

Eysenbach, G., Köhler, C. "How do consumers search for and appraise health information on the world wide web? Qualitative study using focus groups, usability tests, and in-depth interviews." *British Medical Journal* 324:574 (2002). Web. 28 Nov. 2014.

In his article, *How do consumers search for and appraise health information on the world wide web? Qualitative study using focus groups, usability tests, and in-depth interview*, Gunther Eysenbach sets out to gain information on how consumers search for health information on the internet and how they appraise the credibility of the information that they find.

A total of 21 users of the internet participated in three focus group sessions. 17 participants were given a series of health questions and observed in a usability laboratory setting while retrieving health information from the web; this was followed by in-depth interviews.

This study notes that current search behaviors for online health information are suboptimal, in that the participants did not use health-specific search engines, search for only one keyword at a time, and rarely use Boolean operators to narrow searches. Participants claimed to judge the credibility of websites based on design layout of the site, the source of the website, language and ease of use. However, during the observational study, no participants navigated to any *about us* pages, read any disclaimers or disclosure statements. Furthermore, few participants could recall which sites their information came from.

Eysenbach concludes that further observational studies are needed to help content and web designers create new educational and technological ways for guiding consumers to trustworthy health information on the web.

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Metzger, Miriam J. "Making Sense of Credibility on the Web: Models for Evaluating Online Information and Recommendations for Future Research." *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 58.13 (2007): 2078-091. Web. 29 Nov. 2014.

Miriam J. Metzger's article "Making Sense of Credibility on the Web: Models for Evaluating Online Information and Recommendations for Future Research," published in the *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, provides an examination of how Internet users assess information found online for its validity and exploration of various techniques currently used to aid such assessments. Based on past and current habits and methods of assessment, Metzger then offers suggestions as to how users can best judge the trustworthiness and legitimacy of online information. Metzger rightly points out that the responsibility for determining whether a website or online information is true lies with the user, meaning that we need to be concerned with the study of how users assess the authenticity of online information and to what degree they are motivated to perform such assessments.

“Checklist Approaches” (2079) are discussed in length, when users are provided with a list of criteria or questions in order to establish whether online information is valid or not. These checklists are usually lengthy, sometimes over one hundred questions, and it’s been shown that users are generally not inclined to answer them in their entirety. Considering users’ lack of motivation to complete extensive checklists, researchers Fritz and Cromwell proposed “a model for ascribing cognitive authority to Internet information” (2081). This model involves users assessing a website based on credibility and quality rather than long checklists. While arguably an improvement when compared to the checklist approaches, this cognitive authority model leaves quite a bit of gray area behind and lacks a solid response to whether online health information is valid or not, depending solely on the user.

Metzger offers a few approaches of her own, including credibility seal programs, which would work similarly “the TRUSTe or BBB online seal programs...to assist Internet users in locating Web sites whose content has been approved by a trusted outside authority” (2085), credibility rating systems, which “could be instituted to help establish the credibility of Web-based information. Such systems could be controlled by an institution (e.g., the American Library Association) or could be based on a peer-rating system” (2085), and directories, databases, or search engines “that carry or display online content that has been preapproved or filtered for credibility could be developed” (2085). Metzger acknowledges that such tools already exists, including JSTOR and Lexis-Nexis, but believes an expansion of such sites would be incredibly useful.

Ultimately, Metzger concludes that the most valuable piece of information any sort of researcher should take from her study is this: an understanding of your user’s motivation is key to discerning what kind of validity assessment is most appropriate. It’s essential for a researcher to first have an understanding of this information before determining the strongest validity assessment for an audience of users.