in Nigeria.
- Sweeping statement or excessive significance e.g. this is the most important idea ever conceived!
- Conflict of interest (when something is bad and is been portrayed as good).

4 **Support**

The area of support is concerned with the source and the corroboration of the information. Citing sources strengthen the credibility of information. In this aspect, McGrow (2011) is of the opinion that source documentation or bibliography is a factor to be considered when using the internet as a source of information.

The author elucidates further that pertinent question like: where did this information come from? What source did the information creator use? Are the sources listed? Is there a bibliography? Does the author provide contact information in case you need wish to discuss an issue or request further clarification? Answer to this question can help in finding out if other sources support the information one wants to use. The corroboration or conformability is an important test of truth (Haris 2015).

External consistency is another aspect used in the test for support as a factor in the using the internet as a source of information is usually a mixture of the old and new i.e. something you already know and something you do not know. The reasoning is that if a source is faulty where it discusses what you already know it is likely to be faulty in the area you do not know yet. One therefore needs to be cautions in trusting such information.

Indicators of lack of support include:

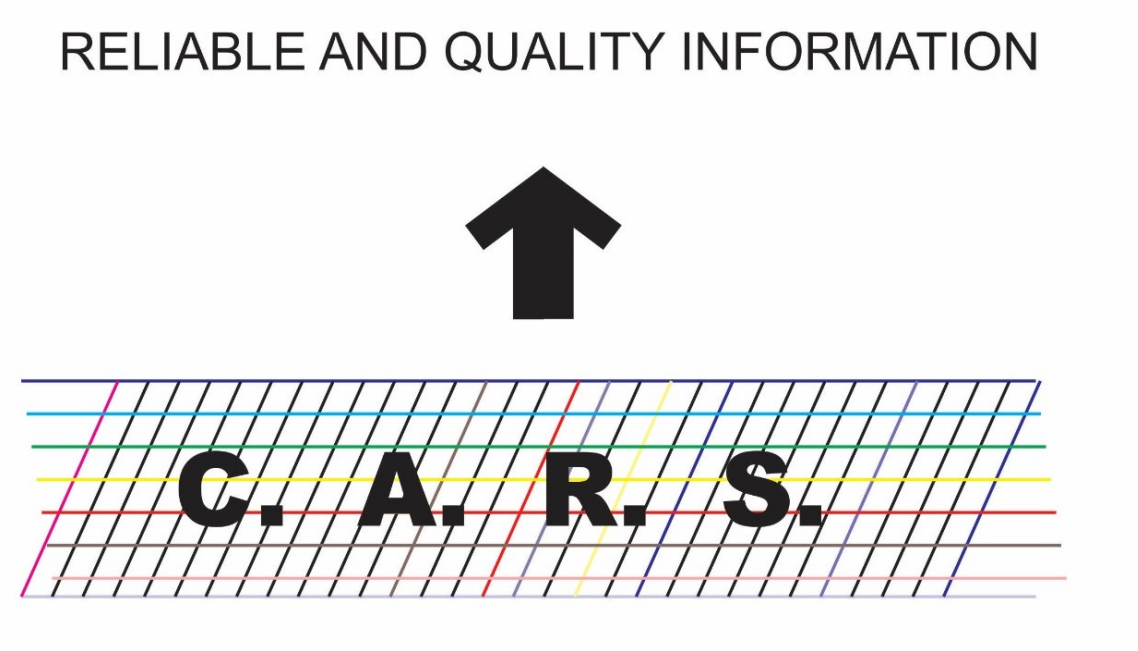
- absence of source of documentation when a discussion or findings clearly needs such documentation.
- If there are number of statistics or model presented without an identified source for them.

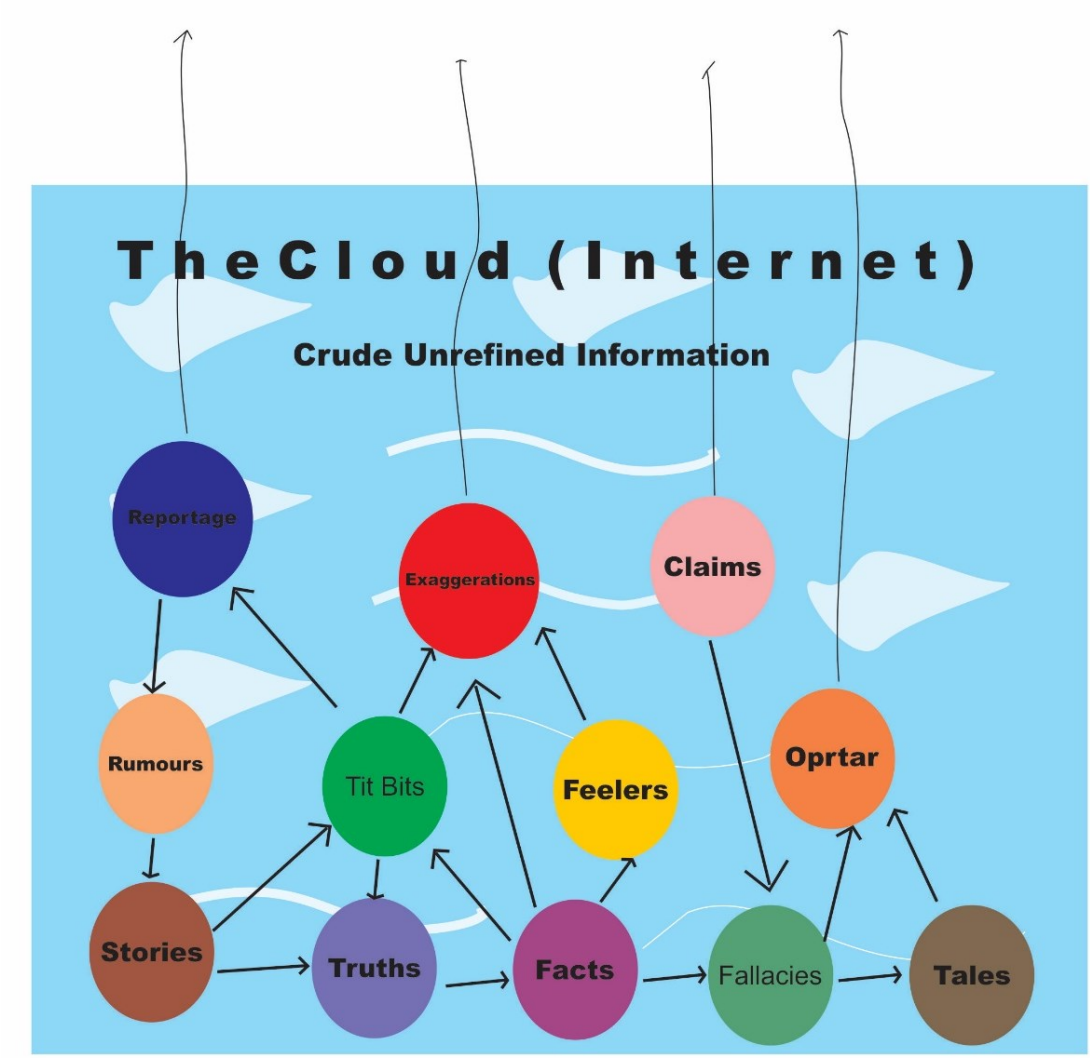
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- When no other source that present the same information or knowledge can be found (lack of corroboration)

Implication for research work

Information is everywhere on the internet. They are existing in large quantities and are continuously being created and revised. This information exists in a large variety of kinds (facts, opinions, stories, interpretations, statistics, etc.) and is created for many purposes (to inform, to persuade, to sell, to present a viewpoint, to create or change an attitude or belief). For each of these various kinds and purposes, information exists on many levels of quality and reliability. It ranges from very good to very bad and it include very shade in between. Therefore, all researchers must evaluate any information they get from the internet using CARS checklist before depending solely on it to be used for research work in their various field of study. The application of this checklist in accessing information from the internet would help educational researcher to get authentic, reliable, and timely education data such as sex, teacher and their qualification, available material, classrooms and so on which allows for proper planning an implementation of educational programmes. This is diagrammatically represented below:





Conclusion

A lot of high-quality information is available through the internet but unfortunately, there is also a large amount of misinformation (honest people mistakenly spreading false information) and disinformation (dishonest people knowingly spreading false information, half-truth, distortion, urban legend, fallacies, exaggeration, and plain old lies). Therefore, people need to adopt a skeptical attitude towards all knowledge claims. They don't have to believe everything they read on the internet neither do they have to become completely cynical and disbelieve everything. Everyone needs to exercise caution.

According to McGraw (2011) obtaining information on the internet is like a whispering game, in the sense that the first person who posted the information

may make few mistakes. The second on intentionally repeat then and makes one or two more; the third make a few more and so on. When sourcing information on the internet especially for educational research purpose, it can be impossible to tell where in the chain the mistake in the information is coming from. Hence, it is always worthwhile not to be completely rely on internet information but where one must do so, evaluation has discussed above is very vital. Harris (2015) proffered the following advice as guides in considering the internet as a source of information. He tagged the advice with the acronym CAFE:

a) challenge the information and demand accountability. Stand right up to the information and ask question.
b) Adapt your skepticism and requirement for quality to fit the importance of the information and what is being claimed. The new information may be true but one requires a robust amount of evidence from highly credible sources.
c) file new information in your mind rather than completely believing or disbelieving it. Do not jump to a conclusion to quickly. Wait until more information comes in, not one search can give you the exact things you are looking for.
d) evaluate and re-evaluate regularly as new information or changing circumstances may affect the accuracy of previous information. Change is the only constant thing, and this applies also to information especially in technology, science, medicine, education e.t.c.

Recommendation

Educational administrators who shoulder the responsibility of overseeing research activities of students and researchers' educational institutions have to be very careful while sourcing and utilizing information from the internet so as produce acceptable and useful research products.

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